

Junior Tigers split pair with 4-1 win over North York and 5-2 loss to Pickering



On Saturday night at the ACC, the Tigers gave the red-carpet treatment to two veteran players – goaltender Christopher Thompson and defenseman Christian Holden – as well as their families at a centre ice ceremony featuring flowers and portraits as keepsakes as well as hugs and handshakes from the Aurora management and coaching staff.

Holden, a three-year veteran Tiger, reflected on his best memory as a Tiger after a narrow 5-2 loss to the Panthers.

“It happened in my first year during my first home game when we won in double overtime against the Markham Royals. It was hugely electric in here with lots of fans. There were lots of fights, too. It was big win for us in my first junior home game.”

Thompson, a star goalie for the PJHL Schomberg Cougars prior to his promotion to the Tigers last season, remembered with great fondness his first OJHL start: “In my first start last year, we got the win when Frenette scored the winner in overtime. I had just been called up from Schomberg as both [Tiger goalies] Will and Yanni were injured. Yanni broke his arm the night before so I knew I’d have to play a full sixty minutes without a backup. The coaching staff was great and showed their trust in me to take off the pressure of my first [Junior A] game.”

Both Holden and Thompson are entertaining NCAA D3 offers as well as OUA hockey-playing opportunities as student-athletes. In addition to projecting his own prospective hockey career after three years in the OJHL, Holden predicted a competitive season for the Tigers in 2025-26: “It’s bittersweet for me to think about it, but the core group of this club is unbelievable. There’s lots of talent here now and so much potential in their future.”

When asked if the Tigers are returning to the OJHL playoffs next season, he was in full agreement: “100%. I’m full of confidence for this team.”

Tigers General Manager and Assistant Coach James Thomson praised both Holden and Thompson for their positive contributions to team culture: “Both have been integral parts of our team. Both have had a big presence, especially for the younger players. Christian’s been our three-year veteran and plays the game the right way. He’s been a vocal leader in the dressing room and has so

much heart as a competitor. Christopher has battled through injuries this year and has played hurt for us. He's always supportive of the team even when he's been hurt and has been a world-class teammate since he was promoted last year.?

Both honorees contributed mightily to a strong first period by the Tigers on Saturday night versus Pickering.

Thompson was up to the task of shutting down the eighth-place Panthers. His most sensational save of the 19 first period stops was when he flashed the leather on a point blank shot at 3:38 to keep the game scoreless.

The towering tender was busy from the opening seconds to the closing seconds?repelling waves of rushes by the playoff-bound visitors.

With Panther defender Jason Zhou in the sin bin for tripping at 19:01 remaining in the first frame, the Tigers cashed in their power play opportunity almost immediately.

The 6'8" Holden?camped out in the slot to screen the Panthers' goaltender?banged one past Ian Michelone just four seconds into the Tigers' man advantage. Jack Rispin and Michael Piao earned assists on Holden's third of the season.

Aurora's season-long recipe for success?stellar 40+ save goaltending and opportunistic scoring?was firmly in place as the first period drew to a close.

However, the Panthers pounced on the young Tigers in the middle frame with four unanswered goals to take a commanding 4-1 lead heading into the third period.

Sam Ethier spearheaded the Pickering uprising with two goals and Charlie Key and Joey Zhang tallied one each as the Panthers fired 18 more shots at Thompson.

After Aurora forward Luc Warner rang one off the crossbar at 1:20 of the third period, Cayden Smith reduced the Tigers' deficit to 4-2 when he rifled one past Michelone four minutes later.

Smith's 16th of the season was assisted by Matthew Johnson and Tristen Aben.

Alexander Colangelo closed the scoring with exactly twelve minutes remaining in the contest when his slap shot beat Thompson to restore Pickering's three-goal lead.

Thompson put forth a heroic effort on Saturday.

The 6'4" netminder stopped 46 of the 51 shots fired on net by the Panthers and earned Third Star of the Game honors as voted by OJHL staff.

The Tigers warmed up for their Saturday night cat fight with the Pickering Panthers by defeating the Rangers 4-1 in North York on Friday.

Smith's three-point performance led the Tigers' attack versus the Rangers.

After North York's David Artenosi opened the scoring at 4:05 of the first period, Piao?with helpers from Holden and Warner?tied the game four minutes later.

Fifteen minutes into the second period, Simon Howard's power play goal staked the visitors to a 2-1 lead. Smith and Andreas Mikrogiannakis earned assists on the rookie forward's 17th of the season.

Smith's power play marker one minute into the final frame provided the Tigers with an insurance goal.

Jace Goring closed the scoring with his first goal of the season at 6:11. Smith closed out his three-point night by drawing his 19th assist of the season on Goring's marker.

Thompson earned the road win by stopping 25 of the 26 shots he faced. The veteran netminder outlined the keys to his team's victory over the Rangers: "We played our game and our systems. The guys did a great job blocking shots. Smith's goal that put us up by two was a great goal"he walked around three Rangers and scored."

Holden credited his goaltender for being a significant factor in the win in North York: "Chris is a great goaltender. He played awesome for us [in North York] and made some big saves when we needed it."

The eleventh-place Tigers (11-37-0-4) close out the home portion of their regular season when they host a rescheduled game versus the fifth-place Wellington Dukes (30-19-0-4) on Thursday, February 27 at 3 p.m. at the ACC.

By Jim Stewart