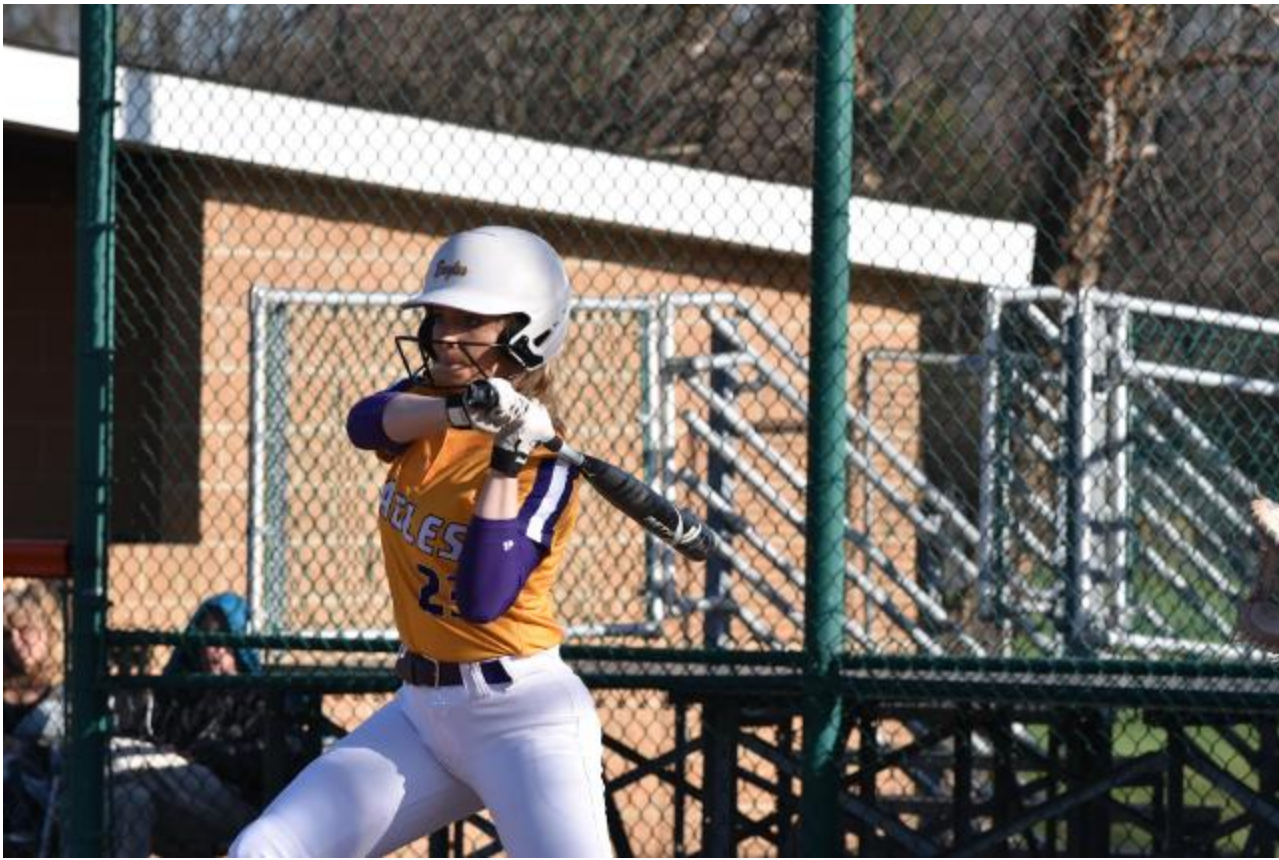


Ward's Homer Ties The Game In the Fifth, Thien Hits Three-Run Homer In Seventh, CM Gives Edwardsville First Softball Loss Of Season 6-4

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - After Riley Nelson gave Edwardsville the lead with a two-run single in the fourth, Bryleigh Ward's two-run homer over the left field fence tied the game, Civic Memorial took the lead in the sixth on an RBI single by Avari Combes, then added insurance on a three-run homer to left by Bella Thien as the Eagles defeated the Tigers 6-4 in a softball game played Monday afternoon at the Edwardsville Sports Complex.



It was the first loss of the year for Edwardsville, while the win was a very important one for CM and both teams are now 6-1 after the game. The Tigers had a good chance in the fifth to go back on top, but left the bases loaded and the Eagles were able to take advantage of their chances.

