

# **Caleb Valentine Explodes With 17 Points Against Flyers, Is iCAN Clinic Male Athlete of Month For Edwardsville High School**

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EDWARDSVILLE - Edwardsville boys basketball senior guard Caleb Valentine had a career game in a big overtime win over East St. Louis on Feb. 24, leading off the game with three straight threes in going on to a 17-point night as the Tigers won an important Southwestern Conference game over the Flyers 53-44 in overtime.at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

Valentine was able to get off to the hot start by taking advantage of opportunities as provided by the Flyers' zone defense.

Valentine is a Riverbender.com Male Athlete of the Month for Edwardsville High School.

"They were playing a zone, and they were just sagging off on us," Valentine said in a post-game interview. "So I just took the open shots, stay in the flow of the offense, and just took my opportunities."

Valentine connected on back-to-back threes to start the game, and knocked down a third three later in the period. And the fast start was something that the Tigers needed.

"It was big," Valentine said. "I just think we need to come out fast on the momentum. We didn't want to come out slow, but I think we did."

East Side did rally back to tie the game and force overtime, but head coach Dustin Battas had some very good advice for his players.

"Just grind it out. Do what we do," Valentine said. "Don't let them speed us up, play our tempo. Play our game."

Valentine also felt that the Tigers were able to bounce back nicely from the adversity and got back from playing their game.

"We kind of fell apart from what we do for a little bit," Valentine said, "but we bounced back, and we got back to it and we got the lead."

Valentine does feel that this was a statement win for Edwardsville, showing that they're ready to go back on top of the Southwestern Conference.

"This is a great win," Valentine said. "Any win in the Southwestern Conference is a good win, but I think this is a statement win, to let people know that the Tigers mean business."

Edwardsville's clutch free throw shooting in the overtime, where the Tigers went 11-of-12 from the line, was big, and the work the team puts in during practice is paying off tremendous dividends.

"We work on free throws every day," Valentine said, "and it came in clutch today. We really had to buckle down and hit shots, and we did when it mattered."

Valentine and his teammates were feeling good after an important win, but the team also knows there's still plenty of work ahead, and they can't afford to let down at any moment.

"I'm feeling great," Valentine said, "but like coach (Dustin Battas) said, we can't sit on it for too long. We've got a game tomorrow (at O'Fallon), so we're going to be back at it.'

And of course, Valentine is very happy that the season is being played after so much uncertainty because of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"Definitely," Valentine said, "because there was a point we didn't think we were going to have a season. So to be out here, be able to play, it means a lot. We don't want to waste it, don't want to waste opportunities."

The Tigers are now 6-1 on the season after the win over East Side, and face two more tough opponents on the road, at O'Fallon and Belleville East. The Lancers dealt the Tigers their only loss of the year to date, but Valentine feels very confident of his team's chances in the next two games.

"We're feeling great," Valentine said. "We've just got to stay focused, don't get too big-headed, and take it one game at a time."

The games come on a stretch of playing four games in five days, a load in the professional ranks, and certainly a very difficult task in high school. The Tigers do seem to be handling the situation exceptionally well.

"We've just got to rest, stay focused," Valentine said. "I kind of feel like the NBA right now," he said with a laugh and smile. "We love it, though. I'd rather this than being home not playing."