

Eagles Score Three Times In Seven Minutes To Snatch Sectional Title From Explorers

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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BELLEVILLE – It was a battle between two St. Louis area perennial soccer programs from the east of the Mississippi in the IHSA Class 1A Murphysboro sectional final Wednesday night at Althoff Catholic High School.

The home of the Crusaders was chosen by the IHSA to be this game's neutral site, being a much more respectable drive for both teams than the long trek up to Murphysboro.

The Marquette Explorers wore white and were the away team taking on the No. 1-seeded Columbia Eagles in all black.

After an intense, scoreless first half, the Eagles would burst open the game with three goals within seven minutes en route to a 3-0 win.

The result propels them to the super-sectionals against No. 1 -seeded Williamsville, the winner of their own sectional over Teutopolis by a score of 2-0. That super-sectional game will take place on Saturday at Virden North Mac High School at noon.

Marquette head coach Brian Hoener preached a simple message to his team back on Oct. 2, the last time the Explorers were beaten, a 4-0 loss at Gordon Moore Park at the hands of the Eagles.

After that loss, he said that "mistakes send people home."

He solidified that message Wednesday night as his teams' season came to a close.

"You can't make mistakes against really good teams, and they're a really good team," Hoener said about his opposition. "We made two mistakes in our backfield and they did what good teams do, they capitalized on them. Once they smelled blood in the water, they went out and buried us."

Liam Bivins opened the game's scoring in the 61st minute with a surreal, long-range effort. He let one fly from around the 40-yard line, into the wind, playing tricks on Marquette junior goalkeeper Will Fahnestock. A difficult ball to handle found its way over Fahnestock's head and opened the door for Columbia.

"I think it's just one where you misjudge it a little bit," Hoener said about the Eagles' first goal. "You think it's going over and next thing you know you're getting it out of the back of the net. It's a difficult situation for the boys to come back from and I think you could definitely see the heads go down a little bit. And when the heads go down, kept on playing."

Columbia indeed kept on playing, scoring twice more within seven minutes.

Bivins doubled up in the 63rd minute and Hayes Van Breusegen put a bow on things with his score in the 68th.

Columbia did the same thing in the two's last meeting on Oct. 2. The Eagles led 1-0 at halftime before scoring in the 47th and 49th minute to blow the game open.

Wednesday's sectional final was never expected to be a goal fest. Heading into it, the Explorers' defense hadn't allowed a goal in three postseason games, while Columbia only allowed one in a 2-1 win over Father McGivney in the regional final.

"We didn't create a whole lot," Hoener said. "The things that we tried to do offensively we just weren't successful at. They got us out of everything that we wanted to do."

A Columbia defense that McGivney head coach Matt McVicar and Hoener called "stingy," a defense that's only allowed three goals in their last 10 games.

The Eagles are also unbeaten in their last 10, including two ties against Class 2A powerhouses Chatham Glenwood and Triad. Their last defeat was on Sept. 22 against Morton, a 2-1 scoreline.

Columbia is now 16-3-4 on the season while the Explorers close at 16-5-1.

13 of Columbia's 16 wins have been shutouts.

The Eagles were nearly off to a dream start Wednesday night, but somehow the Marquette backline made a goal-line clearance in the fifth minute.

The Explorers' best chance came from a corner kick in the 13th minute. According to Hoener, it went just as his team had drawn it up in practice, but the ball just trickled wide after a nice save.

"We executed that perfectly, and their keeper made a heck of a save on it," Hoener said of that play.

"In order to win games like that, you got to catch a break, and if we make that play, who knows what this turns into, but their goalkeeper kept them in the game at that particular point, and from there on we struggled to get any kind of opportunities."

It's a game that he felt was much closer than its scoreline.

"It's unfortunate because I don't think it's a 3-0 type of game," Hoener added.

