

Stearns' Two-Run Homer Sets Pace, Tigers Score Five In Second And Fifth To Defeat Granite City 14-4 In 5 Innings

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Spencer Stearns' two-run homer over the left-field fence in the bottom of the first inning set the pace as Edwardsville scored five times in the second and five more times in the fifth to defeat Granite City in a five-inning game 14-4 at the District 7 sports complex Wednesday afternoon.

The game was moved from Tom Pile Field to the junior varsity turf field because of the rain from the previous night and early in the morning, and conditions were cold, damp and windy throughout the game. The Tigers played well despite the conditions and stayed undefeated in this early part of the season.

"I was impressed with the way our guys performed," said Edwardsville head coach Tim Funkhouser, "and I think they're taking the right approach of understanding what they do well and the things they don't do as well right now. They're kind of acknowledging that and working towards trying to get better each day. So it was fun in practice yesterday and it was fun in pregame. And it was fun to see some guys have success on some of the adjustments they were trying to make."

The Tigers took control of the game with their five-run second, but the Warriors were able to stage a comeback with three runs in the fifth on only two hits. Funkhouser gave credit to Granite for their comeback and also praised Stearns for his efforts.

"Well, they ended up getting right back in the game and had the tying run on deck," Funkhouser said. "Spencer found his rhythm and he's got a lot of power. And he's been working hard and he deserves all the success and you could see on the field, he was able to make a great backhanded play, get another double play started and I think he's one of the better players in not only in the area, but also the state. So it was good for him to have that success and help the team."

The important thing for the Tigers that they're now 5-0 to start the season and are rolling right along.

"Yeah, we had a couple of games that we probably could have very easily lost, being down," Funkhouser said, "and our guys showed some wherewithal to keep battling and playing every pitch. And being able to come out and get some runs early and then just keep adding to them, I was impressed with the way our guys took at-bats and on a cooler day and stuff like that, our guys kept fighting."

The Warriors jumped out on top with a run in the first and made their comeback effort in the fifth and kept plugging away throughout despite the raw weather.

"Yeah, it was a tough day to play; it's cold and windy," said Granite head coach Scott Smallie. "Our guys did a good job battling back there at the end. I mean, we go up 1-0 and then, they hit a two-run homer and it kind of takes the momentum back in them and they put the ball in play, we don't make a couple of plays. They make a great play at third and make a great play at first with the bases loaded and stop a momentum swing there for us. Overall, good effort, we saw a lot that we like and moving forward, just things we can work on to get better."

The Warriors are off to a good start as well, and Smallie is happy with the way things have gotten off the ground this season.

"Yeah, for sure," Smallie said. "I mean, like I said, we've taken a lot of good quality at-bats at the plate, we've got to do a better job of getting strike one in the zone and do a better job of making plays behind our pitcher. And we've got to just keep on battling. It's a young season and it's a long season. We've got plenty of games next week to come back and do our job."

The team goals for Granite are simple: Just take that next step.

"We kind of talk about team goals," Smallie said. "We're ready to take that next step. We've taken that next step at the end of every year, so just playing clean baseball and seeing where that gets us."

The Warriors jumped out on top in the opening inning when, with one out, Brady Smallie reached on an error, went to second on a wild pitch and scored on an Alex Wright single to give Granite a 1-0 lead. Courtesy runner Kyle Hillier was caught stealing to end the inning, then the Tigers went to work with one out, Gavin Huebner drew a walk, stole second and Stearns hit a full-count pitch over the fence in left field to give Edwardsville the lead for good at 2-1.

In the home half of the second, with one out, Jacoby Roberson was hit by a pitch, Cade Hardy singled Roberson to second and Chad Funkhouser doubled in Roberson to make it 3-1. Huebner was hit by a pitch to load the bases and a walk to Stearns forced in Roberson to increase the lead to 4-1. James Manion replaced Wright on the mound and Riley Iffrig hit a sacrifice fly to right, scoring Funkhouser. A two-run double by Caleb Copeland scored both Huebner and Stearns to make it 7-1 after the second inning.

Meanwhile, Tiger starting pitcher Gannon Burns set the side down in order in the third, and in the bottom of the inning, Roberson doubled with one out, Hardy drew a walk and Roberson went to third on a wild pitch and scored on an error by the catcher to make it 8-1. The Tigers threatened but didn't score further in the inning.

In the fourth, the Tigers increased their lead on an Andrew Hendrickson sacrifice fly to score Copeland to make it 9-1, but in the top of the fifth, the Warriors rallied, starting with one-out walks to Brennan Cochran and Smallie, while Mason McMurray was hit by a pitch to load the bases. A Wright ground out to third scored Cochran. Smallie scored on a wild pitch, then Nick Huskamp reached on an error that allowed another run to score and make it 9-4. The Warriors threatened but did not score again, thanks to some very good Tiger defense to keep it 9-4.

In the bottom of the fifth, Hardy led off with a walk, stole second and third, then scored when Bryce Beagle drew a walk, scoring on an errant throw when the ball got away from the catcher. Beagle then scored on a Huebner single, Joe Chiarodo doubled in another run, Hendrickson was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded to force in another run, and Chiarodo ended the game when he scored on a wild pitch to make the 14-4 final.

The Warriors are now 1-2 and host Maryville Christian Friday afternoon at Babe Champion Field in the first of a five-game homestand, with the first pitch coming at 5 p. m. Granite then hosts Belleville East March 28 and Collinsville March 30, with both games starting at 4:30 p.m. Smallie is liking what he sees so far, and he knows that his team will continue to battle and play hard.

"Yeah, so far it's been good," Smallie said. "We're going to keep battling, we've got some pitchers we've got to get figured out and we'll move forward, we'll be ready when it's time."

The Tigers are now 5-0 and host St. John Vianney Catholic Saturday morning at 11 a.m in the start of a three-game homestand that features games against Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin March 28 and New Lenox Lincoln-Way East March 29, both games starting at 4:30 p.m. Funkhouser knows his team will continue to progress and keep going in the right direction.

"We just try to continue the process," Funkhouser said. "We'll try to get better tomorrow and do the same thing on Friday and then see how we do in competition on Saturday."

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