

# **Roxana Rush Their Way To First Undefeated Regular Season Since 2003**

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter  
October 21 2023 12:38 AM



ALTON - With the conference sewn up, there was only one more regular season goal for the Roxana Shells football program: finish undefeated.

It's a feat that hasn't happened at Roxana High School in decades. On Friday night at Public School Stadium, Roxana poured on the offense early en route to a 52-14 win over the Marquette Explorers.

A good traveling crowd greeted the Shells in Alton, where the hosting Marquette Explorers have struggled since their 49-21 win over East Alton-Wood River back in week three.

That crowd had to wait roughly four minutes for a Shell touchdown. Roxana won the toss and deferred to the second half, giving Marquette possession first.

The Explorers punted, and Roxana drove quickly to score. Evan Wells added another rushing touchdown to his ever-expanding collection, and the Shells tacked on two with a short run on a broken play for an 8-0 lead.

Wells had his next touchdown run called back for a holding on the next Roxana drive. Instead, it was Andruw Ellis darting to the end zone for six, and the extra point made it 15-0.

Evan Wells would get that score back on the next Shell possession, running a long way for another touchdown and more yards for his season total, which eclipsed 1,000 yards Friday.

Roxana was up three scores after a quarter and had the ball for maybe two of the 12 minutes of the first frame.

Andruw Ellis fought through some tackles and found the endzone to get the Shells rolling in the second quarter, and with a now four-touchdown lead, the visitors put their foot on the gas pedal before the half.

It wasn't just points being scored that made this a tough game for Marquette, but Roxana's physical style of play. It was a game that was at times chippy: big hits, big plays, some unpleasant words exchanged at times.

"I think that's just how we play," said Roxana head coach Wade DeVries postgame. "We talk about violence. Intelligent, relentless violence. It's always going to be part of the game and we have to play that way."

Roxana's relentless rushing trio was at it again in the second frame, and senior running back Terrel Graves got his touchdown in the second quarter. As many games have gone this season, it was all Roxana before halftime.

Not to be outdone, Roxana's defense also got in on the act with a touchdown of their own, as Mason Crump intercepted a pass from Marquette quarterback Jack Rea, and dodge, ducked, and dipped his way to the endzone to get on the board, stretching Roxana's lead to 46-0 before the halftime horn.

In their last home game at Public School Stadium in 2023, Marquette came out in the second half wanting to fight. Marquette head coach Eric Dickerson noted the heart that his team put on the field in the second half.

“We challenged our kids at halftime,” said Marquette’s Eric Dickerson. “We’ve got 24 minutes left man, how do we want to go out? Our seniors, what legacy do you want to leave? Everyone else, what do you want to build on?’ And they came out and fought for that second half, and I was proud of them for that.”

Marquette found paydirt in the fourth quarter after holding the Shells scoreless in the third. It was senior leader Carter Dennis, usually a lineman on both sides of the ball, who got the handoff in a goal-to-go situation for the Explorers, and Dennis broke to the outside and scored the touchdown, to the joy of his Marquette teammates and those wearing Explorer Blue at Public School Stadium.

“We drew up that little play to get him the ball,” said Dickerson. “And I had no idea we’d be down in a goal line situation. Just so happy for him, and you can tell what kind of team we’re developing here because they all celebrated for him.”

The teams would then trade kickoff return touchdowns. Mason Crump got on the scoresheet again for Roxana with his return, and Duarell Blocker capped his senior season at Marquette with a return touchdown.

That would be all the scoring action, and as the final minutes trickled off the clock, seniors on both sidelines were taking in their final minutes of regular season high school football.

“Somebody told me it had been 883 days (since Marquette had won a game) before we beat (EAWR),” said Eric Dickerson. “So our seniors have been through a lot, and for them to stick with it and get that victory, we just have to take that win and build off of it.”

Roxana’s undefeated regular season is the first since the 2003 team that ended with a 10-1 record. The Shells now wait to find out who their first postseason opponent will be.

“We’ve taken care of the regular season,” Shells head coach Wade DeVries said. “I told (the team) to go celebrate it, for 24 hours we don’t have an opponent to get ready for, so all we can do is enjoy it.”

While not the season Marquette was hoping for, coach Eric Dickerson showed pride in the team that the Explorers have become in 2023. The Explorers will be independent in 2024, but Dickerson doesn’t think that changes their mindset, just their schedule.

“The schedule changes (next year), but it’s still one week at a time,” said Dickerson of the future of the Explorers football program. “Our schedule will change, but we’ll just go with it and do the best we can.”