

Injuries Pile Up For Edwardsville - Panthers Remain Undefeated On The Year

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE – Last time out between the O’Fallon Panthers and Edwardsville Tigers, the two played 100 minutes of scoreless soccer, with O’Fallon eventually winning in penalty kicks.

They met for the second meeting of the regular season Monday evening and continued the regulation-time scoring drought for 78 more minutes.

Both teams had their chances, but it was O'Fallon that struck with 1:20 left on the clock to win 1-0 and continue a perfect season, now at 10-0 on the year and 6-0 in the Southwestern Conference.

"We did have our chances, and they did too. It was just a matter of who was going to finish that one, and they got us," Edwardsville head coach Abby Federmann said.

Late in the game, the final five minutes or so, the Tigers were pushing for a goal at the end of regulation, hoping not to go to overtime and a potential penalty shootout again like they did back on March 21.

It led to throwing some numbers forward and leaving a hole in the defense that the Panthers took advantage of perfectly. Addison Baldus saw the open field and sent a ball over the top, straight into the path of Claire Nieroda.

She made no mistake rushing past a defender and putting the ball behind Edwardsville keeper Genny Burroughs to make it 1-0.

It was Nieroda's 11th goal of the season, and it was the first assist of the year for Baldus.

"Against a great team like this, you're not going to have many moments, so you've got to finish those moments and Claire did a great job of doing that," O'Fallon head coach Justin Judiscak said.

"To get that done at the end of the game and to be able to not go into that extra time is a lot, because we have a game tomorrow," he said.

O'Fallon hosts Alton on Tuesday while the Tigers travel to Belleville East. But the Panthers weren't worried if they had to go into overtime again.

"If we had to go to overtime, we were fine with that," Judiscak said.

"I just felt like we could find a goal within the game. I didn't feel like we were going to go to penalties. Especially in the first half, we had some good opportunities that just didn't find the back of the net. I felt like if we just kept playing the game, we were going to find an opportunity before it gets to that point."

The Panthers certainly had their chances in the first half, and at one point, thought they had found the breakthrough.

Claire Nieroda whipped in a corner kick in the 25th minute that wound up in the back of the net. You can't score directly from the corner kick, rather the ball must deflect off a player and in. Burroughs did get a touch, so the goal would have stood.

Fortunately for the Tigers, the officials deemed there was interference with the goalkeeper and the goal was disallowed.

After that, O'Fallon had many more shots just off target to close out the half.

To open the second half, Edwardsville went on the attack with some chances of their own, the best one coming in the 50th minute when Ellie Neath's shot went just outside the left post, past the outstretched arm of O'Fallon keeper Kendall Joggerst.

Then things started going South for the Tigers.

Anna Maxim and Ayla Homann came out with muscle cramps and did not return for the final 20 minutes, and Edwardsville was looking gassed.

The Tigers ran out of fuel to keep up with O'Fallon's viscous, North-South style of play.

"We had all week to kind of work on how we can stop their super-fast, effective transition. That's O'Fallon's way," Federmann said.

"Throughout the course of the week, we had some injuries that changed some things up, and I just think physically we didn't have it. But I don't think we strayed from our strategy. It was a very evenly played game I think," Federmann added.

"Both teams are so athletic, it's just a matter of who's going to wear down, who's going to have the energy at the end of the game to make that final play," Judiscak said.

"I think that was evident with us being able to run past them in that moment, that we had that last bit of stamina that we needed, because it was just a track-meet for both teams."

With the result, Edwardsville falls to 5-2 on the season and 3-2 in the conference, only losing to O'Fallon. While winning the SWC title will be out of Edwardsville's hands now, the Tigers still have a potential third meeting in the postseason to look forward to.

"We want to win this," Federmann said. "I wanted the conference championship. I think of all the years, the last three, we're as good as O'Fallon and I wanted it. I still feel were as good, if not better."

The defending IHSA Class 3A state champs are a hard team to beat because they just don't allow many goals, just two on the season. Eight of O'Fallon's 10 wins are shutouts, outscoring their opponents 32-2 so far this year.

"I love our defense," Judiscak said. "I think our defense is one of the best in state. I think it's hard for teams to find opportunities to score on us."

" has a very potent offensive team and for our girls to shut them out two games in a row, it just says a lot about our defense. Our girls are really committed to playing defense."