

LaChance stands tall in Tigers' win over Trenton



By Jake Courtepatte

When the final buzzer sounded at the Aurora Community Centre on Sunday night, Brayden LaChance took a knee and pumped his fist in celebration.

It has been a long, grueling season for the rebuilding Aurora Tigers Junior A squad, but LaChance's efforts between the pipes on Sunday will certainly stand out as a highlight moment of the 2016-17 season.

In the most polarizing matchup of the busy weekend in the OJHL, the last place Tigers took on the powerhouse Trenton Golden Hawks, ranked among the top minor Junior teams in the nation with a league-leading record of 21-3-1.

As predicted, LaChance was forced to do most of the work in the first period, with the Tigers hemmed down in their own end and stopping all twelve Trenton shots. The scoreboard remained empty, with the best chance of the period coming in the final minute when Trenton's Chris Sekelyk rang one off the post.

The second period remained much the same, with the Tigers seeing few opportunities. With two minutes to go, LaChance made perhaps an early save-of-the-year candidate, performing a circus dive to stop a deke to the backhand on a Trenton 2-on-1.

The save seemed to have sparked the Aurora club, who went on the powerplay following some rough stuff after the LaChance save. James Thomson then gave Aurora the lead in the final minute, sending a wrist shot home past goalie Joseph Murdaca.

It was the team's superstar, Mel Melconian, who commandeered the final period for the Tigers. Six minutes in, Melconian used a toe drag to wait out the defenseman on a 2-on-1, sending the puck to Tyler Davis who scored on a one-timer for a 2 ? 0 lead.

Melconian added another, with just over six minutes to go, his fifteenth of the year.

LaChance stood tall between the pipes to hold off a Golden Hawks onslaught late in the third, stopping shots in the double digits to secure the shutout.

LaChance, whose minutes played this season is eclipsed only by Wellington veteran Connor Ryckman, has seen more pucks than any other goalie in the OJHL. He has put in a handful of solid performances as of late, earning a 4 ? 1 win over the Markham Royals earlier this month while making 46 saves on 47 shots.

The team as a whole has seen a marked turnaround in quality of play since the hiring of new head coach Brian Perrin three weeks ago, going 2-1-2 while facing some of the toughest opponents in the top-tier Junior A league.

Solid play on both offense and defense has seen the Tigers rise out of the basement of the North division, overtaking the Pickering Panthers with a record of 4-21-4, with all four wins coming at the Aurora Community Centre.

Their best chance for a road win so far will come this Friday when the Tigers visit the Milton Icehawks (3-19-1), one of only two teams in the league lower in standings.

Sunday's matchup with the Cobourg Cougars (19-6-0-1) will kick off a four-game homestand, with three divisional matchups to follow against Pickering, Lindsay, and Markham.

Puck drop Sunday is at 7 p.m.

For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.