

Tigers dodge would-be Rock Island dagger, advance to Super-Sectional 48-44 in overtime

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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CHAMPAIGN – Edwardsville and Rock Island have now clashed against each other in an IHSA Class 4A sectional final.

Thanks to a three-point shot by the Rocks' Bre Beal with 12.4 seconds left in regulation, this one went into overtime.

But the Tigers came up with the answers in overtime – most notably, free throws from Rachel Pranger and Myriah Noodel-Hayward and a couple of big rebounds from Noodel-Hayward – to eliminate the Rocks for the fourth straight year in Thursday night's Champaign Centennial Sectional final 48-44 to advance to Monday's Illinois Wesleyan Super-Sectional in Bloomington.

Awaiting the Tigers will be Chicago's Mother McAuley, who eliminated Frankfort Lincoln-Way East 67-43 in Mother Mac's own sectional final Thursday; the game is set for 7 p.m., with the winner taking on either Lombard Montini or Bolingbrook – the winner of the Lewis University Super-Sectional in Romeoville – at 5:30 p.m. March 2 in the state semifinals at Illinois State's Redbird Arena in Normal.

The Tigers head to Monday's super-sectional at 29-0; the Rocks were eliminated at 24-8 for the year.

Edwardsville had fallen behind Rock Island in the first half – the Rocks holding a 14-9 lead at quarter time and 24-17 at the half – but the Tigers kept battling all night. “We battled,” said EHS coach Lori Blade. “These kids have a will that just doesn't quit; that's a credit to them. Everyone keeps saying it's coaching – these kids are hitting the shots, they're doing what they need to do to be successful and you've got to give them the credit.”

Edwardsville battled back in the second half, taking a 32-31 lead at three-quarter time thanks to some halftime adjustments the Tigers made on the defensive end. “We switched up the defenses a little bit,” Blade said. “The kids did a great job; we went to a triangle-and-two and (Quierra Love) did an awesome job on (Chrislyn) Carr and Haywood did a great job on Beal.”

One of the key moments of the game came with 1:10 left in overtime and the Tigers holding a 43-41 lead; the Rocks' Beal took possession and drove for the Tiger basket to try and draw Rock Island level. Rachel Pranger stepped in and tried to draw a charge on Beal.

Pranger's effort to draw the charge was successful, giving Beal her fourth foul and the Tigers possession. “Unbelievable,” Blade said. “That was huge, that was absolutely huge.”

Right after that, the wind seemed to go out of Rock Island's sails; forced to foul to try to get possession, Kate Martin and Hayward stepped up and knocked down four straight free throws to extend the lead to 47-44, with a Beal three-ball in between; one final free throw sealed the win for Edwardsville.

Noodel-Hayward led the Tigers with 18 points on the night, with Pranger scoring 14 and Martin 10; Carr led the Rocks with 15 points, with Beal scoring 14 and Jameshia Wells adding five.

The win, Blade felt, was a testimony to the hours put in by Edwardsville players preparing for games.

“We have played some really good teams over the years,” Blade said. “Some Ms. Basketballs, like we just did, and everything; it's a testament to these kids and the commitment they put in, to shoot the free throws every morning and watch the film at lunch – everything extra that they do that not many do – that's what they get for those things.”