

Milton Menace Defensemen Hampel and Holden haunt the Tigers in their return to ACC in double OT 2-2 draw

Two ghosts from the Tigers' recent past 'menaced' their old team on Sunday night at the Aurora Community Centre (ACC) as Aurora's Junior A hockey team kicked off its preseason.

Luke Hampel and Christian Holden were rotation defensemen for the Tigers in 2023-24 and both provided go-ahead power play goals for their new squad, but the young tryout team wearing the yellow and black Aurora jerseys got goals from Michael Flynn and Sam Pye to match Milton in a 2-2 Double Overtime tie.

The team, iced by the Tigers on Sunday night, was barely recognizable as only three regulars from the 2023-24 Aurora squad were listed on the game sheet: Liam Longo, Kyle Baston, and Yianni Karkoulas.

Karkoulas picked up where he left off last season and held the Menace to one goal in his 30 minutes of work. The acrobatic goaltender made the quick lightning saves that were on display last season as the Tigers soldiered through a challenging campaign.

Baston, a hard-hitting power forward who caught his stride with regular shifts in the second half of the season, assisted on Flynn's tenacious tying goal four minutes into the second period. Flynn was a promising AP for the Tigers last season and scored in his first OJHL game in an Aurora jersey. His scoring touch was evident in his tying goal.

Longo, a smooth-skating, puck-rushing defenseman, was steady all evening versus the Menace and logged heavy minutes in the five-period game.

Baston, Flynn, and Longo saw plenty of action during the second overtime which featured 3-on-3 hockey. The trio created many scoring opportunities and used the extra space to their advantage. It was a sneak preview of good things to come this season for Aurora Tiger fans.

While these four familiar faces were prominent in key situations, the Tigers-Menace matchup was a homecoming for the visitors as two former Tiger players were on the ice and two former Tiger staff members were in attendance at the ACC.

Hampel, Aurora's best defenseman last season, who was traded before Christmas to the Trenton Golden Hawks during The Great Tiger Diaspora of 2023, opened the scoring at 10:10 of the opening frame on a Milton power play.

Holden, the towering defenseman who played for the Tigers for two seasons, fired a laser wrist shot from the point to provide the Menace's go-ahead goal at 16:46 of the second period. Holden's goal restored his new team's one-goal lead that the visitors held until Aurora's Sam Pye fired a power play goal in between the circles with seven seconds left in the game to pull the Tigers into a 2-2 tie and force what turned out to be two entertaining periods of overtime.

Two former Tigers staff looked on at the preseason game from the Milton bench and from the seats of the ACC, respectively.

Former Tigers' jack-of-all-trades and Assistant Equipment Manager Stephane Perron looked after the Milton Menace players before, during, and after Sunday's contest. Former Tigers' General Manager Sierra Costa was seen wearing a black Menace hoodie in her new role as Milton's Director of Hockey Operations.

The Aurora Community Centre provided an oasis of cool relief from the tropical humidity outside the arena on Sunday night and the 175 fans were treated to an entertaining hockey game to kick off the Tigers' new season.

Assistant Tigers Coach Dave Coverde was pleased with his young players' collective performance.

?Lots of guys got their first experience of playing Junior hockey this evening. We asked the boys to play hard from the first puck drop and they battled right to the final whistle and earned a tie in the final seven seconds of the game.?

Coach Coverde acknowledged that his young tryout squad ?needed to take fewer penalties and Milton scored both their goals on power plays, but our penalty killers did a much better job in the third period to hold Milton scoreless.?

The veteran Tigers coach looked to a brighter future.

?We've got some smart, young players. Implementing strategies is much easier for our coaching staff with these kind of coachable players. Our power play was really good and it got our tying goal late in the third period.?

The Tigers' next preseason home game is Thursday, August 22 when they host the Toronto Patriots at the ACC.

Puck drop is at 7.30 p.m.

By Jim Stewart