

Wildcats Score Five Unanswered Goals, Come From Behind To Deal Edwardsville First MSCHA Home Loss Of Season 6-4

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EAST ALTON - After trailing late in the second period 4-1, Westminster Christian of west St. Louis County scored five unanswered goals to take a 6-4 win over Edwardsville in a Mid-States Club Hockey Association Suburban Division game Thursday night at East Alton Ice Arena.

After using their time out with 2:40 left in the second period when the Tigers went ahead 4-1, the Wildcats scored two quick goals to pull within 4-3 at the end of the second period, then tied the game six seconds into the third period, took the lead on a giveaway in front of the Edwardsville goal on a power play, then clinched the game with an empty-net goal in the final minute.

Tigers coach Jason Walker gave Westminster credit for the way they came back to take control of the game in the final 17 minutes.

"Yeah, I mean you give them credit tonight," Walker said. "They came at us hard; I thought they came at us hard from the drop of the puck. We were just inconsistent shift in and shift out, we didn't play the same way for the 45 minutes, and that's what happens. You leave it to chance, and sometimes, it doesn't work out your way."

Some of the Tiger players who played in a 10-1 win over the Wildcats on Nov. 15 weren't available for the game on Thursday, but Walker thought it was the inability to finish plays played a big part in the game.

"Yeah, we're kind of mixing and matching the lineup, but the lineup wasn't an issue tonight," Walker said. "We had a good lineup tonight, we just didn't finish off some plays, and then, you've got to give them credit. They came out and played hard."

The Wildcats played hard throughout the game, winning the battles that often decide hockey games, and their efforts paid off late in the game.

"Like I said, I don't think there was a difference in the way that they played from the drop of the puck. They played hard, they won a lot of little battles; they certainly won a lot of little battles in front of our net. We didn't do a very good job in front of our net. We just had some trouble in our own end tonight. Six goals is way too many goals to give up."

And it's tough to beat a team twice in a season, especially in the MSCHA, where plenty of good teams abound, and teams can't afford to have an off-night.

"Yeah, there's good teams in this league," Walker said. "All up and down, you're not going to have an off-night. You think you're going to have an off-night, you're going to put yourself in a world of trouble. I thought we came out tonight and I thought we came

out hard, we just weren't mentally checked into every shift, and we made some really big mental errors, and some nights, you get away with it, and some nights, you don't. And we didn't tonight."

The Tigers did get off to a very good start, something that's been a bit of a trademark for the team this season, and there's still some positive things to take away from the game.

"Our starts have been good," Walker said. "I thought our start was good again tonight. It's just trying to continue to build off that as the game goes on. We ought to use this as a learning experience; I mean, this isn't acceptable for us. To be up 4-1, I don't care who you're playing, you've got to find ways to close out the game. And we just weren't mentally sharp tonight."

Westminster also came out ready to play and eager to get back at Edwardsville for the loss in November.

"They've been traditionally a very good team in this league," Walker said, "So we knew that this last game, the score wasn't indicative of how good they are. That's a good team."

Both teams came out hard in the opening minutes, defending well and not allowing very many shots on goal to get started. The two goalies, Edwardsville's Jonas Akeman and Westminster's Emily Griege, were able to make some good saves, but at 13:34 of the first period, just after a penalty to Zach Kilgore had expired, Aiden Stevens picked up a loose puck in front of goal and shot it past Griege into the net to give the Tigers a 1-0 lead. It was short-lived, however, as at 14:29, Kilgore tied the game, with assists going to Ben Parres and Caleb Bross, making it 1-1 at the end of the first period.

And as the second period got underway, Edwardsville took the lead right back when Mark Tucker took a Carter Zimmer pass and scored at 18 seconds to make the score 2-1, Tigers. Both teams did have some solid chances that were turned away, and at 10:46, Edwardsville struck again, this time with Collin Salter scoring from close in, assisted by Tucker and Will Schuster to make it 3-1. Then, with Aiden Penberthy off for slashing, Edwardsville scored on the power play, with Sam Gibbons scoring off a nice shot, with assists to Parker Terch and Schuster at 12:20 to make it 4-1.

Westminster then used its time out to regroup, and for head coach Dean Penberthy to fire up his team. Right away, the Wildcats responded well, as at 12:58, got a pass from Parres and scored to make it 4-2, with Colin McCarthy getting the secondary assist. Then at 14:39, Penberthy scored from Wells and Parres to make it 4-3 Edwardsville after two period, but Westminster had clearly gained momentum.

And the momentum continued only six seconds into the third, when Bross took a pass from Jon Lane and beat Akeman from the point to tie the game at 4-4. The Tigers showed some urgency in their play after the equalizer, but Griege stood tall in the Westminster net.

At 4:38, with Carson Weber off for a cross-checking penalty, the Tigers tried to start a rush up ice, but the clearing pass was stolen by Wells, who found Penberthy in front. Penberthy made no mistake, putting the puck past Akeman into the net to give the Wildcats a 5-4 lead. Later in the period, with Akeman off for an extra attacker, McCarthy got a loose puck by the Edwardsville blue line, passed to Bross, who handed off to Parres, who scored into the empty net at 14:22 for the insurance goal that gave Westminster their 6-4 win.

For the game, the Wildcats outshot the Tigers 29-20, with Akeman making 24 saves, and Greig 16.

Edwardsville is now 7-3-3, and will get have a busy schedule coming up, starting on Saturday with a game against Kirkwood in a 9:45 p.m. face-off at Queeny Park in west County, then play at the Kennedy Recreation Center in Suson Park in south County on Monday against Imperial, Mo., Seckman, before returning home to back-to-back home games, the first coming on New Year's Night against Oakville at 5:15 p.m., then coming right back Jan. 2 against Parkway South at the regular 8:45 p.m. start. Walker knows that the good thing is that the Tigers will have an immediate opportunity to bounce back from the loss.

"We play Kirkwood on Saturday, so that's the good thing," Walker said. "We get to get back at it at practice tomorrow, and get right back at it on Saturday."

And Walker also knows that his players will be eager to get right back at it and put the loss to Westminster behind them.

"Yeah, you know, I think that's the good thing," Walker said. "Let's get this one, and put this one behind us. We've got to learn from it, and get better from it."

And Walker also knows that consistency will play a big role the rest of the way.

"At times, I think the thing for us is learning the consistency," Walker said. "We have moments in games where we've really took it to the other team, and we've dominated the play, but then, we've had some shifts where we kind of mentally checked out, so we've got to focus on that, we've got to learn from this one, and just get better from it."