

Alton “Out Toughed” By O’Fallon Down The Stretch

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – If you asked Alton head coach Dylan Dudley what wins basketball games in the Southwestern Conference, his answer would be simple.

You’ve got to be tough.

The Redbirds were exactly that in the first quarter, grabbing a 15-8 lead over the visiting O’Fallon Panthers thanks to some good three-point shooting early on.

Alton managed to keep O'Fallon at bay as it continued to lead 31-25 at halftime.

But the Panthers outscored Alton 16-8 in the third, ending that quarter and beginning the fourth on a continuous 15-point run. It was enough to propel O'Fallon to a 53-45 win Tuesday night.

"We got out-toughed in the second half on our own home court," Dudley said.

"We don't talk about the score. We talk about not getting loose balls, we talk about not being tough enough to keep a man in front of us, we talk about being tough enough, not to look up at the scoreboard, to do the right thing. And we weren't tough enough. The game honors toughness and the toughest team won tonight, and that team was not us," Dudley said.

It marked Alton's second home loss in a row, having fallen to East St. Louis last Friday night by a score of 79-63.

The Redbirds led that game at halftime as well by three points before being outscored 29-10 by the Flyers in the third.

"We have to figure out the third quarter," Dudley said. "We've come out flat in the third quarter two games in a row and that's on me. We'll get it taken care of."

Alton led by as much as nine points early on in the second quarter before O'Fallon's rally.

After Hassani Elliott's basket made it 39-32 Alton midway through the third quarter, the Panthers ended that frame on a 10-point run.

It kicked off with Will Brown's three-pointer, followed by back-to-back baskets from Rini Harris, and then was capped off by Jaeden Rush's basket as O'Fallon went up 41-39 after three-quarters of play.

Once the Redbirds lost their lead, they looked like a completely different team.

"Our response has not been good," Dudley said. "You have to do the right thing all the time no matter the result."

O'Fallon outscored Alton 12-6 in the fourth to ensure no chance of a comeback.

The Redbirds lost by eight and missed 11 free throws.

“I think it’s unrealistic. No team makes all their free throws,” Dudley said, “but our number is 70 percent. We talk about 50 percent from the field, 35 percent from three, 70 percent from the free throw line. But you’re not going to win going 6 for 17 from the free throw line.”

That comes out to be 35 percent from the foul line, exactly half of the team’s standards.

“You can’t win in this league,” Dudley said. “You can’t give teams extra possessions.”

The Panthers had three players in double figures. Rush led with 16 points while Brown and Harris each chipped in 15.

O’Fallon improved to 17-7 on the season and 6-3 in the SWC.

Alton was led by Semaj Stampley who scored 12. Kobe Taylor and Trai’Sean Sims each scored 11 and Elliot had six.

The Redbirds fell to 14-10 and 3-5 in the conference.

“It’s a disappointing effort,” Dudley said. “We didn’t deserve to win the game in the end.”

Alton will look to bounce back on Friday when it goes to Granite City for a 7:30 p.m. tip-off.