

# **Tucker Leads Way: Tigers Explode For Seven Goals in Second Period, Defeat Parkway South 14-2**

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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EAST ALTON - Mark Tucker's second-period hat trick, along with two goals from Sam Gibbons and goals from Anthony Ruklic and Cam Gillen, were all part of a seven-goal second period that helped send Edwardsville on its way to a 14-2 win over Parkway South in a Mid-States Club Hockey Association game Thursday night at the East Alton Ice Arena.

Both Tucker and Gibbons ended up with four goals each, while the Tigers also a pair of goals from Ruklic and single goals from Gillen, Nate Frey, Matt Clark and Justin Harper in the game.

"It was a good game," said Edwardsville head coach Jason Walker. "Everybody contributed, everybody got into the game, and we were able to finish off a lot of our scoring chances, which is nice to see, and their goalie (Garrett Limpert) played well. So to be able to put that many away was nice to see."

As has been the custom this season, it was a good team effort all around for the Tigers, and it was the most important takeaway of the game.

"Yeah, I mean, the last two games for us," Walker said, also referring to a big 6-4 win over Oakville on New Year's evening at home. "To play two games in the short amount of time we had, for everybody contributing, I mean, we leave the last two games feeling good about ourselves."

Another big factor was in the last two games, the Tigers did a great job of staying out of the penalty box and played the vast majority of the game five-on-five, especially from the night before, when the game against Oakville began getting overly physical. Edwardsville did a very good job of staying focused and not retaliating, which helped their chances.

"I thought we did a great job yesterday, and same thing today," Walker said. "These guys, we take care of the puck, and we're going to stay out of the box, it's that simple. So we took care of the puck, and made smart decisions, and we were able to stay away from situations where we would get penalties."

"You can't win games if you're not disciplined," Walker said. "To the most part, we're a pretty disciplined group. They know that when it comes down to it, those things matter, so we've just got to keep it going. You control your emotions in a game, and the last two games, they've done a good job of that."

The Tigers struck early after only 90 seconds, when Ruklic scored the first goal of the game unassisted off an intercepted pass at the Patriots' blue line, where Ruklic skated in and scored to give Edwardsville the lead at 1-0. South tied it up at 3:09 off a scramble in front of the Tigers' goal, when Joe Randling poked home a puck past Edwardsville goalie J.P. Twombly to make it 1-1. The period then settled into an smooth-flowing game where both teams had good chances, but it was the Tigers who were able to break through at 10:44, when Mark Tucker got a pass from Will Schuster, and scored to make it 2-1 Tigers. Sam Gibbons also assisted on the play. There was no further scoring in the period, which saw the Edwardsville outshoot the Patriots 17-4.

The seven-goal second-period barrage started only 11 seconds into the period, where Ruklic took a Harper centering pass and jammed it home past Limpert to make it 3-1. Tucker then increased the lead to 4-1 at 1:58 with an unassisted goal before Ben Beier put South to within 4-2 at 2:42 on a nice goal, with assists to Jason Gifford and Chris Sanford.

The Tigers then scored five unanswered goals to all but decide the issue. It started at 4:26, when Gibbons scored a power-play goal with Gavin Macklin off for cross-checking, assisted by Tucker to make it 5-2. Another power-play goal at 7:58, with Tucker scoring from Gibbons and Parker Terch while Beier was off for high-sticking made it 6-2, and then Edwardsville scored three times in a span of 2:13. First, at 12:04, Gillen scored from Codi Klenke, then at 13:09, it was Gibbons scoring unassisted, and to wind things up at 14:21, Tucker scored from a Gibbons assist to make it 9-2 for Edwardsville. The Tigers outshot the Patriots in the period 26-5.

It only took 2:14 into the third period for Edwardsville to score again, with Frey getting the goal from Trevor Laub to make it 10-2 and triggering the MSCHA running clock rule. Later on, Gibbons got his hat trick goal at 5:38, assisted by Garrett Doolin, to make it 11-2. Clark then scored from Klenke and Ruklic at 6:27, Harper scored unassisted at 9:20, and Tucker scored from Schuster and Tucker at 11:20 to make the final 14-2. Edwardsville outshot South in the period 11-2, and also in the game 55-11.

The Tigers are now 11-5-2 on the season and have three games remaining in the regular season. Edwardsville plays at home in East Alton next Thursday against Rockwood Summit in an 8:45 p.m face-off, plays Parkway West on Jan. 10 at the Maryville University Hockey Center in west St. Louis County at 7:50 p.m., then concludes the regular season with a home game against Fox of Arnold, Mo. on Jan. 16, again at 8:45 at East Alton. Walker is liking his team's chances of success in the upcoming MSCHA postseason, which will begin in late January and early February.

"Feeling good," Walker said. "We've played a lot here recently, so we only actually have three games left in the season, so we just take it one at a time. We've got a week off here to get back to practice and continue to work on things, and hopefully, we'll be playing our best hockey here in the next couple of weeks."

And although it's still a little bit early yet, there's much anticipation ahead for the postseason and a possible appearance in either the Doug Wickenheiser Memorial Cup final or the St. Louis Blues Challenge Cup final at the end of the season at Enterprise Center in downtown St. Louis.

"Yeah, these guys want to be peaking at the right time," Walker said, "and to go 3-0 for the week, we feel good about it. We know we've got a lot to work on, so just getting better."