

# Goclan's Heroics Seize Victory for Edwardsville in MVCHA Opener

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EDWARDSVILLE – Konnor Goclan scored twice, including a go-ahead goal with 4:01 left in regulation, then hit the game-winner in a shootout to give Edwardsville a 5-4 win, taking the shootout 2-1, in game one of the 2024 Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association championship series Monday night at RP Lumber Center in Edwardsville.

The win put the Tigers ahead in the best-of-three series 1-0, and can clinch the championship in their first year back in the MVCHA Tuesday night at the McKendree Metro Rec-Plex in O’Fallon Tuesday night.

The game itself was a very well-played thriller on both sides, where the Panthers had an answer for each of Edwardsville’s goals, and the game wasn’t decided until Kai Vetter stopped Kyle Settles on his shootout attempt to end the game.

“We were talking after the game,” said Tigers’ head coach Jason Walker. “I think that was one of the best, the fastest MVCHA game, maybe in the history of the league. That team over there is incredible, I mean, they played great tonight. You get one, and they find a way back, you get another one, they fight their way back. It was just back and forth. Great game. I think one of the things it seems about that game is it wasn’t a lot of mistakes, it was just good hockey. Both teams played well.”





Each time O'Fallon had an answer to an Edwardsville goal, the Tigers kept grinding away, and kept pressing forward.

"I think we feel pretty good about where we are, mentally," Walker said. "We're a battle-tested team, and I don't think much bothers us. We say it all the time, we've just got to find a way to win, and they found a way to win It tonight."

Vetter made two saves in the shootout, and Walker felt good about his team's chances in the shootout as well.

"We felt good about it in the shootout," Walker said, "As good as their forwards are, I don't think there's another team that can match what they throw at you, offensively. When we got to the shootout, we liked our chances. Our three shooters and our goaltender, they've got that. That's a pressure situation, and they were able to finish it off."

Walker does know what it'll take to win game two on Tuesday, and he'll be ready for the possible clincher.

"We've got to play better defensively," Walker said. "It's one of the things that was frustrating about this game. We left a few plays out there, defensively, especially moments in the game. I thought the second half of the first period, it was really poor, and we had some issues in the second period, as well. We're better than that defensively, and we'll be better than that in game two, but you can't give up that many chances to a team like that, and they scored four goals tonight. We don't like giving up that many goals."

It was, still, the kind of game where both teams deserved credit for playing so well.

"It was a good game," Walker said. "We've just got to be ready for game two."

It didn't take the Tigers long to get on the board first, when off a scramble in front of the O'Fallon goal, Fred Bramstedt poked a loose puck in the net at 3:38, with Luke Thomlinson and Goclan assisting, to put Edwardsville ahead 1-0. O'Fallon tied the game at 9:02, when Zeth Jordan scored off a good pass from August Feldker III to tie the game 1-1 after the first period.

The Tigers went back on top at 1:05 of the second period, when Goclan scored off assists from Thomlinson and Bramstedt to give Edwardsville the lead back at 2-1. The lead lasted all of 87 seconds, when Jack Vahle took a pass from Caden Garon and scored to retie the game at 2-2. The score stayed that way the rest of the period, thanks to both solid defense and goaltending on both sides.

Edwardsville went ahead 3-2 in the third when Atticus Arth scored from an assist by Zach Cohn at 4:21, with O'Fallon equalizing 48 seconds later on a goal by Feldker, from Abram Tuner at 5:13 to make the score 3-3. Both teams tightened up defensively, but with 4:01 to go in regulation, Goclan struck as he stole the puck, went in alone and scored unassisted to put Edwardsville back on top 4-3. Again, the lead didn't last long, as at 11:40, Jordan scored his second of the game, assisted by Mason Wright, to forge another tie at 4-4. The period expired with no further scoring, and the two teams went directly into the shootout to decide the game.

Branstedt scored first in the shootout, with Vetter stopping Wright to give the Tigers the early edge at 1-0. O'Fallon tied the shootout in the second round, when Thomlinson was stopped by the Panther goalie, and Vahle scored to make it 1-1. Goclan then scored on his attempt in the third and final round, and when Vetter stopped Settles on his attempt, it clinched the shootout and the game for Edwardsville, 2-1 in the shootout and 5-4 in the game.

The Tigers can clinch the Class 2A championship with a win at the McKendree Rec-Plex on Tuesday night at 7:30 p.m. If the Panthers win, the third and deciding game will take place Thursday night at RP Lumber Center at 7 p.m.



