

Allen Scores 19 As One Of Three Tiger Players In Double Figures, Defense Clamps Down On Lancers In Edwardsville's 60-48 Win Over East

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Malik Allen played in his second game of the season after returning from injury, had his first starting assignment, and performed very well, leading the way with 19 points, as A.J. Tillman hit for 16 points and Herb Martin scored 10 points as Edwardsville clamped down on defense and won 60-48 over Belleville East in a Southwestern Conference boys basketball game played Friday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym in Edwardsville.



The win was an important bounce-back win for the Tigers, who lost at O'Fallon Tuesday night 64-46, and coming back with a strong showing against the Lancers was very important to the players and coaches.

"We feel great," said Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas. "Our defense was much improved tonight. Our guys really tried hard and were able to improve on that from Tuesday. A lot can be said for guys who are quick learners, and our guys were engaged in practice on Wednesday, The combination of being smart, and they were smart tonight and they tried hard, and that's what usually makes a good defense. Very proud of our defensive effort tonight."

The defense is something Edwardsville takes pride in, and although the Tigers slipped up on Tuesday, the effort was very strong on Friday. Martin, who went through a bad game against O'Fallon, especially bounced back strong.

"Herbert was excellent tonight," Battas said, "I told him after the game. A.J. was outstanding; he had only one turnover against all their pressure. But I told Herbert he was the perfect wingman. And there were times when they took A.J. away that we were able to give it to Herb, especially against their trap and late. Herb was strong with the ball, he made his free throws down the stretch. And we're going to need those two guys together in the Southwestern Conference because teams are going to get all over us.

"I thought that Malik just had a good overall game, he was very loud on defense, which we've been talking about communication. He was very loud, getting guys to the right spot. He made some free throws, he made some threes. Then Donovan (Coates) didn't score as much as he has been, but I thought his energy was excellent and I thought he flew around and made some things happen late and gave us that bigger lead. He's a valuable piece, even when he's not scoring, but he found a way to impact the game, which was very important. He had a great feat for Donovan tonight."





Overall, it was a great and badly-needed bounce-back win for the Tigers, in which Battas was very happy with the way things went in the game.

"Yeah, I thought we executed things well," Battas said, "I thought our practices were great, the scout guys have done a really good job. They've improved as well in practice. You have in Iose (Epenesa), he's got his conditioning up, and he's getting better every week. I thought he was excellent in defense, his big old body in there. And then, Kris (Crosby) gave us some good moments. We have a lot of trust in Kris, that he's going to be that X-factor for us. I thought the last two minutes of the fourth quarter, Kris got some loose balls and rebounds for us. So, just a great overall team effort, and we're just happy for our guys that they get the reward of a victory."

The first quarter started out with Martin driving the lane for the opening basket, and afterwards, a Three-point play by Savion Mitchell gave East a 3-2 lead. Allen then buried a three to give the Tigers a 5-3 lead, which began an exchange of baskets throughout the quarter, with both sides not gaining much of a lead as the back-and-forth went along. Near the end of the period, after the Lancers went again by one, Coates hit a basket before the buzzer to give Edwardsville a 13-12 lead at the end of the first.

And that would be the last points anyone would score for the first 3:18 of the second quarter, where both sides had chances, but couldn't convert. A pair of free throws by

Crosby put the Tigers up 15-12, and it triggered a 7-0 run that put the Tigers up 20-12. The teams exchanged baskets for the rest of the period, with Kale Waller banking home a three from just behind the mid-court line to cut the Tigers lead to 24-19 at halftime, a basket that might give the Lancers some momentum going into the second half.

Instead, it was the Tigers who gained momentum, with a three from Allen to start the second half, followed by a Tillman basket in the lane gave Edwardsville a 29-19 lead. East, behind a three from Christian Jenkins and baskets from Tallis Lowery and Jacori Brown, went on a 9-0 run to cut the lead to 29-28, forcing a Tiger time-out. Edwardsville righted the ship, and behind Allen, Tillman, and Coates, outscored the Lancers 6-3 to take a 35-31 lead after three quarters.

The teams exchanged baskets to start the fourth quarter, after which Edwardsville began to pull away, with a Martin three-point play being a key, making the score 45-35. The Lancers were able to pull to within 48-42, and from there, in the stretch run, Edwardsville went seven-of-eight from the line to take their 60-48 win.

To go along with Allen's 19 points, Tillman's 16 and Martin's 10, Epenesa had six points, Crosby came up with five points and Coats scored four points.

East was led by Jenkins and Jalen Dawson, who had 10 points each, followed by Mitchell had eight points, Brown hit for five points, Waller came up with four points, Nate Smith, Jenkins and Jordon Jackson all had three points and Xavien Moody had two points.

The Lancers are now 4-4 on the year, while the Tigers go to 4-3, and play a pair of St. Louis City teams, Gateway STEM and Roosevelt, at home on Monday and Tuesday, both games at 7:30 p.m., then play against another City team, St. Mary's Southside

Catholic, at the Carbondale Shootout on Friday evening at 5 p.m. The Tigers will play against Riverview Gardens of north St. Louis County, at home on Dec 18 in a 6 p.m. tip-



off.





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