

Tigers Gain Momentum In Final Set, Defeats Marquette 25-16, 19-25, 25-15 In Hard-Fought Boys Volleyball Match

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Edwardsville High boys volleyball team went out to a big lead in the first set, only to see Marquette Catholic come back to take the second set before gaining momentum in the final set in going on to a hard-fought 25-16, 19-25, 25-15 win over the Explorers Wednesday evening at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

It was a very well-played match that saw both teams fight hard to the end before the Tigers were able to seize the momentum against Marquette, a first-year varsity program, and go on to the win in the third and deciding set.

"Yeah, it was a real good match," said Edwardsville head coach Scott Smith. "They obviously showed that they're a little bit more, as far whether the experience is more or less than we have, the amount of seniors over there, they showed their maturity on Marquette than with their ability to pass and give the setter a lot of opportunities to feed their best attackers and get the ball into play, insistent balls. Luckily, we able to get around a lot of their blocks, but they were still not just letting it drop, they were chasing after it and bringing it back."

Smith gave praise to the Explorers for their efforts.

"They limited their serving mistakes," Smith said, "their strong servers, and we were having trouble passing at first. But then, we made a slight adjustment, moved our serve

receivers back a bit, and that started to give Preston (Weaver) even more options for setting with just one of the pin attackers. We started adjusting to attacking the back row and the front row, and we had a lot fewer attacks in the middle, but everywhere else, Preston was able to reach and chase down the ball and always keep the other side guessing."

And when the Tigers seized momentum in the third set to win going away, it spelled the difference in the match.

"Even when we're not passing well, Preston makes our passes look even better," Smith said, "because he's able to chase down the ball and put the ball into play where we can get a good attack on it, and still make stuff go, to go either across or line wherever we're attacking, because Preston is so quick."

The Explorers fought back from being down big early on and played well throughout the match, with the entire team leaving it on the floor.

"Oh, absolutely not," said Marquette head coach Mark Ellebracht. "We're taking on these big schools that have volleyball programs that are established. I'm really proud of my guys, we battled against Edwardsville, we battled and beat Belleville East a couple of days ago, so we knew we could play with these guys, and we did. We came back and played well in the second set, and played really strong. But like in any game, mistakes cost us at the end, we had some mistakes that were at the wrong time in the wrong place, and once they get some momentum, it's tough to battle back against a team. But that's the thing, they never give up and they're always scrappy, so I'm proud of them."

The Explorers did come back in the opening set after Edwardsville established a big lead, then used the momentum to play well and win the second set, but the Tigers were able to reclaim momentum after the first part of the third set was even and win the set and the match.

"Once they got to that 15 point, and we got down, and it was 18-15 and we gave up a couple of points there," Ellebracht said, "and we're scrambling, and at that point, they had the momentum, and it was going to be tough for our guys to get back into the game. The guys didn't quit, but it just didn't work out that time."

The Tigers did jump out to a double digit lead in the first set, with the Explorers not looking like themselves.

"We didn't play like ourselves in the first set," Ellebracht said, "and we did. We talked about it in the time out between sets, that we wanted to keep it close, because we knew if we keep it close, we can keep ourselves in the game. And we did, and we cut down on

our mistakes. They had a few mistakes in that second set that we capitalized on, and we were able to pull away. The guys played well, and it just wasn't in the cards today, but I was proud of them."

The Explorers are a first-year varsity team after missing the 2020 season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the team has been playing well as along the lines of a first-year expansion team in a professional sports league.

"You could look at it that way," Ellebracht said. "We did play a JV season two seasons ago, with a lot of these guys who are seniors. So we got some experience playing together; obviously, we were cancelled last year because of COVID. So we came back this year, hoping that we could really come out and do something. The guys have shown that they're not going to give up, and to come out and be 5-3 kind of halfway through the season, I'm pretty impressed; these guys are working hard."

The Tigers jumped out to a 6-1 lead early in the opening set, then got kills from Kaden Chiapelli and Miles Bell to help extend the lead to 9-1. Chiapelli tipped home a shot to make it 10-1 before the Explorers got the ball back at 10-2. Edwardsville then scored two of the next three points to make it 12-3 before Marquette got the ball back, but after an exchange of points, the Tigers got the ball back and extended their lead to 16-5. Another exchange brought the score to 17-8 before Marquette got the ball back and Will Schwartz served up three points in a row to make it 17-11 before Edwardsville got the ball back and scored seven of the set's last 11 points to take a 25-16 win and a one-set lead.

Marquette continued to hang tough, and behind Justin Atkinson's service, jumped to a 3-0 lead to start the second set, and after Jacob Geisen's service brought the score to 3-2 and an exchange made it 5-4, Brady Hendricks served up three straight points, with Raymond McFadden and Chad Tesson combining on a block to make it 8-4. Evan Reid's service brought the Tigers back to within 8-7, but in a recurring theme of the set, Marquette was able to hold off the Tigers when Edwardsville got close, and after an exchange, Chiapelli's service brought Edwardsville into a 10-10 tie. The Explorers were able to get the lead and ball back, and after another exchange that brought the score to 14-13, the Explorers, behind Atkinson's service, made it 18-13, causing an Edwardsville time out. Marquette then scored seven of the set's final 13 points to win the set 25-19 and level the match at one set each.

Weaver and Geisen started the deciding set with good service that helped Edwardsville jump to an early 4-1 lead, which became 7-4 after an exchange, but Tesson and Jake Roth combined on a block that made it 9-8 for the Tigers. A William Roderfeld kill tied the score at 9-9, and after another exchange, Bell and Geisen combined on a block that put Edwardsville up 12-10. Another block from Bell dropped in to make it 14-10 for the

Tigers, and after the Explorers got to within 16-15. Edwardsville scored the set's final nine points with Reid serving out the match, the final being 25-15 and Edwardsville winning two sets to one.

Marquette is now 5-3 in their inaugural season, and hosts Metro-East Lutheran on Thursday in a 5:30 p.m. match, and will play six of their final seven regular season matches at Marquette Family Arena, including against Alton, Father McGivney Catholic and various Southwestern Conference teams.

The Tigers remain undefeated at 6-0 and host McGivney on Friday night in a 5:30 p.m. match, then will play in the SWC the remainder of the regular season. Smith is looking forward to playing against the Griffins.

"I'm excited about having another program that is local we can compete against," Smith said, "and that's going to be competitive. I'm not sure too specifically, but there's a couple of players that have played club with some of our players in the past, so they have some experience despite having not a season last year. I'm really excited about that A, Father McGivney has a team, and B, that we're able to once again play a newer team two matches in a row, that shows how much the program is growing, as far as boys volleyball in general goes."

And Smith also extended praise to his players as well.

"Evan Reid is able to fly in the air, and in the back row and the front row," Smith said, "and he's just as effective in the back row as he is in the front row. And that's impressive, and that just goes to show you how effective Evan Reid is, and how well Evan and Preston work together."



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