

Tigers stunned by epic comeback in seven-game series with Voyageurs



SILVER LINING ? While the Aurora Tigers might still be smarting after their loss to Kingston last week, some welcome news came this Tuesday when Cameron Morrison, pictured above in a game against the Newmarket Hurricanes last month, was named Rookie of the Year by the Ontario Junior Hockey League. At 16, he is the youngest rookie to clinch the award since the 2007 ? 2008 season. Auroran photo by Jake Courtepatte

By Jake Courtepatte

The Aurora Tigers seemed destined for a return to the OJHL finals, if not the national stage at the Royal Bank Cup as one of the best teams in Canadian Junior A hockey.

Instead, they empty out their lockers just shy of one month into their postseason journey, one which seemed so promising just two weeks ago.

A goaltending nightmare was the main culprit behind the Tigers' second-round exit. After holding a comfortable three-games-to-none lead on the Kingston Voyageurs, the trio of keepers were beaten an astounding 23 times over the next four games to drop the series in seven.

The Voyageurs buried five goals past two different keepers in the first period of last Tuesday's 6 ? 2 Game 7 win over the Tigers, the third-ranked team in the Canadian Junior Hockey League.

?They're not a team you can sit back on,? said James Richmond, head coach of the Tigers. ?They had a lot of heart and never counted themselves out.?

While 14 fresh faces saw their first taste of junior hockey action with the Tigers in 2014-15, a number of key players are now moving on to the next stage of their careers. A total of nine Tigers are entering the NCAA ranks next season.

Most are staying within the northeast United States, committing to Division 1 hockey schools, the highest level of college hockey North America has to offer. Captain Michael Laidley has signed on to play for St. Lawrence University in New York.

Others have already secured their education for the future, with Noah Delmas, Drake Board, and Matthew Bernard joining former Tigers captain Robert Angiolella at Niagara University in 2016.

But for now they have a summer offseason to choose whether to stew in their defeat or look ahead to the future.

?It's tough to think about, but it's not really how you want to look at this season,? said Laidley. ?We had a lot of big

accomplishments this season.?

They did. The number of accolades received by the OJHL regular season champions piled on throughout the year.

Laidley, Board, Callum Fryer and Kyle Locke all represented Canada East at the World Junior A Challenge in Saskatchewan in December. Defenceman Eric Williams and goaltender Andy Munroe were both named to the OJHL All-Star team, and most recently, Williams was named Defenceman of the Year.

To top it off, Richmond was honoured as Coach of the Year just two weeks ago, for an unprecedented second straight year.

?It's not to say that we didn't have a successful season,? said Richmond. ?You have to look at the bigger picture. We went through a lot this year, and learned a lot from it.?

14 returning players will have the opportunity to suit up for Aurora in the 2015-16 season, as Richmond says the building procedure has already begun on the next season of Tigers hockey.

?It's a constant process.?

Meanwhile, the Veeps have squared up their conference final series with the Trenton Golden Hawks at 1 ? 1 as of press time.