"You know, it's a great game for us to take and learn from," said first-year Tigers' coach Caty Happe. "That's a really good CM team and they did a great job of putting the ball in play and stringing some hits together. And we struggled with that today."

Although it was Edwardsville's first loss of the year after winning their first six games, it's still a great start to the season for the Tigers.

"You know, it's good," Happe said about a young team that lost much of its roster to graduation. "We don't have a ton of returning players who saw action last year. So it's going to be a lot of growing and learning. And given opportunities. These are the types of games we want to be in, this is why we schedule them. So it was a good learning experience for us."

The missed opportunities to score also serve as a learning experience for the Tigers and Happe knows that her players will learn from the misses chances and keep moving forward.

"Just keep looking up and taking at-bats each and every time," Happe said, "making sure we're hitting good pitches. We'll get there."

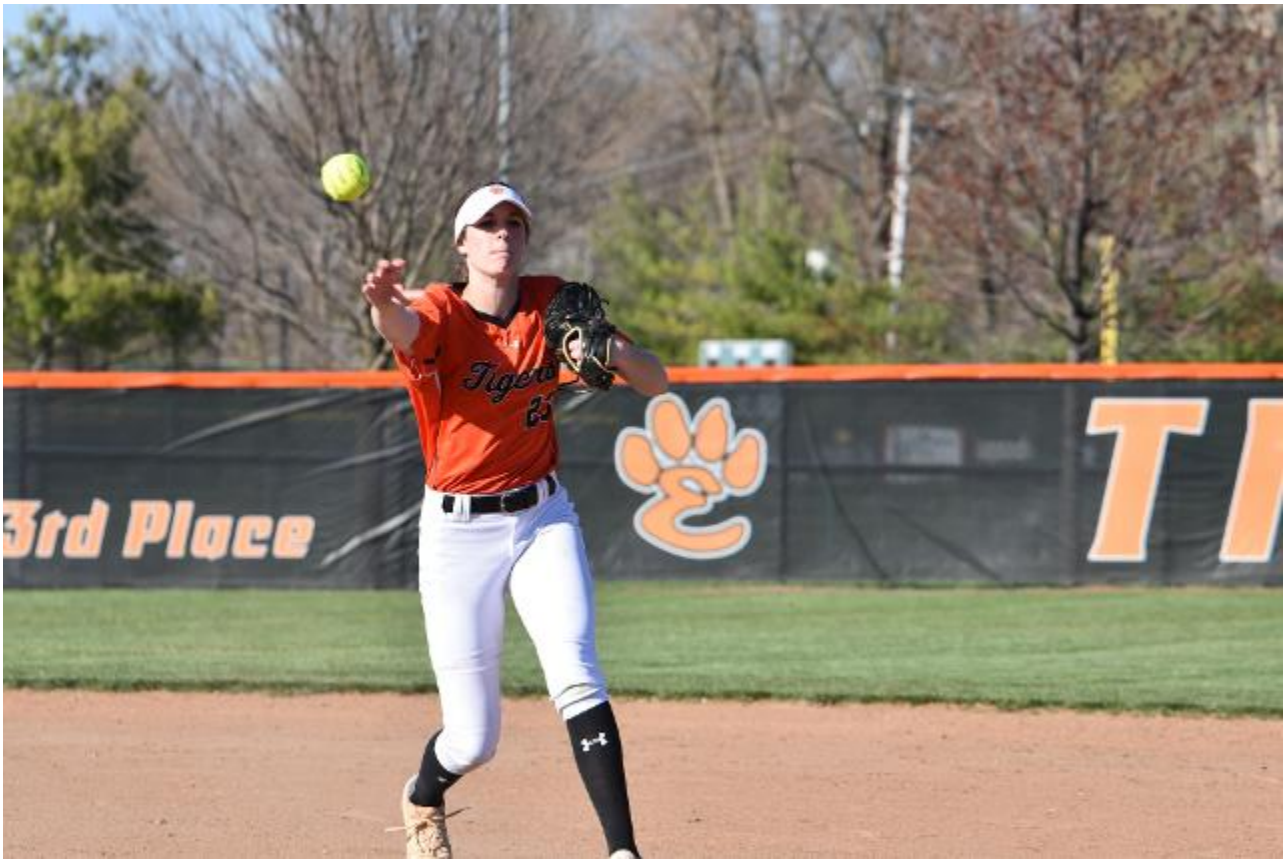


The win is a signature victory for the Eagles and head coach Lucas Angelo was very proud of his team after the game.

