

Rangers ruin 'School Day' revelry while Muskies and Golden Hawks deepen the Tigers' 'Sea of Troubles'

Prince Hamlet, during one of his darker moments, asked 'Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles.'

It's unlikely the tragic Dane had the suffering Aurora Tigers in mind when he uttered these famous words, but it's a fitting assessment of the 'sea of troubles' and 'outrageous fortune' challenging the Town's Junior A hockey team.

Three losses this week - 7-5 to the North York Rangers on Tuesday afternoon in front of 886 school kids at the ACC, a tough luck 2-1 OT loss in Lindsay on Friday night, and a 4-0 defeat to the high-flying Trenton Golden Hawks on home ice on Saturday night - have dropped the Tigers into 11th place in the OJHL's 12-team East Conference.

Saturday night's loss did reveal a marked improvement by the Tigers versus the first-place Golden Hawks. Exactly one month ago, the two teams faced each other at the ACC and Trenton mauled Aurora 9-3 in what could be considered the Tigers' poorest performance of the season.

On Saturday night, the Tigers put forth a 'noble' effort against the #2 team in the OJHL, demonstrating a marked improvement in forechecking and taking away space from the Golden Hawks.

Tigers' Head Coach Tom Milne acknowledged the improved performance of his club against one of the top Junior A teams in Canada.

'The improvement we saw tonight is in the structure we have been able to put into our game and the work ethic is way better. All I can ask is that they continue to play harder so we can compete.'

Tigers' goaltender Will Goumas competed masterfully for his team and 'took arms [and stick and catching glove and chest protector] against a sea of troubles' caused by the gargantuan Golden Hawks.

Goumas held Trenton off the scoreboard until the 8:46 mark of the second period when Lucas Lepalm chipped a rebound into the top left corner of the cage over the fallen Tigers' netminder.

The power play goal gave the visitors a 1-0 lead. Goumas, coming off a great game in Lindsay on Friday night in which he stopped 25 of 27 shots to help the Tigers earn a point on the road in an OT loss, performed heroically between the pipes on Saturday, stopping 28 of 30 shots he faced in the first two periods versus Trenton.

Coach Milne praised his big, athletic goaltender: 'Will was really good last night in Lindsay. I know he'd like to have back two of those goals he gave up tonight, but he was good for us tonight, too, especially in the first two periods.'

With twenty-three seconds left in the second period, Cooper Matthews's wrist shot eluded Goumas to give Trenton a 2-0 lead. 80 seconds into the third period, Lepalm scored his second of the evening and the talented Golden Hawk forward completed his hat trick ten minutes later when he banged in a rebound behind Goumas, hence providing Trenton's four-goal margin of victory.

Adding to 'the sea of troubles' for the Tigers is a growing injury list as Assistant Captain Connor Russo and Hard-Shooting Defenseman Luke Hampel suffered upper body injuries in Lindsay - and Aurora's Captain Keegan Decaluwe left Saturday night's game early and was hospitalized due to another upper body injury.

Russo, Hampel, and Decaluwe played in Friday's night's narrow loss in Lindsay, another 'noble' effort by the Tigers.

Aurora carried a 1-0 lead into the second intermission, propelled by Goumas's fine play in net and Josh Frenette's first goal as a Tiger since coming over in a blockbuster trade last week from the Toronto Junior Canadiens.

Coach Milne complimented Frenette's second period power play marker as "an excellent deflection" of Liam Longo's shot. The power forward's goal stood up until 2:33 of the final frame when Brandon Nye's power play goal pulled the Muskies into a 1-1 tie and sent the game into overtime.

Ethan Walker's goal at 15:39 of the extra period caused the Tigers to "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" in a tough overtime loss to a divisional rival—a defeat worsened by the injuries of key Tigers like Russo and Hampel.

This week's "sea of troubles" for the Tigers started on Tuesday afternoon. Despite the positive energy of 886 fans packed into the ACC for the annual School Game, the Tigers produced an uneven effort versus the last-place North York Rangers and "suffered an outrageous" 7-5 loss.

The Tigers never led in the "School Day Game," although they tied the contest 5-5 in the third period on power play goals sixteen seconds apart by Keegan Decaluwe and Liam Longo.

The home side had a golden opportunity to pull ahead of the Rangers when Hudson Weger drew a major penalty and game misconduct for checking from behind as he tried to drive Tiger Kenny Wu through the south end boards of the ACC.

The school kids chanted "Rangers Suck" after this egregious infraction—hence showing their hockey IQ?—and broke out into a "Go Tigers Go" cheer that rocked the old building.

Alas, the Tigers did not tally their sixth goal on the five-minute power play and, to deepen the tragedy, Ranger Alexey Kulikow stepped behind two Aurora defenders on a bad ricochet and scored the go-ahead goal with 4:48 left in the final frame to put the visitors ahead 6-5.

"Slings and arrows", indeed, for the school kids and the Tigers.

In a disappointing denouement, Peter Smith scored the Rangers' seventh goal into an empty net with 41 ticks left on the clock.

"Fie on it!"

The Tigers sent over 880 school kids to their awaiting buses disappointed that the home side couldn't eke out a win on a Tuesday afternoon, despite outshooting the Rangers 54-29. North York netminder Matteo Porporino caused most of the "sea of suffering" for the Tigers, making 49 saves during the matinee matchup. Porporino was absolutely larcenous during the Rangers' five-minute penalty kill in the third period and was voted OJHL First Star of the Game.

Two goals that eluded Porporino belonged to Tigers' leading scorer and OJHL Second Star of the Game Ryan Evenhuis.

The Assistant Captain's power play goal at 5:22 of the second period tied the game at 2-2 and his second goal 26 seconds into the third period narrowed the North York lead to 4-3. Evenhuis's goals were his 18th and 19th of the season.

The OJHL Top Ten scorer is a bright light for his hockey club, amid "the sea of troubles" the Tigers have faced during this tragic season.

The Tigers (10-20-2-2) will seek a doubleheader sweep next weekend to get back in the playoff race with home games versus the Haliburton County Huskies (14-13-2-0) on Friday, December 8 and the Leamington Flyers (18-8-3-0) on Saturday, December 9. Puck drop for both games at the ACC is 7.30 p.m.

By Jim Stewart