

Two fourth-quarter touchdowns give Waubonsie Valley 21-7 win over Tigers

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – A three-yard touchdown run by substitute quarterback Ethan Nelson and a 59-yard interception return by Harper Cole on the next possession was the difference as Aurora Waubonsie Valley defeated Edwardsville 21-7 in a hard-fought football game Friday night at Tiger Stadium.

The Warriors’ defense was able to shut down the Tigers offensively for most of the game, and were able to come up with turnovers at key times.

“We’ve got to execute better,” said Tigers coach Matt Martin, “gotta quit turning the ball over. It’s tough to win games when you’re losing the turnover battle.”

Martin was quick to praise the Waubonsie Valley defense.

“They’re pretty good,” Martin said. “They’re 4-0 for a reason. Their defense plays hard, they’re physical, they’re well-coached. It’s tough sledding against that defense. They don’t give up very many big plays; they make you grind the field, and you hope you don’t make a mistake, or you don’t get a holding call. That puts you in second and 25.”

There were a lot of positives for the Tigers as well. The defense played very well also, and Dionte Rodgers was singled out for his contributions to the Edwardsville cause.

“I thought they got better,” Martin said. “There’s a lot of positives. Dionte Rodgers, the way he played on offense, defense, special teams, I thought he really played hard. He was a Tiger football player tonight.”

The defensive line also played well.

“Yeah. I thought they responded,” Martin said. “I’m going to have to watch film; I might be getting too excited,” Martin said with a smile. “But I thought there were positives.”

The Tigers took the opening kickoff and immediately started a march downfield, where sophomore running back Justin Johnson, Jr. picked up where he left off from last week, getting a big gain of 30 yards on the second play from scrimmage. Johnson and quarterback Kendall Abdur-Rahman took turns carrying the ball, and eventually got it to the Warriors’ 17, where a fourth and one play was stopped, ending the drive.

The game immediately turned into a classic and physical defensive struggle, with both teams hitting hard, exchanging punts and a turnover each. During that time, Abdur-Rahman was injured after being tackled, and couldn’t return, putting Luke Oglesby in at quarterback.

Halfway through the second, the Warriors’ broke through on a second and six play. Quarterback Jack Drow found Ryan LeMoine up the middle with a pass, and LeMoine went 40 yards for the touchdown with 6:40 left in the half to give Waubonsie Valley a 7-0 lead, the only score of the half.

The Tigers were able to tie it up in the third quarter, thanks to the efforts of Johnson, who ran for over 100 yards in the game. Johnson carried three times in the 29-yard drive, ending when he went up the middle 16 yards for the equalizer with 3:53 left in the quarter to tie it up 7-7.

The Warriors took back the lead early in the fourth on a six play, 55-yard drive. Nelson, now in for the injured Drow, threw 13 yards to LeMoine for a key first down before going up the middle three yards with 9:02 left in regulation to give Waubonsie Valley a 14-7 lead.

The Warriors clinched the game on Edwardsville's next possession. The drive started with both Johnson and Rodgers getting big gains on the ground to get the ball to the Tiger 46, where, on third and eight, Cole intercepted a pass and ran 59 yards to the end zone, giving Waubonsie Valley a 21-7 advantage. The Warrior defense was able to get another turnover to eventually put the game away.

The Tigers will now regroup and get ready for a key Southwestern Conference game against Alton next Friday night at home in a 7 p.m. kickoff.

“Yeah, that’s what you gotta do,” Martin said. “We gotta fix us. We’ve gotta get better, gotta execute better. The bottom line.”

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