

Tigers shutout ?Canes to regain lead in OJHL conference quarterfinals



By Jake Courtepatte

After posting the highest winning percentage in the OJHL since Kingston in 2009-10, this year's first-round matchup against the Newmarket Hurricanes is much closer than most would have predicted.

The eighth-ranked Hurricanes brought the Tigers back to reality early, taking a 2 ? 0 lead in Game 1 last Wednesday before three-straight goals propelled Aurora into the series lead.

The nail-biting didn't end there for the home crowd at the Aurora Community Centre, who packed the house again on Friday for Game 2.

Aurora picked up where they left off two days prior, controlling the pace of the play early through puck possession.

Even two first period penalty kills couldn't slow the offensive onslaught from the Tigers, who had two great 2-on-1 opportunities that Newmarket goaltender Connor Ryckman just got a pad on.

At the other end, Andy Munroe's nine stops in the period kept the game scoreless after one.

The netminders traded highlight save after highlight save in the second, with both Munroe and Ryckman flashing leather on separate early powerplay chances.

With 45 seconds to go in the second period, the Tigers were first to solve the solid goaltending as defenceman Kyle Locke's shot through traffic tipped off of Johnny Curran and in.

A lack of discipline plagued the Tigers in the third, as they headed to the penalty box three times in eleven minutes to put the pressure back in their end.

With Callum Fryer in the box for interference early in the period, Munroe, who's rebound control had been stellar all game, finally let one escape his grasp. Jonathon Colley tied the game for the Hurricanes, who never looked back.

They took the lead with just under seven minutes to go, as the shorthanded Tigers left Munroe out to dry on a play where two Newmarket players stood alone in front of his net.

After that, it was a complete defensive shutdown for the ?Canes, blocking shot after shot in their own end. What they didn't block, Ryckman was there to make the circus save.

Despite storming the net for a long final thirty seconds, the ?Canes escaped Aurora hanging on to a 1 ? 1 series tie.

?We have to give them credit,? said defenceman Eric Williams, recently named an OJHL 1st Team All-Star. ?They came out hard and didn't give up when they were down.?

Natural order seemed to have been restored for Game 3, in which the Tigers handily blanked the ?Canes 4 ? 0 in Newmarket on Sunday.

After going 0 for 5 on the powerplay in Friday's loss, Aurora's special teams went to work, notching two on the powerplay while Drake Board added a shorthanded goal of his own.

Finding the back of the net for the first time in the 2015 campaign was Liam Neuman, scoring twice, including the game winner.

?We just knew we had to get pucks to the net,? said Neuman, who scored on a rebound and later a wraparound. ?They've got a good goalie who's been working hard, so we knew we just had to throw everything at him.

The Tigers will have had a chance to put a stranglehold on the series post-press time, as they travelled to Newmarket for Game 4 on Wednesday.

The series returns to Aurora Friday night at the Aurora Community Centre.

Puck drop is at 7.30 p.m.

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