

SWEET 16: Alton defeats Collinsville in sectional to move ahead to title matchup

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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BELLEVILLE – The Alton boys' basketball team has a lot of ways they can beat you.

Want to slow it down? They'll be patient. Want to run and gun? They'll oblige you. Want to fire jumpers from behind the three-point arc? They'll match you shot for shot.

Collinsville elected to see if the Redbirds could beat them from the outside in their IHSA Class 4A Pekin Sectional semifinal match at Belleville East Tuesday night.

Beat them they did, as Alton hit nine times from behind the arc- four times by senior Darrius Edwards and another three times from senior LaVonte Hobbs – as the Redbirds managed to shake off a pesky Kahoks 67-58.

The win advanced the Redbirds, 27-4, to Friday night's sectional final against Normal Community, who eliminated Rock Island 58-51 in Pekin, with a trip to next Tuesday's Normal Supersectional against the Blue Island Eisenhower Sectional winner at stake; that game will be played at Redbird Arena at Illinois State. The Kahoks were eliminated with a record of 20-12.

“We wanted early on to see if they could shoot the three-pointer,” said Kahok coach Darin Lee. “When you go up against a team that talented, it's like having to pick your poison. We saw the tapes of the games we had against them earlier this season, and those times, they didn't really shoot that well.

“This time, they did, and hats off to them.”



In last Friday's Edwardsville Regional final win against the host Tigers, Hobbs hadn't played that much; against the Kahoks, he stepped it up and hit the key three-balls. Redbird coach Eric Smith thought that was a big key to the game.

“We've had different guys step up for us all year,” Smith said. “Friday night, LaVonte hardly played the other night, but tonight, he steps up and becomes the hero.

“Watching kids like what we have succeed, that's what's really great. We've got kids that can do a lot of things,” Smith said. “We showed quite a bit of patience when we needed to, and we shot the ball much better tonight than we had against them the first two games.”

Alton's defensive pressure was relentless, but the Kahoks, Lee felt, handled it well. “I'm proud of them for how we handled their pressure,” Lee said. “They're a very quick team and they're hard to cover, but we did a nice job of handling their pressure.”

The game itself started out like it was going to be a see-saw affair; Collinsville took a very early lead on a basket from Brett Langley and a three-pointer from Ronnie Midgett, but the Redbirds took the lead for good the next trip down the floor when Edwards connected from three-point range and tried to open up a lead, but the Kahoks kept it close on scores from Anfirnee Wilkerson and found themselves trailing only 16-11 at the first break.

Things remained close throughout the second term, Collinsville pulling to within a point at 18-17 with about five minutes left in the half, but Alton kept coming up with enough answers to keep CHS at bay and held just a 27-22 lead at the long break.

Alton finally pulled away in the final quarter, getting key buckets from Bryan Hudson and Isaiah Thurmond to get some breathing room, the lead finally extending out to 15 points twice before the Kahoks kept finding ways to keep things close, but they could get no closer than nine points.

Darrus Edwards wound up with 16 points, with Hudson and Anderson each scoring 14 to lead the Redbirds. Emmondre Rickman led all scorers with 25 points for the Kahoks, with Wilkinson adding 19.



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