

Alton & Marquette Soccer Rivalry "More Than Just A Game"

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ALTON - Last season, Alton ran red.

Both the boy's and girl's soccer programs upended the Marquette Explorers last year. The boys team won 2-1 in a dramatic penalty shootout, while the Lady Redbirds dominated in a 7-0 win over the Blue Crew.

It will be the ladies who take the field at Public School Stadium tomorrow night in what's expected to be a much closer game than last season.

The Explorers come into the game with an 11-2-1 record while the Redbirds are 8-3-1. Marquette will be playing off the back of a 1-1 tie against a quality Freeburg team while Alton will be trying to bounce back after a 7-1 loss to state-ranked O'Fallon.

Ask anyone around, and they'll tell you that this one isn't your average high school soccer game.

"It's definitely not just a game, ask any of these girls," Alton head coach Gwen Sabo said.

"I mean, it's our rivalry game for a reason. Most of these girls all know each other, they all grew up, went to school together, Girl Scouts, they have some kind of connection with one another."

"Obviously, for the girls, for the community, it's a little bit more than ," Marquette head coach Brian Hoener said, "but as a coaching standpoint, it's another opportunity for us to play another really good team and another opportunity for us to get prepared "

It's a tale as old as time, the big city's public school versus its usually much smaller private school. Take other examples: Waterloo vs. Gibault Catholic, Breese Central vs. Mater Dei, Belleville East vs. Althoff Catholic, and more recently, Edwardsville vs. Father McGivney Catholic.

You can call it a 'David vs. Goliath', but it's really not when both these teams have had great success recently. It's a rivalry game, sure, but it's also a game between two good soccer teams, a game that's supposed to toughen each team's schedule and make them better going forward.

"They're a 3A school and we're a 1A school, our paths don't cross in the postseason, so it's a great game for our community, it's a great game for our team, and for all the players involved," Hoener said.

Talking a little bit about the game's history, Marquette leads the all-time rivalry at 11-9-5 dating back to 2000.

Sabo, a 2011 Alton grad and four-year varsity soccer player, remembers her games against Marquette. In her four years with the team, the Redbirds went 3-1-2 in the rivalry. The teams played one another twice in her freshman and senior years.

According to Sabo, the game always used to be both teams' Senior Night out at Gordon Moore Park where the schools shared the field and was always a huge game. Her senior year was one of the first times the game was played at Public School Stadium and played out to a 1-1 tie.

This game was played for 16 straight years from 2000 to 2016 before a five-year hiatus. The schools' administrations decided it was best not to play one another for a while after things began to get heated between fans according to Sabo.

"I really pushed for us to be able to play each other again because I know how special it is for the players and the community," she said.

"Since Hoener and I have a good relationship, we were able to talk to our administrations and they agreed to let us start playing each other again in 2021," Sabo added.

In the first game back, the Explorers won 3-0 with goals from 2021 graduates Emma Anselm (2) and Madelyn Smith.

A season ago, then junior Emily Baker scored four, then freshman Lyndsey Miller had two, and now graduated Josie Paniagua had the other in the 7-0 win. It was then junior Peyton Baker's third shutout of the season.

If history were to repeat itself, we're probably due up for a tie. Regardless of the outcome, it's good fun for the players and everyone else in attendance.

"This game always draws a large crowd and I know that's special for the players to have so many people come out to support them," Sabo said.

"It's a battle for pride, it's just the biggest game, and everybody looks forward to it. I know Marquette does, and I know we do, it's just an exciting game. It gets the community involved and thinking and supporting soccer, so it's always a good thing."

The game is set to kick off at 6:45 p.m. Friday night, April 21, at Public School Stadium.

For fans unable to attend, Riverbender.com will be [live-streaming](#) the game on-site and on Facebook.