

Marquette Plays Tough Columbia Squad, Eagles Prevail 46-35 In Columbia Tourney Championship

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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COLUMBIA - The Explorers played well and kept hanging in the entire game, but the hot start by Columbia was a lot to overcome in a 46-35 Eagles win to take the Columbia Holiday Tourney Championship.

"We spot a good team, or a great team like that, five threes in the first quarter, you're in for a long night," Marquette Catholic head coach Cody Best said. "But we battled back, I think we cut it to three, maybe four. We were hanging on for a little bit, and then, they just delivered their final blow. They're a good team, I still think we're a good team, but we just started off a little too slow for a championship game."

The Eagles did hold Kline to seven points and played well defensively throughout.

"They did play well defensively," Best said. "(Kline) never did get going, but we played well defensively after we split and went back to man. So, props to them on containing him. It doesn't happen too often."

The Explorers kept battling and got good games from both Jaylen Cawthon and Jaden Rochester, but couldn't get over the hump.

"Yeah, they both had good games," Best said. "Jaden had a good start, and then, Jaylen kicked it in. He's our true point guard, and he's the one who runs our offense. You could

tell he was kind of feeling it after some of those shots he was making, and then on the defensive end, he really stepped up and guarded them pretty well."

With the loss, the Explorers are now 13-3 and had a very good first half of the season. Best and his team are looking ahead to big things as the calendar turns to 2024.

"We are," Best said. "We're 13-3, nothing to hang our head on. We're going to get some more wins, and we're kind of in that stage where we've got to figure some stuff out and see what's going to work, and what's not going to work, and get ready for postseason."





Although some work's needed to be done, Best is feeling very good about his team's chances in the New Year.

"We've got some stuff to clean up, but then, everybody's got some stuff to clean up," Coach Best said. "So, we'll fix it and we'll be ready to go come late February."

Micah James drained a pair of threes, with a Rochester basket sandwiched in between, to get Columbia off to a 6-2 start. After an Explorer basket made it 6-4, a basket by Logan Bosch and a three from Donald lifted the Eagles into an 11-4 lead. After a pair of Rochester free throws cut the advantage to 11-6, Donald and James hit on back-to-back threes to make it 17-6, but the Explorers fought back and got another basket from Rochester and a three from Brody Bechtold to make the score 17-11 for the Eagles at the end of the first.

A Kline basket at the start of the second cut the Columbia lead to 17-13, then Donald went to work, scoring twice to up the advantage to make it 23-16, then Kline scored again to make the score 25-18. The Eagles held on and took a 26-19 lead into the locker room at halftime.

The Explorers rallied in the third quarter, getting a three from Cawthon and a free throw from Sean Williams midway through the period to cut the Eagle lead to 30-26, A pair of

free throws and another three from Donald took Columbia to a 35-26 lead after three quarters. Play was becoming increasingly physical during the second half, and in the final quarter, Rochester was called for a technical foul with 6:03 left. Donald converted the free throws to give the Eagles a 38-30 lead, and the play continued to be rough and physical. Best was called for another technical when he argued about a no-call on a collision, and again, Columbia converted the free throws to take a 42-30 lead. The Explorers didn't cave in and kept battling, but in the end, the Eagles took the championship with its 46-35 win.



Donald led the Eagles with 21 points, scoring his 1,000th career point on a short jumper with about five minutes left, while James added 13 points, Brody Graceland had six points, Bosch scored four points, Brady Hemmingshaus had two points and Hayes Van Brusegen scored a single point.

Rochester led the Explorers with 11 points, while Cawthon scored eight points, Kline had seven points, Williams hit for six points and Bechtold had three points.

In the other games on the final day of the tournament, Civic Memorial won third place with a 60-48 decision over Waterloo, and Freeburg took the fifth place game over Nelson County of Bardstown, Ky. 52-44.

Columbia is now 10-4, while Marquette is now 13-3, with the Explorers tipping off on the 2024 part of the schedule with a home game against Hillsboro Tuesday night, then playing at Granite City next Friday, then are at Belleville Althoff Catholic in a Gateway Metro Conference game Jan. 9, with all games starting at 7:30 p.m.



[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)