

# **Marquette Catholic Continues Return To Play Workouts As New Coach McElrath Builds Bonds With Explorers**

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter  
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ALTON - The football team at Marquette Catholic is continuing its Illinois High School Association Return to Play workouts at a very steady and successful pace, as the Explorers continue to prepare for the 2020 season under their new head coach.

Leon McElrath III was hired as Marquette's football coach this spring, and it's so far, so good in the Return to Play workouts thus far.

"It's been pretty good," McElrath said during a recent interview. "We've had about 40 kids a practice, and it's a lot of conditioning work. The kids have enjoyed the changing of the guard, with lots of new faces, and we're having fun. It's a lot of conditioning, but we make it fun too."

With many players coming out for the practices also includes competition for starting jobs, and that makes things even better for the team.

"We have a lot of competition, building character," McElrath said, "and it breeds champions."

And McElrath has also been very open and honest with his players about what's been happening around the state, with the reports of players and students testing positive for COVID-19 at both Lake Zurich and Quincy Notre Dame high schools, which could put a damper on the season ahead.

"I'm very, very open with my players about what's going on," McElrath said, "and I've told them that we've had to backtrack because of the positive tests from other schools."

The Explorer players are very anxious to get started with heavier workouts, but it's always safety first during this time.

"Obviously, every kids asks that question about when we can start contacts," McElrath said. "when we can into pads, and I always tel them 'in due time.'"

The enthusiasm continues to be very high for the Explorers, and the support from his players, families and administration has pleased McElrath greatly.

"The attitude of the kids has been great," McElrath said. "and the attitude of the parents and the staff in the building has been just as good, and that builds support and great character."

McElrath does hope that there will be a 2020 football season, and will depend on the senior leadership of the team to help Marquette to a very successful season.

"Obviously, I hope we play this year," McElrath said. "That's the most important. We probably have about 11 or so seniors who are chomping at the bit and getting their chance to compete. It is, and it's unquestionable."

McElrath is also looking ahead for the IHSA to give the go-ahead to play the 2020 season, and once it's given, it's going to be a big relief to everyone involved.

"The first thing I'm looking forward to is something concrete from the IHSA that we're going to play," McElrath said. "Once that green light comes down, it'll be a big weight that comes off of everyone's shoulders. I'm looking forward to the challenge."

But McElrath and the school again is emphasizing safety first, and if and when the season does get going, it's going to be a much different look that anyone could have possibly predicted before the pandemic started.

"We're making sure as a school and a coaching staff to ensure our players' safety." McElrath said. "I can definitely tell that if we do play, the game will definitely look different to players and fans."

"We probably have about 11 or so seniors who are chomping at the bit and getting their chance to compete. It is, and it's unquestionable," he added.

[Colin Feeney also contributed to this story.](#)