

Williams? four-goal weekend paces Junior Panthers to a pair of shutout wins



It was the kind of weekend that Central York Panthers U22 Head Coach Steve Dempsey has been looking forward to for quite some time.

His Junior Panthers skated to a pair of emphatic and timely victories ? 5-0 versus the North York Storm on Saturday and 8-0 on Sunday versus the Toronto Leaside Wildcats.

The two crucial road wins clinched eighth place in the OWHL final standings, thus securing Central York a bye to the Provincial Playoffs in two weeks.

Coach Dempsey was pleased with his team's offensive production in the pair of must-win games in Toronto.

?We really ramped up our offence. We're back on track as an offensive team. We changed up lines to create more chemistry. I couldn't have asked for better chemistry and scoring balance.?

The Panthers' bench boss also acknowledged that his team is getting over the injury bug that has plagued the Panthers for months.

?We're getting healthier. As a result, we're going to limit our games to one exhibition in Waterloo and run practices over the two-week break to rest up and heal for the Provincial playoffs.?

He added that the offensive surge by Clara Williams, who had four goals on the weekend, is reflective of a team being restored to health.

?Clara is so hard-working and she's bouncing back from a concussion. The line of [Avery] Johnston, [Amber] Esterbrooks, and Williams had great chemistry.?

Williams fired three goals, Johnston earned three assists, and Cheyenne Degeer and Erica Buckley added a goal apiece to lead the Central York U22 Panthers to their convincing shutout win over the Storm in North York on Saturday afternoon.

The Panthers continued their torrid offensive pace and balanced scoring on Sunday afternoon in Toronto versus the Wildcats. Zoe Li led the attack with two goals and two assists. Williams, Esterbrooks, Buckley, Degeer, Jade Lore, and Hanna Franz added singles to pace the Panthers to their eight-goal winning margin.

On Saturday afternoon, the Panthers got off to a much-needed quick start. Williams opened the scoring less than three minutes into

the game when she converted Johnston's pass past Storm goaltender Rylee Eno to give the visitors a 1-0 lead.

The terrific tandem of Williams and Johnston combined again at 16:18 of the second period when Williams bulged the twine behind Eno with Johnston and Maguire earning assists. Less than six minutes later, Panthers' top scorer Degeer put her team ahead 3-0.

Williams completed her hat trick with 2:42 left in the middle frame and Johnston earned her third assist to give Central York a comfortable four-goal lead heading into the second intermission.

Erica Buckley put the game out of reach when she buried the biscuit behind Eno at 12:58 of the final frame with help from Maguire. Despite a preponderance of penalties plaguing the Panthers in the third period, Central York's penalty killers operated at optimal efficiency to protect Izzy Whynot's fifth shutout of the season. Whynot turned aside 16 shots to calm the Storm. Eno made 33 saves on 38 shots in a losing cause.

On Sunday afternoon, Whynot notched her sixth shutout of the season by blocking all 19 shots fired by the Toronto Leaside Wildcats. The Junior Panthers jumped out to a 2-0 lead in the first period on goals by Li and Williams' her fourth of the weekend.

Li's second goal her 19th of the season at 15:41 of the second period beat Wildcats goaltender Sara Da Silva with a helper earned by Johnston. Less than three minutes later, Li assisted on Buckley's goal that provided a 4-0 margin for the Panthers.

Degeer fired her 19th of the season past Da Silva to give the visitors a commanding five-goal lead at 6:56.

Hannah Clarke earned the assist on Degeer's goal and Jade Lore added to the Wildcats' woes with 3:14 left in the middle frame. Li picked up her fourth point of the game on Lore's marker.

Esterbrooks notched her team-leading 22nd of the season at 13:13 and Franz rounded out the scoring at 5:57 of the third period as the Panthers improved their final regular season record to 25-14-1-3 with the romp over Toronto Leaside.

Panther Production Notes

Four Junior Panthers earned a spot on the OWHL's Top 50 list of scorers as the regular season drew to a close on Sunday:

#17 in League Scoring?Cheyenne Degeer?19 goals and 26 assists for 45 points;

#22 in League Scoring?Zoe Li?19 goals and 23 assists for 42 points;

#29 in League Scoring?Amber Esterbrooks?22 goals and 17 assists for 39 points;

#48 in League Scoring?Erica Buckley?15 goals and 16 assists for 31 points.

Notably, Panthers' Goaltender Izzy Whynot placed third in the league in shutouts with 6.

By Jim Stewart