

Explorers End Postseason Woes Against Althoff – Move On To Regional Semifinals For First Time In Four Years

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
May 15 2023 9:29 PM



ALTON – The short history between the Althoff Crusaders and Marquette Explorers baseball programs has been interesting, to say the least.

Over the last three seasons, the teams have played six times. Althoff won both meetings in 2021 by scores of 10-0 in the regular season and 12-2 in the Regional Quarterfinals.

Marquette won the regular season meeting in 2022 15-9 but lost 7-2 in the Regional Semifinals.

That brings us to this season. The Explorers won an absolute barnburner back on May 1st by a score of 17-16 and were set to face Althoff again in the first round of the playoffs.

The third time is the charm they say, and that rang true for the Explorers as they were able to end the streak after a well-earned, full team-effort 7-4 Regional Quarterfinals win Monday night at Lloyd Hopkins Field inside Gordon Moore Park.

“It’s definitely hit hard the past couple of years losing to them, so figured we should come back and bring it to them,” Marquette senior infielder Myles Paniagua said.

Bring it to them they did, but it was the Crusaders who brought it first.

Marquette grabbed the lead thanks to Shaun Ferguson’s RBI-double scored Paniagua to go ahead 1-0 after two innings, but Althoff had an immediate answer.

All of their four runs came in the top of the third with Marquette starter, sophomore Andrew Zacha out on the mound.

After back-to-back singles from Kyle Fitting and Bo Gomric as well as Grant Hoffman working a walk, Althoff had the bases loaded and no one out. Hank Gomric came up and hit a two-run double to take the lead.

Hoffman later scored on a wild pitch and Hank Gomric was brought in by Ryan Myatt’s sacrifice fly to boost the lead to 4-1.

Marquette came right back as well and burst open a six-run bottom of the third.

Things began after Hayden Sherman and Hayden Garner were both hit by a pitch from starter Braden Edgar. Paniagua singled to load the bases with no outs.

Marquette only got a single run out of a similar situation the inning prior and was not going to let it happen again.

Instead, the Explorers started teeing it up and raked together four hits and a walk.

With the bases loaded and no one out, Skylar Schuster hit a two-run single, then Ferguson hit an RBI double. After Andrew Bober batted in Schuster via a single, Marquette regained the lead at 5-4.

At this time, Edgar's day was done and out came Nick Jahnsen from the bullpen.

Freshman, and recent varsity call-up Jack Rea hit an RBI single that scored Ferguson before Sherman's sacrifice groundout scored Bober to make it 7-4.

Zacha threw 4 1/3 innings, striking out four and allowing four runs, three earned, on six hits. Senior Jack Spain closed out the game and threw 2 2/3 hitless innings.

Explorers head coach Tim Fahnestock felt a weight lifted off his shoulders having finally beat his soon-to-be new Gateway Conference rivals.

"We talked about it today, we wanted to get that monkey off our back," he said.

"I think the guys were a lot more focused today and they knew what we had to do. This is where I wanted to be two weeks ago, sharp enough for the playoffs, but I'm happy it came now," Fahnestock continued.

Besides giving up a four-spot in the top of the third, the Explorers' two pitchers combined to throw six scoreless.

"Drew did a great job on the mound and then we brought Spaino in and shut them down," Fahnestock said.

It wasn't quite a combined 33-run affair like last time, but the Explorers still put plenty of runs across the board and played the defense to back it up.

"We had a good offensive approach, and then I said after the game, the guys who didn't produce offensively made some great plays defensively, so that's a complete baseball game," Fahnestock said.

"We definitely put it all together today. First complete game in a while, so hopefully we can keep it going," Paniagua said.

With the win, Marquette improves to 19-13 on the year while Althoff's season ends at 13-19.

The Explorers earned the No. 6 seed in the postseason, securing them one of the toughest ways out of the regional. They move on to play the No. 2-seeded Columbia Eagles (27-4).

In the one regular-season meeting between the two this season, Columbia won 8-4 back on April 17th.

“It’s not an easy regional, but like I told these guys, if you believe in it, good things can happen, and you never know, we got to play the game,” Fahnestock said.

The Explorers will play in Columbia At Eagleview Elementary School on Wednesday, May 17 at 4:30 p.m.