

Tigers Battle To End: East Side's Battle Throws For 335, Two Touchdowns, Runs For Four More In Win

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Freshman quarterback Roberts "Pops" Battle was 22-of-30 passing for 335 yards and two touchdowns, and also ran for 80 yards and four other scores, while Marquise Palmer ran for 207 yards and two touchdowns as East St. Louis defeated Edwardsville 52-21 in a key Southwestern Conference game Friday night at Tiger Stadium.

It was the Tigers ' Senior Night game, where the seniors and their families were all honored in the annual pregame ceremonies, along with the Edwardsville cheerleaders and dance team members. Although the Flyers' powerful offense was a big part of the game, the Tigers hung in there throughout the game, and kept plugging away.

"Our kids competed hard," said Edwardsville head coach Matt Martin. "Their offensive line's awful big and awful good, so that's tough to deal with. And their receivers and running backs and quarterback do a great job of yards after the first contact."

Sophomore back-up quarterback James Distaso-Hutchins came in at the start of the second half, and played very well in place of injured starter Ryan Hampton, taking two plays on the first possession of the half to score, and went four-for-11 passing for 110 yards and two touchdowns.

"James did some good things," Martin said. "I was proud of him. That's a tough situation to get thrown in there, and he made some plays, and that's good. And there's some things, like I told him, he's gonna have to learn from if we're going to get better, and I think he's willing to do that."

The running game did have some success against the East Side defense, as Justin Johnson, Jr. had 18 carries for 108 yards and a touchdown, while Hampton ran for 75 yards on 12 attempts. And there were others who made some big plays during the game.

"Ryan Hampton ran well," Martin said, "and Mason Ahlers had a good run there, (Grant) Matarelli had a great catch, Gabe James made a big play, the receiving touchdown."

All in all, it was a typical Edwardsville performance, where the Tigers kept fighting, no matter what, and hung in there exceptionally well.

"I was proud of our kids, yes," Martin said. "No bad body language, kept fighting. They're a good football team. I think we could have made it closer, buy you've got to give them credit. But I thought we missed too many opportunities in the passing game in the first quarter, and really, the first half."

The Flyers needed the opening 2:56 to get on the board first, driving 80 yards in eight plays, as Battle ran for 13 yards on the game's second play from scrimmage, the passed to Kenneth Cotton for another 13 yards, and Palmer ran 15 yards for another first down. Battle ran nine yards up the middle for the touchdown, but the conversion kick missed as East Side took an early 6-0 lead.

After an exchange of punts, the Flyers held on a fourth down play and took the ball over with 1:25 left in the first, and then went 65 yards in four plays in a drive that took only 42 seconds. On the first play, Battle ran for 34 yards, then on the final play, ran for a 16-yard touchdown, then passed to Palmer for a two-point conversion to make it 14-0 for East Side with 38.9 seconds left in the quarter.

In the second quarter, Battle hit three different receivers for 56 yards to bring the ball to the Tiger three, but back-to-back penalties against the Flyers put the back on the Edwardsville 13. Undaunted, Battle threw 12 yards to Karon Parchmon for the touchdown, but the conversion was missed, making the score 20-0 East Side with 7:16 left in the half.

The Tigers next possession led to their first score, as Edwardsville took 1:40 to go 61 yards in six plays. A roughing the passer flag on the first play put the ball on the East Side 46, and from there, Hampton ran four times for 43 yards to put the ball at the Flyers' one, where Johnson banged over for the score, and Gavin Walls kicked the conversion to make it 20-7 with 5:35 left in the first half.

On the next possession, the Flyers went 61 yards in five plays, taking only 65 seconds to score. Palmer opened the drive with a 38-yard run down the right side, and after two penalties set East Side back to the Tiger 41, Battle threw for 40 yards to Cotton, who made a big catch over the middle, and then accounted for the last yard himself for the touchdown to make it 26-7 East Side after a two-point run was stopped.

In the final Tiger possession of the first half, Hampton ran for 14 yards on the second play, passed to Johnson for 10 more, and had a nice 16-yard run. On a fourth down play, Hampton was intercepted by Sanchez James, and the half ended 26-7 for the Flyers.

Distaso-Hutchins came into the game at the start of the second half, and on the first play of the half, Johnson had a 34-yard run, and on the next play, Distaso-Hutchins passed 34 yards to James, who made a nice run after the catch, fr the touchdown, with Walls' conversion making the score 26-14 just 18 seconds in the second half.

The Flyers opening possession saw Battle pass to Parchmon for 39 yards, and run for 20 more before an interception by David Deuanephenh put the ball on the Tiger 16. On the

next drive, Jaden Hale intercepted a Distaso-Hutchins pass, and it only took the Flyers two plays to score, with Battle going nine yards for the touchdown, then Palmer going up the middle for a two-point conversion to increase the East Side lead to 34-14 with 5:37 left in the third.

Early on in the fourth quarter Palmer ran 48 yards for another touchdown, with the two-pointer missing to make it 40-14 with 8:41 left in the game. On the first play after the kickoff, Distaso-Hutchins connected with Mararelli for 63 yards, Matarelli running away from toe secondary to make it 40-21 after Walls' conversion. The Flyers struck almost as quickly, as Battle threw for a 61-yard touchdown pass to Luther Burden III, with the two-pointer missing to make it 46-21.

The final score of the game came with 5:21 left, when Battle ran up the middle for five yards and the touchdown, but the two-pointer missed, making the final score 52-21 East St. Louis.

The Flyers are now 4-0, and are scheduled to face O'Fallon next Friday at Clyde C. Jordan Stadium, while the Tigers are now 2-1 and play at Belleville West next Friday, with both games set to start at 7 p.m. Martin knows that his team will be prepared and ready to go against the Maroons.

"Yeah, I just want to get better, watch film, learn from it," Martin said, "have our kids grow, get better, and see if we can't put on a better performance next week."





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