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Tigers aiming to wrap up first in NorthEast Conference



By Jake Courtepatte

Talk about a turnaround season.

Just one year after ending a dreadful 2016-17 season with only nine wins, the Tigers take 33 into the final two weeks of the 2017-18 season, good for first place among those in the OJHL's NorthEast.

Thursday's highly-anticipated matchup between the top two teams in the North division saw the Tigers and Newmarket Hurricanes reach overtime, where Alex Ierullo scored his second of the game just a few minutes in to give Newmarket the extra point.

The Tigers bounced back with a pair of wins over the weekend to extend their lead, including an 8 ? 1 drubbing of the Stouffville Spirit on the road on Friday.

Jake Bricknell and Elijah Gonsalves both found the back of the net twice in the contest, with three helpers going to Joseph Mizzi.

They travelled to Bathurst Street in Toronto on Sunday for a back-and-forth contest with the St. Michael's Majors, one that saw the Tigers with a 5 ? 4 lead after the final buzzer.

After falling behind 1 ? 0 through the first twenty minutes, Mizzi tied it up with a nice solo effort to enter the zone himself and find twine.

The Majors retook the lead on a breakaway shortly after, though Mizzi was the workhorse again on a powerplay goal that saw Evan Bidenti finish off a rebound.

Aurora followed up with two straight goals from Jacob Kostopoulos and Zach Wilkie to build a two-goal lead, while Mizzi scored late in the third on the powerplay to secure the win.

Without a regulation loss in eight games, the Tigers have built themselves a comfortable lead atop the OJHL's North division, now with seven points in hand on the Hurricanes. Having officially clinched a playoff spot last week, their 33-11-1-4 record also stands as the best in the conference, five points up on the Wellington Dukes, who held the title throughout most of the season.

Club president Jim Thomson told members of the OJHL media he is ?confident? that the Tigers can wrap up first place in the competitive NorthEast Conference, with only five games remaining on the regular season schedule. He hopes to see a healthy roster enter the postseason come March, after a rash of injuries plagued the lineup early in the New Year.

One aspect of the Tigers that has remained healthy is their performance at home at the Aurora Community Centre, where four of those remaining five games will be played. The Tigers have lost just four games in regulation on home ice this season, while putting up seventeen wins.

Thomson and his crew also added some depth on forward and in the crease in some late season pickups last week, adding right winger Chris Atanas and goaltender Calder Stark. Atanas reached the Dudley Hewitt Cup with the Dryden Ice Dogs last season, while Stark last tended goal for the Comox Valley Glacier Kings in British Columbia.

Both players are in their final year of junior eligibility.

The Tigers host the Hurricanes in a critical final matchup between the two rivals on Friday, with a puck drop of 7:30 p.m. Welcoming the Kingston Voyageurs at the same time Saturday night, they travel to Whitby on Sunday to take on the Fury.

The season wraps up on February 24.
For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.