

Tigers Battle Back To Within One, But McMinn's Hat Trick Helps Panthers Pick Up Meaningful Conference Victory

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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O'FALLON – In a clash between two Southwestern Conference powerhouses, the O'Fallon Panthers hosted the Edwardsville Tigers Thursday night in a pivotal girl's soccer game.

After a quick start, three goals in the first 25 minutes, O'Fallon was able to hold on to a 4-2 win. The Panthers remain unbeaten on the season (8-0-1) and in the SWC (6-0). The Tigers fall to 5-2 on the season and 3-2 in the SWC, both times losing to O'Fallon.

The first meeting was a 1-0 defeat for the Tigers in a game that was called off at halftime due to continuing heavy rainfall. In that game Edwardsville head coach Abby Federmann said that she believed her team would have at least tied the game if it had continued.

Thursday night was a perfect one for soccer. Temps were in the mid-70s at kick-off as the sun set throughout the match.

It was O'Fallon who came out and dominated possession for the opening half hour. In that time they scored three times.

"I think our girls came out, they had a good game plan," O'Fallon head coach Justin Judiscak said. "We had an idea of how to attack this Edwardsville defense, and they executed it well and saw some goals go in the back of the net."

The Panthers broke the tie in the 8th minute when Claire Nieroda flew down the left wing and right past a couple of defenders. She crossed it into Kiley McMinn who put it away comfortably.

McMinn doubled the lead when she got on the end of another cross in the 17th minute, this time from Addison Bauldus' free kick. McMinn rose up for the header to make it 2-0.

The hot start continued for O'Fallon when in the 25th minute Allie Tredway made a heads-up play. With the ball bouncing at her feet, she realized the Edwardsville goalkeeper, Lainey Wiegers, was off her line, so Tredway lobbed the ball over her from right around the 18-yard box to make it 3-0.

After this goal, the Tigers stepped up their intensity. It led to their best shot yet in the 35th minute from Kylie Peel, but it soared over the crossbar.

Edwardsville kept up the pace and it led to their breakthrough with just 43 seconds left in the half. It was Peel who pounced on a loose ball inside the 18. She ran onto the ball and hit it first time toward the back post to make it 3-1 heading into halftime.

The Panthers opened up the second half with a chance that newly subbed into the game goalkeeper Genny Burroughs was forced to push wide as her first real test in the game.

The Tigers played at their best in the opening 30 minutes of the second half. They were pressing high, forcing the Panthers into making mistakes, and it paid off.

Having a quiet night thus far was Olivia Baca, not to her own fault, but O'Fallon's defense was just dominant. She finally got on the board in the 56th minute when her left-footed shot was rifled into the top right corner. It all happened on a fast break as she used her speed to get by a Panthers' defender.

Baca had a chance to tie the game when her team received a free kick from about 20 yards out. It was a perfect spot for Baca to take it from, and she hit it well, but the play was called dead after some interference in the wall. The Panthers goalkeeper, Kendall Joggerst, made a great save anyway to keep it out.

Kind of against the run of play, O'Fallon grabbed their fourth in the 76th minute. After a well-thought-out, trick play free kick routine, McMinn once again found the ball bouncing toward her and she slammed it in to wrap up the scoring on the night as well as her hat trick.

Coach Judiscak had some strong opinions on McMinn postgame.

"As a senior, I've got to enjoy all the moments I can, because, to me, I've had some great players in the program, but she's the best player I've ever coached," he said.

"She's such a complete player, can do all the things, and just has a motor to keep playing. Very blessed to have her in the program."

Both coaches knew to expect a battle but for Edwardsville, this one was a bit different.

"You know what to expect, but then you don't," Edwardsville head coach Abby Federmann said.

"Our philosophy forever is, we try not to adjust to them, we try to make them adjust to us. It didn't work, and it's too hard to make giant adjustments during a half at this level. We could have used some help with our formation, could have used some help with our keeper, so those were the changes we had to make at the half, and that's just how the game goes," she said.

It's still a little early in the season, but Federmann suggests that her side will see O'Fallon again in the postseason, and it is a likely possibility.

The two met last year in the sectional semifinals and Edwardsville won 2-0 before going out in the super sectionals to the eventual state champs Metea Valley.

For O'Fallon, they won't play again until Tuesday in Alton for yet another conference clash. That game is set for 6:30 p.m.

As for Edwardsville, they'll be back in action this weekend in the St. Joseph's Tournament. The Tigers take on St. Joe's today, April 14, at 4 p.m. then have a double header tomorrow against Cor Jesu and Incarnate Word.