

## Voyageurs ice Tigers in four-game comeback



By Jake Courtepatte

It was a series that seemed over from the get-go.

Leaving the Aurora Community Centre last Tuesday following a 5 ? 1 Game 3 win, the Tigers looked ready to stick a fork in their second-round matchup with the Kingston Voyageurs, holding a sizable 3 ? 0 series lead.

Instead, the Voyageurs engineered what is perhaps the most difficult comeback in North American sports ? bringing a series to a deciding seventh game after trailing three games to none.

A dejected Kingston squad left Aurora on their Queen's University bus that Tuesday evening, awaiting the news that may have been the spark in the change in momentum of the series.

They received it prior to Game 4 ? the Tigers Kyle Locke, having notched seven points over the past two winning efforts, was handed a four-game suspension for a hit to the head two games prior.

Without the experienced, 207-pound shutdown defenseman, the Tigers allowed seventeen goals over the next three games, something unheard of for a team that allowed only 2.07 goals-per-game in the regular season ? a league low.

Thursday's Game 4 matchup in Kingston looked more like a CFL score than a hockey one, with the Vees putting up a touchdown and the Tigers two field goals in a 7 ? 6 defeat.

It was a rough night for goaltender Andy Munroe, who has been solid in net for the Tigers all season, earning Gongshow Goaltender of the Month twice. On this particular night, however, he let in six goals on twenty shots in the first two frames, before being relieved by Marcus Semiao to start the third.

Saturday was Aurora's first chance to put away the series on home ice, and it was little more than a thrashing. Tied 1 ? 1 after the first following a powerplay marker from Jordan DaSilva, Kingston exploded for six goals on Munroe in the third period to reach the seven-goal mark for the second straight game.

?We've got to be stronger in our own end,? said captain Michael Laidley. ?We're letting them get the puck to the net on times when they shouldn't.?

Victory was just one shot away in Game 6, after Vince Figliomeni sent it to overtime with ten minutes to play in the third.

However, with Semiao between the pipes for this one, Kingston was able to ice it just a few minutes in and continue their unbelievable comeback.

Bad memories of an undermanned December schedule came roaring back in this series, as with Locke already in his civvies for Game 7, forward Drake Board, the crucial pest for the Tigers in the Newmarket series, also didn't dress following a hard hit he received in Game 6.

It was clear that the Tigers' goaltending confidence was shook ? but to make matters worse, an ailing Munroe didn't even dress for Game 6, nor would he dress for Game 7 Tuesday night in Aurora.

Instead, the starting job was given to Blake Richard, a 21-year old journeyman call-up, from Ancaster Junior B and with some OHL experience.

It was a rough welcome back to the Junior A level, as the Voyageurs opened the scoring less than twenty seconds into the game, silencing the 644 fans that packed the Aurora Community Centre.

Mack Lemmon set the physical pace early with a couple of crushing hits, putting the crowd back on their feet, before Nicholas Erb potted a beautifully patient baseball-swing style goal just over five minutes in to tie it.

This is where things got messy ? a 2-on-1, a lost faceoff, a screened goalie and a lucky rebound added up to a 5 ? 1 score for the Voyageurs after the first period. Three of the goals were scored just two-and-a-half minutes apart.

Richard was pulled after the second, giving Semiao his third appearance in three games. His three goals allowed came on seven shots.

The start of the second marked a reappearance from Richard in net, who earned some redemption with a great toe save early on an in-close chance.

There were signs of a spark three minutes in, when an Eric Williams shot from the point was tipped home by Taylor Joseph to lessen the lead to three.

But from there on in, a defensive shutdown was the only thing on the Vees players' minds. They were effective in keeping the puck to the outside, forcing shots from bad angles and allowing their goaltender to easily up his save-percentage. Each breakout consisted of a dump-in, with one man chasing while four others hung back.

They iced the game, and the series, with an empty-netter. The OJHL regular season champs went down in defeat to a team they were 2 ? 0 against in the regular season.

The fourth-seed Vees move on to face the Trenton Golden Hawks in the North-East Conference final, while the South-West Conference final is an intercity matchup between the Toronto Lakeshore Patriots and the Toronto Jr. Canadiens.