

Allen Leads five Tigers Players In Double Figures With 14 Points, Edwardsville Holds Off East St. Louis 77-73

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Malik Allen played in his final regular season game at Lucco-Jackson Gym on Friday night, and made the most of his, leading Edwardsville with 14 points as one of five Tiger players in double figures in their 77-73 win over East St. Louis.

Allen, along with fellow seniors A.J. Tillman, Kris Crosby, and SaDonald West, bid their regular season farewells to the home crowd, and all made big contributions to the Tigers win over the Flyers in a very close, physical and exciting game that kept all in attendance on the edge of their seats all night long.

“We feel great,” said Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas. “Those are hard games, that’s a really great team , and I thought our guys just accepted that it was going to be hard, met that challenge head on. And we led the whole game. I think that says a lot about the character of our guys, and the way they executed. We got the lead early, maintained the lead, and when times got tough, we made a few tough threes. So we’re really proud of A.J.; he played 32 minutes, and had to be really physical and handle the ball. And there were all kinds of great individual contributions. Donnie (Coates) was diving all over, Kris, great minutes down the stretch, iose (Epenesa) with some big rebounds. And then, the guards making free throws late. Herbert (Martin) was tremendous. He really responded well late with the two big free throws, and he did a good job on (Robert McCline), who can really shoot for them. So I could go up and

down the roster, but really proud of our guys, and I just hope they're proud of themselves and feel good about their effort tonight."

It was indeed an impressive win against an East Side team that could again contend for the IHSA Class 3A championship next month in Champaign-Urbana.

There's no doubt," Battas said. "That's a championship-level team. We think we are, too, and our league (the Southwestern Conference) kind of prepares you for those games late in the season. We think our league is tremendous. They are a great team, and our guys acknowledge it, and that's really good. We're Impressed, because we had to do a lot of things really well to beat a really good team,"

The Tigers conclude the regular season on the road against two SWC foes, Collinsville on Tuesday, and at Belleville West next Friday, before heading into the IHSA Class 4A playoffs, and those won't be easy games, either.

"We've got two tough ones, there's no doubt, on the road," Battas said, "against state-ranked Collinsville, and Belleville West is a really hard team to play against with their speed. Yeah, we'll keep practicing and try to get a little bit better every day."





The Tigers started off strong by scoring the game's first seven points, on a basket by Epenesa, a three from Coates, and a pair of free throws by Allen, that gave Edwardsville an early 7-0 lead. Curtis Bownes scored the first basket for the Flyers to make it 7-2, but a three from Tillman extended the Tigers lead to 10-2. Bownes and Davis Bynum then scored to make it 10-6, but another Coates three and a late pair of free throws from Crosby gave Edwardsville a 15-6 lead at quarter time.

Crosby made a lay-in to open the second quarter, with a dunk from Bynum making it 17-8. A three from Miccah Butler opened up a 20-8 Tiger lead, and with the score 24-13, the Flyers McCline hit a three, and Taylor Powell scored to cut the lead to 24-18. Near the end of the quarter, Jordyn Burris hit a shot that triggered another Flyer run, with Powell dunking and Isahai Brown hitting a three to cut the lead to 30-28, but on a long pass into the basket in the final second, Devyon Hill-Lomax was in the right place at the right time to score at the buzzer to give the Tigers a 32-29 halftime lead, giving Edwardsville the momentum.

At the start of the third quarter, baskets by Martin, Epenesa and Coates were a part of a 6-2 run to give the Tigers a 38-30 lead. After a Bynum free throw made it 38-31, the Tigers, behind a pair of baskets from Allen, and a three from Butler, gave Edwardsville a 45-31 advantage. East Side rallied back to within 48-41, but the Tigers held off the rally and led after the third quarter 53-42.

The Tigers were able to maintain an 11-point lead through much of the first half of the fourth quarter, but the Flyers, behind a three-point play from Bynum, and a pair of baskets from Jaylen Hampton, cut the lead to 59-55. The final three minutes was a free throw contest, where the Tigers shot well, and aided by a dunk by Crosby, a basket from Epenesa, and timely free throw shooting, were able to hold off the Flyers' comeback attempt and win 77-73.

Allen led Edwardsville with 14 points, while both Martin and Epenesa had 12 points each, Coates and Crosby scored 10 points apiece, Tillman scored nine points, Butler had five points, and Hill-Lomax scored two points.

Bynum led East Side with 22 points, with Hampton having 20 points, Powell scored 14 points, McCline came up with eight points, Brown had five points, and Bownes scored four points.

The Flyers are now 18-9, and wind up their regular season starting on Saturday afternoon at Chaminade College Prep Catholic in west St. Louis County in a 2 p.m. tip, then play their final regular season games at home Tuesday against O'Fallon, and next Friday against Belleville East, Both games start at 7:30 p.m.

The Tigers go to 18-10, and play on the road, at Collinsville on Tuesday, and at Belleville West on Friday, both games also starting at 7:30 p.m.



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