

Explorers Fall To Top-Ranked Breese Central

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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BREESE - The Marquette Explorers are traversing the toughest stretch of their regular season, and they aren't getting the results they would have hoped for having only won one of their last five games.

It began with the championship game of the Columbia Holiday Tournament when Marquette fell to the hosting Eagles.

Then they opened the new year with a bounce-back win against Hillsboro before losing to a red-hot Granite City team that's won six straight including the consolation bracket of the Prairie Farms Holiday Classic in Collinsville.

Then the Explorers dropped a game to new conference rivals Althoff before finally getting to last night, a 63-30 loss to Breese Central.

"They're definitely, in my eyes, the best team in the state in 2A, and they played like it tonight," Marquette head coach Cody Best said about the Cougars.

Associated Press would agree with him, because for the last two weeks Breese Central has been ranked No. 1 in Class 2A.

The Cougars improved to 17-2 on the season, while the Explorers fall to 14-6.

Best still believes that this stretch is good for his team.

"It's making us better, I'd like to think so," he said.

"Right now, we're finding out what we're not good at. So, now we know what we have to work on. If we have to make some changes, we'll make some changes, but, we've got to start getting ready for regionals, and I've got to go with the guys who know what they're doing out on the court."

Marquette was right there in the early goings.

Central went up to a quick 4-0 lead, but Sean Williams cashed a three followed by Jaden Rochester's basket to take the lead at 5-4. The teams swapped the lead, Marquette going back ahead 7-6 after another three from Williams.

That would be the least time they led.

Central's Griffen Becker made a three to go ahead 9-7 as the Cougars went on to lead 16-10 after the first quarter and the rest of the game.

Marquette would make shots, but it seemed as if Central was always one step ahead.

The Cougars used their strength and size advantage to create and force many turnovers throughout the game, many of them turning into points.

Mason Shubert drilled a corner three right before the half time buzzer to increase the lead to 29-17.

"Going to half, down 12, it just snowballed," Best said. "We couldn't hit shots and made everything tough. They play really good D, and when they make every shot, you're in for a long night."

Central started the second half on a 12-2 run to make it a 41-19 ball game.

Marquette, sometimes living and dying by the three, made six threes Wednesday night.

"That's kind of on me," Best said. "I've got to find other ways to score. I've definitely got to be prepared better to go up against the top-ranked team in the state."

Braden Kline and Williams led the Explorers with 11 points each. Isaiah Redd and Rochester each scored three points and Jaylen Cawthon had two.

Zane Schrage led Central with 24 points and Kaden Rakers had 19.

Marquette is scheduled to host Father McGivney in a key Gateway Metro Conference game tomorrow, Friday Jan. 12, but Best believes it might be cancelled due to the incoming weather.

If it is cancelled, the Explorers will be back in action next week at the Litchfield tournament.

