

Blakemore Scores Winning Run On Squeeze Bunt In Bottom Of Seventh, Tigers Defeat Blue Devils 1-0 In Softball Regional Semifinal

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Courtesy runner Grace Blakemore scored the game's only run on a squeeze play bunt by Zoie Boyd with one out in the bottom of the seventh to give Edwardsville a 1-0 win over Quincy in the semifinals of the IHSA Class 4A softball regional Tuesday afternoon at the Edwardsville District 7 Sports Complex.

It was a very tight and tense pitcher's dual between the Tigers' Ryleigh Owens and the Blue Devils' Brynn Krutmeier where both hurlers were brilliant and both teams had their chances before top-seeded Edwardsville came through in the seventh against seventh seed Quincy.

"You know what? You can't go by the seeds with them," said Edwardsville head coach Lori Blade. "You don't see them, they're in an awfully good conference (the Western Big Six) and she (Krutmeier) threw the ball really well. So, I anticipated a good ball game and it was a little bit more than what I anticipated, because she threw really well and we had opportunities, we just couldn't come up with one."

Catcher Lexie Griffin doubled off the fence on a lead-off shot in the seventh that just barely missed going over the fence for a game-winning homer, but hit the fence for a double that led to the winning run being scored.



"Brooke (Tolle) did a great job getting (Blakemore) getting her bunt down," Blade said, "and Zoie did a great job, I think she would have beat it out, even if we hadn't been going, but we just got lucky (the catcher) didn't hold on to that ball there, but we had to press it a little bit. I'm aggressive in what I do and I'm going to go down being aggressive," Blade said with a smile and laugh.

Owens pitched another magnificent game for the Tigers, getting key strikeouts and having solid defensive play behind her.

"She was good," Blade said. "She threw really well. She got put in a couple of spots, we misplayed a couple of balls, but she came up with some big strikeouts when she needed to and just was really good today, especially with her location and everything.

Owens retired the first eight Blue Devil batters before allowing a single by Ariana Adorno in the third, but got the next batter to ground out to end the inning. Krutmeier did likewise in the circle, keeping the Tigers at bay.

Edwardsville had the first big chance to score in the bottom of the fifth, with Griffin drawing a lead-off walk and Tolle sacrificing her to second. One out later, Owens reached on an error by the shortstop to put runners on the corners, but Avery Hamilton popped to the second baseman to end the threat.

The Blue Devils then had a threat in the top of the sixth, when Adorno reached on an error and was sacrificed to second by Paige Kurfman. Owens then struck out Sofi Sangrey and got Jayden Lubbert to ground to second to end the inning.





Quincy had another chance to take the lead when Karly Leenerts led off with a single, then went to second on a ground out by Krutmeier. Owens then struck out Kayden Smith and Aurora Allison to end the threat and keep the game scoreless.

In the bottom of the seventh, Griffin led off with her shot over the left fielder's head that hit off the fence for a double, just missing going over by about three feet. Blakemore went in as a courtesy runner for Griffin, and went to third on a sacrifice bunt by Tolle, then Boyd laid down a suicide squeeze bunt in front of the plate that Krutmeier fielded cleanly, but the catcher dropped the ball on the toss over, allowing Blakemore to score the winning run, giving the Tigers the 1-0 win and advance to the final.

The Blue Devils conclude their season 7-21, while the Tigers go to 28-3, with the regional final to take place Friday against Collinsville, a 4-2 winner over Alton in the second semifinal game, in a 4 p.m. start. Blade is looking forward to the game and anticipates another good match-up against the Kahoks.

"You know what? We talked yesterday; you've got to get yourself to the final," Blade said. "You can't win a tournament if you don't get to the championship game and that's what we wanted to do. And we're got very fortunate doing it, but now, we've got to make the most of our opportunity."

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