

Tigers continue to pace OJHL North division lead



By Jake Courtepatte

This year's incarnation of the Aurora Tigers can be temporarily muzzled, but they are out to prove they can't be tamed. One game after a seven-game winning streak was snapped on Saturday, a surprise 3 ? 0 shutout to the Wellington Dukes, Aurora returned back to the ice on Monday with a roar in a 5 ? 1 drubbing of the Stouffville Spirit on Monday. The Tigers threw 31 shots on the Stouffville net, led by two goals from Joseph Mizzi and an impressive two-for-five conversion rate on the power play.

In just his first season behind the Tigers bench, head coach Mario Cicchillo has kept Aurora at the top of the NorthWest division since game one, helping his team to an 8-2-2 start and a healthy five-point lead over the Markham Royals. OJHL analyst Joe Montesano called Cicchillo "the most underrated coach in the league." "He's a great coach," said Montesano. "His team is a lot younger, more inexperienced, but he also has guys like (team-leading scorer) Mizzi with great experience. These guys can play."

Mizzi, in his second full year with the club, has jumped out to near the top of the league scoring title with 22 points early on. "He's fast, he can shoot, he can score," said Montesano. "The team is stacked."

Keeping up with tradition, much of the Tigers' early season success can be chalked up to their heavy offensive production: through the first twelve games on the schedule, the Tigers are averaging 3.33 goals per game, paced by veteran Mizzi and incoming ex-OHLer Kyle Bollers.

Unlike past years, however, this year's blue line seems much more capable of posting their own lines on the stat sheet. Newcomer Jacob Palandra has jumped out to a nine point effort in his first junior league season, while captain Steven MacLean is already just six points shy of his 14-point total from the entire last season.

MacLean credits his early success, in his first year wearing the "C" on his chest, with his "calming influence" on the ice. "I'm a shutdown defenseman with an offensive ability," said MacLean. "I give it everything I've got in practice and in games." That sense of calm may translate to his teammates skating alongside him, though at six-foot-seven, it's doubtful his opponents feel the same when matched up against the big blue liner.

"You're looking over people. Your head is over everyone."

As for his views on the remainder of the schedule, MacLean sees the future as just as bright as the past. "This team is something special. We think we have the tools to make it on a far run, we're just taking it day by day and we're hoping we can do that."

The Tigers will be hoping to improve on their 3-1-1 record at home with nine of their next ten games going down at the Aurora Community Centre over the next month.

They host the Kingston Voyageurs (4-2-2-1) on Friday for the first time this season, before the Lindsay Muskies (2-6-0-0) come to town on Saturday.

Both puck drops are set for 7:30 p.m.

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