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Challenging situation for Marquette



AP

Duke's Kyle Singler brings down a rebound against Colgate on Nov. 19. Singler was a preseason first-team All-American.

No. 1 Duke fully loaded

By [Todd Rosiak](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Kansas City — Monday night will mark the third time in the last five seasons the Marquette Golden Eagles will face off against the Duke Blue Devils.

In neither of those first two meetings, though, was MU the marked underdog it will be when it takes to the court at the Sprint Center for the teams' CBE Classic semifinal matchup.

Duke enters the game as the defending national champion, the No. 1-ranked team in the Associated Press' media poll and, with arguably even more talent than it had last season during its title run, most everyone's choice to march over MU.

Not that it matters much to the Golden Eagles.

"Our mind-set is, I guess, we really can't go wrong. Everybody's picked us to lose, so the only thing that we can really do is win and prove everybody wrong," said senior forward Jimmy Butler following MU's less-than-inspiring 82-69 win over South Dakota on Saturday.

"Obviously they're a great team, well-coached. Everybody knows who their players are, who their coach is, but if we go out there and execute and play as an underdog and play as hard as we can, I don't see why we couldn't come out on top in that game."

MU (4-0) and Duke (3-0) have faced each other before in the CBE Classic - four years earlier to be exact. After beating Bob Knight-coached Texas Tech in the semifinals, the No. 13 Golden Eagles dumped the No. 9 Blue Devils, 73-62, to win the championship.

The teams met again next season as well, this time in the championship game of the Maui Invitational. Led by Kyle Singler's 25 points, the No. 13 Blue Devils outlasted the No. 11 Golden Eagles, 77-73.

Back for his senior year, Singler just so happens to be one of the many weapons Duke will be looking to unleash on MU this time around. The 6-foot-8 forward was a preseason first-team All-American and enters the game as one of three Blue Devils starters scoring in double digits.

Guards Nolan Smith and Kyrie Irving rank 1-2 at 16.0 and 14.3 points, while Singler checks in at 14.0. Smith, a senior, and Irving, a freshman, combine to form one of the nation's top backcourts. Seth Curry, younger brother of NBA star Stephen Curry, and Andre Dawkins chip in with 14.0 and 12.7 points off the bench, respectively.

Singler (6.0 rebounds per game) and brothers Mason (7.3) and Miles Plumlee combine to form a big and versatile frontcourt, with Singler one of five legitimate Duke threats from beyond the arc.

And, of course, Duke is also coached by none other than Hall of Famer Mike Krzyzewski, who's won four NCAA titles at Duke and led the United States to a gold medal in the 2008 Olympics.

"All I can say is they're probably better than us at every position," said Butler. "Definitely bigger than us down low, probably deeper than us coming off the bench. (Coach) Buzz (Williams) will probably tell you that they're much more well-coached than we are. There's not too much that everybody doesn't know about Duke compared to Marquette.

"But I think we can end up being the tougher team, so that's what will get us the win, if anything."

MU enters the game short-handed, with senior forward Joe Fulce (knee) expected to miss the next few weeks and freshman forward Davante Gardner (shoulder) listed as questionable. And coming off what Williams termed the Golden Eagles' "worst performance of the year," the timing of the game isn't exactly the best from the Golden Eagles' perspective.

"There's probably never a good time to play Duke is probably the right way to say it," Williams said. "I think that they're good enough to be an above-.500 team in the NBA - not the NCAA. We'll have our hands full, but we've got a lot of work to do now between now and Monday night."

MU is 1-6 all-time against No. 1-ranked teams, with its only win coming against Kentucky in the 2003 NCAA Tournament.

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