

Seniors Lead The Way As Edwardsville Wins Two-Set Thriller Over O'Fallon 26-34, 25-22 In Class 4A Pekin Sectional Semifinal

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
November 1 2021 4:29 PM





EDWARDSVILLE - The stellar play of seniors Syd Harris, Gabby Saye, Emma Garner and Kaitlyn Conway were the key factors as Edwardsville's girls volleyball team swept a two-set thriller over Southwestern Conference rival O'Fallon 26-24, 25-22 in a semifinal of the IHSA Class 4A Pekin sectional Monday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The four seniors all made vital contributions during the see-saw match where the Tigers were able to get off a couple of good runs before the Panthers rallied back to tie or come close. Edwardsville was able to hold off the O'Fallon rallies to take the win.

"I'm glad that we finished on top," said Edwardsville head coach Heather Ohlau. "O'Fallon's always a competitor, and we always have that rivalry. And coming into the postseason, you never know. So, I was glad to see that we came out on top in this battle."

And a battle indeed it was, with the Tigers being able to make good shots to score points, while playing good defense to help create the scoring shots.

"I think trying to find creative ways to score on offense," Ohlau said, "not always just hitting the ball, but trying to find those roll shots, the tips. And our defense held solid throughout the match, being able to keep the ball alive so our hitters could get that termination."

Harris, Garner and Saye were key contributors to the win with key shots and blocks, while Conway also made good plays to help keep things going.

"Absolutely," Ohlau said. "They've been leaders since the beginning. It's been nice having those senior clansmen to be able to lead the team, both offensively and vocally. I think the team looks to them to be that force, and they showed up tonight."





Both teams played very well throughout in a highly entertaining match before a packed and very loud gym, keeping the fans involved from the opening serve to match point.

"I like the battles," Ohlau said, "because it always just prepares you for that next level. So this kind of match lets us know what we still need to work on in order to continue our path to our end goal."

The first set started out with both teams splitting the first eight points to tie 4-4 before six straight points behind a combined block from Ava Waltenberger and Saye, along with kills from Waltenberger, Saye, and Garner to go ahead 10-4, forcing an O'Fallon time out. After the time out, it was the Panthers' turn to rally, behind an Adeline Smith tip and a pair of kills to make it 10-7 before the Tigers got the ball back. After an exchange of points, the Panthers came to within 12-11 with an Alyssa Frederking kill, forcing an Edwardsville time out. O'Fallon then went ahead 13-12 before the Tigers tied the set. Both teams then exchanged points, with both sides leading by more than a point until late, when Kloi Karban and Harris combined on a block to make it 24-23 and set point. A net violation against the Tigers tied the set 24-24, but a tip by Sydney Davis and a shot that went long by O'Fallon gave the first set to the Tigers 26-24.

The second set started much like the first, with the teams dividing the opening 10 points that made the score 5-5. Edwardsville went on the first run at 7-7, scoring four in a row

behind Harris, Saye and Davis to go ahead 11-7, with the Panthers again calling time out. Harris and Garner then hit their shots to make the score 13-8 before the teams exchanged points again, with O'Fallon not being able to close the gap until late, when a kill by Morgan Overby brought the Panthers to within 20-19. The Tigers then scored five of the last eight points, with a shot that floated over the net couldn't be returned by the Panthers, giving the Tigers a 25-22 win, clinching the match.

Saye ended up with 11 kills on the night, while Garner, Harris and Conway had six kills each, Conway had 10 digs, with Garner having seven and both Lexie Griffin and Maddie Vieth had five each, Griffin also had 24 assists to go along with Vieth's 10, Harris served up nine points and two aces and Griffin had seven points.

The Tigers go to 31-7 on the year and now face Normal Community, a 25-18, 25-21 winner over Moline, in the final Wednesday at Pekin's gym, starting at 6 p.m. The winner goes through to Friday's super-sectional match at DeKalb against the Fox Lake Grant sectional winner, either Rockton Hononegah or Huntley. Ohlau knows that as the playoffs progress, the competition gets keener and each team provides quality opposition.

"Yeah, I think anybody at this point in the season is going to be a good competitor," Ohlau said.

The Tigers are now through to the last 16, and Ohlau is looking forward to continuing the journey through the postseason.

"Our journey's not done," Ohlau said, "so hopefully, we can continue to fight another day. It's just a good win, and O'Fallon's always a great competitor, and I'm glad we got this win tonight."





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