

Explorers overcome rain, eliminate MEL 8-1 in regional semi

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – Marquette Catholic's boys soccer team overcame some rainy weather in the first half of their IHSA Class 1A Marquette Regional semifinal match against Metro East Lutheran and got a goal and four assists from Chris Hartrich as the Explorers advanced to Friday's final with an 8-1 win over the Knights at Gordon Moore Park Tuesday afternoon.

The Explorers advanced to the final with a 11-6-3 mark on the season; the Knights were eliminated at 6-15.

The Explorer win set up a regional final against McGivney Catholic at 4 p.m. Friday at Gordon Moore, with the winner moving into next week's Freeburg Sectional (see related story).

"I was real happy" with how the Explorers played, said Marquette coach Joe Burchett. "I think we moved the ball well even in the wet; you could see us connecting multiple passes. I think at one stretch, we had 16 passes without disruption; that always tickles me to death when we can keep possession like that.

"I think we had a game last week we had 20; knocked it around 20 times before we created an opportunity. Today we were trying to work it through to Chris, to Aaron (Boulch), to Trent (Dietiker) when he got moved up there – Noah McClintock does a great job on the outside."

Knight goalkeeper Christian Brown stood up for MEL and made several tough saves when he was called on. "One thing that was a little disappointing from Christian in the first half, he just kept on that goal line and that's not how he plays," said MEL coach Noah Enke. "He was just a little scared of that skip and a little scared of the speed; just getting him over that and getting him off that line and able to shoot out with his quickness – that's how we could compete with them shooting people in and sending runs through was him going out and taking one for the team, putting it in his chest. I know it hurts – coming from a keeper myself, I know it hurts.

"We gotta do what we gotta do, and because it, we got 12 saves out of the game."

MEL got their goal during a period when rain pelted the field, evening things up for both sides. "Like I told the guys yesterday, plan for rain," Enke said. "When the rain comes, the game's even; it's no longer who's better, who's worse, it's just who can get the touch, who can make a pass, who can not slip and fall.

"When the rain came, you saw their traps start to get a little worse and we were able to start capitalizing on it and we were able to start making up for some of the frustrating errors of the natural rain."

Boulch got the first MCHS goal in the fifth minute off a feed from Hartrich; seven minutes later, Dietiker took a pass from Hartrich and tucked it behind Brown to up the Explorer lead to 2-0 before Logan McDaniel took advantage of the rainy conditions at the time and scored past Marquette keeper Nick Hemann in the 33rd minute to halve the lead at 2-1. Right before the halftime break, the Explorers answered with a 37th-minute goal from Boulch off a Noah Fahnestock assist and a 38th-minute goal from Fahnestock off a Hartrich assist to enter the break ahead 4-1.

The rain tapered off and stopped during halftime and from there, Marquette went to work, opening the second half with a Hartrich goal from Dietiker in 47th minute before Hartrich found Ben Moehn in the 52nd minute for a goal to extend the lead to 6-1. Marquette's final two goals came from the combo of Justin Atkinson and Will Dixon, Atkinson scoring from Dixon in the 61st minute and Dixon scoring from Atkinson in the 62nd minute to halve the remaining time once Marquette attained a seven-goal lead.

The Explorers and Griffins have already played this season, with Marquette taking a 7-2 win in Glen Carbon Sept. 26. “We know what (McGivney) can bring,” Burchett said. “I think the McGivney game got a little out of hand, but I think Tim (Vance, the Griffin coach) will have them playing better than what we saw earlier in the year – they'll be ready.”

