

Explorers Jump To Early Lead In Both Sets, Griffins Rally, But Marquette Wins 25-16, 25-19 in Girls Volleyball

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GLEN CARBON - Marquette Catholic jumped out to big leads in both sets, only to see Father McGivney Catholic rally from behind to come close, but in the end, the Explorers prevailed 25-16, 25-19 in a Prairie State Conference match played Wednesday night at the McGivney gym.

The Explorers led in both sets by double digits before the Griffins came back, but Marquette had enough to quell the rallies and take the win. The Griffins did play well throughout the entire match.

"I thought we did play very well tonight," said McGivney head coach Paul Vieth. "Of course, a few of those lulls happened on serve-serve, kind of in the middle where it kind of stopped our momentum. But up until that point, we were playing hard, going point-for-point, the girls' energy was up the entire time, even when we did hit those low points. Our spirits were still up, and we're cheering each other on. Once we got past it in that first set, we really competed in the second set, and really came back in a huge deficit there at the very end to really put some pressure on them. And we did that through hustle; our scrappy defense tonight was some of the best play I've seen them play, trusted each other, and I was extremely happy with their performance."

The Griffins are making progress with their young team, and Vieth is very happy with the effort.

"Absolutely," Vieth said. "The effort, that's one thing you can't coach, you have to wish the girls play their hardest, do their best, and that's something here at McGivney, that these girls have a lot of heart, and whatever as far as talent, height, misfortune they have, they're gonna make it up with an effort and that energy. And they showed a lot of that heart tonight, and we had a few outstanding plays out there, and some performances. But overall, as a team, this was one of our best team performances. I wish it could have come with a W at the end, but I felt like it was a W with their effort."

The shortened season is starting to turn towards the stretch run, and Vieth is optimistic that his team is beginning to turn the corner.

"Yeah, absolutely," Vieth said. "Getting the anxiety and the nervousness out of our sophomore class that is playing at the varsity level, our one freshman, they're starting to feel 100 percent part of the team, and what they're doing to contribute to our success. And it takes a lot, sometimes, for young girls to feel comfortable out there on the court, and not playing with fear, but they're playing with aggressive tendencies, and that's what we want to aim for tonight, and we're starting to break out of that shell. So I'm extremely excited for that opportunity for our young players to blossom."

The Explorers overall played well in the match against Father McGivney.

"It's a little bit different pace that what we've been playing this week, with (Belleville) Althoff (Catholic) and Roxana, so coming in, we wanted to take it to them hard, and we had some good moments, and we also had some moments with the tips and not covering on the blocks," Marquette Catholic head girls volleyball coach Sue Heinz said. "But overall, the outcome was good, we took it to them when we could, and ended up with a win."

The Griffins had a late rally in the second set to make things close, but Marquette was able to put the set and the match away.

"My hitters have been really good lately," Heinz said, "really coming through at key moments when we need them. A few serving errors we had, and a couple of hitting errors, but for the most part, we put up a good match."

Of course, Heinz and her team are very happy to be playing their season after it was very much cast in doubt, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have eight seniors that I just wanted, for these seniors so bad to get a season in, no matter how long it was going to be, and, oh year, we're halfway through right now, and it's just so exciting," Coach Heinz said. "We're having fun."

Rachel Heinz started the match off by serving the first two points for the Explorers, with the Griffins coming right back to tie the first set up 2-2. After Marquette got the ball back at 3-2, Josey Wahl served up the next three points, aided by an ace, to make it 6-2 before the Griffins got it back at 6-3. The Explorers then scored seven of the next nine points to make it 13-5, forcing a McGivney time out. After an exchange of points, Kylie Murray served up the next three points to make it 17-6, then another exchange brought the score to 19-9 for the Explorers. Mary-Elizabeth Benware served up back-to-back points to make it 19-11 before another exchange of points brought the score to 21-13 before a pair of service points from Aislin Hall made it 21-15, but a Wahl kill stopped the Griffins momentum. From there, the Explorers scored four of the last five points of the set to take a 25-16 win and a one-set lead in the match.

The second set with Marquette jumping to a 3-1 lead, but three consecutive kills from Anna McKee, along with a Haydee Rios kill, gave the Griffins their first lead of the evening at 5-3. An Emma Menke tip stopped the Griffins' rally, and Ellie Jacobs, helped by kills from Murray and Natalie Wills, served up four straight points to make it 8-5 for the Explorers. Later on, with Allison Woolbright serving, a Abby Williams tap brought the score to 10-6, and the Explorers scored three of the next four points to make it 13-7, forcing another Griffins time out. Kills from Olivia Ellebracht and Allison Geiger

increased the Marquette lead to 15-7, but the Griffins rallied to score five of the next six points to make it 16-12. An exchange of points made it 19-15. then Jacobs served up five points in a row to bring up match point at 24-15. The Griffins wouldn't go away, and with Madasyn Wasser serving, her tap in and ace, sandwiched around a McKee kill, made it 24-19 before a missed spike made the final 25-19, giving the Explorers the match.

The Explorers are now 6-4 on the season, and continues their road trip next week with matches at Columbia, East Alton-Wood River and Highland, with a final road match at Granite City on Apr. 14. Heinz feels that her team continues to play well, and looks forward to the challenges up ahead.

"We struggled there a couple games last week, but this week, we've done really well, kind of picking it back up," Coach Heinz said.

The Griffins are now 3-6, and will take some time off for Easter weekend before getting back into the swing of things with a road match at Mt. Olive and home matches against Bunker Hill and Waterloo Gibault Catholic. Vieth is looking ahead to the break and the upcoming schedule.

"We have a nice spring break here," Vieth said. "We're actually going to take off from some practice time, and spend time focusing on God and family. And then on Monday, we have Mt. Olive in our next conference game. I'd be doing cartwheels if we went out of here with a W," he said with a smile and laugh, "but I am a happy coach."





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