

Harris Leads Way With 34 Points, Younger Players Contribute As Tigers Defeat Kahoks 53-40 In Girls Basketball Game

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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COLLINSVILLE - Senior forward Syd Harris led the way for Edwardsville with 34 points, while many of the younger players on the team, such as Blakely Hockett, Zay Hoover and Ellie Neath, made big contributions as the Tigers went on to a 53-40 win over Collinsville in a Southwestern Conference girls basketball game played Thursday evening at Vergil Fletcher Gym.

Edwardsville, behind precision shooting by Harris and a good defensive effort, took a 19-10 first-quarter lead over the Kahoks and never looked back in going on to their win. The Tigers are currently without some key players because of COVID protocols, and the younger players stepped in and played very well in their places.

"I thought it was a great team effort," said Edwardsville head coach Caty Happe. "We needed everybody offensively and defensively, and I thought we ran things a lot better tonight than what we did on Tuesday."

Harris couldn't be stopped in one of her best performances of the season, following up a big effort against East St. Louis on Tuesday night with another big game.

"She shoots the ball extremely well," Happe said, "and she hit some threes early. Then, she got to the basket, so her overall game has looked really, really good of late. So, just making sure she doesn't force too much, and I think she's doing a good job."

The fact that the team was able to step up and have the younger players play well in the place of the three players currently out speaks well of the Tigers indeed.

"Yeah, it just shows that a lot of different kids can step up and do different things," Happe said, "and I think those other kids are starting to get the confidence in knowing that they can do it as well. I thought Ellie, Zay and Blakely did some really good things, and then Gwen (Anderson) came in and gave us some really good minutes, so always good to see."

But it was Harris who led the way for Edwardsville, and Kahoks' head coach Colin Moore said many good things about her performance.

"She's incredible," Moore said, "and of course, we prepared for all the girls to be there. I wouldn't say it hurt, but our girls, we're kind of almost excited that the other girls weren't there. But I definitely kept trying to remind them that girl's that good. She's a good kid, she's a fun kid to watch play. My assistant coaches, one had never seen her play before, and she's like 'man, that's impressive.' She can do it all; I've seen her do it for a long time now. It's kind of a tough matchup for us. We're kind of undersized in the guard spot, and we try to guard her with a guard, and then, she just goes into the post, we guard her with a post player and she just dribbles right around us. She's just a very tough matchup and she played a great game tonight."

The supporting players made key contributions as well to the Tigers, which Moore felt made a difference as well.

"And that was we wanted those girls to shoot," Moore said. "I mean, it's pretty obvious you'd rather those girls score than Harris, but definitely, the problem was when those girls hit them early, it gives that morale boost for the whole team, kind of gets them all hyped up a little bit. If those shots don't go down early, I think maybe they got down on themselves, and maybe we could have stayed in that game plan longer. But our girls battled; we're playing young kids, too. They definitely showed senior leadership tonight. She dominated tonight."

To the Kahoks' credit, the team stayed in the game and went on a 7-0 run to start the fourth quarter that cut the Tigers' lead to seven. But Edwardsville was able to stop the run with big baskets of their own to reclaim the momentum.

"Yeah, it was nice to just see the girls not give up and just roll over," Moore said. "In the past, you're playing Edwardsville and you get down, and you're saying 'here we go again.' So it was nice to see them play hard. We had some girls just play very hard. I was very pleased with Jordan Gary, Talesha Gilmore played very hard. Our guards handled the ball fine, we just struggled to make some shots against the zone early."

With the current outbreak of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Moore and his players were just happy to be able to play, with a very limited number of spectators allowed inside the gym.

"That's what I kind of told the girls afterward," Moore said. "I said 'be thankful we got to play a basketball game.' And it was another night for us to get better at basketball, and I think, truthfully, we learned something tonight, And I hope that we'll try to play our best basketball in a month and we go to the postseason."

The teams started off by trading baskets before Gary hit a three to give the Kahoks a 7-4 lead. That would be Collinsville's only lead of the game, as Hoover quickly tied the game with a three, then Harris back-to-back threes to give the Tigers a 13-7 lead, then Neath hit on another three to extend the lead to 16-7. Threes from Gary and Harris made the score 19-10 for Edwardsville after the first quarter.

A basket by Hockett opened the second quarter to give the Tigers a 21-10 advantage, but a basket by Jenna Scheller and a free throw from Ella Guerrero cut the lead to 21-13. Harris and Hockett then led a 5-2 run for Edwardsville got the rest of the period, with Scheller scoring the Kahoks' only basket, which gave the Tigers a 26-17 lead at the interval.

The Tigers opened the second half with a three-point play from Harris and a three from Emma Garner that gave Edwardsville a 32-17 lead. Scheller and Gilmore hit on baskets to slice the lead to 32-21, but a three-point play by Harris set the Tigers off on a 9-4 run to end the period, as Harris hit another pair of threes to help Edwardsville to a 40-25 lead after three quarters.

The Kahoks started the fourth quarter on a 7-0 run, with Guerrero hitting a three and Gary hitting a basket and a pair of free throws after a technical foul to make it 40-32 early on. Free throws from Hoover and Harris restored the lead to 42-32, and from there, Edwardsville outscored the Kahoks 11-8 to take their 53-40 win.

Besides Harris' 34 points, Neath had seven points for the Tigers, while Garner added five points, Hoover had four points, Dallas Jenkins had two points and Ella Cook had a

single point. The Kahoks were led by Schller's 10 points before fouling out, while Gary had eight points, both Gary and Gilmore had seven points each, Guerrero had six points and Katie Bardwell had two points.

The Kahoks are now 10-10 on the year, and face Belleville East next Thursday, with a game against Alton having been postponed on Tuesday because of COVID protocols. The Kahoks then will play Teutopolos first in the Highland Tournament, and Moore is looking forward to the upcoming schedule.

"It was nice to be in the game," Moore said, "I wish we would have had a little better start early, but they're a good team, and hats off to Harris, she played well a great game."

The Tigers, meanwhile, go to 14-4 and play at the St. Joseph's Academy Shootout Saturday morning against Kansas City St. Teresa's at 11:30 a.m., then play at Belleville West next Tuesday and host Belleville Althoff Catholic at home next Thursday in a 7:30 p.m. starts. Happe is looking forward to regaining her full roster and moving ahead as a team.

"Well, we'll get all our kids back at some point," Happe said, "so hoping for the kids to get better each day, and continue to grow as a team."







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