

Tigers get swept 3-0 and 9-3 in weekend series versus Toronto and Trenton after the firing of Head Coach Greg Johnston

Conventional wisdom tells us 'It's always darkest before the dawn.'

For the Aurora Tigers, it got dark on Friday night when they dropped a 3-0 decision to the Toronto Junior Canadiens and it got darker on Saturday evening when they were shellacked 9-3 by the Eastern Conference-leading Trenton Golden Hawks.

All in all, Aurora's Junior A team is in a dark place having lost four of its last five games, and changes were implemented to right the recent dip in performance.

After a tumultuous week in which Tigers' Head Coach Greg Johnston was relieved of his duties on Monday, team owner Jim Thomson put the team through its paces during Monday's practice. Assistant Coach and former Tigers Head Coach Tom Milne was promoted from Assistant Coach to Bench Boss, Milne's former coaching partner Darcy Roy was hired for his second run as a Tigers Assistant Coach, and Assistant Coach David Govorde retained his dual role behind the bench. The Tigers turned in two tepid efforts on home ice on the weekend to close out a rough seven-day stretch off and on the ice.

Before the 15.13 mark of the first period during Saturday night's game versus Trenton at the ACC, the Tigers found themselves down 4-0 to the high-flying Golden Hawks. With the OJHL's Goaltender of the Month Benjamin Bonisteel between the pipes for Trenton with his fourth-best save percentage of .932 and a stingy GAA of 1.93, the Tigers' struggling offence and power play were in tough in its tilt with Trenton.

The first place Golden Hawks got early power play goals from Adam O'Marra and Corbin Roach before the five-minute mark of the opening frame to stake the visitors to an early 2-0 lead.

Barret Joynt and Dillon Stiles added even-strength goals at 13.59 and 15.13, respectively, past besieged Tigers' goaltender Will Goumas to extend Trenton's lead to 4-0 heading into the first intermission.

Tigers' Head Coach Tom Milne replaced Goumas with Yianni Karkoulas to spark the tired-looking Tigers, but Joynt scored his second goal of the game, a low laser past Karkoulas, to make it 5-0 for Trenton two minutes into the middle frame.

The Golden Hawks were flying as high as the jets emblazoned on their white travel jerseys trimmed in baby blue and black when Owen Ireton flipped a rebound over Karkoulas at 5.18 to give the visitors a six-goal lead. The rout was on.

At 11.27, it appeared that Ethan Lindsay had swept in and beaten Bonisteel to break a five-period scoreless drought by the Tigers over the weekend, but the goal was called back when the referees ruled that a whistle had been blown before the puck crossed the Golden Hawks' goal line.

With the goal erased from the scoreboard, the mood in the ACC went darker when Thomas Kuipers made a great cut to the net and deked Karkoulas on an excellent unassisted effort to put Trenton ahead 7-0 fourteen minutes into the second period.

To their credit, the Tigers roused themselves from their offensive doldrums in the third period by scoring three goals in eight minutes to get back in the game. Tigers' leading scorer Ryan Evenhuis fired a 'goal-scorer's goal' at 3.49 when he snapped a shot from the right circle over the shoulder of Bonisteel and under the crossbar to put Aurora on the board.

Evenhuis's 16th goal of the season, which broke a Tigers' 114-minute weekend scoreless drought, was assisted by Adam Matar and Ethan Lindsay.

Jobey Pearson, with helpers from Connor Russo and Max Cervjakovs, rifled a wrist shot by Bonisteel at 9.01 to narrow the margin

to 7-2. 36 seconds later, Peter Lopes wired a shot from the left point that beat the Trenton tender high blocker side to pull the Tigers to within four of the visitors. Jace Lavallee and Liam Longo earned assists on the Tigers Co-Captain's second goal of the campaign and the dark mood lightened in the ACC.

However, the Tigers' best efforts to whittle down Trenton's lead were nullified by late penalties. The Golden Eagles ended the game the way they started it with two power play goals scored by the same two players who opened the scoring?at 18.35 by O'Marra?his seventeenth of the season?and at 19.53 by Roach. In all, Trenton tallied four power play goals on Saturday night and, unfortunately, this was a recurrent theme for the Tigers on the weekend.

On Friday night, the home team surrendered two power play goals in its 3-0 loss to the Toronto Junior Canadiens.

The Tigers entered the game tied with the Canadiens for seventh place in the Eastern Conference and in his first game back as bench boss of the Aurora Tigers, Coach Tom Milne's team skated stride for stride with the visitors from Toronto.

In a free-flowing, light-hitting, penalty-free opening frame that one fan aptly described as ?pond hockey?, two evenly-matched teams created many great scoring opportunities but were stymied by the goaltenders: Aurora's Yianni Karkoulas and Toronto's Joshua Branton.

With 11 seconds remaining in the first period, the first penalty of the game was called on Toronto's Evan Malkhassian and Aurora?with the weakest power play in the 24-team OJHL?opened the second period with the main advantage for 1.49. However, the Tigers' frustrations with its special team continued and Toronto had more scoring opportunities during the penalty kill.

After a scoreless second period, the Junior Canadiens took advantage of their man-advantage opportunities in the final frame.

Malkhassian tallied a pair of power play goals at 4.00 and 10.57 to give Toronto a 2-0 lead, much to the delight of the bell-ringing Canadiens' fans whose cacophonous clatter of cowbells filled the ACC.

Jay Feldberg gave the throaty Toronto fans something to clang about with less than four minutes to go in the game when he banged a puck past Karkoulas to provide the Canadiens with their three-goal margin of victory.

Joshua Branton earned the shutout by making 23 saves and was named First Star of the Game by OJHL Staff.

Second Star of the Game was Yianni Karkoulas who turned aside 26 of Toronto's 29 shots, many of them point blank attempts that showcased the Aurora goalkeeper's athletic prowess.

Karkoulas's performance was one of the few bright spots for Coach Milne in his second debut behind the Tigers' bench. He noted in his post-game analysis that the Tigers are taking too many penalties.

?It's been our Achilles Heel all season. We've been third in the league in penalties and we're holding everyone accountable. We need to work harder at the game's fine details and we need to build better team structures to get better. There's no question that our power play needs improvement?we're last in the league. We'll need to implement better structures on the forecheck and neutral zone coverage, too.?

The Tigers' next opportunity to overcome the recent darkness, invite a new dawn, and implement the strategies of Coaches Milne, Roy, and Goverde will be in Cobourg on Monday night versus the Cougars. The Tigers (9-12-1-1) will be out to avenge a narrow 3-2 loss to the Cougars (10-5-2-3) on October 23 and reboot their season as it approaches the midway point of the 56-game OJHL schedule.

By Jim Stewart