"It's a nice win for this program," Angelo said, "because Edwardsville, year in and year out, they're a solid team, they're very well-coached.

"And just because coach (Lori) Blade is gone doesn't mean that they're not well-coached. Caty does a great job and it's a big win for our program and our girls and they should be excited about it."





After the Tigers went ahead in the fourth, the feeling on the Eagles' bench was one of anticipation, because CM knew that they would get their chances to hit.

"We knew we were going to hit," Angelo said. "This team doesn't quit, they change their whole approach at the plate, on the mound, defensively. So we knew we were going to hit; it was just a matter of time."

Ward's homer to tie the game and Thien's homer in the seventh to give the Eagles the breathing room they would need is very indicative of how CM approached the chances.

"I just want them to hit it hard," Angelo said. "Hit it hard, good things happen and that's what they did. Bryleigh's not the typical number nine hitter. She's got decent power, she had great speed. So the thing about Bryleigh is she could be our second lead-off at the bottom of the order and that's why she there. And she did her job today."

Both starting pitchers - Megan Griffith for the Eagles and Avery Hamilton for the Tigers - dominated the proceedings for the first three innings, but Edwardsville had a chance to take the lead in the third when Graham Cobb-Culledge, who had walked and went to second on a passed ball, went to third on a fly out by Hamilton, but was called out at second on appeal for leaving the base too soon. In the fourth, the Tigers took advantage of a chance when, with two out, Jillian Hawkes reached on an error and Grace Oertle singled. Both moved up on a wild pitch and Grace Blakemore singled both runners home to give Edwardsville a 2-0 lead.

In the top of the fifth, Combes led off with a walk, was sacrificed to second and Ward hit a 1-1 offering over the left field fence to tie the game at 2-2. In the top of the sixth, Kaydence Harlan was hit by a pitch with two out, was singled to second by Danika Chester and scored on a RBI single to right-center by Combes to give the Eagles a 3-2 lead.

The Tigers had a chance to tie or take the lead in the bottom of the sixth, starting with a one-out double by Hawkes over the center fielder's head to the fence, then Oertle drew a walk. Both advanced on a wild pitch and one out later, pinch hitter Avery Shaw drew a walk to load the bases, but a fly out to center ended the inning.

Hamilton struck out the first two batters to start the seventh, but back-to-back singles by Griffith and Lauren Hardy set up Thien, who hit a full count pitch over the left field fence that upped the Eagles' lead to 6-2. Walks to Skylar Johnson and Harlan furthered the inning, which was ended by a ground out to short.

The Tigers rallied with a one out triple by Hamilton and a two-run homer by Zoie Boyd over the same left field fence, but Jillian Lane popped back to the pitcher and on the first

pitch to Hawkes, Hardy made a spectacular sliding catch in foul ground to left to end the game and give the Eagles their 6-4 win.

Both teams are now 6-1 and for the Eagles, they face O'Fallon on Tuesday at home, then are at Freeburg Thursday, both games starting at 4:30 p.m., and play a doubleheader on Friday at Trenton Wesclin on Friday with the first game set for 6 p.m. In the words of Angelo, it's time to go back to work for CM.

"We gotta go back to work tomorrow," Angelo said. "We've got O'Fallon, Freeburg and a doubleheader with Wesclin on Friday. So time to go back to work."

Angelo also has some good things to say about Griffith, Chester and Hardy as well.

"Couldn't say enough about Lauren Hardy in left field," Angelo said. "She made an unbelievable catch and she's seeing the ball well, Danika's seeing the ball well. So I like the situation and position these girls have put themselves in."

The Tigers open their Southwestern Conference season Tuesday at home against Alton, then play at Belleville West Thursday, both games starting at 4:30 p.m., then host Triad Friday in a 12-noon start. Happe is looking ahead to getting the conference season started.

"We've got Alton tomorrow, then we've got West coming up," Happe said "so lots of very good hitting teams. So we expect to see more of this and continue trudging along."

But one thing that remains consistent is how the Tigers competed for the entire seven innings, staying in the game until the final out.

"Yeah, I think they're doing a good job competing," Happe said. "They competed today. They didn't give up come to the last inning and just continue to fight and always have that will to win."



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