

Cole Crawford tallies two in Tigers' 7-4 win over Cobourg Cougars

The Aurora Junior A Tigers won their third game in four starts with an impressive 7-4 clipping of the Cobourg Cougars on Saturday night at the ACC.

Cole Crawford scored two first period goals to help the Tigers jump out to a 5-1 lead after 20 minutes of play.

Crawford credited his team's quick start on Saturday night as a key to victory.

Our coaches have been on us to get off to a good start. We got rolling in the first period. We didn't take Cobourg lightly. We knew they won last night and we lost in overtime last night. We had to put together a consistent effort and we were clicking as a team.

The Tigers' offence started clicking four minutes into the contest when the Howard brothers produced the game's opening goal. Assistant Captain Luke feathered his 14th assist of the season to Captain Simon who fired his eleventh past Cougars' goaltender Matteo Porporino.

Seventy-six seconds later, Crawford with a helper from high-scoring Assistant Captain Cayden Smith beat Porporino to put the Tigers up 2-0 before the game was six minutes old. Crawford described the momentum-producing marker.

Smitty gave me a great pass right on my tape and I got off a quick shot to keep us rolling.

After Cobourg forward Mike Albert beat Aurora goaltender Finn Wilson two minutes later to narrow the visitors' deficit to 2-1, Crawford's second goal of the period stifled the Cougars' comeback plans.

The rookie Tigers' forward one-timed a perfect pass from Jamie Buscarini at 5:42 while Aurora was killing a penalty.

Crawford described the shortie that short-circuited the visitors' power play: I saw the puck squirt out and the [Cougars] D was wandering. Jamie made a great pass as I got open. It was right on my tape, too.

After Crawford converted the second perfect delivery from a teammate during the opening frame, Marcus Carter deked Porporino past his left post and slid the puck through the crease to Kyle Butt who deposited the disc into the yawning cage to give the Tigers a 4-1 lead with less than three minutes to play.

On a brilliant individual effort, Anrijs Bundzenieks took Bode Pearson's lead pass and knifed his way to the net off the left wing snapping a puck just under the crossbar that beat Porporino so cleanly that it ricocheted back out of the net.

Bundzenieks's 6th of the season gave the Tigers a commanding 5-1 lead with less than two minutes to before the first intermission.

Eight minutes into the middle frame, Charlie Hotles back in an Aurora uniform after a tour of duty with the Flint Firebirds of the OHL pounced on his own rebound, went to his backhand, and lifted the puck over a sprawled Porporino to make it 6-1 for the home side.

Simon Howard earned his team-leading 14th assist on Hotles's 4th OJHL goal.

With 3:38 left on the clock, Egor Kozlov's wrist shot from between the circles flipped over Finn Wilson's shoulder stick side to pull the Cougars to within four before the second intermission.

Newly-acquired Tigers' forward Paul Mazanik who arrived from the Collingwood Blues on November 7 provided the knockout punch with 7:22 remaining in the third period when he rifled one high under the bar past Porporino to restore the home side's

five-goal lead.

Crawford, whose two-goal performance earned his Third Star of the Game honors as selected by OJHL staff, credited the Tigers' management for acquiring players such as Mazanik and Hotles (from the North York Rangers), along with Finn Wilson (Trenton Golden Hawks), Nick Frasca (Toronto Patriots), Sebastian Catalano and Martin Maryanovsky (Newmarket Hurricanes), Mason Dermastia (Stouffville Spirit), and Gianfranco Rosella (Mississauga Chargers) during the last six weeks as a catalyst for the team's turnaround.

?We're starting to click as a team. We made some big trades and our team has really improved. We're looking to make the playoffs and we're really coming together.?

The Tigers showed that new-found cohesion on Friday night by putting forth a much-improved performance against the high-flying Stouffville Spirit.

Although Aurora lost the game in OT when Zach Corte scored his 16th of the season four minutes into the extra period, Crawford was impressed with the Tigers' play against first-place Stouffville (16-5-0-0).

?We kept it rolling and we put together a strong effort. It was tough to lose, but we got a point and our team was clicking last night, too.?

Stouffville stomped Aurora 7-2 on September 20 at the ACC so Friday's performance against the Spirit reflected the significant change in performance level by the Tigers to which Crawford alluded.

With its three-point weekend versus Stouffville and Cobourg, the ninth-place Tigers improved their record to 8-10-0-1 and trail eighth-place Haliburton by only two points with one game in hand.

Aurora's five-game homestand at the ACC continues next week when the Tigers host the North York Rangers (1-20-0-1) on Wednesday, November 12 for a rare matinee game commencing at 12.30 p.m.; the Markham Royals (6-12-1-2) on Friday, November 14 at 7 p.m.; and the Wellington Dukes (7-8-2-4) on Saturday, November 15 at 7 p.m.

By Jim Stewart