

New netminder's 40 save-performance not enough in Tigers' 5-1 loss to the Mississauga Chargers

Friday night's OJHL tilt between the Mississauga Chargers and the Aurora Tigers featured a series of firsts for the local Junior A franchise.

It was the first time the Tigers have lost to the Chargers. Mississauga skated to an easy 5-1 win at the ACC, besmirching Aurora's pristine 2-0 record accrued during last-season's home-and-away series in the Chargers' first OJHL campaign.

It was the first time this season that the Tigers took to the ice without their top scorer Justin Pavese (5 goals and 15 assists) who was traded to the King Rebellion on Wednesday in exchange for rookie goaltender Erik Powers.

The Tigers clearly missed Pavese's presence, grit, and playmaking on Friday as the home side was limited to one goal and, by the three-minute mark of the third period, Aurora had been outshot 32-7.

It was the first time that the newly-acquired 6' 5" Powers started a game between the pipes for the Tigers and he bore the brunt of the one-sided hockey game.

The rookie goaltender from Edgewater, BC, who carried a sparkling .930 save percentage and stingy 2.42 GAA into Friday's contest based on seven appearances with the King Rebellion, made 40 saves in a losing cause.

The Chargers peppered Powers with sixteen shots in the opening frame and twenty-nine thereafter. For his heroic efforts, the lefty netminder was named Third Star of the Game by OJHL staff.

Powers was sensational in the first period of his debut as the Tigers were outshot 16-4. He made fifteen saves including a clear-cut breakaway with two minutes remaining in the opening frame, but Mississauga forward Aidan Walsh was unchecked and banged in the rebound at 18:06 to put the Chargers up 1-0.

Equally sensational was the superb individual effort demonstrated by speedy Andreas Mikrogiannakis who tied the game at 9:43 of the second period.

The diminutive center darted like a water strider on a still pond through three Charger defenders, deked Mississauga goaltender Hayden Sabourin, and slid the puck into a yawning cage. Mikrogiannakis described his spectacular solo effort that knotted the game.

"The puck came to me in open ice, I was able to get outside, I went to my forehand, and was able to score off my backhand."

Mikrogiannakis's marker, his ninth of the season, electrified the fans at the ACC and was the high point of the game for the home side. Luke Howard and Simon Howard earned their ninth and eleventh assists of the season, respectively, on the tying goal.

Before the Tigers' fans could settle back into their seats, Mississauga struck back sixty-five seconds later when Nick Ellis's wrist shot from inside the blue line whistled through a maze of players and beat Powers high glove side. It was the first of four unanswered goals by the Chargers as they pulled away from the Tigers.

Egor Kozlov pounced on a goalmouth rebound and tucked it away behind Powers at 13:52 of the second period to give the visitors a two-goal lead. Third period markers by Nate Brantnell and Mason Kim provided the margin of victory for Mississauga.

Despite the loss to the Chargers, Mikrogiannakis remained upbeat about what his club needs to do to break out of its eight-game losing streak in November.

?We need to get along as one unit and we have to be on the same page.?

The Aurora resident acknowledged the difficulty of seeing leading scorer Justin Pavese traded to the King Rebellion on Wednesday.

?It's tough. The guys really liked Justin. He was a great guy. But, we have to adjust now, and stick together.?

Mikrogiannakis held out hope that his eleventh-place Tigers (6-18-0-2) would put forth a strong performance on Tuesday afternoon during their Annual School Game versus the twelfth-place North York Rangers (3-23-1-0).

The contest's high noon puck drop allows hundreds of invited students from Aurora's elementary schools to grace the ACC with their spirited presence.

?It'll be nice. We should have a full arena and we need to get a win for them. It should be a lot of fun on Tuesday.?

By Jim Stewart