

Ella Newman-Mixon scores OT winner in U22 Panthers? 4-3 victory over Bluewater to salvage homestand



The U22 Central York Panthers bounced back from two consecutive home losses with a 4-3 overtime victory over the Bluewater Hawks at SARC on Sunday afternoon. Ella Newman-Mixon's unassisted goal, her ninth of the season, provided the OT heroics versus Bluewater as the Panthers (19-9-0-2) earned a much-needed win after tough defeats to the Etobicoke Dolphins (22-0-0-1) and Cambridge Rivulettes (16-8-1-2) earlier in the week.

Quick starts by the Panthers, which generated early goals in all three periods versus Bluewater (16-9-2-1), were the keys to Sunday's victory.

Amber Esterbrooks?who tallied a hat trick against the London Devilettes last Saturday ? opened the scoring 25 seconds into Sunday afternoon's game against the Hawks. Esterbrooks' 17th goal of the season was assisted by Cheyenne Degeer and Zoe Li.

90 seconds into the second period, Erica Buckley, with assists from Klaire Essex and Clara Williams, increased the Panthers' lead to 2-0.

The Hawks responded with a flurry of goals in the second period.

Bluewater's leading goal scorer, Robyn Storey, tallied two in less than nine minutes to tie the game 2-2 and Molly Battram gave the visitors a 3-2 lead with three minutes left in the middle frame.

Panthers' points leader Cheyenne Degeer, with helpers from Li and Esterbrooks?tied the game two minutes into the third period and the teams remained deadlocked at 3-3 after sixty minutes of play.

The scrappy Degeer's fifteenth goal of the season moved her into ninth place in the OWHL scoring race with 34 points.

Esterbrooks and Li earned their 13th and 17th assists of the season, respectively, on Degeer's tying goal to solidify their place among the OWHL's Top 20 scorers at #16 and #18.

With 9:09 left in overtime, Newman-Mixon fired the puck past Hawks goaltender Ella Willoughby to give the Panthers a much-needed win and end the weekend on a high note. Isabelle Whynot returned between the pipes for the Panthers and blocked 17 of 20 shots to earn the W?her 10th of the season.

Sunday's winning effort was noteworthy in that the U22 Central York Panthers and their U18 call-ups continue to weather an outbreak of injuries this season.

The valiant amalgam has maintained their #3 ranking in the 20-team OWHL, despite having up to nine players on the Injured List. However, two of the top teams in Canada visited Aurora this week to challenge the injury-decimated junior club and the results reflected the uneven current rosters with almost half the Panthers skaters relegated to the sidelines.

Prior to their big comeback win versus Bluewater, the short-handed Panthers suffered a pair of home losses at SARC: 3-0 to the seventh-place Cambridge Rivulettes on Saturday afternoon and a 3-2 heartbreaker to the second-place Etobicoke Dolphins on Wednesday night.

Etobicoke and Cambridge have been ranked as high as #1 and #12, respectively, in Canada.

After the tough loss to the Rivulettes on Saturday afternoon, Panthers' Head Coach Steve Dempsey, who has also coached Ontario university hockey for over fifteen years, said he has never seen so many injuries afflict any of his teams.

"We were down at least nine players today. It's been tough on the players, especially the 18U callups who are playing in their games, too. There's been lots of wear and tear on two teams stretched pretty thin by the number of injuries we've had over the last few weeks. Both our goalies were unavailable for today's game, including one that was in the hospital this morning."

Coach Dempsey spoke approvingly of the play of emergency callup goalie Audrey Thomas who was tested early and often by the Rivulettes and kept the Panthers in the game by shutting out the visitors for over half the game.

"I was happy with her performance. When Audrey tracks the puck, she plays very well."

The veteran bench boss thought the turning point of the game versus Cambridge "in addition to hearing about his "starting goalie being hospitalized this morning with heart problems" "was the inability of his team to score an early goal on home ice.

"We needed to set the tone by scoring the first goal. That would have given us more energy."

After the teams battled to a scoreless tie after twenty minutes of play, high energy forward Erica Buckley was awarded a penalty shot at 17:18 of the second period. Buckley's wrist shot on Cambridge netminder Jordy Demarnis sailed just wide of the left goal post.

Panthers' goalie Thomas displayed her athleticism after the missed penalty shot with a pair of saves against the rapid-firing Rivulettes at 9:30, but Cambridge banged in a rebound during a power play goalmouth scramble to put the visitors up 1-0.

The Rivulettes added two goals in the third period to provide their three-goal margin of victory. Demarnis earned the shutout by repelling the Panthers' final five minutes of offensive pressure with Thomas pulled for an extra attacker.

By Jim Stewart