

# Spiller, Kloster Score 14 Points Each, Tigers Get Big Bounce Back With Win Over Cahokia

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EDWARDSVILLE - Both Bryce Spiller and Isayah Kloster scored 14 points each and the Edwardsville defense spoiled Cahokia's bid to win the game when a last-second three was off-target, allowing the Tigers to take a hard-fought and workmanlike 38-36 win over the Comanches in a boys basketball game played Tuesday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

Cahokia came from behind six days earlier in the Jersey Mid-Winter Classic, going on a late 9-0 run to take the win over Edwardsville 46-42, and in Tuesday's win was exactly what the Tigers needed.

"I think that was a gritty performance by our guys," Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas said. "We didn't shoot it great, but there are some plays I think we'd like to have back. But I thought our defense was excellent, I thought our rebounding was excellent. We've talked all year about there being a fine line between winning and losing and tonight, I just thought we competed hard and were able to make enough plays to win, so it's a great win for us."

The effort by the Tigers showed that things are still going in the right direction for the team.

"We've really focused on competing with our guys," Battas said, "getting them comfortable in non-stop, competitive varsity games, being consistent on every possession. If you miss a shot, go back and play good defense. If you turn the ball over, get back and play good defense. We actually executed a lot things well tonight, like I said, we didn't make as many shots as our guys would have liked. But every win is hard. And especially against athletic teams like Cahokia that's playing better and better. A very workmanlike effort. I thought we had multiple contributions, we had guys be physical and rebounding, so I'm really proud of our guys."

The Tigers kept persevering and working hard throughout the game, which was a big factor in the outcome.

"I thought our inside presence with Isayah and (Shaun) Pacatte and Iose (Epenesa) and Hersch (Greene) a little bit, and Hersch is nursing a little bit of an ankle injury. But those guys were real physical inside, got us some big rebounds, and Isayah scoring 14 points on the interior. And that opened up some things on the outside. We got a lot of open threes because of our inside guys demanding double teams and making the defense have to worry about them scoring around the basket. So I thought the effort from Isayah and Pacatte and Iose and Hersch was terrific."

Battas did like the team's energy, but was more prouder of their focus on the game and concentrating on the job at hand.

"Younger guys, they think enthusiasm and energy is different sometimes," Battas said. "I'm glad they were enthusiastic, but I thought our focus was better. Focusing on having energy, focusing on playing with some enthusiasm, focusing on consistent effort. So I'm excited that they felt enthusiastic about tonight, but I'm most proud of their focus was good. I thought every possession, even when it didn't go our way, we knew what we

were doing on offense, we knew what we were doing on defense. Focusing is something that's, honestly, it's difficult, especially for younger players. There are so many distractions these days, it's hard for them to really lock in. And I thought we were really locked in tonight, especially on defense."

Both Kloster and Spiller played aggressively inside the lane, and were able to get their points inside, which also helped make a difference.

"Yeah, really good," Battas said. "The design of our offense a lot of times is shots at the rim and threes; I think we shot four-for-20 in threes. So it doesn't look like on paper that we maybe had our best offensive game, but we're getting shots that we designed to get. And we want to balance that with getting open threes, attacking the rim and throwing it inside to the post. I thought we did all three things tonight and that led to a lot of open shots. We'll get better at making them and they're hard to play against. They're fast and scrappy guys, so getting contributions from those guys, and we have encouraged them to be more confident and more aggressive. And that just makes you more harder to guard."

The game started off with Omario Gooden and Kaden Bell hitting from outside to give Cahokia a 4-0 lead, with Spiller countering from inside and Kloster hitting on a three-point play to give Edwardsville its first lead at 5-4. Spiller and Kloster hit again from inside to complete a 9-0 run at the end of the first to give the Tigers a 9-4 lead at the buzzer.

The two teams traded threes to start the second quarter, and that exchange saw the Tigers up their lead to 17-10, after which Malik Allen scored to make it 19-10, Edwardsville. Another exchange of threes made it 22-13, with free throws from Isaiah Sanders and a basket by Gooden making the score 22-17 before a basket shortly before the buzzer by Spiller put the Tigers up 24-17 at halftime.



Edwardsville started the second half with baskets by Jordan Bush and Kloster to bring the score to 28-20, but the Comanches got back-to-back threes from Gooden and Jimeque Harvey to pull back to within 28-26, forcing an Edwardsville time out. Allen hit a big three to make it 31-26, with Harvey scoring inside before the buzzer to make it 31-28 after three quarters.

The fourth quarter started with an exchange of baskets before Harvey tied the game up 33-33 with a three on the baseline with 4:15 left in regulation. Undaunted, Spiller scored on the end of a break to put the Tigers back up 35-33, with Pacatte scoring inside late to make it 37-34. In the final minute, a steal and score from Sanders made it 37-36, with a free throw on the front end of a one-and-one by A.J. Tillman making it 38-36 with 4.8 seconds to go. Tillman missed the second shot and Cahokia grabbed the rebound, after which they called three straight time outs when they couldn't get the ball in play. The Comanches got the ball past mid-court and called their final time out with 1.9 seconds to play. Edwardsville called their last time out to set up the defense, and a good pass got the ball to Gooden, but his shot was off target, allowing the Tigers to win 38-36.

Besides Spiller and Kloster's 14 points each, Allen scored five points, both Bush and Pacatte had two points apiece and Tillman had a single point. Gooden led the

Comanches with 11 points, while Harvey hit for 10 points, Quinton Jones scored six points, Sanders came up with four points, Bell scored three points and D'Kyren Kizer had two points.

The Comanches are now 2-15 on the season and play a South Seven Conference game at Carbondale Friday night at 7:30 p.m. before meeting Dunlap in the Peoria Manuel Shootout Saturday at 5:30 p.m. The Tigers improve to 10-12 and host O'Fallon in a Southwestern Conference game Friday night at 7:30 p.m., then host Madison next Monday night at 7:30 p.m. Battas and his players are looking ahead to the game against the Panthers on Friday.

"O'Fallon's really hard to play against," Battas said. "They're athletic guys and they put their guys into great positions, and that makes them hard to guard. So we will go in here and start watching some film and put a game plan together and hopefully have two good days of practice. We know we've got our hands full on Friday, but I think our guys are looking forward to going through the conference for a second time. I think we've improved since the last time we played some of these teams. Just a good win and proud of our guys."

