

# **Johnson Runs For Three Touchdowns, Passes For A Fourth In Tigers' 42-21 Win Over Belleville West**

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BELLEVILLE - Senior running back Justin Johnson, Jr. had one of the best games of his career for Edwardsville, running for three touchdowns and passing for a fourth as the Tigers defeated Belleville West 42-21 in the resumption of a Southwestern Conference game suspended by lightning and storm concerns Saturday afternoon at Bob Goalby Field.

The game was suspended with 8:08 remaining in the second quarter, right after the Maroons had tied the game at 7-7 when the officiating crew took both teams off the field and the stadium was evacuated after lighting strikes nearby. The game was suspended about an hour later and picked up on Saturday at the point it was suspended.

When the game resumed on Saturday, Johnson took charge in an incredible performance that helped the Tigers take control.

"I thought it was one of Justin's best games," said Edwardsville head coach Matt Martin. "He ran like a man, made kids miss, broke a lot of tackles. It was almost like a one-man show."

Overall, the Tigers played with a lot of poise and maturity, and handled the delay and the eventual suspension of the game very well.

"Offensively, I thought we showed a lot of maturity," Martin said. "Yesterday, the first drive was solid, the second drive, we sputtered. And defensively, we were pretty good, we just gave up three big plays last night. Saturday, we went back to our base defense, and we just let the kids work on getting off blocks, running and tackling."

The return to basics on defense served Edwardsville very well when the game resumed.

"I thought so," Martin said. "Sometimes, when things aren't going well, it's easy to want to find some magical calls, but it's really getting back to fundamentals, and letting the kids play."

Sophomore quarterback James Distaso-Hutchins got his first varsity start on Friday night, and played well, but when the game resumed on Saturday, senior Ryan Hampton was back in, and also played well.

"James threw some good balls," Martin said, "but Ryan started the resumption on Saturday. He's a little bit better runner, and we can always count on Ryan."

Overall, Martin was very happy for his players, who showed much maturity and poise despite some inexperience in some positions.

"I was happy for the kids," Martin said. "We're a little young and inexperienced in some positions, and I thought we showed a lot of maturity."

The Tigers scored on their first possession of the game on Friday night, with Johnson scoring his first touchdown of the game on a 15-yard run down the Edwardsville sideline with 7:48 left in the first quarter to make it 7-0 after Gavin Walls' conversion.

The Tigers also had a good drive going on their second turn with the ball late in the first, but the Maroon defense stiffened and took over on downs at their own 45. Javieon Wallace capped the ensuing drive with a six-yard run down the right side with 8:08 left in the first half to tie the game 7-7 after Logan Seibert's conversion.

Immediately after, the officials saw the lightning strikes and brought both teams off the field for the delay, which ultimately led to the suspension. When play resumed on Saturday, it didn't take the Tigers long to reclaim the lead, as Johnson scored from one yard out with 3:40 left in the first half, and later passed six yards to Grant Matarelli 32 seconds from halftime to give Edwardsville a 21-7 halftime lead.



The Tigers struck again with 6:29 left in the third quarter on another one-yard run from Johnson to make it 28-7, but the Maroons struck back with 4:44 left in the quarter on a 21-yard touchdown pass from Darron Millender to Xavier Martin to make it 28-14. West then recovered a fumble on the ensuing Tiger possession, but the Tigers got the ball back, and on the final play of the period,, Hampton ran in from five yards out to make the score 35-14.

Sophomore running back Jordan Bush ran for an 11-yard touchdown with 9:41 left in the fourth quarter to extend the lead to 42-14, but the Maroons scored with 4:25 left on a two-yard pass from Millender to Barron Manning to make the final 42-21.

The Tigers were helped in the second half by key interceptions by Matarelli and Kellen Brnfre, which helped set Edwardsville up with good field position.

"Grant and Kellen both had some good interceptions," Martin said.

The Tigers are now 3-1 on the year and travel to O'Fallon, who came back from a COVID-19 quarantine in grand style by pulling off a stunning 28-19 upset of East St. Louis Saturday afternoon at Clyde C. Jordan Stadium. The results of next week's games will determine the week six match-ups in the Southwestern Conference, with the top two teams playing for the league championship April 23.

"It's a great win for them, and it makes things interesting in the conference," Martin said. "Just another night in the Southwestern Conference," he said with a laugh.



