

Three narrow losses by Tigers conjure up comforting words of Nietzsche



German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche uttered famously, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." After suffering three narrow losses in four days, the Aurora Tigers are hoping that this kind of late-season disappointment is good for them and will build resilience in 2024-25.

A tough 4-2 defeat to the Wellington Dukes during a Thursday matinee at the ACC was followed by a 2-1 home ice heartbreaker to the Cobourg Cougars on Saturday night when the visitors scored the winning goal on a wraparound with 26 seconds left in the game.

On Sunday afternoon, the tired Tigers were edged 2-1 by the Rangers in North York.

The Tigers deserved a better fate on Saturday night and controlled the pace of play for most of the contest versus the playoff-bound Cobourg Cougars (28-15-3-4). Buoyed by the excellent play of call-up goaltender Christopher Thompson, the Tigers put forth a winning performance at the ACC for all three periods versus Cobourg.

Less than three minutes into Saturday's contest, a wee bit of magic occurred for the home side as another call-up, Max Palermo, scored on his first shift in Junior A.

The tenacious Palermo's second jab at a Jobey Pearson rebound was slid past sprawled Cobourg goaltender Ryan Piros to give the Tigers an early 1-0 lead. The slick play-making of Pearson and aggressive forechecking of Kyle Baston earned assists on Palermo's tally. The go-ahead goal, which earned the Markham AAA marksman Second Star of the Game honors by OJHL staff, was uplifting for the Tigers, according to their power forward Josh Frenette.

"I was super impressed by Max's goal on his first shift in the league. It got the boys going tonight. Max has been practicing with us for weeks and he's a great call-up from Markham."

Frenette, who fired the game-winner in overtime last Saturday versus the Rangers and assisted on Adam Matar's marker on in North York on Sunday afternoon, also praised the fine play of rookie goaltender Christopher Thompson during the two-game home-stand.

Thompson was similarly spectacular on Thursday night when he earned Second Star of the Game honors versus the second-place Wellington Dukes and Frenette assessed his teammate's pair of performances between the pipes.

"He's unbelievable. He stood on his head tonight and did what he could to keep us in this game. Chris has been all we could ask for."

The two pucks that got by the nifty netminder were few and far between on Saturday night as Thompson put on a goaltending clinic. The first one was an equalizer at 13:10 of the first period when Michael DeSousa's power play goal pulled the green and black-clad visitors into a 1-1 tie that held until the final minute of the game.

Although the teams were separated by more than 30 points in the standings, the Tigers played like they were steaming into the playoffs. Especially effective was the trio featuring center Connor Russo flanked by hard-charging wingers Frank Castiglione and Josh Frenette.

Russo and Frenette earned assists in Thursday's matinee versus the Dukes and carried their efficacy to the ice on Saturday night.

Frenette commented on the line's growing chemistry.

?Russo's an incredible draw guy and Castiglione is such a great finisher. We all throw the body and set a tone to the game.?

All three created numerous scoring chances on Saturday night, but it was the Cougars who capitalized on the last chance of the game.

Trevor Hoskin used a burst of speed off the right wing, glided behind the Tigers' net, and tucked the puck in the short side behind a sliding Thompson with 27.6 seconds left. The high-scoring Hoskin's 37th of the season left Aurora fans crying in their \$7 beer?an epicurean delight for loyal fans and a source of solace on a tough loss at the ACC.

The audio crescendo of the evening came after one highlight reel save by Thompson late in the third period.

During the FloHockey broadcast, Tigers' brilliant play-by-play man Kevin Dean was left in abject amazement and yelled into his microphone: ?Someone call the cops. There's been a robbery here at the ACC.?

It was that kind of night for Thompson who yielded just six goals in three contests versus Wellington, Cobourg, and North York to keep the young Tigers competitive as the season winds down.

With three games remaining in their season versus St. Michael's (30-15-1-6), Buffalo (29-18-0-3), and regional rival Stouffville (25-17-2-5), the Tigers (13-34-2-4) will have to heed the words of singer-turned-talk show host Kelly Clarkson who once crooned a variation of Nietzsche's famous remark: ?What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.?

The Town's Junior A hockey club will need to exhibit that strength when it plays its final home game of the season on Saturday, February 24, when the Tigers host fourth-place Buffalo.

Puck drop at the ACC will be 7.30 p.m.

By Jim Stewart