

Weller Scores 22 Points, James Adds 16 As Edwardsville's Second-Half Surge Pushes Tigers Past Belleville West

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Senior forward Brennan Weller led the way with 22 points, while Gabe James added 16 points in leading a big second half surge that helped Edwardsville to a 58-32 win over Belleville West in a Southwestern Conference game Tuesday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Tigers held a 24-15 lead on the Maroons at halftime, and outscored West 38-17 in a big second half, getting hot three-point shooting and good defense to take control.

Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas felt that his team were getting good shots in the first half, but once the Tigers hit a pair of threes, the floodgates opened.

"It wasn't a whole lot at halftime; I thought we were getting shots in the first half," Battas said. "We just had a hard time making them early. I thought once you make a couple, sometimes, that helps with confidence. We didn't change a whole lot at halftime, we just reinforced some things we were getting against their defense. When they pressure and trap, you have guys open, you just have to have a little bit of guile about you, and find the right guy, and I thought we made the extra pass in the third quarter and got wide-open shots instead of kind of open shots, and sometimes, that's the difference in making and missing them."

Although the Tigers missed some shots in the first half, their confidence never waned, and in the second half, Edwardsville shot very well.

"Our guys spend a lot of time in practice shooting," Battas said. "I don't worry about their confidence much, because they put the work in, and that's where the confidence comes from. So we just encouraged them and reminded them that we want them to keep shooting. And they're not missing by much; it's not like they're hitting the side of the backboard. They really don't get too down, you know, we talk a lot about basketball being a consistent effort for 32 minutes. You might miss a couple in the first quarter, so we've been there before. We have older guys that have had that experience in being in these games, and they realize that you might go oh-for-three, but you might make the next three, and that makes you a 50 percent shooter.

"That didn't alarm us much," Battas continued, "we kind of stayed positive and reminded them 'let's get good ones, and let's make them.'"

Edwardsville had defeated West on the road in the season opener on Feb. 6, and have changed very much as a team since then.

"I think we've changed as a team," Battas said. "We tweaked our offense a little bit to fit our personnel a little bit better. I think you're always changing things. We're short on time, so we're not going to be able to change a lot of stuff. We also played a different defense tonight than we did against them the first time. (Tommie Williams) for them is really good; he's hard to stop with the ball, so we had early help in throwing a lot of bodies at him, and get out to the guys who can shoot, maybe not get out to the guys that can't shoot as well. It just seemed to work, but that's a credit to our guys. They're smart and they try hard, so you can do a lot of different things on defense when you have guys like we do."

James had one of his best games on the season, and is starting to come around after starting the season hurt.

"Gabe can really score," Battas said. "He started the season hurt a little bit, so he was a little behind on practice. But he's really good on offense, and he's starting to get the hang of our defense, and the sky's the limit for Gabe. We think he's a very important part of our team this year."

The Tigers started the game on a 10-0 run, with Weller scoring the first three points on a free throw and basket, then both James and Preston Weaver followed up with baskets of their own to make it 7-0, forcing a West time out. Three free throws from Weller made

it 10-0 before the Maroons started a run of their own, with Williams scoring his team's first five points. A three-point play from Weller shortly before the end of the quarter made it 13-5 Tigers after one.

Williams opened the second quarter with a basket, with baskets from Jalil Roundtree and Shaun Pacette making the score 17-7 Edwardsville going into the COVID time out. Some very tight defense from Edwardsville led to a James basket to make it 19-7, forcing another Maroon time out. West then went on a 6-2 run, getting a basket from Ty Lampley and threes from Williams and J'luan Patterson to make it 21-15 before a Weller three made it 24-15 Edwardsville at halftime.

An exchange of baskets led off the third quarter before another Weller three up top extended the Edwardsville lead to 29-19. The Tigers then got out from behind the arc, going on a 14-3 run the remainder of the quarter, with James hitting a pair of threes and Weaver hitting another three to put Edwardsville up 44-22 after three quarters.

The Tigers then outscored the Maroons in the final quarter 16-10, with the final four minutes played under the running clock rule as Edwardsville went on to the 58-32 win.

Edwardsville is now 5-1 on the season, and hosts East St. Louis on Wednesday night, then plays at O'Fallon on Thursday night and at Belleville.





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