

Aurora Junior Tigers? rookie goalie Jayden Rhee makes 36 saves in 2-0 blanking of Newmarket Hurricanes

Cayden Smith and Anrijs Bundzenieks tallied third period power play goals and Jayden Rhee made thirty-six saves in his OJHL debut to lead the Aurora Junior Tigers to a 2-0 win over the Newmarket Hurricanes at the Ray Twinney Rec Centre on Saturday afternoon.

Junior hockey returned to Newmarket with a flourish after a six-year absence and over 1,082 fans pushed through the turnstiles to see the transplanted Toronto Junior Canadiens transformed into the latest manifestation of the beloved Hurricanes.

A festive atmosphere was created by the Hurricanes' management with Newmarket's party band, The Jones, entertaining fans before the game and between periods from Section H of an arena that has housed AHL, OHL, and OJHL teams during its rich forty-year history.

The Battle of Yonge Street was reborn on Saturday and Sportsnet's John Bartlett, serving as the Emcee and PA announcer, gave the matinee game more resonance and gravitas.

The rebranded Junior Canadiens reworked their familiar 'rouge, bleu, et blanc' into new home blue Hurricane jerseys with red numbers while the Tigers were decked out in their traditional white, yellow, and black road jerseys.

A rich array of opening festivities preceded the game between the regional rivals. They included a formal banner-raising that acknowledged the five founders of the Newmarket 87's-Hurricanes' franchise: Charlie Macoun, Jim Wells, Sr, Gerry Ertl, Ken Storie, and John Burt. A red carpet ceremonial faceoff was presided over by Mayor John Taylor, then the puck was dropped for real and the 2025-26 OJHL season opened for both squads.

The Hurricanes were clearly pumped up by the pomp and circumstance as well as the almost 1,100 fans in attendance after toiling in front of less than 100 fans per game at the Scotiabank Pond last season in Downsview.

The Canes tried to run the visitors through the boards and rink with six big open ice hits in the first five minutes of play: much to the delight of the locals assembled.

The Tigers withstood the opening barrage of brutality by their hosts and played the home side evenly for forty minutes. Game One for both teams turned into an old-fashioned goalie duel featuring the puck-stopping talents of Max Grovestine for the Hurricanes and Rhee who turned aside 17 and 19 shots, respectively, after two periods of play.

However, Rhee stole the show in the final frame as the acrobatic netminder made 18 saves to foil the hard-charging home side while the Tigers scored on two of their six shots against Grovestine to eke out the road win.

The Canes got a wee bit cantankerous at 12:16 of the final frame when Andrew Lanni got the gate for slashing. A dangerous and dirty knee-to-knee check that went unpunished on the same play tested the Tigers' discipline.

Aurora's ensuing power play made Newmarket pay for its truculence.

Cayden Smith buried the biscuit past a sprawled Grovestine at 8:10: skillfully converting Anrijs Bundzeniek's pass who had been set up by Captain Simon Howard on a nice tic-tac-toe passing play. The articulate Tigers' leader, who led the club in scoring last season, described the game winner: 'We created pressure and great puck movement on the power play. Anrijs's pass created space and Cayden's great hands finished it off.'

Rhee made a timely save just seconds after the power play marker and followed up with a huge acrobatic stop at 10:18 to preserve

the visitors' precarious lead. Tigers' Head Coach Darcy Roy called a timeout to steady his squad after Rhee's heroics, but the Canes appeared even more testy after the strategy meeting by Aurora.

Eight seconds after the timeout, Hurricanes' forward Kristian Lamanna rammed Rhee into the back of his net and the transgressor was called for interference with the goaltender.

Simultaneously, Joseph Macchione became unhinged and joined Lamanna in the sin bin for unsportsmanlike conduct.

The opportunistic Tigers capitalized on their 5-on-3 opportunity and Bundzeniek banged in a rebound on the doorstep twenty-five seconds into the power play?poetic justice for Lamanna running Rhee.

The turning point of the game took place with the Tigers on a 4-on-3 power play.

Hurricanes' penalty killer Brett Bouchard pounced on an Aurora miscue at the blue line, raced toward Rhee on a breakaway, managed a shot that was saved by the nimble netminder, but it was deemed that the Newmarket attacker merited a penalty shot with 7:40 left on the clock.

Bouchard attacked off the right wing, but the unflappable Rhee flashed the leather?coolly catching the low snap shot. The rookie ?tender made three successive blocker saves at 5:45, 4:56, and 3:55 and withstood sustained pressure by the home side when the Hurricanes pulled Grovestine for an extra attacker with 2:39 left on the clock.

Captain Simon Howard described his goaltender's spectacular performance: ?To step in as a 17-year-old into his first junior game?it was an impressive first performance. He was a highly-touted goalie with the 18U Don Mills Flyers last year and probably half of this win goes to him.?

Howard described the importance of the Tigers getting off to a good start this season: ?It's crucial. We made it our focus from day one of our main camp. Darcy expected us to get off to a great start this year and we had a players' meeting to go over what we expected of ourselves, especially coming in for this game. Since we have more depth and size this year, we'll be more competitive. The team has recruited really well. There was no way we were going to lose our first six games of the season as we did last year.?

When asked about the Tigers' impressive 2-0 record over two seasons at Ray Twinney including last year's dramatic victory over the playoff-bound Junior Canadiens, Howard responded: ?We were a much younger team last year and that was probably our biggest win of the year. This year, we'll be working to disrupt a lot of teams and today, we disrupted the Hurricanes and ruined their party.?

The two squads will renew acquaintances on Saturday, September 13 when the Tigers host the Hurricanes. Puck drop at the ACC will be 7 p.m.

By Jim Stewart