

PERFECT SEASON: Edwardsville finishes unblemished season with 4-2 MVCHA playoff triumph

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EAST ALTON – Edwardsville completed The Perfect Season.

No, not the girls basketball team (though that could still happen) – the hockey team.

The Tigers put the final touches on a 22-0-0 Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association season with a 4-2 win over Triad in Game 2 of the best-of-three Class 2A Final at East Alton Ice Arena Thursday night, thanks to two third-period goals from Tyler Hinterser. The win clinched the Tigers' fourth MVCHA Class 2A championship in a row.

[Watch Edwardsville vs Triad MVCHA Playoffs video below:](#)

“It's pretty exciting to accomplish this,” said Tiger coach Jason Walker. “It wasn't a goal we had set for ourselves at the start of the season, but I can't say enough about how these kids prepared mentally all season long for every game.”

“We just kept working and fighting for it,” Hinterser said. “We had a team that had a lot of skill.”

The win didn't come easy though. The Knights gave the Tigers everything they had; every inch of territory was contested the entire evening. “We threw everything at them, including the kitchen sink, and it was just about enough,” said Knight coach Pat Culiberk. “We showed a lot of heart against them; (Knight goalie) Nathan (Funk) was just cool in net, facing 11 shots and stopping them all in the first period.

“We put a lot of our kids in unfamiliar roles this season, especially our seniors, and everyone responded. Our seniors were the best we've had and we're going to miss them.”

Indeed, Funk was up to the challenge, making several good saves in the opening 13 minutes, and the Knights had several good chances as well that were turned back by Tiger goaltender Brady Griffin.

Edwardsville finally broke on top early in the second when Carson Lewis fired a shot that got past Funk to the upper left corner at 2:55, Christian Trevino assisting on the play. Nearly four minutes later, the Tigers took a two-goal lead when Tyler Schaffer picked up the puck from Hinterser and scored.

The Knights, undaunted, kept coming at Edwardsville and, with Justin Warta off for cross-checking, halved the lead when Kyle Kowalski took a pass from Blake Takmajian and fired one past Griffin with 1:32 left in the second, making it 2-1 in Edwardsville's favor through two periods.

Hinterser himself got his first goal just five seconds into a power play when, with Kowalski off for holding, got a feed from the faceoff from Jake Aurelio and scored at 1:23 to restore the two-goal lead. Triad bounced back and, with a two-man advantage

thanks to simultaneous penalties on the Tigers, cut the lead to 3-2 when Takmajian beat Griffin to the right side, Kowalski and Michael Cortivo getting assists.

Both teams kept grinding away, trying to get either the tying or clinching goal, and in the final minute, Culiberk pulled Funk for a sixth attacker to try to get the tying goal and force a shootout. But with 25.5 seconds left, Hinterser gained possession, skated into goal and scored into the empty net to seal the win.

Edwardsville outshot Triad 31-20, with Griffin making 18 saves and Funk 27 saves. Triad was 1-for-2 on the power play, while Edwardsville scored once in four attempts.

“We had a really goal-oriented group this year,” Walker said. “We're losing a lot of seniors from this team, but we'll still have some good players back, including our two biggest scorers (Hinterser, a junior, and Schaffer, a sophomore). It'll be a lot of fun.”