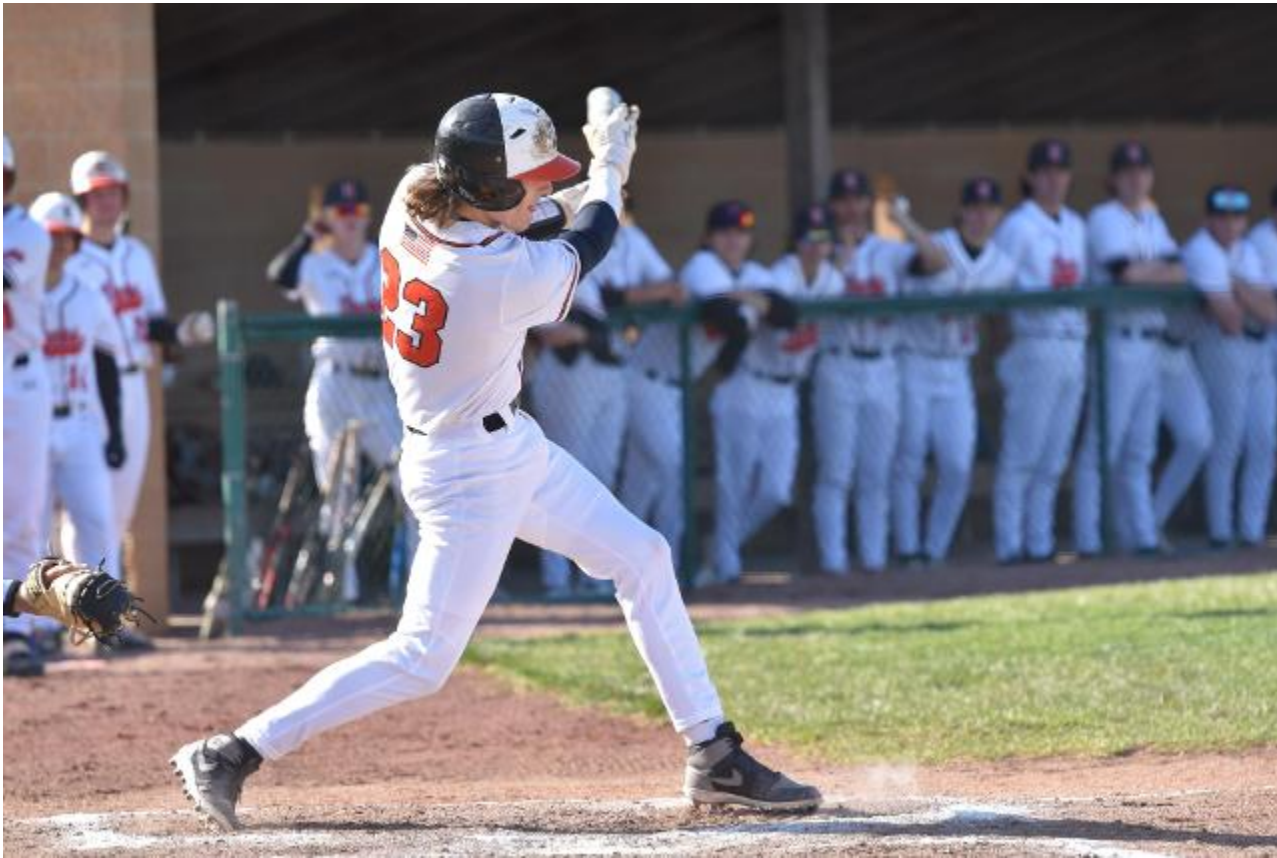


Edwardsville Captures 20th Straight Baseball Win

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Gannon Burns pitched six innings, striking out four and allowing a run on five hits while designated hitter Adam Powell hit a lead-off home run to start a five-run second inning that helped give Edwardsville an 8-3 win over Belleville West in a Southwestern Conference baseball game Tuesday afternoon at Tom Pile Field.

