

Packed house welcomes surviving Broncos to Hometown Hockey



By Jake Courtepatte

Sometimes, hockey is more than just a game.

That was the sentiment shared by Ryan Straschnitzki, one of a handful of former Humboldt Broncos players to make the trip to Aurora for last weekend's Hometown Hockey event, before the Aurora Tigers game Saturday night hosting the Newmarket Hurricanes.

?It's about adversity, friendships relationships?it teaches you life lessons as well. When you face adversity, it's how you overcome that and what you're going to do next.?

The positive attitudes, and the overall enormity of their story on that fateful day in April was a major reason for a sold-out crowd of 1,400 fans to pack the Aurora Community Centre for the matchup between the longtime rivals, where the Broncos and their family were honoured with a pre-game standing ovation.

Crowds lined up outside the ACC starting around 6 p.m. for the 7:30 puck drop, a sight not seen in decades for the Junior A club. Once inside, and with the puck dropped, the rink turned into a time machine with the atmosphere akin to that of the glory days of junior hockey decades ago.

Unfortunately for the Tigers, the on-ice product came up short in front of plenty of fresh faces, falling to their Yonge Street rivals by a score of 5 ? 1. Yet the game still provided plenty of entertainment by two clubs stirred up by emotion from the large crowd.

Adding to the luster of the night was the raining of teddy bears in the dying minutes of the first period, when Aurora's Payton Schaly broke a 2 ? 0 goose egg with a curled wrist shot from in close. Hundreds of bears were tossed onto the ice, providing about a ten-minute delay while the Tigers emptied their bench to collect. The bears were delivered to Southlake, while a crate worth of non-perishable food was also donated to the Aurora Food Shelter over the weekend as well.

The loss was the third in a row for the Aurora club, the first real slump of what has otherwise been a stellar season. They now trail the Oakville Blades by thirteen points in the NorthWest conference race, while the Markham Royals inch slightly closer in the division, behind by eight yet with two games in hand.

Second-year Aurora keeper Jack Irvine, who was between the pipes for Friday's 6 ? 3 loss to Pickering, is still confident his team has the ability to go all the way.

?This season has been great so far, for me coming from last season as a rookie backup to a starter this year has been pretty much a smooth transition,? said Irvine. ?I feel so far that my play has been good, and I aim to continue to be consistent with my numbers and my plan to be a top goaltender in the OJHL.?

He added that he believes his team will ?only get better? in the second half of the season.

?We have a great group of men who are all about business and our locker room is great and getting better as we continue to get to know each other. I'm looking forward to the second half and the final stretch before the playoffs, I believe we can come together completely and that we have the team to win a championship.?

The Tigers will look to get back on track in a back-to-back schedule this weekend, first visiting Markham in a key matchup at Markham Centennial Centre on Friday night. They close out the weekend Saturday in hosting the Stouffville Spirit, who were finally able to solve the Tigers in their last meeting in mid-November after Aurora took their first three meetings this season.

Puck drop is set for 7:30 p.m.

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