

Tigers capture Canucks Junior Classic tournament in Niagara Falls to extend their five-game heater

The Aurora Tigers swept through their OJHL competition on the weekend to capture the Canucks Junior Classic tournament in Niagara Falls.

The three victories?6-4 over the Wellington Dukes, 8-4 over the Niagara Falls Canucks, and 5-1 over the Buffalo Junior Sabres ? capped off a perfect week for Aurora's Junior A club.

The Tigers opened the week with a nervy 3-2 Double Overtime win over the Admirals on Sunday night in Caledon. Three nights later, the Tigers blanked the Admirals 3-0 at the ACC.

Tigers' Governor and Owner Jim Thomson was pleased with his young team's tidy shutout victory on Wednesday night.

?A win is a win. There are spots up for grabs and we're down to the crunch. It's all the competition during preseason and the training we've been doing that brought out these good performances. The guys know that they need to make something happen when they're on the ice in games like these.?

Thomson also credited Wednesday's win to excellent goaltending by Yianni Karkoulas and Andrea Demelis.

?Yianni made some great saves against the Admirals. Both guys played well for us. You're going to need good goaltending like we saw tonight to win in this league.?

In Niagara Falls, three days later, the Tigers got the good goaltending to which Thomson referred and the squad's potent offence pumped in 19 goals in 3 games to create a perfect recipe for success at the Canucks Junior Classic.

In the Game 3 showdown with Wellington on Saturday afternoon, the Dukes' Tyler Tsoulakas opened the scoring five minutes into the first period, but a pair of power play goals by Kyle Baston and Matthew Johnson put the Tigers up 2-1 heading into the first intermission.

Justin Pavese's goal at 11:43 of the middle frame gave Aurora a 3-1 lead, but the Dukes tied the game on goals from Zach Carrero and Ethan Moore. However, the young Tigers' resolve on the road manifested itself in three consecutive goals by Pavese, Jamie Buscarini, and Antonio Cerque to give Aurora a commanding 6-3 lead midway through the third period.

Ryan Schaap pulled Wellington to within two with less than four minutes to play, but the scrappy Tigers stifled the Dukes' closing rally to sweep the tournament. Karkoulas and Chris Thompson put in another strong performance between the pipes, repelling 39 of the 43 shots they faced.

In Game 2 on Saturday morning, Kyle Baston and Andreas Mikrogianakas fired two goals each to pace the Tigers' offense versus the Niagara Falls Canucks.

Tristen Aben, Nolan Winter, Justin Pavese, and Matthew Johnson added one goal each in Aurora's eight-goal outburst at the Gale Centre. Aben's goal at 1:53 of the opening frame gave the Tigers an early lead they would not relinquish against the home side. Matt Humphries earned the W?turning aside 27 of the 30 shots he faced in two periods of play. Karkoulas closed the game by making saving 13 of the 14 shots fired by the Canucks in the third period.

In Game 1 on Friday night, Justin Pavese spurred the Tigers' offence with 2 goals and 1 assist to help sink the Buffalo Junior Sabres. Matthew Johnson, Pavese, Andreas Mikrogianakis, and Nolan Winter scored four unanswered goals to pull away from Buffalo. Kyle Baston and Luke Howard tallied two assists each.

A significant factor in the win over the Junior Sabres was another stellar performance turned in by Tiger goaltenders Thompson and Karkoulas.

The dynamic duo stopped 43 of the 44 Buffalo shots they faced.

The 3-game sweep in the Canucks Junior Classic in Niagara Falls came hot on the heels of a 3-0 whitewashing of the Caledon Admirals at the ACC on Wednesday night. Tigers' defenseman Cristian Glowacki wired a snap shot from the left face-off circle and bulged the twine behind Admirals' netminder Calem Yorke to give the home side a 1-0 lead thirteen minutes into the opening frame.

The teams played a close-checking chess match for much of the middle frame, but Andreas Mikrogianakis's marker less than two minutes into the third period gave the Tigers a two-goal margin and some breathing room.

Caledon rang one off the cross bar two minutes later, but the Tigers carried the play for much of the final frame before speedy Tristen Aben scored into an empty net with one second remaining in the contest to provide the margin of victory.

The Tigers kicked off their week in Caledon where it took the heroics of Kyle Baston to seal a 3-2 double OT victory over the Admirals. The veteran power forward's second goal of the game at 5:51 of the second overtime period clinched the road win and started the Tigers' five-game heater.

Baston's hard-checking style and offensive prowess--5 goals and 4 assists in 5 games--were significant factors at the heart of his club's success. According to Jim Thomson, much will be expected of Baston, Karkoulis, Jack Rispin, and Liam Longo as the only full-time returnees from the 2023-24 Tigers. Despite the significant roster turnover, the former NHLer and Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee has high hopes for his young club.

?We're very excited about the upcoming season. We only have four to five returning players, but our goaltending is going to be stellar and I'm also excited about the steady improvement of the team over the last week.?

The Tigers' regular season home opener is Friday, September 27 when they host the Toronto Junior Canadiens. Puck drop will be 7.30 at the Aurora Community Centre. The ACC will, indeed, be home sweet home for the Tigers after opening their 2024-25 OJHL season with six consecutive road games.

By Jim Stewart