

# **A tremendous season: Tiger quest for state final berth falls just short to Loyola 17-10**

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EDWARDSVILLE – Edwardsville knew it was going to be facing a difficult battle with Loyola Academy of Wilmette in Saturday afternoon's IHSA Class 8A football playoff semifinal at Tiger Stadium.

The conditions for the game weren't the best; a cold front sweeping in from the northwest sent temperatures plunging from the low 70s into the low 40s by the time the game kicked off, with a stiff breeze and hard rain affecting what both teams could do.

In the end, the Ramblers “took care of the ball better better than we did,” said Tiger coach Matt Martin, “and there was a time when they hurt us with turnovers” in a 17-10 Rambler win that sent Loyola into next Saturday's IHSA Class 8A final against Frankfort Lincoln-Way East, 24-14 winners over Park Ridge Maine South in the other 8A semifinal Saturday night, at 7 p.m. at Huskie Stadium on the Northern Illinois campus in DeKalb. Loyola advanced to the final with a 12-1 mark while Edwardsville was eliminated at 9-4 on the season.

The Rambler defense did a good job containing Tiger quarterback Kendall Abdur-Raheem, Martin felt. “They're pretty solid,” Martin said. “They have great schemes, they played hard and they're coached well; we're getting a head on a hat, but we weren't staying on our blocks – you needed to hit it quick; they're a good football program.”

The Tigers were trailing 17-10 going into the final quarter, but the chance was there on a big drive downfield that the Ramblers eventually contained to get the ball back. “I thought that said a lot,” Martin said of the Tiger drive. “We're proud of our kids; they fought all the way through, they didn't lay down and die – they competed.

“We didn't end up as winners, but the kids competed well.”

While both teams had to deal with the conditions as the game wore on, it did alter what both teams could do. “I thought you saw some ball-security issues,” Martin said. “You saw a bad snap on a punt; that hurt us – field position again, maybe some of the turnovers – I don't know. But both sides had to deal with it – I thought they handled it a little bit better than we did.”

Edwardsville took the lead early on thanks to a 40-yard field goal from Devin Parker with not quite four minutes gone in the first quarter, but the Ramblers got the following wind in the second quarter and countered Parker's field goal with a 30-yard field goal of their own from Liam Congaham just past the midway point of the quarter to tie things up a 3-3.

The Ramblers took the lead for the first time with 1:13 left in the half when Rhys Logan ran it in from nine yards out, with Congaham adding the convert to put Loyola ahead 10-

3 at the long break. Rambler quarterback Quinn Boyle extended the lead to 17-3 with a three-yard run with four minutes left in the third period.

Edwardsville answered that with a drive downfield that ended with a six-yard Justin Johnson TD run with 1:37 left in the quarter to get the Tigers to 17-10; the Tigers did have their chances to pull even down the stretch, but the Rambler defense came up big when they needed to to hold on to the lead.

The Tigers opened the season with losses to Naperville North, CBC and East St. Louis but pulled together as the season went on and went on a nine-game winning streak that not only put them in the playoffs but got them to the semifinals. “When you think about it, we played some of the best teams in the state,” Martin said, “even in Missouri – East St. Louis, CBC (who won the Missouri Class 6 championship in Springfield, Mo., Saturday night over Blue Springs 31-14), and Loyola's one of the best programs year in and year out.

“The kids played hard and played great competition. I'm very proud of our kids – I think they have nothing to hang their head about – they competed all the way. I thought our defense really stepped up tonight and had some tough field-position situations and I thought they competed hard and executed well.”

















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