

Panthers Overwhelmed By Alton - Redbirds Take Third-Place Game At Jersey Mid-Winter Classic

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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JERSEYVILLE – After a heartbreaking loss to Granite City in their last contest, the Alton Redbirds were relegated to the third-place game of the Jersey Mid-Winter Classic where they'd meet the hosting Panthers.

Alton went on to lead wire to wire in a 79-43 win.

After Alton scored the game's first nine points thanks to back-to-back baskets from Semaj Stampley and a steal and score from Alex Macias, the Redbirds would go on to lead 16-4 after the first quarter.

Not much changed in the second as Alton opened with a 7-2 run to improve its lead to 25-6. The Redbirds began shooting the three at a high rate, especially Sean Tyus who went 5 of 6 in the first half, only missing his final shot of the half, a buzzer-beater attempt from the corner.

Still, Alton led 41-13 at the half.

“We overwhelmed them,” Alton head coach Dylan Dudley said. “But more so, we had a really hard film session on Wednesday. It had nothing to do with basketball. It was about our effort, energy, and enthusiasm. The one thing we do really well in this program is we tell each other the truth and we addressed that. So, to see them come out and score the first nine points was good. The response that they had was something that's good to see.”

The Redbirds continued to be dominant in the second half as they led 69-38 after three quarters, outscoring Jersey 10-5 in the fourth.

Jersey went 1-2 in the tournament with an 80-49 loss to Edwardsville on Monday.

“I think in the long run, that helps prepare our guys for our conference,” Jersey head coach Matt Murphy said. “Those are two, really good, historical programs that both have really, really good coaches right now, that both have really good players as well.”

“As young as we are with varsity experience, to kind of see what this is, what really good basketball teams look like and this is what we strive to be.”

Murphy, a former Panther himself, and the all-time leading scorer at Jersey, saw the introduction of the Mid-Winter Classic in his sophomore season.

“It's cool to bring in different teams from around the area,” Murphy said about the tournament. “You don't have to travel, which is nice. We get to play in front of our fans, and they get to see some teams that they might not get the chance to see.”

“I enjoy talking to those coaches in the Southwestern Conference and building those relationships.”

The Panthers drop to 9-4 on the season. Friday night against Alton they were led by Jaxon Brunaugh with 13 points while Francis Vogel and Aiden Taylor each scored eight.

The game played out exactly how Dudley intended as his team had four double-digit scorers.

“That’s what we want,” Dudley said. “We have to make it a track meet, and when it’s a track meet, I don’t care who we’re playing, no disrespect to anybody else because there’s some damn good teams around here, but we have a chance.”

Tyus finished the game with six three-pointers and 18 points, a team high.

“He has come in and just fit in with the team like a glove,” Dudley said of Tyus. “A great kid, very humble kid, very appreciative, does everything that we’ve asked him to do. He has an elite-level skill; he can shoot the ball as good if not better than anyone.”

Along with Tyus’ 18 points, Ian Kambarian and Kobe Taylor each scored 13 points while Stampley ended up with 10. Chris Atkins scored seven points while Ka’Nye Lacey and Kameron Burnett each had five.

The Redbirds improved to 14-8 on the season and don’t play again until Friday when they host East St. Louis.