

Stouffville storms into first place with 7-2 win over Aurora Junior A Tigers



Hudson Armstrong and Evan Breckles scored two goals each to pace the surging Stouffville Spirit to a 7-2 win over the Aurora Tigers at the ACC on Saturday night.

With the decisive victory against their regional rival, the Spirit (5-1) moved into a share of first place in the OJHL East Conference while Aurora (3-3) fell into sixth place.

Before most fans had settled into their black and gold ACC seats, Armstrong one-timed a shot past Tigers' goaltender Rafael Defina to give Stouffville a 1-0 lead thirty-eight seconds into the contest.

The Spirit, averaging six goals per game so far this season, are a force to be reckoned with in the OJHL and their offense was showcased in the first period of play. Sixty-one seconds after Armstrong's marker, speedy Stouffville forward Zackary Corte stole the puck at his own blue line, flew down the left wing, and snapped one off the pipe and past Defina from the left faceoff circle to make it 2-0. It was the sharpshooter's seventh of the season.

Decked out in their white Blackhawks replica jerseys with the classic red and black stripes, the Spirit rolled to a three-goal lead with brilliant tic-tac-toe passing on the power play.

Breckles fired a high shot stick side past Defina from the left dot at 6:42 to finish a feathery feed from Keiran Litterick who had been given the puck in space by Lucas Manikis as the skilled trio broke down the Aurora PK.

Stouffville made it 4-0 in less than fourteen minutes of play when Elijah Chavez, off the right wing, roofed one under the bar and over the shoulder of a shell-shocked Defina.

The four-goal outburst by the visitors facilitated a goalie change by Aurora Head Coach Darcy Roy as Defina was replaced by Jayden Rhee at 13:47.

The strategy settled the Tigers and Rhee's reflexes repelled all but one of Stouffville's shots for the balance of the first period and most of the middle frame.

The puck that eluded Rhee was Breckles's second tally of the game.

The sturdy Stouffville forward stripped the puck from a Tigers' defender in the neutral zone, created a breakaway off the right wing, and although his shot was partially blocked, it knuckled between Rhee's skates and slid into the net to give the visitors a 5-0 lead with 8:05 left in the second period.

Playing 4-on-4 to start the third period, the Tigers capitalized on the open space.

Luke Howard finished a nice pass from Anrijs Bundzenieks to get Aurora on the scoreboard thirty-five seconds into the final frame. It was the smooth-skating defenseman's third goal of the season. It was Bundzenieks's team-leading sixth assist.

Howard's goal seemed to strengthen the Tigers' resolve and only a trio of spectacular saves by Spirit goaltender Hayden Sabourin kept Aurora from reducing their deficit.

Despite the Junior Tigers' valiant pushback, Armstrong lit the lamp off the left wing when his wrist shot bulged the twine behind Rhee. Armstrong's second goal of the game restored Stouffville's five-goal lead at 8:53.

Rookie Tigers forward Marcus Carter blasted a puck high stick side from between the circles to make it 6-2 with four minutes to go, but the explosive Spirit offence responded when Litterick chipped one past Rhee for Stouffville's seventh goal to close the scoring at 2:30.

Aurora resident and veteran Spirit defenseman Nate Windle offered reasons why first-place Stouffville is off to such a strong start with 37 goals in six games.

"Our leadership group brought in all the new guys to our systems we have right away. Everybody's contributing and we don't skip shooting pucks."

The steady defender, in his third season with Stouffville, commented about the play of Evan Breckles and Zackary Corte who had outstanding games on Saturday night.

"Once Corte puts his jets on, he has some slick finishing ability. Breckles has been in the league for years, he's a fast player who understands the game."

Windle also lavished praise on his goaltender Hayden Sabourin who has backstopped Stouffville in five of the team's first six games and turned away 23 of the 25 shots he faced versus Aurora.

"He's a really calm goalie. He's really easy to communicate with on the ice. Hayden made some great saves tonight when the Tigers were pressing us."

The Tigers host the Pickering Panthers (4-2) on Friday, October 4 and the Cobourg Cougars (0-5) on Saturday, October 5. Puck drop for both games at the ACC will be 7 p.m.

By Jim Stewart