

# Explorers' Super-Sectional Bid Comes Up Just Short Against Williamsville

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BEARDSTWON, Ill – The Marquette Explorers were in search of their first sectional title since 2017.

And they were about 40 seconds away from it Friday night in Beardstown.

Marquette had the ball and a two-point lead over Williamsville at 47-45 with under a minute remaining, but an untimely turnover gave the Bullets the ball back with 39 ticks left.

It still wasn't the absolute worst-case scenario. The Explorers just couldn't allow a three-pointer or foul.

They did the latter.

Williamsville's Brecken Thomas broke toward the basket and on his way up was fouled. The basket counted and he made the foul shot to take a 48-47 lead with 24 seconds remaining.

The Explorers called a timeout with 19 seconds left to try and draw up a play, but that was thrown out the window after the situation turned into a baseline inbound with eight seconds left.

In a desperation move, the ball was kicked out to the corner to Sean Williams who put up a well-contested three-pointer that landed just short.

It might not have been the drawn-up play, but Marquette head coach Cody Best was okay with the last-ditch effort.

"I mean it's Sean Williams. He's been on fire lately. If somebody asks, 'Do you want Sean Williams to take a corner three for the win?' I'm going to say yeah."

Williams was the top scorer in the opening round game against Staunton with 15 points, he put up 16 in the regional final against Roxana, and then another 14 against Pleasant Plains in the sectional semifinal.

Friday night against the Bullets he finished with eight points.

After the ball went out of play off of an Explorer all Williamsville had to do was inbound the ball and run out the final two seconds to win its second-ever sectional crown. The Bullets previously finished fourth at state back in 1991.

After the 48-47 loss, Marquette's season comes to a close at 26-9.

Williamsville, who is well out-performing its No. 5 seed in the bottom half of the Beardstown Sectional, move on to the Elite Eight. They'll take on the winners of the Canton Sectional, the Macomb Bombers in the super-sectional on Monday, March 4 in Springfield.

Things looked good for Marquette early on. Jaylen Cawthorn scored first to take the initial lead before Williamsville's Garrett Tim splashed a three to take the advantage. Braden Kline returned the favor with a triple to go up 5-3.

Both Jaden Rochester and Brody Bechtold connected on three-point plays to grow the lead to 13-7 but back-to-back baskets from Carson Kohler shrunk the lead down to 13-11 after the first quarter.

Thomas tied the game up to start the second, but Kline kept the Bullets at bay with a basket and another three. It was Timm's potential four-point play that took the lead back at 19-18. He made the fall-away three-pointer, missing the following foul shot as he gave his team back the lead.

Williamsville went into the halftime break with a 21-20 lead.

Thanks to a three-pointer from Sean Williams, the game was tied back up at 23. It was again tied at 29 after Rochester's basket-and-one.

Jaylen Cawthorn drove to the basket and put up a floater to take the lead at 31-29 before the Bullets took it right back. Two free throws from Rochester swapped the lead again, but the Bullets closed the quarter on a 6-2 run to take a 39-35 lead after three.

Williamsville's Brayden Saling hit a three to open the fourth and push the lead to seven points, his team's largest lead of the game.

The Explorers could have packed it in then. Instead, they went on a 10-point streak.

Kline made a three and was fouled to convert the rare four-point play before Williams and Cawthorn scored straight baskets to take a 43-42 lead.

Shortly after, Rochester hit the ground hard and was slow to get up. He got up and was okay but had to leave the game temporarily to deal with a cut on the side of his head. The Explorers had to play for about a minute without their big man.

When he did come back in, the run continued as Rochester himself capped off the 10-point blitz to lead 45-42.

Reid Bodine made two free throws for the Bullets before Cawthorn went the other way for a basket. Jack Sanders sunk a single free throw for Williamsville to set up the final dramatic 40 seconds.

“It seemed like we just crumbled there in the last minute. It’s very unfortunate,” Best said.

After Marquette’s 10-point run, Williamsville outscored the Explorers 6-2 the rest of the way for the win.

The toughest thing for Marquette is watching its entire starting lineup graduate. All five starters: Cawthorn, Kline, Williams, Rochester, and Bechtold are all seniors.

“They did everything I asked them,” Best said. “They’ve got their heads down now, but they’ve got nothing to be upset about. They’ve left their legacy with wins and the regional, just getting here.”

Their freshman year was shortened by COVID-19 but in each of the following years won at least a regional title. This senior class compiled a record of 73-42 over the course of their high school careers.

Marquette was led on the night by Kline with 14 points. Rochester added 12, Cawthorn had 10, Williams had eight, and Bechtold had three.

Tim led the Bullets with 13, Thomas had 12, and Saling had 11. Williamsville improves to 24-9 on the season.