

Edwardsville holds on for 5-4 hockey victory over Alton

by John Hough, Sports Writer
December 12 2018 3:48 AM





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EAST ALTON - An early three-goal lead by the Edwardsville (MVCHA) Tigers was nearly erased by a late surge by the Alton Redbirds, but the Tigers managed to hold on for a thrilling 5-4 victory on Tuesday night at the East Alton Rink in a Missouri Valley Club Hockey Association contest.

“We’re happy with the effort. Alton-Edwardsville games are always great,” Alton head coach Aaron Kestler said. “The first period was pretty sluggish, but we brought it back in the second and stepped it up in the third to bring it back to a one-goal game. We wish it would’ve went a little more our way.”

Alton goes to 3-9-1 and is now on a three-game losing streak.

The Tigers improve to 3-5-2 on the season.

“One of the keys for us was getting off to a good start. That hadn’t been the case for the last few games,” Edwardsville head coach Jason Walker said. “We got into a little penalty trouble in the second period. After the kills, we were a little back on our heels, and that’s when I thought took it to us, but they regrouped and made enough plays at the end to get it done.”

A pair of freshmen would owned the spotlight.

Edwardsville’s Aiden Stevens was a prime attacking force as he scored a hat-trick to add to his 13-goal tally this season.

“He’s that guy that has that ability everytime he steps on the ice to be a difference maker offensively. Early in the game, he was awesome,” Walker said. “When he moves his feet he’s one of the better players in this league. Him as a freshman to make the impact that he does is awesome.”

Alton’s Nick Jones netted two goals and one assist while he consistently showed great individual puck maneuvering all night long. Jones now has 22 goals in 13 games.

“We lean on him a lot. For being a freshman he’s got a pretty big role on the team,” Kestler said. “He needs to expect to keep that going for the next four years.”

In a back and forth game throughout where both teams had ample amount of chances, it was the Tigers who took advantage of their opportunities in the first period.

Aidan Stevens found of the back of the net at the 9:25 minute mark and then three minutes and 24 seconds later he did so again putting Edwardsville up 2-0. Precisely 60 seconds after Steven's second goal, Tyler Jansen made it 3-0 after he managed to get the puck past Ryan Grizzle from a bad angle on the right side of the goal.

It didn't take long for Alton to respond in the second period.

With 70 seconds in, defenseman Cayden Barton blasted a shot past Arianna Johnson for a power-play goal to make it 3-1. However, 54 later Stevens would complete his hat-trick as he perfectly placed a wrist-shot 5-hole past, Grizzle.

Jones replied with a goal to cut the deficit back to two at 4-2 with 8:03 left in the period.

Edwardsville nearly let Alton close the gap even further as they were whistled for two penalties within 32 seconds, which gave the Redbirds a 5-on-3 man advantage for a minute and 28 seconds. The Tigers, thanks to multiple saves by Johnson and timely blocks by defenders were able to hold out unscathed.

"When you get into that position it's making saves and then the guys out there making plays on the puck. We had a couple of good blocked shots," Walker said. "That was the key of the game."

With 9:10 left in the game, Edwardsville caught a big break as Adam Nava's dump-pass from just inside the red line came toward Grizzle and trickled between his legs for a goal. That once again restored the Tigers three-goal lead 5-2.

Alton wouldn't quit.

Then 100 seconds later the Redbirds responded again. Jones wristed home a pinpoint shot in the top shelf of the goal from just inside the blue line of the Edwardsville zone. With 1:10 remaining, Zach Carter received a pass and scored on a one-timer to put Alton within a goal at 5-4.



