

Tigers drop the puck on perfect start to season



By Jake Courtepatte

Same rivalry, new combatants.

The first leg of the 2018-19 Battle of Yonge Street has decidedly gone to the Aurora Tigers, who doubled up on the Newmarket Hurricanes in a home-and-home start to the new Ontario Junior Hockey League season.

In an odd twist, the term "home" did not necessarily apply for the Hurricanes who hosted the Tigers on Thursday, forced out of their own ice at the Ray Twinney Complex due to the installation of new dehumidification and air conditioning units.

Instead hosting at the Magna Centre's main ice, the Aurora club seemed the more comfortable of the two when veteran Joseph Mizzi opened the season's scoring just 39 seconds in, finishing off a centering pass from newly-minted captain Steve MacLean.

After Newmarket took the lead 2 ? 1, Hollander Thompson made his OJHL debut one to remember by potting a Landis Antonic rebound to send the game to overtime.

It took just over twenty-three minutes of extra time for Mizzi to give the Tigers the two points, finishing off a back-and-forth passing play with Michael Palandra.

Both teams had to reset quickly for the Tigers home opener on Friday night, where despite the Magna Hoedown festivities just down the street, around 500 fans packed into the Aurora Community Centre.

A ceremonial opening faceoff featuring a number of faces from Tigers past set the tone for another grueling battle, featuring some heavy defense in the first period.

With the score tied at zero late in the frame, MacLean showed why he earned the 'C' by catching up to a Newmarket forward on a breakaway and stripping the puck, before Jacob Ball went the other way and opened the scoring for the home team with eight seconds on the clock.

Both Mizzi and Palandra finished rebounds in the second period to give Aurora a 3 ? 0 lead, with Spencer making it a four-goal game early in the third period.

Jack Irvine's shutout bid was only broken with just under three minutes to play, when the Hurricanes scored shorthanded for a finals core of 4 ? 1.

Wrapping up the week with a 3 ? 2 win over the Oakville Blades at home on Saturday, Evan Spencer played the hero in potting the game winner with just under three minutes to play.

"They knocked off one hell of a hockey team," said Tigers analyst Kevin Dean. "The Oakville Blades are a dynamite team?I'm sure we'll see them again down the road."

Head scout Jason Maslakow said this is "only the start."

"With our third game in three nights, (we) persevered."

Last year's regular season conference champions are already playing up to their standards after being named just one of two Ontario teams named to the CJHL's top twenty pre-season rankings list, along with the Wellington Dukes. Aurora remains the only team in the NorthWest Conference to stay undefeated, while across the lines, the Cobourg Cougars are 4 ? 0 to start the season.

The more experienced Jack Irvine got the call between the pipes for two of the Tigers three opening games, with 16-year old rookie Christian Filippetti getting the nod in game one. The 18-year old Irvine should shoulder the brunt of the load for the long and grueling season after seeing action in two dozen games with the Tigers last season.

The Tigers will hope to keep their perfect streak going when they return to the ice on Friday, visiting the Pickering Panthers for the first match of the year between the divisional rivals.

The next home game is scheduled for Saturday when the Tigers host the Trenton Golden Hawks, with puck drop scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

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