

Allen Leads With 17 Points, But Tigers Fall To Belleville East 45-44 In SWC Game

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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BELLEVILLE - Malik Allen led Edwardsville with 17 points, but the Tigers lost an early fourth-quarter 10-point lead as Belleville East recorded a 45-44 comeback win in a Southwestern Conference boys basketball game played Friday night at the Belleville East Gym.

Edwardsville had held a 41-31 lead early in the fourth quarter, but a 14-3 run by the Lancers in the final quarter, which was capped by a three from Tallis Lowery with 42.2 seconds left in regulation, made the difference, as the Tigers missed a pair of late free throws, plus a pair of critical turnovers in the final 10 seconds, helped East preserve the win.

"We did a lot of good things to win the game, but we just melted the last three or four minutes, missed free throws, costly turnovers," Edwardsville head boys coach Dustin Battas said. "And they made a couple of huge shots. (Xavien Moody) makes an NBA three, (Lowery) makes an NBA three, and we just weren't able to weather those things and still come out on top. We had way too many turnovers and missed free throws late, and it's the same old story, with all these close games that we lost lately."

Although the Tigers lost, there were very good positives to take from the game, including the performances of Allen and Iose Epenesa, who had eight points in the game.



"Yeah, we had some things that we did very well," Battas said. "Two or three times in the game, we were up 10, missed a wide-open three. Up 10, we missed a wide-open three. We had a couple of opportunities to extend the lead when we were playing really well, and just quite couldn't make those big shots, and it an eight-point game, and a six-point game, and right at the end, they make a deep three. So certainly, there are some things we did well, and I thought Miccah (Butler) did well, Malik made some shots, and Iose was good. There was each individual player who did some good things, just collectively, as a group at the end there, we just had trouble holding on to the ball and had trouble making free throws."

The Tigers now have four regular season games to go, including three in the Southwestern Conference, before the IHSA Class 4A playoffs begin. The Tigers can still do many good things before the end of the regular season.

"Yeah, we have to get better," Battas said, "we have to make sure that are practicing every day, and working on our deficiencies, so we can be playing our best basketball here in two weeks. We want to do good, yeah, we want to do good. We like competing, we're heartbroken right now, not so much because of a loss, but we've had seven just like this, where we had the lead and fell apart late. I think that's the hard pill to swallow, that we're still shooting ourselves in the foot, some. So we'll keep working, and we'll look at some things and try to get better, and start winning these close ones."

Butler hit a three right off the bat for the Tigers as Edwardsville went ahead 7-2 to start the game, with Herbert Martin hitting a floater in the lane, and Butler also scoring in the lane to give the Tigers an early 11-4 lead. A free throw from Jalen Dawson, and both a three and basket from Lowery cut the Edwardsville lead to 11-10 at the end of the first quarter.

Dawson hit again in the lane to give East its first lead at 12-11, but Allen hit twice to give the Tigers the lead back at 15-12. Another Butler three increased the lead to 18-14, and the two teams exchanged baskets to bring the Edwardsville lead to 22-18. A free throw from Jacori Brown and a basket from Donovan Coates gave the Tigers a 24-19 lead at halftime.

Early baskets by both Coates and Epenesa increased the lead to 28-19, but a three-point play from Moody cut the lead to 28-22. Undaunted, the Tigers maintained their lead, with Kris Crosby hitting a pair of key free throws in the period, and Martin hitting a basket at the end to give the Tigers a 37-29 lead after the third quarter.

Edwardsville got a pair of baskets early on in the final quarter from Butler and Allen to go ahead 41-31, when the Lancers began their comeback. A free throw from Lowery and a three from Moody cut the lead to 41-35, with Epenesa connecting an a pair of free

throws that make it 43-35. Moody hit another three, and a basket by Dawson suddenly made it 43-40 for Edwardsville, with another basket by Lowery making it 43-42 with less than a minute to go.

A free throw by Coates upped the lead to 44-42, before Lowery hit his clutch three with 42.2 seconds left to give the Lancers the lead at 45-44. The Tigers did have chances to take the lead back, or win it, in the final 30 seconds, but a pair of turnovers, plus missed free throws with 6.5 seconds left, doomed Edwardsville, as the Lancers ran out the clock to take the win.

To go along with Allen's 17 points, Coates had nine points for Edwardsville, both Butler and Epenesa had eight points each, and A.J. Tillman, Martin and Crosby all scored two points apiece.

Lowery led East with 18 points, while Savion Mitchell scored nine points, Dawson had five points, Moody and Brown scored three points each, and Christian Jenkins had two points.

The Lancers are now 17-9 on the season, while the Tigers slip to 16-10, and play their final two home games of the year this coming week, hosting Waterloo on Tuesday, and having their annual Senior Night game next Friday against East St. Louis, winding up their season on the road, at Collinsville on Feb. 13, and at Belleville West Feb. 16, with all games starting at 7:30 p.m.





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