

East Side Survives And Advances Past Lemont In Wild Finish - Set Up Third State Championship Appearance In Four Seasons

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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EAST ST. LOUIS - The East St. Louis Senior High School Flyers football team (11-2) is headed back to the IHSA Class 6A State Championship game for the third time in four years.

The Flyers will be seeking their 10th state title in program history this Saturday when they take on the Prairie Ridge Wolves (12-1) at 1 p.m. inside Memorial Stadium on the campus of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

East Side made it to the state championship game last season but fell by a heartbreaking score of 37-36. They lost to an undefeated Cary Grove team.

The 2020-21 season did not have a postseason due to the pandemic.

The year before that was East St. Louis' last title in the 2019-20 season. Who did they play in the championship game? The Prairie Ridge Wolves.

That season the Flyers went undefeated and won the game against the Wolves by a score of 43-21.

But how did these two teams get back here?

Prairie Ridge did so by averaging 52.5 points offensively during these playoffs putting up scores of 63-55, 57-22, 69-28, and 21-19. They've scored a lot of points, but they've also allowed a lot of points.

The Flyers also average a high amount of points with 47 per game. They weren't bothered in the first three rounds of these playoffs, shutting out their opponents with scores of 71-0, 40-0, and 45-0.

The Flyers ran into their toughest test last week in the semifinals when they were down 14-0 to undefeated Lemont (12-0 at the time) after the first quarter. They still trailed 14-12 heading into the fourth.

They escaped with a narrow win by outscoring Lemont 20-15 in the fourth quarter, going on to win the game by a score of 32-29. And what a wild finish this game had.

Putting the team on his back that game was star running back sophomore TaRyan Martin. He ran for four touchdowns, including two in the fourth quarter and 340 yards total. A short 10-yard run gave his team their first lead at 18-14, but Lemont quickly responded to flip the script back to 21-18.

Two plays into the Flyers' following drive, Martin found a hole and ran it 76 yards to the house. After a successful two-point conversion run from senior running back Marquis Palmer East Side regained the lead 26-21, but we still weren't done there.

Palmer received his first unsportsmanlike conduct penalty after celebrating a little bit too hard.

On his team's pursuing drive he scored a 33-yard touchdown to extend the lead to 32-21. And then he received his second unsportsmanlike conduct penalty when he was out on defense after his team had a huge tackle for loss. He was ejected from the semifinal and will miss out on the state championship game.

Lemont ended up scoring another TD with a successful two-point conversion to get the score to its eventual final of 32-29.

Junior QB for the Flyers Robert "Pops" Battle didn't throw the ball a lot against Lemont, going for just 24 yards on eight attempts. He went 3-8 with an interception.

He typically likes to keep the ball himself as he's got 10 rushing touchdowns on the season to go with another 21 throwing TDs. He's got a completion rate of just under 60% this season.

The Flyers will look to wash away the memories of last year's championship game result and leave Champaign with the program's 10th state title.

Memorial Stadium is located at 1402 S. 1st St., Champaign, IL 61820. Tickets can be bought at the door for \$15.

Those unable to attend the game can watch it on the [IHSA Network](#) or stream it on [NFHS Network](#).

