

Edwardsville slips past Quincy to advance to championship

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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IHSA CLASS 4A EDWARDSVILLE REGIONAL SEMIFINAL

EDWARDSVILLE – Edwardsville's boys basketball team has had a bit of a rough go of it lately.

The Tigers got Dan Marinko back for their IHSA Class 4A Edwardsville Regional semifinal match against Quincy after suffering a cut thumb against O'Fallon, but lost

Kyler Davis to a broken arm he suffered in a collision in their regular-season finale against Belleville East.

Then the Tigers had to play without sophomore power forward A.J. Epenesa for stretches at a time against the Blue Devils because of foul trouble.

One thing the Tigers do have, though, is resiliency, and it came through as EHS held off a late charge to eliminate QHS 53-49 at Lucco-Jackson Gym Tuesday night. The win put the Tigers into Friday's 7 p.m. regional title tilt against a familiar foe – Alton, who eliminated Granite City earlier in the evening.

The winner earns a berth in the Pekin Sectional next week against the Belleville West Regional winner (that sectional semifinal game will be played at Belleville East at 7 p.m. March 10).

Tigers coach Mike Waldo wasn't surprised by the Tigers' resiliency. "We've practiced with different combinations," Waldo said, "and we've had guys step up when we needed them to and played well. Anytime you have a Kyler Davis out of the lineup, it hurts you because he's an excellent player and good teammate.

"Quincy's a well-coached team; they have a lot of set plays that they run well and makes it hard to guard against. We did a good job executing on offense, passing and screening well and Jordan Harris had an excellent game on defense."

One thing that helped the Tigers early on was some red-hot shooting from Oliver Stephen; the sophomore had 11 points in the opening term on three three-pointers from the corners and a driving lay-in to stake EHS to an 18-11 lead at quarter time. "We had some set plays we ran and screens that helped get me open," Stephen said.

Edwardsville extended the lead to 22-13 early in the second on a free throw from Chrys Colley and an inside bucket from Epenesa, then extended the lead gradually before Stephen hit on a three-ball at the siren to give the Tigers a 29-19 lead at the long break.

Edwardsville got the lead to as much as 12 in the third term but the Blue Devils started chipping away in the final quarter. Scores by Mark Smith and Harris kept Quincy at bay throughout the term, sealing it when Stephen connected on a pair of free throws with 1:09 left.

Smith came away with 20 points and Stephen 18, with Harris and Epenesa getting six each. Parker Bland led Quincy with 12 points, with Mike Dade adding 11.

Now comes a third meeting this season between the two SWC rivals; the Redbirds have defeated the Tigers in both encounters this season.

“Alton does some good things and has had a good season,” Waldo said. “But every game is different; we’ll get out there and prepare for them and just do our best.”

