

Southwestern Conference Title Decided On Final Day Of Regular Season – SWC Teams Set For Playoffs Next Week

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – The Southwestern Conference over the course of the regular season was a wild ride.

And it came down to the wire.

After the Collinsville Kahoks beat Alton Friday night, they clinched the SWC crown with a 9-3 record. Had they lost, they'd share the title with O'Fallon, both finishing 8-4.

"The kids did a great job," Collinsville head coach Darin Lee said after the win over Alton Friday night.

"Every team's really good. I thought nine would clinch a tie at least, I really thought. Anybody could've got to nine this year," Lee said.

If you asked him if he thought the conference title was going to be decided on the regular season's finale, he had no doubt.

"Oh yeah, 100 percent," Lee said. "In this conference, this year, one through seven is really good."

Alton's head coach Dylan Dudley shared the same sentiment.

"I did. To be honest, I did," he said about his thoughts on the conference getting decided on the last day.

"They're all the same, every team is the same. Every team has good players, every team has good coaches, every place is hard to play, every community, every school, they get behind their team, it's important," he said.

"I bet if you went and looked back historically it's probably went down to the last day of the season many, many, many times before. Probably more so than not. I'm not surprised, just disappointed it wasn't us," Dudley said.

Alton finished the season at 3-9 in the conference with wins over O'Fallon, Belleville West, and Edwardsville.

West finished one game better at 4-8 while Belleville East, Edwardsville, and East St. Louis all finished 6-6.

That's just about as even as a conference can get.

And it all translated very questionably into the postseason seedings.

Besides East St. Louis who is in Class 3A, all other six SWC teams join Granite City and Quincy in the top half of the Pekin Sectional.

And just like the regular season, the seeding is kind of wild.

Collinsville earned the No. 1 seed, there wasn't a lot of question about that, but seeds two through eight could have gone any other way.

Edwardsville, the only team to beat Collinsville twice in the regular season, somehow came up with a No. 5 seed.

Quincy is No. 2, O'Fallon No. 3, Belleville East No. 4, Edwardsville No. 5, Alton No. 6, Belleville West No. 7, and Granite City No. 8.

"Belleville West's a really good team and they're a seven. Alton's a really good team and they're a six. So, everybody's really good," coach Lee said.

Dudley had mixed emotions.

"As far as seed, yes, playing who I thought we were going to be playing, honestly, no," he said on his thoughts of the postseason. "To be honest, I don't think Belleville East is playing who they want to play, I don't think O'Fallon is playing who they want to play."

"Eventually, you have to beat everyone I understand that, but the IHSA needs to do something about what they did to our regional because that's ridiculous," Dudley continued. "Just seed it one through eight, if you have to switch it because of the sites, switch it because of the sites. Quit using the excuse of geography, just stop. Just do it right. But it is what it is. Where not going to cry about it. I've complained about it for 10 seconds now, but I won't do it again, and we'll go play the game."

Alton will take on that No. 2-seeded Quincy team, one that is ranked No. 5 in IHSA Class 4A according to the Associated Press' final state poll. The Kahoks are ranked slightly lower at No. 7 but gained the top seed after beating the Blue Devils earlier this season.

That part makes sense but seeds three through eight were an absolute toss-up.

"Everyone's the same," Dudley said.

"probably have a player that we don't have, Thomas (a 6-foot-6, 225-pound junior forward), he's a difference-maker. But every team has a player that's bigger than us, it's not an excuse. The team that plays the hardest, the team that's the toughest, and the team that makes the fewest mistakes will win a really good high school basketball game on Wednesday."

The same could be said for Collinsville's matchup against Granite City.

“We’ve got Granite, they played us close. The kids know that,” Lee said. “They’re not a typical eight-seed. They won the consolation side of our tournament. The reason they’re eight is because the other seven are so good.”

The Warriors, albeit not in the Southwestern Conference, still beat Alton and Edwardsville in the regular season, but they also lost to O’Fallon, Belleville West, Belleville East, and Alton later on.

Granite City lost to the Kahoks 67-60 earlier this season.

All eight teams will be in action on Wednesday, Feb. 21 in their respected regional semifinal games.

Belleville East plays Belleville West and O’Fallon plays Edwardsville in the other two matchups.

The regional finals are set for Friday, Feb. 23 at Edwardsville and Granite City at 7 p.m.