

Tigers battling Hurricanes for North division supremacy

By Jake Courtepatte

As the OJHL regular season winds down, the playoff race is heating up.

The Aurora Tigers are among the hottest with just over a month left in the regular season, earning an 'honourable mention' in this week's top-20 rankings of the best Junior A hockey teams in Canada.

Sunday's 7 ? 1 win over the Pickering Panthers tied the Tigers with the Newmarket Hurricanes for tops in the OJHL's North division, a title Aurora has been chasing for months against a very talented Hurricanes squad.

It took a 13-game point streak, dating back to the first day of December, for the Tigers to catch the Hurricanes, knotted at 52 points apiece and two ahead of the Markham Royals.

With the entire OJHL suspending play on Friday night due to weather conditions, both Aurora and Newmarket had just one game on the past week's schedule. While the lowly Stouffville Spirit managed a 1 ? 1 tie with the Hurricanes on Sunday, Aurora was taking the Panthers to school led by a goalie clinic from Bradley Van Schubert.

Van Schubert tightened his grip on the team's starting position by making 25 saves on 26 shots, while Austin Eastman and Joseph Mizzi contributed a trio of points each.

Twelve players recorded at least a point in the win, storming back after a Pickering goal just over two minutes in for seven straight. Captain Jake Bricknell capitalized on goal number twenty-two of the year, just one day after earning player of the month honours for December. The ex-OHLer has been the top difference maker for an Aurora team that struggled mightily last season, earning the 'C' before the drop of the puck this year and leading the team with 66 points in 36 games.

Those numbers are good for second place in league scoring, behind just Andrew Petrucci of the Toronto Lakeshore Patriots.

With just fifteen games left on the regular season schedule, the race for the top position in the league's North division could come down to the wire. While Markham resides just two points back of both the Tigers and Hurricanes, the leading teams have three games in hand, giving them quite an advantage.

The Yonge Street rivals will meet one more time this season, on February 8 at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex, where the Hurricanes have lost just four games in regulation this season.

In the meantime, Aurora plays a rare Tuesday night road game in Lindsay after press time, followed up by a return to the Aurora Community Centre on Friday to host the Whitby Fury, their first home game of 2018.

Puck drop is set for 7:30p.m.

For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.