

Harris Scores 22, Is Named Game's MVP As Tigers Defeat Highland 62-48 In Opener Of Scott Credit Union Shootout

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EDWARDSVILLE - Sophomore point guard Sydney Harris was named the game's Most Valuable Player with 22 points as Edwardsville defeated Highland 62-48 in the opening game of the Scott Credit Union Edwardsville Shootout Saturday afternoon at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Tigers' win avenged their loss last year to the Bulldogs 47-45 on Dec. 1, which ended Edwardsville's 93-game home winning streak. On Saturday, the Tigers played very well for the most part, keeping Highland at bay for most of the game.

"We did," said Edwardsville head coach Lori Blade. "And that was important. We played really well in spurts, and then we head silly, silly spurts where we turned the ball over, unforced, I thought, just with poor decisions. And we've got to do a better job against a team that's going to grind it like they do. They play hard, and it was a good win for us."

Highland is a team that works hard and plays smart, and it makes things difficult for their opponents. Blade felt that the Tigers were able to battle through the difficulty to win the game.

"Well, they're smart kids," Blade said. "They're not flashy, but they're smart kids, and they're relentless in their effort, so that's always going to make it tough. But I thought

we had an opportunity to give (Bella) LaPorta her third foul there in the second quarter, and got a no-call, and that kind of changes that game, too. But like I said, the kids did what we needed to do. Elle (Evans) didn't shoot it real well, but she battled through some other stuff, so that was good to see, because that's the first time she's been through that. Like I said, it's a good win, because they're a good program, and they play hard. They took some stuff away from us, but I thought that when Que (Love) went out, we went on a good little run there, and that was important."

It happened late in the first half, when Love was forced to leave the game temporarily due to injury. She was OK, and returned in the second half, and Blade thought her team responded well when Love was out of the lineup.

"It is, and it could go one of two ways," Blade said. "We can either handle the pressure, and continue through it. or have a tendency to turn the basketball over any time a kid like that goes out. But we handled it really well. I thought Kylie (Burg) had great minutes, (Ariana) Bennett gave us some good minutes today. Overall, like I said, it was a good win."

The first quarter was especially important, as the Tigers were able to keep the Bulldogs away inside, especially LaPorta, whose scored 13 points in the win the year before.

"LaPorta's a handful," Blade said. "And there isn't one kid around one-on-one that can stop that kid once she gets the ball, so we tried to limit touches, and we tried to do two things and make sure there was help, and put enough pressure on the ball that they couldn't see her so easily. Last year, we just let her have her way and get all the touches she wanted. But that's alright. We just tried to make sure we had help. We had some big bodies, and some length helps. And a little bit of pressure on the ball so they don't see her so easy."

The Tigers held the Bulldogs to three points during a long stretch until halfway through the second quarter, but in last year's game, Edwardsville was able to jump to a good lead before Highland rallied to win.

"It was important, but we got a good lead last year, and we just kind of bloated the last three quarters," Blade said, "and the way they're able to knock down the threes, no lead is safe. And we talked about that as well, when we had that good start. Second quarter, they outscored us due to that three there at the buzzer. But I thought the first half, we dominated the boards, and that was huge. That's going to make a big difference, and they didn't get the shots that they hit last year; last year, they got hotter and hotter, just buried us there. Just all around, the boards are important to us, one, to lead us to transition, and two, to not LaPorta second, third chances on the boards."

And that run where the Tigers held Highland to three points through halfway in the second quarter was perhaps the biggest factor in the game.

"It was," Blade said. "We got some turnovers, and we got some transition out of it. But overall, they didn't get easy touches on the kids that want to score, and that's important."

The Tigers scored the first two baskets of the game, on drives by both Bennett and Harris before Taylor Kesner scored to make it 4-2 in the early going. Free throws from Maria Smith and a three from Harris put Edwardsville up 9-2 before a free throw from a Kesner free throw made it 9-3. From there, the Tigers scored the next seven points, with a free throw from Burg, a basket from Evans, and back-to-back baskets from Love, the second being at the buzzer as Edwardsville took a 16-3 lead after the first.

Love scored again at the start of the second quarter to make it 18-3 before a three from Megan Kronk ended the Highland drought. The Kronk basket started a small run from the Bulldogs, as a LaPorta basket and another three from Kirsten Taylor brought Highland to within 18-11, but a three from Harris and a basket from Evans, who smartly stepped into a passing lane, stole the ball and scored, brought it back to 23-11. Ellie Brown hit from inside with 2:23 left in the half to bring it back to 23-13, but on the play, Love was injured, but came off the court under her own power, and returned in the second half. With Love out of the lineup, the Tigers scored five straight points, getting a basket from Evans off a break and a three from Macy Silvey to make it 28-13, but near the end, a free throw from Taylor and a three from Brown at the buzzer cut the Tiger lead to 28-17 at halftime.

The two teams exchanged points to open the second half, with the Tigers holding a 32-22 lead after the exchange. The Tigers' lead never went below nine points during the quarter as Edwardsville took a 39-28 lead after three quarters. The points exchange continued into the final quarter before a three-point play from Evans and a three from Harris gave the Tigers a 47-32, forcing a Highland time out. From there, the Bulldogs did outscore Edwardsville 16-15, but the Tigers were able to get a key basket from Silvey as well as a three and free throws from Harris as Edwardsville went away to the 62-48 win.

Besides Harris, the Tigers got 13 points from Love, 10 from Burg, nine from Evans and four each from Bennett and Smith. The Bulldogs were led by Brown and LaPorta, with 14 points each, while Kronk and Taylor had six points each, Kesner scored five points and Liv Wilke had three.

Edwardsville moves their mark to 9-0 on the year, and are scheduled to host St. Louis Soldan International Studies in a 5:30 p.m. tip-off on Monday, then host Granite City on Dec. 20 before opening play against the host school in the Visitation Academy Christmas Tournament next Saturday in a 1 p.m. tip-off.

[Chris Rhodes also contributed to this story.](#)