

Crawford's hat trick triggers Tigers to 8-2 thrashing of North York Rangers

Cole Crawford fired three goals and added one assist to lead the resurgent Aurora Tigers to an impressive 8-2 win over the North York Rangers at the ACC on Friday night.

The tenth-place Tigers have won four of their last six games since General Manager and Assistant Coach James Thomson replaced Head Coach Darcy Roy two weeks ago.

Coach Thomson's team came out firing on all cylinders against the Rangers, taking a two-goal lead before the game was five minutes old. Javian Nei's 15th of the season opened the scoring at 4:03 and Sebastian Catalano made it 2-0 fifty seconds later when the Aurora defender beat North York netminder Reid Thomas.

Crawford, who along with Anrijs Bundzenieks earned an assist on Nei's opening goal, credited his line's tenacity for setting the tone early in the game.

"We followed our coach's game plan. Javian is such a talented scorer and he put it in the back of the net."

The Crawford-Bundzenieks-Nei combo accrued seven points against the Rangers and Crawford attributed the line's productivity and his hat trick to the trio's on-ice familiarity.

"We've been developing a lot of chemistry. I couldn't have done it without them tonight. All three of us were following our coaching staff's game plan."

The Tigers took a 3-0 lead when defenseman Tommy Kut found open space during his foray in from the blue line and fired a wrist shot from between the circles that beat Thomas cleanly at 4:53.

North York got on the scoreboard with 1:12 left in the first period when Noah Naurbaev one-timed a low shot off William Divitcos's juicy rebound, one that ricocheted into the left faceoff circle on to Naurbaev's tape after a slick side-to-side save by Tigers' goaltender Noah Kraus.

The Rangers just missed making it 3-2 with one second left in the first frame, but a big short-side stop by Kraus kept the visitors from creeping closer before intermission.

Crawford praised that timely save and his goaltender's 26-save performance.

"Having Kraus in net fills us with so much confidence. We're lucky to have him. He's played great for us to help our team play over .500 during the last six games."

Crawford's two goals between 6:58 and 7:22 in the second period provided the knockout punch that short-circuited the visitors' comeback attempt.

The hard-working winger was grateful for the puck luck that accompanied his first goal which gave the Tigers a 4-1 lead.

"It came on the forecheck and it was a lucky bounce that went off a player and past the goalie. I'll take it."

Twenty-four seconds later, Crawford banged home a rebound created by Bundzenieks's powerful incursion off the right wing. The quick strike staked the Tigers to a four-goal lead and ended Thomas's night between the pipes.

Replacement goaltender Joseph D'Angelo kept the Tigers off the scoresheet and recalibrated the shell-shocked Rangers squad. With

1:12 left in the second period, North York reduced its deficit to 5-2 when Timur Naurzbaev received a pass from Divitcos and roofed one just under the crossbar and over the shoulder of Kraus into the Tigers' net.

However, the home side restored their four-goal lead less than five minutes into the third period when Johnathan Cirone's quick burst off the right wing created a perfect pass for Jamie Buscarini who buried the biscuit past D'Angelo.

After Buscarini finally solved D'Angelo, Charlie Hotles scored the most picturesque goal of the contest.

The power forward corralled the puck at his own blue line, created space in the neutral zone, bedazzled a pair of North York defenders, burst in from the left wing, and rifled a low shot through the Rangers' replacement keeper to make it 7-2 at 16:32.

Crawford completed his hat trick with 25 seconds left in the game when he sniped a shot from the right circle off the post and past D'Angelo blocker side.

It was Crawford's 16th of the season and first hat trick in 2025-26 for the Tigers.

The young scoring hero noted that his last three-goal game was ?last year in U16 versus Markham.?

The Junior A Tigers finish their regular season next Saturday by hosting St. Mike's at 7 PM at the ACC.

Tigers give Spirit a scare

Another sign of the Tigers' improved play under new Bench Boss James Thomson was Aurora's narrow 2-1 loss to the mighty Spirit in Stouffville on Thursday night. Tigers' goaltender Kian Hodgins put forth a stellar performance between the pipes?turning aside 40 of the 42 shots he faced.

The second-place Spirit (38-11-1-1) needed a third period goal from former Tigers' power forward Kyle Baston to edge Aurora in front of 368 fans. Thomas Leone's goal at 3:48 of the third period pulled the Tigers (18-33-0-2) into a 1-1 tie, but Baston scored the game-winner one minute later to seal the deal for Stouffville.

Around the OJHL

Another former Tiger, defensive stalwart Bode Pearson, had a big offensive showing in Collingwood's 16-0 romp over Cobourg on Friday night. The rugged defenseman had a four-point night?one goal and three assists?in the Blues' annihilation of the Cougars in front of 706 fans at the Eddie Bush Memorial Arena in Collingwood.

It was Pearson's first goal of the season to go along with fifteen assists.

By Jim Stewart