

# Edwardsville boys roll past Belleville West

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer  
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EDWARDSVILLE – When Edwardsville's boys basketball team gets on a roll, they're pretty hard to stop.

Just ask Belleville West.

The Tigers opened the game with a 13-0 run, then went on a 12-0 run in the final quarter. Both runs proved to be the difference as EHS defeated the Maroons 64-57 in a Southwestern Conference clash at Lucco-Jackson Gym Friday night.

West coach Joe Muniz would certainly agree.

“We got blitzed at the start,” Muniz said. “Edwardsville got into a good flow and knocked down some shots, and when they do that, they're hard to stop. I had to call a timeout and tell the kids to try and win the last two minutes of the quarter; I thought it would get some confidence going, and it did.

“We came out in the second and picked up some confidence and it helped us.”

Muniz was right; Edwardsville (13-7 overall, 5-3 SWC) came out on fire from the opening tip, especially Oliver Stephen, who drained a couple of three-point shots early and, along with inside baskets from AJ Epenesa and a three-ball from Dan Marinko, jumped out to a 13-0 lead just three-and-a-half minutes into the contest.

West (7-12 overall, 2-7 SWC) didn't score for the first time until there was 3:53 left in the term, when Tyler Dancy connected from the paint. But Mark Smith and Marinko scored from behind the arc to extend the lead to 19-2, and Stephen got the lead to 22-7 on his third three-pointer late in the term.

Edwardsville's execution helped the Tigers overcome everything West could throw at them. “West played an excellent game,” Tiger coach Mike Waldo said. “(Eugene Jones) was a load; he did a great job. We kept executing, got some open looks and hit some shots.

“They gave us a lot of different defenses, but we executed well against them. Our guys practice shooting all the time, and if you keep practicing well, good things will happen.”

The Tigers aren't as experienced as they have been in recent years, but Waldo likes their work and practice habits. “Our guys have kept improving all year,” Waldo said. “We've been practicing well every day and the sheer repetition we have really has made a difference.”

The Maroons did make a run at the Tigers in that second term, chopping the EHS lead to 34-30 at the half and getting to 39-35 with about three minutes left in the third. That's when the Tigers caught fire again, getting big buckets from Marinko and Stephen along with a pair of free throws from Stephen and a alley-oop slam from Espensa off a feed from Kyler Davis to cap the run and make it 51-37 with 5:24 left.

West tried to make one more run at Edwardsville, but could get no closer than 59-53 with under a minute to go.

Stephen finished with a game-high 24 points for the Tigers, with Marinko, Espensa and Smith all getting 13 each. The Maroons were led by Jones with 22 points, with Demond White adding 14 and Donovan Whitley 12.



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