

Alton Snaps Nine-Game Losing Streak To Edwardsville – Elliot's Late Game Heroics Sees Redbirds Win In OT

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – February 21, 2020.

The last time Alton had beaten Edwardsville in a boys basketball game.

A nine-game streak snapped Thursday night at Alton High School.

After being down by 11 points at the beginning of the fourth quarter, the Redbirds battled back to beat the Tigers 60-55 in overtime.

“It was definitely a hump that we had to get over,” Alton head coach Dylan Dudley said. “If someone beats you nine times and that’s supposed to be your rival; that can wear on you. It was wearing on me. I felt the pressure. And I think some of our kids felt the pressure. I thought that’s why we played so timid to start the game.”

The Redbirds took an early 4-0 lead thanks to baskets from Trai‘Sean Sims and Kobe Taylor but Edwardsville’s AJ Tillman scored a three and then immediately grabbed a steal and score to regain the lead at 5-4.

The Redbirds wouldn’t lead again until overtime. The Tigers led 10-7 after the first quarter.



Tillman scored again to open the second quarter as Edwardsville used a 6-0 run in the middle of the frame to go up 20-16 at halftime.

The timidness Dudley spoke of was forced on by the Tigers, who made Alton slow the game down and take it possession to possession in the early goings.

That stayed the same to start the second half, as Edwardsville outscored Alton 16-11 in the third quarter.

“I told the guys at the end of the third quarter, ‘Look, we’re playing at their pace.’ If we play at their pace, we’re not winning,” Dudley said.



After Malik Allen scored to open the fourth and make it a 38-27 Edwardsville lead, the Redbirds began to push the pace and play to their style in the closing minutes.

Hassani Elliot scored Alton’s last eight points in regulation to force OT. He made two free throws to tie the game at 48-48 with 38 seconds left in the game.

The Tigers inbounded the ball, but Allen would turn it over to Semaj Stampley. He got off an ambitious half-court shot that went off the rim. He got his own rebound and put another shot attempt up as the buzzer sounded but it too bounced off the rim and out.

Tillman opened the scoring in OT to take a 50-48 lead. Elliot answered with a free throw before Stampley made both of his foul shots to go ahead 51-50, Alton's first lead since early in the first quarter.

Tillman still went the other way and scored to flip it back to 52-51 Edwardsville, but Elliot's and-one basket with 1:18 left to go ahead 54-52 just about did the trick.

Elliot sunk two more free throws and made another basket before Stampley made both of his shots from the line to ice the game.



"I just felt like if we could get the game pressure back on them, we can swing the momentum. And I think over time that's what happened," Dudley said regarding the fourth quarter.

"That's how we have to play. That's how we have to get the game going. That's how we were in the game at Collinsville because over time we wore them down," he added.

Alton came into the game against Edwardsville on the heels of a 57-51 loss at Collinsville on Tuesday. The Tigers had just handed the Kahoks their first loss of the season last Friday by a score of 42-38.

Collinsville suffered another Southwestern Conference loss Thursday against Belleville East in OT as well by a score of 48-45.

Being the first win over Edwardsville since 2020, naturally, it was the first time Dudley had done so since being hired on last season, and it meant the world to him.

“We talk all the time, when stuff goes bad, you can’t blink. They never blinked,” he said about his own players. “I’m just really, really proud of those kids. And I’m really happy for this program, for this community.”

“To see the looks in those kids’ eyes, they never blinked. If that effort is what this program is built on from the ground up, we’re in a really good place.”



Elliot would be the game’s hero as he scored a career-high 29 points. 21 of those points came in the fourth quarter and OT combined.

“It really meant a lot,” Elliot said. “Since my freshman year, we’ve been losing close games to them. And I just wanted to win, bad.”

“What a night, but more importantly, what a kid,” Dudley said about Elliot. “What an unbelievable kid, an unbelievable person. I get choked up talking about him because I

just know the story. I know his story, I know what he's been through, I know all the stuff he's overcome, and I get emotional talking about him, but I love that kid."

Along with Elliot's career night, Stampley ended up with 12 points and Taylor had 9.

Tillman led the Tigers with 17 points. Allen added 10 points and Kris Crosby had nine.

Alton improved to 11-7 on the season and 3-3 in the Southwestern Conference. The Redbirds are now 7-0 at home.

"If you want a fighting chance in this league, I don't care who you are, but if you don't win your home games in this league, then you have no chance," Dudley said.

"We beat a damn good team. We beat a damn good team with a damn good coach," he continued. "And we'll probably have to play them again I would assume, it's what we all do in the Southwestern Conference. But we're happy about tonight."





Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas saw the silver lining in the loss at Alton.

“I think that’s complimentary to our guys,” he said about Alton’s desire to beat his team.

“Traditionally, Edwardsville has had success. I hope people think we’re hard to play against. Coach Dudley is doing a good job. He’s kind of putting the program back, trying to restore it back to where it was, so they’re going to take pride in beating teams. To me, that’s a compliment, when teams beat you and feel good about it.”

“Credit to him and his kids,” Battas continued. “But certainly, I’m sure they had this one circled on the calendar. They’ve been playing a lot better and are a really good team. We’ll get to see them again and I’m sure it will be another tough battle.”

The Tigers won the first SWC meeting on Dec. 1 in Edwardsville by a score of 76-61. They could see each other again in the postseason, but they might not have to wait that long.

With both teams participating in the Jerseyville Mid-Winter Classic, there's an opportunity for Alton and Edwardsville to meet in the final next weekend.

Battas took responsibility for his team's defense Thursday night.

"I told my guys that I've never been more disappointed in myself," he said. "As a coach, to let No. 11 (Elliot) score 29 points, there's a lot of things I could have done better on defense. I apologized to my guys for the defensive end, a lot of that is on me."

Edwardsville falls to 12-7 and 4-3 in the SWC.

Thursday's game was moved up a day because of the predicted weather forecast for Friday night, meaning that both teams only got one day's rest from Tuesday night's games.

"Those things are out of your control," Battas said. "That's kind of what sports are all about, dealing with some adversity and trying to battle through that. Tonight, just played a little bit better than we did."



