

# **Oilers' Hardin Scores 23 Points, Tough Oilers Slip By Improved Griffins 61-45**

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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GLEN CARBON - Antonio Hardin led East Alton-Wood River with 23 points, with the Oilers outscoring their opponents 15-5 in the second quarter, and it was enough to help give EAWR a 61-45 win over Father McGivney Catholic in a Prairie State Conference boys basketball game Friday evening at the McGivney gym.

The Oilers played well for three quarters, but allowed the Griffins to rally back in the fourth quarter before pulling back away to get the win.

"We played really good at times," said EAWR head coach Steve Flowers, "but in the fourth quarter, we looked very flat. We got comfortable with the lead, and we let them back in it."

The Oilers played very well defensively, converting Griffin turnovers into transition baskets.

"We played great defense," Flowers said, "got a lot of turnovers, we got a lot of transition baskets, and that was our offense."

It was a good win for the Oilers, which puts them at 8-6 on the season.

"It's great," Flowers said of his young team. "The guys are starting to figure out how to win, and what it takes to win. We're in a position where we want to be in, and I wish that we had a postseason this year. But we're trying to split the conference with Metro-East (Lutheran)."

The Griffins and first-year head coach Todd Strong thought his team also played well for three quarters, but the second quarter definitely spelled the difference in the game.

"Well, I thought we played three pretty good quarters," Strong said, "and I was proud of the way we played in the second half. I thought the kids battled, but in that second quarter, we got outscored 15-5, and I thought that was kind of the difference tonight."

The Griffins are still building their program, and the team has been very competitive all season, but Strong knows that building a successful program takes time.

"We're competing, but this is a process," Strong said, "and it isn't going to happen overnight. And throw COVID on top of this, and this has been a really messed up season."

Nevertheless, Strong is very grateful to be playing the season, such as it is, and is very happy for his players that they're getting to play as well. He's also looking ahead to the off-season, where he feels the Griffins can improve very well.

"I'm glad we're playing," Strong said. "I'm happy for the seniors, because they get to play, and I look forward to the off-season to see what's to come next year."

Strong is very proud of his players, both on and off the court, and he can't wait to work with them during the off-season.

"You won't find better kids," Strong said. "They're all wonderful human beings. We've got to teach them to be more competitive, and get stronger. I'm very excited for the future."

As far as the game went, Hardin's 23 points led the Oilers, while Ryan Dawson had 15 points and Evan Merritt added 13 to help the EAWR offense. Darren Luchetti led the Griffins with 16 points, while Jack Rodgers added 11 points.

The Oilers are now 8-6, and travel to Freeburg for a key non-conference tilt this afternoon at 2 p.m., then face a tough final week, where they'll host Metro-East on Monday, travel to Bunker Hill on Tuesday, then to Greenville on Wednesday, host McGivney again in their Senior Night game Mar. 11 and wind up the season Mar. 13 at Roxana. Flowers is especially looking ahead to today's game at the Midgets.

"We go to Freeburg tomorrow, and that will be a good, tough, competitive game," Flowers said, "and will show where we are as a program. Freeburg is a good basketball program, and this will be a good challenge for us."

The most important thing from this season for EAWR is that the team, especially the seniors, got to play after so much uncertainty over the fate of the 2020-21 campaign.

"Getting these seniors, and getting them back on the court together, it's been great," Flowers said, "and it makes it even better that we're having some success."

The Griffins are now 1-11 on the year, and wind up the season at home on Tuesday night at home against Waterloo Gibault Catholic, have a rematch against the Oilers at EAWR Thursday, and finish the season at home next Saturday afternoon against Lebanon. Strong has one simple goal for his senior class.

"Closure for the seniors," Strong said. "We have four absolutely wonderful seniors, and I'd like to send them out on a good note."





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