

Tigers crown Royals to stay atop OJHL North division



By Jake Courtepatte

There's a storm on the horizon, but for now, the Tigers are still kings of the jungle.

The Junior A Aurora Tigers picked up two of a possible four points on the OJHL schedule over the weekend, maintaining a five-point lead over the surging Newmarket Hurricanes to stay atop the North division standings.

Looking to snap a personal two-game losing streak, Aurora starting goaltender Jack Irvine was busy in the first period of Friday's road matchup with the Markham Royals, surrendering the first goal of the game late in the first while sprawled helplessly on his stomach.

His team came in support early in the second period, when Jacob Ball converted on an early powerplay for his sixteenth of the season. Ryan Littlejohn capitalized shortly after to give Aurora a 2 ? 1 lead, though Markham stormed back late in the period to tie the game at twos heading into the final twenty minutes.

Cameron Neaylon snapped a twenty-game goalless streak in the third period to put the Tigers back up by one, a lead they never relinquished in a 3 ? 2 regulation win.

Hosting the lowly Stouffville Spirit in Saturday's home game at the Aurora Community Centre, the Spirit surprised the powerhouse Tigers by jumping out to a 3 ? 0 lead, a hole the home squad could never dig out of.

Neaylon's hands stayed hot in notching his second goal in as many games, though the Spirit took the contest 6 ? 2. MacKenzie Dobson had the other marker for Aurora, who went 0 ? 6 on the powerplay in a penalty-filled game.

After making 43 stops on a whopping 45 shots in Friday's action, Irvine showed signs of fatigue Saturday, getting the yank after allowing the sixth Stouffville goal early in the third period.

Despite the loss and a string of recent bad luck for the squad, Aurora forward Jack Varga still sees the Tigers as possible champions when all is said and done.

?As a team we are looking for that strong push going into the playoffs,? said the former Spirit captain, in his final year of junior.

?We want to make a statement that we are a contending team this season. With team success comes personal success, and my goal is to play college hockey next September.?

With Saturday's game marking their fourth loss in the last five games, the Tigers (20-12-2-0) have seen their lead atop the North division stagger as the Hurricanes (15-11-2-5) have picked up five straight wins. The sides meet for the fifth time this season on January 5 in a crucial rubber match, with each team taking two games apiece so far.

Before then, the Tigers have a pair of games on the docket this weekend before the holiday break, first hosting the Spirit (7-21-0-3) in a rematch on Friday at the Aurora Community Centre. Puck drop is set for 7:30p.m.

They round out 2018 with a visit to the Brampton Admirals (15-14-0-3) on Saturday, before a two-week break in the schedule. For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.