

U22 Panthers? slide continues in 3-2 home ice loss to Waterloo Ravens

Coming off a 3-1 loss to the 17th-ranked Devilettes in London on Saturday, the Junior Panthers were looking to break out of a slump on Sunday at SARC.

Three losses over their last four games to London, Etobicoke, and Cambridge constitutes a significant downturn in performance for the second-place Panthers (14-2-0-2).

A Sunday home ice matinee with 14th-ranked Waterloo seemed like the kind of antidote the Panthers needed. A spirited two-point performance by Audrey Martone provided hope for the U22 squad, but the feisty Ravens extended Central York's November woes with a 3-2 road win.

The Panthers' offence remained as cold as the autumn snow that fell on Central Ontario on Sunday morning. Plagued by bad puck luck in London on Saturday, the same affliction set in at SARC during the opening period, especially during a power play sequence at 8:42 during which the Panthers prowled and prodded but could not score with the man-advantage.

However, there was a shaft of light when Martone staked the home side to a 1-0 lead at 7:27.

The talented Central York forward received a pass from Keira Johnson in the slot and rifled a wrist shot top shelf stick side that bulged the twine behind Raven netminder Teagan Mason.

Martone described her tenth of the season: "Kudos to my teammate Keira Johnson on winning the face off so cleanly. I was able to skate to the front of the net and I got a great pass from Kiera. It was a really promising start to the period."

Less than two minutes later, the Ravens replied with a picturesque goal of their own by Madelyn Davies who corralled a lead pass from Allison Gauley, burst off the right wing, fended off a Panthers defender, pulled Panthers goalie Jamie Sanford from left to right, and tucked the puck in the lower right corner.

With 2:09 left in the first period and during a goalmouth scramble, Ravens' forward Alexa Tout tapped the puck into the lower left corner behind Sanford from the left edge of the crease to stake Waterloo to a 2-1 lead.

The heroics of Sanford were evident at the outset of the second period as she repelled a breakaway and stood tall on slot opportunities by Waterloo. Despite a series of fine saves by Sanford, Davies tallied her second goal of the game for the Ravens when she picked the lower left corner from between the circles, ringing the pipe just behind the acrobatic goalie at 6:41 of the middle frame.

It was the last goal that Sanford would surrender and the veteran Panthers' goaltender turned back 28 of the 31 shots she faced.

The Ravens fended off three Central York power plays during the second period as the Panthers' lack of finish in the offensive zone manifested itself again. In their last five games, the Panthers have tallied only nine goals after scoring 76 goals in their first eleven games.

Central York created suspense in the final frame with a timely goal by Rachel Telesnik.

7:15 into the third period, Telesnik tallied her second of the season from just inside the left faceoff circle and beat Mason high stick side to finish off a strong passing sequence by Martone and Elizabeth Janovski. Martone described the Panthers' second goal: "It was a great 3-high. Jano did a great job to work the puck low. Rachel took my pass and did a great job with the puck."

Martone just missed the equalizer while working on the PK, but her shot flew over Mason and the crossbar at 5:09. The Ravens

dodged that bullet and the Panthers' closing push. With an upcoming power play and an offensive zone faceoff looming, Central York Head Coach Steve Dempsey called a timeout with 2:52 on the clock and drew up a play.

The Panthers' lack of puck luck was on display during the man-advantage and the final stand by the Ravens was the turning point of the game. Coach Dempsey pulled Sanford for the extra attacker with just over a minute to play, but there was no last-minute hero on Sunday at SARC.

Mason made 29 saves to earn the win and, much like Poe's famous black bird, the Ravens' goaltender declared 'Nevermore' to the Panthers' closing onslaught.

Martone acknowledged that the Panthers will be challenged after serious injuries on the weekend to goal scorers Demi Lazarou (12) and Lily Paisley (9).

'They're two huge players for us. This will be a great time for us to figure out how to win without them until they come back. This is like family?it's tough not to have members of your family in the lineup?but we're going to support them, they're going to support us while they're out, and we need to win games for them.'

When asked to posit the solution to the Panthers' slump, Martone took a philosophical stance: 'One of the key parts of our hockey culture is not forgetting about our core values and to remember what our team has done so well and how we've committed to the core values that our coaching staff has taught. We'll win our way out of this slump with hard work?we'll stick to the team's strengths and be ready to play [three big games next week].'

The 3rd-place Panthers travel to Barrie to take on the 5th-place Sharks on Thursday night and to Durham West to take on the 6th-place Lightning on Saturday afternoon. Central York hosts the 24th-ranked North York Storm on Sunday afternoon. Puck drop at SARC is 1:25 p.m.

By Jim Stewart