

Singleton Scores 14, Is Named MVP As Lift For Life Wins In Overtime Over Marquette 64-60 In Metro-East Lutheran Turkey Tournament Final

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Rico Singleton scored 14 points, including several key baskets late in regulation and in overtime, as Lift For Life Academy of the Soulard neighborhood of St. Louis defeated Marquette Catholic 64-60 in overtime to win the 39th annual Metro-East Lutheran Thanksgiving Turkey Tip-Off Tournament Saturday night at Hooks Gym.

It was a very close, entertaining game throughout, where the Explorers had an early advantage before the Hawks took the lead, and the lead see-sawed several times in the fourth quarter and early in overtime before LFL took charge in the overtime to win the championship. But the players on both sides gave a tremendous effort throughout the entire game.

“Yeah, it really was,” said Explorer coach Steve Medford about the final. “It was a great game, they’ve got some great athletes, Lift For Life, and I think they do a really great job with their kids. Their kids played hard. I think one of the things we had to do was to get back in transition defense, make sure we could contain them, and keep them off the boards, and we did that for the most part. They just made a couple more plays than us, and unfortunately, someone had to lose that game tonight. I’m proud of my guys, I’m proud of the way they fought and the way they went about it, and we’ll just try to continue to get better.”

Every player who was on the floor during the game gave their all during the final, and it was a tremendous effort for all who played in the final.

“Absolutely not,” Medford said. “You know, both teams played really, really hard tonight. And you know, just a few more plays we could have executed. Free throws were not real good; I think we were 12-of-25 from the free-throw line, and then, just missing a couple of bunnies late in the game, that really hurt us. But overall, I’m super proud of these guys, and where we’re at right now.”

The game went into overtime when Brett Terry, who had played a magnificent game all night, barely missed a three-ball off the back of the rim as time expired, setting up overtime.

“You know, I just still felt like we had a chance,” Medford said, “but I did know that I wanted to try to win the game there. I know it was 11 seconds, I had a time out left, but just throwing the ball in on a sideline play, or on an (out of bounds) play was just so difficult against Lift For Life, because they’re so quick and so athletic. So I thought I’d let the play remain, and let them play, and unfortunately, it didn’t fall. But you know, going into OT, I thought like we still had a pretty good chance, but our guys were just gassed. They were just absolutely gassed. Most of the guys we played were, we just played six-deep tonight. So yeah, proud of my guys.”

Although Marquette missed winning a fourth straight title in the tournament, the Explorers’ 3-1 mark to open the new season is also still pretty good.

“Absolutely,” Medford said. “It’s a matter of working hard in practice, just to try to get better, and we will. Our execution will get a lot better by the middle of the season happens, and we’ll execute a heck of a lot better, and hopefully, we’ll just keep working hard with the kids, and keep getting better.”

Cortez Harris got loose underneath to score the game’s initial basket for Marquette, and after a Hawk time out only 37 seconds into the game, Bret Terry scored to make it 4-0, which he extended it to 7-3 with a three-point shot right after the Hawks cut the edge to 4-3 on Barcus Jackson’s conventional three-point play. Another Terry three upped the lead to 10-3 for the Explorers. A pair of timely LFL threes cut the lead to 10-8, but a pair of Iggy McGee free throws and baskets from McGee and Terry gave the Explorers a 14-11 lead at the end of the first quarter.

As the second quarter began, McGee hit a free throw, but a pair of free throws from Tevon Wiley cut the lead to 15-13, and from there, Terry hit on a driving basket to extend the lead to 17-13, but two free throws and a three ball from Singleton gave McDonald’s its first lead on 18-17. Another three-ball extended the Hawk lead 21-17,

and from there, both sides executed as well as they possibly could, with the Explorers outscoring 5-2 to creep to within 23-22 at the interval.

As the second half started, Spencer Cox drilled a three to put Marquette up again 25-23, but Singleton hit on five consecutive points to put the Hawks back on top 28-25, forcing a Marquette time out. Harris then hit on a basket and a free throw to tie game at 28-28. The lead switched back and forth throughout the remainder of the period, with neither team gaining much of an advantage. The Hawks were able to build a six-point edge at 45-39 before Marquette closed the gap to within four, at 43-39, as the third quarter ended.

Both Harris and Cox hit free throws to get the fourth quarter started to the game again at 43-43, and the two sides began to exchange points, with neither team gaining a clear-cut edge. Eventually, a Richtelle McDaniels free throw made it 53-49 late, but the Explorers, helped with some Hawks errors, were able to draw level at 53-53, and both teams had a chance to win in regulation at 55-55 but off of a scramble, Terry just missed hitting a three up top, the ball bouncing off the back of the rim, forcing overtime.

In the extra period, Singleton scored on a drive, but missed on the back end of the one-and-one to keep the score 57-55. The Hawks were able to extend the lead on a three-point play from Demarcus Sanford, and the Explorers got a three from Jaxon Hendricks, with Marquette pulling to within three at 60-57. Three free throws in the final seconds gave Lift For Life its 64-60.

Singleton was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player for his efforts all week, while both Cox and Terry were named to the All-Tournament Team, which was announced after the game.

The Explorers start the season 3-1 and will have their home opener against Highland on Tuesday evening, and Medford is looking ahead to the first home challenge of the new season.

"I think, again, if we play the right way, and do it the right way, we'll have some success," Medford said. "Highland had a pretty good history, but they are down a little bit. We can't take anybody for granted. We've got a lot of guys that are solid players, but we know that we can't overlook anybody, and we're not going to do that with Highland on Tuesday night."



[Chris Rhodes also contributed to this story.](#)