

Schomberg Cougars open 56th season by splitting a pair with Clarington and Caledon

By Jim Stewart

The Schomberg Cougars took to the ice at the Trisan Centre on Thursday night to launch their 56th season and commence their 2nd campaign in the PJHL's challenging East Orr Division. The Cougars hosted the perennial powerhouse Clarington Eagles to kick off their 2025-26 season and the rookie-laden squad turned in a feisty performance in a narrow 2-1 loss to the reigning East Orr Division champs. Andrew Claughton, whose athleticism is reminiscent of 2025 Cougars' MVP Nicolas 'Marvelous' Morvan, kept the Eagles off the scoresheet for over 15 minutes with a series of point-blank saves, especially during a mid-period flurry by Clarington. However, a high sticking infraction to veteran defenseman Jared Leite at 15:52 gave the blitzing Eagles a man-advantage. With seven seconds left in Leite's penalty, Blake Peters-Davey banged in a rebound past Claughton from the edge of the crease to give the visitors a 1-0 lead. Despite being outshot 15-5 in the first 20 minutes of play, Claughton's heroics kept his club within striking distance. The Cougars were gifted with a penalty shot when Mason Bondy was tripped on a clear-cut breakaway at 10:16 of the middle frame. Schomberg's rookie forward skated off the right wing, cut in to the net, and deked goaltender Jaius Ford, but the spread-eagled Eagle thwarted Bondy's slick effort and maintained Clarington's slim lead. When Schomberg defenseman Max Popov was called at 17:39 for handling the puck in his own end, the Cougars PK did a nice job blocking pucks and getting sticks in passing lanes to stymie the Eagles' power play. However, just as Popov's penalty expired, Brayden Hicks's snap shot from just inside the right faceoff circle found the five-hole on Claughton with 15 seconds left in the middle frame. Trailing 2-0 heading into the third period, newly-installed Schomberg captain Jack Geniole took exception to a slash by Eagles' forward Owen White. The 6'6", 220-pound PJHL veteran who played over 100 games for the Georgina Ice over three seasons took matters in his own hands and dropped White like a sack of hammers much to the delight of his teammates and the Cougars' faithful at Trisan. Geniole earned a game misconduct for his bare-knuckled efficacy and ended up 2/3 short of a Gordie Howe hat-trick. However, Geniole's banishment inspired his teammates. Minutes later, rookie rightwinger Gavin Crane made a big steal below the Clarington goal line and feathered a pass to Justin Caruk in the slot who blasted the puck high blocker side past Ford to cut the Eagles' lead to 2-1 at 11:11. Caruk a Schomberg resident who played for the Innisfil Spartans last season credited his linemate for setting up his goal: 'Gavin battled down low and did a great job to find me open in the slot. The goalie was moving side to side so I saw the space to shoot and shot it top corner.' The sharpshooting power forward also credited his Captain for inspiring the Cougars towards a better third period effort during which Schomberg outshot Clarington 10-8: 'The fight really picked up the team. We have to play these guys seven more times this year so it was good that Jack sent a message to them in Game One.' Geniole's fisticuffs inspired the younger Cougars as well as veteran Matthew Lychek whose wicked wrist shot beat Ford cleanly with 5:40 remaining, but the puck clanged off the crossbar and the Eagles eked out the road win. Although he didn't pick up the W on Thursday night, Claughton's 33-save performance between the pipes earned him Second Star of the Game. The Keswick resident, who played for the Wellington Dukes of the OJHL last season, spoke hopefully about the upcoming season: 'We got off to a good start tonight. The guys are tight and even though we are one of the younger teams, we're determined. As a team, we're committed to our coaches and to one another. Every shift, we need to get better. We're trying to grow together.' The Cougars got better and grew together on Sunday afternoon when they defeated the Caledon Golden Hawks 5-1 at the Mayfield Recreation Centre. Schomberg poured it on during the first period and outshot Caledon 19-6. The opening frame offensive yielded the visitors an early lead when Samuel Lamy scored 21 seconds into the contest and Dawson Bolly made it 2-0 when he finished Lamy's pass at 7:05. With 1:05 on the clock, Samuel McDonald got the Golden Hawks on the scoresheet to cut the home side's deficit to 2-1. The Cougars continued their dominance in the middle frame by outshooting their hosts 19-7, but Caledon's AP goaltender Max Zemp repelled all the shots he faced to keep the Golden Hawks in the game. However, Schomberg solved Zemp in the third period when Brandon Scott, with helpers from Tyler Duggan and Matthew Lychek, scored four minutes into the final frame. Jace Goring finished a passing play with Scott and Lychek at 11:39 to put the Cougars up 4-1. Scott's power play goal his second tally of the period finished the scoring with an assist by Duggan at 18:21. Schomberg outshot Caledon 55-17 to even their record to 1-1. The Cougars' next home game is Thursday, September 18 versus the Port Perry Lumberjacks. Puck drop at the Trisan Centre is 7:30 p.m.