

Marquette takes on Mount Carmel with state 2A tourney berth at stake

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – Marquette Catholic's boys basketball team has a huge opportunity in front of them Tuesday night.

For the first time, the Explorers are in an IHSA Super-Sectional basketball game.

Marquette won their first-ever sectional title with a come-from-behind 55-48 win over Nashville in Friday night's IHSA Class 2A Nashville Sectional final, eliminating a team

with one of the great basketball traditions in southern Illinois just a week after eliminating another traditional regional small-school power in Waterloo Gibault in the Gibault Regional final.

“It's a great opportunity,” said **Explorer coach Steve Medford** of tonight's IHSA Class 2A Super-sectional against Mount Carmel, set for a 7:30 p.m. tip at SIU Arena in Carbondale; the Explorer-Golden Aces game follows a Class 1A Super-sectional between Effingham St. Anthony and Woodlawn. Marquette enters the game at 30-3 on the year, while Mount Carmel takes a 27-4 mark into the contest.

Tuesday's winner takes on the DeKalb Super-sectional winner between Rockford Christian and Kankakee Bishop McNamara, who clash at Northern Illinois' Convocation Center at the same time as the Marquette-Mount Carmel game, at 5:30 p.m. Friday in the Class 2A state semifinals at Peoria Civic Center/Carver Arena; the state championship game is set for 7:15 p.m. Saturday.

“It's something we've never done before,” Medford said about the 3. “This is the farthest Marquette has ever been and we had to win two tough games to get here against Gibault and Nashville just to get here.”

The Explorers and Golden Aces have met during the regular season, the Golden Aces upending the Explorers 34-32 in overtime in the Panther Basketball Showcase shootout event in Pickneyville Jan. 28; that was the last time Marquette dropped a decision. Sammy Green led the Explorers with a 15-point, nine-rebound effort that night.

“We know a little bit about them,” Medford said. “They have a couple of big guys on their roster (**6-8 senior Justin Carpenter and 6-7 junior Jackson Marcotte**) and we're going to have to keep them off the boards.

“We're going to have to play a possession game and shorten the game a bit.”

Green leads the Explorers in scoring with a 12.2 PPG average, followed by Isaiah Ervin, who averages 10.5 PPG and gave the Explorers a huge lift with an eight-point burst in the third quarter against the Hornets, a burst that put Marquette ahead 38-32 in the late going of the period and a lead that they wouldn't relinquish; Jake Hall comes in with a 10 PPG average, followed by Reagan Snider and a 9.1 PPG scoring average.

Regardless of the outcome, Medford and the school are very proud of what the team has accomplished this season – not only is it Marquette's deepest-ever postseason run, the 30 wins are a school record for most wins in a season.

“You don't get the chance to play in a super-sectional very often,” Medford said, “and it's our first one. We're very proud of what the kids have accomplished this year and I don't think we're done yet.

“We're one step away from the state tournament, and no matter what happens, we have much to be proud of.”