

Tigers? co-captains Lindsay and Lopes KO the Niagara Falls Canucks 6-3 in OJHL action

The Niagara Falls Canucks, one of two new squads in the revamped 24-team OJHL, paid its first visit in franchise history to the ACC on Saturday night.

However, the Aurora Tigers and their Captains were in no mood to be hospitable hosts to the expansion team.

Still a wee bit ornery from a nasty 7-1 home ice loss to the Markham Royals the night before, the Tigers skated their first shifts on Saturday night as if they had been shot from a circus cannon.

The home side took and subsequently blew a 2-0 first period lead, but scored four of the game's remaining five goals to dispatch the Canucks 6-3.

Aurora's co-captains Ethan Lindsay and Peter Lopes contributed five points to the much-needed victory.

The irrepressible Lindsay had a three-point night, including two goals. Lopes fired the winning goal in the third period and added an assist on Lindsay's key second period goal that restored the Tigers' lead. Lopes's marker in the final frame was his first goal of the season, but the veteran Tigers' defenseman expressed relief about the timing of the goal.

?We had lots of momentum and we needed to stay ahead. I wanted to make a play by sending it to the net and it hit a few bodies on the way in.?

Lopes thought his team put forth a much-improved effort after a bad game versus the Royals.

?Tonight's win was huge for us after a tough loss here last night. We can play with any team in the league, but we had a much better compete level tonight against Niagara Falls. We kept things moving and skated better.?

Indeed, Aurora moved and skated brilliantly to start the game and only the heroics of Canucks' netminder Avery Alves kept the game scoreless as he withstood a half-period onslaught of shots by the home team. However, the Tigers finally solved Alves with less than six minutes left in the first frame when Luke Hampel crept in undetected from the blue line and one-timed Jobey Pearson's rebound to put Aurora up 1-0. Hampel continued his hot hand of late, notching Goal #5 at 5.55.

Two minutes later, Aurora's CEL Line?comprised of Frank Castiglione, Ryan Evenhuis, and Lindsay ? was buzzing. Castiglione made a power forward move between the circles, shrugged off a Canucks' defender, and slung a shot at Alves who kicked out a juicy rebound to Lindsay.

The Co-Captain collected the carom and buried the biscuit to give Aurora a 2-0 lead. Evenhuis and Castiglione both earned their 12th assists of the season.

However, a grievous defensive gaffe 26 seconds later by the aggressive Tigers provided Canucks' forward Bryce Grandbois with a right wing breakaway. He sniped a 30-foot snapshot past Aurora goaltender Yianni Karkoulas to narrow Aurora's lead to 2-1. The inspired Canucks?resplendent in their red sweaters with black trim and a white maple leaf not unlike Canada's national team uniforms?tied the game with forty seconds left in the first period when Wolf Giles made a lightning quick move behind the net and tucked the puck glove side behind Karkoulas.

Karkoulas kept the game tied at 2 with some remarkable save sequences during the second period including three in succession at 14.20 and he made a huge save on a goal mouth one-timer at 4:04 to inspire the home team. Consequently, the CEL Line struck again. Lindsay restored the Tigers' lead with two minutes to go in the middle frame when he made a nice left to right feint to tuck the

puck behind Alves?thus completing a pair of crafty passes by Evenhuis and Lopes.

The Tigers took their 3-2 lead into the third period and Lopes picked a good time for his first goal of the season. Lopes's blast from the point eighty-four seconds into the final frame, assisted by Castiglione and Evenhuis, restored Aurora's two-goal advantage.

Three minutes later, Aurora's top line struck again to make it 5-2. Castiglione was rewarded for his grinding efforts when he sniped one from the slot on a perfect pass from Lindsay who was set up by the swift-skating Evenhuis. The CEL Line accrued an impressive ten points versus the Canucks and were worth the price of admission.

After Canucks' penalty killer Keagan Driscoll one-timed a pass to pull NFC to within two with 3.47 remaining, Tigers' penalty killer Kenneth Wu returned the favor eighty-one seconds later. Wu crushed Niagara Falls' comeback hopes when he fired a 160-foot laser into the empty visitors' cage. Christian Holden and Connor Russo earned assists on Wu's clutch empty net shortie.

Tiger Tales:

The Niagara Falls Canucks were not the only hockey team making their inaugural visit to the Junior A Tigers' rink. Also making their first trip to the ACC this year was Coach Adam Theodorou's U11 Aurora Tigers who raised the decibel level in the arena, and brought boundless energy in support of the home team.

Coach Theodorou's group of coaches, players, and parents took up an entire section of the ACC and cheered for the Tigers from puck drop to closing whistle.

Cheers to the U11 Tigers for their unbridled enthusiasm. It was great to see the AMHA represented at a Junior A Tigers game.

The young Tigers danced their way through the exciting third period as the older Tigers danced their way to the penalty box with a series of untimely infractions. However, the spirited U11 team was undaunted and chanted ?Fight, fight, fight? and ?Pull the goalie? amongst other collective calls that contributed to the Tigers' OJHL victory on Saturday night. Nicely done by both teams of Tigers!

By Jim Stewart