

Hemann scores 17, Rice 12 as Explorers explode for 70-26 MELHS Turkey Tourney win

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Nick Hemann scored 17 points and Jack Rice added 12 as Marquette Catholic defeated the Metro-East Lutheran junior varsity team 70-26 in day one of the 38th MEL Turkey Tip-Off Classic Monday night at Hooks Gymnasium.

The Explorers lead from the opening tip in recording their initial win of the new season. It's a young team, and it was important to get the younger players some experience.

“I’ll say this about this group,” Marquette head coach Steve Medford said, “we’ll get a lot better as the year goes because we’re really young.”

The goals for Marquette remain the same as usual.

“You know, I think every year, the same expectations are there,” Medford said. “They want to win, they want to compete, they want to try to compete for every tournament, compete for a regional championship, a sectional championship. That’s what they want to do, and I don’t think that goal’s changed. But I think what this group really is just about a day-by-day. Every day we practice, every day we play, I think, is a day that we’re going to get better. Hopefully, we can just continue to get better, but we’ve got to do a lot better job rebounding the basketball if we’re going to have a chance tomorrow night, though.”

Knights’ JV coach Joe Rempfer felt that his side kept battling throughout the game.

“Yeah, we said at the beginning, you know, it’s a varsity tournament, you’re a JV team. Every game you play is going to be tough,” Rempfer said. “It’s good for us to step up and have a challenge like that. It’s tough to start the year that way, but you’ve got to start the year somehow. And I agree; I thought we played hard, showed some things we need to work on. But I appreciate the grit and toughness our guys played with.”

Rempfer was pleased with his offense, which had some good moments.

“I was pleased with our offense. Unfortunately, we had a lot of turnovers,” Rempfer said. “We struggled to get into the offense sometimes, but I think once we were into the offense, we ran our plays well, we didn’t get too flustered, and thrown off our game because we run through our plays enough to be familiar with our offense. So I was pleased with that part.”

The first quarter was played evenly, as neither side were able to gain a significant advantage as the Explorers lead after one 7-5. In the second quarter, Rice and Cortez Harris hit consecutive threes to give Marquette a 13-5 lead, then a Harris drive for a basket made it 15-5, resulting in a Knights’ time out. An Adam Sahuri basket made it 16-7, Marquette, but then, the Explorers went on an 8-0 run, lead by Chris Hartrich and Hemann, who scored six unanswered points to make it 24-7 before Ben Ide banked home a three to make it 24-10. Marquette ended the quarter on an 11-1 run, getting free throws from Harris and a long three from Rice to help the Explorers take a 35-11 lead at halftime.

Marquette started the second half on a 25-3 run, with Hemann, Nate Hall and Davin Thompson leading the way. The Explorers scored 21 consecutive points before a Michael Reynolds free throw ended the streak, Luke Neath banked home a three before the buzzer to make the score 65-20 Marquette after three.

The fourth quarter had a running clock as the Knights outscored the Explorers 6-5 to make the final of 70-26.

Harris had nine points for Marquette, while Ide was MEL's leading scorer with six.

Marquette advances to a championship bracket quarterfinal game against St. Louis College Prep this evening at 7 p.m., and Medford is looking forward to the game.

"They're very athletic, you're really going to have to get back in transition defense," Medford said, "have really good gap defense and play the lane a little bit, and make sure you rebound the basketball. You do those three things, you're going to have a real good chance against them. They're athletic, and they get on the boards really well. Hopefully, we take care of those things, and if we do, we'll win. I just hope we can continue to get better."

And while the Knights' JV has plenty of work ahead of them, playing in the tournament will be a very good thing, indeed.

"Yeah, exactly," Rempfer said. "Like I said earlier, it's a varsity tournament. All teams are going to be talented, and you're going to play some good competition. But it's a good start for us to see where we're at, and to understand we've got work to do. But I was pleased with some of the things we did."

"We're looking forward to tomorrow night, getting back out there," Rempfer also said. "We'll take what we need to from this game. We'll take the positives, learn from the negatives and keep it rolling."

The Knights play Roxana in a consolation bracket quarterfinal game in the auxiliary gym this evening at 6:30 p.m.

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)