

## Revamped Aurora Junior Tigers put up spirited fight in narrow 4-3 loss in Stouffville

The Aurora Tigers were edged 4-3 by the Stouffville Spirit on Thursday night as both teams opened their OJHL season.

Andreas Mikrogiannakis, Matthew Johnson, and Liam Longo lit the lamp for the new-look Tigers in the narrow loss.

The Spirit opened the scoring midway through the first period when Riley Pope beat Tigers' goaltender Matthew Humphries.

Tempers flared between the York Regional rivals with less than two minutes left in the opening frame when Tigers' Luca Moreno and Spirit Jacob Winsor dropped the flippers. Moreno and Winsor earned seven minutes each for fighting majors and helmet infractions while Winsor earned the instigator penalty to put the Tigers on the power play.

Although the Tigers failed to capitalize with the man-advantage, Aurora forward Andreas Mikrogiannakis fired an even strength goal past Spirit netminder Kyle Downey three minutes into the middle frame to tie the game. The Tigers' power play clicked at 9:01 when Matthew Johnson beat Downey to give the visitors a 2-1 lead.

However, the home side rallied with two consecutive goals by Lachlan Wells and Evan Breckles to restore the Spirit's one-goal lead.

The Tigers' power play scored its second goal of the period when Aurora defenseman Liam Longo put one past Downey to tie the game 3-3 with 8 seconds left before the second intermission. Justin Pavese earned his second assist of the game on Longo's goal.

Despite the Tigers' strong road effort in the final frame, Cameron Martin's goal at 15:45 secured the victory for the Spirit much to the delight of the 509 fans in attendance at the venerable Stouffville Arena.

The Tigers' gutsy performance on Thursday night was in sharp contrast to the club's listless loss in Stouffville to conclude the teams' 2023-24 seasons.

The disheartening 7-2 defeat on March 3 was suffered by an Aurora squad bearing scant resemblance to the new-look 2024-25 Tigers.

Only three players? Kyle Baston, Jack Rispin, and Longo? are back from the 11th place team that finished with a 13-37-2-4 record and 33 points behind the 8th place Spirit.

Thursday night's performance by the Tigers in Stouffville? especially its two power play goals-- suggests the gap between the teams has closed considerably and a better season is ahead for Aurora's Junior A hockey club.

The Tigers continue their grueling seven-game, month-long, season-opening road trip with games in Pickering, Haliburton, King, Milton, Georgetown, and North York before hosting the Caledon Admirals on Saturday, October 5 at 7.30 at the Aurora Community Centre.

**By Jim Stewart**