

# Rodgers, Johnson score twice, defense gets five turnovers in Tigers 35-12 win over Redbirds

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EDWARDSVILLE – Both Dionte Rodgers and Justin Johnson, Jr. scored two touchdowns each while the Edwardsville defense had five takeaways as the Tigers defeated Alton 35-12 in a key Southwestern Conference football game Friday night at Tiger Stadium.

It was a big bounce-back win for the Tigers, who broke a three-game losing streak with the win.

“We need it,” said Edwardsville coach Matt Martin. “They’re a good football team, that was a good win for us.”

And Rodgers and Johnson each had incredible performances as well. Rodgers scored on a 46-yard touchdown run, and also added a 60-yard touchdown reception.

“They both ran the ball hard,” Martin said, “and when they’re doing well, that usually means the O-line and the wide receivers are usually blocking for them, too.”

Martin praised the Redbird offense and their playmaking ability.

““They’ve got some playmakers, don’t they?,” Martin said. “They throw those jump balls, and they can go up and get everything, they throw the screens to them, which is good against pressure. Our goal was to be good tacklers; I don’t think we tackled very well in the first half, a little bit better in the second half.”

And the five turnovers was a very key part of the game.

“Absolutely,” Martin said. “That makes you look pretty good after a while. Last year, when we played them, it was a close game, and we lost the turnover battle. You know, they’re a physical team, you see that. They can stop the run from tackle to tackle. They do a good job.”

The Redbirds got off to a bad start on the game’s opening possession, which helped set the tone.

“I don’t think we came out playing our best, it’s obvious,” said Alton coach Eric Dickerson, “But we played a tough second half, especially on defensive wise. So it’s definitely not what we wanted or expected, but we’ll have to look at the film and see what we can do.”

Senior wideout Terrance Walker had a tremendous first half with four catches for over 150 yards and a touchdown, but came out in the second due to injury.

“Tough. I mean, it hurts,” Dickerson said. “It happens in this game, injuries are going to happen. But you’ve got to have that next man up mentality, and we’ve gotta find that in this team to who’s going to step up. We were getting tired, we’ve got a lot of guys going both ways. So we’ve got to look for some guys to step up this week.”

Things didn’t start well for the Redbirds, where on the second play from scrimmage, a snap went over the head of quarterback Andrew Jones, who fell on the ball at the Alton two, and two plays later, Rodgers took a punt back to the Redbirds 10, and a half the distance penalty put the ball on the five. It took only two plays for the Tigers to score, with Johnson going up the middle one yard for the touchdown. Brendan Latham’s kick made it 7-0 1:44 into the game.

Later in the quarter, the Redbirds came back on a Jones to Walker connection for 48 yards, Walker making a tipped one-handed grab to put the ball on the Tiger 14. Jones ran it in from seven yards out three plays later to make it 7-6, but the Tigers blocked the kick on the convert to keep the score that way.

Edwardsville came right back on its next possession, taking only 51 seconds to go 62 yards in four plays. Quarterback Luke Oglesby, playing for the injured Kendall Abdur-Rahman, had a couple of good runs, to set things up, and on a hand-off, Rodgers went 46 yards up the middle on a great run for the touchdown with 3:44 left in the first term. Latham’s convert made it 14-6.

The Tigers then recovered a fumble on the ensuing Alton drive, and went 80 yards in 11 plays to extend its lead. Johnson carried the ball most of the way on the drive, and Oglesby connected on a 25-yard pass play to Chase Moore, who made a nice running catch on the play. The drive culminated with a seven-yard keeper by Oglesby to make it 21-6 early in the second.

Later on, the Tigers scored again on a 15-yard screen pass from Oglesby to Johnson, who made a nice run after the catch to make it 28-6 after the convert. The Redbirds came right back on the next possession as Jones connected with Walker for a 51-yard pass play that helped set up a 10-yard strike from the pair to cut the Tiger lead to 28-12 at halftime after a two-point pass fell incomplete.

“I thought Luke did a good job,” Martin said. “He had some cadence issues going on; I don’t know what it was. These are minor. He didn’t hurt us, in fact, he helped us, he did a good job. But there are some things we’ve got to work on.”

Edwardsville received the kickoff to start the second half, and on the second play from scrimmage, Oglesby found Rodgers on the sidelines and hit him with a pass that Rodgers took 60 yards for the touchdown after only 35 seconds into the half. The

convert made it 35-12. The Redbirds tried to come back, but two interceptions by Rodgers, along with another by Jalen Cooper, ended the drives.

With 10:06 left in the fourth quarter, the Tigers started a drive that didn't produce any points, but took all but the final minute off the clock in a 20 play possession that saw both Rodgers and Johnson keep the ball on the ground that ate up the time. The drive ended at the Redbird 12, and two Alton runs got a first down, but the game ended with the 35-12 final.

Dickerson praised the Tigers team after the game.

"We knew watching film, they're good up front, both defensively and offensively," Dickerson said. "They came out, and they executed really well, putting our defense in a position like we did there to start the game, I mean, not anything we're looking forward to. We give up seven points, and we should be able to come back from there, but just a lot of mistakes tonight."

The Redbirds, now 2-3 overall and 1-2 in the league, host Belleville East in their homecoming game next Friday night in a 7 p.m. kickoff, and Dickerson knows that Alton will bounce back and be ready to go.

"Oh, yeah," Dickerson said. "We talked to them; we can't just spot any team 21, 28 points, we've gotta come out ready to play. We'll shore up some things, I know we will. These kids have a lot of heart, a lot of fight in them. This one stung a little bit, so I expect them to come together, and we'll fix things up."

The Tigers, now 2-3 and 1-1 respectively, go on the road for the first time since August 31 when they play at O'Fallon next Friday in another 7 p.m. kickoff. Martin knows the task at hand for his team.

"They're all going to be important from here on out," Martin said. "Our backs are against the wall. We've gotta win out."



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