

Harris Scores 25 Points, Tigers Hold Off O'Fallon Rally To Win Class 4A Girls Sectional Semifinal 60-50, Move To Sweet 16

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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COLLINSVILLE - Senior forward Syd Harris led Edwardsville with 25 points as the Tigers took control of a close game in the third quarter, then held off an O'Fallon rally near the end of the period. In going on to a 60-50 win over the Panthers in the IHSA Class 4A Joliet Central sectional semifinal game Tuesday night at Vergil Fletcher Gym in Collinsville.

The Tigers advance to the Sweet Sixteen with the win, going on to the sectional final on Thursday in Joliet. It took a team effort from Edwardsville to win the game, and head coach Caty Happe was very pleased after the game.

"It was a great atmosphere, two great teams out there competing and putting it on the line," Tigers' Head Coach Caty Happe said. "We're happy to come out with the win."

The Tigers went on a run early in the third quarter to go up 42-32, but O'Fallon went on their own run, later on, to cut the lead to 42-39. The Tigers scored the last two baskets of the quarter to go back up by seven and went from there to hold the lead and move on.

"We got up 10, we had a couple of turnovers, brought it to within five," Happe said, "and then, we got back up and really hit some free throws, I thought we did a better job of taking care of the ball in the fourth. But they battled to the end, and that's what we want. It pushes us and makes us better."



Besides Harris, Emma Garner, Elle Evans, Macy Silvey and the entire team made big contributions to the win.

"Everybody contributed," Happe said. "That's what's this team does, day in and day out, between the kids who do play and get on the floor and the kids who don't. They prepare us and we're really a definition of what a team is."

Garner in particular had a good game, stabilizing things for the Tigers in the first quarter.

"Garner had a great game, she had six points in the first quarter," Happe said, "really settled things down for us, did a good job on their bigs, so just an awesome performance from her. So we were definitely focused on rebounding and keeping them out of the paint."

The Panthers played exceptionally well in the first half, but had a big turnover late in the first half that allowed the Tigers to go into the half leading by four.

"I thought we played an excellent first half," said O'Fallon head coach Nick Knollhoff. "That turnover there when we were trying to go one shot was pretty costly leading into halftime. But they started to take over there in the third and we made a nice little run to get it all the way back to, I think, three. We just couldn't quite get it over the hump. Just a few costly turnovers and we didn't shoot the ball very well tonight. But I thought our defense was fantastic, causing them to create some turnovers themselves. But they just did enough to win."

Junior point guard Shannon Dowell led the Panthers with 23 points and helped keep her team in the game until the end.

"We ask her to do a lot, sometimes too much," Knollhoff said. "But she played fantastic and that's what she has to do for us to try to pull off an upset like that against Edwardsville."

The Tigers did a very good job of shutting down center Zsana Hawkins, holding her to 13 points and not allowing her to establish herself in the post.

"I think Z had an OK game," Knollhoff said, "I think she still had about 13 or something like that. But they help so well off the weak side that it's really hard to get the ball into the post and try to get any dominant post position to where we could score."

The Panthers still had a very good season and bring back many of their top players for the 2022-23 campaign.

"We started five juniors tonight," Knollhoff said. "I think eight of our top ten are back next year. So we're going to be pretty strong and we're looking forward to next year already."

The teams started the game by trading baskets before Hawkins converted a three-point play to give O'Fallon a 5-4 lead. Another exchange of baskets happened before both Harris and Garner scored to give Edwardsville a 10-7 lead and after the two teams exchanged free throws, Dowell hit a pair of free throws and Avery Christopher scored off a steal to give the Panthers a 15-14 lead after the first quarter.

Harris hit a baseline three to open the second quarter, giving the Tigers the lead back at 17-15 and from there, built the lead to 21-16 before O'Fallon came back, getting a three from Christopher and a putback from Dowell to tie the game 21-21. The teams exchanged baskets before Hawkins hit inside to give the Panthers a 27-25 lead, after which a three from Silvey gave the Tigers the lead back at 28-27, and O'Fallon held for the last shot of the half. The Tigers got a steal and Harris converted a three-point play with 21.1 seconds left in the half to give Edwardsville a 31-27 halftime lead.

The Tigers opened the third quarter by going on an 11-5 run, with Harris taking charge and completing the run with a three-point play that made it 42-32. O'Fallon responded with a 7-0 run, with a three-point play from Dowell and baskets from Me'Chilah Vinson and Dowell cutting the lead to 42-39. The Tigers halted the rally with a pair of baskets from Evans to give Edwardsville a 46-39 lead after three quarters.

Dowell opened the fourth quarter with a baseline drive to score, with baskets from Garner and Harris upped the Tiger lead to 50-41. The Panthers did cut the lead to 50-45, with free throws from Garner, Harris and Kaitlyn Morningstar keeping the Panthers at bay as the Tigers went on to their 60-50 win.

Outside of Harris' 25 points, Garner added 12 points, Silvey scored nine points, Evans had eight points and Morningstar had six points. Dowell's 23 points led the Panthers, while Hawkins added 13 points, Christopher hit for seven points, Klaire Keel had three points and Laylah Jackson and Vinson had two points each.

The Panthers finish the season 25-6 and Knollhoff is very proud of his team and their efforts all season.

"Three of our losses were to Edwardsville," Knollhoff said, "and that's why they're a top-ranked team in the state. We were just so close all three times we played them. But I'm really proud of what we're able to do. I strengthened our schedule a little bit so we are prepared for this type of game and I think we showed up and it's just a great ball game by both teams."

The Tigers are now 28-4 and face Normal Community, a 66-35 winner over Joliet West in the other semifinal, in the sectional final Thursday night at Joliet Central in a 7 p.m. tip. The winner faces either Bolingbrook or Homewood-Flossmoor in the super-sectional game at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington next Monday night. Happe is looking ahead to the game against the Iron.

"We'll cherish what we have tonight and then, we'll start getting ready tomorrow," Coach Happe said.





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