

Junior A Tigers edge King Rebellion 2-1 in spirited preseason tilt at the ACC



In what could best be described as a dress rehearsal for the OJHL season, the Aurora Tigers hosted the King Rebellion on Thursday night at the Aurora Community Centre.

Long-time Tigers' play-by-play announcer Kevin Dean warmed up his pipes for the regular season by gracing the Steve Mitchell Media Booth. The print media and scouts contingent arrived to document a preseason tilt between two regional rivals.

With the Toronto Junior Canadiens rebranded as the Newmarket Hurricanes and taking up residence at Ray Twinney Recreation Complex for the 2025-26 season, there are now four OJHL teams operating in York Region?including the Stouffville Spirit, Rebellion, and Tigers.

The emergent rivalry between these four clubs will be an interesting feature of the upcoming season.

The ice surface on Thursday night?adorned with the new Tigers golden centre ice logo ? was filled with AP's wearing preseason jerseys. The Tigers' hockey pants were emblazoned with JT Prospects on the side panel and the Rebellion hopefuls wore different helmets and pants suggesting that their days in the OJHL could be numbered.

Nevertheless, a game is a game for the hockey-starved fans of Aurora and both teams treated the 150 fans to a feisty contest in which the four goaltenders put on a defiant show. Many in the seats and along the rail of the ACC were scouts from other clubs looking for potential roster pickups as three levels of junior hockey in Ontario will go through convulsive roster shifts over the next week.

Ostensibly, this was a final Junior A tryout for many of the young aspirants and their nervous parents who paced the upper reaches of the arena.

The preseason game was also noteworthy in that it was the first time the Rebellion played at the Aurora Community Centre since 2023. The team relocated to King from Brantford in 2024, in the franchise's earlier incarnation as the 99ers, and the Rebellion hosted Aurora in their only meeting in the 2024-25 season: a 5-2 win by King.

The Tigers were coming off a narrow 4-2 loss to Milton earlier in the week in which the aspiring playoff squad played many of its regulars and played the Menace evenly after surrendering three quick goals to the visitors in the first period of play.

On Thursday night versus King, the Tigers took the game to the Rebellion from the opening faceoff and dished out some crushing neutral zone hits that delighted teammates and the fans in the stands.

The home side struck first at 13:51 of the first period when Marcus Carter secured possession of the puck in the left faceoff circle and rifled one past King goaltender Patrick Darolfi.

Justin Anselmo and Mark Brennan drew assists on Carter's first of the preseason.

Big saves by the keepers during the opening frame kept the score 1-0 until the Tigers doubled their lead at 16:06 of the second period when Tristian Scott banged home a rebound on the doorstep to beat Darolfi. Assists were earned Matthew Scozzese and Eric Li. The goal served as vindication for Scozzese who had a stealthy goal called back just seconds before Scott's marker.

The customary exhibition game goalie switch took place at 9:03 of the second period with David Healy going between the pipes for King and William Whited replacing Rafael Defina in the cage for Aurora.

Whited was tested immediately and often as he put forth a stellar performance for the Tigers to preserve their precarious lead, especially during three penalty kills which resembled shooting galleries.

A kick save and a beauty at 9:03 by Whited bailed out a grievous giveaway by the Tigers' defense corps and the agile netminder surrounded and smothered pucks during a dominant King power play with eight minutes to play.

The athletic goaltender stymied the pressing visitors in the waning minutes of the third period and flashed the leather with 3:45 left in the contest to preserve his shared shutout with Defina.

With 1:15 left on the clock, the King coaching staff pulled Healy for the extra attacker and the strategy paid off within four seconds when the Rebellion won the offensive zone faceoff, the bouncing puck ricocheted off a Tigers defender on to the tape of King forward Mason Quinn who gathered the puck off the left circle, sidled to his right, got Whited moving side to side, and deposited the puck along the ice into the yawning cage to narrow the deficit to 2-1.

It was engaging shinny right to the closing horn as the home side foiled the Rebellion in the remaining seconds and earned a one-goal victory in front of an appreciative crowd at the ACC.

Whited stopped 19 of the 20 shots he faced while Defina repelled 14 of 14 during his half game of work. Together, Whited and Defina merited First Stars of the Game honors with their combined 33-for-34-save performance?many of which were point blank scoring opportunities that showcased the athleticism of the Tigers' talented ?tender tandem.?

The Junior Tigers' first regular season game is Saturday, September 6 at 4.30 p.m. when they pay the newly-branded Hurricanes a visit at Ray Twinney Recreation Complex in Newmarket.

The Battle of Yonge Street has resumed at the OJHL level.

By Jim Stewart