

Defensive woes continue for freefalling Tigers

It was the story of two seasons: one on a meteoric rise to the top, one remaining locked in the basement.

The Aurora Tigers met the Stouffville Spirit for the second time in six days on Friday, coming off a 6 ? 3 loss on November 13, securing the Spirit seventeen points in their last ten games.

For Aurora, Friday's home match at the Aurora Community Centre meant an opportunity to snap their current four-game losing streak, and perhaps bring their number of wins on the season up to a handful.

The Spirit had other plans: the offense came out guns blazing, throwing fourteen shots on Aurora keeper Andrew Barwinski in the first period alone, who has recently taken the net from slumping veteran Christian Filippetti.

Barwinski managed to stop all but one puck in the opening frame, though the onslaught continued into the second period, where Stouffville took a 3 ? 0 lead. Jackson Clark finally stopped the bleeding for the Tigers with just over five minutes to go in the period with his seventh goal of the year, though it was too little, too late in an eventual 5 ? 2 loss.

Steven Li managed the Tigers lone other goal.

With new head coach Jim Wells Jr. now leaning heavily on Barwinski as the backstop, he returned to the net on Saturday to face the Markham Royals, faring no better in a 3 ? 1 loss.

Markham spread out three goals over the three periods, while Jalen Balbosa was the only Tiger to find the back of the net in the second frame. Barwinski made 27 stops on the 30 shots he faced.

The latest pair of losses comes as an extra blow for the Tigers, who have failed to turn it around under the tutelage of Wells, unable to gain a point in his three games as the top dog behind the bench.

It has all been part of just the latest streak this season, this one adding up to six games lost. That brings the Tigers to a record of 4-20-0-3, eight points behind the Pickering Panthers in the North division's basement, and 23 back of the division-leading Spirit.

Any chance of turning around the season has to begin with a complete overhaul of the defensive system, with the Tigers

giving up a dismal 4.63 goals per game. That tops only the Lindsay Muskies in the league, with the two clubs well behind the rest of the OJHL in the category.

It is apt to point out, however, there are some shining lights in this dim season: defenseman Jonathan Balah has been named to Saturday's OJHL All-Star Game roster in Oakville, leading the Tigers in scoring with twenty points on the year.

Announced to the OJHL Prospects Game is Kaleb Nelson, at just 16-years-old.

The recent commit to Providence College has shone in his first junior league season, sitting third in team scoring with thirteen points.

Affiliate Ryan Dunbar from the York-Simcoe Express will also take part in the OJHL Affiliate Players Game.

Sandwiching Saturday's All-Star festivities is a hosting Friday evening of the Mississauga Chargers, and a visit to Wellington on Sunday to face the league-leading Dukes.

Friday's opening faceoff is set for 7:30 p.m. at the Aurora Community Centre.

For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.

By Jake Courtepatte