

Walker scores 16, Wells 12 as Oilers defeat Griffins 50-36

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GLEN CARBON – For a program that's starting to rebuild, it was an important win on the road.

And that's what happened to the East Alton-Wood River Oilers on Friday night, as Tavion Walker scored 16 points and Jake Wells added 12 as the Oilers defeated Father McGivney Catholic 50-36 in the Griffins' home opener.

“We'll take it,” said first-year EAWR coach Ron Twichell. “It was a hard fought win, tough atmosphere. Tough gym to play in; you can't hear two feet in front of you. I was proud of the kids; they battled, and nothing's better than getting a win before Christmas.”

Twichell was very complimentary of Walker, who overcame a slow start to be the game's leading scorer.

"He did play well," Twichell said of Walker, who's a sophomore. "He did well for us tonight. He didn't start too well, but he came on better. He's starting to become more and more coachable, so that's a big plus."

And for a young team that has only three seniors on its roster, the Oilers and their new coach knows there's still much work to be done.

"Well, we've got a long way to go," Twichell said. "This is the fourth program I've tried to build, and I'm going to get that done. It usually takes about two years. We're getting there, it's a slow process. But I like our progress right now, I do."

For the Griffins, it's a reminder of how much work that still lies ahead for the second-year varsity program.

"East Alton-Wood River, they came in and played really well, I think," said McGivney coach Rich Beyers, "and took us out of everything we wanted to do tonight. They made us realize just how much work we've got to do. Kudos to them and their coach; they did a great job. I'm happy for them. I know it's been a struggle for them this season, and I'm happy they were able to come out and play the way that they did."

"I feel unfortunate for our guys," Beyers continued. "They hung in there, let some calls that didn't go their way kind of affect them. It can change the whole complexity of the game, and it did for us. But it also starts in practice; we didn't have a good practice this week before the game on Thursday, so that doesn't never help, either. It's always tough to lose at home."

The first quarter was a bit of a see-saw affair as both teams had trouble scoring in the first two minutes. After that, the lead changed hands several times before Walker banked a shot in right before the buzzer to give EAWR a 12-11 lead after one. The Griffins countered with the first five points of the second quarter to take a 16-12 lead, thanks to a Zach Brasel three ball and free throws from Alex Loeffler and Clayton Scott. A pair of baskets from Daren Spruill tied the game up before Walker, Spruill and Justin Englar combined on a EAWR 8-2 run in the final two minutes to give the Oilers a 24-18 lead at halftime.

The Oilers outscored McGivney 10-6 in the third quarter to build on their lead, thanks to Walker and Wells who hit key baskets in the period to extend the advantage to 34-24 after three. It became a 12-point game early in the fourth as Spruill hit twice inside, sandwiched around a Loeffler basket to make it 38-26 before a three-point play from

Logan Shumate cut the EAWR lead to nine. Late in the game, the Oilers salted it away from the free throw line, going 12 of 18 down the stretch with Walker, Marc St. Peters and Wells all hitting their shots as EAWR won 50-36.

The Griffins were pumped up for their home opener, but missed many shots during the game that could have made a difference.

“I don't think there was any lack of energy to get ready for the game,” Beyers said. “Maybe they were too amped up, because it just seemed like we couldn't even make a layup, we were shooting it over the rim, over the backboard, I don't know. It seemed like the ball was bouncing all over the place but where we wanted it to. You have nights like that. We'll learn from it, we'll get better, and hopefully, we'll come out next time and be able to play a little bit better.”

Beyers also had high praise for the Oilers.

“I just don't think that we played very well,” Beyers said. “Again, I think part of that is East Alton-Wood River. They did a nice job of taking us out of what we wanted to do, and we didn't do a very good job of taking them out of what they do. We kind of let them dictate the game, and again, that's a tribute to their coach and to their program, and what they're doing right now. And they just did a better job of executing, and rebounding, and taking care of the basketball, making free throws and all those sorts of things that win basketball games. They did it and we didn't.”

For the Oilers, it's about building up their program going forward into conference play in January and February.

“Yeah, we hope so,” Twichell said. “We just take them one game at a time, one day at a time. When you've got a new coach, you change the culture a little bit. They've got to get to know you, you've got to get to know them. It takes a while.”

The Oilers now look ahead to the Carlinville Holiday Tournament, and it's something Twichell and his club is looking ahead to.

“Very tough,” Twichell said about the tournament. “We've got to play a couple of teams that thumped us pretty good. We've got to play an 8 o'clock game, and come right back and play at 3 o'clock on another day, which I'm not real happy about that at all. But we'll just go up there and do what we can do and see what we can do.”

The Griffins go on the road again next Tuesday at Civic Memorial and Friday at Hillsboro before playing in the Vandalia Holiday Tournament.

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