

# Crean Lutheran boys basketball team falls to Esperanza 56-53 in tourney third place game

By **TOM CONNOLLY** | Orange County Register

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Isaiah Johnson scored 16 points, Chris Swardstrom added 13 and Maximus Bo poured in 11 points but the Crean Lutheran boys basketball team fell to Esperanza 56-53 in the third-place game of the AutoNation Toyota Irvine Invitational at Crean Lutheran High.

“This was a good tournament for us,” said Crean Lutheran coach Josh Beaty. “We have a young group and we’re gaining valuable experience.”

The Saints (4-2) started fast and Jackson Ebner’s basket gave Crean Lutheran a 16-4 lead late in the opening quarter.

But the Aztecs, behind Brendan Harrick, rallied and went on a 15-1 run over the final 5:05 of the half and bolted to a 31-26 lead at the break.

“I think we got too comfortable and let up a bit,” said Johnson. “They had a big run before half and they had a quick start in the third quarter. We have to keep our energy up for the whole game and focus.”

Esperanza maintained a double-digit lead until Swardstrom completed a 3-point play, Bo drilled a 3-pointer and Johnson made a free throw to cut the lead to 56-53 with 51 seconds to play.

With 10 seconds remaining, Aiden Gilbert stole the ball but his potential game tying 3-pointer was off the mark and the Aztecs held on to win.

“We got off to a good start and we know that Harrick is one of the best players in the county and we played tough defense on him tonight,” said Swardstrom. “We fought hard but we didn’t match their energy in the second half.”

Harrick led all scorers with 20 points.

“We showed fight coming back from 10 down in the final minutes,” Beaty said.