

Tigers Show Resilience, Have Many Contributors To 33-9 Season To Win Second Straight Class 4A State Championship

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - The 2023 Edwardsville High School baseball team made plenty of history in going on to a 33-9 record and their second consecutive IHSA Class 4A state championship, which the Tigers won over Chicago Brother Rice Catholic 6-4 on June 10 at Duly Health and Care Field in Joliet.

The Tigers had a winning streak of seven early on and ended the season with a 10-game winning streak, while in between, won the Southwestern Conference title with an 8-2 record, finished second in the USA High School Invitational tournament to Father McGivney Catholic in Millington, Tenn., lost back-to-back games only twice and showed tremendous resiliency and competitiveness all season long.

The senior class will go down in Edwardsville history as one of the most successful and decorated in the program's history, even after having the entries 2020 season canceled, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that swept through both the state and the nation.

"What the Class of '23 was able to do during their time at EHS was remarkable and historic," said long-time Tiger coach Tim Funkhouser, who won his 800th career game in the sectional finals on June 3rd in a 3-2 win over Minooka.

"These guys missed their entire freshman baseball season due to COVID, but maximized what time they did have after that."

Senior first baseman Riley Iffrig and right fielder Caeleb Copeland were three-year starters for the Tigers, who made big impacts on the team during their careers, as Iffrig hit .363 with seven homers and 45 RBIs this season, while Copeland hit .413 with two homers and 37 RBIs. Second baseman Cole Funkhouser hit .400 with five home runs and 22 RBIs and third baseman Kayden Jennings hit .337 and drove in 21 homers, contributing a key home run, his first-ever, in the state semifinal win over Elmhurst York. Both Funkhouser and Jennings were reserves in their sophomore year.

"During those three years, the teams were a combined 103-17 record with back-to-back state championships. Remarkable!," Tim Funkhouser said.

"This season was no doubt historic and will be remembered for so many players impacting the team throughout the season."

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Cole Funkhouser set the tone for the season by driving the first pitch of the year over the fence at Tom Pile Field in Edwardsville's win over St. Joseph-Ogden 12-3 on Mar. 15 in the Illinois Baseball Report kick-off tournament, also set the tone in the final against Brother Rice with a first pitch lead-off single.

"Cole Funkhouser provided a spark to the top of the order, which was demonstrated on the first pitch of the season, all the way to the last swing RBI single, driving in the eventual winning run in the championship," Tim Funkhouser said.

"Iffrig, Copeland, and (Andrew) Hendrickson all solidified the middle of the order as left-handed hitters with the ability to drive in runs as well as find ways on base. Kayden Jennings not only flashed the leather in the field, but his bat speed and his leadership by example were on display daily."

The pitching staff was a very solid one indeed as well, as Logan Geggus, Jake Holder, and Hendrickson formed a very formidable starting rotation. Geggus was 8-0 on the season, having an ERA of 2.22 with 53 strikeouts, Holder's record was 3-0 with a 3.05 ERA while fanning 19 and Hendrickson went 3-1 with a 2.82 ERA, striking out 25 and even earned a save.

"Logan Geggus and Jake Holder, as well as Hendrickson, were able to step into senior leadership roles on the mound," Funkhouser said. "Their competitive desire provided a great foundation."

In addition, Montrez West, Drew Frese, Austin Naylor, and Travis Engeman also contributed to the Tigers' success in different ways.

"Montrez West impacted both of our championship teams on the bases with key stolen bases and reads," Funkhouser said. "Drew Frese did that as well this year. Austin Naylor

and Travis Engeman, when given the opportunity on the mound, attacked hitters and worked daily."

The underclassmen also made big contributions to the club as well. Sophomores Joe Chiarodo and Greyson Rathgeb had big seasons for Edwardsville, with Chiarodo .361 with one homer and 18 RBIs and Rathgeb, who drew the game-winning, bases-loaded walk in the regional final win over Collinsville 5-4, hit .286 with 12 RBIs, none more important than the RBI from the game-winning walk against the Kahoks.

In addition, Chiarodo was very good on the mound, going 4-2 with an ERA of 1.14, fanning 44 batters.

"Joe Chiarodo was impactful to our team on multiple levels," Funkhouser said.

"He provided elite-level pitching, which was on display in his sectional final complete game win and state semifinal six-inning performance. He also was key to our run production out of the two-hole."

Junior Lucas Huebner was a solid catcher who came up with big hits time after time, hitting .338 with one homer and 28 RBIs, also coming up with four saves on the mound, having a 1.91 ERA, striking out 18. Junior relief pitcher Alec Marchetto frequently came out of the bullpen and also made the spot start, having a successful year, going 6-1 with a 1.58 ERA, and striking out 27 along the way.

"Alec Marchetto provided a lot for the team," Funkhouser said, "which was on display in the championship game, as he closed out the final six outs in dominant form."

Also, freshman Tony Eberlin made an impact for the Tigers, providing solid pitching when called upon, while sophomore Hunter Baugh also had big showings, both at-bat and on the mound. Other players on the championship team that made contributions were Amari Berry, Bryce Beyers, Nick Bobinski-Boyd, Dax Durrell, Augie Johnes, Chase Milburn, Evan Moore, Tyler Powell, and Danny Story.