

Tigers end home stand on a positive note against OJHL rivals



By Jake Courtepatte

With two games on the schedule last week, Aurora's Junior A Tigers looked to get back to their winning ways after suffering their first back-to-back losses since mid-September.

The losses have come without the help of four key Tigers players, out of OJHL action until after Christmas while at the World Junior A Challenge in Saskatchewan.

Facing the Newmarket Hurricanes on home ice on Friday, the Tigers went down early on a goal by Mitchell Duggan, traded from Aurora to Newmarket last month.

While a first-period marker by Cameron Morrison tied the game at one, that would be the closest the Tigers would get to a lead. Newmarket added two more in each of the final two periods, taking the game by a final score of 5 ? 1.

Visiting the next night were the Trenton Golden Hawks, sitting second behind the Tigers in league standings.

This time it was the Tigers who drew first blood, when Daniel Mantenuto picked up a powerplay goal with time running out in the first period.

They doubled the lead just thirty seconds into the second, as Morrison's feed from behind the net was one-timed by defenceman Eric Williams, deflecting off a stick and in.

After the Hawks cut the lead in half in the second, Mantenuto once again found the back of the net off helpers from Nicholas Erb and Nolan Dunn, the sixth and seventh Tigers to get on the scoresheet that night.

"Everyone has really put themselves in a role to step up without the big guys there," said Mantenuto after the game. "It's hard to fill those roles, but everyone's trying to be more of a leader."

With time winding down and a two-goal lead, Johnny Curran picked the short side of the net with a hard wrister from a sharp angle, which should have sealed the game.

However, the shot went in and out too quickly for the referees to take notice, culminating in a Trenton goal at the other end of the ice.

Fortunately, goaltender Andy Munroe, who had made some circus saves earlier in the evening, did not let the Hawks get any closer and Keaton Ratcliffe buried an empty-netter.

Munroe was stellar between the pipes for the Tigers, making 34 of 36 stops against the highest scoring team in the OJHL. ?He's been unreal all year,? said Mantenuto. ?He makes us feel so safe when he's in net.?

After losing three straight while undermanned, the Tigers seemed to play a consistent, confident game on Saturday, something fans have seen much of this season.

?Honestly, we're not changing much,? said Mantenuto. ?We're playing the same system, same type of game, just everyone's chipping in more.?

Following a match against the St. Michael's Buzzers in Toronto Wednesday, the Tigers' schedule has been compressed to fit in three games over the weekend, at home Friday against the Toronto Jr. Canadiens before hitting the road Saturday and Sunday to face the Orangeville Flyers and Pickering Panthers, respectively.

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