

Hurricanes wreck Junior Tigers? Opening Night party with 5-3 comeback victory at ACC



The Aurora Tigers spoiled the Newmarket Hurricanes' home opener last Saturday afternoon at the Ray Twinney Recreation Centre and the visitors returned the favor on Saturday night at the ACC.

The Tigers, who came into the game undefeated at 2-0, opened an impressive 3-1 lead after the first period and appeared to be on their way to a third consecutive victory. However, four unanswered goals by the Hurricanes ruined the Opening Night vibe created by over 783 fans in the stands and Newmarket posted a 5-3 win to improve their record to 2-1.

The Tigers provided free admission to Opening Night and distributed free t-shirts to the first 500 fans in attendance. The OJHL club saluted the legacy of legendary videographer Steve Mitchell prior to the game and Mitchell's family strode the red carpet to take part in the official puck drop alongside Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas.

After the poignant spotlight ceremony concluded and almost 800 fans settled into their seats, the Tigers provided hope for a big season by playing one of the best first periods the club has put forth in years.

Two minutes and 30 seconds into the game, Nicholas Brady's wrist shot from the left point was tipped deftly by Luc Warner past Newmarket netminder Max Grovestine to stake the home side to a 1-0 lead.

It was the Assistant Captain's first of the season and the St. Andrew's College grad described his game-opening power play marker: ?It was a fast goal that gave us early momentum and supplied some positive energy at the beginning of the first period.?

Warner was flying up and down the right wing in the opening frame and narrowly missed a second goal on his next shift when Grovestine snared a puck labeled for the top left corner of the net.

The visitors tied the game ninety seconds after Warner's goal when Chase Yanni buried the biscuit off the left faceoff circle with a snap shot high blocker side that eluded Aurora goaltender Jayden Rhee.

The athletic rookie entered the game with the third-best save percentage in the OJHL after backstopping the Tigers to a 2-0 record with wins over the Hurricanes and the North York Rangers in his first two Junior hockey contests.

Ninety seconds later, the plucky Tigers picked up their goalie and restored their lead when Jamie Buscarini took Anrijs Bundseniek's pass, darted from behind the net, and tucked the puck in the short side past Grovestine. It was Bundseniek's fourth assist of the young season.

Luke Howard's shot from the left point at 10:21 fluttered through a sea of players to not only give the Tigers a 3-1 lead, but it forced the Hurricanes to burn their timeout. Rhee responded to Newmarket's post-timeout push by making a timely kick save to preserve his club's hard-fought two-goal lead. Warner commented on the Tigers' first period performance: "We had a great start. All four lines were going and our power play clicked."

When Aurora Captain Simon Howard banged a snap shot off the shaft of Grovestine's stick, just narrowly missing the top right corner of the net, the Tigers maintained the pressure on the visitors and closed off the opening period with ferocious forechecking and some crowd-pleasing open ice hits.

However, the Hurricanes opened the second period with their backup goalie in the crease and James Ruffell turned aside all fifteen shots he faced to help spur Newmarket's comeback.

Sebastian Catalano rifled a wrist shot from the left face-off circle that went off iron and past Rhee 5:57 into the middle frame to cut Aurora's lead to 3-2.

Catalano's defensive partner Lucas Preiano tied the game 36 seconds later when his knuckler caromed off Rhee's trapper and dribbled past the goal line. After the two quick goals, Tigers' Head Coach Darcy Roy hooked his rookie goaltender in favor of backup Rafael DeFina.

With sixteen seconds remaining in the middle frame, the Hurricanes took the lead when Nathan Philips shoveled a backhand pass toward the net that took a strange hop past DeFina and slid along the ice into the net.

Newmarket scored its fourth consecutive goal with 6:24 left in the third period when Yanni converted Joseph Macchione's feed and snapped a wrist shot from between the circles past DeFina.

Yanni's second of the game secured his club's comeback victory, much to the disappointment of Warner, who described his team's letdown in the second period.

"We got carried away after a good first period and played like we already won the game. We stopped playing the kind of hockey that helped us win our first two games of the year. In the second and third periods, we weren't as efficient with our chances."

On a more positive note, Warner outlined what the Tigers need to do to secure two victories over Georgetown and Oakville at the Governor's Showcase games in Buffalo on Monday and Wednesday: "We need to play our game. We need to get off to a good start in both games and we need to be ready to play hard as soon as we get off the bus."

Warner, who was selected as the Game's Second Star for his one goal and one assist performance versus Newmarket, described his team's transformation from last year: "Our team is so close already. All four lines have grit and skill. We're all in this together and we did a lot of team bonding at training camp before the season started. The team leaders have told our players our expectations for a good season and we're off to a good start."

By Jim Stewart