

Staunton Can't Slow Down Explorers - Marquette Moves To Eighth Straight Regional Final

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
February 22 2024 8:08 AM



ROXANA – The Staunton Bulldogs beat Gillespie 52-49 in a play-in game last Saturday.

Doing so gave the No. 9-seeded Dogs a regional semifinal against the awaiting Marquette Catholic Explorers, the No. 2 seed in their respected sub-sectional.

On Wednesday night inside Larry Milazzo Gymnasium, Staunton tried to slow Marquette down, but the Explorers still led the entire way en route to a 55-32 win.

Marquette got out to a quick 6-0 lead after a three-pointer from Sean Williams and a traditional three-point play from Braden Kline.

The Dogs worked their gameplan to perfection in this quarter, going on two and even three-minute-long possessions. A good game plan, if Marquette didn't have the ball, then they couldn't score.

But a triple from Jaylen Cawthorn and a free throw from Williams pushed the lead to 10-2 after the first quarter.

Staunton stuck to its gameplan and continued to try and slow Marquette down, but the Explorers still outscored the Dogs 9-6 In the second quarter, never in any real danger at the halftime break.

The second half was entirely different.

"It clicked for our guys," Marquette head coach Cody Best said. "I don't yell a lot because I like to think I'm a nice guy, but at halftime, I just had to let them know, we've got to speed them up, we've got to jump them, and all that. They're a young team and we're an old team, so we have to play to our advantage."

The message was received.

Marquette outscored Staunton 25-11 in the third quarter to go ahead 44-19.

"Third quarter definitely played the way we wanted to play the whole time," Best said. "We sped them up and we were just trying to cause chaos tonight."

The Explorers' lead grew to as much as 29 but never quite got to 30 to initiate a running clock.

"We were trying to get to a certain point in the game," Best said. "I tried getting some of those guys in, Redd and Jack , they're trying to get the experience. So, it would have been nice to get them in sooner."

Getting some of his bench players experience in a regional game is paramount, considering Marquette is graduating its entire starting lineup of Cawthorn, Kline, Williams, Jaden Rochester, and Brody Bechtold.

Naturally, those five led the team in scoring against Staunton.

Williams led with 15 points, Bechtold had 11, Kline and Rochester each finished with 10, and Cawthorn netted seven.

Holding Kline to just 10 points is an achievement on its own, considering he averages double that per game, but Marquette proved that it had plenty more weapons in the arsenal.

“BK, he’s going to get everything thrown at him,” Best said. “I thought the other guys stepped up and if those guys are hitting shots, then you’ve got to kind of pick your poison at that point.”

Best gave credit to the Dogs for working their gameplan and keeping it close early on.

“Staunton came out and did what they wanted to do, work the clock, so hat’s off to them.”

The Marquette coach laughed and said that’s why high school basketball needs a shot clock.

A young Staunton team, a team that only rosters one senior and eight underclassmen, was led by freshman Luke Moore with 12 points and sophomore Bryce Coalson with nine.

Staunton’s season ends at 16-16.

Marquette and Staunton played in the first semifinal game of the night at Roxana, meaning that Best didn’t know his team's upcoming opponents yet.

It didn’t matter to him all that much.

“It doesn’t matter who we see, they’re going to throw that same defense at us. Other guys are just going to have to step up,” he said.

In the second semifinal, the hosts Roxana defeated Piasa Southwestern 50-37, setting up a regional final between the No. 3-seeded Shells and Explorers on Friday, Feb. 23 at 7 p. m. in Roxana.