

St. Mary's slips by Alton 60-59 in Redbird Tip-Off Classic title matchup

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
November 27 2016 9:00 AM





ALTON – **Alton's boys basketball team** fell behind to **St. Mary's** early on in their Redbird Tip-Off Classic championship game Saturday night.

That the Redbirds came off the deck and made a game of it was something **Alton head coach Eric Smith** was pleased to see.

“We've got competitive kids,” Smith said. “They're going to fight.”

Fight back they did, rallying from behind to get to within a point of the Dragons but Alton could not get the shot they needed to drop to put themselves into the lead – especially in the final seconds after a missed free throw – and fell to St. Mary's 60-59 in the championship game of the tournament.

The loss dropped the Redbirds to 2-1 on the year with a game coming up at 3:30 p.m. Dec. 3 against Granite City in the SWC @ The “E” event at SIUE's Vadalebene Center.

Alton fell behind early on and faced a 20-9 deficit at quarter time and 36-24 at the half. “We dug ourselves too big of a hole,” Smith said. “It's a credit to them (that they battled back), but the first 10-15 minutes of the game, we couldn't handle their pressure, we took bad shots, we didn't run any offense; they took us out of what we're accustomed to doing.

“Our kids settled down and did some stuff a little bit better at the end, but we've got to be a little bit better from the beginning.”

Smith praised the Redbirds' competitiveness. “We just have to try to do a better job of getting themselves ready to play at the beginning,” Smith said.

The Redbirds were even with the Dragons in the opening stages before St. Mary's got on a run and grabbed the lead, never relinquishing it as the game wore on though Alton kept chipping away at it in the second half.

Maurice Edwards and Kevin Caldwell led the way back for Alton, hitting key shots and making plays when the Redbirds needed them to claw their way back into it. They pulled to within a point three times, with their final chance coming with 7.8 seconds left and the Dragons' Antonio Burks having missed the front end of a one-and-one.

Edwards grabbed the rebound and charged down court, finding an opportunity to put a shot up that bounced off the rim. Alton got the rebound and tried again at the buzzer, but couldn't find the range.

Edwards led the Redbirds with 21 points with Caldwell adding 14 and Ty'ohn Trimble nine. Burks led the 3-0 Dragons with 17 points, followed by Yahuza Rasas with 14 points and Dominic Mitchell with 10 points.

In the evening's curtain-raising game, Carnahan, behind 17 points from Aaron Brookins, defeated Riverview Gardens 53-49; Davion Williford led the Rams with 17 points on the night.

Edwards was named the tournament's most outstanding player, with Burks, Rasas and Yuri Collins of St. Mary's, Tyrone Wright of Carnahan and Tavon Graham of Riverview named to the Bill Drake All-Tournament first team; Caldwell, Tyrone Bell of Riverview, Miles Jones of St. Mary's and Brookins and Darrion Gibson of Carnahan were named to the tournaments' second team.

The Dec. 3 game against the Warriors will give the Redbirds a chance to work on some things in practice. “We've got a little bit of a break, so it'll be nice that we can get some practice in and do some stuff that we need to work on,” Smith said. “We'll get in here Monday and get after it a little bit and get ready to play Granite on Saturday.”

