

Edwardsville Rallies On Senior Night, Defeats Vianney 20-25, 25-23, 25-18 To Complete Undefeated Home Season

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – The Edwardsville boys volleyball team honored Frankie Holloway and his family in a pre-match ceremony on the Tigers’ Senior Night, then Holloway came out and played a big role as Edwardsville rallied from an 18-11 second game deficit to defeat St. John Vianney Catholic of Kirkwood, Mo., 20-25, 25-23, 25-18 Monday evening at Lucco-Jackson Gym,

The win clinched an undefeated home season for the Tigers as they go into the final matches in the Southwestern Conference and head into the IHSA playoffs, which starts in the next two weeks. And Edwardsville did so with perhaps its most impressive comeback of the season.

“Yeah, it was a very exciting match,” said Tigers head coach Scott Smith. “There are not too many times we’ve beat Vianney; the last two times that we’ve beaten them were some of our strongest years that we’ve had, and it’s always good to beat Vianney, who’s always one of the better teams that we’re going to play. Especially leading up to the playoffs, which starts in two weeks, having that before the conference play comes back.”

Smith felt the key to his team’s second game comeback was being able to keep service errors to a minimum, and hitting their spots when serving.

“I think we were getting our serves in a better spot,” Smith said. “Once again, big wins are the result of the lack of service errors, compared to service points, and able to put the ball where the other team is not, so that’s huge, being able to focus on hitting a spot on the floor.”

And once the Tigers were able to get on a roll with their service points, it was hard to stop them.

“Yeah, Vianney’s such a great passing and attacking team, that we were able to mix it up well,” Smith said, “that kept them guessing. They’re very well-coached and very well-disciplined, and almost all those boys are playing volleyball year-round, and some of them have played with our kids.”

The entire match was one of the most entertaining of the season, and it definitely helped keep the fans on the edge of their seats for the entire evening.

“Yeah, 100 percent,” Smith said. “The boys, they’re playing some of their best volleyball right now, and it’s heading toward the end of the season, and that’s the best time you want to do it, every single practice, every single game, get a little bit better than the last time you saw a volleyball.”

The opening game started out in favor of the Golden Griffins, as they scored the first three points, only to see the Tigers come back to score the next three and tie it up at 3-3. The two teams then kept trading off points, not allowing the other to get a good cushion, with the Tigers going up by two at 7-5, then later 16-14 as Josh Whittenburg scored a service ace. From there, Vianney got the ball back on a Michael Langan kill that made it 16-15, and Langan reeled off a six-point service streak that featured Jacob Craig making a magnificent block that made it 17-16, and some good spikes by the Griffins that made it 20-16, forcing an Edwardsville time out. After the time out, a spike went into the net that made it 21-16 before Holloway got a dink shot to go down, making it 21-17 and giving the Tigers the ball back. The teams again traded points before the Griffins made it 24-18 and game point. Whittenburg got a dink shot to land just in, and Daniel Pauk and Preston Weaver combined on a block to make it 24-20, but a Vianney spike clinched the first game 25-20.

The Griffins took an early second game lead, jumping to a 9-2 lead, thanks to the service of Langan, who put together a six-point string, getting help from a pair of kills from Alex Whitesides before a Henry Hupp kill made it 9-3, giving the Tigers the ball back. Eric Epenesa served up a pair of points to make it 9-5, and the two teams again exchanged points, with Vianney being able to put together back-to-back points to make it 15-8, prompting another Edwardsville time out. Epenesa then hit home a shot to make

it 15-9, giving the ball back to the Tigers, but Vianney scored three of the next five points to make it 18-11, and after an exchange of points that made it 19-13, Brock Hennig served up a point that made it 19-14, but Luke Valentine scored on a spike that made it 20-14. Valentine's ensuing service went into the net to make it 20-16, and Max Sellers then went on a five-point service streak, with Whittenburg getting a kill that made it 20-17, and a missed Vianney shot that made it 20-18, with the Griffins calling time out. After the time out, a missed Griffins' spike and a kill from Sellers tied the game at 20-20, but then, Vianney scored the next two points to make it 22-20. A Pauk spike made it 22-21 to give the Tigers the ball back, Hupp served up an ace to tie the game again 22-22, and Epenesa spiked home to give Edwardsville its first lead at 23-22. Vianney used its last time out of the game, and immediately tied the game at 23-23, but its ensuing service went long, and Sellers closed out the game with a spike, making the second game final 25-23 to even the match at a game apiece.

The momentum stayed with the Tigers at the start of the third and deciding game, as Hennig scored on a kill and Whittenburg and Weaver combined on a block to make it 4-0 before the Griffins got the ball back. The teams then exchanged points to make it a 6-2 Edwardsville lead before Vianney scored twice in a row to cut the Tiger lead to 6-4, and after another exchange that made it 10-8 for Edwardsville, the Griffins tied the game up at 10-10 before an Epenesa made it 11-10, and Epenesa himself served up two points to give the Tigers a 13-10 lead. Edwardsville then scored three of the next four points to go up 16-11, with Vianney calling time out, then a spike and Sellers dink both got in to give the Tigers an 18-11 lead. Edwardsville then extended its lead to 20-12, then to 22-14 before one last Vianney streak made it 24-17. A service went long, giving the ball back to the Griffins at 24-18 before Whittenburg drove home the last spike to give the game and match to the Tigers 25-18.

Whittenburg led the Tigers with 16 kills, with Sellers adding seven. Hupp had 16 digs, with Sellers adding 15, Weaver 10 and Holloway five, Hennig had 14 assists, with Weaver adding 10 and five team assists, both Whittenburg had nine service points, with Whittenburg added four aces and Weaver one, with Sellers scoring eight points and an ace, and Hennig had four blocks.

The Tigers are now 15-9 on the season, and finish up on the road, starting at Alton on Tuesday night in a 5:45 p.m. start, then play at Father McGivney Catholic on Thursday and conclude the regular season at Belleville West May 14, with those matches starting at 4:30 p.m. Smith feels the momentum of the win over Vianney will help tremendously.

"We're playing Alton tomorrow at Alton, so hopefully, we keep that momentum going," Smith said, "and keep limiting our mistakes as best as possible."

And that Holloway was able to contribute much to his final home match meant a lot to Smith and the Tigers.

“Really exciting game,” Smith said. “I’m happy that Frankie was able to get in there and contribute so much to us. I know he always wants to be a part out there, and be out on the court even that much more, and I’m glad that it worked out that we did that today.”



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