

Three Tigers score in double figures in 70-38 girls' win over Kahoks

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COLLINSVILLE – Sydney Harris led with 21 points and was one of three Edwardsville players to score in double figures as the Tigers defeated Collinsville 70-38 in a Southwestern Conference girls basketball game Tuesday night at Vergil Fletcher Gym.

Jaylen Townsend added 18 and Que Love had 13 as the Tigers hit on nine three-point baskets in the first half in building a 45-22 halftime lead in the Kahoks' Pink Out game that raised funds for cancer research.

The Tigers shot the ball very well throughout the game, and good defense also contributed to the win.

“We did. We shot it really well, but we moved the ball pretty good,” said Edwardsville head coach Lori Blade, “and found kids with the ball movement, the kids that were open, and fortunately, we were knocking them down. But probably more importantly, and what stands out to me, is our defense, from the last time we played them to now, we made a huge jump, and that’s what we were focused on coming in, because I was really disappointed when we broke down the film the last time we played them. Our defensive effort was not good individually or, more importantly, as a team. So, that’s what really stood out to me.”

The Tigers held center Kristyn Mitchell to five points in the rematch, after scoring double figures in the first game at Edwardsville.

“And she’s good, but we let them do whatever they wanted to do the first time,” Blade said. “The kids dug in tonight, and really kind of took them out of there, their speed that they want to go, and didn’t give them the things they usually get. So, I’m really proud of our effort defensively. I thought we did give up some boards in the second half, but overall, I thought our defense was really good in the second half. And then you combine that with shooting the ball pretty good, that’s what gonna happen.”

And the defensive effort led to baskets on the other end.

“Absolutely, it did,” Blade said. “I don’t know if they got tired, or what, but we got a lot of boards, and tried to get some transition there. They are know to contest outlets, and we knew that if we could get it out quickly, we would have numbers. But we also got some transition early against the press, and they pulled that off. Considering Que getting into foul trouble with that second one in the first quarter, I thought the kids did a good job, still extending the lead with her on the bench, and you never know how that’s going to go.”

The Tigers started out and stayed hot from the floor throughout, and the Kahoks did everything they could to keep up.

“Yeah, they certainly did,” said Collinsville coach Lori Billy. “They didn’t seem to miss from the floor. I’m looking to see what their shooting percentage was, especially in the first half. But yeah, we tried to stay with it and tried to execute our offense, and we really struggled to try to get back into it.”

The Tigers didn’t seem to miss at all in the first half, hitting from just about anywhere on the floor.

“We had a hand in their face, and they were still knocking them down,” Billy said. “So that makes it tough.”

The Kahoks have played well, for the most part, this season, but ran into a very good Tiger effort on the evening.

“Yeah, we’ve had a decent season,” Billy said. “We’ve talked about the fact that there are some games that we probably shouldn’t have given away, but tonight was definitely one where we got beat.”

The teams started out trading free throws that gave the Tigers a very early 2-1 lead, then Love hit a three that started an early 10-5 run, which also included baskets from Morgan Hulme, Harris, Megan Silvey and a long three from Love that made it 12-6. Love and Faith Liljegren then traded threes to make it 15-9 before the Tigers went on another run, outscoring Collinsville 7-2 on a basket by Townsend and both a basket and a three by Harris, with Caite Knutson scoring inside for the Kahoks to make the score 22-11 after the first quarter.

The Tigers stayed hot in the second quarter, getting the first seven points on baskets by Townsend and Hulme, sandwiched around a Harris three, to take a 29-11 lead. Mitchell and Harris then traded threes before the Tigers went on a 13-8 run as Harris scored five points during the run, and both Townsend and Kylie Burg hit threes to help Edwardsville open a 45-22 halftime lead.

Edwardsville hit nine threes in the first half.

“You don’t see that very often from us,” Blade said with a smile. “But you know what? That’s what they’ve been giving us lately, and we worked on that. We have a majority of the time, we’ll have more kids on the floor that can shoot it, at least stretch it out a little bit. And fortunately, tonight it went in.”

The Tigers stayed hot at the start of the third quarter, going off on a 17-6 run, getting a pair of baskets from Townsend to start, then Hulme getting a good bounce off the rim on a three, a Love basket off a good pass from Townsend,

Townsend hitting a three on the side and a pair of baskets from Love to make it 62-28. Knutson hit on a three and a basket inside to cut the lead to 62-33, but a three-point play by Burg and a Maddie Stephen bucket extended the lead back to 67-33. The quarter ended 67-35 and forced a running clock in the fourth quarter, in which both teams scored three points each as the Tigers ran out to the 70-38 final.

Knutson led the Kahoks with 11 points, while Liljegren and Mitchell had five each.

The second half of the season is getting underway, and for the Tigers, the focus is on getting better as a team, and creating good habits.

“Well, it’s been on getting better, maturing and getting what we want out of things,” Blade said. “And then trying to create good habits. So we’re still working on that. We’re understanding a lot better, we’re a lot tougher mentally than we used to be, and we’re playing, like I said, better and better defense, which is going to be big down the line. We thought that our defense let us down in the Parkway Central game, and I still think that it did. But it also gave us kind of a rude awakening as to what needs to keep us in games when we’re not shooting well. And we didn’t that night, and our defense just wasn’t good enough to keep us in it. So that’s been our focus; that’ll continue to be. But we still have some kids that are battling for time, and that doesn’t always happen at this time of the year. So that’s a plus for us.”

The defense and better ball movement on offense have been the biggest improvements from the start of the year for the Tigers.

“It is, but also the fluid movement in our offense, as we know them better now,” Blade said, “when we had so much inexperience early, that getting everything in sync and everybody on the same page. We still need to set better screens. There’s probably defense that’s number one, and we have to set better screens as a team. But they’re buying in. They believe in what they’re capable of doing, and we just need to battle game in and game out.”

For the Kahoks, Billy hopes to see her team improve day by day, and will work on both the team’s offensive and defensive sets.

“Well obviously, we want to improve on a game like tonight,” Billy said. “We want to be able to compete on the highest level. And so, we’re going to continue to work on our offense, and being able to execute against all kinds of pressure. And defensively, we

want to be more effective. We want to be able to stop the drives and to be able to rotate out and get to the shooters.”

And of course, there’s the competition in the Southwestern Conference, where every game is a battle.

“Absolutely,” Billy said. “The Southwestern Conference is tough every night, no matter who you go out and face. And so, each night you have to take, obviously, like a championship game, and just go out and play your best.”

The Tigers, now 18-2 on the year, play Alton in a conference game on Friday night, then hosts St. Joseph’s Academy Jan. 16 in another 7:30 p.m. tip.

The Kahoks, who fell to 9-6, host Belleville West on Thursday, and Riverview Gardens next Tuesday. Both games are set for 7:30 p.m.