

Crean Lutheran volleyball coach proud of team despite loss in semifinals



Crean Lutheran coach Eric Olson (far right) looks on as his players compete against Bishop Montgomery in the CIF playoffs last week. Tim Burt photo

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Crean Lutheran's boys volleyball team let a lead in the first set get away and was unable to recover, losing to Bishop Montgomery in three sets in the semifinals of the CIF Division 3 playoffs last week at Crean Lutheran.

The scores in the match of Wednesday, May 17, were 26-24, 25-16, 25-18.

Tanner Petchul led Crean Lutheran (20-12) with eight kills, Nate Tjepkema had seven kills and Robert Briones six kills to lead the Saints.

Crean Lutheran (20-12) had an 18-12 lead in the first set before Bishop Montgomery (19-9) rallied behind 6-foot-4 Daniel Matheny and eventually won the first set.

Crean Lutheran was trying to reach the CIF finals for the second year in a row. Last year, the Saints lost to Saddleback Valley Christian in four games in their first appearance in the finals.

"It was a great season; we improved all year long," said Crean Coach Eric Olson. "After losing some key players last year and having a great year and getting to the finals (last season), I think the sentiment on our team was, 'what are we going to do.'"

"We came out this February after the winter sports ended and got it together. I really admire these boys; I love them a lot."

Olson realized the first set was the key to the match.

"We made a couple of uncharacteristic errors that let them back into that game," he said. "But I got to tip my hat to Bishop Montgomery. They played two and half solid games after the first part of that (first) game. They played very well. I know they have a couple of outstanding players over there but everybody else on the court when their number was called and they had to make a play, they made a play."

"We're just happy about our season; winning two league titles in a row and coming into a higher division and getting to the semis. It's definitely not the result we wanted, but we're still keeping our heads high. I praise God for the relationships I made this year with these boys. I coached boys volleyball since I was 18 years old and I haven't had a team that I've liked this much. They are really good kids and they treat each other well and it was a very fun season because of that."

Crean Lutheran advanced to the semifinals by defeating Paraclete in the quarterfinals on Saturday, May 13. The scores were 25-16, 25-16, 25-20.

Petchul had 18 assists and 16 kills to lead the Saints. Tjepkema had 14 kills and Briones had six kills and three blocks.