

Tigers Take First Set, Play Well, Vianney Rallies To Take Final Two Sets, Defeats Edwardsville In Season Opener

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March 20 2024 8:38 AM





EDWARDSVILLE - The Edwardsville boys volleyball team won a see-saw first set in the season-opening match on Tuesday, but St. John Vianney Catholic of Kirkwood, Mo. rallied back to take a tight win in the second set and dominated the deciding set to take a 22-25, 29-27, 25-14 win over the Tigers at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Golden Griffins were able to regroup after the opening set, held on to take the second set to tie the match, and then were dominant in the third and deciding set, taking a 12-5 lead in going on to win the match.

The Tigers did play fairly well and kept battling throughout the night, but mistakes doomed Edwardsville.

"A little disappointed," said Tigers head coach Doug Allen. "I really thought we had it there in the second set, we didn't quite pull through. We've still got a little bit more work to do, and that's what we said after the game. We have some work to do. We're not as polished as we need to be, but we did play really well. We're playing a very tough Vianney team; they're always tough, and they're well polished They always are and we're right there with them. So, it was good to see where we've made progress from last year to this year, and we knew it would be tough. We knew it would be a tough match, and it was a lot closer than I thought it would be. It was a really good match."

Both sides played well, with Vianney showing their class and poise in the final set to take the win.

"I don't know if we felt the pressure," Allen said. "We were struggling with our serve, and our block was a little off. Towards the end, I don't know if we were tired. But we will clean up those faults that we had, move forward, and do better."

The first match, as usual, revealed the things Edwardsville needs to work on in practice, and Allen now knows where the improvements need to be made.

"That is absolutely true," Allen said. "We could see all the holes in our defense, right up front, and we know exactly what to work on. That's what we said in the group afterward. We said we know exactly what we're working on tomorrow. You all should know as well, and they all did."

Still, it was a very good effort by the Tigers on opening night, which pleased Allen.

"You never want to lose," Allen said, "but, as far as if you're going to lose, I don't mind losing if we're playing well, and that's what we did. So, I'm good with that."

The opening set was very much a see-saw affair, with neither team being able to build a big advantage, the largest lead not being more than two points on either side.

With the set tied 22-22 late, Jacob Williams threw down a kill to give the Tigers the lead and the ball, and from there, Brayden Wallis was able to serve out the set, with Colin Donaldson scoring the decisive spike to give Edwardsville a 25-22 win and a one-set lead in the match.

The second set started off about the same way, with both teams trading points, and not being able to build a big advantage. Andrew Kellar threw down a kill to give Vianney a 12-9 lead, and later in the set, the serving of Garrett Hauck, along with kills from Max Stoecklein and Adam Rush, increased the Griffins lead to 19-12.

Eventually, the score became 22-14 when the Tigers started a rally behind the service of Lucas Gebhardt, who served up seven points in a row, getting help from kills by Wallis, and blocks from Joe Liston and Donaldson, to cut the lead to 22-21.

The Tigers were able to tie the set at 24-24, after which the teams exchanged points. with Edwardsville at match point once, and Vianney having four set points, before a Stoecklein kill and combining with Kellar for a block that gave the Griffins a 29-27 win to even the match at one set each.

Vianney came out to a 4-2 lead to start the deciding set, with Rush increasing the lead through his service to 7-2 before the Tigers regained the serve. The Griffins got the ball back at 8-3 and scored four of the next six points to go ahead 12-5, and eventually took a 16-7 lead. The Tigers did rally to cut the lead to 18-11, but the Griffins outscored the Tigers the rest of the way 7-3 to take the final set and the match 25-14.

Vianney starts its season 1-0, while the Tigers open up at 0-1, and face another tough test Thursday night at CBC, where Edwardsville will play under Missouri's best-of-five system. The Tigers then will be playing in the Joliet West Invitational tournament this weekend in Joliet, and it's something Allen is looking forward to and also very happy with his team's endeavors.

"We've got CBC on Thursday," Allen said, "and Friday, we leave for Joliet, a big tournament up in Chicago, that's always a lot of fun for us. I'm pretty happy with the team effort. It's a good team effort, and they played well."

