

Edwardsville Comes Out Strong, Newcomers Show Way As Tigers Sweep Panthers 25-13, 25-23 To Win Opener

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - The girls' volleyball team at Edwardsville High had a historic season in 2021, going 33-9 and finishing fourth in the IHSA Class 4A state finals in Bloomington-Normal.

For their 2022 debut, the Tigers came out strong, reeling off the final eight points of the first set, then holding off a furious rally in the second set to defeat Southwestern Conference rivals O'Fallon 25-13. 25-23 in the season opener Edwardsville Tuesday evening at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Tigers graduated nine seniors from last year's team and many of the new varsity players, along with the returnees from the 2021 season, played a big role in the team's opening win.

"I think these girls came fired up and wanted to show everybody what this team is about," said Edwardsville head coach Heather Ohlau, "and what we are this year."

The newer players did an outstanding job of getting things done and played well throughout the match.

"The new players, they stepped into that role," Ohlau said. "I think that's one thing we stressed early on in the preseason is that each person has a role and it's up to them to

step in and do what the team needs. I think they showed no fear, there were no nerves tonight, which is good to see, as this was our first match."





The veterans from last season helped show the way and their experience was invaluable.

"Yeah, I love the leadership that our upperclassmen are taking," Ohlau said, "especially the ones who were part of last year's team. They know what it feels like and I think they're using that experience to fuel this year and hopefully, be able to repeat."

Although the Panthers were able to rally back to within 24-23 near the end of the second set, the Tigers didn't panic and were able to clinically get the match winner through a big spike by Sydney Davis.

"It was control what we can control," Ohlau said, "do what we know how to do and work on getting that first ball tipped, because the more that you play around, your chances kind of decrease. So it was focusing on that very next ball, that first ball kill and we produced."

A point early in the match, where the Tigers got the point off a hit on the dead run fell in, was an early indication of how the night would go for the Tigers.

"Absolutely," Ohlau said. "I think that anytime, any player can make a big play that gets the team fired up. It just fuels everybody else to do better. They feel their teammates going hard and they want to do that as well."

Edwardsville played a strong defensive game as well, and it played a big role in the outcome of the match also.

"I think a strong defensive team is what it's going to take to, again, be able to compete," Ohlau said. "We've got the offensive threats again, but that defense is what gives us our offense those opportunities."

Davis had a big match to help the Tigers and her experience in last year's state run proved to be a big help for the team.

"It's nice to see what we have," Ohlau said. "These girls have been putting in the work the last three weeks and for them to be able to show and perform at that level, I think it's only up from here. I couldn't be happier with how we started our season."

Edwardsville scored five of the first set's opening nine points to go out in front 5-4, then a big save off Sara Guy's service led to the point that made it 7-4 and seemingly gave the Tigers momentum. Edwardsville took advantage of the play to score three of the next four behind Vyla Hupp's service to make it 10-5, forcing an O'Fallon time-out. The Panthers scored twice in a row to make it 10-7, with freshman Ciera Cunningham getting her shot down to make it 11-7 and trigger the match's first big run, where Hanna Matarelli served up three in a row to give Edwardsville a 14-7 lead. Later on, with the Tigers ahead 18-13, a violation against the Panthers made it 18-13 and Gouy came on to serve out the set as the Tigers, behind big plays from Cunningham, Dallas Jenkins, and Davis, scored the last seven points to take the first set 25-13.

The second set started out with the Tigers going ahead early 3-2, then scoring three in a row to increase their lead to 6-2. O'Fallon, behind strong play from Kendall Kingdon, Cecelia Venne, Alyssa Frederking, and Adeline Smith, helped the Panthers rally back to tie the set at 9-9. The teams traded points to keep the scores level at 11-11 before Edwardsville came up with three straight to take a 14-11 lead. The Tigers maintained a three-point lead up until 22-19, when Edwardsville scored twice to make it 24-19 and reach match point. O'Fallon put on a rally that got them to within 24-23 before a big kill from Davis ended the match with the Tigers taking the set 25-23 and the match 2-0.

Davis led the way with eight kills, while Hupp had seven kills and Cunningham four. Ava Waltenberger came up with three blocks, Megan Knobloch and Gouy each had 12 assists, Matarelli led with 11 digs, while Hupp and Davis each had seven digs, Gouy

served up nine points, with Matarelli and Hupp having five points each and Gouy also had a pair of aces.

The Tigers open the season 1-0 and play at Collinsville on Thursday night in a 6 p.m. start, then host their Tiger Classic tournament this weekend at Lucco-Jackson Gym, then host Belleville East in a 5:30 p.m. start next Tuesday. Ohlau felt that the season got started off the right foot with a quality win over a conference rival.

"Absolutely," Ohlau said. "Anytime you can come in against a solid O'Fallon team, I mean, O'Fallon always puts together competitive hitters and defense. it's just nice to see where we stand in our first game, so now, we can just roll."





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