

Marquette Catholic Has Young Boys Soccer Team After Loss Of 11 Seniors, Paniagua, Davis, Stork Will Provide Leadership

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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ALTON - The Marquette Catholic boys soccer team enjoyed a successful season, going 6-5-4 in the abbreviated spring season, gaining quality wins over Columbia, Waterloo Gibault Catholic, and Collinsville as highlights of their season.

With the opening of practice on Monday, head coach Jerry DiSalvo is using the first week to evaluate players and see where they will fit in for the Explorers.

"The first week of practice is usually slow," DiSalvo said, "but we have tryouts to see who will make varsity and JV. So I'm putting the players in situations where I can observe them play so we can determine where they will be best suited. Once we split the team into varsity and JV, then we'll start doing training sessions."

DiSalvo's first year as the head coach went very well, all things considered, with a shortened season due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and moved to the spring instead of its traditional fall spot, and no IHSA state tournament series as well.

"I thought it went fine," DiSalvo said. "New coach, COVID season, no playoffs. It's hard to play when there's no prize at the end, but I thought it was a good learning experience for the both of us."

The Explorers lost 11 seniors from the club, including standout striker R.J. Parker, but the team returns a good mix of all four classes, with many of the underclassmen looking to make a contribution to the team this season.

The three key returnees for Marquette are junior striker Myles Paniagua, junior midfielder Dre Davis, and senior goalkeeper Preston Stork. Paniagua had five goals and five assists for the Explorers in the spring, while Davis had a goal and an assist. Stork allowed only 18 goals this past season while keeping two clean sheets. DiSalvo will rely on the trio to provide leadership for the younger players.

"Those three were instrumental last year," DiSalvo said, "and I expect them to be our leaders this year."

Marquette Catholic's boys' soccer schedule is an ambitious one, described by DiSalvo as "very challenging." The Explorers play good Illinois sides in Belleville Althoff Catholic, Columbia, O'Fallon and Triad, and also will go against a pair of St. Louis powers in both John Burroughs and Whitfield, who are perennial contenders in Missouri soccer.

DiSalvo's goal is to get the Explorers to play a team-oriented style that also emphasizes the fun of the game as well.

"The key is to get them to play for one another vs. themselves," DiSalvo said, "to gain an understanding of the system and style of play that I'll be teaching, and have fun. We play the game to win, but also have fun."

