

Erik Powers's 40-save performance staves off ?Valentine's Day Massacre? in Tigers? tough 3-2 loss to surging Stouffville Spirit

It was a mismatch on paper on Friday night between playoff-bound Stouffville and the young Aurora Tigers.

The OJHL squads' records suggested that the game could be a bit one-sided for the fifth-place Spirit (27-17-4-0) matched up against eleventh-place Aurora (10-34-4-0). Stouffville carried momentum into the contest as their 7-3-0-0 record would indicate while the Junior Tigers' record was 2-7-1-0 record in their last ten. Additionally, Stouffville gave #1-ranked Trenton a spirited performance last week in a 2-1 loss and had knocked off two playoff-bound teams?Pickering and Wellington?prior to rolling into the ACC for their evening tilt on Valentine's Day.

Despite these daunting metrics, the young Tigers showed much grit and determination in a narrow 3-2 loss to the surging Spirit at the Aurora Community Centre.

Rookie goaltender Erik Powers's 40-save performance was a significant factor in the contest, including a 20-save master class in net-minding in the first period.

After Stouffville forward Lachlan Wells banged in a rebound past Powers to complete a precise 3-on-2 at 2:08, there were concerns among the ACC denizens that the rout was on. Four weeks ago, the Spirit scored early and often in their 10-4 beating of the playoff-bound King Rebellion ? a brash demonstration of Stouffville's fire power.

However, Powers prevented the hockey version of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre with impressive acrobatics, reflexes, and exquisite flashings of the leather to keep black-clad Stouffville off the board for 41 minutes of play after Wells's early marker.

The young Tigers also showed their season-long penchant for opportunistic scoring. The combination of 40+-save goaltending and timely scoring have been necessary ingredients for wins this season for Aurora.

Midway through the first period, rookie forward Lucas Tsaparis tied the game when he converted a nice goal mouth pass from Aurora resident Tristen Abel.

Tsaparis chipped the puck past Spirit netminder Masen Johnston to make it 1-1.

Tiger defenseman Luke Howard earned his 19th assist of the season on Tsaparis's timely marker versus Aurora's traditional regional rival.

When Captain Nicholas Brady's first goal of the season gave Aurora a 2-1 lead heading into the second intermission, the 150 fans assembled at the ACC on Friday night could sense a significant upset brewing in Tigertown.

It was also Brady's first goal as a Tiger. After receiving a nice set up from Michael Piao, the rugged defender fired a wrist shot from the left circle that beat Johnston cleanly to give his upstart squad a one-goal lead at 15:24?shocking the contingent of Stouffville fans at the ACC into stunned silence.

The articulate Captain described his first goal of the season: ?It felt great. The guys were happy about my first goal, especially our group of defensemen. Michael gave me a great pass off the boards and I was able to find the open space.?

The youngest team in the OJHL held their one-goal lead with valiant effort through the second period and into the third until Griffen Boyle's unassisted goal?a wrist shot off the left circle ? at 2:20 of the final frame pulled Stouffville into a 2-2 tie.

Danny Thomakos's 16th of the season was the game-winner at 6:59. Thomakos converted Julian Demiglio's 34th assist of the season

to complete a 2-on-1 break and give the playoff-bound Spirit a 3-2 lead. The feisty Tigers battled to the final horn, but could not manage the equalizer with the man-advantage and Powers lifted from the cage for the final fifty-five seconds of play.

Captain Brady was disappointed by the outcome of the game, but he expressed optimism about the club's future.

?Next year, we'll be more competitive. We've been getting better as a young club. My job as captain is the keep the young guys going. I do my best to deal with each of them and I know they've been down sometimes during a tough season. I think we have a great core of guys and I hope we can stay together so we can have a good season next year.?

One of those key players to be retained is Powers. Brady complimented the British Columbia resident for a strong effort versus Stouffville and for so many great performances since the 6'5? netminder arrived in a mid-season trade with the King Rebellion.

?He's an amazing goalie. Erik's always doing the right thing. He plays the puck really well for the defensemen, too. He's definitely a nice goalie to watch.?

The Tigers' final two home games this season feature the twelfth-place North York Rangers on Friday, February 21 and the eighth-place Pickering Panthers on Saturday, February 22. Puck drop for both will be 7.30 p.m. at the ACC.

By Brock Weir