

Aurora Panthers ousted from playoffs



By Jeff Doner

The Aurora Panthers women's hockey team was ousted from the PWHL playoffs last weekend, but it wasn't for lack of effort.

The Panthers were eliminated by the Whitby Wolves in four games after a 2 ? 1 loss on Saturday.

The series was a low-scoring affair and the Panthers just didn't seem to have much luck on their side.

Panthers defenseman Ashley Rothern ? who scored the lone Panthers goal ? offered an honest assessment of the game and attributed a quick goal by the opposition just 28 seconds into the first period as a pivotal moment.

?They scored on us on the first shift in the game and that was rough on us, but in the first two periods we were battling ourselves and couldn't get anything through.?

But instead of letting the game get away from them, the Panthers kept things close.

?At the end we were all over them six-on-five (with the goalie pulled) and the buzzer went, but the ref called a penalty shot because one of their players put their hand on the puck in the crease or something. Our player went in and had the goalie beat, but it just didn't get by her. It's tough.?

Although regretful about the loss, Rothern was proud of how her team came out to play against a higher ranked Whitby club.

?It was a good series overall, every game was close,? she said confidently. ?We battled hard and played the way we were coached to play and it sucks to lose, but you win and you lose games and it just makes you that much stronger for when you move on.?

Coach Stephanie Boyd agreed with Rothern's assessment of the game.

"You know what, it was really tight today,? she said. ?They scored first and we kind of battled back and we had a ton of chances and just didn't finish. The ref made some great calls around the crease, including the penalty shot at the end, but they covered the puck up. It felt like it just wasn't meant to be for our team today.?"

Anyone who watched could say that's how the whole series went for Aurora ? so close, yet so far.

?You know what, it is,? continued Boyd. ?First game we lost in overtime, second game we lost 2 ? 0, third we won 2 ? 0, so it's as even as you can possibly imagine. We just kind of came out on the losing end of it ? it's tough.?"

As Whitby prepares for their next series against London, a strong season comes to an end for the Panthers squad.

Boyd, a former Olympian in women's hockey, praised her team and their season.

"This is a great group of kids," she said. "A ton of character and a ton of skill and they stuck together as a team, which is all that matters win or lose. If you can stick together - which they did - that's what sets them up for success."

Rothon added: "It's going to be hard to leave the girls, but it was a hell of a season. It's going to be hard to move on."