

Redbirds Respond In Second Half For Girls Win, But Edwardsville Keeps It Close In First Half

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Talia Norman led Alton’s girls basketball team with 16 points, while Kiyoko Proctor came up with 15 points, and Jarius Powers added 14 points as the Redbirds dominated the second half, outscoring Edwardsville 45-16 en route to a 67-36 win over the Tigers in a Southwestern Conference game played Thursday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

Edwardsville played a sensational first half overall and cut the Redbirds lead to only 22-20 at the half. The Tigers scored the last five points of the second quarter to cut the lead to two at the interval, and inside the locker room, Alton head coach Deserea Howard delivered a strong message to her players.

Consider the message received.

“Yeah, we’ve been practicing way too hard to come out and not do what we’ve been doing,” Howard said with a smile and chuckle. “So I had to kind of give them a reminder, get them to act right, and come out and do what we’re supposed to do in the second half.”

And plenty went right for the Redbirds in the second half.

“Defensive pressure, boxing out, getting on top of the boards,” Howard said. “We had an urgency. I just felt like we were a little lackadaisical in the beginning, we were apprehensive on offense, not taking it to them, more so trying to watch and see what they were going to do. So we were letting them dictate the pace of the game, and that’s not what we do. So I just had to kind of remind them, like, this isn’t our style of basketball. Play how we play.”



The first half was more of reacting to what Edwardsville would do instead of dictating the pace of the game, and it’s where the Redbirds got into trouble in the first half.

“Yes, we were reacting to what they were going to do We were trying to read their offense, as we try to remember all of the scouting reports, instead of just playing. We were prepared for the game, so now, we just have to play the game.”

The Redbirds were led in part by the play of Proctor, who took the reins and led her team in the charge.

“Exactly,” Howard said. “I mean, Kiyoko, you put the head on Kiyoko, it puts the head on the team. So we’ve got to keep her active, keep her engaged, keep her moving. Again, I just thought she was thinking too much in the beginning, and once we took that away, and let them just trust what we do, I saw a much better second half.”

The overthinking hurt the Redbirds in the first half, but it was a much different story in the final 16 minutes.

“Like I said, in the beginning, it was just, you could see we were thinking,” Howard said. “We were almost going to travel, we were just like ‘what do I do, what do I do, what do I do?’ We just had to settle in.”

The Redbirds have bounced back well from their first loss of the season, to Notre Dame Academy of Green Bay, Wisc., last Saturday and are now 19-1 on the year, a loss that taught the Redbirds a valuable lesson.

“Absolutely,” Howard said. “It taught us a lot, so actually, it was probably a good thing that we took that loss early, and we took that loss the way that we did. We were competitive, we were in the game, but again, we didn’t do some things that we normally do that could have won the game for us. And sometimes, that makes you lock in a little bit harder, and I think that’s what we did tonight. Just very proud of the girls, they’re working really hard, and we’re just gearing up for finishing out the season strong.”

It was all Alton in the second half, as they went off in the second half and ended up leaving the Tigers behind.

“Yeah, you know, they’re hard to play against,” said Edwardsville head coach Bryan Young. “They’re tough, they’re physical, they’re fast. They’re tough to play against, and especially Kiyoko. She does a lot of good things for them, she kind of settled them down and got them going in the second half.”

The Tigers did do many good things in the game, especially in the first half, as Edwardsville stayed close and came within two at the long break.

“Well, in the first half, I thought we stayed patient on offense,” Young said, “passed the ball around, and controlled the tempo of the game. And like I said, the second half, they got in the passing lane, got some steals and we turned the ball over too much in the second half.”

Once Proctor started going and helped lead the Redbirds, it was very hard to stop her. Or Alton, for that matter.

“She’s tough,” Young said. “Give credit to Alton. Their coach (Howard) has got them playing at a high level. I think she got on them a little bit at halftime, and I give her and her coaching staff credit. She got on them and they came out and responded.”

Edwardsville did start out well, but too many turnovers in the second half didn’t serve the Tigers well.

“I do still think they believed they could win the game,” Young said after the great first-half effort. “It’s just a matter of taking care of the basketball, and they got some steals in transition that kind of got away from us. And we kind of stopped competing there for a second, but I’m proud of them. Alton’s hard to play against.”

The game started with a flurry of Alton shots that just wouldn’t fall, but after that, the two teams exchanged baskets that put the Redbirds up 4-2. A Powers basket gave Alton a 602 lead, and after that, the two teams exchanged baskets that made the score 8-6, when a Kaylea Lacey free throw and a basket from Powers gave the Redbirds an 11-6 lead after the first quarter.

An Ellie Neath basket at the start of the second quarter cut the advantage to 11-8, then a basket by Justice Haynes and a three-point play by Powers expanded the Alton lead to 16-8. An undaunted Tiger team managed to cut the lead to 19-14 later on, and with the score 22-14 late in the period, Edwardsville went on a 6-0 run, with a three-point play by Mia Semith and a three from Molly Peel right before the buzzer cut the Redbird lead to 22-20 at the half.



Baskets from Norman and Proctor at the start of the second half put Alton in front 26-20, with a Semith three cutting the lead to 26-23. Alyssa Lewis downed a three right back to restore Alton's six-point lead, and it triggered a 10-0 run that expanded the lead to 36-23, with Proctor taking charge. The Redbirds led after the third 38-25.

In the fourth, Kyrindas Orr knocked down a three up top to give the Redbirds a 41-25 lead, and from there, it was all Redbirds, as Proctor kept hitting from all over the court, getting help from Norman and others, outscoring the Tigers in the quarter 29-11 and scoring the game's final 11 points to win 67-36.

Norman led with 16 points, with Proctor having her 15 points and Powers adding her 14. Aryanna Anthony hit for six points, both Lacey and Lewis had four points each, Orr scored three points and Haynes came up with two points.

Neath led the Tigers with 11 points, while Semith had 10 points, Lainey McFarlin had five points, both Gabby Cook and Peel had three points, and Blakely Hockett and Sophie Shapiro had two points apiece.

The Redbirds are now 19-1, and will play in the Highland Invitational this coming week, opening up against Belleville West Saturday morning at 10 a.m. After the Highland tourney, Alton plays at East St. Louis on Jan. 23 at 7 p.m., and hosts O'Fallon on Jan.26 at 7:30 p.m.

The Tigers go to 9-9, seeing a six-game winning streak end, and next plays Monday afternoon at Westminster Christian in west St. Louis County at 4:30 p.m. then hosts Chatham Glenwood next Thursday, then plays at O'Fallon on Jan. 23, both games at 7:30 p.m.



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