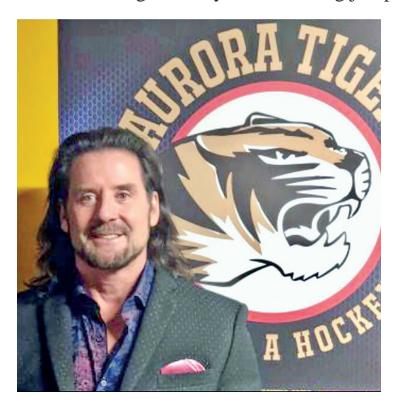
Thomson?s Tigers ready to make a big jump in newly-aligned OJHL



Jim Thomson has so much to look forward to this autumn. Not only is the former LA King being inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame in November, but the Governor and Assistant General Manager of the Aurora Tigers is excited about his team's on-ice prospects in the newly-aligned, expanded OJHL.

Thomson has seen his Tigers enjoy ?glory days? ? two of his powerhouse teams captured the RBC Cup as National Junior A champions in 2004 and 2007. Both Canadian championship banners are displayed prominently and proudly in the Aurora Community Centre.

Thomson was simultaneously reflective and optimistic in our interview and acknowledged that ?Junior A hockey teams go through cycles, including leadership cycles.?

?Some leadership groups struggle to run a professional dressing room, but this year's group of Tigers is older and so much more mature and ready for such a role.?

The former NHLer is excited about the quality and quantity of this year's leadership group that includes Lucas Stanojevic as the Tigers' returning captain. Thomson knows that his captain is heading into a significant final year of Junior Hockey: ?This is a big year for Lucas?he wants to get a scholarship and play hockey at the university level.?

?This is a massive year for him to build on last year's excellent scoring production, get a D1 scholarship, and lead this team for a full season.?

Thomson is also impressed with Stanojevic's supporting cast, including Assistant Captains Peter Lopes and Ryan Evenhuis.

?Lucas, Peter, and Ryan will provide great leadership for this year's team. We've set our goals high. We're the only OJHL franchise to have won two national championships and, on paper this year, we have a shot at it.?

Governor Thomson believes that the team taking the ice at the ACC this September will be at the top of its leadership cycle.

It was evident in our conversations with Thomson and Stanojevic that there is an urgency for the Tigers to achieve this season, both in terms of scholarships earned and wins accrued toward a championship.

Thomson pointed out that the Tigers' roster is much stronger.

He noted three significant additions that could push the existing core of returning players over the top.

?We've signed right defenseman Luke Hampel from the Lake Forest Academy Caxys of the Midwest Prep Hockey League.?

Hampel, a 6'2?, 195-pounder who hails from Waterdown, was the Assistant Captain of the Caxys and starred for the Illinois Prep School last season in his senior year. One of Lake Forest Academy's more notable graduates is Alex DeBrincat of the Detroit Red Wings. In addition to the help that Hampel will provide on the blue line, Thomson extolled the scoring production and leadership of two forwards that have been imported from British Columbia.

?Carson Brown is a right winger from Kelowna who scored 30 goals last year for the Kerry Park Islanders?he's really going to help our team's offensive attack. Jobey Pearson, the Captain of the Port Moody Panthers last year, is a 200-foot player who will help us in all areas.?

In addition to Hampel, Brown, and Pearson, there are other confirmed additions to the club that will be announced in ensuing weeks and the Tigers' Prospect Camp will be held on August 3 - 6 to further augment the roster.

It's clear that Thomson and Tigers' General Manager Sierra Costa have looked far and wide? literally to the West Coast and Midwest? to improve their team's talent and make a big push in 2023-24 in the newly-aligned, expanded Ontario Junior Hockey League which grew from 21 to 24 teams over the summer.

The Tigers' Governor ?loves the new alignment and the expansion of the league.?

Thomson is ?a big fan of the Tigers playing games in Trenton, Wellington, Lindsay, and Cobourg as we used to.?

?There will be more bus trips and we'll be going into packed arenas which are hard to win in. We'll also be playing powerhouse teams like the Jr. Canadians, in our Eastern Conference. This cluster of teams was who we played originally in the OJHL before COVID forced the league to do a different divisional alignment. It'll be great to be back in the Conference we played in originally and to go into hostile arenas. It'll be a different feeling for our players and it will be challenging mentally and emotionally with hundreds of fans packed in on a Friday night. That's why it's so important to have such a strong leadership group with Lucas, Peter, and Ryan. These veteran guys and the new leaders we have brought to the team will show them the way.?

As much as winning is important to the Aurora Tigers' Governor and Assistant General Manager, Thomson delineated clearly in our interview that ?the club's prime objective is that the kids learn to play the sport in a great culture?with our players giving back to the community and the team securing scholarships for our players so we can get them off to good schools.?

?We are blessed to have such a great coaching staff to make this happen. Coach Greg Johnston and his staff are excellent mentors who have set a goal for this team: to make the playoffs and take a shot at the OJHL championship. Greg's experience as an NHL player helps create a winning culture that is all about teaching the game the right way and creating a peaceful tone for those lessons. Winning can be secondary compared to the bigger goal of creating a professional culture for these young men.?

Thomson knows all about successful professional hockey cultures and how they go hand-in-hand with winning. He played for the Wayne Gretzky-led Los Angeles Kings?a team that came so close to capturing a championship thirty years ago this Spring when the

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Western Conference champs lost in the 1993 Stanley Cup Final to the Montreal Canadiens. The former NHLer, who also played for the Washington Capitals, Hartford Whalers, New Jersey Devils, Ottawa Senators, and Anaheim Ducks, was philosophical about getting that close to a Stanley Cup ring and any hockey title.

?Everything has to line up to win a championship?goaltending, health, goal scoring, reffing?so many factors are involved.?

It's Jim Thomson's fervent hope that ?everything will line up? for his revamped Aurora Tigers this season. The enthusiasm, experience, and vision of their Governor and Assistant General Manager will surely carry the franchise a long way in 2023-24.

Tiger Tales:

Jim Thomson's enshrinement in The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame will take place on Thursday, November 2 at the Royal Venetian Mansion.

The Aurora Tigers Junior A Prospect Camp will take place on August 3, 4, 5, and 6 at the ACC.

The Tigers' first 2023-24 OJHL preseason game will be August 19 versus the Patriots.

The Tigers' School Matinee game is scheduled for 12 noon on November 21.

By Jim Stewart