

Tigers pull off blockbuster mid-season trade that delivers immediate dividends in 2-1 win over Markham

On Friday, October 27, the Aurora Tigers started down a rabbit hole with a 7-1 home-ice loss to the Markham Royals.

Team owner Jim Thomson was disenchanted by the team's performance and felt that his team "did not show up."

What followed was a mesmerizing series of events including the dismissal of Head Coach Greg Johnston, the hiring of former Tigers' bench boss Tom Milne, a six-game losing streak that strained the team to the breaking point, and, on Wednesday, a trade demand by Team Captain and three-year veteran Peter Lopes.

Lopes's demand to be traded to a contender was granted by the Tigers owner and his General Manager Sierra Costa in a four-for-two deal with the Toronto Junior Canadiens.

"My Captain Peter Lopes asked for a trade," said Thomson. "We had to start shopping for a trade partner. JRC had two good prospects we wanted and two picks available in the June draft. JRC wanted Lindsay to make the 4-for-2 trade."

Tigers' GM Costa amplified the scenario: "We were put in a situation. You're dealing with politics. We had to move Peter so we weren't affected long-term. It was tough to move a pair of third-year players like Peter and Ethan, but it was the right decision."

Thomson and Costa are pleased with two dynamic rookies secured in the deal with JRC—defenseman Carson Littlejohn (2 goals and 11 assists) and forward Josh Frenette (4 assists).

Thomson describes Littlejohn as "a great prospect."

"His brother played for the Tigers so we have history with the family."

Costa sees Littlejohn as a defenseman with "a high hockey IQ" and views Frenette as "a bonus for us."

"He's a big, physical, gritty player. Josh is going to be given time to get comfortable with the guys he's playing with. We see him as a shut-down, power forward. He's going to get his numbers playing for us."

Flash-forward to Friday, November 24 and the revamped, rookie-laden lineup of Tigers—with Keegan Caluwe installed as the team's fourth captain of the season—skated to an impressive 2-1 win over the same Royals that had "waxed" them at the end of October and commenced their precipitous tumble down the East Conference standings.

Taking two points from the third-place Royals (15-6-2-2) was impressive and the Tigers' collective effort kept high-scoring Markham off the scoresheet until 13:18 of the third period when Ashton Miwa ruined Yianni Karkoulas's shutout bid.

Karkoulas backstopped the team to victory, according to Thomson.

"We got really good goaltending from Yianni. We played a solid game in Markham and it showed how our coaches—Tom, Dave, and Darcy—want our young team to play. They're learning the ins and outs of Junior A hockey."

Aurora forward Adam Matar chose a great time and place to tally his first goal of the season at 9:08 of the opening frame. Ryan Evenhuis and Frank Castiglione earned their 20th and 15th assists, respectively on Matar's marker.

28 seconds into the second period, Castiglione's seventh of the season put the Tigers up 2-0. Evenhuis—tied for tenth in OJHL scoring with 38 points—provided the assist on Castiglione's first game-winning goal of 2023-24.

Castiglione is one of the ten rookies populating the team's post-trade roster.

It was a goaltenders' duel in Markham on Friday night. Karkoulas stopped 27 of the 28 pucks fired his way by the Royals while Christopher Quizi turned aside 26 of the 28 shots for the home team.

By Jim Stewart