

Aurora Tigers gearing up for postseason, honour their graduate players

The Aurora Tigers finished off the Ontario Junior Hockey League regular season with a 10-0 annihilation of the Oakville Blades and a nail-biting 5-4 loss to the Pickering Panthers.

The Tigers, ended off the year with a 25-23-2-4 record.

In quite the eventful week, the team saw Blake Frost, Hollander Thompson and Nolan Boyd play their final regular season matches in the OJHL.

Frost has committed to the Nazareth Golden Flyers in Div. III NCAA hockey and Boyd has committed to York University. Thompson has yet to make his decision.

It couldn't have been more of a storybook ending for these players. Both Thompson and Frost secured hattricks, and Boyd earned his third shutout of the season against the Blades.

‘Obviously 10-nothing, the guys feel really good about that. Oakville had some APs dressed and some players out of their lineup. They’ve been battling hard to get a playoff spot secured so they rested a few players and our guys took advantage of that,’ said head coach Greg Johnston.

‘The loss against Pickering, I thought, was a really good game. Pickering played well, we played well. Yes, we did lose, they won, but it was a good hockey game [with the] ebb and flow I wish every good hockey game has. They had some push, we had some push. We just came up on the short side on the scoreboard. A couple of things we need to tidy up, but I’m really happy with the guys. Overall, it was a good hockey game. Good one to go into the playoffs with.’

Heading into the playoffs, it has been a guarantee for some time the Tigers were going to play the Collingwood Colts. The last time the Tigers played the Colts, the game ended in a 1-1 draw.

Coming into this one, there will be little margin for error.

It will be a three-game series against the Colts, beginning on Sunday in Collingwood at 1.30 p.m. and Game Two in Aurora next Wednesday.

Should the series need three games, Game Three will take place next Friday in Collingwood.

‘You can’t afford a slow start or a bad period. It’s quick. These last couple of weeks have been really good for the guys to kind of, get focused on their details and attention to what our goals are. We’re playing a tough team in Collingwood who are looking to do the same thing. In my opinion, it should be a very good series.’

Prior to being the head coach of the Tigers, Johnston was the head coach of the Collingwood Colts. However, the majority of the Colts’ current roster is vastly different than his time with the club.

Colts goaltender Noah Pak is one of the best in the OJHL. His 22-16-1 record is ranked fourth in the league, accompanied by four shutouts and a 2.28 GAA.

The Tigers will have to get as much traffic as they can in front of him and of course, that won’t be particularly easy.

The Colts’ top defenseman, Ricards Landmanis, will be quite a handful. The 6-foot-6, Ventspils, Latvia native leads all defenseman on the team with nine goals and 18 assists on the year.

?He's the key on their back end no question. He plays a lot of minutes, a lot of key minutes, and a lot of key roles. Let's face it, you have a player of that stature, you won't get them off their game. You'll have to make it hard on him and tough on him to play. But we hope to do that with everybody,? Johnston said.

It's an exciting time for the Tigers and fans in the community. The majority of the club's players, will be taking part in the OJHL playoffs for the first time in their careers.

The last time the Tigers made the playoffs was in the 2018/2019 campaign, when the club took on the old rival Newmarket Hurricanes in the first round.

The last time the organization won the Buckland Cup was back in 2007.

By Robert Belardi