

Third-quarter explosion sends Marquette Catholic to Carbondale Super-Sectional

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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NASHVILLE – Marquette Catholic's basketball team went on a run in the third quarter and exploded for a come-from-behind 55-48 win Friday night to reach Tuesday's Class 2A Super-Sectional at SIU Arena in Carbondale against Mount Carmel.

Nashville had gotten out to a 26-17 lead at the half and had all the momentum and a loud home crowd behind them in the IHSA Class 2A Nashville Sectional final. Then came the third quarter – and the Explorers suddenly went on a run, getting an eight-point burst from sophomore Isaiah Ervin, and before anyone knew it, Marquette had gone from 32-30 down with 3:08 left to 38-32 ahead with 1:19 left, part of an 18-2 explosion that put the Explorers in control of the game.

The Explorers had to survive a stretch where the Hornets came within two points of tying the game twice in the final quarter, but Reagan Snider hit some clutch free throws down the stretch to enable the Explorers to reach uncharted territory for them, winning the school's first-ever IHSA sectional championship with a dramatic win to reach Tuesday's Class 2A Super-Sectional at SIU Arena in Carbondale against Mount Carmel, 54-49 winners over Robinson in the West Frankfort Sectional final Friday; the game is set for 7:30 p.m. following a Class 1A Super-Sectional that night.

A super-sectional win would put the Explorers up against either Rockford Christian or Kankakee Bishop McNamara, whoever wins Tuesday's Northern Illinois University Super-Sectional in DeKalb, at 5:30 p.m. March 10 in a Class 2A state semifinal game at Peoria's Carver Arena; the state final would be played at 7:15 p.m. March 11.

The Explorers extended its single-season win mark to 30-3; the Hornets were eliminated at 20-13.

“At halftime, we told the kids, 'hey, let's try to win every two minutes,’” said **Marquette coach Steve Medford**. “They're a confident group of kids and we battled, we made a few more shots – first half, we were only 3-of-12 from (behind the three-point arc). I knew we were down only nine, and I thought we had a good chance to get back in the game.

“Isaiah is capable of doing that; he's done that several times this year for us. It's a great group of kids – they deserve it – I'm just so happy for the kids and for the program and what it means for our whole program. We've never won a sectional title and we've finally got one – dang, it feels good.”

What made the win even more remarkable than the third-term explosion was that, on successive Friday nights, Marquette has defeated two traditional programs – Waterloo Gibault in the regional and now Nashville in the sectional – in their own buildings. “It's

a testament,” Medford said. “The other night, I had three sophomores and two juniors on the court, and for those kids to have to overcome adversity and do this on home courts, it's awesome and I'm just so happy for the guys.”

“They turned up the heat and we coughed it up several times,” said **Hornet coach Brad Weathers**. “They converted on it – they made some tough shots, threw us out of our combination defense, which I thought very, very well because when we went into this game, we knew we were going to have a heck of a time guarding them and with their athleticism, trying to match up in every spot.

“They run that Princeton (offensive pattern) stuff so well and all that, that's why we elected to go that rout. We held on there for a little over two quarters; they adjusted and credit to them and their defense and they made enough free throws down the stretch. We struggled against their pressure; I'm very proud of the effort of our kids. It wasn't pretty at times in the second half, but I thought we left it on the court.”

Snider led the Explorers with 20 points, with Sammy Green adding 15 points, Ervin had 11 points, Jake Hall seven and Chris Hartrich two; the Hornets were led by Brogan Kemp's 15 points, with Hayden Heggmeier adding 10, Bryson Bultman eight, Ryan Brink six and Brandon Schnitker and Dale Anderson five each.

That the Explorers are making so much school history this season says much about the program, Medford said. “It says a lot,” Medford said. “Our kids have prepared really hard, our coaching staff does a good job of preparing; we take a lot of pride in it.

“I'm just so happy for these kids because they really wanted this and they deserve it. They go about it the right way, they prepare like heck in walk-throughs and practices and I'm so darn proud of them.”

