

Epenesa, Stephen power Tigers past Belleville West in regional opener

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EAST ST. LOUIS – Edwardsville's basketball team had been aiming to be playing its best when the postseason got under way.

The Tigers had a pretty good game in their IHSA Class 4A East St. Louis Regional semifinal contest Tuesday night, getting 24 points from **A.J. Epenesa** and 23 points from **Oliver Stephen** as they advanced into Friday night's final with a 69-44 win over Belleville West; they'll take on tonight's East St. Louis-Belleville East winner for the regional title and a trip to the Collinsville Sectional at 7 p.m. Friday.

"I thought our guys executed a lot of things very well tonight," **Tiger coach Mike Waldo** said. "I thought our guys played a very good game; Belleville West is a good team. They've been playing really well; they're well-coached, and to beat them, that was a very hard first game of the regional."

The Tigers got out of the blocks pretty quickly, taking an 18-4 lead at quarter time and never looking back; Edwardsville took a lead of more than 30 points at one point in the second half and were never really seriously threatened by the Maroons.

"I thought **Chrys Colley** did a great job defensively, and I thought he did a lot of things really well defensively for us," Waldo said. "and I thought our help defense was very

good. I thought A.J. had an excellent game defensively, and I thought all of our guys did. Chrys does a really good job taking away what guys want to do; he does that really well.”

The Tigers had already played the Maroons a couple of times earlier in the season in the Southwestern Conference schedule, and knew what to expect. “We scouted them a whole bunch,” Stephen said. “We knew a majority of their points came from their big man (Tyler Dancy). It's always harder the third time around; we've met them three times.”

“It all starts during the week with preparation,” Colley said. “That's what we did the entire weekend; coach Waldo gave us a game plan. We had a job to do.”

The road for Edwardsville doesn't get any easier as the postseason goes on; their final against the Flyers-Lancers winner may be a stern test. “I think this is the hardest regional we've ever been in,” Waldo said. “The teams in it are very good, and our opponent Friday night will be very good; we've got to keep practicing and keep preparing and try to be as ready as you can when you play.”

Mark Smith had 10 points for the Tigers, with **Colley** adding eight. Dancy led West with 13 points, with Dalton Fox adding eight and DeAndre Jackson seven.



