

Edwardsville celebrates Senior Night with 70-0 thrashing of Kahoks, clinches playoff berth

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE — It was Senior Night at Tiger Stadium, where Edwardsville High honored their football team's Class of 2018 in pregame ceremonies.

For each of the seniors — Rodney Smith, Joe King, Dustin Walls, Blake Neville, Devin Parker, Ethan Schmidt, Jay Singlittery, Donovan Booker, Zac Ballosini, Jaylen Lewis, Reginald Wilson, Chase Viehman Ryan Connelly, Eli Grigaitis, Philip Newton, Drew Johnson, Griffin Kraut, Cale Warrer, Nick Thomas, Jacob Milton, Alec Van Patten, Jacob Stellhorn, Andrew Sill, Carson Robinson, and Donovan Spiller — it was recognition for all of their hard work and dedication to one of the Metro-East's and St. Louis area's most successful programs.

And to top everything off, the Tigers forced seven turnovers and took command early in defeating Collinsville 70-0, a win that officially clinched an Illinois High School Association playoff berth

"I'm proud of the kids," said Tiger coach Matt Martin of his team. "I think they've gotten better every week."

The Tiger defense was particularly stingy, not allowing the Kahoks much in the way offensively. And when Collinsville seemed to be threatening, Edwardsville made a play or a stop to shut the door.

“And they have some good players,” Martin said about a very young Kahok team that played mostly sophomore and juniors — Collinsville only had six seniors on their roster. “(Juan Garth) and (Kameron Sloan), and (Sloan’s) just a sophomore, and he’s a good-looking kid. They have the potential to break long runs, and we were able to contain them.”

Offensively, the Tigers were able to move the ball almost at will on the Kahok defense, scoring on its first four possessions in building a 28-0 lead. Junior quarterback Kendall Abdur-Rahman threw for two touchdowns in that span, one to Norman Harris and another to Booker, who made a great leaping catch to score. Abdur-Rahman also ran for another score, while freshman running back Justin Johnson ran in for a touchdown in the opening period as the Tigers built their lead.

In the second quarter, after an exchange of turnovers, Johnson on the third play of the drive, ran 38 yards to the Kahok one, where Abdur-Rahman took it in two plays later to give the Tigers a 35-0 lead. On the next Edwardsville possession, a nifty 23-yard Abdur-Rahman run set the Tigers up at the two, where Justin Johnson scored two plays later to up the advantage to 42-0. A fumbled snap on a fourth down punt set Edwardsville up on the Kahok 15 on the ensuing possession, where Abdur-Rahman fumbled the snap on the first play, recovered and made a nifty run through tacklers on the way to the end zone, making the halftime score 49-0, Edwardsville.

“It’s crazy,” Martin said. “He’s running strong, and he broke some arm-tackles on that. Last year, he wouldn’t have been able to do that. But he’s just so much stronger now, so much more confident. And I’ll be honest with you, I think it was a pass play. And I’ve been on the other side of that, where you’ve got a kid that just makes plays. And now, with Kendall, he’s probably one of the first kids in a long time, where you don’t have to be perfect on your blocking, he can make people just miss, and just have big plays.”

Collinsville did put together one good drive before halftime, mixing some runs from Sloan, Garth, Jake Holten and Gabriel Miller. The drive stalled, however, and a 43-yard field goal attempt was short.

The second half was played under the running clock rule, but the Tigers’ offense kept moving the ball well. Sophomore running back Kenyon Johnson, called up from the junior varsity, had a spectacular 69-yard run on the first play from scrimmage, while Antonio Thigpen, Jr. took it the rest of the way, scoring from 16 yards out three plays later to make it 56-0 after the convert. In the final quarter, Singlittery ran 57 yards up

the middle for another Tiger touchdown, while Eric Epenesa climaxed the scoring with an incredible strip and carry 31 yards for the final touchdown and score of 70-0.

“Isn’t that impressive?” Martin said. “The rip and fumble recovery for the touchdown. He is so close. . .he’s getting there. I’m proud of him.”

The Tigers finish the regular season 6-3. 6-1 in the Southwestern Conference, and now await who their first playoff opponent will be. The classifications and pairings will be announced by the IHSA Saturday evening in a show to be livestreamed free on the IHSA website, via their television partner, NBC Sports Chicago (formerly CSN Chicago).

Martin feels that the schedule the Tigers played have prepared his team for the postseason.

“Yeah, we’ll have a better idea tonight, but definitely won’t know for sure until tomorrow,” Martin said. “We’ve been preparing for good competition all year; we’ve played good competition, so we’ll see what happens.”





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