

Time running out for Tigers in battle for North division



By Jake Courtepatte

The Aurora Tigers' chance of retaining their title of division champions is slipping away.

A busy weekend that saw two overtimes over three games wasn't enough for the Tigers to close the gap between them and the Markham Royals, who have flourished since moving from Hamilton before the season.

Goaltender Daniel Manella backstopped the Whitby Fury to a 3 ? 1 win over the Tigers on Friday at the Aurora Community Centre, stopping 38 shots while getting beaten only once in the first period by JD Falconer.

The Tigers brought the burden of three regulation losses in four games back to the ACC on Saturday night to play spoiler to the Pickering Panthers, officially knocking the Panthers out of playoff contention by squeaking out a 2- 1 overtime win.

Josh Boyko and his Pickering counterpart Troy Paquette were perfect through the first two periods before Noah Delmas broke the goose egg for the Tigers early in the third. Pickering countered on the powerplay with just over five minutes to go.

Liam Nueman had the OT winner for the Tigers.

It was a similar story on the road on Monday against the Cobourg Cougars, with Cobourg sending the game to overtime with under a minute left on the clock and on the powerplay.

Fatigue seemed to play a factor, though, when the Cougars took the extra point just sixteen seconds into the extra frame to win 4 ? 3. Aurora's goal scorers were Nueman, Darren Iwai, and Alex Formenton.

After picking up three of a possible six points over the weekend, the Tigers are left eight points back of a streaking Royals squad for first in the OJHL's North division, a team that has gone 7-0-1 in their last eight. They clinched their ticket to the playoffs during last week's action.

The Tigers, meanwhile, have struggled in stringing together wins for most of the season. Though a respective 6-4-1 since returning from the holiday break, with only two weeks left on the regular season schedule, every point is crucial.

?Giving up an overtime loss at this point in the year is a pretty big deal,? said Drake Board, who leads the Tigers in goals with 19. ?Everyone's looking for a playoff spot.?

Though he took the loss on Monday night, Boyko has been stellar backstopping the Tigers since December. After pulling backup

duties for most of the season, an injury to starting goaltender Alex Fotinos has given Boyko the spotlight, going 7-3 since the break while putting up a respectable 2.39 goals-against-average and a .915 save percentage.

Fotinos has struggled since being acquired early in the season, with the ex-OHLer earning a win in only two of the eleven games he has started.

Aurora's 24-15-0-7 record has them sitting in fifth in the Northeast conference.

This weekend doesn't get any easier: Aurora hosts Cobourg on Friday at the Aurora Community Centre, the divisional rival Royals on Saturday, and travel to Wellington to face the Dukes on Sunday, who are currently four points up on the Tigers.

Puck drop Friday is at 7.30 p.m.

For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com.