

Silver Stallions Shut Down – Explorers Hand Christ Our Rock First Loss Of Season In Exciting Conference Rematch

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON – There wasn't an empty seat in the building Friday night as the Marquette Catholic Explorers boy's basketball team hosted Christ Our Rock Lutheran in a decisive Gateway Metro Conference game.

The Silver Stallions came into the game undefeated at 23-0 and had won the previous meeting with Marquette handily by a score of 62-47 back on Jan. 14.

Marquette head coach Cody Best called the last meeting with Christ Our Rock “one of our worst games.” The Explorers had to chase the game the whole way after going down 18-6 after the first quarter.

The second meeting Friday night was the polar opposite.

The Explorers used an exuberant home crowd to hold on to a 40-38 win and tie themselves up at the top in the GMC standings. Both the Silver Stallions and Explorers are now 7-1 in the conference.

It was Christ Our Rock who opened to a 14-10 after the first quarter but the Explorers’ 11-1 run in the second gave them a 21-15 lead heading into the locker room.

Coming back onto the court the teams went back and forth with the Explorers still leading 28-24 through three.

Marquette opened the fourth with a couple of threes, one from Braden Kline and another from Parker Macias. Those shots pushed the Marquette lead to 34-26.

Christ Our Rock stormed back though and tied the game up at 36. It was another three, this time from junior Sean Williams to give Marquette the lead back at 39-36.

“Sean Williams doesn’t usually have the green light, but he had the green light on that one,” Best said jokingly. “He stepped up, he got rebounds for us, and he played his role. That’s all we need him to do.”

A bucket the other way made it 39-38 with just under two minutes remaining in the game.

The Explorers basically passed the ball around and played keep-away instead of trying to increase their lead late in the game. Down a point, the Silver Stallions had no other choice but to start fouling to try and regain possession.

The fouls sent Macias to the line first shooting one-and-one. He missed, but the Explorers got the rebound and then Kendall Lavender was immediately fouled. He made his first free throw but missed the second. His team was up 40-38, but Christ Our Rock had the ball with 8.7 seconds left on the clock, plenty of time to go the other way and get a shot off.

Off the inbound, instead of going for the tie, the Silver Stallions shot a three for the win, but it didn't go. As the buzzer sounded it was the 'Blue Crew' that stormed the court to celebrate the upset.

"We were able to hang on and control it," Best said. "We didn't turn it over as much as we did last time. The last four minutes were huge for us, we just controlled the ball."

The win brings Marquette to 15-11 on the season, and they really dug deep to get this one.

"We wanted that win a lot," Kline said who led all scorers with 15 points and five threes. "That's the number one team in 1A and we just gave them their first loss, it feels great."

He's slightly exaggerating. The best Class 1A team is up for debate, but as of the latest Associated Press rankings, the Silver Stallions were ranked No. 3 in Illinois 1A.

Following Kline's 15 points was Jaden Rochester with 12. Macias and Williams each finished with five while Lavender had four.

The Silver Stallions were led by Parker Boehne with 12 points and Dallas Fair with 10.

It's worth mentioning that Christ Our Rock had a fairly large fan section as well that made the hour-and-a-half drive from Centralia and made the small Marquette gym louder than ever.

But Marquette fans had this game circled on the calendar and showed out with overflow from the body-to-body student section up on the stage.

"The atmosphere was amazing," Kline said. "When you can get that many students here to support you, it's awesome."

After a long drive to Quincy, the Explorers will be back at home on Tuesday in what will probably be another sell-out crowd for Senior Night.

Marquette will host Maryville Christian at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 7.