

# GIRLS' BASKETBALL

— Mark Harrington

Knowing that the number three team in the state tagged it their toughest game in 11 outings, the Oswego East High School girls' basketball team could relish that fact to console themselves in a nail-biting, stinging defeat.

The championship battle, a defensive strategist forte, was expected between the Edwardsville Tigers and the OE Wolves. It amazed Edwardsville Coach Laurie Blade, who credited Oswego East's tough, physical play as the kind unseen by her ball club in the St. Louis region.



Throughout the OE tournament, both teams encountered easy contests, racking up lopsided wins. In fact, the Wolves, now 12-3 record, smacked Rockford Harlem around to a 35-0 first half lead en route to a 90-21 triumph coupled with 75-25 and 75-37 wins. Meanwhile, the Tigers won 73-26, 60-23, and 84-27 en route to the title matchup.

Finally in overtime, unbeaten Edwardsville (14-0) claimed a narrow 49-47 victory over Oswego East, a championship featuring two NCAA Division One committed players from each squad.

Another OE setback was the third bitter loss this season to ranked teams, defending state champion Benet Academy (16-2) by two points and number one ranked Homewood-Flossmoor by one point. "We were hoping the third time was the charm," OE Coach Abe Carretto said.

"We knew coming in they have talented athletes", Blade said. "We were fortunate to make plays in the end."

But eight ties, 10 lead changes later, and no team's lead more than four points, the Wolves could only remember the possibilities, owning a seven-point lead, 35-28 in the third quarter, courtesy of two flashy quick layups by Jesinde Thomas.

With six minutes remaining in the fourth frame, OE clinged to a 37-35 lead. Behind by two points, Amaya Johns drove the free throw lane to deadlock the battle at 39. Neither team scored in the last 2:21 on the regulation clock.



In overtime, tournament star Makenzie Silvey, who scored a game-high 19 points, hit consecutive three-pointers for a four-point Tiger lead, later pouring in two free throws at the 24.4 second OT mark. Silvey had tourney games of 26, 24, and 17 points.

"We lost her (Silvey) twice in overtime", Carretto said. "We put on our scouting report that we've got to know where she was...she catches and shoots quickly. She never misses. They (Edwardsville) set up double screens and we got lost on that. There was not much we could do when we got screened."

The Wolves coach reflected, "Maybe we should have pressured Edwardsville more, but we didn't want them to get quick points."

"We wanted to go, push the ball and attack the hoop," Carretto said. "We hesitated."

Oswego almost recovered in OT; using full-court traps after the Edwardsville inbound pass was delivered. Ty Battle scored inside to bring the Wolves within one point.

A Thomas steal created a Christine Corpuz long shot three, the Wolves now trailed by two with 30 seconds left. Silvey dropped in two free throws at the 24.4 mark and Battle's put-back closed it to two with 1.4 second ticks.

After scoring her 1,000th career point earlier in the week, Oswego East standout 6-foot-2 Sydney Schultz was held to one basket in the second half and eight points for the game. Often, she was double-teamed, swarmed when touching the ball.

"They're (Schultz and Battle) hard to go against, a handful" Blade said, adding Oswego's defense forced her team to earn points. "They are so long (arms) and can make post-to-post passes. When Battle gets the ball, one person is not going to stop her."

Now Oswego looks for critical battles against unbeaten Geneva (13-0) and Montini (16-0) and tough Bolingbrook in the upcoming weeks. But Minooka (10-3) awaits Friday. "We don't give up," said Carretto. "We've got to get over the hump, get our confidence up and we needed that (title) victory."