

## New Tigers tally four goals but five-goal rally in third period propels Golden Hawks to 8-5 win

Aurora's Junior A hockey team dropped an 8-5 decision to the nationally-ranked Trenton Golden Hawks on Saturday night at the ACC, but the final score did not reflect how close the home side came to a major upset.

The Tigers held leads of 2-0 after the first period, 4-3 after the second period, and 5-4 at the 2:33 mark of the third period, but the Trenton tandem of Jamie Darlison and Tao Artichuk served as a relentless wrecking ball to foil the home side's plans.

Remarkably, Darlison scored four goals during the final frame to avert a Trenton loss in Aurora.

Artichuk, the OJHL's leading scorer, earned an assist on each of his team's five third-period goals to boost his points total to 60 in 28 games.

The Moncton, NB, native ran roughshod over the Tigers in the final twenty minutes of play, setting up all four goals by Darlison and Jack Ziliotto's marker for good measure.

Darlison earned First Star of the Game honors with his four-goal and two-assist performance. Artichuk's six-assist outburst earned him Second Star of the Game.

The Golden Hawks' five-goal third period surge ruined a valiant effort by the revamped Tigers whose roster was shaken to its core by the December 2 blockbuster trade.

Aurora's Captain and leading scorer Simon Howard and NCAA commit defenseman and Assistant Captain Luke Howard were sent to the first-place Toronto Patriots in exchange for forwards Javian Nei and Lucas Marshall, as well as defender Tommy Kut. The five-player deal had been preceded by a swap of defensemen on November 22 with Bode Pearson being sent to the Collingwood Blues for Quinlan Clair.

The terrific triumvirate of Nei, Marshall, and Clair tallied four of the Tigers' five goals versus the second-place Golden Hawks.

Kut made the scoresheet, too, by earning an assist on Nei's first goal of the game late in the middle frame which gave Aurora a 4-3 lead. Nei, who tallied two goals, discussed the connections being developed: "Marshall and I are from the Patriots so we have chemistry on the ice. Our team is building intensity. Hopefully, we'll create some momentum in our upcoming games."

The most recent additions to Aurora's roster contributed immediately on Saturday. Fifty seconds into the contest, the new-look Tigers took a 1-0 lead when Clair, set up by Charlie Hotles and Cayden Smith, fired a power play goal past Trenton goaltender Dylan Lee-Stack.

Less than nine minutes later, Marshall chipped a loose puck past the Trenton defender on the left point, generated a breakaway off the right wing, drew Lee-Stack to the right, and deftly slid the puck between the pads of the sprawled netminder for an electrifying shortie. Marshall's first goal as a Tiger gave the home side a 2-0 lead.

An ensuing penalty kill didn't feature another shortie by Aurora, but it did show the Tigers' toughness as the fearless four blocked six shots during a ninety-second sequence. The frustrated Golden Hawks looked on in disbelief as their slapshots made resounding thuds off the white-clad defenders instead of finding the back of the net.

The Tigers kept Trenton's high-octane offence off the scoresheet until the start of the second period. Forty-nine seconds into the middle frame, Beckett Ewart wheeled to the net and snapped one past Owen Byers to narrow Aurora's lead to 2-1.

At 2:46, Jack Ziliotto one-timed a rebound from the edge of the crease to pull the Trenton crew into a tie. Thirty-three seconds later, Andrew Wycisk stormed down the right wing, rifled a wrist shot that bulged the twine behind Byers, and presto the visitors held their first lead of the game by tallying three goals in less than three minutes.

Aurora Head Coach Darcy Roy called a time out after Wycisk's go-ahead goal to settle his shocked troops.

Nei noted the content of the one-sided conversation.

Coach told us to get back to our game plan. We were off the plan to start the period. The timeout got us back in the proper mindset.

Indeed, Coach Roy's words of wisdom worked as the down time slowed the whirling dervishes clad in black and gold. The re-set also helped the home side's offense. At 10:29, Jamie Buscarini created space on the left wing off a perfect pass from Clair and ripped a shot that banged under the crossbar and ricocheted downward over the goal-line to tie the game 3-3.

Seventy-eight seconds later, the Tigers made it 4-3 when Nei made a slick move off the left wing, dragged the puck through one more defender, and calmly slid the puck past a sprawled Lee-Stack who had bitten on the deceptive centre's first deke.

Nie described his first goal as a Tiger: It was created by playing with two good teammates. We've only had two practices together, but it felt good to contribute and help the team.

Trailing by a goal, Trenton opened the third period as they started the second. Darlison tallied the first of his four goals thirty-seven seconds into the final frame to tie it 4-4.

Undaunted, the Tigers fought back when Nei tapped the puck past Lee-Stack for his second of the game. The articulate Markham resident described the go-ahead goal: We had a face-off play set up. The bounces went my way and I was able to bury it in the empty net. For his two-goal effort, Nei was selected as the Third Star of the Game by OJHL staff.

### **High Points of the Game**

With the Tigers leading 2-0, the ACC popcorn and tube steak purchased for the reasonable price of \$10 tasted even better during the first intermission. On top of the gustatory delights served up by Yan, the PA crew played traditional Christmas music to create a festive mood. Dreams of a major OJHL upset danced in our heads. That prospective Upset of the Season still seemed possible with the nifty Nei put the Tigers up 5-4 less than three minutes into the third, but Darlison and Artichuk were the Grinches who stole the Christmas Miracle in Aurora with their breath-taking offensive surge in the final frame.

### **Two-game weekend at the ACC**

The gritty Tigers host the Haliburton Huskies on Friday night and the Lindsey Muskies on Saturday night. Puck drop will be 7 p.m.

**By Jim Stewart**