

Tigers clinch fifth consecutive playoff berth



By Jake Courtepatte

Better late than never.

The Aurora Tigers became the fifth team in the OJHL's Northeast conference to clinch a playoff spot with a 2 ? 1 overtime win over the Toronto Lakeshore Patriots last Wednesday, ten days before the end of the regular season.

The 2014-15 regular season champs struggled mightily throughout November and December after a strong start, but have experienced somewhat of a resurgence since the Christmas break, going 9-4-2 to settle cozily into fifth position.

Continuing on Friday night was the ongoing Battle of York, hosting the Newmarket Hurricanes in back-and-forth action. JD Falconer had two goals, and Kyle Locke had the game winner with under four minutes remaining in a 3 ? 2 win that had the Canes playing catch up, and the Tigers never leading by more than a goal.

The week wrapped up with a marathon matchup against the Stouffville Spirit on Saturday, a team fresh off their first loss of February but still one point out of the Northeast's final playoff position.

Liam Neuman got the Tigers on the board first with his first goal in six games, on a pretty tic-tac-toe passing play with Nolan Dunn and Drake Board.

Stouffville returned the favour minutes later when the Tigers failed to clear the puck out from in front of Josh Boyko's net.

Both teams exchanged another in the second, with Aurora captain Daniel Mantenuto catching a nice bounce off the boards from Ryan Shaw and another failed clearing attempt by the Spirit defence.

Two overtimes solved nothing as they left the ice with a point apiece.

When the dust settles this weekend, an away game against the Oakville Blades on Friday night followed by the regular season's final home game Saturday against the Trenton Golden Hawks, the Tigers could be sitting as high as third-place in the conference.

If the season were to end today, the Tigers would face the fourth-place Wellington Dukes in the first round, with home advantage going to the Dukes.

They, however, remain just two points up on the Tigers while the Tigers have a game in hand.

For the Tigers, home-ice advantage could be crucial. Their 11-11-1-3 road record is countered by an impressive 16-5-0-5 record at the Aurora Community Centre this year.

Just ahead lies the idle Markham Royals, a team that had the North division all but wrapped up before allowing the Tigers to slowly claw back into the race. They sit two points ahead of the Tigers, again with Aurora having a game in hand.

It will be no easy task though: the Golden Hawks are one of the top-ranked Junior A teams in the country heading into the playoffs, running away with the OJHL title this season. The puck drops Saturday at 7.30 p.m. at the Aurora Community Centre.

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