

Humphries and Howard lead Tigers to 2-1 win over #2-ranked Leamington

Aurora netminder Matthew Humphries made 40 saves and Tigers' Captain Simon Howard produced a 2-point night to lead the home side to a thrilling 2-1 win over the Leamington Flyers on Friday night at the ACC.

The Tigers' victory over the second-place Flyers snapped a five-game losing streak and handed Leamington its second loss of the season.

The Flyers' .818 winning percentage is second in the 24-team OJHL.

Captain Simon Howard described the importance of the Tigers' effective start versus the Flyers.

?It was important to get off to a fast start tonight. We've been ready to go all week after our practices prepared us for this game. We changed a lot of things this week and it was great to see how all our hard work in practice showed up in tonight's game.?

Howard's early goal at 2:21 into the first period got his club off to the fast start it needed.

The 6'4? centre took a lead pass from new linemate and former OHL Flint Firebird Charlie Hotles, crossed the blue line with space, and fired a shot under the crossbar that eluded Flyers' goaltender Gannon Hunter glove side.

The Tigers' colorful play-by-play announcer Kevin Dean was at his animated best in the Steve Mitchell Media Booth during the Captain's big goal: ?Howard buries it top shelf with an absolute cannon!?

The Captain with the cannon described the scoring play: ?It was a turnover by them and I was calling for the puck. Chuck put it right on my stick and I was able to go top corner.?

The Tigers protected their 1-0 lead for over forty-eight minutes of play with grit and discipline, but the Flyers tied the game at 9:22 of the third period.

Leamington forward Reid Hayes got loose on a set up pass by Spencer Vandenberg and fired a wrist shot that bulged the twine behind Humphries?the only shot that eluded the brilliant Aurora netminder during his masterful stifling of the Flyers' high-powered offence.

Undaunted by Hayes's equalizer, the valiant Tigers demonstrated much fortitude by restoring their lead within 27 seconds. Captain Howard earned the secondary assist on Thomas Leone's game-winning goal at 9:37 and described his teammate's brilliant breakaway scoring touch: ?It was off a key faceoff and I was able to get the puck to Hotles.?

?It was a nice play by Chuck and Thomas was wheeling. He's got great finish.?

Leone sped through the Flyers' defensive pairing and fired the puck high stick side just over Hunter's shoulder and under the crossbar. His marksmanship elicited a spirited celly along the end boards behind the Leamington net as weeks of frustration poured off Aurora's talented Junior A squad.

Leone's second of the season steeled the resolution of the Tigers with 10 minutes to play and Humphries?who most recently played for the Niagara IceDogs of the OHL?made four high quality saves in the final six minutes to cover any gaps in Aurora's defense.

The 6'4? keeper?who starred for the Tigers last season before his promotion to the OHL?stopped 40 of the 41 shots he faced and was particularly effective in the waning seconds of the game when Hunter was pulled to give Leamington an extra attacker.

Ethan Walker's wicked wrist shot from the right circle, off a set play by Leamington, was surrounded by Humphries' chest protector and he controlled the rebound to stave off a secondary scoring opportunity.

The sensational side-to-side save had the ACC buzzing and was a prelude to Humphries being mobbed by his teammates as time expired.

Simon Howard described Humphries's return performance between the pipes: ?He was unbelievable tonight. I just expect it from him since he played so well for us last year. Humphries is an elite goaltender. We all know he's great. He made big saves all night and allowed us to play freely and with confidence.?

Tiger Tales

More good news on the Tigers' front. Defenseman Luke Howard has committed to the NCAA Division 1 Rochester Institute of Technology Tigers for the 2026-2027 season. A feature on Howard's US College commitment will follow in the October 22 edition of The Auroran.

Coming Attractions

The eighth-place Tigers (4-6-0-0) host their regional rivals from King Township (8-4-0-0) on Friday, October 17. Puck drop versus the sixth-place Rebellion?voted 9th by League GM's in the most recent OJHL Power Rankings Top Ten List-- will be 7.30 p.m. at the Aurora Community Centre.

By Jim Stewart