

Roxana outlasts arch-rival East Alton-Wood River 51-36

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ROXANA — It was the type of game fans of both **East Alton-Wood River** and **Roxana's boys basketball teams** expected: 32 minutes of intensity that wouldn't be decided until late.

That's exactly what happened on Friday night, as the Shells used a 14-6 run down the stretch to take a 51-36 decision over the Oilers at Larry Milazzo Gym.

The win against their backyard rival was important to the Shells, seeking to establish momentum as they begin South Central Conference play.

"It's a game that you don't want to lose at this juncture of the season," **Roxana coach Mark Briggs** said. "So we felt like coming into this game, definitely for momentum's sake and moving forward in our conference play was big for that reason. Tomorrow's going to make it easier for our kids to get out of bed, look at a newspaper or look at a box score and not come out on the losing end of this thing, so it was a big win for that reason."

The Oilers stayed on level terms with Roxana for most of the game, but the Shells' run in the final stages made the difference.

"In the second part of the fourth quarter is when they went on their run," said **Oiler coach Kyle Duncan**. "They had about four or five possessions in a row, then a couple of fouls and the technical. They went on the run there, but I thought we played tough defensively. Roxana did their job, they executed their offense pretty well, and down the stretch, they kept their composure, and you know, I thought the Shells played well, but I thought defensively we played pretty good tonight. Just couldn't get it done offensively."

Briggs felt the key to the game was that the Shells held Oiler guard Jamie Roustio to five points, well below his average of 15 points per game.

"Defensively, we play man," Briggs said, "but it looks like a zone because we switch everything. I think our switches gave them some issues. We did lose (Jake Roustio); he banged us for 18, but that's going to happen. On a switch to man-to-man, he ends up with a matchup that's pretty favorable for him.

"But the key to the night was, if you look at the box scores, is gonna be that Jamie Roustio had five points, and he's been averaging about 15 or so for them," Briggs continued. "We put the clamps on him, kept him away from the rim. He's been hurting people with dribble-drive stuff, and we told our kids to stay flat, keep him in front of you and make him beat you from outside. I think our kids executed."

The action was intense from the opening tip, as both teams tried to gain an advantage. The Shells struck first with a couple of free throws by Jacob Maguire and a driving lay in by Zach Golenor. A Jake Roustio free throw and driving layup cut the edge to 4-3, but a pair of free throws and a short jumper by Cody McMillen upped the Shells' lead. Justin Englar hit a three at the top of the key before the buzzer to cut the Roxana lead to 8-6, giving the Oilers a spark and some momentum at quarter time.

The second quarter started out with Mickey Ross hitting a floater in the lane to up Roxana's lead, but Zaide Wilson countered on a short jumper. Free throws from Jamie Roustio and Joel Biesk gave the Oilers the lead for the first time at 12-10, A Ross three out of a Roxana time out gave the lead back to the Shells, but a Roustio free throw retied the game at 13-13, and a three gave the Oilers the lead back.

It was a part of a game high 18 points for the senior guard, helping to keep EAWR in the game.

"And that's really his game, is a little inside-out type deal," Duncan said. "He can score from outside pretty well. He's been struggling most of the year, but I think he's starting to find it, and I think later on in the season, he should be a pretty good threat."

The period continued to see saw, but near the end, McMillen hit a jumper and a three point play to give the Shells a 20-16 lead at halftime.

The Shells came out of the long break with some momentum, getting a three ball from Zack Haas and a outside jumper from Ross to make it 25-16. The Oilers called time out, and promptly cut the lead back to four on a Jamie Roustio three and free throws from Englar, who then cut the lead to two when he hit a fallaway jumper as he was fouled. The free throw was missed, and the again, the period kept going back and forth. The quarter ended with the Shells on top 29-25, and an exciting final term looming.

It started with Ross hitting a three ball at the outset, a part of a big contribution he gave to his team.

"I'm really pleased with some minutes Mick Ross gave us tonight," Briggs said. "He hasn't seen a whole lot of minutes on the floor, but he ended up with 10 points. I think it was a big night for him, and getting minutes like that is huge to have other guys step up."

The Oilers kept coming though, getting to within seven at 37-30 on Christian Hunter layup and a three from Jamie Roustio. That was a close as EAWR would come, as the Shells began to pull away. A three-point play from McMillan and a reverse lay in by Ross upped the lead to 12, only to have Jamie Roustio answer with a pair of threes between a free throw by Hass, cutting the edge to 43-36. The Shells put the game away

in the final two minutes, hitting three of four free throws after Duncan was called for a technical after arguing a call, upping the Shells' lead to 10. Roxana scored the final five points to make the final 51-36.

The intensity was there for the entire 32 minutes, something Duncan was very pleased with.

"Oh yeah, I think the kids played hard," Duncan said. "It's always a rivalry game; I never question the intensity in this one. They always want to beat each other. I think the kids stepped up to the challenge, we just didn't get it done down the stretch."

In the Shells' case, it was lesson learned after a loss to Carrollton in the previous match.

"We sustained it," Briggs said. "The last game, not to take anything away from Carrollton; that's what they do to you. They play for 32 minutes, and when you play for 20-25 minutes, you're gonna get beat. So coming into this game here, that was a big key for us is go out there between the lines, and play hard for 32 minutes. And I felt like our kids took a big step up in that direction."

The Shells open up their conference play at home tonight against Pana, a team Briggs expects to be physical.

"Pana's physical, Pana's always a top team in the conference," Briggs said. "They're always there in the mix. They're under some different leadership. . .they've got a new coach. We don't know what their philosophy is going to be, they've only played a few games so far; we've got a couple of films on them. We expect a team that's physical, they know how to win, and they're on our home floor though, so we gotta defend our home floor. Win at home, split on the road, and that's the key to surviving the conference."

Meanwhile, the Oilers will get ready to face McGivney Catholic, a school in its first year of varsity play.

"I'm giving the kids the weekend off to regroup, and then, we're going to get back at it," Duncan said. "I think that we need to come back out with the same intensity, play hard, and work on our defense a little bit, work on some offense and get it going."



