

Larson Strikes Out Nine, Panthers Score Three In Fifth, End Edwardsville's Winning Streak In 4-1 Class 4A Sectional Semifinal

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - O'Fallon pitcher Mike Larson allowed only one run on three hits and struck out nine, while Xavier Deatherage drove in two runs in the fifth with a single

as the Panthers defeated Edwardsville 4-1 in the IHSA Class 4A sectional semifinal Wednesday afternoon at Tom Pile Field.

The loss ended the Tigers' 28-game winning streak, ending the season at 34-4, while O'Fallon advances to the Round of 16 in the sectional final on Friday.

The Tigers missed an opportunity in the second inning when they had runners on second and third with one out, but a pair of strikeouts from Larson ended the threat, as Larson held Edwardsville to one hit in the first six innings.

"We got a little anxious at times," said Tigers' head coach Tim Funkhouser, "we didn't center ourselves on balls we could have hit, but bottom line is he just kept up on his pitches, and I wish we would have had an answer to it, but we didn't. And for him to be able to go the distance like that is a great credit to him. And it's a great credit for their team. I told them all earlier that he threw really well, and I wish we would have been able to score more runs for them."

The Tigers kept battling throughout the game, to their tremendous credit, and never gave up, but Larson's performance was a big difference.

"Their pitcher was really good," Funkhouser said, "we didn't have a solution for him, and that's kinda baseball. And I thought their team really competed well. And they deserved to win; they played better than us today, and we've had a heck of a season. Nothing's going to take away the season that we had. And we wish we could have played better today, but I couldn't have been more proud of our guys, I'm not disappointed in our guys, I'm just disappointed that we didn't perform as well. But I'm not disappointed in our guys at all, because we've got a great group. I'd go to battle with these guys any day."

Larson's performance on the mound was a big boost for the Panthers after returning to the lineup from injury, and it helped O'Fallon tremendously.

"Obviously, he's one of our guys," said Panther head coach Joe Bauer, "and i can't remember who I talked to when we played our last conference game here. I think the statement here is we're young, and dumb, and inexperienced, and we've just got to find our way, It's amazing what happens when you get a Larson back when he's healthy, and you get Connor Lindsay back after 20 games with a broken collarbone. Not that they had a ton of experience, but they're the few that we had coming in. We're rolling in with four, five sophomores every game, and Mike giving us that kind of start is outstanding. It's a first-class program, Tim is a good friend and does a great job. That is a great offense,

Someone asked me if I hoped to compete," Bauer continued. "No, I expected to win today, but that's still a very, very good team. In terms of that, Mike did a phenomenal job for us today. It might be the best game we've ever had a guy throw here."

O'Fallon was able to make adjustments as the game went on, and they paid off exceptionally well.

"We struggled early, but our kids made some adjustments," Bauer said, "and our approaches improved as the game went on. Put pressure on somebody else. If you guys have seen us, you know we're going to run, we're going to put pressure on people, whether that's throwing strike one, or being aggressive early. By far, a clean game, but we'll take a 4-1 sectional win any day."

The Tigers had a chance to break out on top in the second when, with one out, Evan Funkhouser drew a walk, stole second and went to third on an error by the shortstop that allowed Riley Iffrig to reach. Iffrig stole second, but Larson fanned both Caleb Copeland and Kyle Modrusic to end the inning.

Quinn Weber retired the first eight Panther batters, striking out five, but O'Fallon had a chance when Ethan Crouse reached second on an error and stole third, with the ball sailing into left field. Crouse was thrown out at the plate by Ty Berumen to end the inning.

The Panthers took the lead in the fifth, starting with back-to-back singles by Garrett Meyer and Kellen Scruggs. Both moved to second and third on a sacrifice by Kendall Brookins, after which Deatherage delivered a two-run single to right center to score the first runs of the game. Haidyn McGill tripled home Deatherage one out later to make the score 3-0.

In the sixth, with two out, Meyer tripled to right center, and the throw to third got away. The Tigers backed up the throw, but after a discussion, the umpires ruled that the throw crossed the out-of-play line near the Edwardsville dugout and allowed Meyer to score, making it 4-0. Scruggs beat out a throw to first, but on a single by Brookins, Scruggs was thrown out at the plate to keep the score 4-0.

The Tigers rallied in the bottom of the seventh, starting with a leadoff scratch single by Evan Funkhouser, going to second on an error. Two outs later, pinch hitter Gannon Burns beat out an infield single, and Funkhouser scored on an error on the play, with Burns going to second, but Larson struck out pinch hitter Zak Zoelzer to end the game 4-1 for O'Fallon.

The Panthers are now 23-9 and advance to Friday's sectional final against Joliet West, a 4-1 winner of Minooka in the other semifinal, while the Tigers end their season 34-4.

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