

Former Tiger Captain Stanojevic tallies four points in Cobourg Cougars? 7-2 win over Aurora

Like Ebenezer Scrooge being haunted by the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Aurora Tigers were visited by a Captain of the Not-So-Distant Past on Friday night.

Lucas Stanojevic appeared out of the ether of the ACC for the first time as a Cobourg Cougar and led his new team to a decisive 7-2 win.

The Tigers' leading scorer in 2022-23 showed his flair for productivity in eerily familiar surroundings by scoring two goals and two assists for the fifth-place Cougars (18-10-2-3).

Stanojevic earned assists on Jordan Fuller's goals at 4:40 and 9:13 of the first period to stake Cobourg to a 2-0 lead.

Riley Pitt's power play goal six minutes later into the opening frame gave the Cougars a three-goal cushion before Alonzo Milano, playing in his first OJHL game, scored for the Tigers with fifty seconds to go before the first intermission.

Kenneth Wu and Frank Castiglione earned assists on what injured Tigers' Assistant Captain Connor Russo described as 'a gorgeous goal'[Milano] showed lots of patience and poise. He really showed confidence at the next level.?

Cobourg's Matt Mueller restored the Cougars' three-goal lead 1:08 into the second period, but the home side showed some fightback when Tigers' veteran Jace Lavallee tallied his eighth of the season 52 seconds after Mueller's marker. Kyle Baston earned the assist that narrowed the visitors' lead to two.

However, only Cobourg lit up the scoreboard after Lavallee's goal.

A pair of power play goals by Stanojevic, at 6:04 and 7:35 of the second and third periods, respectively, put the game away.

Stanojevic noted that the Cougars needed a big effort after losing two straight games prior to Friday's game at the ACC.

'Good teams don't lose more than two in a row so we really needed to emphasize our performance against Aurora.?

The articulate former Tigers' captain offered a concise assessment of his eventful season so far and his four-point night on Friday.

'It's been an up and down year for me. It was a shock to be traded by the Tigers to JRC before our first preseason game. It was out of my control and I wasn't expecting to be traded. The trade to JRC didn't work out, but it's been good in Cobourg. I've been here for 11 games now, learning a new set of systems including our power play. I love playing there and I've been adjusting some things in my game. I played a pretty good game [tonight]. It was one of the more complete games of the year?team-wise and personally.?

On Saturday night, the saga remained the same for the struggling home side as they fell to the Wellington Dukes 7-1.

It was the Tigers' eighth consecutive loss. The second-place Dukes (22-13-0-2) opened strongly and took a 2-0 lead on goals one minute apart by power play quarterback Dimitri-Alexander Tzaferis's blast from the point and Cory Jewitt's skillful even strength deflection of Logan Sitlani's wrist shot.

Tigers' forward Frank Castiglione?on assists from Carson Littlejohn and Josh Frenette-- cashed in a rebound with 90 seconds left in the period to narrow the visitors' lead to 2-1. Castiglione's eighth goal of the season evoked the airborne delivery of dozens of stuffed animals to the ACC's ice surface to both celebrate the goal and promote the club's annual Teddy Bear Toss. The toys were collected by the players as Christmas presents for distribution to charitable agencies in the Aurora area.

Alas, the Teddy Bear Toss was the high point of the game for the Tigers as Wellington increased its lead to 4-1 in the middle frame on power play goals by Tzaferis and Connor Loerzel. Wellington forwards Zander Latreille, Connor Hunt, and Ryan Schaap added goals in the third period to provide the six-goal margin of victory.

Tigers' Assistant Captain Russo, who is expected to come off the Injured List in January, saw some positive developments, especially with the line combination of Josh Frenette, Kyle Baston, and Adam Matar.

?All three guys are getting an opportunity. Eventually, it will start to pay off. They played a heavy game tonight and they love to hit. That's their game. They created some chaos and scoring opportunities for us tonight, too. They're building chemistry between the three of them.?

Russo, a hard-working forward whose gritty play and leadership are missed by the Tigers, discussed the value connected to the team's newest arrivals, including Milano, center Hector Martel, goaltender Christopher Thompson, and defenseman Michael Lee.

?We have a lot of APs getting opportunities. They're putting on a showcase for the coaches. Milano is a natural goal scorer and Martel centered a combination of players tonight. Chris played for us last night and will get more chances. Lots of promising players like Michael and our coaches will have a great view. These guys will get lots of chances.?

The veteran Tiger, decked out in a three-piece suit that added an element of elegance and sartorial flare to the otherwise dreary corridors, was philosophical and classy in defeat as he summed up a tough weekend.

?It's obviously hard when you're losing and we only have four players left with OJHL experience. We're trying to stay level-headed. There are going to be growing pains, but we're still trying to make the playoffs. We're only three games out. Everyone is battling.?

The Tigers' next battle before the OJHL's Christmas Break is Thursday, December 21 when they play the Caledon Admirals (5-22-1-5) at the Mayfield ?Icebox? at 7.30 p.m.

The tilt versus the Admirals kicks off a six-game road trip itinerary including Trenton, JRC, Wellington, St. Michael's, and Oakville.

The Tigers host the Pickering Panthers on Friday, January 26 and the Lindsay Muskies on Saturday, January 27. Puck drop for both games of the weekend doubleheader at the ACC is 7.30 p.m.

By Jim Stewart