

Simon Howard and Cole Crawford lead Junior Tigers to 6-2 win over Cobourg to kick off three-game road trip

The Aurora Junior A Tigers kicked off a three-game road trip with a decisive 6-2 win over the Cougars in Cobourg on Monday night.

Simon Howard and Cole Crawford fired two goals each to lead the Tigers' 43-shot attack.

Nick Frasca and Gianfranco Rosella added one each as Aurora rolled to its sixth win in its last eight games.

Howard's power play goal opened the scoring at 2:58 of the first period and Tigers' captain described the go-ahead marker: "We were working on a new power play set up. It started with a pass to Cayden who drove to the net and the puck slipped off his stick to me. I was on a dry streak so it felt good to get one."

Egor Kozlov's tally at exactly 10:00 of the opening frame drew the Cougars even at 1-1.

A pair of goals by Frasca and Crawford five minutes apart by the midpoint of the second period established a 3-1 lead for the visitors.

Riley Mesa reduced Cobourg's deficit to one goal at 9:43, but Tigers' goaltender Matthew Humphries kept the home side off the scoreboard for the rest of the game. Humphries earned the W and stopped 33 of 35 shots.

Howard praised his goaltender's strong performance, especially at the beginning of the game when Aurora got off to a sluggish start: "It was a game that we were supposed to win, but we weren't ready to go. He made some big saves for us and he made huge saves when we were on the PK."

The Tigers pulled away in the third period by firing three unanswered goals. Howard scored his second of the game at 8:52--finishing a perfect pass by prolific playmaker Anrijs Bundzenieks. Captain Howard described the quality of Bundzenieks's 16th assist of the season: "It was a good feed. It was right on my stick. I wasn't expecting it and either was the goalie."

Gianfranco Rosella made it 5-2 for Aurora at 12:52.

With 5:42 left in the third period, Crawford capped off the Tigers' victory with his second goal of the game.

Crawford is on a roll--scoring five goals and adding three assists in his last seven games.

The power forward's surge in performance mirrors the Tigers' markedly improved play over the same seven-game period.

Howard acknowledged his teammate's recent productivity.

"I expected it. He's young and it takes a while to get used to the league. I remember when he skated with us at camp. I see how hard he works every day so I'm not surprised by how well he's playing."

Onward to Milton and Toronto

The Tigers played back-to-back games against two OJHL West powerhouses on Friday and Saturday: the third-place Milton Menace and first-place Toronto Patriots.

On Friday night in Milton, the Tigers were edged 5-3 by the nationally-ranked Menace.

Smith's 12th goal of the season with one second left on the clock gave the visitors a 1-0 lead heading into the first intermission.

Thomas Leone's marker less than five minutes into the middle frame provided the visitors with a two-goal margin and the Junior Tigers looked poised to pull off an upset in Milton.

However, the Menace responded with a flurry of three goals in four minutes to close the second period.

Easton Lynds' power play goal at 14:34 cued the Milton comeback. Three minutes later, Matthew Babiy tied the game. Graeme MacAuley provided Milton with its first lead of the game less than one minute later and just before second intermission.

Captain Howard acknowledged Milton's level of play: "Their compete level is really high. We gave a big effort in Milton, but we didn't have all our guys: Frasca, Bode, me. Milton is well-coached and we could learn something from them in terms of their physicality."

A short-handed goal by Milton's Ivan Fabjan at 4:39 of the third period turned out to be the game-winner. The spirited Tigers responded 37 seconds later when Sebastian Catalano pulled his club to within one, but Lynds fired his second goal of the game at 12:19 to provide a two-goal cushion for the Menace.

On Saturday in Toronto, the Tigers were dumped 5-1 by the mighty Patriots. The OJHL West-leading club built a 5-0 lead by three-minute mark of the third period. Bundzenieks notched his 9th of the season with three seconds on the clock.

Howard credited the Pats' strengths: "We know it's a really good squad over there. They were ready to play and we got behind."

Toronto is 7-1 in November and has outscored its opponents 53-13 during that eight-game stretch. The fifth-best Junior A hockey club in Canada improved its record to 23-6-0-0.

Frasca promoted to Erie Otters of the OHL

Tigers' defenseman Nick Frasca signed with the Erie Otters of the OHL on Friday.

Frasca is the third Aurora Junior A player to be affiliated with and promoted to an OHL club this season. He joins Charlie Hotles (Flint Firebirds) and Humphries (Oshawa Generals) as a two-way player moving between the OJHL and OHL.

It's always a possibility that Frasca could stay up with the big club. The talented defender was in the lineup immediately for the Otters on Friday night in Erie's 3-2 OT loss to the Barrie Colts.

Pearson traded to the Collingwood Blues

Another Tigers defenseman was on the move on Saturday when Bode Pearson was dealt to Collingwood for Quinlan Clair. Pearson earned 14 assists in 67 games for the Tigers over parts of two seasons. In 28 games with the Blues this season, Clair has scored 3 goals and 11 assists.

The 6-foot, 185-pound defender is committed to NCAA D1 Niagara University for 2027-28.

By Jim Stewart