

Tigers claw back against Cougars, taking semifinal in Game 7



By Jeff Doner

Although things seemed a little bleak earlier in the series, the Junior A Aurora Tigers pulled off a gutsy win over the Cobourg Cougars in Game Seven of the OJHL northeast semi-finals on Tuesday night.

The win vaults them into the northeast conference finals against the top seeded Kingston Voyageurs in a series that will feature two of the OJHL's best teams of the 2013-14 regular season.

"I was expecting another close one for game seven," said head coach James Richmond. "It's one of those things you expect this time of year, but we stayed with the game plan."

In front of a near capacity crowd at the ACC on Tuesday night, the Tigers relentlessly attacked the opposition looking to gain an advantage.

Adam DiBrina was ready to go in the first, fighting his way to the net and burying the puck past Cobourg goalie Nathan Perry to put the Tigers up 1 - 0 midway through the period.

Drake Board added a second goal for the Tigers in the third period and Cobourg scored one shortly after, but the Tigers held on for the 2 - 1 win.

Noticeably absent from the Tigers net was Kevin Entmaa who was a last minute scratch due to a flu bug.

However, the dependable Andy Munroe stepped in and made 46 saves that included a few big stops at key points in the game.

With the win now behind them, the Tigers are focused on being ready for Game One against Kingston on Thursday night.

"They're the regular season champs and were only two points ahead of us," Richmond said of the Voyageurs. "I thought we matched up pretty well against them. They're a big fast team that likes to push the pace of the game and I think the speed of the games will be a lot quicker this round."

Earlier In The Series

Heading into Game Six on Sunday night, the Cougars had pushed the Tigers to the brink of elimination after stealing wins in Games Four and Five in a couple of low scoring affairs.

"They have a good system and go with the trap," said Tigers goalie Kevin Entmaa. "We knew that they were going to just try to capitalize on chances that we give them, so they've had the bounces go their way so far this series, but I think we have put the pressure on them as well."

Last Wednesday, the Tigers went to Cobourg for Game Four and were hoping their offence would break through. Cobourg, however, scored lone goals in the first and second periods to establish a 2 ? 0 lead.

Dylan Sikura added a goal from Taylor McCloy in the third period, but the Tigers fell short in their bid to notch the equalizer.

With the win, Cobourg tied the series at two games apiece, with Game Five headed back to the ACC on Thursday.

There, Entmaa and Cobourg goalie Nathan Perry continued to show their talents in what has been a battle of the nets.

The game remained deadlocked at 0 ? 0 and was sent into an overtime period that ended up being a spectacle.

First, Cobourg had a goal waved off when the net came off its moorings. It was a lucky break that seemed to spur the Tigers, who controlled most of the play in the extra period.

Then, with plenty of speed, Tigers forward Curtis Warren charged the Cobourg net and scored what seemed to be the game winning goal. But the referee immediately waved off the goal, convinced that Warren kicked it in.

Minutes later Cobourg scored the game winner with a deflection off a skate that beat Entmaa top corner.

?Going into overtime, I tried not to think of the game as being any different and tried to keep playing the way I was. I was hoping the bounces would start going our way, but obviously they didn't,? said Entmaa.

Warren said the loss stung, especially after having his ?goal? called back.

?It hurts a lot, because I didn't kick it in,? he said. ?It did go off my skate, but it was redirected and I still got my stick on it. It was a complete game changer and it wasn't fair to the team.?

Down 3 ? 2 in the series, the Tigers shook off the loss and hit the road for a must-win game six in Cobourg Sunday night.

Ahead of the game, Warren said the Tigers had to play a full 60 minutes using their speed to break the Cougars down and force them to make mistakes.

?We can't take a minute off, because if we give them an inch, they're going to take a mile,? he said. ?We've got the coach of the year coaching us, so we have faith in him and we have faith in each other. We need to be able to use that moving forward.?

Cobourg got on the board first, but it was Warren who provided some timely heroics for the Tigers by tying the game at 1 ? 1 in the first period.

Just four minutes into the second, captain Robert Angiolella gave the Tigers their first lead since Game Three. It was short-lived as Cobourg again tied things up before the third period.

As the game wore on, Warren was again the one who broke through for the Tigers when he scored an unassisted goal at 11:46 to give his team a 3 ? 2 lead.

Defenceman Mihkel Poldma scored the insurance goal with just under three minutes left to help deliver a 4 ? 2 win for the Tigers and send the series back to Aurora for game seven on Tuesday evening.

?We played the best hockey of the year,? said Warren. ?We had every single player buying into the team game plan and Entmaa played an amazing game, making the huge game changing saves, especially in the third period. But that's what it took to win game six.?

Games One and Two of the conference final series will be played in Kingston on Thursday and Sunday, before heading back to the Aurora Community Centre for game three on Monday night at 7:30 p.m. and Wednesday night at 7:30 p.m.