Dubbed the “road warriors” by many, in reference to its undefeated record on the road this season, the Illinois State football team lived up to its away-game legacy with a thrilling 38-37 overtime victory in the second round of the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) playoffs against No. 6 Appalachian State in Boone, N.C., on Saturday.

Shelby Harris’ blocked extra-point in overtime was the difference in the game, helping the Redbirds to advance to the FCS playoffs quarterfinals game against Eastern Washington on Saturday, Dec. 8.

“Me and Colton [Underwood] felt like we were getting close all game, and I wouldn’t have been able to do it without Colton,” Harris told WJBC radio. “We both got a great push off the ball, and we just happened to both keep our feet and just drive towards the ball and just happen to block it.

“It’s exciting and it really feels good. It’s a testament of how Coach Spack has really built this team up over the years, and you can’t say enough about Coach Spack and the coaching staff and what they’ve done for Illinois State football,” Harris said.

The Redbirds have not made it to the quarterfinals since 2006 during the Denver Johnson coaching era, where they lost to Youngstown State.

“It was a great win. I’m just so proud of our team,” ISU head coach Brock Spack told WJBC radio. “It was just a culmination of a lot of hard work by a lot of people.

“The thing I’m most proud of is how tough our team is. They’re just tough kids and that’s kind of what we preach, and it pays off. People who work hard, good things happen to them, and that’s what happened to these kids today,” Spack said.

Senior quarterback Matt Brown finished the game 20-for-32 for 322 yards and tied a career-high of five touchdown passes, while senior wideout Tyrone Walker led the receivers with 10 catches for a season-best of 176 yards and two touchdowns.

On the defensive side, Ben Ericksen led with 12 tackles while Matt Goldsmith contributed a career-best of 10 tackles. Evan Frierson added 1.5 sacks and 2.5 tackles-for-loss.

In a 31-31 tie after regulation ended, the ISU offense took advantage of the opportunity to score first, as Brown connected with James O'Shaughnessy on a 25-yard pass on the first play of the overtime period. Nick Aussieker's extra point widened ISU's lead to 38-31.

The Mountaineers scored on four plays to make it a one-point game, 38-37, but a Shelby Harris blocked extra point sealed the deal for the Redbirds.

At the start of the game, Illinois State scored first on a 41-yard touchdown pass from Brown to Walker to take the initial 7-0 lead, but would not score again until late in the second quarter after ASU scored on a 2-yard-run to tie the game at 7-7.

ISU responded with a touchdown and an extra point of its own thanks to a 9-yard pass from Brown to O'Shaughnessy with 44 seconds left in the half to take the lead, 14-7. But a 37-yard ASU field goal would cut ISU's lead to 14-10 heading into halftime.

The Redbirds scored first again after the break as Donovan Harden caught a 17-yard pass from Brown to lengthen ISU's lead to 21-10. But ASU answered quickly with 48-yard reception to cut its deficit to 21-17.

ISU refused to let up, responding with a long pass of its own as Brown threw 32 yards to connect with Walker in the end zone, extending the Redbirds' lead to 28-17 heading into the fourth quarter.

Appalachian State opened the fourth quarter with a touchdown to cut the ISU advantage to 28-24, but a Nick Aussieker 41-yard field goal would again increase the margin to 31-24 in favor of the Redbirds.

ASU battled back to tie the game up at 31-31 for the second time in the contest, sending the teams into an overtime period where ISU would ultimately come out victorious.

"You live for this type of stuff. You live for this type of game. You live to be the away team [when] the stadium is packed," Harris said. "Being a football player, this is what you want to play in, and in a playoff game [with this] great atmosphere, you couldn't ask for anything better than this."