

Late comeback not enough in Aurora Tigers' loss to Rangers

By Jake Courtepatte

A three-week break to clear their heads may not have been enough to turn around the floundering Aurora Tigers.

The Junior A club returned to the ice Sunday in North York to take on the Rangers, a team already warmed up from two other matchups since Christmas.

Ex-Windsor Spitfire goaltender Alex Fotinos, however, looked anything but cold for the Tigers in the first period. He stopped all ten Rangers shots he saw, while his counterpart, Gianluca Baggetta, did the same at the other end.

It was in the second that the Rangers found some holes in Fotinos' armour, beating him three times, including twice in less than a minute. Darren Iwai scored his tenth of the year for the Tigers to trail 3 ? 1 after two periods.

Liam Neuman and Ryan Shaw potted their own back-to-back efforts just over a minute apart in the third to bring the score back to a tie, though it didn't last long. Fotinos was beat by Ryan Hunt at the seven-minute mark, while the Rangers added an empty-netter late for a 5 ? 3 final score.

Daniel Mantenuto had two assists for the Tigers.

The loss is Aurora's fourth in their last five games, a streak stretching back to the start of December. The team's three goals on Sunday is the most they have strung together in a game during that stretch, and aside from a 10 ? 1 whipping of the lowly Milton IceHawks, the offence has dwindled to less than two goals per game since mid-November.

What is most devastating to the Tigers is their toughest divisional opponent, the Markham Royals, are headed the other way. The Royals have won nine of their last ten, and now hold an eight-point cushion on the Tigers in the OJHL's North division.

On a positive note, a look ahead at the Tigers' remaining schedule can provide a fan with a sense of relief. With 19 games left in the regular season, only eleven of those games will be against teams currently holding a playoff position, and just five are against a team with a better record.

They will, however, take to the road for four of the next five games before returning home to the Aurora Community Centre for a four-game home stand. The stretch begins Friday when the Tigers visit the Pickering Panthers (12-18-1-4), before returning home for a game Saturday to host the Lindsay Muskies (8-21-0-6).

The real test, however, comes Sunday: the Tigers meet the Royals for a matinee game in their second-last matchup of the season, meeting again in Aurora mid-February.

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