

3HL Tour returns to Aurora for Christmas Classic

By Jake Courtepatte

Overtime, all the time.

That is the fast-paced experience fans get with the 3HL Tour, making a stop in Aurora over the holidays in the league's third year. Dubbed as the world's first professional three-on-three hockey league, eight teams from across York Region and the GTA will vie for a share of a \$15,000 purse in the Aurora Christmas Classic, returning to Aurora after a successful inaugural visit last season. The Markham Millionaires, Toronto Bees, Niagara Rapids, Newmarket Saints, Milton Flyers, Simcoe County Clippers, and Hamilton Tigers will take to the ice at the Aurora Community Centre, this year joined by some hometown flavour.

The home crowd will be represented by the Aurora Avalanche, in their first year in the league.

3-on-3 Hockey provides more open play, which allows players to be more creative with the puck and makes for more scoring opportunity, said Pat Gregoire, Director of Media Relations with the Tour. The NHL has seen a ton of success with their new 3-on-3 overtime format that has created end-to-end non-stop action, but only for five minutes. With the 3HL, we like to say its overtime, all the time.

It was Aurora's PJ Buys who first brought the tour home last season for the first event at the ACC, titled the Aurora Dangle Fest. It proved to be an overwhelming success, when over 600 fans packed the rink to watch the revolutionized game of hockey.

(Buys) approached Justin Fox, the CEO and founder of the league, and was adamant that the 3HL make a stop in Aurora, said Gregoire. He told us if we came to the ACC, the seats would be filled with fans wanting to see exciting professional 3-on-3 hockey.

Aurora is a great hockey town that has a very tight-knit community that has been unbelievable in supporting this event.

Buys, now 27, cut his teeth at the Junior level with the OJHL's Newmarket Hurricanes from 2008-10, before playing at the collegiate level with the British Columbia Intercollegiate Hockey League.

After a stint with the Newmarket Saints last season, Buys took a leadership role as the captain of the new Avalanche team in the offseason.

With just two games under their belt heading into the Aurora Christmas Classic, the Aurora squad will be looking to establish themselves in a highly competitive league.

The parity in the league is rarely matched in today's pro hockey world, with the tour having repeat champions for only the first time ever last weekend, when the Toronto Bees won their second tournament in a row.

Buys shares the team lead in points so far with Kyle Morrison, also an ex-OJHLer who competed at the collegiate level.

Boasting talent from levels as high as the NHL, the action consists of two seven minute halves per game, with no icing or offsides.

The event runs December 23 from 12-3 p.m. at the Aurora Community Centre. Tickets are \$9.99 for children seventeen and under, and \$19.99 for adults, while more immersive experiences can be bought at a higher price.

For more information, visit www.3hltour.com.