



# **Tillman Hits Game-Tying Three, Key Free Throws To Help Tigers Win Over Belleville East 33-32, Holds Jordan Pickett To 10 Points**

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
February 4 2023 6:50 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - A.J. Tillman hit a game-tying three - the only three of the night for either team - then hit key free throws down the stretch as Edwardsville pulled off a major 33-32 win over Southwestern Conference leader Belleville East 33-32 in a boys basketball game played Friday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.



The night was a special one in many ways, as the new inductee class for the Edwardsville High Sports Hall of Fame was introduced before the game, and for the second consecutive year, the Tigers wore throwback uniforms honoring Lincoln High School for Black History Month, playing as the Lincoln Trojans.

The game itself was a tooth-and-nail battle between both teams in which Edwardsville held the Lancers' best player, Jordan Pickett, to 10 points and the rest of the East lineup to single digits in a key game in the SWC title race.

"A great win for us, for our guys," said Trojans coach Dustin Battas, "that's a feel-good win that our guys really laid it on the line all week in preparation. I told them I was really proud of how they handled the week. We thought we were going to have a game on Monday (against East St. Louis SIUE Charter, a game that was postponed due to the ice storm that hit Sunday overnight). That game got postponed and you have a long week with no game. We got right to work on Belleville East on Tuesday and we really prepared well. And we think, holding them to 32 points, was a great feat by our guys.

So, that was the key to our success tonight, was our preparation and our defense carrying over into the game."

That the Trojans held East to 32 points, all without conceding a three-point shot all night, is a credit to his players.

"It takes a lot to play good defense against a really good team that's well-coached like them," Battas said. "They've got a lot of weapons in there, they're in good spots, that makes it hard. Our guys had to work really hard, physically and also mentally to remember our scouting report, and who can do what. We had some great individual efforts by Kris (Crosby), Malik (Allen), and Johnnie Robinson, when he comes into guard. Isayah (Kloster) was excellent in his help and recovery, and A.J. guarding (Mason Mosley), he's a good player. So it's very much a team effort and there's a lot that goes into that, even with scout guys in practice, running all their actions.

"So that's really hard," Battas continued. "I don't think people really realize what goes into that, but I think it's a sign of our maturity. Competitively, our guys really now can pay attention and execute things that are really going to give us a chance to beat good teams. And to do beat really good teams, you've got to practice good and execute those things and I thought that's what we did tonight."





Three players - Kloster, Allen and Tillman - all dominated the scoring, with Kloster getting points in the first half, Allen doing his work in the third quarter and Tillman coming through with his clutch three and free throws in the fourth quarter.

"Yeah, that what we think makes us good," Battas said, "is that we have guys in roles, we have guys that can do different things. They had the big guy in (Alex Jackson) in the first half, so we went to Isayah a lot, trying to get by him and get him to the rim and they went small in the second half to pressure us. And when you pressure us, that gives A.J. opportunities to get to the basket and we challenged him in a time-out to do just that. He was huge down the stretch, just getting to the rim and putting pressure on them. But then, Malik is always a weapon. You're just, during the game, trying to find spots where you can just get him in and find shots. He just took what the defense gave him and was ready to make them and made a big free throw for us late. And he did an excellent job on defense as well."

The two teams opened the game by trading baskets, with East leading by not more than four points, with Pickett scoring to make it 8-4 and Kloster countering with a basket in the lane to make it 8-6 for the Lancers after the first quarter. Free throws by Pickett and a basket by Tallis Lowery early in the second gave East a 12-6 lead, but the Trojans came back as Kloster hit on three in a row to tie the game at 12-12, which is where the score stood at halftime.

Crosby hit on a great move to the basket to start the second half, giving the Trojans their first lead at 14-12, and afterward, a pair of Crosby free throws and a floater from Allen gave Lincoln an 18-14 lead. The teams exchanged points until a three-point play from Jackson Muse allowed the Lancers to cut the lead to 22-21 at the end of the third quarter. At the start of the fourth quarter, the two sides exchanged the lead three times before Pickett started to take charge with a basket and a pair of free throws to give East a 29-24 lead. Tillman hit the front end of two separate one-and-ones to cut the Lancer lead to 29-26, then hit his key three with 2:14 left to tie the game 29-29. Another Tillman free throw gave the Trojans the lead at 30-29 with 1:21 left before a basket from Savion Mitchell lifted the Lancers into the lead at 31-30 with 1:02 to go. Tillman drove to the basket to score with 47.3 seconds left to give Lincoln the lead right back at 32-31 and an exchange of free throws gave the Trojans a 33-32 lead with 5.7 seconds left. The two teams called their final time-outs to set up their strategy and the inbound pass got away and Lincoln was able to run out the clock and take the thrilling 33-32 win.

Tillman led the Trojans with 12 points, while Kloster hit for 10 points, Allen had nine points and Crosby scored two points. To go along with Pickett's 10 points, Mitchell hit for eight points, both Antwine Wilson and Lowery scored four points apiece and Darien Singleton and Muse had three points each.

The Lancers are now 22-4, while Edwardsville goes to 16-8, winners of three straight, five of their last six, and are 12-3 in their last 15 games. The Tigers go to Waterloo on Saturday night in a 7 p.m. tip-off, then play at Mascoutah on Tuesday and at East St. Louis at Lindenwood University-Belleville next Friday night, with both games starting at 7:30 p.m.





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