

Tigers downed by Markham in North division battle



By Jake Courtepatte

While it may have been their first meeting of the season, the rivalry already runs deep between the Junior A Aurora Tigers and Markham Royals.

Closing in on the halfway mark of the Ontario Junior Hockey League season, the division rival Tigers and Royals got their first look at each other on Friday at the Aurora Community Centre in a battle for North division supremacy.

The Tigers earned the first real chance of the game just a few minutes in, when Rizvan Mansurov sent a pretty cross-ice feed to Matthew Ferrari for a one-timer, who rang it off the crossbar to keep the game scoreless.

Bryce Martin was almost the recipient of some wild puck-luck shortly after, when a dump-in turned into a scoring chance, hitting the stanchion and bouncing towards an open cage before Markham goalie Alexander Bishop dove back to stop it with his stick.

'I thought it was going in,' said Tigers commentator Kevin Dean. 'Sometimes you've got to be lucky to be good and good to be lucky.'

It took over thirty minutes of shutout hockey for the Royals to score the game's first goal, a two-on-one one-timer that gave Bradley Van Schubert little opportunity to save.

They doubled the lead in the final minute of the second period, when a failed attempt to clear the zone ended up with the Tigers on an odd-man situation in their own end.

Zach Wilkie broke the shutout with his ninth of the year just over three minutes into the third period, electing to keep the puck on a two-on-one with Jake Bricknell and sniping it far side, though the 2-1 score stood for the remainder of the game.

The Tigers and Royals will meet three more times before the season is out.

The loss extends the gap in what has been a tightly-contested race in the OJHL's North division, with the Royals now five points up on the 13-9-1-1 Tigers.

The saving grace for the Tigers is having four games in the bank over the Royals, thanks to a barren November schedule. The Newmarket Hurricanes lead the division by a sizable four points over Markham thanks to a trio of wins over the weekend.

December heats up for the Tigers with eleven games on the docket, including back-to-back-to-back contests running this Friday through Sunday, beginning with a home game hosting the Kingston Voyageurs (16-8-1-0) at the Aurora Community Centre.

They close out the weekend with a pair of inter-conference matchups, paying their only visits of the season to the Toronto Jr. Canadiens (18-9-1-2) on Saturday and the North York Rangers (18-7-0-3) on Sunday.

The Tigers would also like to remind fans that December 9 will be the team's annual Teddy Bear Toss, where fans get the opportunity to throw stuffed animals on the ice to be donated to kids at Southlake Regional Health Centre.

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