

Aurora Tigers lose two heartbreakers to open OJHL playoff series with Georgetown Raiders

March is playoff hockey season in Ontario and it's a month with equal amounts of celebration and disappointment.

The seventh-place Aurora Tigers put forth a pair of inspirational efforts to open their OJHL playoff series against the second-place Georgetown Raiders, but both games ended in heartbreak for the valiant hometown squad.

The Tigers let an early 3-1 third period lead slip from their grasp in Georgetown on Saturday night and lost a 4-3 heartbreaker in Double Overtime to open their series with the Raiders.

On Sunday night, during Game 2 in Aurora, Georgetown scored a power play goal with only five seconds left in regulation to flee the ACC with a 2-1 victory and 2-0 lead in the OJHL matchup.

In Game 1, the Tigers opened the scoring at the old Master Arena when Jace Lavallee hit the scoresheet at 13.53 of the first period with assists going to Peter Lopes and Adamo Zingaro.

Georgetown tied the game at 1-1 three minutes into the second period when Brandon Kakei tallied a power play goal assisted by Isa Parekh and Andrew Della Rovere.

The Tigers responded six minutes later when Noah DeSantis set up by Stefan Forgione and Lucas Stanojevic scored to pull Aurora into a 2-1 lead. Ryan Evenhuis with helpers from Matthew Godwin and Carter Real augmented the Aurora lead to 3-1 less than two minutes into the third period. The Tigers appeared to be in a good position to steal a road win against the second-place Raiders. However, Georgetown struck back with two goals in 22 seconds by Parekh and Kaleb Nelson in the middle of the final frame to force the game into overtime.

The Tigers and Raiders played to a scoreless first overtime and Georgetown iced the game in the second overtime when Quinn Tavares fired the game-winner at 1.54 to salvage the home team's victory. Tigers goaltender Glen Crandall turned in another heroic effort on Saturday. Aurora's netminder faced 61 shots and turned away 57 in a losing cause.

In Game 2, Brandon Kakei put the Raiders on the board at 13.31 of the first period on assists from Andrew Della Rovere and Kaedyn Johnstone. After a scoreless and penalty-filled second period and with Georgetown clinging to its 1-0 lead, Tigers forward Matthew Godwin tied the game at 9.42 of the third period.

Ryan Evenhuis and Carter Real earned assists on Godwin's goal. With the Raiders and Tigers deadlocked at 1-1, the game appeared headed for a second consecutive overtime. However, with the Tigers' Jonah Ziskinder in the penalty box for interference, Della Rovere deflated the ACC with a Raiders' power play goal with only five seconds left in regulation time.

T.S. Eliot wrote in *The Wasteland* that "April is the cruelest month," but the Tigers might disagree with the famous poet after the cruel twists of fate that came their way in Games 1 and 2 of the 2022-23 playoffs.

The Tigers' next home game is Game 4 of the playoff series versus Georgetown on Friday, March 17 a St. Patrick's Day tilt with the Raiders starting at 7.30 at the ACC.

By Jim Stewart