

Depleted Junior Tigers drop hard-fought 4-2 decision to regional rival King Rebellion

Lachland Larmand tallied two goals including an empty netter to lead the King Rebellion to a 4-2 victory over the Aurora Tigers on Friday night at the Aurora Community Centre.

The Junior Tigers faced myriad challenges both on and off the ice on Friday night.

Cooling down a red-hot Rebellion squad was going to be a tough task for the host team, but, to their credit, the determined Tigers put forth an effort reminiscent of their 2-1 winning performance last Friday versus Leamington.

Complicating matters for the Junior Tigers versus King was the absence of Head Coach Darcy Roy who was rushed to Southlake Regional Health Centre for an emergency appendectomy.

To make things even more challenging for Aurora's roster was a pair of end-of-week promotions to the OHL. The Tigers' lineup was considerably lighter after star goaltender Matt Humphries was recalled by the Niagara IceDogs and high-scoring winger Charlie Hotles, who scored three goals and three assists in five games, was recalled by the Flint Firebirds.

The OHL giveth and the OHL taketh away.

A very early goal by the visitors intensified the Tigers' travails. Thirty-seven seconds into the game, Owen Bruining beat Aurora goalkeeper Finn Wilson to give King a 1-0 lead. Despite surrendering the quick opening goal to Bruining, Wilson turned in a sparkling performance for the Tigers by turning aside 36 of the 39 shots he faced.

The Junior Tigers tightened their D after the opening minute lapse and countered with 1:28 left in the first period. Gianfranco Rosella, with assists from newly-acquired defender Nick Frasca and Aurora's leading set-up man Anrijs Bundzenieks, beat OJHL-leading goaltender Owen Edwards to knot the contest at 1-1.

At 4:41 of the second period, Larmand, off a nice feed from Jared McNeil, rifled a shot top shelf stick side from the between the circles that beat Wilson. Larmand's sixth of the season?also assisted by defenseman Ryan Castle ? restored the Rebellion's one-goal lead.

Four minutes later, on a King power play, Castle whistled one from the left point just above the faceoff circle which eluded a thoroughly-screened Wilson to extend the Rebellion's lead to 3-1.

Three high quality saves by Wilson in the final minute of play in the second period kept the Tigers within striking range.

At the midway point of the third period, back-to-back penalties to Cerqua and Castle gifted Aurora with a 5-on-3 power play and compelled Tigers Coach James Thomson to call a timeout at 11:08 and draw up a play for a key offensive zone faceoff.

King netminder Owen Edwards was his team's best penalty killer during the Aurora two-man advantage.

The OJHL's top goaltender repelled a pair of slot shots at 10:48 and 10:20 to stave off the Tigers' determined efforts. However, with eight minutes remaining, Aurora's perseverance was rewarded when rookie Cole Crawford one-timed a sweet cross-slot pass from Bundzenieks to pull the Tigers to within one. It was Crawford's first OJHL goal and Bundzenieks's tenth assist of the season.

After Wilson foiled a Bruining breakaway with 3:50 remaining, the acrobatic goaltender was pulled from the net for an extra attacker at 1:33. Larmand?who turned in a strong, two-way game for the Juniors from King Township?fetched a loose puck in the neutral zone, skated inside the Aurora blue line, and fired the puck along the ice, off the right pipe, and into the empty net to give

King an insurance goal with 58 ticks left on the clock.

Rebellion Head Coach Geoff Schomogyi, whose team was playing the first of three games in a row this weekend, delineated two keys to King's tenth victory of the season: "We managed the puck well tonight and our forecheck was really heavy. We played well most of the night. When you've got three games in a row to play, winning the first one is key."

Schomogyi, who won his 200th OJHL game in a 3-1 win over the Rangers in North York on Tuesday, discussed the personal significance and satisfaction of the milestone victory.

"It was symbolic to win it where I got my start as a Head Coach. It's special to think about the hundreds and hundreds of players I've been lucky enough to coach in this league and to help them with their careers. You push your players to get the best out of them."

The Tigers will push themselves to be at their best when they host Round 3 of the Battle of Yonge Street versus the Newmarket Hurricanes on Friday, October 24. The 4-game season series is 1-1. Puck drop at the ACC will be 7 p.m.

By Jim Stewart