

Foul Trouble And Francis Howell's Speed Plagues Edwardsville – Tigers Set To Play In Third-Place Game At MICDS Tourney

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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LADUE, Mo. – The Edwardsville Tigers won't be playing in the championship game of the MICDS Holiday Tournament.

After Edwardsville led by a point after the first quarter, the Francis Howell Vikings began pulling away toward halftime and especially later on in the third quarter as they won the second semifinal game of the night by a score of 68-55.

After scoring the first basket of the game, the Tigers led by scores of 7-2 and 13-6 early on in the game.

But, Francis Howell's speedy one-two punch of DeAnthony McJames and Jeremiah Poniewaz, as well as big-man Will Paulson proved to be tough to handle all night. Paulson, listed at six-foot-seven and the team's leading scorer, is a threat at the rim, but still shoots 40 percent from beyond the three-point arc.

"2 and 3 (McJames and Poniewaz) are really fast," Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas said. "People think 11 (Paulson) is a big guy, so you just have to worry about him at the basket, but he makes us more nervous away from the basket because he shoots at such a high clip. It really put us in a bind defensively."

The Vikings finished with three double-digit scorers on the night. Poniewaz led with 20 points, Paulson had 18, and McJames had 12.

McJames sunk a couple of free throws and later grabbed a steal and took it in for an emphatic dunk. Poniewaz kept that momentum going as he sunk a buzzer-beater three-pointer to make it just a one-point game. The Tigers led 17-16 after one.

The Vikings opened up the second quarter with a 7-0 run to jump to a 23-17 lead, a lead that they would hold on to the rest of the way. EHS tried chipping away but trailed 33-26 at halftime.

"We got off to a good start, I thought our preparation was good," Battas said. "We got a couple of steals, and then we had some foul trouble, so we had to adjust some things. And then speed got to us a little bit and they started really getting some transition baskets, or at least getting the ball down so fast we couldn't get the exact matchups that we wanted."

That foul trouble Battas eluded began to arise early in the second half.

Edwardsville's leading scorer, and best defender, Malik Allen picked up his third foul with six minutes to go in the third quarter. Iose Epenesa and AJ Tillman were both in foul trouble as well, meaning the Tigers couldn't play their usual, fast, in-your-face style of defense.

“Good teams do that. They take advantage of different situations,” Battas said. “Malik got in a little foul trouble early, and that led to some different things that we had to do, and they took advantage of that with their speed.”

“Combine that and then in the third quarter we had trouble getting it to go down, missed some shots around the rim and some shots that we usually make, but a lot of that has to do with ,” Battas continued. “They’re long on defense and they’re fast. They make you play a little differently than you want to. We knew it was going to be a tough game, we wish we would have made a few more shots, but I’m proud of our guys’ effort.”

It all led to an 11-0 run to start the third quarter for Francis Howell, jumping out to a 44-26 lead. Allen, back on the floor, scored Edwardsville’s first basket of the second half with 1:44 remaining in the third quarter.

The Tigers went 0-for-5 shooting with two turnovers in that frame and trailed 46-33 after three.

Despite some baskets finally dropping for the Tigers in the fourth, the deficit was too much to overcome as they picked up just their third loss of the season. Edwardsville falls to 10-4 while Francis Howell improves to 9-1.

Allen still finished the night with 17 points while Tillman and Herbert Martin each scored nine. Donavan Coates scored seven points, Kris Crosby added six, and Miccah Butler had five.

The Tigers will play against the hosts MICDS Rams in the third-place game set to tip off at 3 p.m. Friday, Dec. 29. Francis Howell will play Ladue in the championship game at 7:30 p.m.

“That will be a tough challenge, there’s no doubt about that,” Battas said. “MICDS is a good team, they’re well-coached. It’s their tournament so they’ll take a lot of pride in that game.”