

Tigers? three-goal rally versus Lindsay creates weekend split after narrow 4-2 loss to Haliburton

Cole Crawford, Charlies Hotles, and Marcus Carter scored one goal each to spearhead a three-goal rally as the Aurora Junior Tigers defeated the Lindsay Muskies 3-1 on Saturday night at the ACC.

After surrendering a shorthanded goal to Ajay Raj at 12:27 of the first period, Tigers' goaltender Kian Hodgins held the Muskies scoreless for the remaining 48 minutes of play to earn the much-needed W.

Hodgins was selected Second Star of the Game by OJHL Staff for his 30-save performance.

The timely victory by the ninth-place Tigers pulled the club to within seven points of the eighth-place Muskies for the final playoff spot in the OJHL East. Aurora has a game in hand on Lindsay.

Cole Crawford catalyzed Aurora's comeback when he beat Muskies netminder George Cote for his 11th of the season at 13:08 of the second period.

Three minutes after Crawford tied the game, Aurora Assistant Captain Cayden Smith earned his 25th assist of the season when he fed Charlie Hotles. The big winger slipped the puck past Cote for the game-winning goal. Hotles's heroics earned him First Star of the Game honors.

Smith had noted the keys to beating Lindsay after the Tigers' narrow 4-2 loss to the Haliburton County Huskies on Friday night.

?They're an aggressive team. We need to get under their skin and finish our checks. We need to play our best game to get two points tomorrow night.?

Smith's assessment turned out to be prophetic, indeed, as the Tigers turned in one their best games of the season on Saturday. The home side induced the aggressive Muskies to take five penalties compared to only two trips to the sin bin by the disciplined Tigers.

An empty net goal by Marcus Carter with one second remaining on the clock provided his club with its margin of victory. It was Carter's seventh of the season and sealed a big win for the home side.

Despite the disappointing final 4-2 score on Friday night which included an empty netter by the visitors with 0.7 seconds on the clock, Aurora put up an urgent effort against Haliburton from the opening puck drop.

Due to their early forechecking, the Tigers took an early 1-0 lead when Smith?set up by Hotles's pass-- beat Huskies' netminder Carter Wadon at 6:08. The Tigers' leading scorer described his 18th of the season.

?We had a good forecheck. We got a break on a bouncing puck. I was able to tip the puck from my skate to my stick. I was in the right place at the right time.?

The gritty and tireless centre, whose regular shifts were augmented by plenty of penalty killing and power play ice time, was disappointed by the final result versus the Huskies.

?We played a solid 200-foot game tonight. We needed to block a few more shots from the point to help [Tigers goaltender] Noah [Kraus]. I know he didn't see two of the three goals that got by him.?

The former Lindsay Muskies' netminder was particularly spectacular in the second period.

Kraus's athleticism compensated for a number of his defenders' giveaways and helped protect Aurora's slim 1-0 lead for twenty-eight minutes. Smith complimented Kraus's 34-save effort between the pipes.

?He's come in from Lindsay and he's done such a good job for us. His hard work in practice is starting to show up in our games. We needed to give him more support tonight.?

After a penalty-free first period, tempers boiled over early in the middle frame when Tigers' defender Martin Maryanovsky and Huskies' forward Ryan Gosse dropped the flippers, peeled off their helmets at centre ice, and revved up those assembled at the ACC.

Maryanovsky and Gosse earned their game misconducts. Numerous haymakers were landed in the spirited tilt that ended with Maryanovsky taking Gosse down to the ice. After the ice chips cleared, the exhausted combatants got a warm ovation on a frigid night in Aurora.

The dustup at center ice at 1:26, won by Maryanovsky in a split decision according to our panel of judges, woke up the docile dogs from Haliburton. The re-energized visitors carried the play for the rest of the period. Undaunted by the charge of the Huskies, Kraus flashed the leather at 16:37 and 14:57 then delivered a spectacular three-save sequence moments later as his high-quality goaltending bailed out the leaky Tigers defensive corps.

Kraus kept the Huskies off the scoreboard until 14:39 of the second period when Luis Sturgeon's wrist shot from the right point flew through a group of players and beat the screened Kraus high glove side.

Four minutes later, Chase Del Columbo banged in a rebound past Kraus from the right doorstep to give Haliburton County its first lead of the game which they took into second intermission.

Del Columbo scored his second of the game at 7:48 of the third period when his quick shot from the top of the left faceoff circle fluttered through a maze of players past a trebly-screened Kraus and into the back of the Aurora cage.

Haliburton held its 3-1 lead until 16:16 when Aurora forward Anris Bundzenieks swept off the left wing and rifled the puck short side from the faceoff circle?beating Nadon cleanly for his 14th of the season.

The Tigers pressed valiantly through the waning minutes of the period, especially when Kraus was pulled with 1:04 on the clock and his teammates on the attack. With 44.6 seconds left, Aurora Head Coach Darcy Roy called a timeout and the home side executed their bench boss's offensive zone strategy. However, a moment of bad luck in the Huskies zone created a footrace for a neutral zone puck won by Haliburton forward Isaac Larmand who shoveled the puck into Aurora's empty cage with 0.7 seconds left in the entertaining contest.

After a pair of strong weekend performances, the Tigers continue their quest for the playoffs when they host the Pickering Panthers on Friday, January 30 and the Trenton Golden Hawks on Saturday, January 31. Puck drop for both games at the ACC is 7 p.m.

By Jim Stewart