

Tigers tamed on opening weekend



By Jake Courtepatte

New roster, same results in the ongoing heated rivalry between the Aurora Tigers and Wellington Dukes.

Wellington walks away from the opening weekend of the Ontario Junior Hockey League season with four points, and Aurora with one, following a home-and-home series that saw the Tigers get lambasted on home-opening night.

Fans packed the Aurora Community Centre to welcome a pair of FDNY firefighters on the anniversary of 9/11 on Sunday, with the hockey game to follow quickly melting into a deficit for the home team. Wellington capitalized just 57 seconds in, doubling the lead at the four-minute mark.

Starting goaltender Brayden Lachance was pulled when Wellington scored their third goal of the night just a minute later, though screens prevented him from seeing two of his three allowed goals.

Jake Sabourin, a 19-year old who last tended goal in Syracuse, came in to allow three more goals on 39 shots in a 6 ? 1 loss.

Mel Melconian provided the only breathing room that the Tigers would manage offensively, scoring a pretty goal from the top of the slot in the first period. On an odd-man rush with Eric Holland, the quick-handed centreman sidestepped the one defender, bringing the puck with him before sending home a heavy wrist shot.

Tigers play-by-play announcer Joe Montesano said he believes Melconian, who lit the lamp every night last season in Minor Midget AAA, is going to be ?a special player.?

?He is exciting and he's going to be a force in this league,? said Montesano. ?He scored a highlight reel goal.?

Melconian leads the team in points in the young season with four, vibing well with Holland on the first line as the two have had their hands in every Aurora goal.

The home loss followed a season-opening overtime loss Friday in Wellington, where Melconian provided goals 17 seconds apart in the third period to put the Tigers up one in a back-and-forth game. Wellington tied it with just over five minutes to go before Brayden Stortz scored the winner shortly into the overtime period.

The series was a fitting renewal of the animosity stirred up by the teams in last season's playoff quarterfinals, where the Dukes eliminated the Tigers in six games. Roughing penalties became the norm right from the first drop of the puck on the 2016-17 season with each team fighting to stake their claim in front of the net.

“Our work ethic is really good; however, a lot of guys were trying to do too much,” said rookie head coach Nik Poliakov. “So, after two games the nerves are out and we believe hard work will start bringing results.”

Another division rivalry renews this Thursday in a road matchup with the Newmarket Hurricanes, who also exited the OJHL playoffs in the first round last season. The Tigers then visit the Stouffville Spirit on Saturday, before Sunday's weekly home game has the team hosting the Pickering Panthers.

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