



# **Sophomores Smith, Epenesa lead Tigers to win**

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
December 10 2014 11:30 PM



Kyler Melvin (1) of Edwardsville dribbles by Jalen Jones (20) of East.

Age matters not to Edwardsville Tigers head basketball coach Mike Waldo. Sophomores Mark Smith and A.J. Epenesa scored 16 and 15 points respectively as the Tigers outlasted the Belleville East Lancers 45-37 in Edwardsville on Tuesday night.

“I don’t care how old they are,” Waldo said. “I thought that Mark and A.J. did some good things and I thought we did a good job of getting the ball in good spots.”

The Tigers move to 4-2 overall and 2-0 in Southwestern Conference play. Belleville East drops to 3-3 and 0-1 in the conference.

Dan Marinko chipped in 11 points for Edwardsville. Although he did not score, Kyler Davis dished out 6 assists, got 4 steals, and shined on defense for the Tigers.

“We were able to win because we guarded well,” Waldo said. “Kyler Davis did an excellent job defensively tonight.”

The game had a lively start as Drew Millas scored the game’s first 5 points for East. Epenesa scored Edwardsville’s first 7 points and was on the business end of a thunderous ally-hoop during that span.

The score was 11-10 Tigers after the first quarter, but then came the defensive struggle. Both teams assembled in man-to-man defensive setups that worked to perfection.

“I thought we did a lot of good things defensively,” Waldo said. “I thought their defense was good and it was hard to get open shots.”

It was tied at 17 with 30 seconds left in the half when Jalen Jones of East stole a pass and scored on a fast break to put the Lancers ahead 19-17 at the break.

The Lancers broke out to a 27-19 lead midway in the third quarter, which would be the biggest of the game. Waldo called a timeout to stop the bleeding. After that the Tigers came alive.

“I don’t think it was anything that we told them,” Waldo said. “Our guys are competitive and have gotten in physical condition. They just kept on playing.”

Edwardsville went on a pivotal 9-0 run after the timeout to retake the lead, with Marinko and Smith being the main forces.

The score was tied at 30 going into the fourth quarter and still knotted at 37 with under 2 minutes to go. Epenesa hit a 4-foot hook shot to break the deadlock and then the Tigers got the stop they needed on defense to force East to foul. Smith and Marinko sank six consecutive free throws to ice the game.

Edwardsville will journey to Belleville West to take on the Maroons at 7:30 p.m. this Friday.

For their next game, Belleville East will renew their cross-town rivalry at Belleville West at 7:30 p.m. next Tuesday.

