



Explorers playoff run comes to a close against Althoff

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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The Marquette Catholic Explorers season came to an end on Tuesday night with a 5-0 defeat to the Althoff Catholic Crusaders in the IHSA Class 1A Columbia Sectional Semifinals on Tuesday night.

In a match that pitted two top soccer programs in the Metro East, it was the Crusaders who came out and arguably played their best game of the season. Liesl Whitener scored a hat-trick, and Julie O'Neil tallied a brace to lead Althoff.

"Postseason is a very difficult process, and if we weren't going to advance, I want to beat by a better team. Not beat ourselves, but by a better team," Explorers coach Brian Hoener said. "Althoff was better prepared. Their speed was a big factor. I thought in the second half we played better, and maybe the scoreline wasn't necessarily indicative of the game, but they were the better team."

Five minutes into the game, Althoff hit the crossbar and in the tenth minute, Liesl Whitener gave the Crusaders a 1-0 lead with a close-range goal coming from the right side. A minute later, Marquette came close to leveling it up with a deflected shot that forced Althoff keeper and the University of Tulsa commit, Rachel Monken into a save.

O'Neil gave pretty much ended Marquette's chances of winning in two minutes with two goals. The first was a similar goal to Whitener's first and the second was a nicely placed header into the top corner.

With 14 minutes to play until halftime, the Explorers were down 3-0 and had to play from behind, which is not ideal.

"You can't chase the game," Hoener said. "When you start chasing the game, you start trying to make too many plays. And when you try to make too many plays, you make mistakes. When you make mistakes against as good a team as Althoff, they end up in the back of your net."

Althoff enjoyed a significant majority of possession. However, Marquette had phases of Madelyn Smith and Lauren Walsh making decent runs and passes but wasn't able to create much out of it. Ultimately the Explorers had limited shots and three on target.

Whitener scored her second of the game four minutes into the second half and then put the icing on the cake for Althoff with a 35-yard belter that landed in the lower right-hand corner of the net.

Hoener had a successful first season as coach of the Explorers leading them to a competitive 14-8-2 record and a regional championship.

“It was a learning experience for all of us. It’s been a tremendous opportunity working with these young ladies,” Hoener said. “I learned probably as much as they did coming from the college level. I made some mistakes, I gotta do some things better to put us in better positions, but I feel like I’m more prepared for future years... It was an absolute blast, a really enjoyable experience.”





