Tigers struggle out of the gate in OJHL pre-season



By Jake Courtepatte

Last season's OJHL regular season champions are still searching for their first win of 2015/16, but the real action is yet to start.

Aurora Tigers prospects had their chance to prove their worth in two pre-season games with the Orangeville Flyers last week, but came up well short in both games.

In front of a few hundred curious fans at the Aurora Community Centre last Wednesday, the Tigers struggled early as former South Central Coyotes goalie Ryan Franz let a weak shorthanded goal through his legs just one minute in. With the 2 ? 0 score in the second, forward Alex Formenton scored the Tigers' first goal of the year on the powerplay, just twenty seconds in on a 2-on-1.

That would be all for Aurora's offence, as Orangeville put two more past Saginaw Spirit prospect Josh Boyko for a 4 ? 1 win.

The Tigers then traveled to Orangeville on Saturday where they were blanked 7 ? 0 on almost forty shots from the Flyers.

?Orangeville's a good team, but our guys didn't really show their best effort,? said head coach Mark Joslin. ?We had a lot of defensive breakdowns.?

Ex-CCHLer Cole Skinner earned the loss, giving up seven goals over 38 shots. Boyko took over the last seven minutes, but wasn't tested much.

With a high number of prospective players seeing action in the pre-season, the turnover of the roster has certainly increased as of late. Only about ten players from last year's squad are now expected to suit up again for the Tigers this year.

?Those guys have been great,? said Joslin of the returnees. ??I'm the new guy to them, but we've worked well together.?

Two of the Tigers' biggest pieces of the puzzle have now decided to move on to different leagues. Cameron Morrison, the rookie hometown sensation who led the Tigers in goals last year, will now be suiting up for the USHL's Youngstown Phantoms. Leading point-scorer Johnny Curran requested a trade to the British Columbia Junior Hockey League.

?It's difficult to replace guys like that, but we'll do the best we can,? said Joslin.

One of the Tigers' most recent additions is forward Cole Hepler, a 20-year old American who spent last season with the Northern Ontario Hockey League's Elliot Lake Wildcats.

?He's a strong two-way player,? said Joslin.

Hepler had 23 goals and 43 assists in his 52 games with the Wildcats last year.

First-year coach Joslin said that eight of his players are away at OHL camps this week, which says a lot about the young talent on his team.

The regular season is set to kick off next Thursday with the Tigers in Newmarket to face the Hurricanes. The Tigers are pleased to announce that their home opener, September 12 against the new Markham Royals, will be free to the public this year.

?It's a gesture to the town of Aurora to come out and see some great hockey,? said Joslin.

The first 500 fans will also receive a free Tigers tee-shirt, and Canadian rock group Platinum Blonde's Mark Holmes will be dropping the ceremonial puck. Puck drop is at 7.30 p.m.

For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.