

Tigers draw Hurricanes in OJHL first round



By Jake Courtepatte

The Battle of Yonge Street is back.

Fans of both the Junior A Aurora Tigers and Newmarket Hurricanes should have no problem making the six-kilometre commute between home rinks for each game of their upcoming best-of-seven series, in the first round of the Ontario Junior Hockey League playoffs.

And if Thursday's penultimate game on both sides' regular season schedule is any indication, they are in for quite a ride.

The rival squads went through a pair of overtimes in a 3 - 3 tie, before the final buzzer left the teams with a point apiece.

Newcomer Adam O'Marra buried his first goal in a Tigers uniform, playing in just his third game as a 16-year old. Payton Schaly and Cameron Neaylon also found the back of the net for the Tigers.

Aurora closed out their schedule on Friday in a 3 ? 0 shutout loss to the Markham Royals, who cemented their North division title. The loss left the Tigers with a completely even regular season final standing, finishing with a record of 24-24-3-3: six points back of the Hurricanes, and eleven back of the division-winning Royals.

OJHL analyst Alex Bloomfield said he saw a resurgence in the Tigers' game despite just the one point over the weekend.

?It's a detraction from a huge slump,? said Bloomfield. ??It looked like a bit of a different team from what we've seen for the past month and a half before where they were just sliding down the standings.

?But this team, I think in the wake of losing Joseph Mizzi?they've got to replace that scoring somehow, I think they are coming together as a team?they're able to head in with some pretty clear heads now.?

Before turning professional with the ECHL's Utah Grizzlies earlier this month, Mizzi lead not only his Tigers' teammates in scoring, but the entire OJHL. As it stands, Mizzi's 32 goals are still good for second in the league.

Despite the monumental loss to the lineup, Bloomfield said he still wouldn't ?write them off? for a big playoff push.

?There's some veterans on that team with OHL experience?I wouldn't write them off in the first round of the playoffs, absolutely not against Newmarket who's not far above them in the standings or overall talent-wise, even without a guy like Mizzi.?

Hurricanes captain Sheldon Nolan told the OJHL website staff the upcoming series will have ?fireworks.?

?We go into this series with the home ice advantage we have worked for all season,? Nolan told the OJHL. ?The Tigers' strength is their offense and I feel if we can play a tight, fast game we can shut them down. Special teams are going to play an important role for both teams and if we stay out of the box and capitalize on our chances we will be successful.?

The devil is in the details in the final season series standing between the longtime rivals: a finish of four wins for the Hurricanes and two for the Tigers to go along with the tie, though Newmarket went 4-0-1 to close it out.

The Hurricanes will enjoy home-ice advantage throughout the opening round based on regular season standings, hosting four of the possible seven games at the Ray Twinney Complex.

The rink will host game one Thursday evening at 7:30 p.m., before the Aurora Community Centre gets its first taste of playoff hockey in game two Friday at 7:30 p.m.

Game Three returns to Newmarket for a Sunday matinee, while game four will be at the ACC on Wednesday. If necessary, game five will go Mar. 7, game six on March 6, and game seven will be played on March 10. For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.