

Junior A Tigers remain confident despite recent slump



By Jake Courtepatte

Cold streaks are not simply limited to the weather lately in Aurora.

A powerhouse throughout most of the Ontario Junior Hockey League season, the Junior A Aurora Tigers fell 3 ? 2 to the Buffalo Jr. Sabres on Tuesday to drop their sixth decision in a row.

With the score tied at two at the end of regulation, Buffalo's Matthew Novo potted the game winner just under four minutes into the overtime period. Joseph Mizzi and Cameron Neaylon each scored for Aurora.

The Jr. Sabres peppered goaltender Lucas Durante with shots throughout the contest, forcing the starter to make 38 saves, the fourth time in the last five games facing 30-plus.

The blast of winter cold through Southern Ontario over the weekend forced the cancellation of Saturday's home game against the Pickering Panthers, one of seven games cancelled across the OJHL.

Despite the recent string of bad luck, a deep roster full of talent could still be enough to pull the Tigers out of the dumps.

?Since the beginning of the year, we have been searching for a team identity,? said Tigers GM Dermot Anderson. ?We would like to say that we are forming a culture here. Although we are in the toughest slump of the year, we are confident things will turn around in time to win the division with nine of 13 games remaining vs divisional opponents.?

Anderson said the team will be looking towards veteran players to turn the club around, like league-leading scorer Mizzi, Tyler Davis, and Jack Varga, as well as some recent OHL acquisitions in Jacob Ball, Rhys Forhan, and Ryan Littlejohn.

?We want to be prepared for a long playoff run,? said Anderson. ?By bringing in Ilir Mehmeti and Norm McCauley to complement our other co-coaches, Rob DeFulviis and Tim Armstrong, we feel that our team now has the leadership and knowledge to push this group to their fullest potential. By implementing some defensive, neutral and offensive zone systems and structure all we will need on top of some great goaltending is for our boys to put their work boots on and find a way to outscore our opponents.?

Anderson added his trust in the rookie Tigers this season, like defenceman Michael Palandra, who sits fourth in team scoring.

?Our recruit class has been good to date and expect more of their winning experiences to contribute to our run,? said Anderson.

?(Markus) Paterson, (Payton) Schaly, (Michael) Palandra, and (Evan) Pringle will log some important minutes. Our 'D' core we are confident in in shutting down some other team's potent offences.?

?We are also very happy with our affiliate recruitment. Kyle Heitzner, Noah Tooke, Brock Philips and Brendan Bowie, among others, should see some games in the near future. All in all, despite a team-high losing skid, we feel that we have the leadership, the identity and the skill to reach our goals.?

With less than a month left on the regular season schedule, the Tigers (21-17-2-1) have fallen three points behind the streaking Markham Royals for tops in the North division, while the Newmarket Hurricanes have pulled within four points.

The Tigers set off on a five-game road swing starting this Friday visiting the Panthers, who have bested the Tigers in three of their four matchups so far this year.

They close out the weekend Saturday visiting the Georgetown Raiders.

The Oakville Blades and North York Rangers are the only teams to clinch a postseason position so far.
For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.