

Aurora Tigers slot in some more changes

It's been busy in the jungle for the past few weeks.

The Aurora Tigers announced a new assistant coach, new captain, new assistant captain and a new player, all while the Ontario Junior Hockey League confirmed via press release, Board Governors have approved an October 1 start date for the upcoming season.

The Tigers got things started when Team Governor and General Manager Jim Thomson caught wind that assistant coach Robert Powers had been speaking with a gentleman named Joseph Piccone.

"I said I know this guy. When we looked at his resume and saw he is a former Tiger who won the RBC Cup here and was interested in coming aboard, it was a no brainer," Thomson.

"He won the national championship in the dressing room. He brings a lot of history and a lot of belief back to Aurora."

Piccone recorded 12 points in 21 playoff games en-route to winning the cup back in 2007. He is excited to be returning to Aurora, which he praises as one of the best hockey towns around.

"Aurora has been a place where champions have been built. The 04 Tigers were a machine and in 07 we were a strong team too. That winning culture is what has embodied the Tigers for a long time," Piccone said.

"And ultimately, it's also how the Aurora community circles around the team. We were always welcomed everywhere we went. Seeing what Jim does within the community, that spirit is still alive today. To see that consistency over the last 15 or 20 years is incredible and speaks volumes about the organization."

Shortly after Piccone was named to the bench, the Tigers named defenceman Jonathan Balah the club's captain for this year via Instagram.

The 19-year-old Barrie native led the team in points in his first year with the group. He recorded 10 goals and 26 assists. Coach Greg Johnston also announced Luc Reeve and Tommy Kloepfer will be the team's assistant captains.

The club, which has continuously revamped the roster and the front office over the past year, has continued to put their best foot forward in chase of a title.

The group finished second last in the season pre-COVID-19, with a 7-43-4 record.

Approaching this upcoming season and with pretty much a completely different roster, the jungle recently welcomed 18-year-old left-winger from Hopeville, ON, Connor Van Weelie to the team.

Van Weelie will be entering the OJHL for the first time in his young career. He previously spent the past two seasons with the Kirkland Lake Gold Miners in the NOJHL, recording a total of 37 points (24 G, 13 A) in 61 total games played.

On approach to the start of the season that every OHL player and member of staff have been waiting for, Piccone says that this office has a lot of experience that is beneficial to the players.

"Top to bottom in our office, we have some incredibly experienced hockey players. Jim Thomson played at the highest level. Coach Johnston played at the highest level. Coach Powers played pro and was an NCAA standout and he won a title with Stouffville. I'm coming in with the least amount of playing experiences but we all believe in the same thing. Put your work on the line. Be

disciplined. Have the desire and the will to win and you will succeed.?

By Robert Belardi