

Caledon Admirals? Dawson Hettiarachchi tallies two points in narrow loss to Aurora]

By Jim Stewart

Dawson Hettiarachchi scored a goal and an assist for Caledon to reach 48 points on the season, but the Aurora Tigers closed their regular season on a winning note with a 4-2 home victory over the Admirals in OJHL play on Monday night.

Hettiarachchi's two-point night improved his season production to 17 goals and 32 assists for the 8-38-1-4 Admirals.

Caledon held their own versus the playoff-bound Tigers (18-27-3-5) with the game tied 2-2 midway through the third period, but Tigers forward Connor Russo scored the game-winning goal on a breakaway to give Aurora a 3-2 lead.

Russo rifled a snapshot between the pads of Admirals' netminder Nicholas Van Kaufmann with 3:21 left in the third period and Tigers' Captain Lucas Stanojevic scored his 33rd goal of the season into an empty net with 42 seconds left to provide the margin of victory.

Stanojevic felt the Tigers "controlled the pace and stuck to doing the little things. It was a big game coming in tonight and it was great to get the seventh spot for the playoffs."

In addition to his impressive 60-point season, Stanojevic reflected on playing in his 100th OJHL game.

"It's pretty cool and exciting to reach these milestones. I've had great line-mates all season. I've tried to take care of myself and I've set high expectations for myself to be a better offensive producer."

Stanojevic's Tigers set the tone and played physically against Caledon in the first period of play. They shot early and often on Admirals' goaltender Van Kaufmann who was a stellar performer for Caledon.

The big goalkeeper turned aside 21 of the Tigers' 24 shots, most of them high caliber, point-blank saves throughout the game, but Aurora's furious forechecking was rewarded at 7:44 when Matteo Iacovelli tipped in Alex Case's wrist shot from the point to put the Tigers ahead 1-0.

Another Case blast from the blue line was tipped into the back of the Admirals' cage with less than two minutes remaining in the period, but the goal was nullified due to a high stick.

The Tigers took a 2-0 lead in the middle frame when Noah DeSantis made a nice move at the right point to elude an Admiral and fired a puck from the top of the circle.

DeSantis's shot generated a juicy rebound for Jace Lavallee to bang past Van Kaufmann. Assists went to Russo and Stefan Forgione on Lavallee's 10th of the season.

The game turned, however, due to a roughing penalty by Iacovelli with 1:59 left in the period. Iacovelli's scuffle after the whistle provided the Admirals with a power play which they converted deftly when Dawson Hettiarachchi tipped in a deflection between Glen Crandall's pads.

Admirals' top scorer Daniil Kononov drew his 41st assist of the season on the power play goal with the other assist going to Dawson Doner with forty seconds remaining in the middle frame.

The Admirals' power play went 1 for 4 versus Aurora.

Midway through the third period and with momentum shifting to Caledon, the Admirals tied the game 2-2 when callup Nathan

Catalano snapped a shot past Crandall on assists from Hettiarachchi and Tanner Greenwood.

The Admirals were inspired by Catalano's marker and dominated play in the waning minutes of the game, but Russo's electrifying breakaway goal at 3:21 on Noah DeSantis's second assist of the game and Martino's finesse feed put Aurora on top to stay.

With 1:44 to play and the Tigers clinging to their one-goal lead, Caledon Head Coach Chris Taylor called a timeout with a faceoff in the Aurora zone.

He pulled Van Kaufmann for the extra attacker and the Admirals pressed to tie the game.

However, Tiger forwards Carter Real and Ryan Evenhuis gained the neutral zone with the Admirals' net empty and Stanojevic iced the game with 41.6 seconds left.

The Admirals' leading scorer Daniil Kononov is 38th in the OJHL scoring race with 11 goals and 41 assists for 52 points. Kononov's 41 assists rank him 19th in the league.

The Admirals dropped to 8-38-1-4 with the loss to the Tigers and, unfortunately, will miss the OJHL playoffs.