

Marquette Catholic leads talent field at Columbia/Freeburg

Unbeaten young Explorers; Gibault, Sandoval, Triad round out top-seeds

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COLUMBIA - The **Marquette Explorers**, unbeaten at 10-0 and the winners of the Lebanon Thanksgiving Tournament, are the top-seed at the Columbia/Freeburg Holiday Tournament to be played December 27-30.

Head coach Steve Medford leads this young squad that is trying to improve on last season's sectional run by continuing to win games in an impressive style.

The Explorers have done all of their winning without the services of 6-foot-5 senior forward and 1,000-point scorer Derrik Starrett. This team leader, and the only senior on the squad, missed the first nine games of the season due to an ankle injury suffered in the fall playing football. Starrett made a brief appearance in Tuesday night's 64-32 win over Roxana and should be rounding into shape soon for Marquette.

But the good news from the Explorers' camp is that the other youngsters on this team have stepped up.

Jake Coddington, a 6-foot-6 junior forward, has led a very balanced and potent attack with 12.5 points a game. The backcourt of Deion Lavender and D'tae McMurray have been very good. Considering that these two are but sophomores makes their talent level even more impressive. Lavender is averaging 10.1 p.p.g. this season for Marquette while McMurray is sitting at 12.2 points per contest.

Two other players who start for the Explorers are averaging double-figures.

Sam Schneider, a 6-foot-2 junior guard, and 5-foot-9 sophomore guard Mike Williams-Bey are averaging 10.7 p.p.g. and 11 points a game respectively.

They have beaten perennial IA power Madison twice and have a dominating 68-42 shellacking of Wesclin in the title game of the Lebanon event. The Explorers are a very deserving top choice in this tournament.

The second seed **Gibault Catholic Hawks** have had some recent trouble, having lost just two games but one recently with a defeat on the road at Bethalto Civic Memorial, also a Columbia/Freeburg entry.

Coach Dennis Rueter's team is 7-2 with just the CM defeat and a low-scoring 33-30 loss at 2A Pinckneyville.

John Pratl is a 6-foot-4 senior forward who is topping the Hawks' scoring list at 14.7 p.p.g. which is nearly double his output from a year ago.

Matt Schreder is second on the club with 11 points a game and this 6-foot-2 sophomore is second on the squad with 4.8 boards a game.

Josh Konkel has been a big force around the basket for Gibault. Konkel is a 6-foot-4 senior who transferred in to the program from Belleville West. Konkel is third on the club in scoring (9.8 p.p.g.) while topping all Hawks with 7.7 rebounds a game.

Nick Row, another sophomore standing 6-foot-1, and 6-foot-3 junior Brendan McFarland round out a very good starting unit.

The number three seed is a bit of a surprise as small school southern Illinois rep **Sandoval** and head coach Herb Williams got some love from the seeding committee with the third slot. The Blackhawks from the Midland Trail Conference are also 10-0 but haven't been in with the same caliber of teams that these other metro-east teams have dealt with on a nightly basis.

Warren Jones, a 6-foot-1 junior guard, is averaging an outstanding 27.9 points a game for the

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champions of the Ramsey-Mulberry Grove Thanksgiving Tournament. Trevor Gore, a 6-foot senior guard, is averaging 16.8 points a game while teammate 6-foot-5 senior Jacob Wooters adds 10.1 points a game to the total.

The four-seed in the tournament is last season's runner up. The **Triad Knights** enter the fray with a 6-2 mark and are the fourth team in this event after also winning an early season tournament.

Triad won the Civic Memorial Thanksgiving Tournament with wins over Granite City, Taylorville, Nokomis and CM. Their two losses are to 2A ABV top-ranked Breese Central and 3A Waterloo.

Head coach Sam Drake has good size in the backcourt with 6-foot-4 senior Brandoin Varel who is the only Knight in double-figures in scoring with 14.7 points a game. Matt Zobrist is next in points with 8.5 a night while leading the team with 5.9 rebounds.

The number five-seed and perhaps the most dangerous team in the field is two-time defending champion **Murphysboro** with high scoring guard Pierre House returning after starting on the 35-1 state tournament runner up in 2A.

Coach Daryl Murphy's club stands 6-2 two with the losses coming within the SIRR Ohio Division to Harrisburg and Benton. They have a quality win over Massac County in their most recent game.

House is the leading scorer with 15.5 points a game. Zane Heller is second on the squad with 9.6 p.p.g.

The six seed is the host **Columbia Eagles** and head coach Mark Sandstrom whose club has struggled with inexperience in the early part of 2011-12.

The Eagles are just 4-5 with losses to Marquette, Madison and Wesclin most notably.

Columbia has just a pair of scorers in double-digits with 6-foot-3 senior Tommy Lewis (12.2 p.p.g.) and 6-foot-4 senior Tyler Schutzenhofer (11.3 p.p.g.; 7.8 r.p.g.) leading the troops.

The seventh seed are the **Waterloo Bulldogs** who, like Triad, are a member of the Mississippi Valley Conference and are led in scoring by Shane Lenhardt with 10.9 points a game while Jake Augustine adds nine points a contest for first year head coach CJ Cruser.

Coach Cruser was a long-time assistant coach at Nashville and then Collinsville with Darin Lee and has taken the reigns of this program. Of their three wins, one came against Triad, a 49-45 victory December 9.

Metro-East Lutheran and head coach Tim Reeb are not without a chance. A win in the opening round will get them a crack at the top-seeded Explorers in the bracket.

The Knights are 8-4 with four wins coming in their own Thanksgiving event before losing to Gibault in the finale. In fact they have dropped two games to Gibault to go with losses to Columbia and most recently Greenville, 56-51 on December 20.

Three MEL players are sporting double-figure scoring averages with Tyler Moore, a 6-foot-1 guard, who nets 14.4 p.p.g. Jacob Fanshier averages 14.3 points and 7.2 rebounds while Nick Hoff, a 6-foot-3 senior, chips home 12.8 p.p.g.

Civic Memorial, with its win over Gibault, improved to 3-5 overall and deserves a mention. These purple and gold Eagles from the MVC will be a strong first round test for Sandoval, a school that CM will dwarf over in enrollment.

Six-foot-four senior forward Drew Emerick is the top scorer at 10.7 points a game while 6-foot junior Kyle Yates adds 9.9 p.p.g.

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