

Alton outlasts Edwardsville in IHSA Class 4A regional championship game

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Twice before this season, Alton had defeated Edwardsville using a fast-paced running game.

Given a third shot against the Redbirds, Tiger coach Mike Waldo decided a different approach was in order.

Waldo decided to use a deliberately paced slowdown game to try to keep the ball away from Alton as much as possible.

For the most part, it worked – but Alton showed they could play the Tigers' game as well, and used a 14-4 third quarter to down EHS 44-27 in their IHSA Class 4A Edwardsville Regional final Friday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The win moved Alton, now 26-4, to Tuesday's Pekin Sectional semifinal against Collinsville, who stunned East St. Louis 58-50 to win the Belleville West Regional. That game, set for 7 p.m. Tuesday, will be played at Belleville East. Edwardsville ended the year at 18-11.

“It's a satisfying win,” said Redbird coach Eric Smith. “They played a different way against us than they had before, but we did what we had to do; we stuck to our game plan.

“If teams want to come out and slow things down on us, we can do that too.”

“We wanted to go to a deliberate pace,” said Tiger coach Mike Waldo, “and when you take a group of high school kids, ask them to play a certain way and they go out and do it the way we asked them to – they're a great group of guys.

“Their work ethic is great and they executed things the way we wanted to.”

Alton's quickness and size played a key role in the regular-season wins, and Waldo wanted to limit their possessions in this matchup. “They're quick and long,” Waldo said, “so it's hard to hold on to the ball for long. They showed they have a good delay game as well, so give them credit.”

Edwardsville's game plan became clear early on; they took a very early lead on a layup by Oliver Stephen, but the Redbirds went deliberate as well and built up just a 6-2 lead halfway through the first term on a pair of baskets from Bryan Hudson and a jumper from Carlos Anderson. Edwardsville got to 6-4 late when A.J. Epenesa scored inside the paint, but Darrius Edwards floated a jumper with 1:13 to go to extend the lead to 8-4, which is where the quarter ended.



The deliberate pace by both teams continued throughout the second term; neither team was willing to start to run, but worked the ball and took advantage of good scoring chances, leading the Redbirds ahead only 14-10 at the long break. Alton finally took control for good when steals led to a three-point shot by Anderson and a long two-point shot from Darrius Edwards.

Any lingering doubt was eliminated when Edwards took a rebound and drove downcourt for a layup and a free throw with 2:39 to go in the final term. As the final buzzer sounded, the Redbirds and their student supporters gathered together with the regional plaque.

Anderson ended up with 18 points for the Redbirds, with Darrius Edwards and Isaiah Thurmond scoring eight each. Epenesa led the Tigers with 16 points, with Mark Smith scoring four and Dan Marinko three.



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