

# **Tigers eliminate Lancers 28-14, advance to second round of 8A playoffs**

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Edwardsville quarterback Dan Marinko calls signals during the Tigers' 28-14 win over Belleville East in the first round of the IHSA Class 8A football playoffs in Edwardsville Friday night. Edwardsville advanced to play Homewood-Flossmoor next weekend.

**EDWARDSVILLE** – Big plays usually wind up winning big games, especially in the postseason.

The latest case in point: Edwardsville senior linebacker Zac Rujawitz, who had a fumble recovery that set up a touchdown and then returned a blocked punt for another touchdown late in the first half that help send the Tigers to a 28-14 win over Belleville East in a first-round match of the 2014 IHSA Class 8A Football Championship Friday night.

The Tigers (9-1) will host suburban Chicago school Homewood-Flossmoor, 41-20 winners over Naperville Neuqua Valley Friday night, in a second-round match; the time and day are yet to be determined.

The Tigers eliminated the Lancers despite a 25-carry, 195-yard game from DeMarius Ward, an effort that caught the attention of Tiger coach Matt Martin. “They've got a big offensive line, they were just banging away,” Martin said. “They're a really good-quality team.”

“Give them (Edwardsville) credit,” said Lancer coach Tim Funk. “We really played well at times, fought our tails off. They just made some big plays and we didn't.”

One of the biggest plays was the blocked punt late in the first half. With the Lancers pinned deep in their territory and Matt Sotiropoulos back to punt, Kyler Davis crashed through the line and got a hand on the kick. The ball bounced into the air and into Rujawitz's hands, where all he had to do was get past Sotiropoulos and waltz into the end zone to give the Tigers a 21-0 lead heading in the long break.

“You really can't make mistakes like that against a good team,” Funk said. “We played a really good first half but mistakes like that are going to hurt you.”

Rujawitz also helped set up the Tigers' first score when he recovered a fumbled punt deep in East's half of the field. Two good rushes put the ball at the Lancer 3, where Dan Marinko scored to put Edwardsville up early. The Tigers then went up 14-0 late in the second when, after converting a third-and-long when Marinko hit Fontez Davis with a big gain, then found Isaiah Michl on another long pass to put the ball on the Lancer 6. Two plays later, Kendall Davis hit pay dirt to extend the Tiger lead to 14-0 with 1:48 left.

Right after that came the blocked punt that Rujawitz scored on, sending Edwardsville into the locker room up 21-0. Michl extended the lead to 28-0 on a 6-yard pass from Marinko with 5:55 left in the third, but the Lancers got 11- and 28-yard TD runs from Ward to make it closer. East, however, could not score again and Edwardsville advanced into the second round.

“I know (Homewood) is a very talented team from a good conference (the Southwest Suburban in Chicago). They'll be battle-tested, so we'll have to be at our best,” Martin said.