

Falconer's OT winner lifts holiday spirits of slumping Tigers

By Jake Courtepatte

If anything, at least the Aurora Tigers can head into their three-week holiday break on a high note.

The Junior A squad was able to squeak out the tiniest margin of victory in Saturday's home game against the lowly Whitby Fury, who sit in the basement of the OJHL's East Division.

With captain Daniel Mantenuto and assistant captain Drake Board back from their stints at Team Canada East selection camp for the World Junior A Challenge, it was Mantenuto that opened the scoring for his home club late in the first period. Whitby's Justin Brand tied it up in the second.

Newcomer JD Falconer, his jersey barely used but no rookie to the Aurora Community Centre, was the overtime hero in the second extra frame. His first goal as a Tiger, snapped from the top of the left circle, ended a four-game losing skid for the Tigers.

It was only the Tigers second overtime goal in eight attempts this season.

Falconer, a 5'9", 18-year-old Barrie native, spent the past two seasons as a point-per-game player with St. Andrew's College in Aurora before joining the Victoria Grizzlies of the BCHL this year.

He had one goal in 23 games with the Grizzlies before being purchased by the Tigers last week.

"It's good to be back in Aurora," said Falconer. "They've got a great organization here, and I'm excited to be a part of it."

Before Falconer's overtime winner, the Tigers had lost seven of their last nine games, by far their biggest slump of the season. Since a six-game winning streak in October, they have not looked like the Aurora Tigers that won the OJHL regular season last year.

They scored just two goals during their four-game losing skid, after being shut out by the league-leading Trenton Golden Hawks on Wednesday.

And it all shows on the stats sheet: despite Saturday's win over Whitby being only the second win in eight games with the Tigers for goaltender Alex Fotinos, his 23-save performance solidified his position as one of the OJHL's top netminders, sitting second in the league with a 1.90 goals-against-average.

"We've got to be better in front of him," said Mantenuto. "He can play a solid game every night, but if we're not helping him on the other end it doesn't make a difference."

Going the other way in league standings is the Markham Royals, who have swiped top spot in the North division out from under the Tigers. The Royals now hold a four-point lead over Aurora, and also have a game in hand.

Aurora returns to the ice on January 3 against the North York Rangers. They don't play another game at the Aurora Community Centre until January 9, hosting the Lindsay Muskies.

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