

Mississauga Hurricanes edge Central York Panthers 4-3 in entertaining U22 Elite tilt at SARC

All the elements were in place for a riveting Junior Panthers' victory on Wednesday night.

Demi Lazarou, Catelyn Clark, and Elizabeth Janovski tallied highlight reel goals.

Leading scorer Annabella Van Berkel dished out three assists.

Claire Hicks turned in a solid 33-save performance between the pipes.

With five minutes left on the clock, their net empty, and trailing 3-2, the Junior Panthers executed a whiteboard play drawn up by the coaching staff when Janovski fired the tying goal ten seconds into the urgent power play.

However, the Mississauga Hurricanes' Maria Mazi ruined that good vibe by scoring the game winner with 2:44 left in the third period to edge Central York 4-3 in OWHA U22 Elite action at SARC.

Janovski, a rugged veteran leader and tireless forechecker, described her game-tying goal at 4:53 after the gutsy Panthers' coaching staff took their timeout trailing by a goal and pulled Hicks for an extra attacker with 5:03 left in the final frame.

?We had to capitalize in that situation. In our pre-game, we made it a focus to stay positive for the whole game. That kind of attitude brought us the tying goal. I decided to stay off to the side of the net away from the puck. I got lucky with a great pass and I was able to go short side.?

Janovski's sixth of the season finished a fine passing play with Van Berkel and Abby Pak. The dramatic goal by the home side appeared to be a turning point in a battle between two Top Five U22 Elite Division teams.

However, the Hurricanes deflated the elation at SARC two minutes later when Mazi barreled in off the right wing and ripped a backhand shot that handcuffed Hicks and restored the visitors' lead.

Janovski attributed the disappointing defeat not so much to what the Hurricanes did, but what her team didn't do: ?We had a lot of good chances to capitalize. We needed to bear down and get this win by finishing our chances.?

The Panthers finished a scoring chance eight minutes into the game when Demi Lazarou lit the lamp.

The natural goal scorer with the lightning-fast release was back in the lineup after spending six weeks on the Injured List.

Janovski described the importance of Lazarou's return and her first period goal that gave Central York a 1-0 lead: ?It was great to have her back. It's her first home game after playing for us on Sunday [in Waterloo]. When she scored early in the game, it set the tone for us. She really knows her way around a puck and knows how to score.?

Indeed, Lazarou's scoring touch was on full display at 7:38. She converted a perfect pass on her tape from Ashley Minor by rifling a wrist shot from between the circles ? high blocker side past Hurricanes' netminder Kalia Pharand and into the back of the net.

The red-clad Panthers held their precarious 1-0 lead for almost 20 minutes due to Hicks's goaltending heroics?especially during the second period when she blocked 18 of the 19 shots she faced. The only shot to elude the athletic netminder in the middle frame was a deflection by Hurricane forward Keira Owen whose deft tip of Sophia Fabro's pass dramatically altered the puck's direction. It flipped over Hicks's shoulder and settled into the back of the net at 13:19.

Seven minutes into the third period, Panthers' Captain Kiera Johnson was assessed a holding penalty and the visitors took advantage almost immediately. Eleven seconds into the Mississauga power play, Taia MacDonald fired a wrist shot just inside the left faceoff circle that beat Hicks high blocker side to give the Hurricanes their first lead of the game.

Seventy-six seconds later, Central York got the equalizer when Catelyn Clark crept in from the blue line and fired a wrist shot just above the circle that beat Pharand cleanly high glove side. Clark's tying goal instigated a celebratory ?Panther Pile? after the steady defender scored her second in as many games.

Janovski complimented her teammate's mid-period marker: ?It was an amazing shot. She scored her first Junior goal last Sunday and she got another one tonight. We jumped up at the bench?we were so happy for her. It was a big goal.?

Alas, the Hurricanes' power play clicked again less than two minutes after Clark's goal. With Ellie Lewington in the box for the second time in the period, it took Mississauga only 10 seconds to score.

Olivia Aquino banged home a rebound on the left edge of the crease past Hicks to stake the visitors to a 3-2 lead?setting the table for the dramatic exchange of goals in the final five minutes of play.

The fifth-place Junior Panthers (22-7-1-2) will look to get back in the win column when they host the 15th-place Bluewater Hawks (13-14-2-1) on Sunday, January 18.

Puck drop at SARC will be 1:25 p.m.

By Jim Stewart