

Marquette Catholic plays tight all the way with tough Taylorville squad

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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ALTON - On the opening night of the 2016 postseason, both **Marquette Catholic** and **Taylorville's football teams** played a fantastic game that left everyone on the edge of their seats and undecided until the very end.

And in that very end, the Tornadoes turned a fumble and interception into maximum points that helped spell the difference to give Taylorville a 32-24 win over the Explorers in the first round of the Illinois High School Association Class 4A playoffs Friday night at Public School Stadium.

And there's much to look ahead to for the 2017 campaign, said **Explorer coach Darrell Angleton**.

"Oh, yeah," Angleton said. "I feel for the seniors; they're a great group of kids. I love 'em. Some of them, I've coached since they were seven years old. **Sam Stemm**, I've coached **Marshall Youngblood** for a long time. Just a bunch of them, and we'll all miss those boys. But you know, next year, I'm going to have 17 seniors, which is a great number for a school our size.

"But tonight, I'm gonna go up there and I'll cry with the seniors, because they're a great group of kids," Angleton also said with a smile.

And that the Explorers were able to play with Taylorville, a school with double the enrollment of Marquette, was a big feather in the Explorers' cap.

"Just the important thing is that's, you know, it's a lot of effort to play a school that's twice your size," Angleton said. "It's always going to be a challenge for us when you have the multiplier. And I like the fact these kids didn't show any fear, came out and executed the plan. I mean — you gotta love that. I'm real proud of them."

The opening drive indicated what kind of game it was going to be. On the first play from scrimmage, Tornado quarterback Brandon Odom hit Justin Wright with a 29-yard pass play, then got good runs from both Odom and Evan Champley. A motion penalty seemingly killed the momentum, and on the next play, Jayce Maag intercepted a Odom pass, and Marquette went to work.

Operating from their single wing formation, **D'Avion Peebles**, **Brady McAfee**, and **Treven Swingler** all took turns running the ball to the Marquette 32. A holding penalty stopped the momentum, and the Explorers punted.

It only took Taylorville four plays to grab an early lead. Odom ran for 15 on a keeper and Keegan Halford ran for 27 on a sweep before Odom called his own number and ran 15 yards up the middle for the opening touchdown. Taylorville faked a kick and ran in a two-point convert for a 8-0 lead with 3:35 left in the opening term.

It didn't take Marquette long to respond. On the first play after a false start flag, Peebles swept around right end for a 72-yard touchdown run just 25 seconds later. The kick was good, cutting the Taylorville lead to 8-7.

Jeremy Streble intercepted an Odom pass on the next play at the Taylorville 44, and Marquette went to work again. Streble, Swingler and McAfee runs took the ball to the Tornado five, but the drive stalled, and a 22-yard field goal attempt went wide left.

After a three and out, Peebles struck again, this time going 54 yards up the middle with 11:43 left in the first half. Liam Maher's kick was good and Marquette had its first lead at 14-8.

"Love him," Angleton said of his speedy junior running back. Peebles and Swinger, a sophomore, give Marquette a two fisted backfield that also supports each other. "Him and Trevon, they're a dual-headed monster. One might do better on one game, and one might do a little better in another, but they're both scary, and they're just great kids. And you know what? They're both back next year.

"They're great kids," Angleton continued, "And they work together, they cheer each other on. And that's great. They both had the same number of yards and same number of touchdowns, and that's tough. A kid wants to collect all the stats he can, but those two have been good, and I'm proud of them for that, because that's hard to do at that age."

The duo continued to shine in the next possession, getting valuable yardage on direct snaps from the single wing. The drive eventually sputtered, and Maher kicked a 43-yard field goal with 5:09 left in the half to up the Marquette advantage to 17-8.

It took only three plays for Taylorville to answer back, as Chambley rumbled 61 yards up the middle for a touchdown with 4:07 left in the half. The convert made it 17-15. Right after a three and out, the Tornadoes looked to get the ball back, but a fumbled punt recovered by Marquette set the Explorers up on the Taylorville 12. It only took four plays to take advantage, as McAfee went five yards up the middle to make the halftime score 24-15 after the convert.

Taylorville's first possession of the second half was a time consuming affair, taking 5:34 to go 74 yards in 12 plays. Odom, Chambley and Kyle Durbin each played a role in the drive, culminated with Halford's 27-yard field goal with 3:01 left in the third.

Marquette's possession started out promisingly, as Peebles, McAfee, Swinger and getting the ball into the Tornado half. Disaster struck however, as, in a key play of the game, Taylorville recovered a fumble on their own 26 to take over.

Odom opened up his aerial game start the drive, then picked up 31 on a keeper for a big first down. Odom then hit Justin Wright along the sidelines for a 15-yard touchdown pass with 4:57 left. Halford's kick gave the Tornadoes the lead back at 25-24.

After a pair of three and outs, the Explorers got the ball back with 1:58 left and no time outs. On the fifth play, Taylorville took an interception back for a touchdown, but the

Tornadoes were flagged for an illegal block in the back. In what was seen as a very unusual move, Marquette declined the penalty allowed the touchdown to stand, with the convert making it 32-24 with only 34.8 seconds left in regulation.

The decision to decline the penalty was a very savvy move, as it meant that the Explorers would get the ball back after the kickoff, still a one score game and a chance to tie it up and force overtime.

“We had to,” Angleton explained. “It would have been 24-25. It might have looked better on the scoreboard if we hadn’t been able to do it, but it was our only chance. We had to allow them to have it, and if they went for one, which they did, that gave them eight-point lead, so we had a chance to get the ball back. Otherwise, we were out of time outs, and they would have just kneeled us out.”

The Explorers did have the opportunity to go down the field to possibly force overtime, but an intentional grounding penalty on the first play put Marquette into a hole, and McAfee was sacked on fourth down to preserve the Tornado win.

Taylorville advances to a second round game next week against top-ranked Belleville Althoff, a 53-14 winner over Carterville, next weekend. For the Explorers, it’s the end of a season that saw them win the Prairie State Conference title and much to look forward to.

“Like I said, we’ll go up and share some hugs and tears,” Angleton said with a smile. “And then tomorrow — well, maybe Monday — we’ll think about next year.”



[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)