

Rivers' buzzer-beater three gives Redbirds 44-43 win over defending state champion Maroons

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
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ALTON – Josh Rivers had 10 points to lead Alton, with the last three of them being the biggest.

Rivers hit a three-point shot that rebounded to him at the buzzer to give the Redbirds a 44-43 win over defending IHSA Class 4A champion Belleville West Wednesday night at the Redbirds Nest.

It was a game that Alton rallied to win, trailing the Maroons 18-12 at halftime and 33-24 after three, outscoring West 20-10 in the final quarter, gaining the win on Rivers' game-winner.

“We told the kids the whole game plan, and we didn't think the effort was an issue. We played our tails off,” said Redbird coach Eric Smith. “But offensively, for the first half, that might have been as bad as we've been. We had no ball movement, we had no player movement, guys, I think, in terms of the moment, wanted to try to do too much, like they wanted to be the guy who scored, and that's not a good representation of that. We're really, really good when we shoot.”

Alton's play improved vastly in the second half, as the Redbirds looked for good looks and open shots.

“We shot 15 threes in the first half,” Smith said. “I mean, we shot a ton of threes in the first half, and they were contested, they weren't all paint busters. But in the second half, we got more stuff going to the rim.”

The game-winning shot came about by Rivers making a great, heads-up play to keep the ball alive when it deflected out to him at the top of the key.

“Yeah, I mean I think Don (Donovan Clay) had a good look at it,” Smith said, “and he's a real good player. When you give him an opportunity, and Josh made a heck of a play. Sometimes, it's good when the ball bounces the way you want it to.”

Maroon coach Joe Muniz felt that his team could have played much better.

“Well, like I told the kids, it wouldn't have mattered if we won that game or lost that game, I'd been happy if we won because we won the game, that's about all you can say,” Muniz said. “I'm just really disappointed in our kids. We didn't play well. We just

didn't play well. We had everything going in our direction, we had them in plenty of foul trouble, and we lost our heads a little bit."

A tough schedule, including the nightly battles in the Southwestern Conference, may be starting to catch up to West, but the Maroons are still battling.

"Well, yeah, it's about as tough a schedule as ever," Muniz said. "These kids are basketball players, we're a good basketball team. I think our kids are playing against great teams. And I think Alton's a great team, I think Collinsville's a great team, I think East St. Louis is a great team. I think every team in our Southwestern Conference is a great team. And there are no nights off, and our guys have to figure out a way to pull through this, and like I said, we've yet to play a complete team game, where we have all five guys moving the ball. We did a lot of standing tonight, and if we don't get our guns up and get going, it'll be a short postseason."

Clay added nine points for the Redbirds, while Andrew Jones had eight. West was led by Keith Randolph, Jr., who scored 12, while Will Shumpert had 11 and E.J. Liddell scored eight.

The Maroons are now 26-4 on the year, while the Redbirds are now 19-9. Alton finishes its regular season on Friday night at home against O'Fallon on the Redbirds Senior Night, while West is at home against Granite City.





[Colin Feeney also contributed to this story.](#)