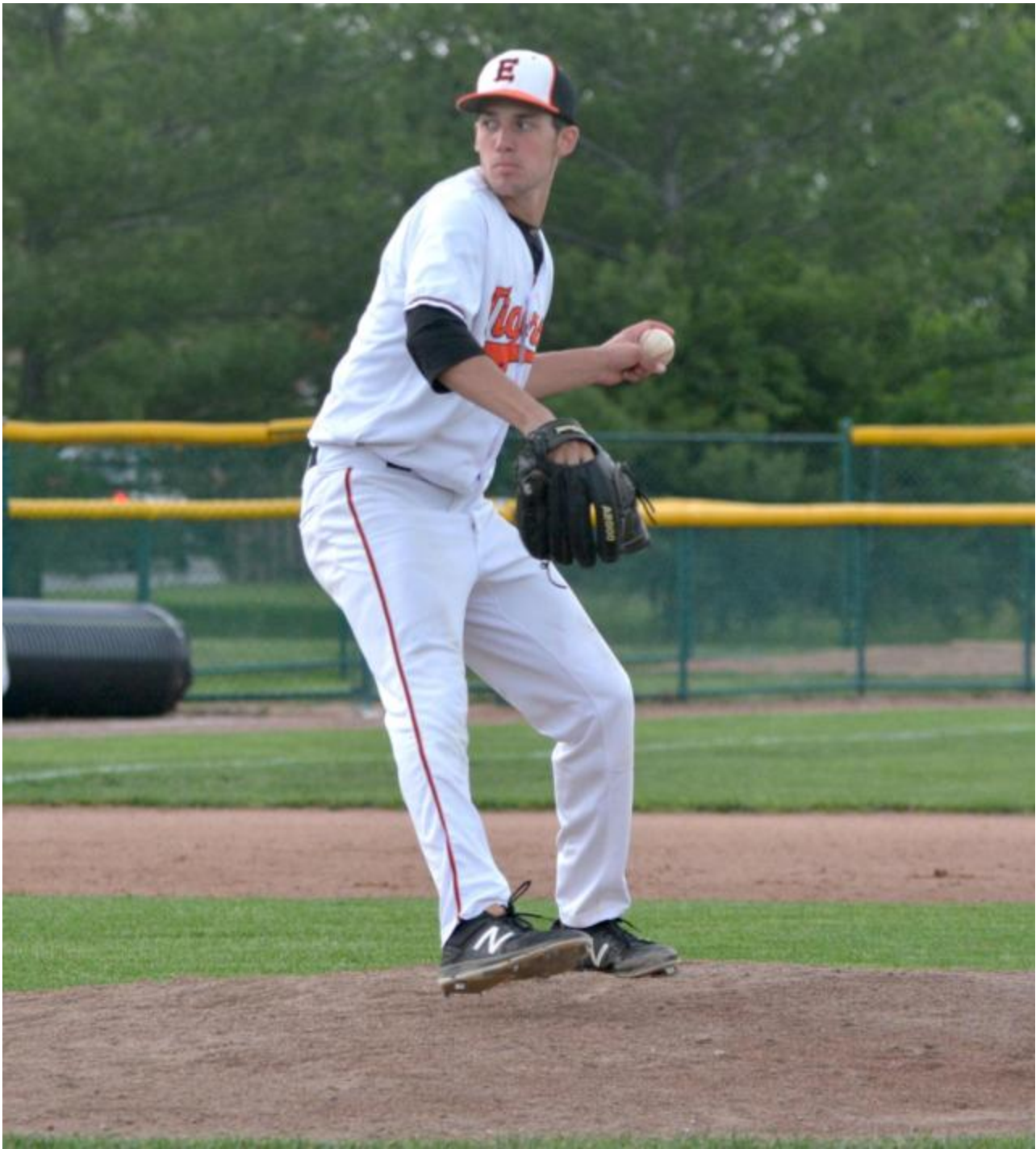
