

Zoe Ordanis fires game winner in 4-3 nailbiter over North York and ends Panthers' five-game slump

The slumping third-place Central York U22 Panthers needed a visit from the 23rd-place North York Storm like Marjorie Taylor Green needs a new political bestie.

The Junior Panthers, who lost 5-4 in overtime to the Barrie Sharks on Thursday and 6-5 to the Durham West Lightning on Saturday, received timely two-point performances from Elizabeth Janovski, Elizabeth Shapira, Abby Pak, and Zoe Ordanis to stabilize the offense, especially with Demi Lazarou and Lily Paisley still on the Injured List.

There was a storm brewing prior to the home side's narrow 4-3 win on Sunday afternoon.

After dropping five games in a row, leading scorer Annabella Van Berkel was at the forefront of the Panthers' high-pressure system. However, Van Berkel buzzed one just over the crossbar at 5:20 on a promising opportunity?the recent bad puck luck following the Panthers like a shadow.

When Ava Chefero-Iannazzo took a trip to the sin bin for body checking at 2:32, the home side was staked to a 5-on-3 advantage and Panthers' Head Coach Steve Dempsey used his timeout to diagram a play.

Alas?the Panthers could not light the lamp and the first period ended 0-0.

Despite the fizzling of the power play, the Panthers scored two quick goals in the middle frame.

At 11:34, Elizabeth Shapira took a pass from Elizabeth Janovski, broke through a pair of Storm defenders, and skipped the puck past goaltender Kaitlyn Earl from the left edge of the crease.

Coach Dempsey was pleased by Shapira's growing confidence as a goal scorer.

?I'm really happy she broke through a few games ago and now she's on a goal-scoring streak. Elizabeth is getting the confidence as a goal scorer. She's usually been a playmaker for us since she came to us from Leaside and she's had some tough puck luck early in the season.?

Seventeen seconds after Shapira's go-ahead marker, ?Big Goal? Van Berkel finished a great pass in the slot from Abby Pak to make it 2-0 ? providing the Panthers with some cushion.

Much existential relief swept through SARC.

Despite the finishing touches on offense, a number of defensive lapses by the Panthers forced Jamie Sanford to make a series of saves during the midpoint of the second period.

North York forwards continued to take liberties with the Panthers' netminder by making extra digs for the puck after whistles.

Sanford had enough at 9:10 and slashed a pesky puck picker. The demonstrative ?tender flashed the leather during the PK and surrounded perimeter shots to help kill off her own penalty.

However, five minutes later with Central York on the power play, Kira Rowe broke through the Panthers' defensive pairing and slid the puck under Sanford for a shortie at 4:13. The acrobatic Sanford got a piece of the puck, but it wobbled over the goal line in agonizing slow motion.

Seven seconds into the third period, the Storm blew into the Panthers' zone on the power play and Amber Nazir snapped the puck past Sanford to tie the game.

The Panthers, in need of veteran intervention to steady the slump-weary club, received timely marksmanship from third-year Central York forward Elizabeth Janovski.

Jano finished a nice passing play from Shapira and snapped a shot top corner blocker side to restore Central York's lead at 16:08.

It was a quality goal that the team needed something that Coach Dempsey was pleased to see, given the amount of practice time that is devoted to scoring.

We've been trying to improve our players' offensive abilities, especially their shooting. When you're on a losing skid, when the other teams score, you tend to dwell on the negative. Everything is amplified. Having Jano step up showed her leadership and she's also able to reach back to our success from previous years. She'll draw a lot of confidence from that goal and she'll be ready to score more when we need her to.

Five minutes after Janovski's spirit-raising goal, Pak and Ordanis powered their way into the Storm zone, created a two-on-one, and provided a much-coveted insurance goal.

Pak used Ordanis as a decoy and fired a shot from the edge of the left face-off circle that Earl blocked partially. The puck skittered into the crease and Ordanis slammed it into the empty cage to put the home side up 4-2.

Coach Dempsey was happy to see that Zoe slowed down on the 2-on-1.

They had all the time in the world to make the pass or shoot whichever the defense gave them. Abby's a really competitive player too and she wants to contribute to make our offense better. Moments like those require them to slow it down and Abby did a great job to shoot and Zoe was in position to score on the rebound.

Coach Dempsey's Panthers protected their two-goal lead for seven minutes until 4:41 when Storm forward Emily Wallace scored North York's second power play marker of the period to make it 4-3.

However, a double-minor for head contact committed by North York's Jade McNicol aided and abetted the Panthers-- allowing the home side to skate out the win with a power play advantage for the remaining four minutes of play.

Coach Dempsey's reaction to the win over North York was mixed.

There were moments when we looked good and then we would slip into the same bad habits that have hurt us over the last five games. We ended the slump, but there are things we need to work on. We needed the three points, but we also need to focus on playing better getting out to a quick start, getting pucks on net and finishing, and creating sustained pressure by forechecking.

Coach Dempsey's formula for success will be tested on Wednesday night when the Panthers host the Brampton Canadettes at 7.40 p.m. at SARC.

By Jim Stewart