

# **Tillman Hits In The Lane To Force Overtime, Edwardsville Outscored Mascoutah 6-4 In Overtime, Takes Scrappy Win**

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January 24 2024 10:30 AM





EDWARDSVILLE - A.J. Tillman hit a shot in the lane with 3.2 seconds left in regulation, allowing Edwardsville to go into overtime, where the Tigers outscored Mascoutah 6-4 in the extra period to defeat the Indians 54-52 in a non-conference game played Tuesday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The game was a hard-fought, physical and scrappy affair, where the Tigers made the plays they needed to in order to win the game.

"I am proud of our guys," said Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas. "That was a hard game, and sometimes, the ball didn't bounce our way there, late. So we had to really guard, really protect the basket. I thought Iose (Epenesa) was excellent protecting the rim late. And Donovan (Coats), Herb (Martin), A.J. and Malik (Allen), Kris (Crosby) were in there, scrapping for rebounds, and throwing their body on the line, showed some toughness, which is necessary to win close games. So, really proud of the effort, really proud of the grit, and even though we shot ourselves in the foot on offense, I thought we really buckled down on defense, and did a good job."

The Indians has a chance to go in front late on a three-point shot by Greg Adams, but Coats ran over to block the shot, and Mascoutah couldn't get another shot off until a half-court bid to win the game bounced off the rim and went away.

"They ran a baseline (play) out of bounds, and I think for a second, we fell asleep and didn't see their best shooter (Adams) in the corner," Battas said. "And Donovan either heard me screaming, or just saw it kind of out of the corner of his eye, and sprinted over and blocked the shot. So, really heads up play by Donny, because you'd really hate to give up a wide-open three to their best shooter there on that possession."

Although the Tigers missed a good number of free throws that may have salted the game away, Edwardsville still had a good effort and made the plays the needed to win the game.

"Yeah, a lot of our games have come down to one possession," Battas said. "Obviously, tonight's another example of that. So, you need to take care of the ball when you have it, you need to rebound the ball when you don't. And we'll keep getting better in the late-game stuff. Some of our guys are new to that, beyond A.J. and Malik, and they're getting better. So, I thought our intensity was good, I thought our determination was good. We just have to clean up a few things late in the game against traps. But I'm confident that we can do that."

The IHSA Class 4A regionals start next month, on Feb. 23, and many things can happen between now and the start of the playoffs. And as usual, it's something Battas is looking ahead to.



"Oh, yeah, four weeks left," Battas said, "the regional is exactly a month from tonight. Our goal is always to be playing our best basketball. I talked to our guys after the game; we've got nine guys I think can play. We've got to figure out a way to get some of those guys in there, get some of that pressure, figure out a way to get the best lineups in place to play certain teams, so you have your best nine guys ready to go at their peak come regional time."

The game started out with exchanges of both free throws and baskets that left the two teams in a 6-6 tie, before the Tigers went on a 7-0 run, as Martin sank a three, Tillman scored off a steal, and Epenesa scored on a reverse lay-in to give Edwardsville a 13-6 lead. Miles Ntekop and Jayden McCoo both scored before the end of the period to cut the lead to 13-10 after the first quarter.





Corey Harris hit on a three-point play to tie the game early in the second quarter 13-13, and from that point, the score fluctuated between a tie and a two-point Indian lead. After McCoo scored to give Mascoutah a 19-17 lead, the Tigers took the lead right back on a three from Bryce Pryor to put Edwardsville up 20-19. Threes from both Pryor and Coats after Mascoutah baskets helped give the Tigers a 26-23 lead at halftime.

The teams exchanged baskets to start the third quarter, which lasted that way until a three from Crosby made it 37-33 for Edwardsville, and a basket before the buzzer from Tillman from distance gave the Tigers a 41-38 lead after three quarters. A free throw and basket from Epenesa extended the lead to 44-38 early in the fourth quarter, with a McCoo three cutting the lead to 44-41 with 5:09 to go in regulation. After a basket from Crosby made it 46-41, the Indians came to within 46-45 on a Ntekop three-point play and a free throw from McCoo, Both teams missed free throws late to keep the score a 46-45, with Mascoutah getting the lead back on a Harris basket and a Ntekop free throw late to make it 48-46. Tillman then hit on a floater in the lane with 3.2 seconds left to tie the game at 48-48 to force overtime.

Epenesa scored the first basket of the extra period to put the Tigers up 50-48, and after an exchange of free throws made it 51-49, a pair of Tillman free throws made it 53-49 for Edwardsville. Undaunted, McCoo hit a three to bring the Indians to within 53-52, and after a Epenesa free throw made it 54-52, Coats made the biggest play of the night,

blocking Adams' three in the corner to preserve the score. Mascoutah had one last chance, but a half-courter at the buzzer bounced off the rim, giving the Tigers the win.

Tillman led the Tigers with 12 points, with Epenesa adding 11 points, Martin had eight points, Crosby scored seven points, Pryor came away with six points, and Coats had a single point.

McCoo led Mascoutah with 21 points, while Ntekop had 20 points, Harris scored seven points, and both Adams and Camren Reed had two points apiece.

The Indians are now 14-8, while the Tigers go to 15-8, and continue their four-game home stand Friday night against O'Fallon, then host Jennings, Mo., of north St. Louis County next Monday, and Lutheran St. Charles next Tuesday, with all games starting at 7:30 p.m.



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