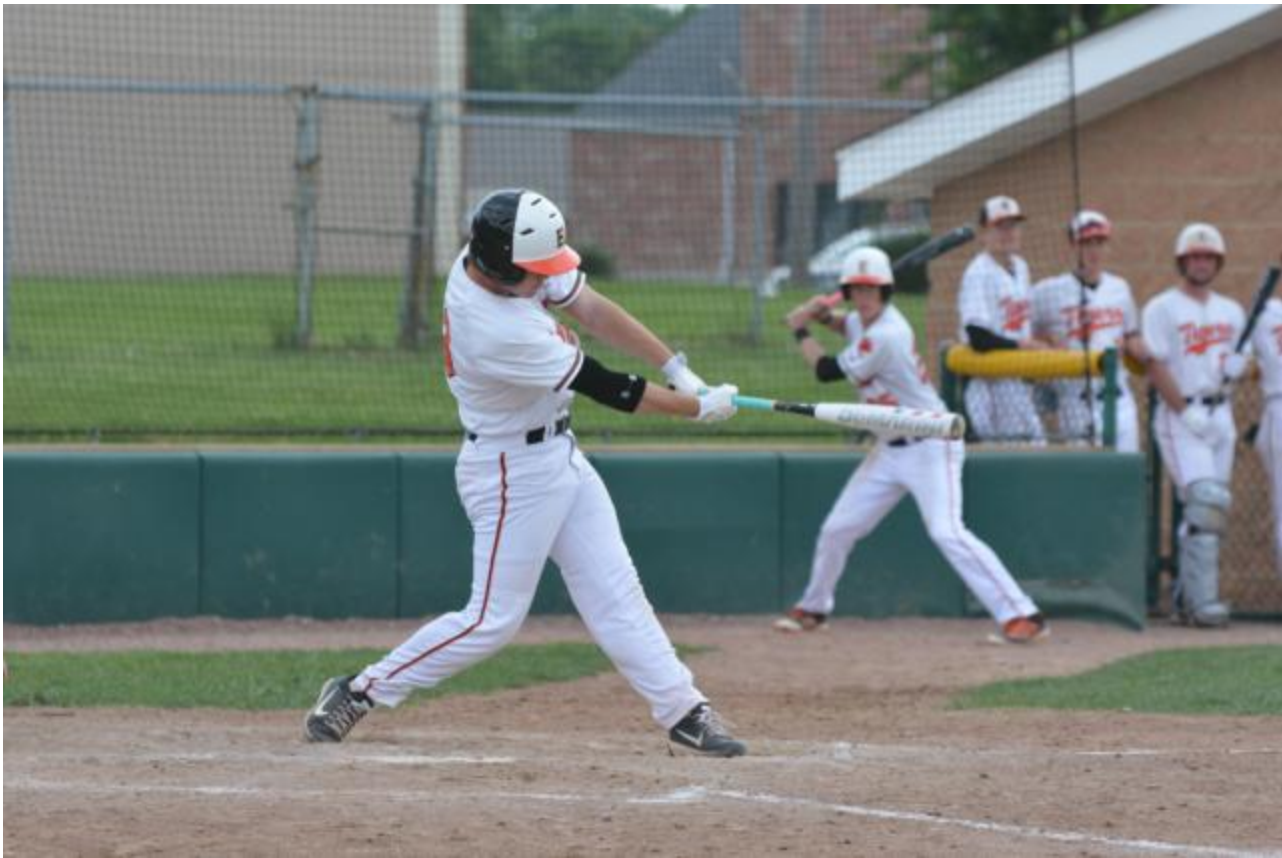




