

Minor Bantam AE Tigers 'Storm the Centre' in Toronto



By Jake Courtepatte

It is every young hockey player's dream to skate on the same ice as their NHL heroes.

While the Minor Bantam AE Aurora Tigers may have fallen just short of reaching the Air Canada Centre, home of the Toronto Maple Leafs, they did get the chance to compete against the best of the GTA last weekend at the MasterCard Centre for Hockey Excellence in the 'Storm the Centre' challenge, presented by Under Armour.

The MasterCard Centre is the official practice facility of both the Leafs and their AHL affiliate, the Toronto Marlies.

'I'd been racking my brain for a 'fun experience' for the boys this season and came across the Storm the Centre contest on the OMHA website,' said Mike Petinarelis, team manager. 'It was specific to our age group so it was perfect!'

Entering the challenge was not simply a 'sign up and you're in' deal, but a challenge in itself. Split into three periods, the 'first period' had prospective teams completing photo and video challenges, including various drills, cheers, wearing Under Armour gear and, according to head coach Bart Lorio, even 'fun stunts' like snowing the goalie and naming their sticks.

'The boys really had fun with it,' said Petinarelis.

Submitted videos can be found at www.nhl.com/mapleleafs/community/stormthecentre.

When the contest closed on November 11, the Tigers were one of the top five teams on the leaderboard selected to take part in what Under Armour called the 'Skills Gauntlet' at the MasterCard Centre.

Dubbed the 'second period' of the challenge, Sunday's Skills Gauntlet had players passing, shooting, and skating their way through a series of tests for an opportunity to hustle their way to the Air Canada Centre.

The five tests involved target shooting, 30-yard sprints, goalie agility, stick handling, and a shootout.

While the Tigers did not qualify for the 'third period' as one of the top two teams in the Gauntlet competition, they enjoyed the ride and the chance to skate on the same ice as their favourite Leafs.

'It's a great team of young men aged 12-13,' said Lorio. 'Most of the boys have been playing together for over four years. The boys are positive, work hard, and have a lot of fun together on and off the ice.'

As a consolation, the Tigers were one of the first two teams to submit five videos to the contest, winning box seats to a Leafs game earlier this month.

While the on-ice product was subpar, with the Leafs losing 7-0 to the Los Angeles Kings, the off-ice product was just right.

'Box seats and all the popcorn, hot dogs, pizza and pop they could handle!' said Petinarelis. 'They weren't too disappointed by the loss