

Harris Leads Way With 26 Points, Silvey, Weller, Evans, Add 9 Each As Edwardsville Girls Roll To 57-37 Win Over Belleville West

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Junior forward Syd Harris scored 26 points, while sophomore Emerson Weller, and juniors Elle Evans and Macy Silvey all added nine points as Edwardsville won their long-awaited season opener in a 57-37 win over Belleville West in a Southwestern Conference girls basketball game Saturday afternoon at Lucco-Jackson Gym.

The Tigers came back from an early 10-3 deficit to take control, especially in the second half, and ended the game on a 16-0 run, shutting out the Maroons in the final period to take the win.

It was the first-ever win for new Edwardsville coach Caty Happe, who took over from longtime coach Lori Blade after Blade announced her retirement after the 2019-20 season, and although things looked ragged to start, the Tigers were able to take charge in the fourth quarter to win going away.

"Yeah, I mean, people expect us to come out there and be perfect," Happe said during her post-game interview, "but you've got to realize that we've only had two practices and contact, and let alone, we took a week to go over plays, and things like that. So, I expected some rustiness, so hopefully, now that we have that part out, the second half, we looked a lot better, so it's really just getting the kids comfortable, really going game speed again against the defense."

Needless to say, everyone involved - players, coaches, officials, sideline workers and others -- were very excited to be back after having nearly a year away from the games, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Masks were the rule of the day, as everyone inside the gym were required to wear one, as was social distancing. Happe knew that her players were excited to be back on the court and playing.

"Super excited to get out there and play," Happe said. "I mean, they've been waiting for this, they've been wanting it. I don't think they would have come this quick, so I think that kind of shell-shocked us for a little bit. But it's always good that they could go play somebody."

The Maroons jumped out to an early 10-3 lead that caused the Tigers to take their first time out. Happe was very pleased to see how her team responded to the early adversity.

"It was awesome to see us respond," Happe said. "West has some shooters, and two of their kids hit some shots. But what I want to see in this group is how are they going to respond when things don't go their way. The past couple of years, they've had it pretty easy in terms of early on, and things have just kind of worked out. They've run good things, and now, some of these kids have to really dig in and figure out what their spot is, and how we're going to get good looks."

The Maroons started out well after missing their opening three shots, going on a 7-0 run after trailing 3-2, getting a basket from Maliah Sparks and a pair of threes from Reese Bennett and Lamiya Terrell to take a 10-3 lead with 3:52 left in the quarter, forcing an Edwardsville time out. Right afterwards, Evans hit a three to cut the edge to 10-6, and Harris went on to score the Tigers' next three baskets, with Evans chipping in a pair of free throws, to go on an 11-1 run to give Edwardsville a 14-11 lead. Jalynn Rook hit a three shortly before the siren to give the Maroons a 14-14 tie at the end of the first quarter.

A basket from Tikylah Harris-Mickens gave West the lead back, and after a three from Silvey and free throws from Bennett, the Maroons held an 18-17 edge. Baskets from Ariana Bennett and Harris gave Edwardsville a 21-18 advantage, but a Reese Bennett three tied the game for West at 21-21. A three from Harris and a three-point play by Reese Bennett kept the score tied, but the Tigers scored the last seven points of the half, getting a basket from Evans. and both a three and a basket from Harris to give Edwardsville a 31-24 lead at halftime.

The Maroons went on a 6-2 run to start the second half, cutting the lead to 33-30, and Harris took over from that point, scoring five of the next Tigers points to up the lead to 39-30. An Evans tip brought the lead to double figures at 41-30, causing a West time out, and the Maroons went on a 7-0 run, getting free throws from Casandra Sams, a Reese Bennett three and a basket from Sparks to cut the lead to 41-37. That would be the last points West would score, as Harris started the final run with a free throw shortly before the third quarter buzzer to make it 42-37 for the Tigers after the period.

Harris scored the first basket of the fourth quarter for the Tigers to make it 44-37, and from then on, it was all Edwardsville, as Silvey sank a three in the corner, Weller scored three baskets off breakaways while adding a free throw, and for good measure, sank both ends of a one-and-one to give Edwardsville their 57-37 final.

Harris' ability to take control of a game was very evident during the runs that ultimately decided the game.

"She did," Happe said. "She saw that we were kind of hitting a lull, and she did what Sydney can do. So I expect her to step up in big moments, and she did that well today."

The balanced secondary scoring from Weller, Evans and Silvey also was a big help to the Edwardsville cause.

"Absolutely," Happe said. "We're gonna need more than one person to score, and we're fully capable, as our team, of really evening out that outside, being able to hit shots."

After Harris' 26 points, along with Weller, Evans and Silvey all chipping in nine points each, both Katelynne Roberts and Ariana Bennett had two points each. Reese Bennett led the Maroons with 16 points, while Amiah McGee had seven points, Sparks had six points, Sams and Terrell each had four points, Rook scored three points, and Keyara Baerga-Plumey had two points.

It was Happe's first-ever game as head coach, and first-ever win, but wasn't sure how different it was being an assistant to Blade, and being the head coach herself.

"It's hard to say how different it was as an assistant," Happe said, "because of how COVID was, and the long time outs. But It's definitely different not having her there as a sounding board, and really having to make all those decisions."

Blade was at the game on the sidelines, and Happe was very happy to see her, but also felt different at the same time as well.

"It was nice to see her out there on the sidelines," Happe said, "but it's definitely different, having been with someone for about five years."

The biggest non-COVID adjustment that Happe had to make?

"Non-COVID?" Happe said. "Biggest adjustment was probably looking at getting subs in, because that was my job before. Now, I'm really looking at the game, and it's hard to figure out how to get some of those kids in all the time."

Happe has a very good coaching staff on her team, and it's still a learning curve for everyone as the season is just underway.

"Absolutely," Happe said. "So they're still learning, and we're trying to figure out how we're going to distribute different duties, and what not. But they've been awesome so far."

The Tigers, now 1-0 on the season, are on the road for the next three games, playing at O'Fallon Tuesday night, at Belleville East on Thursday, and at Civic Memorial next Saturday afternoon.





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