

Central York Junior Panthers get two-point games from Cranney and Degeer in decisive 4-0 win over Toronto

Mikayla Cranney and Cheyenne Degeer generated timely offence for the Central York Junior Panthers in their regular season finale on Sunday afternoon at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

Cranney and Degeer contributed two points each to the Panthers' decisive 4-0 victory over the Toronto Aeros to close their regular season on a winning note.

Panthers' goaltender Brooke Vaccari earned the shutout by turning aside 22 Aero shots. The high-flying Panthers finished the regular season in second place in the East Division with a 28-10-5 record and qualified for the OWHL U22AA Elite Championship Weekend.

Prior to their tilt with Toronto, President of the CYGHA and Panther Coach Mark Dubeau introduced his organization's fourteen graduating players, many of whom are heading to NCAA or OUA destinations in September.

The Junior Panther grads celebrated their accomplishments individually by skating over to their coaching staff and Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas for a ceremonial photo, then carried that good feeling into the first period versus the Aeros.

Panthers' Captain Abby Lunney, a gold medal-winning member of Canada's National Women's Under-18 Team and bronze medal winner at the Canada Winter Games, put her team on the scoreboard at 12:14 of the opening frame. Lunney made a strong weak-side cut to the net and one-timed a perfect feed from Cheyenne Degeer.

The Captain's 18th goal gave the Panthers a 1-0 lead. Kaitlin Teixeira, the Panthers' third-leading scorer, earned her 20th assist of the regular season on what turned out to be Lunney's game-winning goal.

The Central York squad carried the play for most of the period. However, Panther Goaltender Brooke Vaccari bailed out her teammates' periodic defensive miscues with a strong game between the pipes and earned the shutout.

Coach Dubeau praised his netminder's effort versus the Aeros: "Brooke's been a rock for us. She was solid this afternoon for sure. She stayed focused and she was on point."

Equally on point was Cheyenne Degeer's unassisted short-handed goal one minute into the second period. Degeer's marker at 17:59 was a masterful solo effort that delighted the Panthers' faithful gathered at the packed Stronach Recreation Complex.

The goal emboldened the Panthers, deflated the ninth-place Aeros, and became a turning point in the game, according to Central York Coach Marc Dubeau: "We came out strong to start the game, but fell back in a defensive struggle. Cheyenne's goal really turned it around for us and we stopped sitting back. We created excellent transitions to offence."

The Panthers' offensive transitions, as well as their skill and speed, were on equal display less than ninety seconds later when Kayla Kondo finished a perfect cross-ice pass from Mikayla Cranney. Kondo, the Panthers' leading scorer over the regular season, roofed the puck just under the crossbar and above Aeros' goaltender Lyla MacKinnon to give Central York a 3-0 lead into the second intermission.

Cranney's speed was again on full display three minutes into the third period. The smooth-skating forward generated a clear-cut breakaway from Makenna Slocum's pass and buried the puck stick-side at 16:38 to provide the Panthers with a commanding 4-0 over the 12-29-5 Aeros. The Panthers played with urgency with a 4-0 lead which pleased Coach Debeau.

"The last few games we've struggled to finish games. Other teams we've been facing lately are playing to make the playoffs so

we've faced urgency. I thought they finished well as they should in front of big crowd at the rink.?

SEASON NOTES Three Panthers have committed to NCAA Division 1 schools: Hailey McGuire (Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire); Hannah Clarke (Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island); and Makenna Slocum (Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts).

The Panthers finished the season in second place in the 10-team U22AA OWHL's East Division with a 28-10-5 record. Their 61-point total and .709 winning percentage was the 5th-best record in the 26-team league. Their overall record in 2022-23 is an impressive 38-12-6-1.

Kayla Kondo finished 15th in the OWHL regular season scoring race with 29 goals, 16 assists, and 45 points in 41 games. She was the Panthers' top scorer.

The IIHF game featuring Team Sweden and Team Switzerland on April 2 at the ACC is a big event for the Panthers' organization, according to CYGHA President Mark Dubeau.

?We'll be setting up tables and distributing post cards to the young ladies in attendance. Most importantly, this is an opportunity for local girls to see these world class athletes who are here for the World Championships. This is great access for them?up close and personal at the ACC with top athletes from Sweden and Switzerland skating on the same ice as our players do.?

By Jim Stewart