

# **EHS Girls Basketball Players Celebrate With 'Exciting Senior Night'**

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February 8 2023 1:29 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - The five members of the Edwardsville girls basketball Class of 2023 -- Ashlyn Hauk, Kaitlyn Morningstar, Ella Cook, Dallas Jenkins, and Emerson Weller - played their final home game on Tuesday, a 58-28 Senior Night win over St. Louis Lutheran North, at Lucco-Jackson Gym, and celebrated their contributions to the team and program in a postgame reception in the school commons.

In postgame interviews, the five seniors, who were honored with their families in the annual pregame ceremonies, reflected back on their time with the program and their feelings on their final home game.

"It feels really good," Weller said. "The best part of it is just to be out there, all five of us seniors together, because we really haven't had a chance to do that, with some illnesses and injuries. So it was a really fun game."

The Tigers dominated from the opening tip and never looked back as Weller enjoyed her final chance to be able to play with her fellow seniors.

"Yeah, they're like my family," Weller said, "and it means everything to play with them."

Going into the game, Weller had many feelings about her final home game of her high school career.

"I was excited, nervous," Weller said, "had all the emotions. It didn't really hit me until they announced our names and I was like 'oh my gosh, I was just a freshman,'" she said with a smile and laugh. "it goes by way too quick."

Hauk had similar feelings going in but was also excited for her special night.

"Just all the nerves," Hauk said with a smile. "It was just super exciting and we took the win. So it was good."

Hauk was especially happy to see Cook be able to play after missing the entire season due to a torn ACL in her knee.

"Yeah and I was super excited that Ella Cook got to get in," Hauk said, "because she had her ACL torn. And then, we just really made sure that we got everyone some buckets."

Hauk was feeling nervous going into the game, but not for the reasons one may think.

"I was super nervous, not for, like, the ball game part of it," Hauk said, "but everything else. Just like, everyone being there and supporting me."

Jenkins felt very good after the game and thought her team played well throughout.

"It was a really good win for us," Jenkins said. "I had a lot of fun."

Jenkins, who usually came off the bench to play a key role in the Tigers' success, felt she learned much from her time on the team.

"I learned a lot through all my years," Jenkins said. "I think my coaches did a really good job of teaching us not just basketball, but things about life. I think they were just really good coaches overall."

Jenkins also felt good about the game itself, in which the Tigers won their sixth straight game and are on quite the roll going into the IHSA playoffs, which begin next week.

"These wins have really kept us going and give us good energy," she said. "I think we're getting better connections and playing together, so I think we'll go pretty far."

Cook has been out the entire season, due to her knee injury, but was able to return for her final home game and scored a fourth-quarter basket to bring both the crowd and her teammates to their feet in celebration.

"I'm feeling great," Cook said. "I tore my ACL a couple of months ago and I haven't played a game yet this season, actually. So this is my first-night playing and it felt so good to go out there and score tonight."

Cook's knee is feeling better, but it will prevent her from playing any more this season.

"It's good," Cook said with a smile. "It's a little sore; that was more than I've done in. like, three months. So it felt good."

The fact that Cook was able to come back from a knee injury, much like Weller, is very important to her.

"Yeah, it's super important," Cook said. "I'm working every day to try and get it better."

Although she won't be able to play, Cook has confidence in the Tigers' chances in the IHSA playoffs.

"I'm super excited for playoffs," Cook said. "Sadly, I can't be a part of it, but I'm glad to be on the bench to support my teammates."

Morningstar also was very happy to get the win on Senior Night and was also happy for her teammates.

"I'm feeling great," Morningstar said. "I'm glad we could get a team win tonight and just complete the Senior Night. It's a really special night for sure."

The final home game was climactic of the four years of hard work that Morningstar and her fellow seniors put in, and she was very happy for everything and everyone.

"Yeah, I just can't believe the girls that I've seen me and my teammates over these four years that we've stuck together this long," Morningstar said, "and I just can't wait to see what we all do at the next level and, like, outside of college. I just love it."

The seniors will all be going on to college, with Weller playing basketball at Missouri-St. Louis, joining her older brother Brennan, who plays on the men's team, and Morningstar going to Illinois State on a track scholarship, while Hauk, Cook and Jenkins will all be going to the University of Missouri, but won't play any sports. Still, each of the seniors has a favorite memory of playing for the Tigers.

"You know, my favorite memory was the Alton game," said Weller, "because there was so much energy and the atmosphere. But I had to change it to tonight's game, just to be able to play with those girls. They're my best friends in the whole world."

"My favorite memory, just an overall junior experience with the whole team," Hauk said. "We had a bond on and off the court and we tried to continue to do that today."

Jenkins had a similar favorite memory of the 2021-22 Tigers team.

"I really enjoyed last season, watching us go really far," Jenkins said, "and seeing the team itself and seeing how successful we were."

"My favorite memory is probably last year," Cook said. "We stayed at an overnight camp at Murray State (in Murray, Ky.) and just being with my team and bonding with them. We all, like, stayed in the same room, and talking for hours was just the best memory I have of basketball. I'll remember that forever."

Morningstar's favorite memory is also that of the previous year's team.

"Favorite memory? I don't have a certain one, but I would say probably the team chemistry from last year, my junior year," Morningstar said. "with the three seniors that are (Division)-I now. I definitely enjoyed that year a lot."