

Edwardsville's boys basketball squad has high expectations with loads of talent back

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
November 19 2016 8:27 AM



EDWARDSVILLE –The **Edwardsville boys basketball team** has high expectations for the 2016-2017 season with a host of returnees back from last year's 25-5 overall, 14-0 Southwestern Conference team.

The Tigers will be facing quite a few challenges this season.

“It looks like this year will be the most competitive year I can remember,” said **Tiger coach Mike Waldo**. “There's so many good teams and good players out there; we're going to have to play our best every night.”

Last year's Tigers went 25-5 overall, 14-0 in the Southwestern Conference, before falling to Alton in the IHSA Class 4A Collinsville Sectional semifinals. Four of last year's starters are back for this year's Tigers – **seniors Mark Smith, A.J. Epenesa and Oliver Stephen and junior Caleb Strohmeier**; they'll be joined by **junior Jack Marinko**.

Epenesa led the team in scoring and rebounding last year, averaging 16.8 points per game while adding 13.4 rebounds per game, as one of the area's top power forwards, while Stephen's outside shooting abilities – he hit 98 three-point shots last year – helped him to a 14.4 PPG average. Smith averaged 14.1 points a game for EHS while Strohmeier and Marinko played key roles that helped the Tigers throughout the season. Seniors **Nathan Kolesa and Zach Doornink** will play key roles off the bench this year, along with senior **Jackson Best**.

“We've got some good experience back,” Waldo said. “We're good at the things we do and we've got kids who play well as a unit; they work hard in practice every day to get better. They're competitive and enjoy each other's company.”

Belleville Althoff will be joining the Tigers' sectional complex this season after reaching the 2015 Class 3A final and winning it all in 2016; the Crusaders are expected to be one of the top teams in the St. Louis area this season. “They'll make a tough complex even tougher,” Waldo said.

Edwardsville opens the season Monday at the Bulldog Tournament in Highland against Waterloo; they then face Carbondale, tournament host Highland and Althoff in what could be a very early test. The SWC season will open at SIU-Edwardsville's Vadalebene Center Dec. 3 against Belleville West as part of the new SWC at the E season-opening event where all eight league teams will play against each other. The other games feature Granite City against Alton, Collinsville against O'Fallon and East St. Louis against Belleville East

Edwardsville will also return to the Prairie Farms Collinsville Holiday Classic tournament over the holiday season this year, bringing the number of SWC teams in the event to five, including the host Kahoks, Granite City, Belleville East and East St. Louis. The home opener comes Dec. 6 against the Lancers.

