

DeMare Catches Five-Yard TD Pass From Curry With 33.5 Seconds Left, Tigers Win Pickering's Debut Over Jackson 30-21

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Senior wide receiver Joey DeMare caught a five-yard touchdown pass from Jake Curry with 33.5 seconds left in regulation, then the defense added a safety on the next play from scrimmage to give Edwardsville a dramatic 30-21 win over Jackson, Mo., in the football season opener for both schools Friday night at Tiger Stadium in Edwardsville.

The win was the first for new Tigers' head coach Kelsey Pickering, and he was quite a happy man after the game, although he wishes the score could have been different.

"No, I'll take 60-0 every time," Pickering said with a big laugh. After the quip, he had very high praise for the Indians, one of southeast Missouri's biggest powers.

"You know what? That's a great program that we just played," Pickering said. "They have deep tradition and they do things the right way. So, for us to be able to play them in week one and kind of find out where we're at. One of the things we always look forward to is our week one game and where are we? Because we don't know. And so, I think we battled through adversity, we had guys step up and it was just a great team win. Our coaches, our players, a lot went into this win."

There were the usual first-game mistakes and problems, but when the Tigers needed someone to make a big play and step up, they found it.

“Well, I think that goes to the group that we have,” Pickering said. “We’ve got a bunch of seniors that have done this before. I didn’t see panic, I saw guys fight, but make good decisions. There’s a neat deal to get this win against a great program.”





One of the key players who came up with the plays when needed was junior tight end Jack Weaver, who came up with some clutch catches and plays at opportune times.

“Jack’s done a great job, he’s really worked hard,” Pickering said. “Last year, being a first-year boy, he knows what it’s like now. And he knew what the off-season, how he worked. It’s just neat to see our guys make that growth from year one to year two. And some of these guys are now four-year starters, three-year starters. I think it’s really cool.”

DeMare also made some key plays down the stretch and has become a key go-to player in the Edwardsville offensive schemes.

“Again, that’s just where we talk about is all of our guys that are returning, that there’s a comfort level,” Pickering said. “The offense is comfortable, the defense is comfortable, the special teams are comfortable. We can make adjustments, like they know how to make those known, as opposed to running a simple route or doing a simple cut. Now, we can make adjustments. So that’s what’s neat about that receiving corps.”

Curry again showed his poise in helping the Tigers march down the field late for the winning touchdown. Pickering praised his behind-the-scenes prep work and how he prepares for games.

"You know, Jake, he's one of those guys," Pickering said. "We've talked about it before, he's a tireless worker. People don't get to see the two hours that he spends up here in film, in learning the playbook and things like that. He puts the time in. And so, it's just the reward. Him making those decisions, yeah, that's Jake. He's doing a great job."

After both defenses held to start the game, the Tigers got on the board first on an eight-play, 64-yard march which ended with Curry's first touchdown pass of the season, a 19-yard strike to Dontrel Smith with 4:56 left in the first to give the Tigers a 7-0 lead after Nathan Loftus' conversion. It didn't take long for the Indians to counter, as quarterback Blayne Harris found JJaylon Hampton for a 75-yard touchdown to tie the score 7-7;

The score stayed that way throughout the rest of the first half, as the Edwardsville defense stopped a long drive by Jackson, the Indians also hurting themselves with a costly 15-yard penalty for an illegal chop block deep in Tiger territory. A similar long drive for Edwardsville was thwarted by an interception as the teams entered the locker room tied 7-7

The Tigers scored on the opening possession of the second half, taking 97 seconds to go 64 yards in seven plays, with Curry finding Weaver over the middle for 35 yards and the touchdown to make it 14-7. Jackson later drew level again with Harris hitting Adler Finn from 14 yards out, with the ball deflecting off a pair of Tiger defenders before Finn made the catch to make it 14-14 after the conversion.

A mix-up on the ensuing kickoff put the ball on the Edwardsville five to start off the next possession. No sweat, said the Tigers offense, as they marched down the field 85 yards, with running back Patrick Chism carrying the load and Curry finding Michael Hedge from two yards out to take the lead back for the Tigers on 21-14. The Indians came right back in two plays, a 55-yard completion from Harris to Hampton and Hampton taking it in from the final five yards with 4L48 left in regulation to tie things up again 21-21.

On the game-winning drive, Curry got a 21-yard scoring pass to Chism, but it was called back due to a penalty. The Tigers stayed with it and got a key pass interference call on a third-and-five play, then got the ball to the five, where DeMare calmly caught the touchdown pass with 33.5 seconds left to put the Tigers up 28-21. Oh the first play following the kickoff, the snap got away from Harris, who fell on the ball in the end zone for a safety to give the Tigers the 30-21 win.

Edwardsville opens its season 1-0 and plays at Cahokia next Friday night in a 7 p.m. kickoff at Brien Field. Pickering was very happy for his first win as a head coach, but gave credit to those around him.

“It’s about our program,” Pickering said after a thoughtful pause. “It’s obviously a great start, it’s how you want to start a coaching career as a head coach, there’s no doubt about that. But again, it’s not about me, it’s about our coaches, and they’re tireless workers. People don’t see the time they put in, they don’t see the time the players put in, and it’s about them. So, for me, the win is all about our team.”

And as you might expect, Pickering also got the Gatorade bath from the players.





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