



# STATE CHAMPS: Ngma goal in 99th minute gives Explorers IHSA Class 1A soccer title

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**EAST PEORIA** – As long as people talk about the Marquette Catholic boys soccer program, the name of **Kwame Ngma** is bound to come up.

It was Ngma's direct free kick just outside the penalty area that found a way through a hole in Monmouth-Roseville's defensive wall and went into the back of the net in the 99<sup>th</sup> minute of an extra-time thriller that gave the Explorers the 2017 IHSA Class 1A boys soccer championship.

The goal made it 4-3 in Marquette's favor and sent the Explorer supporters into a frenzy; moments later, the Explorers themselves celebrated their second state championship in the programs history, with the first one coming in 2012 when they defeated Urbana University in Normal.

The championship win put Marquette at 17-6-3 on the year; the Titans were eliminated at 21-4-3.

“It was an exciting game,” said Explorer coach Joe Burchett. “It certainly feels good to win this one; we knew going into the season that we had a good team and had some players back from last year's team that had some success.”

That Ngwa, a junior, got the call with a penalty-kick shootout facing both sides wasn't by accident. "Kwame can really hammer the ball," Burchett, who stepped into the coaching role this season when Jeremy Sanfillippo stepped down, said. "He found a hole in their wall and got it on target; I don't think anyone would want to be on the receiving end of a ball Kwame hammers.

"He's been solid and strong for us all year at center-back."

The match was a hard-fought affair from both sides. "It was getting chippy out there the later it got," Burchett said. "I told them before (extra time) started that we had to play smarter and keep our composure."

The game was steady and even most of the first half; the Titans got the first goal of the match when Robert Lian found Grego Massengo with a pass; Massengo then fired and beat Explorer goalkeeper Nick Hemann in the 35<sup>th</sup> minute to put the Titans ahead 1-0 at the break.

Marquette answered in the opening stages of the second half when Aaron Boulch found the ball in the middle of a goal-mouth scramble and put the ball away to draw the teams level at 1-1; Monmouth kept coming and got a 56th-minute goal from Kyaw Thang to put themselves back up at 2-1. Marquette didn't get down when the Titans got the lead back.

But a big break came for the Explorers when they were awarded a penalty kick in the 61<sup>st</sup> minute off a foul inside the penalty area; Chris Hartrich got the call to take it and he didn't miss, tying the match at 2-2. Both teams had chances down the stretch, but couldn't put the ball in the back of the net and the match ended up going into 20 minutes of extra time, divided into two 10-minute halves that are not golden-goal (sudden death) periods.

In the 85<sup>th</sup> minute, the match took an unexpected turn when the Titans were called for another foul in the penalty area; the decision led to another penalty-kick attempt for the Explorers, with Noah Fahnestock taking the kick. Like Hartrich did earlier, Fahnestock put the ball away and gave the Explorers their first lead of the match at 3-2. Three minutes later, however, the Titans answered back when Lian beat Hemann in the 88<sup>th</sup> minute to tie the match at 3-3.



For a time,

the teams looked like they were going to go to a penalty-kick shootout to decide the winner before the Titans were whistled for a direct-kick foul just outside the penalty area; that's when Ngma stepped up and drove the ball into the back of the net for the match-winner.

Following the win, Burchett received a good number of text messages congratulating him and the Explorers for the win. “We had a good number of fans here tonight,” Burchett said, “including several members of the 2012 championship team; that really warmed my heart and I'm glad to be a part of the program and the championship.”

There will be a reception for the team and celebration of the state title at 6 p.m. today at the MCHS gym.













