

Explorers Top Shells And Move Into Litchfield Tourney Semifinals

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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LITCHFIELD - It was the Shells who got off to a fast start in their second game of the Rick McGraw Memorial Tournament in Litchfield, but Marquette battled back for it's second 20-point win over Roxana this season by a score of 50-30.

The previous meeting on Dec. 22 saw the Explorers win 56-36 in Alton.

Aidan Briggs opened Tuesday night's game with a layup followed by Chris Walleck's three-pointer to go up 5-0.

Jaden Rochester got things going for the Explorers as they used a seven-point run to take their first lead at 9-7 after Jaylen Cawthon's trey.

Roxana tied and then went ahead 11-9 after Walleck's basket and then led 13-11 after the first quarter thanks to Sean Maberry.

Back-to-back baskets from Rochester and Braden Kline gave Marquette a 15-13 advantage before Briggs tied it back up. Kline and Rochester both scored again to go up 19-15 and from there Marquette never lost its lead.

The Explorers led 25-20 at halftime.

"It was a fight up until halftime," Marquette coach Cody Best said. "A five-point game and then our guys kind of kicked it into another gear. Defensively I thought we played very well against them. Offensively, we didn't really hit the shots we normally make and we didn't execute."

Marquette held Roxana to just 10 points in the second half as the Shells had an off night when it came to shooting.

The Shells made just three triples going 3 of 23 on the night and 11 of 42 from the field.

Despite the poor shooting, Roxana head coach Mark Briggs thought it was a good game for his team.

"I'm glad we were able to play Marquette here, because I feel like we'll see them again in postseason," he said. "It's just another opportunity for us to gauge and get a feel for them."

"We know coming into the game that Marquette is probably one of the top two teams here. It was very complete. Down five at half, but it could have gone either way," Briggs added.

Marquette, led by Rochester with 16 points and Sean Williams with 15, went 2-0 in pool play, having beat Pana 55-32 the night before. The Explorers now move into the semifinals on Friday, Jan. 19 at 7:30 p.m. against Civic Memorial, 74-63 winners over the hosting Litchfield Panthers.

The Panthers will play the Shells in the consolation semifinals on Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

Briggs was Roxana's only double-digit scorer against Marquette. He ended the night just shy of a double-double with 12 points and nine rebounds. Maberry added seven points and Wallace scored five.

Marquette improved to 17-6 on the season after its third straight win.

"We kind of got our swagger back is what I was telling," Best said. "We've got to get on a run here toward the end of the year. After this tournament, it's going to be that part where you've got to find a way to motivate these guys for regionals."

"That's why we wanted to get in this tournament, to see who we're going to go up against and play a couple of them. We definitely want to win it. We didn't just come to visit. It would be nice to come out here with four wins and get back to what we've been doing," Best added.

Roxana, after beating Pana 41-39 in its first game at Litchfield, fell to 11-9.

"We just want to be playing our best basketball like every coach says at this time of year," Briggs said. "Our kids aren't satisfied with where we're at. I think they're still pressing forward and that's a good thing about this group. They're a bunch of competitors. They're kids that want to win and know how to win. It's going to be interesting to see."