



Weaver Layup Allows Tigers To Survive Matchup Fee With Belleville West 36-34, Host SWC Final Saturday

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EDWARDSVILLE - Preston Weaver's lay-up with 2.1 seconds left climaxed a comeback where Edwardsville trailed by 10 points at halftime to a dramatic 36-34 win over Belleville West in the second semifinal of the Southwestern Conference boys basketball postseason tournament Friday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Tigers had to survive a half-court buzzer beater by Ty Lampley similar to a shot made by Ethyn Brown two weeks earlier, to claim the win and advance to Saturday's final against fifth seed East St. Louis, who upset top seed Belleville East 52-46 to advance. The Tigers will host the final at 3 p.m.

"It was a great game," said Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas. "And we knew that Belleville West was going to be a tough out. They've been playing great lately, and things weren't going our way earlier, they made some shots, we missed some shots. It was just a grinder, and I think our guys are just a resilient bunch. We talked about it at halftime, we were down 10, not trying to get all back right away, we changed our scheme of defense, we changed our lineup a little bit, try to spread it out, make some threes, and we were able to do that in the third and get back in it. And then, we were able to do that in the third and get back in it. And then it felt like we were just getting one rebound and one make, kept getting stops down two, we just couldn't quite get that basket to go. I think (Brennan) Weller's two free throws tied it up. And then, once we had the ball, have a chance to have the last possession, I like our chances, because our guys are so disciplined and so intelligent."

Battas described the winning basket as a smart play from Weaver, with some of the options for the Tigers being denied by the Maroons' defense.

"Obviously, a great play by Preston there at the end," Battas said. "They took away a couple of our other options, and he went and made a great play at the basket."

Battas described the move used by Weaver as one he's worked on in practice.

"Right, and he's just a smart kid," Battas said. "The move he did at the end there., that's something he does all the time. He gets on two feet in practice, he takes his time, we talked about shot-faking a lot, because we're not as athletic and tall as anybody. For him to have that peace of mind in that moment, to still do everything he practices. He gets on two feet, is patient, shows the ball, gets him up in the air and then steps across, keeps his pivot foot down and makes it. It was just a-la the guys that stay that focused in that moment. And so, I'm super proud of him, but I'm not surprised."

Battas chuckled when asked about the final half-court shot that was waved off.

"I know, I know," Battas said with a laugh. "We tried to guard the ball a little better at the end, they still made a half-courter. Luckily, they took a couple of dribbles first to get it. I was certainly glad to see that backcourt light up before it left his hand, that's for sure."

The opening 3:10 of the game gave some indication about what kind of game it would be, with plenty of action and excitement. West scored the first five points, a basket by J'luan Patterson and a three from Lampley to go up 5-0. Weaver and Patterson then exchanged threes to make the score 8-3, with a Weller drive through the lane making it 8-5 before the first COVID time out. After an exchange of baskets, Caleb Valentine hit a three on the baseline to tie the score 10-10, but a long two from Lampley put the Maroons back up 12-10. A free throw from Jalil Roundtree and another basket from Weller put the Tigers up 13-12 at the end of a very exciting first quarter.

The Maroons then went on an 11-0 second quarter run, staying hot at the start of the period with a pair of threes from Javieon Wallace to go up 18-13, then another three from Dwight Newsome, Jr. extended the West lead to 21-13. The Tigers had some good looks, but couldn't hit their shots, and a basket from Tommie Williams put the Maroons up 23-13. Both teams had some good shots, but couldn't score as the half ended 23-13 for West.

Valentine hit a three at the start of the third quarter to cut the Maroon lead to 23-16, and that triggered a three-point shooting contest, where the two teams, led by Wallace and Valentine, scored to keep the West lead at 29-22. Weller then drove inside for a basket to cut the lead to 29-24, and a three from Weller later on put the Tigers to within 29-27. A three from Newsome pushed the lead back to 32-27, and after an exchange of baskets which included one from Newsome that would prove to be the Maroons' last score, a Weaver three made it 34-32 late. The Maroons couldn't get off a last shot at the buzzer, leaving the score 34-32 at three quarter time.

Both teams had good chances to score, but good defense on both ends, along with misses, kept the score as it was until Weller hit a pair of free throws with 2:38 left to tie the game at 34-34. Both teams had a chance to go back ahead, but good defense thwarted the opportunities. A West turnover with 34.9 seconds left gave the ball back to the Tigers, and they called time out to set up a play.

West had a foul to give, and they used it with 7.1 seconds left. On the inbounds play, Weaver used his move he had practiced on, and got a lay-up to go in with 2.1 seconds left to put Edwardsville ahead 36-34, sending the Tigers' fans and bench wild with delight. The Maroons called time out with 1.5 seconds left to set up a play, with the Tigers calling time immediately after to set their defense. The inbounds pass came right

to Lampley, who took a pair of dribbles before letting fly from the mid-court line, the shot going right through the net. But the officials ruled that it came after the buzzer, waving it off and giving the Tigers the incredible comeback win.

Weller led Edwardsville with 19 points, with both Valentine and Weaver scoring eight points each and Roundtree scoring a single point. Patterson led the Maroons with 10 points, while Newsome had nine points, Lampley scored seven, Wallace scored six points and Williams had two points.

West finishes its season 11-5, while the Tigers are now 13-2 and will play the Flyers at home in the final. Battas heard of the East Side win at East immediately after the game.

"Right as I walked off," Battas said. "My dad let me know that East St. Louis had defeated Belleville East. It's going to be a tough one. They're long and athletic, and three games in three days, both of us. So it'll probably be another grind it out type game, and hopefully, we can spread them out and make some threes like we did last time."

It's been an incredible season for the Tigers, and the come-from-behind effort to defeat West may have been the best of its kind.

"To be down 10 against a good team, and we're not necessarily built to press, to trap, and all that," Battas said, "so we try to pressure them in the half-court and change our defense back-and-forth a couple of times. It just speaks to the how committed our guys are to the resiliency of them. They never lost their head, we subbed a couple of guys out, they never had bad body language, they were just happy to go in and out as we needed them, and I thought we chipped away and took advantage of a great play at the end by Preston Weaver. Just so proud of our guys, and we get to spend 24 more hours with them. So I'm grateful and just feel blessed to have the opportunity to coach these guys in one more game."



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