

Powerhouse Raiders too much for Aurora Tigers



By Jake Courtepatte

The Aurora Tigers are down to their bare bones for the remainder of the season, and it showed through in their return to hockey after the holiday break.

With the Ontario Junior Hockey League trade deadline come and gone on Tuesday, the Tigers moved some key skaters to make room for the future in early January. That spelled out a return to the ice with a handful of affiliate players on Saturday, against the Georgetown Raiders no less, one of the top teams in the entire OJHL.

Backup goaltender Jake Sabourin was handed the reins for the Tigers in this one, and was certainly given his fair share of practice. He was able to turn away about a dozen Georgetown shots before he was finally solved in the first period, a tic-tac-toe play that showcased the immense skill of the sixth ranked Junior A team in the country.

Georgetown added another late in the period, a backhand from in close that fooled Sabourin, and never looked back. By the final buzzer, 63 shots had been thrown Sabourin's way, with five finding the back of the net in a 5 ? 0 shutout.

For his efforts, Sabourin was named second star of the game. The Tigers managed just nineteen shots of their own.

The Tigers are now winless in their last eight dating back to late November, going 0-7-1 in that time period. They are very much on the outside looking in, fourteen points back of the eighth-place Newmarket Hurricanes for the eighth and final playoff spot, with only sixteen games left on the regular season schedule.

As so, the Tigers have already entered into what team owner Jim Thomson calls 'rebuild mode', making moves to send older players out of town for future considerations or cash. Thomson's son James, a staple on the Tigers' blue line for the past two seasons, was released last week to give him the opportunity to sign a Junior C affiliate card with the league-leading Trenton Golden Hawks. Both Matthew Tozer and Evan Spencer, two of Aurora's most heavily leaned-upon forwards all season, were sent to Elliott Lake of the Northern Ontario Junior Hockey League for cash.

The Tigers last failed to qualify for the postseason in the first year of the modern OJHL, back in 2010-11, when they missed the final spot by just three points.

The remaining games this season will consist of a mixture of the remaining Tigers and call-ups, which Thomson says gives he and his team an opportunity to do some deep scouting in preparation to return to form next season.

The Tigers return to action on Saturday to host the North York Rangers (17-16-1-2) at the Aurora Community Centre, before welcoming the Oakville Blades (23-12-0-3) on Sunday.

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

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