

# **SECTIONAL CHAMPS: Marquette Catholic soccer girls capture another title**

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**LEBANON** – For Marquette Catholic's girls soccer team, winning sectional championships never gets old.

The Explorers won their fourth straight IHSA Class 1A sectional title Saturday afternoon under coach Steve Mitchell, but winning this one didn't come easily.

Marquette had to survive a penalty-kick shootout for the second match in a row, the Explorers winning the shootout 5-4 after their Class 1A Belleville Althoff Sectional final at McKendree University's Leemon Field remained level at 1-1 through extra time after the Explorers and Columbia had traded early second-half goals to send Marquette into Tuesday's Illinois-Springfield Supersectional against Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin, 5-0 winners Friday over Quincy Notre Dame in the SH-G Sectional final; that match begins at 6 p.m., with the winner taking on River Forest Supersectional winner at Concordia University in the Chicago suburb in the state semifinals at 5 p.m. Friday at North Central College in Naperville.

"You just have to hand it to the kids; they kept pressing and pressing," Mitchell said. "We were tired the last 25 minutes, but they showed a lot of heart and kept coming and kept coming; they (Columbia) were sending two and three up top (near the goal on offensive attacks) and our defense just held us in the game.

"We had a couple of good looks and we were just unfortunate on a couple (of opportunities), but that's the playoffs; you never know. One bad bounce can cost you a game. We were up 1-0 and they get a deflection into the net; it is what it is. The kids never let it bother them and they did a great job. I'm so proud of them; now we've got one game to go and get a shot at the state finals."

"I thought we played well," said Eagle coach Jamey Bridges. "I thought we had better opportunities; I thought we played even better, but that's the nature of the game. I feel bad for our girls, they worked hard, as Alton Marquette did; somebody's gotta win. Unfortunately today, it wasn't us.

"Simple mistakes (from the Eagles, Bridges citing Marquette's goal in the 41<sup>st</sup> minute, right at the start of the second half); that's been kind of the nature of our season, even in the losses. You make simple mistakes, the other team makes you pay for it. They've shown great character all year, they came back to tie it up. I'm proud of them, it's just one of those things."

Play was concentrated, for the most part, in the midfield throughout the first half, both teams getting few chances to get a goal; when the teams mounted an attack, goaltenders Lauren Fischer (Marquette) and Alison Riddle (Columbia) were there to make the stops and the match went into the halftime break scoreless. The Explorers broke on top first in the 41<sup>st</sup> minute, Natalie Brown beating Riddle to give Marquette a 1-0 lead.

The lead didn't last very long, though, when the Eagles' Blair Wittenbrink scored in the 47<sup>th</sup> minute to draw the Eagles level at 1-1. Columbia got the better of the play the rest of the way, having a couple of good chances to take the lead turned back. The match went into extra time and neither team could break through to force the shootout.

Marquette won the toss and elected to shoot second, forcing Columbia to begin the shootout; Kalee Jackson, Fae Harrell, Taylor Parks and Wittenbrink converted on their kicks, while Bailey Hartrich, Adrianna Schindler, Claire Dalton and Lauren Walsh did the same on their chances, essentially turning the shootout into a sudden-death affair from that point.

Madelyne Junger stepped up next for the Eagles and fired a shot that was gathered up by Fischer to give the Explorers a chance to win, and Elisa Senno made no mistake, burying the kick to send Marquette into the supersectional.

It was the second match in succession that Marquette advanced in a shootout, having eliminated Waterloo Gibault the same way in Wednesday's semifinal match. "The game's got to end some way," Mitchell said. "For Columbia, they're a great team and very well-coached; it's terrible for a team it has to end that way.. Someone's got to win and someone's got to lose."

"I think it takes a team game and makes it into an individual one," Bridges said. "It's what makes it difficult."

The Explorers advance into the supersectional with a record of 13-9-3; the Eagles were eliminated with a mark of 15-6-2.