

Crean Lutheran retires Garrett Cox's number in ceremony at Irvine Stadium

By [TIM BURT](#)

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Crean Lutheran's football team honored the late Garrett Cox before Thursday's season opener with Calvary Chapel and Coach Matt Bowman announced that Cox's number 44 Saints jersey will be retired.

"No one from Saints football is going to wear (number 44) anymore," Bowman said Friday.

Cox's father, Roy, attended the ceremony before the game at Irvine Stadium along with his son, Blake, a former Crean Lutheran player along with other family members.

"I was very happy that our fans and our coaches and our players and our whole community was there to support Garrett's family," Bowman said Friday. "We love them and support them and have been praying for them a lot so I hope it was helpful for them to feel our support and know that Garrett meant a lot to us."

The 6-foot running back/linebacker, a Tustin resident, was named the Academy League's defensive player of the year, helping the Saints reach the semifinal round of the CIF-Southern Section East Valley Division playoffs for the first time in school history.

Cox, 18, an All-CIF player for the Saints in his senior season, died June 24 when he was hit by a vehicle near the 17th Street on-ramp off of the 55 in Santa Ana, according to police.

Campus pastor Tim Unke led prayers for the players, coaches and fans.

Roy Cox was presented a helmet signed by the Crean Lutheran players from last year.

Bowman said the family appreciated the support by the team.

"From what I could see he was very moved and very touched and overwhelmed," Bowman said. "He told me before the ceremony 'my family is here' and he pointed to our football team. I know that he feels like they are family and he is family to us. It was good to see Garrett's brother who played for us in the Saints class of '13. His senior year was the 2012 season, so it was good to have him there."

It was an emotional beginning for the Crean Lutheran team, which went out and [defeated Calvary Chapel, 35-14.](#)

"I saw a couple of guys shedding some tears on the sidelines when we were all standing there," Bowman said. "Garrett was a great brother to a lot of those guys and they sure miss him and things like that kind of bring back the fact that we don't have him anymore but I think that kind of led our enthusiasm and some of our fire to come out and play that much harder.

"During the game, I heard a lot of guys mentioning Garrett and how we are playing for him in that game, so it was a good motivation for a lot of our kids. There definitely has been a lot of emotion, which is good. I'm glad that they feel that strongly about Garrett."

Bowman was pleased with the effort of his team in his first game as the Saints head coach.

“I feel like my kids came out and were ready to play,” he said. “They played hard and showed a lot of character. We faced some adversity and could have let it get away from us a little bit but we stayed composed and we carried ourselves the right way and I was very pleased with our players’ discipline and their effort and pleased that we won.

“But even more than that, I told them in our team meeting Monday, ‘guys, I know we’re playing a game on Thursday but supporting Garrett’s family is going to be the most important thing we do,’ and I think they understood that. Football, I love it and our players love it, but at the end of the day, it’s a game and that ceremony is real life. We definitely played the way he played last night: we played hard, we played intense, disciplined and composed and with character.

“We sure do miss him. But above all, we know that he was a Christian...and we know he is watching over us and he is the inspiration for our kids to play that much harder.”

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