

Rochester Leads With 20 Points, Three Marquette Players Score In Double Figures, Top Pleasant Plains 56-45, Advance To Sweet Sixteen

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BEARDSTOWN - Jaden Rochester led with 20 points as three Marquette Catholic players hit in double figures as the Explorers won over Pleasant Plains 56-45 in the semifinals of the IHSA Class 2A boys basketball sectional Tuesday night at Beardstown High School.

The Explorers advanced to the Sweet Sixteen with the win, where they will meet the winner of Wednesday night's semifinal between Auburn and Williamsville for the right to go to the Elite Eight and the super-sectional at Bank of Springfield Center next Monday night.

Marquette came out exceptionally strong in the first half in building their lead, and used free throw shooting and tight defense in the second half to go on to the win.

"I feel great," said Explorers head coach Cody Best. "We made the long trip up, and the guys were ready to play from the get-go. We had a great first half, the second half was OK, and we knew they would punch back. They cut it down to six late in the game, we made our free throws, played better defense near the end, and that sealed the deal for us."

Rochester was a big help to Marquette, as was Sean Williams. who made a mighty contribution to the Explorers' cause.

"It was a great game for Jalen," Best said, "and Sean Williams had a great game, too."

Best is very proud of his players for reaching the Sweet Sixteen but knows what they'll have to do against either the Trojans or Bullets to move on to the Elite Eight.

"We're going to have to stick to our defense," Best said, "and we're going to have to grab every rebound on their misses."

The Explorers went out to a 9-4 lead after the first quarter, then expanded the lead to 26-12 at halftime, then to 42-28 after three quarters, with the Cardinals outscoring Marquette in the fourth quarter 17-14, but the Explorers coming away with the win to advance.

To go along with Rochester's 20 points, Williams hit for 14 points, Braden Kline scored 11 points, Jaylen Cawthon had seven points, and both Isaiah Redd and Brody Bechtold had two points each.

Pleasant Plains ends its season at 17-15, while the Explorers are now 26-8, and will face the Auburn-Williamsville winner in the final Friday night at 7 p.m. The winner advances to the Elite Eight and the state quarterfinal game in the Bank of Springfield Center super-sectional against the winner of the Canton Sectional, either Taylor Ridge Rockridge, Peoria Manuel, or Macomb, in a 6 p.m. tip-off, with the winner moving on to the state finals at State Farm Center in Champaign-Urbana on Mar. 7, playing the Joliet Central super-sectional winner in the first semifinal at 2 p.m. The third-place game is set for Thursday night at 8:15 p.m., and the final will be played on Mar. 9 at 1 p.m.

