

# Flyers Go 99 Yards After Stopping Tigers On Fourth-And-Goal, Wins Eighth Straight SWC Championship 27-15

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EDWARDSVILLE - East St. Louis' defense stopped Edwardsville quarterback Jake Curry just short of the goal line in the third quarter, then marched 99 yards in two plays for a game-breaking touchdown that was the turning point of the game as the Flyers won

their eighth straight Southwestern Conference championship 27-15 over the Tigers in the feature game of week eight Friday night at Tiger Stadium.

It was also Senior Night for Edwardsville, and in the annual pregame ceremonies, the Class of 2024 - Curry, Kellen Brnfre, Jaiden Vonner, Michael Hedge, Zach Williams, Kaylon Bursey, Joey DeMare, Kire Bradley, Parker Eyre, Paul Kostich, Dalton Brown, Clarence Stewart, Nate Loftus, Wyatt Kolnsberg, Ben Giguere, Cole Griffith, Quinton Kolnsberg, Emilio Gomez-Garcia, Antonio Box, Isaac Luitjohan, Andrew Angle, Brett Moss, Adrian Nohl and Alex Reed -- and their families were all honored and thanked for all of their contributions to the Tiger football program. Senior band members, dance team members and cheerleaders were also honored in the ceremonies.

As for the game itself, the Flyer defense, oftentimes overlooked, came up big at key spots in the game and it was a big factor in the East Side win.

"Yeah, we knew they were a good program; they are a good program," said Edwardsville head coach Kelsey Pickering. "And if we want to be considered in the top of the state, we've got to figure out how to do better than what we did tonight. The positives are, I think, everything. We'll see; we've got to watch film. But I think that things that happened tonight are all fixable."

Pickering felt that the game against the Flyers was a gauge to see how far the Tigers have come and what they still need to do to get better.

"Yeah, you know, I think part of it's coaches," Pickering said. "We've got to, first, figure out what we didn't do right, where we could do better. And then, we've got to take it to the kids, show them, and they have to accept the ownership, make adjustments and find a way. That's part of football; we have to find a way to win these ball games."

The 99-yard, two-play drive that happened after the Tigers were stopped just short of the goal line was indeed the turning point of the game.

"That was tough," Pickering said. "We had the momentum, I felt like. I felt like things were going to continue going in our favor. And then, it kind of deflates the sidelines real quick, it deflates the players. Those aren't fun."

As explosive as the Flyers' offense is, it was the East Side defense that stepped up big on Friday night, and it's a very good defense that tends to be overlooked.

"Well, not in my opinion," said Flyers coach Darren Sunkett with a laugh. "We talk about it in that locker room. So as long as we're talking about it, these guys, we know how great they are. They've been a part of the success."

The pregame atmosphere was electric, befitting a game that was rated the ninth biggest of the week by MaxPreps.com. And the Flyers came out extra-motivated to do well.

"Well, you know, it was big," Sunkett said. "And we knew tonight, the atmosphere was going to be electric. We were aiming for our eighth straight conference championship, so our guys, had a chip on their shoulders there. We were aiming for our fifth straight winning the conference without a loss. So we had a lot of goals we wanted to keep accomplishing that the guys in the past accomplished. So it's all about keeping that tradition alive. These guys stepped up and did that."

After stopping the Tigers on the opening possession, it took East Side only seven plays to go 31 yards, as TaRyan Martin ran in from one yard out to put the Flyers ahead 7-0. Later on, in the second quarter, East Side went 76 yards in 11 plays and scored on a 23-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Robert "Pops" Battle to John Daily to make it 13-0 after the conversion was missed.

The score stood at 13-0 at halftime, and with 5:59 left in the third, the Tigers launched a promising drive, which was helped by a pass interference penalty that put the ball on the Flyer 49. A 33-yard pass play brought the ball to the eight. and three plays later, Edwardsville faced fourth-and-goal from the five. Curry cut through the middle, but was stopped inches short. On the next play, Battle threw 57 yards to Jesse Watson, who made a great catch in traffic, then Martin took off down the sideline on a 52-yard touchdown that made it 19-0.

Edwardsville got its first touchdown on the next possession as Brnfre went five yards for the score to make it 19-7, but the Flyers used over five minutes on their next drive, getting a 13-yard touchdown run from Larevious "Fresh" Woods to make it 27-7 after a good two-point convert try.

The Tigers got their final touchdown with 1:06 left, when Javion Smith went one yard it for the score and Curry hit Brnfre with a two-point conversion pass to make the final 27-15.

The Flyers will end up with a record of 7-2, being awarded a forfeit win by the IHSA and creating a much-needed bye on the final week of the regular season. The Tigers are now 7-1 and conclude their regular season at traditional St. Louis power DeSmet Jesuit in Creve Coeur, Mo. The kickoff is set for 7 p.m.

