

Hampel harnesses the Huskies and Evenhuis eviscerates the Buzzers in Tigers' homestand sweep

The Aurora Tigers' inexorable climb up the OJHL Eastern Conference standings continued in earnest with a pair of entertaining victories at the ACC on the weekend.

On Friday night, Luke Hampel scored twice and the Tigers got three goals from their defensemen in a tidy 4-2 win over the Haliburton Huskies.

On Saturday night, Aurora won a game best described as a Wild West Shootout. The Tigers' leading scorer Ryan Evenhuis fired the last bullet at the ACC Corral and defeated the St. Michaels Buzzers 6-5 on an electrifying short-handed breakaway goal in the third period. It was Evenhuis's second goal of the game and his thirteenth of the season.

Aurora Captain and Penalty Killer Ethan Lindsay described his line-mate's game-winning goal: "I was able to chip the puck off the boards to Ryan and he just did the rest. He got behind the Buzzers and he scored a big goal for us. I think all my assists this year have come on goals by Ryan. He's one of the best players in the league."

Captain Lindsay, who earned three assists in the win over the Buzzers, including his seventeenth on Evenhuis's game-winner, discussed the importance of the wins on the mini-homestand.

"These results definitely set a standard for us. This weekend showed we can compete at a very high level. This is the start to some momentum for the team."

Lindsay also complimented the team's goaltenders, Will Goumas and Yianni Karkoulas, for their work on the weekend.

"Both goalies had nice games and we have so much confidence in Will and Yianni. They made big saves for us to hold leads and came up huge when we needed them."

The Tigers picked up their goaltenders early versus the Buzzers. Less than three minutes into the first period, Tigers' forward Kenneth Wu made a quick cut toward the net on a nice feed by Connor Russo and slipped the puck past Buzzer netminder Luca DiFilice to give the home side a 1-0 lead.

The visitors from Toronto responded with two consecutive power play goals by Jonathan Morello to pull ahead 2-1 at 12:35, but speedy Tiger Jace Lavallee flew down the left wing and lit the lamp 37 seconds later to tie it at two. Aurora took the lead when its power play, which has struggled at home this season, finally clicked with seventy-seconds left in the period as Keegan Decaluwe completed a dandy passing play from Lindsay and Evenhuis to tally his fifth goal of the season.

The Tigers added to their lead when Evenhuis, on assists from Bode Pearson and Lindsay, scored 29 seconds into the second period to put the Tigers up 4-2, but the Buzzers tied the game on a strange short-handed goal by Ethan Nobes and Morello's third goal of the game at 7:38.

Aurora re-took the lead when Decaluwe scored his second of the game at 14:56 on a fortuitous rebound of a Luke Hampel point shot, but the persistent Buzzers tied it 5-5 before the end of the middle frame when Marco Iozzo fired a puck that just squeezed through Tigers' netminder Yianni Karkoulas on the short side.

Karkoulas flashed the leather multiple times prior to and following Evenhuis's game-winning, short-handed goal at 5:43 to preserve the Tigers' victory during a fretful third period versus the Buzzers.

After Friday night's 4-2 win over the Haliburton Huskies, Tigers Coach Greg Johnston acknowledged that three goals from the blue

line brigade was something he doesn't see every week.

?It's a rarity. Our defensemen have been told to get their shots on the net and through.?

A trio of lasers fired by Hampel and Jacob Carroll got through on Friday and boosted the Tigers' offence.

Coach Johnston also noted the confidence-boosting impact of first goals scored by two of his players.

?It was nice to see Asher [Goduco] and Jacob [Carroll] get their first goals of the season. It takes some pressure off them and they don't have to squeeze their sticks as much after seeing the first one go in.?

When asked what he liked about his team's effort versus the Huskies on Friday night, Coach Johnston replied, ?Everything. Our defensive positioning was much better. Good decision-making. We limited our mistakes.?

The Tigers and Huskies both seemed focused on limiting their mistakes in the opening minutes of their game on Friday. The two closely-matched teams, who battled to a 3-3 double OT tie in Haliburton earlier in the season, were enmeshed in a tight-checking contest where scoring chances were at a premium.

However, Tigers forward Asher Goduco broke a scoreless battle of attrition nine minutes into the opening frame. Goduco?who hails from Lake Forest, Illinois?fired a wrist shot that deflected off a Huskies' defenseman and knuckled past Haliburton goaltender Vlad Visan. Kyle Baston and Tyler Oletic drew assists on Goduco's first OJHL goal.

With 37 seconds left in the first period, Tigers' defenseman Jacob Carroll fired a wicked wrist shot from the right point that eluded Visan. Keegan Decaluwe and Jobey Pearson earned assists on Carroll's bullet from the blue line and Aurora took a 2-0 lead into the first intermission.

The Tigers struck early in the second period on another laser from the point from an Aurora defenseman. On a delayed penalty call and after laying out a healthy dose of heavy body checks on an assortment of Huskies, Luke Hampel wired a low slapshot that clunked off the net's base skirting behind Visan and put the home team up 3-0 less than three minutes into the middle frame. The hard-checking duo of Connor Russo and Kenneth Wu earned assists on the goal that chased Haliburton goalie Vlad Visan from the game.

Logan Kennedy took Visan's place in the Huskies' net at 2.52 and the substitution seemed to inspire the visitors. Completing a nice three-way passing play with line-mates Isaac Larmand and Antonio Cerqua, Haliburton forward Lucas Vacca fired a wrist shot from above the circle that beat Tigers' netminder Will Goumas at 6.38.

Seventeen seconds later, Cerqua swept down the right wing and converted a Larmand pass to narrow the margin to 3-2. The Haliburton surge six minutes into the period took some of the wind out of the home team's sails, but Max Cervjakovs's shot off the crossbar seemed to rouse the Tigers from their temporary slumber and Aurora carried its one-goal lead into the dressing room.

Less than five minutes into the final frame, Hampel's second goal of the game?a top-shelf laser from the right point that flew over Kennedy's shoulder ? restored the Tigers' two-goal lead and gave the home team and its fans some much-needed breathing space. It was Hampel's favourite of the two goals he scored on Friday night.

?Our fourth goal of the night was important. It felt great and a big weight was lifted off our shoulders.?

Hampel also opined about the importance of his team's win over the Huskies.

?We've struggled this year to get some momentum. This was a big win after a loss on Tuesday. We need to play our game, stay out of the penalty box, create some momentum, and put some wins together.?

As it turns out, Hampel's post-game words on Friday night were prophetic. The Tigers executed the game plan he described to beat the Buzzers, swept the homestand, and created some much-needed momentum as Aurora rose from tenth to sixth in the Eastern Conference standings with two consecutive wins on the weekend.

The Tigers host the Markham Royals on Friday, October 27 and the Niagara Falls Canucks on Saturday, October 28. Puck drop for both games is 7.30 p.m. at the Aurora Community Centre.

By Jim Stewart