

Tigers take 3 of 4 points in 5-2 Opening Night win over Caledon



The Aurora Tigers continued their early season improvement over the weekend by taking three of four points from their opponents.

Team owner Jim Thomson couldn't be happier. The former NHLer noted wryly, "When the team is playing better, I'm feeling better."

In his Junior A squad's first home game following a grueling month-long road trip, the Tigers scored five power play goals to defeat the Caledon Admirals 5-2 on Saturday night. Thomson said he was pleased with both his team's effort at the ACC in front of 475 fans and the Tigers' work at Scotiabank Pond on Sunday night in a narrow 4-3 OT loss to the Junior Canadiens.

"We came out strong in both games and, as the youngest team in the league, we competed and scored some beautiful goals on the weekend. You have to have talent to beat top teams like the Junior Canadiens and you need good goaltending to win in this league. Chris [Thompson] had a good game in net on Saturday against Caledon, Matt [Humphries] made 42 saves against JRC on Sunday, and I can't remember the last time the Tigers scored five power play goals in a game."

The 2023 Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee offered two reasons for his club's jump from 12th to 8th place in the OJHL East standings: "The power play needs talented scorers and players that can think themselves through situations, especially along the boards to create space. Coach Tom Milne has put in a system in place that is really working and he has the pieces this season to make it work. As well, you can't win without good goaltending and Humphries and Thompson are both coming into form in recent weeks."

The affable owner of the Tigers also lavished praise on the ACC staff for the show that was put on during Opening Night festivities.

"We've been doing Opening Night for ten years with spotlights, t-shirt giveaways, and special guests for our ceremonial puck drop. When the curtain rises, it needs to go off as planned. Without Scott Davidson and all of the excellent ACC staff, nothing happens on-ice for the Tigers. They're the backbone of our organization and they're the engine that makes so much happen for us. We're deeply appreciative of their hard work."

In the home opener on Saturday night versus the Admirals, the Tigers purred like the well-tuned engine to which Thomson referred. Luke Howard bulged the twine behind Caledon goaltender Blake Sloan at 2:47 for the first of five Tiger power play markers—much to the delight of nearly 500 fans assembled at the ACC. The Admirals replied with a power play of their own as Tanner Greenwood tied the game midway through the opening period.

The Tigers' potent power play was on display in the middle frame.

Parker Bonsignore, Justin Pavese, and Antonio Cerqua scored man-advantage goals at 5:04, 10:55, and 13:55 to stake Aurora to a 4-1 lead after 40 minutes of entertaining hockey. Tigers' rookie forward Simon Howard assisted on all three goals in the second period to provide his share of a six-point night by the Howard brothers who hail from Woodbridge.

Thomson complimented the hockey program from which the siblings graduated en route to the OJHL.

?The Howard brothers came from the Toronto Young Nationals program. U18 Nationals Coach Brett Punchard is one of the best hockey coaches in Canada and his teams are national champion caliber. The Nats have won two Telus Cups recently. Luke and Simon were ready to make the jump to Junior A based on what they learned from Coach Punchard.?

Tigers' rookie defenseman Luke Howard earned his second assist of the game when he fed Pavese for the Tigers' fifth power play goal less than ninety seconds into the final frame. Pavese's second goal of the contest provided the home side with a comfortable 5-1 lead to sink the struggling last-place Admirals (1-9-0-0).

Christopher Thompson earned the W for the Tigers by stopping 19 of the 21 shots fired by Caledon.

On Sunday night, JRC jumped out to a 1-0 lead thirty seconds into the game when Jacob Crisp beat Aurora goaltender Matthew Humphries.

The visitors replied with two goals in less than seventy seconds when Antonio Cerqua and Michael Piao scored at 4:49 and 5:58, respectively. Braydon Russell scored for the Junior Canadiens ten minutes later to tie the game 2-2 heading into the first intermission.

Two minutes into the second period, Luke Johnston scored for the home side to give JRC a 3-2 lead?a margin they held stubbornly until the final minute of play. At 19:14, Aurora power forward Kyle Baston tallied his fourth of the season to push the game into OT and earn the Tigers a point on the road.

Jay Feldberg scored the game winner at 8:09 of the extra period when he slipped the puck past Humphries.

Otherwise, Aurora's goaltender turned in a stellar effort at the Scotiabank Pond, stopping 42 of the 46 shots delivered by the third-place Junior Canadiens (8-3-0-0). The Tigers (3-5-0-1) have earned 7 of 8 points in their last four games and hold down the final playoff spot in the East Conference.

The Tigers' next home game is Friday, October 11 when they host the Haliburton County Huskies. Puck drop is 7.30 p.m. at the Aurora Community Centre.

By Jim Stewart