



Tigers Get Three in First, Four in Sixth to Defeat Eagles 7-1

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Freshman pitcher Ryleigh Owens got two key strikeouts in the fifth inning with Civic Memorial poised to take the lead, and it was the big moment in the game as the Tigers went on to defeat the Eagles 7-1 in a softball game shortened to six innings because of rain on Friday afternoon at the Edwardsville Sports Complex.

Owens came into the game in relief of starter Kay Swanson, who gave up only one run and two hits in four-and-one-third innings, with runners on second and third with one out, and proceeded to strike out Malena Wade, hit Jenna Christeson with a pitch to load the bases, and strike out Kate Griffith to end the inning.

Owens showed a lot of aplomb in getting out of the inning, despite putting Christeson on.

“She did,” said Edwardsville head coach Lori Blade. “We had an open base, so I wasn’t too upset with that, because I thought about walking (Christeson) anyway. But she put the ball where we needed to put it, and we made plays behind her, but she came up with a couple of huge strikeouts in that situation.

“She moves the ball around,” Blade continued, “she does a good job with that, she had a great mentality and approach for a freshman. She’s going to be one that steps in and does a good job for us at times like that when we needed to.”

And Swanson also pitched well in getting the win, shutting down a very good hitting CM team.

“She did,” Blade said. “Her first three innings were really good. Their fourth and fifth, she started getting behind a bit, and then, they hit a couple hard. But we made some nice plays behind her today, which was good to see. But they can hit, so to hold them to one was a good outing for both kids.”

Katherine Bobinski-Boyd played a big role, hitting a two-run double in the first to give the Tigers a 3-0 lead, part of a two-for-three day. She’s one of a corps of younger players gaining experience in every game.

“Some of these kids need experience and confidence at the varsity level,” Blade said. “We just don’t have much of that coming in, and they’re getting it. They’re getting it figured out, and we will. But I expect us to compete every at-bat; we can’t take at-bats off. We have to have that mentality to bear down, and compete in at-bats, and not give in. So, we’re getting better, like I said we would, and we’ll continue to do that.”

The Eagles couldn’t get anything going until the fifth, scoring their only run on a Braylen Cox RBI double.

“Well, they jumped off to a 3-0 lead,” said CM coach Lucas Angelo, “it took us a while to get going and get out timing, and we did score one on a nice double by Braylen, who got to third base, and just couldn’t get anything going after that.”

Angelo credited Swanson with keeping the Eagle lineup off balance, and the Tigers defense with making the plays behind her.

“Yeah, had good defense, and (Swanson) did a nice job keeping us off-balance, and moving it around,” Angelo said, “and changing eye-levels, so good for her. She did a nice job.”

The Eagles did get off to a good start, but lost leads in three games. Still, when the CM offense clicks, they’re a hard team to stop.

“Absolutely,” Angelo said. “We actually blew a 4-1 lead, 7-1 lead, so we’re better than what our record indicates, and we are scoring a lot of runs. And it’s going to come down to our pitching, because we have a solid defense, and when our pitchers are on, they’re as good as anybody.”

And when it comes down to the race this season in the Mississippi Valley Conference, Angelo boiled it down again to one word.

“Pitching,” Angelo said. “It’s going to be pitching, and you know, we’re going to continue to hit the ball, and that’s going to be our main focus. But it all comes down to pitching for everybody.”

After the Eagles went down in order in the first, Maria Smith started the home half with a single, then went to third on Swanson’s sacrifice bunt and scored on Moe Kastens’ single to left-center to make it 1-0. One out later, Mackenzie Owens walked, and both Kastens and Owens came home on Bobinski-Boyd’s double to the fence in left-center to make it 3-0 for Edwardsville after one.

The Eagles had a chance to draw level in the second when Rebecca Harkey drew a lead-off walk and Ally Hardy was hit by a pitch. Ally Hallstead then forced Harkey at third, and Cox flew to center, doubling off Hallstead at second to end the inning.

Edwardsville had a chance in the fourth when two-out hits by Sydney Lawrence and Sam Sanders put runners on first and third, but Smith fanned to end the inning. The Eagles got something going in the next inning, starting with a walk to Hardy, but she was forced at second on a grounder to second for the first out. Cox then tripled to the fence in right-center to score Hallstead, and Kelbie Zupan then drew a walk, which brought in Ryleigh Owens to pitch. Zupan stole second, but Owens caught Wade looking on a called third strike, hit Christeson to load the bases, then got another called third strike on Griffith to end the inning, leaving the score 3-1.

The Tigers then scored four times in the bottom of the sixth to put the game away. With one out, Bobinski-Boyd singled, went to third on when a pickoff throw by the catcher went into right field, Jayna Connoyer walked and stole second, and both came in on Ellie Viox's double past the left fielder to make it 5-1, with Viox taking third on an error. A ground out to first by Sanders scored Viox, and Smith singled, stole second and scored on Swanson's RBI single to make the final 7-1. The game was called at the end of the inning because of rain.

The Eagles, now 3-4 on the year, travel to Cahokia on Monday, then host both Marquette Catholic and O'Fallon Tuesday and Wednesday at the Bethalto Sports Complex, with all games starting at 4:15 p.m. The Tigers, who upped their record to 4-2, are at East St. Louis on Tuesday, then host Alton on Thursday in Southwestern Conference games, with the start times 4:30 p.m.

