

# **Pre-Season Video Included: Marquette Catholic Football Team Prepares For Spring Opener Saturday Against Mater Dei**

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### **See pre-season video below:**

ALTON - The long-awaited opening of the football season is almost at hand for Marquette Catholic, and the Explorers preseason drills have been going well as the team opens the season at Public School Stadium March 20 against Breese Mater Dei Catholic in a 1 p.m. kickoff.

The moving of the football season from fall to spring by the IHSA, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, served as a bit of a wake-up call to the Explorers and all the schools in the state that anything can happen, and things can't be taken for granted.

"It was definitely a reality check, that anything can happen at anytime," said first-year Marquette head coach Leon McElrath III said in a recent interview. "So I think that my guys - I hope everybody around the area did a good job of Just staying prepared, lifting weights, watching film, doing as much team bonding stuff as they could within the social distancing, things like that. I think that's really important. We coaches, or my coaches at least, stayed in constant contact with our kids, always texting them. We had Zoom meetings, so we tried to keep them prepared, because we knew that this day would come sooner than later."

The Explorers are looking forward to getting the season started, and especially playing in front of their fans, as the IHSA recently ruled that outdoor venues, such as Public School Stadium at West Elementary School, can be filled up to 20 percent of capacity. Indoor events this past winter were limited to 50 fans as Illinois Phase Four mitigations were met in the area.

"So we look forward to playing in front of fans," McElrath said, "we look forward to competing against other good teams in the area and in the state. The IHSA came through with a ruling that we get 20 percent fan attendance, and since we play at West Stadium, I think the AD (Brian Hoener) said that West Stadium holds about 3,400 people. So we'll get about 600, which is great for us. So we hope to have a lot of fan support."

But the most important part is that the players will get to play their season, albeit in a six-game schedule, and the seniors get to close out their high school careers on the field, as well as underclassmen gaining valuable experience.

"I'm extremely happy that our seniors get to, at least, have to compete their last year of high school," McElrath said. "I'm happy that our freshmen get to get their feet wet for their freshman year, where they're not going into next year kind of wet behind their ears. That's really, really important. As far as team wise, we want to compete, we want to put on a good show for the fans, we want to come out here and improve on a daily basis. And we talk about getting better each day, winning the day. So that's super important to us."

The Explorers have been conducting mainly non-contact drills, and one of the most important fundamentals of football will be heavily emphasized as the start of the season approaches.

"The biggest thing is tackling," McElrath said, "and with the no-contact practices, or no-contact days earlier in the year. it's always about form tackling, using the bags, using tackling wheels. We talk about getting the guy on the ground, making the offense run another play. So that's a big segment of our practices, just tackling drills, understanding how to form fit, and where to be at. Next thing we talk about is just competing. We do a lot of conditioning drills, we do a lot of competition things to make sure our guys understand that hey, we want to win at everything. So we're not trying to come in second; we do a lot of competing here in practice. As far as offensive-wise, we're still working on the little things, trying to get better every day. Catching the ball, running crisp routes, clean pocket on the hand-offs. the mesh points. So once again, we try to get better every day, just a little bit better."

The Explorers will be ready for the home game against Mater Dei, playing for the first time on the new turf field of Public School Stadium, and the schedule also features



home games against Salem and Columbia, as well as road trips to Freeburg, East Alton-Wood River and Breese Central. McElrath knows that his team will be ready to face any and all challenges.

"Week one, we have Mater Dei," McElrath said, "which they are a very, very good football team. So it'll definitely give us a test to see where we are. We are extremely excited to play and compete against them. My seniors are hungry to show what they've been doing over the last year in the weight room, on the practice field, how they did in the classroom. And my underclassmen are hungry, too. to show the seniors that they're worthy of being called Explorers."



