

Tigers squander 5-2 second period lead and lose 7-5 to Hurricanes in Battle of Yonge Street

Anrijs Bundzenieks and Charlie Hotles contributed three points each and Kian Hodgins made 53 saves for Aurora, but the Junior A Tigers fell 7-5 in a morning matchup with the Newmarket Hurricanes on Wednesday at the Ray Twinney Complex.

The Tigers built an impressive 5-2 lead when Bundzenieks scored his second goal of the game and 13th of the season at 13:03 of the second period.

With seven minutes left in the middle frame, it appeared that Aurora was on its way to a second consecutive upset win at the Ray Twinney Complex this season.

The Tigers shut out the Hurricanes 2-0 in the season opener on September 6 when the former Toronto Junior Canadians played their first game in their new digs in Newmarket in front of 1,086 fans.

Jayden Rhee made 36 saves that late summer afternoon, even turning aside a third period penalty shot, to earn the shutout. Rhee was waived by mid-October and was the first of eight goalies to start a game between the pipes for the Tigers in 2025-26. Following Rhee were Rafael DeFina, Finn Wilson, Matthew Humphries, Owen Byers, Lucas Carpino, Noah Kraus, and Kian Hodgins.

Back in September, Bundzenieks helped ruin the Hurricanes' home opener with a goal and an assist in a game that celebrated the return of Junior A Hockey to Newmarket after a six-year absence.

However, even the good recurrent vibe provided by Bundzenieks was not enough on Wednesday morning.

The third-place Hurricanes (26-13-1-1) hunkered down and scored five unanswered goals to secure the home ice victory. Hodgins did his best to weather the Hurricane blast by stopping 53 of the 59 shots he faced, but the tenth-place Tigers' slim playoff chances diminished with the tough loss to Newmarket. On Wednesday afternoon, Aurora (13-24-0-2) trailed eighth-place Lindsay by nine points for the last OJHL East playoff spot.

The Tigers had one more kick at the can to pick up points on the Muskies when they travelled to Haliburton County on Saturday night to take on the third-place Huskies (24-11-1-5).

The Huskies? tied with the Hurricanes and the Pickering Panthers with 54 points each? took control of the game early and showed why they are one of the top clubs in the OJHL.

After Haliburton's Kieran Raynor fired his second power play goal of the game at 7:29 of the first period, gritty Assistant Captain Cayden Smith got the Tigers on the scoreboard thirty seconds later. Charlie Hotles and Bundzenieks earned assists on Smith's seventeenth of the season.

However, three consecutive goals by the Huskies? including Raynor's third of the game at 5:50 of the second period? put Haliburton County up 5-1. Raynor's hat trick earned him First Star of the Game honors as selected by OJHL staff.

Javian Nei narrowed the Tigers' deficit to 5-2 when his power play goal finished a passing play by Smith and Bundzenieks at 12:22 of the middle frame.

Five minutes later, the Huskies restored their four-goal lead when Carson Durnin beat Tigers' substitute netminder Noah Kraus at 17:46 to close the scoring.

The Tigers host the Huskies on Friday, January 23 and the Muskies on Saturday, January 24. Puck drop for both games at the ACC

is 7 p.m.

A home-stand sweep by the Tigers would be required to keep them in the OJHL East playoff race.

By Jim Stewart