

Tigers head into playoffs with the Battle of Yonge Street



By Jeff Doner

Heading into last week, the Tigers needed to win their final two games in order to be the top team in the OJHL.

However, it wasn't meant to be as they dropped a tough match to Buffalo on Friday night before bouncing back the next night with a convincing win over Stouffville.

"We worked all year to get to the spot we were in and then to lose that game was tough," said Tigers playmaker Dylan Sikura. "But I think we still need to take some positives from that game on Friday. We were down 4-0 in the first period and we worked our way back up to 4-3 and it was a cat and mouse game from there and we didn't end up catching them."

Sikura went on to explain that finishing the season on a positive note is important for getting off to a good start against Newmarket for their first round playoff series that opens Wednesday.

"We didn't finish first, but we finished second and we were two points behind the best team in the league and we definitely still have confidence," he said. "Obviously going into the first round is going to be tough playing Newmarket, but I think that they think they have a good chance if they try to get under our skin, we had a good season matchup against them. Every guy knows what it takes to win and personally I'm really looking forward to it."

Despite a fantastic regular season for the Tigers, they only managed to split the season series 2-2 with the Hurricanes.

"At the end of the day we can't be scared to play these guys, we've got to know we're the better team and hopefully teams are going to come in and they're going to be scared to play us and not vice versa," Sikura said. "It's always a big game playing in Newmarket with the Battle of Yonge Street."

Finishing the season with 38 wins, the Tigers scored the third most goals in the league with 220 and allowed the fewest with 122.

An overall team commitment to defence and back-to-back goalie of the month Kevin Entmaa were the main factors in being the best defensive team in the league.

But, as was evident in the latter part of the season, the Tigers will be looking for some secondary scoring to help out their top line.

"Secondary scoring is definitely really important," said forward Drake Board. "We need all four lines to score, because come playoff time there's going to be guys shadowing our top guys, so we'll need other guys to put the puck in the net."

Board is predicting the first round series with Newmarket to be a tough one, but figures his Tigers are ready for whatever the

Hurricanes will bring.

‘We’ve just all got to be ready and focused,’ he said. ‘We’re one of the fastest teams in the OJHL, we’re pretty well structured and we’ve got a great coach in JR [James Richmond] and I think if we follow everything they tell us to do and we work as a team we should go a long way.’

For Sikura in particular, the talented forward is hoping to make his mark, as this will be his last playoffs with the Tigers before heading off on a scholarship to Northeastern University for the 2014-15 season.

‘I think there’s a little pressure,’ he said. ‘Coming off a year like we had this year, there’s obviously some pressure for some of the older guys, but it’s not like we had a big run last year that we have to follow up. The only thing we have to follow up is our record this season.’

‘Personally I’m going to use that pressure in a good way. It’s going to add a little fuel to the fire and it’s going to help me play, especially being up against Newmarket. For me at least, it’s going to be a fun series.’

The first round series schedule against Newmarket has been set up as follows: Game 1 at Aurora, February 26 at 7.30 p.m.; Game 2 at Newmarket, February 27 at 7.30 p.m.; Game 3 at Aurora, March 1 at 7.30 p.m.; Game 4 at Newmarket, March 4 at 8.00 p.m.; Game 5 at Aurora, March 6 at 7.30 p.m.; and (if necessary) Game 6 at Newmarket, March 8 at 8.00 p.m.; Game 7 at Aurora, March 10 at 7.30 p.m.