

Frenette fires OT winner, Oletic tallies two in Tigers' 4-3 triumph over North York Rangers

Josh Frenette fired the OT winner and Tyler Oletic tallied two goals to lead the Aurora Tigers to an exciting 4-3 win over the North York Rangers on Saturday night at the Aurora Community Centre (ACC).

The Tigers earned three of four points over the weekend after dropping a heartbreaking 3-2 OT loss on Friday night to the St. Mike's Buzzers.

The club's incremental improvement has been evident over the last seven games during which the Junior Tigers have cobbled together a 2-3-2 record.

The hard-hitting Oletic opened the scoring 15 minutes into the first period when he banged in a rebound past Rangers' netminder Amir Valiullin off a Jack Rispin blast from the blue line.

Call-up defenseman Lars Derstroff, promoted from the PJHL Penetang Kings, earned his first OJHL assist on Oletic's fourth goal of the season.

The Rangers tied the game with 90 seconds left in the opening frame when Johnny Ringas squeezed a puck short side past call-up goaltender Christopher Thompson who was tested early and often by the visitors.

Thompson, who is having an excellent rookie season with the PJHL Schomberg Cougars, made a big blocker save two minutes into the second period and bailed out his d-men one minute later after an egregious giveaway.

However, Ranger forward Owen Ibbotson rifled a wrist shot from the left circle that banged off the post and past Thompson at 12:23 to give North York a 2-1 lead.

A line of rookie Tigers rallied the team and tied the game at 17:59 when Oletic redirected Kyle Baston's pass behind Valiullin to lift the spirits of supporters on a Saturday night which featured \$7 beer sold by Town of Aurora staff between periods.

Baston and Max Cervjakovs earned assists on the tying goal toasted by legally-aged ACC denizens.

Veteran center Connor Russo gave the Tigers the lead with 28 seconds left in the middle frame when Josh Frenette's wrist shot was redirected by the Assistant Captain into the Rangers' net.

Russo's second of the season was assisted by the hard-driving Frenette and Assistant Captain Jace Lavallee.

The Rangers continued to be a thorn in the paw of the Tigers at 13:45 of the third period when Ringas tallied his second goal of the game to pull the visitors into a 3-3 tie that the teams took into overtime.

North York ruined the Tigers' School Day game earlier in the season when their 7-5 victory sent home over 900 disappointed fans, but revenge for that result was meted out by Frenette in OT.

There was no crying in their beer for Saturday night's crowd at the ACC, due to the heroics of Frank Castiglione, Russo, and Frenette while the teams battled 4-on-4 in the first extra period.

Castiglione, the Tigers' leading scorer, narrowly missed depositing a rebound behind Valiullin, but tireless work by Russo created space for Frenette who buried a laser wrist shot 5:37 into overtime to secure the victory.

Assistant Captain Russo had a front row seat to Frenette's game-winner and praised his rookie teammate's efforts.

?It's unreal how Josh has the knack to get open, especially when we're playing 4-on-4. It took a great shot to beat their goalie tonight.?

As Russo implied, Valliulin frustrated the Tigers all evening and turned aside 42 of 46 shots to earn First Star of the Game as selected by OJHL staff.

Frenette's OT game-winning goal and his earlier assist earned him Second Star of the Game honors.

Russo complimented Frenette's playmaking which set up the veteran center's go-ahead goal at the end of the second period.

?It was Josh again being effective on the ice. He got it to the net and it was nice to get the monkey off my back by scoring a goal. It's been a while and it felt good to put one in the back of the net.?

The veteran Tiger also applauded Christopher Thompson's play between the pipes.

?This was Chris's first full Junior A game. We didn't have a backup goalie dressed tonight due to Yianni's injury last night against the Buzzers, so there was a lot of pressure on Chris. He played amazing.?

Thompson earned the W?his first in the OJHL?by repelling 25 of 28 Ranger shots.

With the win over North York, Russo expressed relief that things have started turning around for the young squad.

?It's been a tough year?lots of new faces in and out of the lineup, but we've carried on. To have a weekend like this when we earn three out of four points is great. We've worked so hard to get better and I'm excited for the young guys. We've been building something for the last seven games and for next year. We're staying optimistic and keeping it light at practice so we can keep morale high for our final games of the season.?

Russo, an accomplished Elvis Presley impersonator, could aptly compare the Tigers' 2023-24 season to a ?Heartbreak Hotel? that left the team ?All Shook Up? after a ?Blue Christmas?, but if the Tigers continue to show their ?Burning Love? for improvement, they will dispel all the ?Suspicious Minds? that counted this team out.

The charismatic Assistant Captain could also claim that there is no ?Surrender? in these young Tigers, and they'll play with urgency for the rest of the OJHL season as if ?It's Now or Never.? There will be no crying like ?A Hound Dog.?

The Tigers host the Wellington Dukes on Thursday, February 15 in a rare weekday matinee game.

Puck drop will be 2:30 at the ACC. Former Tigers Captain and 2022-23 leading scorer Lucas Stanojevic returns to the ACC on Saturday night when Aurora hosts the Cobourg Cougars.

Opening faceoff will be at 7.30 p.m.

By Jim Stewart