

Tigers, Dukes pause to remember Humboldt brothers



By Jake Courtepatte

On one of the busiest weekends across the hockey landscape, what happened on the ice barely seemed to resonate among players, fans, and hockey families alike.

On Friday, April 6, less than an hour after the Aurora Tigers team bus arrived in Wellington for Game Four of their OJHL NorthEast final series against the Dukes, their Humboldt Broncos counterparts of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League were involved in a collision between their team bus and a semi-truck, leaving fifteen dead and fourteen injured.

Tributes immediately poured in from across Canada and the world, hitting especially close to home for the thousands of junior hockey players who seem to spend more time on the team bus than anywhere else, what is supposed to be a safe haven and a place of bonding.

Aurora lost the game, shut out 3 ? 0 to fall to the brink of elimination in their most successful season since 2013-14, taking the bus back to Aurora for a critical Game Five on Sunday evening.

Despite the animosity of a hard-fought series, both teams came together before the game for a fitting tribute to their fallen brothers. Following in the footsteps of a number of NHL teams over the weekend, both the Tigers and Dukes came together at centre ice for a moment of silence, when you could hear a pin drop, or maybe a sniffle, among the almost 700 fans who came out to support both the Tigers and the Broncos.

?It was really a wake-up call,? said forward Tyler Davis before the game. ?You never think something like that could ever happen. It really hits close to home, because we're always on those buses. You just feel for those families?we came together before and said a little prayer for them.?

Sport Aurora past president Ron Weese called the memorial ?a stirring tribute? on Twitter, adding ?you are winners on and off the ice.?

Over \$3,000 was raised by fans at the game, as well as Tigers management, to add to the staggering output of financial support for the Humboldt community.

A rendition of Amazing Grace by the St. Andrew's College pipe band paved the way for the puck drop, where Wellington got on the board first late in the opening period, before Austin Eastman tied it up on a Zach Wilkie rebound shortly before the buzzer.

The two combined again in the second to give Aurora its first lead of the game, Wilkie finishing off an Eastman end-to-end rush to make it 2 ? 1.

Wellington tied it up just over a minute later, a score that held until the second overtime, a do-or-die scenario for the home team. The series was put to bed just over a minute into the second extra frame, on a rebound chance over a sprawling Bradley Van Schubert.

Wellington will move on to play either the Georgetown Raiders or Toronto Lakeshore Patriots in the Buckland Cup final, with the SouthWest conference final tied at three games apiece at press time.