

EHS girls awaiting difficult tests in Visitation tournament

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – There's no doubt that Edwardsville will have quite the challenge awaiting them over the next several days.

That challenge gets under way at 1 p.m. today when the Tigers take on Parkway South in an opening-round contest of the Visitation Christmas Tournament in St. Louis County, one of the top tournaments of its type in the St. Louis area year after year. After today's opening contests, the tournament takes Christmas Eve and Christmas Day off

before resuming Tuesday and running through Thursday when the champion is crowned beginning at 8 p.m.

The tournament traditionally attracts many of the top teams in the St. Louis area; this year's tournament is no exception, with top-seeded Incarnate Word leading the 16-team field. Also in the tournament are the host Vivettes, St. Joseph's, Ursuline Academy, Whitfield, Cor Jesu, traditional rivals Kirkwood and Webster Groves and Hazelwood Central.

“It's loaded,” said Tiger coach Lori Blade of the field for the tournament. “But what a great challenge for the kids; we're looking forward to it. We'll see how it opens up with Parkway South, then have a good little break for the holiday and then hopefully come back refreshed and ready to dig in and compete hard.”

There's no doubt that the teams entered in the tournament will give Edwardsville some big tests as the tournament goes on. “It's going to be tough,” Blade said. “It's going to be a tough field, but I also think it's going to be very well-coached teams; the majority of the 16 teams have been very successful at one point or another.

“I think you're going to see well-coached teams that take away strengths and try to push into weaknesses, and we'll go from there, but it's a great field and it'll be very competitive. We'll get battle-tested, that's for sure; we just need to make sure we're ready to dig in and compete, being the lone Illinois team.”

“There's not a bad team in the tournament,” said the Tigers' Rachel Pranger. “Every game will be a challenge and it'll be good for us to go against it. I'm really excited to go there and see what we can do.”

A Tiger win today would send them into Tuesday's quarterfinals at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday against the winner of today's Washington, Mo.-Webster Groves opening-round contest; a win in that game would send them into a semifinal contest at 8:30 p.m. Wednesday against the survivor of the quadrant between Kirkwood, Visitation, St. Joe's and Hazelwood Central. The final is set for 8 p.m. Thursday.