

# Columbia upsets Explorers to claim regional championship in overtime

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
March 3 2018 4:25 PM



ALTON - Being perfect in this world is incredibly hard.

The Marquette Catholic Explorers were 29-0 and looked for win No. 30 to claim the Class 3A Waterloo Regional Championship.

However, the Columbia Eagles and Jordan Holmes had plans of their own and nothing to lose.

They shocked Marquette and the state of Illinois with a 55-53 overtime victory to end the Explorers perfect season and claim the regional championship on Friday night in Waterloo.

“I told the kids I want Marquette to have to play from behind because they haven’t had to do it,” Columbia head coach Mark Sandstrom said. “I think our schedule that we played paid dividends tonight with our execution. We didn’t panic. Our schedule got us this win.”

Holmes tied a season-high 31 points, including knocking down 5-of-6 three-pointers.

“I felt like I was in a zone in the first half. Every time I wanted the ball I wanted to shoot it. I was gonna do anything I could to get these guys this trophy,” Holmes said. “We knew had really good defenders. I’ve played with Regan Snider my whole life. Sammy Green and Ervin great defenders, and Jake Hall in the post. “Our guys capitalized when they got the ball and made shots. We played defense exceptionally well too.”

The Eagles led for most of the game, but a steal and a Jake Hall layup with 15 seconds to go gave Marquette a 53-52 lead. It seemed like the Explorers would escape, but Columbia’s Brennen van Breusegen stormed down the court, missed a layup, but after a missed put-back, Riley Huber grabbed another offensive rebound and was fouled in the act of shooting.

He made the first shot to tie the game but put too much power on the second shot, which led to overtime.

Cole Khoury scored the only points in the extra frame on two free throws.

Marquette had possession with just under 30 seconds to play and called timeout with 11.0 left. Columbia’s defense was solid, and Sammy Green was forced to shoot a 25-foot shot that grazed the front of the rim at the buzzer.

“We deserved to be here, but we weren’t entitled to that championship. It’s unfortunate,” Marquette head coach Steve Medford said. “We got beat in the regional championship, but hats off to and Mark. He’s a great coach, and I’m proud of his team. They did a great job.”



Jake Hall led Marquette with 14 points. Reagan Snider and Isaiah Ervin each tallied 13 and Green added ten.

The Explorers threw plenty at Holmes for the entire game, but his brilliance was ultimately good enough to unlock Marquette's vaunted defense. He even drilled two buzzer beaters in the first half that were both three-pointers.

"Jordan Holmes was really good. We haven't had a guy score more than 15 to 20 points on us all year. We could just not stop him. We put Regan, Hartrich, and somebody else. In the second half I finally started running two guys on him to try to get the ball out of his hands," Medford said.

"I think it boiled down to that and the rebounds. The rebounding late was really critical," Medford said. "We weren't the same team on the defensive end that we were probably a month ago and we lost a step. I don't know what it was, but we did lose a little edge."

Jon Peterson scored ten points for the Eagles, and Hubler followed with seven.

The Eagles stretched the lead to 40-32 with 2:21 to play in the third quarter, which was the biggest of the game. After a Marquette timeout, the Explorers made their run.

Ervin drained two triples in a row to bring Marquette back to within two heading into the fourth quarter. Snider hit another trey to give the Explorers a 41-40 advantage and then they added a bucket to lead 43-40. It was there that Medford thought his team was on their way.

"I did. Then we took three quick three's. All of them could've been daggers," Medford said. "If you get up six, maybe you get a chance to milk the clock, and with our guard play, we could do that. Unfortunately, we didn't."



The Eagles weathered the storm and would hit the Explorers with a 12-5 run and lead 52-48. With 1:58 left, Snider nailed another three-pointer to get Marquette within one, and that's when Columbia decided to run out the clock and force the Explorers to foul.

On the final sequence in overtime, Medford blamed himself and his staff on why they didn't get a cleaner look at the basket.

"It was discombobulated. We thought the ball was gonna be on the sideline, which was a poor job by our staff. We had a sideline play drawn up and then we wanted to try to get an exit for Sammy. It wasn't well executed by any means," Medford said. "We were going for the best available . We had a flare screen set, and if we had a flare shot, then we were gonna take it. It is what it is."

On Wednesday Sandstrom promised that his ballclub would, "show up and they're gonna give their best shot possible." Promise fulfilled.

“I’m super impressed with the way our kids came in here and battled an undefeated team in the postseason,” Sandstrom said. “We went head-to-head. That was a heavyweight battle.”

Columbia advances to the Centralia Sectional Semifinals and will face Marion, who pulled an upset as well over Carbondale 61-59 on Friday night. The game is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Tuesday at Centralia High School.

Marquette will say goodbye to seniors Hall, Green, Snider, and Jayce Maag. In the two years, they were all together; they helped lead the Explorers to a 59-5 record.

“I’m still proud of my guys. I’m very proud of what they accomplished, and I’m sad because I lose four great kid that ultimately are just really good kids. I love them.” Medford said. “It’s hard to win 29 games. It’s tough to maintain. It’s a heck of a year, and our guys should be proud. They wanted this to validate the season and get that 3A sectional.”











