

# **Strong Second Half Sends Explorers Past Oilers To Next Round Of Girls Basketball Playoffs**

by Nathan Tucker

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ALTON - The friendly confines of Marquette Gym hosted first-round Class 2A regional girls basketball action on Saturday afternoon, with the Explorers hosting the visiting East Alton-Wood River Oilers. The home team led the whole way, and Marquette took a 63-32 victory.

Marquette head coach Whitney Sykes-Rogers had two words of encouragement written on the whiteboard in the locker room for her team at the halftime break. “STOP FOULING” Her team was up eleven at half, but had given EAWR plenty of free-throw chances in the bonus in the second quarter.

At one point in the second frame, the Oilers had cut the Explorer lead down to just four points, often driving at the Marquette defense, drawing fouls in the process. Foul trouble put Marquette in a tough place in the first half, and gave the Oilers plenty of bonus free throws.

“We were giving them free points by fouling like crazy,” Whitney Sykes-Rogers said postgame. “We had three starters with three fouls at the end of the half. So we were able to get away from that and extend our lead in the third quarter.”

Marquette’s solid shooting, both from the field and from the free throw line, proved the difference maker in Alton on Saturday. Five different Explorers scored from behind the arc on Saturday, Payton Patterson and Haley Rodgers both finished on fifteen points to lead the home team’s efforts.

“We played a great third quarter,” Sykes-Rogers said. “The third quarter is the reason we were able to pull away. We have to move our feet and convince ourselves that we don’t need to always get a steal on the ball. We have to get away from reaching in on the pass, that’s when I get upset with them, when you have a player trapped, in a good spot, and then you reach in. So just things we learn from and move on.”

The Oilers, who are actually the host team for the regional tourney, were plagued by fouls and turnovers all afternoon. Several Oilers were in foul trouble, and leading EAWR scorer Ocean Bland fouled out late in the contest. Offensively, Bland contributed eleven, followed by Kaylynn Buttry who added ten. Buttry was a constant presence, staying out of foul trouble for Lyndsey Perez and EAWR.

The Oilers postseason ends there, and Marquette will face the winner of Southwestern and Gillespie on Monday evening. The Explorers will be going in there full of confidence, if not experience.

“We haven’t been in any tournaments or played them or anyone around them,” Sykes-Rogers said, looking ahead to her team’s next game on Monday. “I was just looking at film because we haven’t seen anything. So we just go into that game, play hard like we did today, and hope for the best.”