The win was the Tigers' 20th consecutive to start the season, a stretch where the Tigers have played well all year, and head coach Tim Funkhouser couldn't be any happier with how things have gone this season.

"I thought Burns threw really well and I thought we took some pretty good at-bats within the game, so it was good to come away with the victory," Funkhouser said.

The second inning, where Edwardsville scored the five runs that would put them ahead to stay, has been typical of the Tigers this season so far.

"Well, we've been doing a pretty good job of taking good at-bats throughout the whole lineup," Funkhouser said, "so even when we got out of the first inning, we were able to answer back and kind of talk about a hole in a canoe. Eventually, the water's going to find the hole in the canoe and what that hopefully does for us is keeps guys trying to take each at-bat, play each pitch and then, put ourselves in a situation where we can get a bigger inning."

Edwardsville did survive a scare in the top of the seventh inning, when Caden Archer replaced Burns on the mound, but had difficulty getting batters out, allowing two runs without a hit before Jake Holder came in and got the last out to preserve the win.

"Jake Holder came in and closed the door," Funkhouser said. "He did a great job. Caden Archer didn't have his command today, but he's got really, really good stuff. And he's going to keep working. He'll be back out there and I think he's got some of the best stuff on our team, he didn't have a feel for his release point today, but he'll be back."

To their credit, the Maroons hung in there and were able to score their three runs late, and Funkhouser gave full credit to West.

"Belleville West always plays good baseball," Funkhouser said, "and there were a couple of hard-hit balls at us and we were able to make good plays defensively, too, with Burns out there on the bump and the rest of our guys, it's hard to score runs. They did a great job."

After both teams were scoreless in the opening inning, Powell led off the Tiger second with a homer over the right-center field fence on a 1-2 pitch to give Edwardsville the lead at 1-0. Cade Hardy and Joe Chiarodo then hit back-to-back singles, with Hardy going to third on an error, then Kayden Jennings was hit by a pitch to load the bases.

Cole Funkhouser hit into a force play at second to bring in Hardy, then Grant Huebner's two-run single made it 4-0, A RBI single by Spencer Stearns brought in another run to make it 5-0 after two.

The Edwardsville defense shined in the West third. With one out, Nick Muskopf singled and a John Hilpert fly ball just eluded Caleb Copeland in right field for a double. Copeland recovered nicely and threw a strike to Funkhouser, whose relay throw to the plate was centimeter perfect to nail Muskopf at the plate, with Hilpert taking third on the throw.

In the fourth, Stearns led off with a double, went to third on a passed ball and scored on Copeland's double to make it 6-0. One out later, Powell singled home Copeland to make it 7-0. Chiarodo led off the fifth by being hit with a pitch, stole second and went to third on a passed ball, where he was singled home by Powell to make it 8-0.

The Maroons got on the board in the sixth with a one-out double by Hilpert and a one-out bloop single by Brayden Biggs to make it 8-1. In the seventh, with Archer pitching, Jake Stedman reached on an error, Ryan Legrand walked and Max Holmes was hit by a pitch to load the bases. A wild pitch and another walk brought in two more runs before Holder was brought in and got Briggs to ground back to the box for the final out, giving Edwardsville the 8-3 win.

The Tigers are now 20-0, while the Maroons fell to 4-9-1, with the two sides set to play at West on Thursday afternoon at 4:30 p.m. Edwardsville then plays at Civic Memorial on Friday afternoon, then host DeSmet Jesuit at home Monday, all games starting at 4:30 p.m. Funkhouser is looking forward to going against the Maroons once again.

"We'll be back at practice tomorrow," Funkhouser said, "and then, go after it Thursday, head over to Belleville West. It is always a tougher place to play, to score runs. Their park is usually a bigger park, always a tougher place to score runs. So hopefully, we'll get in a situation where we can put some runs across, play good defense and get the pitching we've had and enjoy playing the game."