

Full Team Effort Leads Edwardsville To State Title In Come Back Win

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
June 12 2022 2:06 PM



JOLIET – It was a beautiful night for a baseball game Saturday at Duly Health and Care Field up in Joliet. More importantly, it was a beautiful night to win a state championship.

That's exactly what the Edwardsville High School baseball team did defeating Mundelein High School by a score of 4-3 in the Class 4A State Championship. It's the Tigers' fourth title in program history.

Head coach Tim Funkhouser was emotional after the win.

“We prepared all year to be in this environment and when we set up the schedule, and whenever they stepped up after like the third day of practice, it was just changed,” Funkhouser said about his team. “We’re not out here just to be out here. We’re out here on a mission, and then it just continued to build as the season went on.”

This game started off as an absolute nail-biter. It began with four scoreless innings with neither team giving up any ground.

Edwardsville was the away team for the game meaning they batted first. The Tigers faced starting pitcher Caden Morton. He threw four scoreless innings picking up seven strikeouts along the way.

It was his final inning of work that allowed Edwardsville to take the lead.

The top of the fifth started with senior Grant Huebner getting walked. After senior Spencer Stearns flew out, Huebner took to second and later stole third. With a runner at third, senior Adam Powel came up to the plate.

He hit an opposite-field bomb scoring Huebner and himself to make it a 2-0 ballgame.

“To be able to do that is unthinkable,” Powell said about the home run. “It’s the stuff you dream of while playing whiffle ball in the backyard. It’s just insane, I’m still processing it.”

“Off the bat, it felt good. I didn’t think it would be anywhere close to going out, maybe a foul ball but it just kept going. Until I got to second base, I didn’t even know it was gone, I just couldn’t see it anymore, so I figured it was out.”

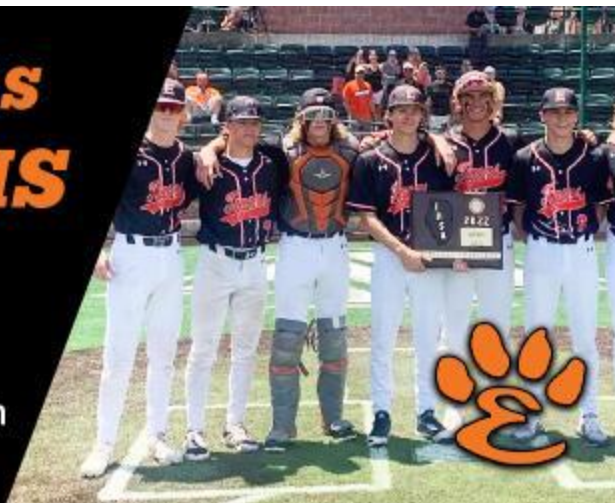
Huebner was proud of his fellow senior teammate saying it was the biggest hit of his career.

“He deserves it so much,” Huebner said.

Congratulations & Good Luck EHS Tigers!



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Unfortunately for Powell and the Tigers, their lead did not last long.

In the bottom of the fifth Edwardsville's pitcher, junior Gannon Burns, began to have a little trouble.

Burns picked up the first out routinely, with Stearns, the third baseman, making a great throw to first, but things went downhill from there.

Following that great play, Stearns allowed an error as Christopher Callas was awarded first base. Lucan Ganan pinch ran for Callas. Then Jacob Buysse singled putting runners on first and second with one out. Burns walked Connor Weik and then the bases were loaded.

Daniel Connely stepped into the batter's box and doubled off the wall scoring a couple of runs and moving Weik to third. Michael Farina hit into a fielder's choice scoring Weik, but Connely was out at third. Still, the Mustangs regained the lead at 3-2 after five innings.

Callas pitched the top of the sixth and stumped the Tigers. Burns did the same in the bottom of that inning.

So, the Tigers were up to their final at bat. They needed at least one to force extra innings.

Stearns led off the inning with a double which completely energized the Tigers who looked as if they were out of it. Luke Range pinch ran for Stearns. Junior Riley Iffrig followed up with a single moving Range to second. Junior Montrez West ran for Iffrig. Both runners stole and ended up at second and third with just one out.

Powell was up to bat again and this time hit an RBI single scoring Range from third. That tied the game at three. Junior Cade Hardy hit a sacrifice fly after that to score West and take the lead at 4-3.

“After the homer, I knew I was seeing the ball well, so I just had to put the ball in play. When you do that kind of stuff usually good things tend to happen,” Powell said.

Powell finished the day 2-4 with three RBI's. Hardy 1-3 with an RBI. Stearns went 0-3 his first at bats but it's thanks to that double in the seventh that got everything started.

Burns finished out the seventh on the mound for the Tigers. He ended up with five strikeouts and threw the whole game, something he's become known for this postseason.

“I was just trying to go out there and throw strikes and give my team a good chance to win,” Burns said after the game.

“It's crazy for me because I watched my brother play in the state championship game and lose, so, to do it, now I have bragging rights which is cool,” he said jokingly.

Gannon's older brother Kade pitched in the championship game back in 2017 but his team eventually fell 8-3.

When asked about his thoughts after trailing 3-2 after five innings, Gannon said he was confident.

“I knew that we were going to battle back. That's what we've been doing all season. That's just what we do,” Burns said.

Overall, the Tigers out-hit the Mustangs 7-5 and ended their season at 29-6.

After a lineout for Mundelein, it was Edwardsville who stormed the field and started the celebratory dog-pile.

The Tigers wrap up an exciting 36-4 campaign with their second state title in three years.

With the win, the seniors go out with a bittersweet feeling as described by Huebner.

“There's nobody else I'd rather go to state with than these guys,” he said.

“This is the best ball club I've ever been a part of. You just can't get any better than high school baseball. It's sad to come to an end, but I'm happy it went out like this.”