

Tigers Explode For Six-Goal First Half, Shutout Redbirds For Second Time This Season

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EDWARDSVILLE - Seven different players scored goals as Edwardsville raced out to a 6-0 halftime lead and eventually defeated Alton 7-0 in a Southwestern Conference boys soccer match played Monday evening at Tiger Stadium in Edwardsville. The game was originally set for last Thursday, but was postponed to Monday, due to lightning and thunderstorms that passed through the St. Louis area early that evening. It was

rescheduled for Monday as a varsity-only match, since the junior varsity had gotten its game in before the lightning was seen. And on Monday, the Tigers continued to play well, having overcome a slump where Edwardsville went through a three-match winless streak, using momentum gained from an important 1-0 win Saturday at Normal Community.

"Why I think that seasons kind of have their ups and downs," said Edwardsville head coach Mark Heiderscheid. "And with the sport of soccer, and knowing there's high school kids, they're going to sometimes have games where there's high energy, and sometimes, there's a whole lotta things that are going on. And there's so many games. So many times, it could be that our players are lacking, maybe they're tired, the focus isn't quite there."

In Saturday's game at Normal, the Tigers were being overwhelmed with the Ironmen's size, strength and athleticism, but were able to pull back in the second half and get a great result on the road.

"Normal Community was extraordinarily athletic," Heiderscheid said. "They were big, they had a couple of guys at wings that were fast. And honestly, they had us in the first half absolutely reeling on our heels, because we had a hard time with their strength, their size, the passion they played the game, again, very technical. And so, that made it difficult."

"However, in the second half, the kids did a very, very masterful job of changing the complexion of the game," Heiderscheid continued. "All of a sudden, we started connecting the ball very well. It was really not unlike what we had done a number of times during our midseason, where, in the second half, we step on the field, make adjustments."

Against the Redbirds, Heiderscheid was very happy with the way his players took charge at the start and finished well throughout.

"This one here, the kids did fantastic to get a very quick start," Heiderscheid said after the win over the Redbirds. "We're finishing goals, I think they understood the environment situation quite well, moved the ball well, but got forward though. Some of the games turn around as we have some very tough opponents coming up."

The Redbirds have had a rather difficult season thus far, but have played hard and kept striving. On this night against the Tigers, things didn't go well for Alton from the opening whistle.

"Well, I don't think we played that hard," said Alton head coach Greg Nasello.

"I think we have a lot more in us than that. I think tonight, for whatever reason, we came out flat, we didn't do what we tried to do in training, we sure didn't do what we planned for in pregame. We did a lot of standing around and watching the game and against a team like Edwardsville, they make you pay. So, what I told them is it's time to put this game behind you, because there's nothing we can do to fix it now and get ready for the next three games this week, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, because that's what we've got and we've got to move on from there."

Although the Redbirds are having a rough time of it thus far in the season, the team is still hanging in there, and Nasello also knows there's much more to his players than what they showed against the Tigers.

"The thing is, these guys have a lot more in them," Nasello said, "and they've shown that all, until tonight. Tonight was the first time we've really didn't not play the way we wanted to play. Like I said, we'll get back on it tomorrow in training, we'll get ready for Wednesday's game and we'll come out harder."

The main highlight for the Redbirds has been a hard-fought effort every night, playing hard and staying in games.

"The highlights have been just the way we play," Nasello said. "The effort is always there. When you watched us play the last games against O'Fallon, against Belleville East. We're coming at teams, especially on back-to-back nights, never quitting. Our fitness is good and we just play as hard as we can. For whatever reason tonight, we just didn't. That's the thing, it's the difference tonight versus what we saw last week. We came out and played extremely aggressive and tonight, we just didn't. We played a flat game and hopefully, that's the last one we do."

The Tigers got their first goal in the eighth minute, when Gavin Gierich fed Blye Brickman with a good pass, and Brickman slipped the ball into the back of the net to give the Tigers the lead at 1-0. Edwardsville doubled the lead after 11 minutes when Colin McGinnis took a good pass from Nate Loftus and scored to put Edwardsville into the lead at 2-0. The next goal came off a corner in the 15th minute, when a perfectly placed cross allowed Henry Vivian to head the ball in against the underside of the bar to make it 3-0.

Two minutes later, Majd Hamad took a ball and went in around the Alton goalie, then calmly slotted the ball into the net to give the Tigers a 4-0 lead. In the 18th minute, Parker McMillian got a good through ball from Evan Moore and slotted the ball home to make the score 5-0 and in the 24th minute, Moore scored directly in front to give Edwardsville a 6-0 lead. The Redbirds did have a pair of opportunities late, but were turned away as the Tigers kept their 6-0 lead at the interval.

In the second half, Jonas Mahler, who had the only goal of the match against Normal Community, sent a shot in that deflected off an Alton defender in the 50th minute that made it 7-0 and halved the remaining time off the clock. The Redbirds had a pair of late chances, the best in the 69th minute when Logan Rynders had a shot from distance, but Zeke Manning was there to collect the attempt and preserve his clean sheet as the Tigers took their 7-0 win.

The Redbirds are now 0-9 and play three in a row at home next, starting with a match against McCluer North of Florissant, Mo. Wednesday, then a Southwestern Conference match against Belleville West, then going up against Hazelwood West on Friday, with the matches against the Stars and Wildcats starting at 6 p.m., and the game against the Maroons kicking off at 6:30 p.m.

The Tigers are now 9-4-1 and host Belleville East on Thursday at 6:30 p.m., then host CBC and the nation's all-time winningest coach, Terry Michler, Saturday morning at 11:45 a.m.