

# **Tigers Battle Toe-to-Toe With Powerful East St. Louis Team, but Flyers Take Advantage of Turnovers**

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
October 5 2019 6:40 AM











EAST ST. LOUIS – The Edwardsville High School football team went toe-to-toe with a powerful East St. Louis team, but in the end, turnovers proved to be costly as the Flyers defeated the Tigers 43-21 in a Week Six Southwestern Conference game at Clyde C. Jordan Memorial Stadium.

The Tigers held a 14-13 lead early in the second quarter, and came to within 27-21 early in the fourth, recovering an on-side kick deep in Flyer territory, but couldn't get any closer.

East Side was able to take advantage of the Edwardsville turnovers to help them pull away in the end, but the Tigers were able to hang tough with the Flyers.

“Our kids competed hard,” said Tigers coach Matt Martin. “They just have so many weapons. You have to tackle better. I thought we did tackle better tonight, but it’s not good enough, because when you miss a tackle, it’s going to be a big play or a touchdown.”

The Edwardsville offense played very well to help the Tigers stay in the game with a Flyers team that has many weapons to choose from.

“It’s tough,” Martin said. “They beat you deep, they can throw short, and they can make you miss, and run long. But their run game is tremendous as well.”

And the Tigers offense had many positive things happen as well.

“Yeah, we did positives,” Martin said. “We’re here to win.”

That task was made more difficult without star running back Justin Johnson, Jr., who saw limited action because of injury.

“It doesn’t help,” Martin said. “He wanted to go, he couldn’t. So, he tried.”

And there were many positives that the Tigers had in the game as well.

“I think I mentioned earlier, we tackled better at times,” Martin said. “I thought we were physical, the offensive line was physical at times. We needed to make more plays in the passing game to be more successful. We just didn’t make enough; we made some.”

It was also the Flyers’ Senior Night game, and East Side came out pumped up for the game, but mistakes also proved to cause problems as well.

“It was a big day for them; our seniors were excited, everyone was excited about the game,” said Flyers’ coach Darren Sunkett, “and we just didn’t execute tonight. When we needed to execute, you saw the results. They’ve got a good team, no doubt. But everything we did was self-inflicted.”

The Flyers were able to take advantage of the Edwardsville miscues to pull away in the end.

“All the time,” Sunkett said. “That’s what the game of football is all about. We’re looking to exploit their weaknesses, and that’s not what we did today.”

Still, it was a Senior Night win and that important to the Flyers’ players and their families.

“It’s great the guys won on Senior Night,” Sunkett said. “The guys had a big crowd, their parents were here, the kids are here, and they went out and performed. Like I said, we came out strong, we struggled for a minute offensively. Defense, we had to make some adjustments. They pretty much ran something that some guys hadn’t seen. I thought we made the proper adjustments, and we slowed the offense down.”



It didn't take the Flyers long to score on the game's opening drive, with quarterback Tyler Macon hitting Dominic Lovett 69 yards on the third play from scrimmage to give East Side an early 7-0 lead after the convert. The Tigers countered with an eight-play, 59-yard drive on their first possession, with running back Torrance Johnson, who played a magnificent game, going up the middle for 29 yards on the third play, and quarterback Ryan Hampton moving the ball well also. It was Hampton who scored from five yards out with 6:39 left in the opening term to tie the game 7-7 after the conversion.

The Flyers put together a good drive on their second possession, but hurt themselves with inopportune penalties, and on a fourth-down play, Macon was stopped short of the first down, giving the ball to the Tigers. After Edwardsville went three-and-out, East Side needed only three plays to score, with DeMonta Witherspoon carrying the ball all three times for 41 yards, scoring from 10 yards out to give the Flyers the lead back at 13-7, but a bad snap caused the conversion to be missed.

Edwardsville only took two plays to match the touchdown, with Mason Ahlers making a brilliant one-handed catch and going 62 yards for the touchdown, with Eric Epenesa's convert giving the Tigers a 14-13 lead 11 seconds into the second quarter. The defenses then stiffened, but then, the Flyers only four plays to score, with Macon passing 21 yards to Keantez Lewis and 14 yards to Lawaun Powell, Jr. The touchdown came on a 28-yard pass to Witherspoon with 8:13 left in the first half to give East Side the lead back at 19-14. A two-point pass was incomplete.

On the Flyers' next possession, Macon connected on passes to Lewis, Witherspoon, and Powell for a total of 60 yards to bring the ball to the Tiger 10, and one play later, Macon went up the middle five yards for the touchdown that made it 27-14 with 3:23 left in the half after Macon hit Lovett in the end zone for a two-point convert.

Antonio Johnson intercepted Hampton on the second play of the next Edwardsville possession, and the Flyers went to work again, but penalties hurt the drive, and the Tigers were able to hold on downs, but the East Side defense held Edwardsville, and the two teams went into the rooms at halftime with the Flyers up 27-14.

On Edwardsville's second possession of the third quarter, Hampton hit Noah Goldsmith with a great pass up the middle for 37 yards, but a big hit forced a fumble that the Flyers recovered near midfield. But the Tiger defense held, and the offense took over and launched a 14-play drive, with Hampton hitting Kenyon Johnson for 33 yards and a pass interference penalty against the Flyers that put the ball on the East Side 13. Early in the fourth quarter, Hampton went one yard up the middle for the touchdown that cut the lead to 27-21 after the conversion.

The Tigers then squibbed the kickoff along the ground, and the ball was up for grabs when Ethan Young recovered the ball at the Flyer 32, giving Edwardsville a golden opportunity to take the lead. But the Flyers turned back the drive, and a pooch punt by Hampton went into the end zone, giving East Side the ball at their own 20.

The Flyers then went to work on a nine-play, 80 yard drive that was started by a 27 yard run by Witherspoon, and climaxed by Witherspoon cutting nicely on an eight-yard touchdown run with 6:45 left in regulation, with a Macon pass to Powell on a two-point play extending the East Side lead to 35-21.

Johnson had his second interception on the night on the next Edwardsville possession at the Flyer 49, and on the third play, Witherspoon scored his fourth touchdown of the night with a 41 yard run up the left side to give the Flyers a 43-21 advantage after another two-point pass from Macon to Powell was good with 5:44 left.

Edwardsville had once last chance, but the Flyers recovered a fumble at their own 35, making the 43-21 final.

The Flyers improve to 6-0 overall, 3-0 in the Southwestern Conference, and are at O' Fallon next Saturday afternoon in a 2 p.m. kickoff. The Tigers go to 4-2 overall, 2-1 in the league, and host Belleville West next Friday in the Edwardsville homecoming game at Tiger Stadium, with a 7 p.m. kickoff. Martin will look at both the positives and the mistakes and will get ready for the Maroons.

“Those fumbles, those are hard hits,” Martin said. “They forced the mistakes, too. So we’ll look at what we think were forced mistakes, and what we thought were mental mistakes that you can control, and we’ll try to learn from them.”







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