

Battle of Yonge Street over after sale of Hurricanes

By Jake Courtepatte

The Battle of Yonge Street is over, yet in this fight there is no winner.

After more than forty years servicing the Newmarket area with high-level junior hockey, the Hurricanes have packed up and moved.

Less than two days after the Hurricanes lost game seven of their round two OJHL playoff series to the Markham Royals, co-owner Anthony Cella announced the sale of the franchise to buyers in Milton, where the team will take on the name of the Milton Menace.

It's a sad day when a storied franchise like the Newmarket Hurricanes pack up and leave, said Matt Milne, a former assistant coach with the Aurora Tigers and player with the Hurricanes. Many years ago the Hurricanes meant something to the residents of Newmarket. It was the place to play and it used to be the thing to do on Thursday nights.

The most recent incarnation of the Newmarket program began in 1987, aptly named the '87s' before taking on the Hurricanes moniker in 1997. Yet the Aurora-Newmarket rivalry dates back all the way to 1975, when the Seneca Flyers moved to Newmarket in the Ontario Provincial Junior Hockey League, of which the Tigers were members since its founding three years prior.

Spurred on by their geographical proximity, the rivalry was already embedded between the two squads thanks to the 1974 playoffs, when the Tigers bested the Flyers in six games in the OPJHL quarterfinal series.

It wasn't until 1985, the Flyers penultimate year of existence, when the two rivals met again in the postseason, where the Aurora team once again came out on top four games to three in the league's semifinals.

During a time of unease and turmoil among Ontario junior hockey leagues, some shakeups led the Newmarket franchise to a one-year hiatus before returning to six seasons of junior B as the 87s. They rejoined the junior A ranks in 1993-94, and in poetic circumstance, were victorious over the Tigers in their first season as the Hurricanes in the 1998 postseason.

The 2000's era saw a postseason rivalry akin to that of the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs and Ottawa Senators at the time, in the height of the Battle of Yonge Street rivalry: Newmarket and

Aurora saw each other in the playoffs five of seven years between 2002-08, with the Tigers coming out the victors in all five, including division championships in 2002, 2004, and 2005.

Though the sides have only seen regular season action since 2008, the rivalry has continued to be deeply embedded among fans and players alike: though the Hurricanes attendance numbers sat at just over an average of 200 a night, the number crept up significantly with their rivals in town.

Adversely, the Tigers average attendance in 2018-19 sat just under 270, good for fifth in the league among those who provided numbers.

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