

Bean, Smith Score 17 Each, Tucker Adds 14, As MELHS Defeats Marquette Catholic 60-51, Williams Has 18 For Explorers

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
February 23 2021 6:06 AM





EDWARDSVILLE - Seniors DaMarkus Bean and A.J. Smith both scored 17 points, while Zion Tucker added 14 as Metro-East Lutheran defeated Marquette Catholic for the first time in 13 years in a 60-51 win Monday night at Thomas Hooks Gym.

The Explorers held a 17-11 lead at the end of the first quarter, but the Knights went out to a 30-23 halftime lead, and held the advantage the rest of the way in going on to the win.

It was a good bounce back win for Metro-East, who dropped their first two games of the season on the road to Collinsville on Friday night and Breese Mater Dei Catholic Saturday afternoon.

"We hadn't beat Alton Marquette since 2008," said Knights' head coach Anthony Smith, "and it was a good win. We went to a tough Mater Dei, we went to a tough Collinsville. came home and got a quality win against a really good ball club. So I'm excited. It's a really good win for me and the boys."

Both Bean and Smith played key roles in the win, and they're both important players for the Knights.

"If we can get 22 boards out of them - one had 12, the other had 10 - and then have double figures from both of those kids, we're having a really, really good night," Anthony Smith said. "If we get those kind of board efforts from them, and that kind of scoring, I mean, we're really good. We're really good."

Both Tucker and Champ Chipman also hit some big shots during the proceedings, and they're both important parts of the Knights as well.

"Well, we know that Zion can shoot," Smith said. "The problem for Zion is he wants to shoot all the time, when technically, if we get it out of the offense, when they double A. J., we skipped across to him, he's got a clean look. Then, he's really effective that way. When he just kinds of catches it, and shoots off the shot, it's in-between. When we swing the ball, move that double down, we skip pass to him and he hits open shots like that, he's a really good shooter. I've got to get him in the mindset that I've got to get him in the offense and off the swing."

Smith felt it was a great win against a traditionally good team who's one player away from being a great team.

"Alton Marquette's, they're one big man away from being really, really good," Smith said. "(Kendall) Lavender is a great player; he's not a post kid, though. He's a wing, or two, three. He's not a kid who can guard 6' 8", 6' 6". He had a great effort. (Steve) Medford (the Explorers' head coach) does a great job in getting his program ready, they shoot the ball well, they run their sets, they're really, really tough to guard on the offensive end. Tonight, we just happen to outscore them, but man, they made it us work for it. But it's a good win for us. We'll take it. First win against them since 2008. we'll take it."

Medford was not very happy with his team's effort.

"No, no, they didn't fight," Medford said. "They didn't fight. We're bad. We gave up 60 points; I don't know the last time we've given up 60 points. It's plain and simple, there's not effort there, and we're not a very good basketball team right now. Hopefully, we can work with them in the next two or three weeks, try to get them a little bit better. But when you have to coach effort, and you're not coaching execution, that's a real issue. Right now, as a staff, we have to coach effort. We've won over the years because we were able to coach execution and get the kids to do the right things, and we're a way from that right now."

The Explorers are a young team, but Medford isn't accepting that as an excuse.

"That's an excuse, though," Medford said. "I've got a third grader that plays harder than some of my seniors. And some of my sophomores. I mean, that's just the reality of it right now. That's an excuse of kids saying that 'hey, we're young.' That's an excuse that a lot of people want to use, and whenever we're talking about effort, I don't care if you're a freshman, you're an eighth grader, you're a seventh grader, you can still play hard. And so, I think that's just an excuse of saying you're young."

There's still plenty of time left in the abbreviated season, and Medford hopes that his team gets better in the remaining time.

"Yeah, I hope so," Medford said, "I hope so. But you know, we'll just have to see what happens, We've got some kids that hopefully can get a little bit better, and we'll just try to get a little bit better. But you know, when you give up 60 points, you're not going to beat anybody. You can't beat anybody, so not being able to defend anybody, it's just a real issue we've had so far."

The game started with a flurry of exchanged baskets that led to an early 7-7 tie before a basket from Owen Williams and threes from Dre Davis and Lavender triggered a Marquette 8-0 run that gave the Explorers a 15-7 lead. A further exchange of baskets near the end of the first period gave Marquette a 17-11 lead at quarter time.

The Knights started the second quarter with threes from Roderick Holmes and Tucker to gain a 17-17 tie, but another three from Davin Thompson put Marquette back up 20-17. Free throws from both Bean and Smith tied the game back up at 20-20, and then, both Bean and Smith led Metro-East on a 10-3 run the remainder of the quarter to give the Knights a 30-23 lead at halftime.

Another exchange of baskets at the start of the second half kept Metro-East's advantage at 35-29, but a basket and a three from Williams put Marquette to within 35-34. A Holmes basket made it 37-34, but a three from Thompson drew the Explorers level at 37-37. But a pair of threes from both Smith and Tucker gave the Knights a 43-39 lead after three quarters.

A Thompson three cut the Metro-East lead to 43-42 at the start of the fourth quarter, and a basket and a dunk from Smith increased the lead to 47-42. Smith, Tucker and Bean then led a final charge that helped the Knights outscore the Explorers 13-8 the rest of the way to give Metro-East the win.

Besides Smith, Bean and Tucker, Holmes added seven points and Luke Neath had two points for the Knights. Williams led the Explorers with 18 points, while Thompson had 17 points, Lavender scored seven, Davis had five points, and both Cortez Harris and Brody Lawrence had two points each.

The Explorers are now 3-3 on the year, and host Granite City tonight and Breese Central on Thursday, while the Knights, now 5-2, get a well-deserved break, playing at Father McGivney Catholic Thursday and at Granite City next Tuesday. Smith is welcoming the break in the schedule.

"By all means," Smith said. "Just two games this week is a great thing. We'll probably take tomorrow off, then get back to it Wednesday."



[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)