

Tigers Baseball Defeats Brother Rice 7-4, Move On To Class 4A State Championship Game

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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JOLIET – The Edwardsville High School baseball team is headed back to the state championship game. It comes after beating one of, if not the best team in the state, Brother Rice. The Tigers defeated the Crusaders 7-4 Friday afternoon in Joliet.

“It’s just clutch performances,” Edwardsville head coach Tim Funkhouser said postgame. “It’s a total team effort throughout all our guys and I’m just really impressed by the way they stayed true to what they do every day and laid it on the line.”

Rain drizzled down throughout almost the entire game at Duly Health and Care Field, but it didn’t slow down either team from putting runs on the board.

Both teams had their number one guys on the mound. For Edwardsville, it was senior Spencer Stearns and for the Crusaders it was Dylan Warda.

Stearns took the mound first as the Tigers were the home team.

He hit his first batter, but then senior Grant Huebner threw out the runner at second for the first out. It was a huge momentum booster for the Tigers early on.

Stearns walked the next batter and after a flyout, the go-ahead run was at second base. Stearns picked up the strikeout though to bring up the bats.

The bats did not do so good the first inning as Warda was able to go 1-2-3.

The first runs were scored by the Crusaders in the top of the second. Amir Gray led off the inning with a single. Bryce Nevils followed that up with a double to put Gray on third. Stearns walked Andrew Ivy and just like that the bases were loaded for Brother Rice.

Stearns picked up a popout and a flyout and it looked like he might get out of the jam, but Zion Rose had other ideas. He singled scoring Gray and Nevils to make it 2-0. Stearns got the final out to prevent any further damage.

Warda blanked the Tigers picking up a couple of K’s in the bottom of the second.

That brought Brother Rice back up to bat and they put another run on the board to make it 3-0. They wouldn’t hold that lead very long though.

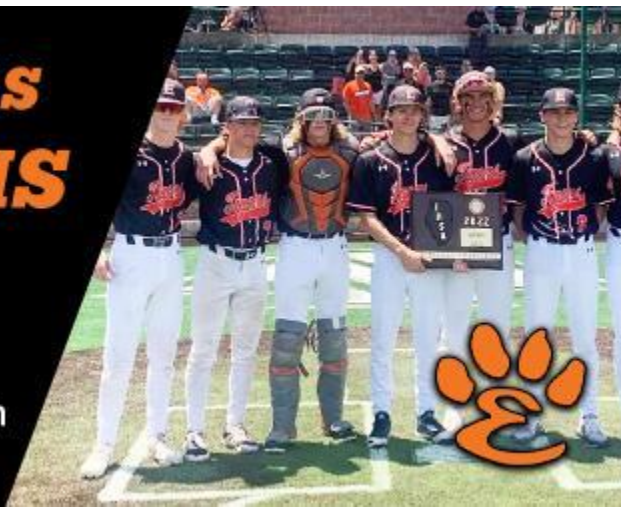
Warda picked up a strikeout to start the bottom of the third, but then he walked Huebner. Stearns hit a ball deep into right and ended up at second after an error in the outfield. Huebner was at third. Luke Range pinch ran for Stearns.

Riley Iffrig singled to score Huebner and to make it 3-1. Warda walked Caleb Copeland and Edwardsville had the bases loaded with only one out. Adam Powell was hit by a pitch which walked in a run. Montrez West pinch ran for Powell.

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With the bases still loaded, Cade Hardy hit a sacrifice fly ball to score Iffrig which tied the game at 3-3. Then one of the craziest things to do in baseball happened. West was at third after the sac fly, so after a set play, he managed to steal home to give the Tigers the lead. Edwardsville led 4-3 through three innings.

Coach Funkhouser said postgame that he has “great trust” in West and praised his performance. Funkhouser mentioned that West has played a lot of JV baseball this season but delivered a huge play when it mattered most.

