

Three Panther Players Hit In Double Figures, Helps O'Fallon To 63-54 Win Over Tigers

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EDWARDSVILLE – Will Brown, Jr. led three O’Fallon players in double figures with 17 points, as the Panthers’ hot three-point shooting in the first quarter helped set the tone as O’Fallon eliminated Edwardsville 63-54 in the second semifinal of the IHSA Class 4A boys basketball regional Wednesday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Panthers hit four threes in the opening period, taking a 22-14 lead, and from there, held the Tigers at bay, never giving up the lead as O’Fallon advanced to the final on Friday night.

“I tell people they’re a terrible match-up for us,” said Edwardsville coach Dustin Battas. “Just personnel vs. personnel, the way their speed, and the way they’re able to space out the floor. A lot of different guys can make threes, I thought we prepared well, we tried to take away the perimeter in the first quarter, and they still hurt us. I changed defenses a couple of times, and slowly, but surely, we got back into it. You give up 22 in the first quarter, you’re fighting an uphill battle the rest of the night.

And I thought we executed things. Our first five, six possessions, we got some really good shots, we executed some of our set plays. But when we’re behind, it makes things harder. At the end, I think we cut it to four, had a couple of wide-open threes that just didn’t go down That happens against a really good team.”

Both teams were hitting their threes at the start, as Allen hit back-to-back to give the Tigers an early 6-5 lead, with Tillman connecting on another three to give Edwardsville a 9-8 lead. A Brown basket gave O'Fallon the lead at 10-9, and it triggered a 7-0 run, with Caden Saunders hitting another three that helped the Panthers take a 15-9 lead. An exchange of baskets brought the score to 17-11, and from there, a three and a basket from Brenton Hunter allowed the Panthers to take a 22-14 lead after the first quarter.

The Tigers went on their own 7-0 run to start the second quarter, led by both Tillman and Allen to cut the O'Fallon lead to 24-21. The Panthers weathered the storm, and expanded their lead on baskets by Brown and Eric Swartz, Jr. to go back ahead 28-21. The Panthers led at halftime 30-23,





A Rini Harris three at the start of the second half gave O'Fallon a 33-27 lead, which became a 7-2 Panther run to increase the advantage to 40-29. The sides exchanged threes, and O'Fallon took a 48-39 lead after three quarters. Baskets from Saunders and Brown took the advantage to 52-39 at the start of the fourth quarter, but the Tigers, led by Miccah Butler and Allen, pulled to within 54-47 later on. Brown then hit a three to give O'Fallon a 57-47 lead, but the Tigers again came back, with a basket from Tillman cutting the lead to 58-54 with 1:26 left. The Panthers managed to hold off the charge from Edwardsville and went on to the 63-54 win to move on.

Brown led O'Fallon with 17 points, while Jaeden Rush added 14 points, Zach Tebbe came up with 10 points, Saunders scored eight points, Harris had six points, Saunders hit for five points, and Swartz had three points.

The Tigers were led by 19 points by Allen, and 13 points from Herbert Martin, Iose Epenesa came up with six points, Tillman had four points, Donovan Coates hit for four points, and Kris Crosby scored two points.

Coach Battas concluded the matchup against O'Fallon was "a tough regional semifinal to play a team as good as that."

"I felt like it was more like a sectional game than a regional semifinal game should look like," he said. "So, we knew they were good, and they played good tonight. And we were going to have to catch them on an off-night to beat them."

While the Tigers finish up at 19-12, O'Fallon is now 21-10, and will meet Quincy, who pulled out a 48-47 win over Alton in the first semifinal, in the regional final Friday night at Lucco-Jackson Gym, with a tip-off time of 7 p.m.





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