

Tigers, Redbirds Set for Edwardsville Regional, Kahoks, Warriors Play in Belleville East Regional

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EDWARDSVILLE - America's Original March Madness has finally arrived in the state of Illinois, and locally, it'll be in the IHSA Class 4A regionals at both Lucco-Jackson Gym in Edwardsville, and the gym at Belleville East where the madness will open up Tuesday night.

The Edwardsville regional starts with a semifinal doubleheader, when Alton meets O'Fallon in a 6 p.m. tip-off, followed at 7:30 p.m. when the host Tigers meet up with Quincy, one of the most storied basketball programs in both the state and the nation. Meanwhile at East, highly-ranked Collinsville opens up against Granite City in a 7 p.m. tip, with the second semifinal being played Wednesday night between the host Lancers and crosstown rival and two-time defending state champion Belleville West, in a game that also starts at 7 p.m.

The finals in both regionals will be played Friday night, with the games slated to start at 7 p.m.

Here's a look at the teams that will start their journeys to a possible berth in the IHSA finals on the weekend of March 20-21 at Carver Arena in Peoria:

EDWARDSVILLE REGIONAL

The Redbirds, who finished the regular season 13-17, face O'Fallon, who ended the regular season 24-6, in the first semifinal at Edwardsville. The Panthers won both regular-season games, winning at the Redbirds Nest 74-58 on Dec. 10, then 54-53 this past Friday at the Panther Dome.

The Redbirds have two strong scorers in senior Moory Woods, who averaged a team-leading 13.3 points-per-game, and Ky'lun Rivers, who averaged 11.6 points-per-game. Also making big contributions to the team are Andrew Jones, who averaged 6.4 points-per-game, and Ja'markus Gary, with a 9.4 points-per-game average. Dante Herrin averaged 9.6 points-per-game, while Camren Edwards averaged 6.9 points-per-game, and are also expected to be an important part of the Redbirds' attack.

O'Fallon will counter with forward Shaun Riley II, the Panthers' leading scorer with a 10.9 points-per-game average, and he'll get help from guard Drew Tebbe, who averaged 9.1 points-per-game, Caleb Burton, who had an average of 8.6 points, Mason Blakemore, with an average of 7.4 points-per-game, and Amarey Wills, who averaged five points-per-game. Chris Porter, who averaged 4.3 points-per-game, and Logan Lowery, who averaged 4.2 points, will also be counted on by O'Fallon.

In the second semifinal, the Tigers enter the game with a 22-9 mark, coming off a stretch where they won 12 of their final 14 games, including an 11-game winning streak. They're paced by junior forward Brennan Weller, who comes in with a 19.9 points-per-game average and a streak where he scored at least 20 points in many of the final games of the regular season. Jack Nafziger, who averaged nine points-per-game, and Ethan Young, who averaged 3.1 points-per-game, will also be looked to for Edwardsville. Nic

Hemken, who averaged 4.5 points-per-game, is the Tigers' leading rebounder with 6.7 boards-per-game, while Weller averaged 5.7 rebounds-per-game. Jalil Roundtree, Caleb Valentine and Gabe James are also expected to be major contributors to the Tigers.

The Blue Devils enter the contest at 16-13 and on a four-game losing streak. Andonte Crider and Lucas Reis are the leaders for Quincy, who have been playing without scoring leader Jeremiah Talton, who's out with a leg injury.

BELLEVILLE EAST REGIONAL

Over at Belleville East, Collinsville and Granite City are set to play each other tonight, with the winner going on to Friday's final against the Lancers-Maroons winner.

The Kahoks have senior forward Ray'Sean Taylor, who's emerged as one of the best players in the St. Louis area, and has made his mark on the historic Collinsville program. Taylor, who'll play next season at SIU-Edwardsville, is averaging 23.8 points-per-game, and this season broke the school's single-game points record with a 53-points outing, and also broke Tom Parker's career scoring record, set in 1987-68.

Taylor gets much help from Cawhan Smith, who's averaging 9.3 points-per-game, Keydrian Jones, with a 9.2 points-per-game average, and Nate Hall, who's averaging 7.5 points-per-game.

The Warriors ended the regular season at 13-16, and are led by Jahkeis Tippitt, who averages 13.7 points-per-game, Christian Jones, with a 12.2 points-per-game average, and Freddy Edwards, who's averaging 11.3 points-per-game.

The regional winners will play each other in the Pekin sectional, with the semifinal game set for next Tuesday, Mar. 10, at a neutral site to be announced. The game is slated to tip-off at 7 p.m.