

Express bounced in OHL Cup semifinals

By Jake Courtepatte

A bid for a second OHL Cup title fell short for the York-Simcoe Express, bowing out to the Vaughan Kings in the tournament's semifinals on Saturday.

The 2016 champs entered the competition among the favourites after winning the OMHA title in early March, earning a 4 ? 1 win over the Mississauga Reps in their opening matchup despite goaltender Alex Imperio forced to contend with 45 shots.

They became the first team in the twenty-team tournament to reach 2 ? 0 with a 4 ? 2 win over the Mississauga Rebels on Wednesday at Toronto's Scotiabank Pond, thanks to a three-goal output in the second period from Cameron Butler, Ty Collins, and Jack Bar.

"We're playing with a lot of speed," said Express blueliner Bar who had a goal and an assist. "The ice here is really good and I think we've had pretty complete team efforts last night and here this morning."

The Express stayed perfect in game three thanks to a pair of late goals against TPH Hockey of London, with Butler tying it at three with just over two minutes remaining, before Evan Vierling put away the game winning goal less than a minute later.

"I knew I needed to step up there," said Vierling, who earned MVP honours for the game. "It was a bit of a funny game and they challenged us. We had some big saves from (Alexander) Imperio to keep us in it until we got things together."

After a 6 ? 2 win over the Mississauga Senators capped a perfect round robin for the Express, it was Vierling who once again provided the winner in Saturday morning's quarterfinal, sending the Express into the final four with a 2 ? 1 overtime goal.

With just under two minutes remaining in the overtime period, Vierling capitalized on a clear path to the net from just over the Oakville Ranger blue line.

"It's exhilarating, that's all I can really say," said Vierling after being mobbed by teammates. "Everything is so tight in that situation and I just wanted to get the puck to the net. Fortunately it found a way in."

York-Simcoe's perfect record was snapped, however, in a 3 ? 1 loss to the Kings in the afternoon's semifinal.

Imperio made 26 stops, while Butler provided the lone York-Simcoe goal.

Aurora native Vierling finished second in tournament scoring with ten points over six games, and was named one of the three forwards on the tournament's All-Star team.

Vaughan earned the silver after falling 5 ? 1 to the Toronto Jr. Canadiens in Monday's final, broadcast nationally on Sportsnet.