

Tigers keeping pace in tough OJHL North division



By Jake Courtepatte

The race is on.

Just past the halfway mark of the Ontario Junior Hockey League season, three teams have separated from the herd in the North division, seemingly making it a three-team battle for the title the rest of the way.

Among them are the Aurora Tigers, winners of two over the weekend, giving the cats a very real chance to catch both the Markham Royals and Newmarket Hurricanes.

Friday night saw the Tigers visit a rebuilding Lindsay Muskies team that has managed just five wins all year, a one-sided matchup that earned backup goalie Jack Irvine his first shutout of the year.

The Tigers walked away with a 3 ? 0 win, thanks to goals from Jake Bricknell, Evan Bidenti, and Christopher Giroday.

It was Saturday's matchup with the Pickering Panthers that proved to be the game of the week, a tight contest coming down to the final two minutes of play.

With the game tied at one after two periods, Tyler Davis set up Elijah Gonsalves on a two-on-one for a one-timer to give Aurora their first lead in the third.

The Tigers then doubled their lead in the eighth minute of the frame on the powerplay, when Brock Welsh tipped home a Bricknell point shot.

Pickering stormed back with a pair of their own late in the game, including the tying goal with just under two minutes left in regulation.

But it was Christian Monachino that was the recipient of some nice puck luck just seconds later, when the Panthers goaltender botched a pass behind his own net.

Welsh capitalized on the mistake, and centred to Monachino who buried it in the empty cage, putting another two points on the standings board for the Tigers.

Kevin Dean, play-by-play analyst for the Tigers, called it a ?tough break? for the Pickering goaltender.

?He came out, he thought he was Bobby Orr, and played the puck,? said Dean. ?Tough break for him.?

Unfortunately for the Tigers, the red-hot Canes also picked up a crucial four points over the weekend to stay atop the division.

Fortunately, Markham fell to both the Wellington Dukes and Mississauga Chargers, leaving Aurora only two points back of the Royals with a whopping four games in hand.

Six points separate the Tigers from the Canes, though Aurora also holds an advantage in games in hand against their Yonge Street rival with three.

This Friday's road matchup with the Royals may be the most crucial on the Tigers' schedule so far, having met them just once so far this season.

Saturday's home matchup with the Mississauga Chargers at the Aurora Community Centre kicks off a five-game homestand, which will run into the New Year.

Saturday will also be the final opportunity for fans to donate to the Aurora Food Pantry at a home game, with a collection box for non-perishable items located outside the box office.

Anthony Romano, the team's second-highest scorer after over-ager Jake Bricknell, will miss both games this week while representing Canada at the World Jr. A Challenge in Nova Scotia.

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