Tigers honor senior players, split doubleheader with Knights

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE — It was Senior Night on Friday at Tom Pile Field, as the Edwardsville baseball team honored a total of 15 graduating seniors and their families for their hard work, dedication and contributions to the Tiger baseball program.

On the field, the Tigers and Triad split a doubleheader, the Tigers taking the first game 7-2 while the Knights won the nightcap 4-2.

The focus, however, were on the seniors, and Edwardsville coach Tim Funkhouser is very proud of them.

“Our seniors have worked hard,” Funkhouser said, “and we’ve got 15 guys out there that come each day to try to make the team better, and it was fun to go out and see them play.”

Throughout the twin bill, the Tigers battled and got a good win in the first game, but ran into a very good pitcher in Travis Heilman, who held Edwardsville to four hits in recording a complete game win.

“Yeah, we did,” Funkhouser said. “I thought our guys battled and we came up with that first victory; that was a good victory for us. And (Heilman) did a good job of making pitches, and we didn’t have a couple of hits at the right time. And maybe make the pitches or make the plays as much, but that’s kinda baseball, and we’ll come back and we’ll be ready to go tomorrow.”

The doubleheader was Triad’s sixth game in the last five days, with another game coming tomorrow. And Heliman’s complete game couldn’t have come at a better time for the Knights.

“We’ve been playing hard all week,” said Triad coach Jesse Bugger. “That game right there was our sixth game in five days, and we’re gonna play again tomorrow,” he said with a laugh. “We’re running a little bit thin on pitching, and Travis Heilman did a great job tonight of saving us a little bit in going complete game. Getting a win was definitely fantastic, but not burning a whole lot more pitching tonight, because of our seeding in the postseason, we play on Monday. We’re not using one through four, because we’ve got an elimination game Monday.

“To get a win against a quality program like Edwardsville on a night like tonight says a little bit about our character,” Bugger also said.

The Tigers broke out on top in the first inning of the nightcap. Dylan Burris drew a walk to start the proceedings, then was sacrificed to second by Kade Burns. Will Messer singled home Burris with initial run. It stayed that way through the fourth as Heilman

and Tiger starter Andrew Yancik settled into a pitcher's duel. Yancik struck out five batters through the fourth, while Heilman fanned two.

Tyler Lewis came in to pitch the fifth for the Tigers, and struck out Heilman to get things started. Hunter Smith was hit by a pitch, and later advanced to second on a balk. He then went to third on an infield hit by Ethan Gratton, and Josh Messenbrink doubled to deep center to score both, giving the Knights the lead at 2-1. Issac Garrett was brought in soon after, and Nick Beeler greeted him with a single to right, sending Messenbrink to third. The two executed a double steal, with Messenbrink scoring, and the final run scored on a Mack Langdon double. Chase Bertlesman singled, but Langdon was thrown out at the plate on a perfect throw by Burris to end the inning.

The fifth inning explosion was a byproduct of Triad getting good at-bats throughout the week.

"We've been taking good at-bats all week," Bugger said. "We won the first four games this week; we dropped the first one on the doubleheader tonight, but the boys have been swinging the bat real well all week, competing well, and taking good at-bats. So it's good to see it continue."

The Tigers did pull back to within 4-2 in the bottom of the frame, getting singles from Drake Westcott and Burris to get things started. Burns walked to load the bases, but Jack Cooper forced Westcott at the plate. The catcher's throw to first to get the double play was wild, and Burris scored on the error, Burns going to third and Cooper to second. Heilman got Will Messer to ground back to the box to end the inning.

The Tigers did make a pair of runs in the sixth and seventh, but Heilman shut the door both times to preserve the win for Triad.

In the opener, the Tigers scored three times in the third and four more times in the fifth to win. Westcott doubled home two runs in the inning, while Joel Quirin singled home another. The Knights did pull to within 3-2 in the fourth, courtesy of RBI singles from both Beeler and Bertlesman, but Edwardsville put things away in the fifth, starting with a lead-off Burris homer to left. Dalton Wallace doubled home two runs later in the inning, while Yancik doubled home another run.

Andrew Frank went the first four innings for the Tigers, giving up two runs on three hits while fanning three. Dan Piccihotti went the final three innings, allowing only one hit and striking out four. Drew Parres struck out three Tigers in his four innings of work.

With the regular season set to wind down, Funkhouser likes the way his team has played down the stretch.

“We’ve been playing on a regular basis,” Funkhouser said. “I like the way our guys have been playing, and we’ll look forward to tomorrow.”

