

Bethalto nips Alton Marquette in playoff hockey matchup

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EAST ALTON – Playoff games, regardless of the sport, can be really tight, considering what's often at stake.

Bethalto and Alton Marquette played that type of game in their Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association Class 1A Western Division semifinal playoff opener Monday night

at East Alton Ice Arena, the Eagles finally putting away the Explorers with an empty-net power-play goal from Jayden Kahl with 36 seconds left to give Bethalto a 4-2 win and a 1-0 lead in their best-of-three series.

The Eagles won't have time to celebrate the win; Game 2 of the series is set for 7:15 p.m. today at East Alton. A deciding game, if necessary, would be played Thursday night.

“It was a lot closer than we thought it might be,” said Eagle coach Cory Newgent. “But taking nine penalties (for 28 penalty minutes) put us on our heels; you take that many penalties in a 39-minute game, it's going to be difficult. You really can get tired.

“We did a pretty good job of killing them off. You can't ask for much more than that.”

The Explorers had several missed opportunities to score as well, and the misses didn't help, felt Marquette coach John Dumolin. “We had a lot of good chances in front, and we just couldn't get the puck in,” Dumolin said. “That's hockey sometimes.

“The best part of this is that we've got them again tomorrow.”

The Eagles opened the scoring with Konnor Loewen taking a feed from Kahl and beating Explorer netminder Alex Harder just 2:16 into the game. After the goal, play kept going up and down the ice, interrupted when the Eagles took several penalties that put Marquette on the power play. The Bethalto penalty kill unit and goalie Kyle Hillard were up to the challenge, though, turning back every Marquette thrust into their end of the ice.

Kahl had the Eagles' second goal, and it came when Bethalto was down a man because of a too many men on the ice decision. Kahl raced in and scored past Harder to make it 2-0 at the 1:22 mark.

Marquette bounced back at 6:07, however, when Bryce Simon got a pass from Ian Sovar and beat Harder to make it 2-1, which is where it stood through two periods.

The Eagle lead went to 3-1 at 4:36 of the third when Aaron Scott beat Harder, with assists from Kahl and Loewen, and seemed to have the game in hand. But Simon had other ideas, scoring on a power play with 3:30 to go, assisted by Jacob Nickel. But a interference penalty on Mark Vitali proved costly when Kahl, assisted by Loewen, scored into an empty net on the power play with 36 seconds left to seal the win.

Marquette outshot Bethalto 25-24, with Harder having 20 saves for the Explorers and Hillard having 22 for the Eagles.