

Evans, Bennett Come Up Big As Tigers Come From Behind To Defeat O'Fallon In 67-62 Overtime Thriller

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
February 26 2021 6:08 AM







EDWARDSVILLE - Ariana Bennett's lay-up with 2.1 seconds left in regulation tied the game, and Elle Evans hit a pair of clutch threes in overtime to help Edwardsville come from behind to defeat O'Fallon 67-62 in a Southwestern Conference thriller at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Tigers rallied from a 52-44 deficit in the final two minutes to tie the game, then outscored the Panthers 10-5 in the overtime to win in the team's first meeting since O'Fallon eliminated Edwardsville in the IHSA Class 4A sectional semifinal last season.

Tigers' head coach Caty Happe was very proud of her team's effort in the game.

"Just very proud of my team," Happe said. "I cant believe how hard they worked, and they never gave up."

Happe was also very pleased with how the Tigers came from behind to get the victory.

"Great team win," Happe said. "I mean, everybody supported, contributed when they needed to, and came up with big shots. So, it's awesome to see that we shared the basketball, and we can hurt you from different positions."

The match against O'Fallon was a highly-awaited encounter that was a tight affair all the way through, and Happe felt that the Tigers had a very strong effort throughout.

"I thought we came off really strong," Happe said. "I thought we had a really good first half, then I thought we got tired a little bit; fatigue showed. But again, they never, never quit, and that's what's important."

Both the Tigers and the Panthers are in a stretch of playing four games in five days, and it may have played a factor in the team's fatigue. But in the end, the Tigers went out and made the plays they needed to at the end.





"Absolutely, but it is for O'Fallon, too," Happe said. "They had the same thing coming. So just managing kids' minutes, and I told the kids that they wanted it more than them at one point, and they had to go take it if they wanted it. And they did."

Junior forward Sydney Harris, a day after becoming the 20th player in Tigers' history to join the 1,000-point club, led the way with 33 points in another masterful performance.

"She hit shots inside, outside, came up defensively," Happe said, "and had a great overall game."

The most important thing is that the Tigers go to 7-0 on the year, and Happe was very happy with that.

"It is," Happe said. "Glad to get to go practice with my team tomorrow," she said with a smile.

Panther senior Amelia Bell and Harris scored their teams' first points of the evening with the Tigers holding a 5-4 advantage before a Bennett basket and Harris three propelled Edwardsville to a 10-4 lead. The teams exchanged baskets before Macy Silvey connected on a three to put the Tigers to a 15-8 lead. A free throw and basket by Aubrey Mister cut the lead to 15-11, but a pair of baskets from Harris and Emerson Weller

pushed the margin back to eight before a steal and score from Shannon Dowell cut the Edwardsville lead to 19-13 after the first.

Dowell did the same thing again at the start of the second quarter to cut the deficit to 19-15, but a long three from Harris put the lead back to seven. A Dowell drive and a basket from Tyanna Lovelace made it 22-19, and after an exchange of baskets, the Tigers got a basket from Evans and a big basket before the buzzer from Harris to take a 30-23 lead at the interval.

Harris and Dowell exchanged threes to start the second half, and following a Panther time out, O'Fallon, led by Dowell and Mister, went on a 7-0 run to tie the game at 33-33. A baseline three from Silvey gave the Tigers the lead back at 36-33, but Lovelace scored twice in a row to give the Panthers their first lead since the opening basket at 37-36. Harris countered with a drive in the lane to score, then later hit a pair of free throws to give Edwardsville a 40-37 advantage. After another exchange of baskets, a Lovelace basket and a Dowell free throw tied the score at 42-42 at the end of the third quarter.

Mister banked home a three to open the final term to give the Panthers back the lead, 45-42, and a long two from Katelynne Robers cut the lead to one. Free throws from Bell and Mister upped the O'Fallon lead to 48-44, followed by baskets from Avery Christopher and Lovelace giving the Panthers a 52-44 lead with less than four minutes left. After a O'Fallon time out with 3:02 to play, a free throw from Evans and a three from Harris cut the lead back to 52-48, forcing O'Fallon to call time again with 2:02 to go. Harris hit on a big three-point play with 1:05 left, then a three from Evans with 32.2 seconds left tied the game at 54-54. Dowell, who played a brilliant game all night, then swished a three of her own with 7.9 seconds left to give the Panthers a 57-54 lead. Edwardsville called time out with 7.1 seconds left to set up a play, but O'Fallon fouled Harris to send her to the line with a one-and-one. Harris hit the first free throw, but a lane violation against the Tigers gave the ball back to the Panthers with 3.7 seconds to go. After a time out, O'Fallon was called for an offensive foul with 3.1 seconds left, a call that was protested vigorously by the Panther coaching staff. On the ensuing inbounds pass, Bennett got loose underneath and laid the ball in before the buzzer to tie the game 57-57 and force overtime.

As the extra session began, Evans hit a three up top to give the Tigers the lead back, and after a pair O'Fallon free throws from Bell made it 60-59, Evans again came up big with another three up top to give Edwardsville a 63-59 edge. Four free throws from Harris clinched the game for the Tigers as they took the 67-62 win.

Outside of Harris' 33 points, Evans added 14 points for Edwardsville, with Silvey scoring eight points, Roberts had six points, Bennett four and Weller had two points. The Panthers were led by 20 points each from Dowell and Lovelace, while Mister added 16, Bell had five points and Christopher two.

The Panthers are now 6-1 on the year, and start a four-game home stand on Saturday afternoon against Alton. The Tigers are 7-0, and host Belleville East Saturday afternoon and Highland Monday night before a quick rematch against the Panthers at the OTHS Panther Dome next Wednesday night. Happe knows her team will be ready to go.

"We'll just get back to the drawing board, and ready to go," Happe said with a big smile.





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