

STATE BOUND: Marquette Catholic nips Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin with Walsh goal in shootout

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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SPRINGFIELD – Marquette Catholic is heading to the 2016 IHSA Class 1A state tournament.

The Explorers, who won both their Belleville Althoff Sectional matches over Waterloo Gibault and Columbia in penalty-kick shootouts, won their third straight shootout of the

postseason over Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin in the University of Illinois-Springfield Supersectional match Tuesday evening. The Explorers and Cyclones played to a scoreless draw after 80 minutes of regulation time and another 20 minutes of extra time to send the match into the shootout.

Lauren Walsh scored the winning goal in the shootout after both teams were level 4-4 after the initial best-of-five portion of the shootout; both the Cyclones and Explorers remained level at 9-9 through 10 rounds until Walsh connected after a Cyclone miss in the 11th round of penalties. Marquette goalkeeper Lauren Fischer had turned back a Callie Costa shot to set up Walsh's goal that sent the Explorers to the state semifinals.

“The kids have really battled these last three matches,” said Explorer coach Steve Mitchell. “I told the kids before the match to leave it all on the field and they did, and now they're going to the state tournament.

“That shootout was nerve-racking, but this is what we train for all year; we practice and play with making the state tournament in mind. We mention it in the first meeting of the year and constantly talk about it. The kids earned it; they kept battling all year.”

Marquette (14-9-3) will meet West Chicago Wheaton Academy, 2-1 winners over LaGrange Park Nazareth Academy in the River Forest Supersectional at Concordia University, in a state semifinal match at 5 p.m. Friday at North Central College in Naperville, with the state championship match set for 5 p.m. Saturday between the Marquette-Wheaton winner and the winner of the other semifinal between Williamsville and Woodstock Marian; Friday's losers will play at 3 p.m. Saturday for third place.