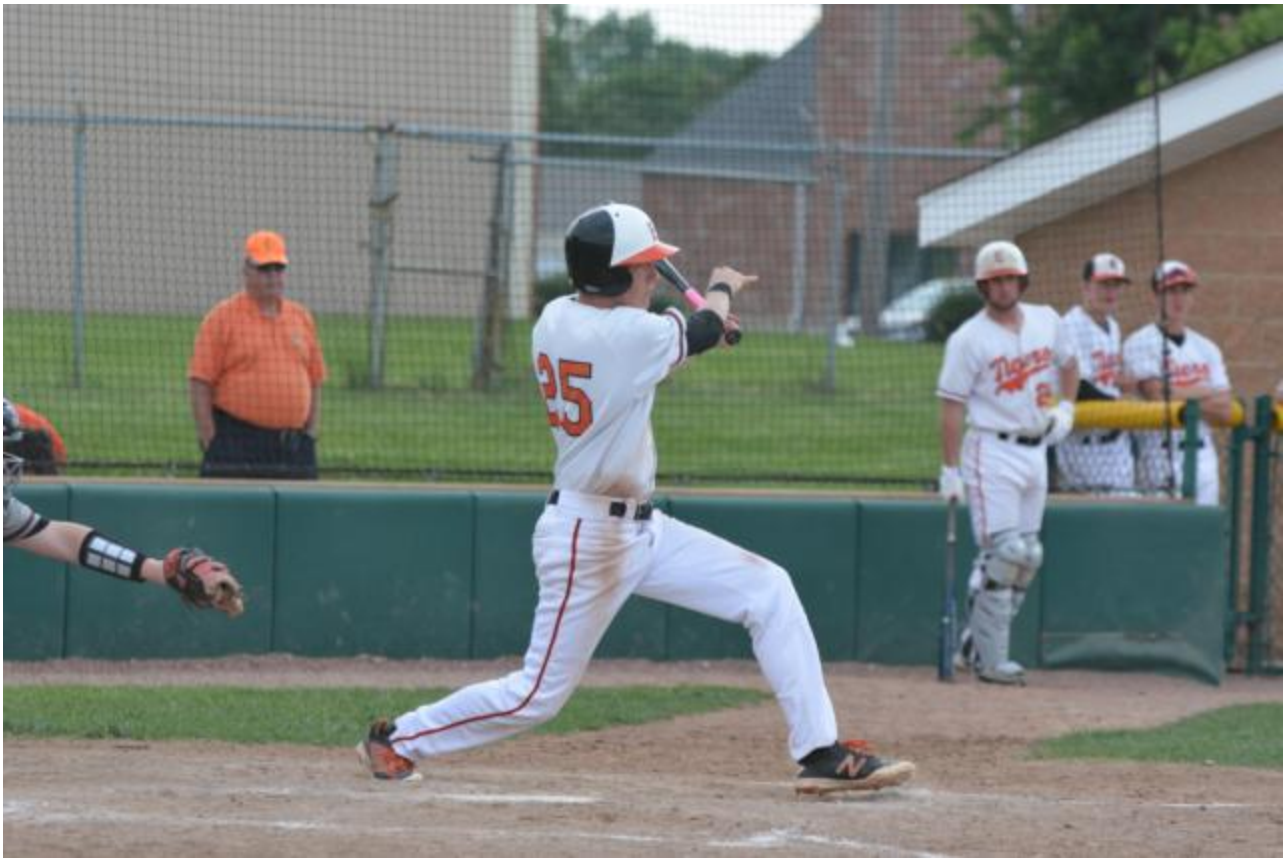
That’ll be a game against Springfield High at Tom Pile Field tomorrow morning, then winding up the regular season Monday against Waterloo at GCS Ballpark.

The postseason is also set to arrive, and both coaches are looking ahead to the playoffs.

“We’ve got some time to continue to sharpen our abilities and be ready,” Funkhouser said.

“We hope to win the regional and keep moving,” Bugger said. “That’s what we base all our preparations on all year. is the end of the year and the postseason, and try to play as long as we can possibly play.”





[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)