

Tigers take hold of OJHL North division title



By Jake Courtepatte

The Aurora Tigers have taken back the crown as the kings of the jungle.

Locked in a season-long battle with the Newmarket Hurricanes for first place in the Ontario Junior Hockey League's North division, the Tigers are on top for the first time this season.

Riding a streak of fifteen games without a regulation loss into Saturday's home game with the Markham Royals, a feat accomplished largely on the back of starting goalie Bradley Van Schubert, the club welcomed an unsung hero in Cale McWilliams to keep the streak going.

A pair of early goals from Matthew Ferrari and Elijah Gonsalves gave the Tigers a quick two-goal lead, prompting a Markham timeout and a refreshed Royals squad.

Markham climbed back with three straight goals, two of which were questionable on goalie interference, something Van Schubert was increasingly vocal about.

Sent to the dressing room by the referees after the third goal, the sixteen-year old McWilliams was forced into action late in the first period, making his junior hockey debut.

Tested early on a breakaway from Markham captain Lucas Condotta, making a spectacular toe save, McWilliams made eleven stops on twelve shots to give Aurora a 5 ? 4 come-from-behind win.

Aurora captain Jake Bricknell was able to tie the game in the second period, cutting across the crease to beat the Markham goaltender on the far side, before Joseph Mizzi gave the Tigers the lead early in the third period.

Markham beat McWilliams on a rebound opportunity just minutes later, though Bricknell scored the game winner on the powerplay with just under fourteen minutes to go.

?What a performance by the kid,? said Tigers analyst Kevin Dean. ?Welcome to the league, he played one heck of a hockey game.?

With Van Schubert suspended for two games, McWilliams earned the rest on Monday to give Jack Irvine a turn between the pipes, riding a five-game winning streak into the matchup with the Cobourg Cougars.

Unfortunately both Irvine and the Tigers' streaks came to a halt in a 5 ? 1 loss, where the special teams was the enemy for the Tigers, allowing a pair of powerplay goals to put them in a hole.

Mizzi scored Aurora's only goal, while Irvine made 33 saves.

Despite Monday's loss, Saturday's win was enough to give the Tigers a two point lead over the Hurricanes in the North division.

The close proximity could make for a wild final month of the regular season for two of the league's hottest teams, who were both eliminated from playoff contention at this time last year.

Aurora draws a tough schedule this week in battling the Wellington Dukes on Friday, who sit first in the Northeast Conference and second in the league standings.

They return to the Aurora Community Centre on Saturday for a 7:30 start against the 24-15-0-3 Buffalo Jr. Sabres, the only meeting of the year between the international competitors.

The Hurricanes are coming off a pair of shutouts last week to contend with the streaking Cobourg Cougars at home on Thursday. For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.