

Christopher's Hat Trick Spells The Difference As Panthers Win Over Tigers 5-1 In SWC Opener, Olson Has Edwardsville's Goal

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
March 25 2022 5:18 AM





EDWARDSVILLE - Senior striker Avery Christopher had a hat trick, scoring twice in the first half as defending IHSA Class 3A state champion O'Fallon defeated Edwardsville 5-1 in the Southwestern Conference opener for both teams Thursday night at Tiger Stadium.

Although the Panthers were able to take early control of the match, the Tigers still had a great effort, but had trouble finishing and that's what helped spell the difference.

"I still think that our effort was 100 percent," said Edwardsville head coach Abby Federmann. "We applied things that we needed to apply. You know, 5-1 doesn't look as good as I think we played on the field. O'Fallon's a better and tough team, so I'm happy we get to see them again and maybe fix some things."

The Tigers did have quality opportunities throughout the match, but couldn't capitalize on them.

"We did have our chances," Federmann said. "Right off the bat, we had a really great opportunity off a cross from (Olivia) Baca to (Payton) Federmann, and we've got to score on those. O'Fallon's a type of team that scores on that kind of stuff. We have got to capitalize on every opportunity against a team like that."

The Tigers have now faced all three Illinois state champions from 2021 - Belleville Althoff Catholic in Class 1A, Triad in Class 2A and the Panthers - in four of the first five games of the season, and Federmann feels the Tigers will be the better for it.

"Yeah, I do think we probably, looking across the board, have the toughest start to our season in our conference," Federmann said. "But I think ultimately, loading our season at the beginning with these tough teams is going to be more beneficial for us in the long run rather than, maybe, playing teams we know we can rack up seven, eight, nine, 10 goals on. Shows a challenge that we have something to work on."

When asked about the differences between Triad and O'Fallon, Federmann felt that both sides were similarly alike in many ways.

"They're actually real similar," Federmann said. "I just think that the passing of O'Fallon, the speed of the one-touch pass - there's a reason why they won state last year. So it's very hard to defend. I think their speed of play is faster, I do think they're very similar though."

Although the Panthers were the better team on the evening, the Tigers came away with some positives from the match.

"Yeah, I mean, and I said it, if they're going to get the opportunity, they're probably going to finish off of it," Federmann said. "We've got to get ourselves to that point. I think we matched up with them well, outside of finishing. So I think if we can get that under control, then the next time we see them, it's going to be a different story, for sure."

Christopher's hat trick was an indicator of her being one of the area's best players, and her hard work has paid off tremendously for the Panthers.

"Avery is certainly a special player," said O'Fallon head coach Justin Judiscak. "And what I see throughout the trainings and throughout the days we're not playing games, it's just absolute leadership. She leads by example, she plays as hard as anyone, she expects her teammates to play hard, she really leads in a way that girls are willing to follow."

Christopher is a most complete player that puts everything together in a package that's one of the best in the area.

"She's such a special player, because she plays the targeting role," Judiscak said. "She uses her body so well and can turn on a dime to get her shot off. She's worked so hard on that, she's been, after practice, even our training, she's working on those things. So, it's to her credit she's put the work in and now it's paying off."

Christopher's three goals came from different positions and situations on the pitch, and it makes her even more dangerous.

"So again, she's a multi-faceted player," Judiscak said. "She's not just like a one-trick pony that does one thing well, she does a lot of thing well and I think that showed well tonight in the game."

The fact that it was the conference opener also made in an important win for the Panthers, as O'Fallon is now off to a 5-0-0 start.

"It's always good to start the season off and play a team like Edwardsville," Judiscak said, "where we know it's going to be a tight game and being able to push through and get the results. And that's a good start for us to feel like, 'OK, we can do some special things again this year,' with that kind of start."

The Panthers have other players that can step up as well, which makes them a very complete team that will be hard to defeat this season.

"Well, I think the benefit for Avery is not only her ability, but the girls around her," Judiscak said. "So, you can't really say that we're going to take a girl and try to double team, because then, you've got Becca (Koenig), you've got Anna (Chor), you've got a number of other girls that that OK, we'l just beat you with option number here. So I think that keeps other teams honest and it allows Avery to do what she does best and work those one-v-ones and be successful."

Baca did indeed have the game's first big chance in the third minute, but got tangled up with a Panther defender and couldn't get her shot away. O'Fallon followed that up five minutes later when Koenig got off a good shot that went wide. The ensuing corner was cleared away, keeping the match goalless.

It was in the 14th minute that Christopher first struck, gaining a great through ball Ella Peterson and firing a low shot past Kaitlyn Naney into the back of the net to give the Panthers a 1-0 lead. Baca then took charge for the Tigers and had some great opportunities, the best coming in the 23rd minute, when her looping shot off a great through ball forced O'Fallon goalie Macie Mueller to dive out to her right to snare the ball, keeping it 1-0.

Christopher got her second goal in the 29th minute, taking another great through ball and scored at the near post to double the Panther lead to 2-0. Edwardsville did have some good chances the remainder of the half, the best being a nice chip from Mea Hook, but it was stopped as O'Fallon took a 2-0 lead into the interval.

In the 44th minute, Payton Federmann had a great chance, getting a nice pass from Baca to break in, but her shot just went past the far post to keep things 2-0. In the 61st minute, Christopher completed her hat trick as she took a good pass inside, set up and scored to give the Panthers a 3-0 lead.

Kiley McMinn made it 4-0 almost immediately after that, scoring off a scramble in front of the Tiger goal, but Edwardsville managed to pull to within 4-1 in the 75th minute, as Olivia Olson opened her 2022 account with a goal off a great through pass. Peterson completed the scoring in the 79th minute with a goal to make the final 5-1 for O'Fallon.

The Panthers kept their 100 percent record intact at 5-0-0, and next play at Alton next Tuesday in a 6:45 p.m. start, then host Belleville East Apr. 5 and Collinsville Apr. 7 in 6:30 p.m. starts. The Tigers are now 2-2-0 and play at Cor Jesu Catholic Academy in Affton, Mo. Saturday in a noon kickoff, then host Belleville East Tuesday evening in 6:30 p.m. start and go to Belleville West Apr. 5 in a 6:45 p.m. kickoff.

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