

# Resilient Redbirds bounce back, down Columbia in overtime

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer  
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BELLEVILLE – If there's one thing you can say about Alton's boys basketball team, it's this: the Redbirds are certainly a resilient, competitive team.

After a pair of difficult losses this week in the Belleville East Chick-fil-A Classic to Champaign Central and Belleville Althoff, the Redbirds bounced back Saturday afternoon and grinded out a 64-56 overtime win over Columbia in the seventh-place game of the tournament to take their record to 11-7 on the season, while the Eagles fell to 10-9.

“The kids showed some resiliency,” Redbird coach Eric Smith said. “We’ve had a little bit of a grind over the last couple of weeks and we’ve been challenged a little bit, but it just kind of shows the competitiveness of the kids and their resiliency.

“We had a little bit more togetherness out on the court; guys shared the ball a little bit more, different guys made plays when it was their opportunity – that's kind of what's happened for us when we've had some success.”

That the Redbirds grinded out a win on the day is what the Redbirds are, Smith thought. “That's kind of what are kids are for the most part,” Smith said. “We're not going to do a whole lot of pretty things – we're going to have to grind and grind and grind and find a way to make the games fit us a little bit.

“It's a testament to our kids – that's a pretty good Columbia team; they're competitive, Mark (Sandstrom, the Eagles' coach) does an incredible job with them, they run a lot of good stuff. Obviously, there's things we'd like to do a little bit better, but it was similar to our win the other night against Edwardsville (a 55-50 overtime win Jan. 12) – we had to walk through a little action, the kids had to communicate and get to the right spots and for the most part, we did that today.”

The game certainly started out evenly; both teams had the lead at some point during the opening quarter before the Redbirds settled into a 19-13 lead; the Eagles stayed in touch with the Redbirds the rest of the way, Alton leading 29-25 at halftime before the Eagles pulled to within 34-33 midway through the third period; Alton answered with a run of their own to take 41-33 lead thanks to scores from Kevin Caldwell, Donovan Clay and Malik Smith.

Alton eventually expanded the lead to 43-37 at three-quarter time, then took off at the start of the final quarter, eventually getting out to a 51-41 lead before the Eagles came back, with Jordan Holmes and Jon Peterson leading the way, eventually pulling to 52-52 and then 54-54 to send the game to overtime.

That's when the Redbirds' Charles Miller stepped up; he scored the first four points of overtime for Alton, points that would prove to be key before Kevin Caldwell extended the lead to 60-54; Alton never looked back after that and ran out winners on the day.

Caldwell led the Redbirds with 25 points on the day while Malik Smith added 22 points and Clay had 11 points; Miller's only four points of the day came to put the Redbirds ahead in overtime. Holmes led all scorers with 29 points on the day with Peterson adding 19.

The Redbirds return to the Southwestern Conference schedule with a visit from Granite City at 7:30 p.m. Friday before they head to Galesburg for the Galesburg shootout Jan. 27 when they take on Rock Island.

