

Round One Preview - One-Loss Tigers Look To Make Deep Run In Postseason, Host A Struggling West Aurora Team

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
October 26 2023 9:24 AM



(29) West Aurora (5-4) @ (4) Edwardsville (8-1) Saturday 2 p.m.

The Edwardsville Tigers head into the playoffs as a one-loss team, the first time since the 2016-17 season, one where they went out in the third round finishing up a 10-2 mark.

A defense that's done its job all season on average allows just above 15 points per game. That average would be much lower if it wasn't for their week-seven slug fest with Belleville East, a come-from-behind 49-45 win.

Edwardsville's offense has consistently put up big numbers as well, scoring at least 45 points six times this season.

Quarterback Jake Curry has racked up 97 completions on 154 attempts for a percentage just shy of 63 percent. He's thrown for 1,624 yards and 25 touchdowns with just two interceptions. He also has seven scores himself with 286 yards rushing.

His favorite target is Kellen Brnfre. The two have connected for four scores while Brnfre has 285 yards receiving. Other usual targets are Kaylon Bursey (275 yards receiving) and Joey DeMare (241 yards receiving).

The Tigers' two-way offense will be one that keeps West Aurora on their toes. And the Tigers' defense will be just as formidable.

Dalton Brown has 25 solo tackles, eight of those for loss with two sacks. Big man Iose Epenesa has six sacks this season. Drew Smith and Jaiden Conner also have 21 solo tackles each.

After the Blackhawks won their first five games of the season to become playoff-eligible, they proceeded to head into the postseason on a four-game losing streak.

Two of their wins were over 1-8 teams and two of them were against 4-5 teams. West Aurora's only credible win was a 17-14 week-five win over Yorkville, who finished the season 6-3 and seeded No. 18 in Class 7A.

In Max Preps' final rankings, Edwardsville came in at No. 3 in Class 8A and No. 5 in the state. West Aurora is ranked No. 28 in 8A.

The Tigers have beaten two Illinois playoff teams in Cahokia (47-6, week two) and Belleville East (49-45, week seven). Cahokia (5-4) is seeded No. 13 in 5A while the Lancers (7-2) are No. 11 in 8A.

The Tigers also took down a pair of Missouri powerhouses to open and close the regular season.

Edwardsville remains the only loss on Jackson's schedule, a 30-21 win in week one, and the only loss on De Smet's schedule, a 29-12 triumph in week nine.