

Edwardsville Defense Holds Down O'Fallon, But Missed Shots Are Costly In 45-43 Loss To Panthers

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Edwardsville defense played well, holding top player Koby Wilmoth to four points, but guard Rini Harris picked up the slack with 13 points and some missed shots down the stretch proved costly as the Panthers defeated the Tigers 45-43 in Edwardsville's home opener Tuesday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Tigers played very well against a Panther team that's expected to be a contender in the Southwestern Conference and executed their game plan very well. The missed shots, particularly in the paint, were a problem for Edwardsville.

"I just talked to our team; I think we did a couple of things that really gave us a chance to win," said Tigers' head coach Dustin Battas. "First was holding their best player (Wilmoth) to four points gave us a chance and taking care of the basketball. We had nine turnovers, which isn't bad. So, I thought we gave ourselves a chance to win, even though shots weren't falling.

"On our stat sheet, we were 13-for-30 at shots at the rim. So that means we got 30 post touches and only made 13 of those, so I talked to our guys, if we make two more of those, we win the game. So we did a lot of things well, we competed hard, we tried hard, we really executed our game plan well, we just missed a few shots around the rim that would like to have back."

It's a very encouraging sign for the Tigers that they were able to stay with the Panthers for the entire game.

"Exactly," Battas said. "I told them after the game it shouldn't be any feeling of despair, it's a feeling of a little bit of disappointment. I think when you lose, it never feels good. But I think they're wise enough to know we competed hard, that we were right there with a really good team that's going to finish highly ranked in our conference and win a lot of games. So, they're a confident bunch and that comes from our preparation. So they're disappointed that they lost, but they realized there are a couple more things we could have done a little better and we could have had a very good chance to win."

That O'Fallon was able to make plays and shots that they needed to near the end of the game is a testament to how well the Tigers played.

"Yeah, O'Fallon's a good team," Battas said. "They have good players and coach (Brian) Muniz does a really good job. They've got guys who can shoot and guys that can drive, so there's a lot of things you worry about on defense. And credit to them, they made a few tough shots there at the end and they made their free throws down the stretch and that was the difference."

An early basket by Isayah Kloster and a three from Jonathan Stump gave the Tigers a quick 5-0 lead to start, which became 7-2 after an exchange of baskets. A three-point play by Harris cut the lead to 7-5 and helped spark a mini-run by the Panthers to tie the game 8-8, but a Kloster basket in the lane gave Edwardsville a 10-8 lead at quarter time.

A.J. Tillman hit early on in the second to extend the Tiger lead to 12-8, but a three from Isaiah Camper and a pair of from Wilmoth and Harris, the second on a breakaway dunk, gave O'Fallon a 15-12 lead, forcing an Edwardsville time out. Kloster got the Tigers back to within 15-14, but a three from Camper put the Panthers on a 7-4 run to end the quarter, giving O'Fallon a 22-18 halftime lead.

At the start of the second half, a 6-4 spurt by the Panthers extended the lead to 28-21, but the Tigers fought back and were able to cut the lead to 30-27 after three quarters on a basket by Malik Allen. At the start of the fourth, a three from Will Allen, Jr. gave O'Fallon a 33-27 lead, and the Panthers maintained a six-point lead through much of the quarter.



The Tigers hung in and got baskets from both Tillman and Kloster to put the Tigers to within 39-37 late. Both Jalen Smith and Harris hit both ends of one-and-ones to increase the Panther Lead to 45-37 with less than a minute to go, but a three from Tillman and a free throw by Allen cut the lead to 45-41, and a putback from Tillman at the buzzer made the final score 45-43 for O'Fallon.

Harris led the Panthers with his 13 points, while Smith hit for 10 points, Camper scored eight points, Jaeden Bush came up with seven points, Wilmoth had four points and Brown had three points.

Tillman led the Tigers with a career-high 14 points, while Kloster added 13 points, Stump had seven points, Allen scored six points, Iose Epenesa hit for two points and Kris Crosby scored a single point.

The Panthers are now 4-2 on the season, while the Tigers go to 2-3 and faced a very highly ranked Belleville East team on the road Friday night at 7:30 p.m., then meet another highly ranked team in Mary Institute-Country Day in the Scott Credit Union Edwardsville Shootout Saturday evening at 5 p.m.

"The week does not get any easier," Battas said. "I told the guys that. We can't dwell on this very long, we just have to have a good practice tomorrow to get ready for the rest of the week."

As usual, the team chemistry is very strong with the Tigers and Battas knows it's a confident group that'll go into battle with both the Lancers and Rams.

"I like our guys," Battas said. "I like our guys, they like each other, they're a good group to work with, so I like our chances moving forward."



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