

Redbirds Beat Explorers For First Time In 10 Years In Season Opener

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – The last time Alton High played Alton Marquette in baseball was on April 28, 2013, at Busch Stadium. The Redbirds came out on top by a score of 5-1.

Fast forward nearly 10 years, and the cross-town rivalry has sparked back up yet again. This time Marquette had home-field advantage.

The game Wednesday night (March 16) was the first to be played on the brand new turf at Lloyd Hopkins Field. Alton mayor David Goins cut the ribbon during the pre-game activities and stuck around to watch the Redbirds win an exciting game by a score of 5-4.

It's a huge deal whenever these two schools play one another, no matter the sport, and this game delivered expectations.

Things were quiet for the first three innings, but boy did this game pick up.

Marquette got things started in the bottom of the fourth when junior Broc Brown hit a lead-off triple. The next at-bat junior Hayden Gardner got walked and then later on stole second. The Explorers had runners on second and third with no outs.

It looked like Alton's pitcher, junior Ashton Schepers, was going to get out of the jam when he threw back-to-back strikeouts, but that wasn't the case.

The next at-bat Schepers threw a wild pitch. Brown scored to make it 1-0 and Gardner advanced to third. After an infield error at first base, Gardner was able to head for home and make it a 2-0 lead for Marquette.

Schepers was pulled and sophomore Austin Rathgeb came in to make the save for the Redbirds. He did so successfully after a groundout to end the inning.

The Redbirds came storming right back in the top of the fifth.

Senior James Vambaketes got on base for Alton to start things off. Then Rathgeb came up to the plate and hit an RBI single to tie things up at 2-2.

Sophomore Logan Bogard got walked and all of a sudden, the bases were loaded. In came senior Darrius Weaver to pitch and try and save the day for the Explorers. He struck out his first batter for out number two.

Weaver hit the next batter by a pitch and walked in a run. That brought up junior James Stendback. He was also walked, and the Redbirds took a 4-2 lead.

Marquette head coach Tim Fahnestock said postgame that his team just needed to throw more strikes.

The Redbirds didn't hold the lead very long though, as Marquette battled right back.

The bottom of the fifth started off with a lead-off walk for the Explorers. Junior Andrew Roth came into pinch run and immediately stole second base. Broc Brown came up to bat again and put down a perfectly executed bunt down the third-base line to advance Roth to third. Brown stole second which meant Marquette had runners on second and third with one out.

Roth was able to round the bases when he stole home off a wild pitch to make it 4-3. Brown advanced to third.

Senior Owen Williams came up next and hit an RBI single to score Brown and tie the game at 4-4. Rathgeb finally got the strikeout he was looking for to end the inning for the Redbirds.

Senior Caden Laslie took it upon himself to regain the lead for Alton and that's exactly what he did. He got on base with a single and then proceeded to steal second base. After a wild throw to first base, Laslie took off for home and made it safely to score the eventual game-winning run and make it 5-4.

Alton head coach Scott Harper was happy with his team's ability to take advantage of their situations.

“We did a great job of having some discipline. They had some control problems there in our four-run inning, so we got that lead,” Harper said postgame.

The Redbirds will play a doubleheader this Saturday (March 19) against Lockport and Galesburg at Lloyd Hopkins Field. The first game starts at 9 a.m. and the second begins at 2 p.m. Alton will make their home debut on March 22 against Granite City.