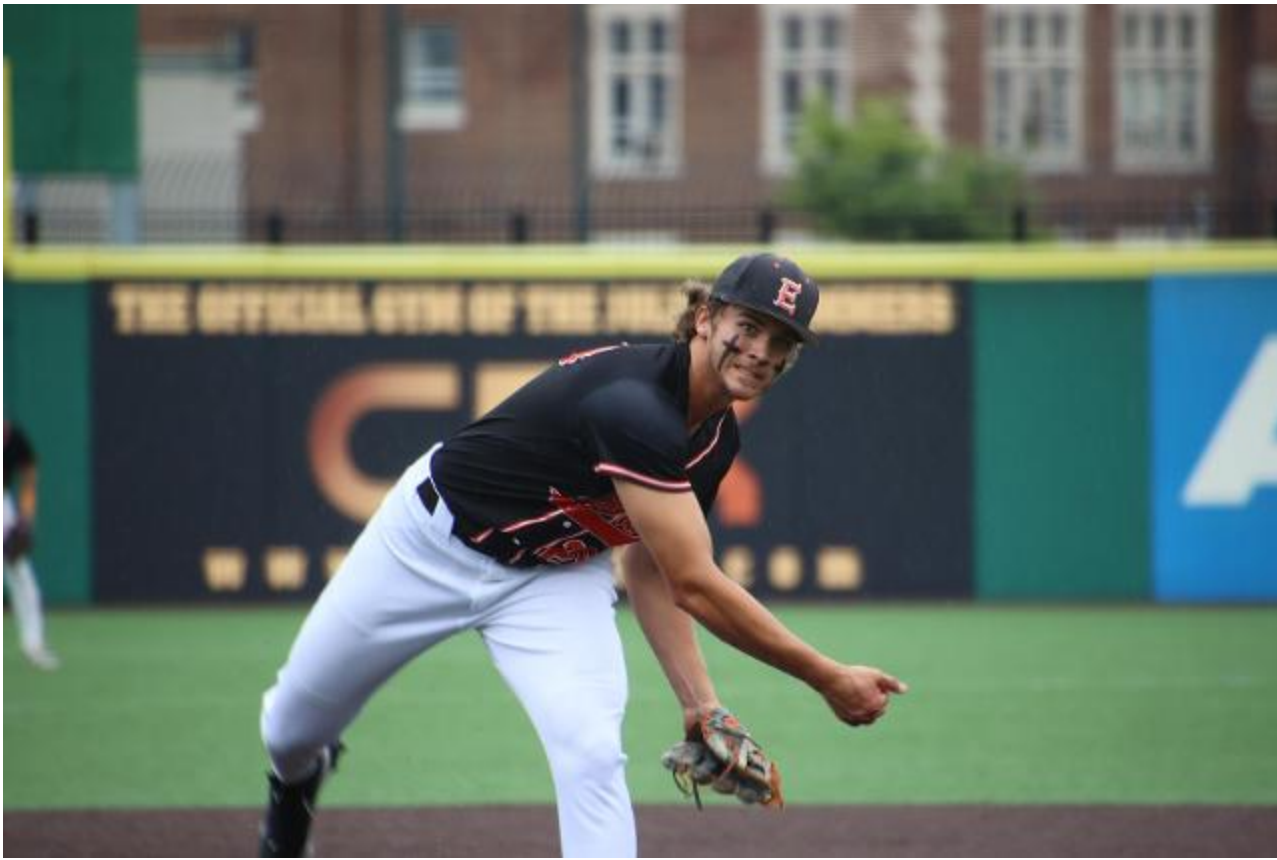
“It really brought the momentum for us,” Funkhouser said.

“I wasn’t really nervous. I kind of figured it was going to happen. We did it a lot in practice and I was looking forward to it. We got it done,” West said about the set play.



It sounds as if the Tigers had that trick waiting up their sleeve for a while and pulled the play off at a critical time in the ball game.

After all the excitement Stearns was able to keep Brother Rice at bay in his final inning.



Then the Tigers piled on some more runs for good measure.

To start the bottom of the fourth, Warda walked Cole Funkhouser, then Gannon Burns singled.

With runners on, Huebner stepped back up to the plate. He launched a two-RBI triple to clear the bases and make it 6-3. Stearns came up and hit a sac fly to score Huebner and make it 7-3 after four innings.

“Well, I stepped in the box and I kind of felt like it was going to happen. I smiled down at him and just got a fastball, drove it in the gap, and started running. That’s huge,” Huebner said about the play that blew the game wide open.

All the Tigers had to do at that point was hold on. Alec Marchetto came in to pitch the final three innings and he got the job done. He did however allow an earned run to get the score line to its final of 7-4.

“I’ve been in the fire, and I was ready for it,” Marchetto said on the bus after the win over Brother Rice. “I felt pretty comfortable going out there.”



Overall, the Tigers only combined to throw three strikeouts. The Crusaders were all over the ball and out-hit Edwardsville 7-5.

Coach Funkhouser gave the utmost respect to Brother Rice after the game.

“There’s no doubt that Brother Rice is a phenomenal team. I think their coaches do a great job and we’re happy to come out on top today,” Funkhouser finished.

Edwardsville ends Brother Rice’s season at 35-6. The Tigers move up to 35-4 and are now one win away from a second state championship within three years.

They will take on the winner between Mundelein and McHenry at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, June 11 at Duly Health and Care Field.

(Expect a full preview of the championship game first thing Saturday morning)