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Damien drops Division 3 second-round playoff match to Crean Lutheran 3-1

By Michelle Gardner, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

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LA VERNE >> The Damien boys volleyball team took an impressive streak into its CIF Southern Section Division 3 second-round playoff match Thursday against Crean Lutheran.

Coach Randy Bohlmann's team had won 11 straight postseason matches which propelled them to back-to-back Division 5 titles.

But all good things must come to an end and that streak did as the Spartans fell to the visiting Saints 3-1 (21-25, 25-22, 25-23, 25-20).

Despite the loss, Bohlmann was satisfied with his team's showing. The Spartans graduated three All-CIF players from the title-winning teams and they moved up two divisions.

Damien didn't go down without a fight either.

"That's a very good team," Bohlmann said of Crean Lutheran. "It's an Orange County team with a lot of good club players. They play a fast game and for the most part we were able to keep up with them. You never like to lose but I'm glad we played well."

There were several contributors. Daniel Enriquez had a team-high 13 kills and the Spartans also got 10 each from Jack Mitchner and Danny Helou. Setter Brandon Nyquist tallied 47 assists and 12 digs and libero Sunny Cingolani 22 digs. Andrew McCarson had eight kills and four blocks.

But those numbers paled in comparison to some of those by the Saints (19-11), the Academy League champion.

Nate Tjepkema had 17 kills and Tanner Petchul added 15 and Robert Briones 12 — all seniors.

"I'm not sad with the way we played or that we lost. I'm sad my high school career is over," Nyquist said. "Everyone really stepped up. We knew it was going to be a lot tougher this season."

Damien (19-12), co-champion of the Hacienda League, never trailed in the opening game although it was even for the last time at 19-all. A block by McCarson gave the Spartans a 22-19 lead and they wrapped up the game moments later when the visitors netted a return.

The Saints were in control the entire second game, maintaining a four- to five-point lead throughout. They led 24-18 and faltered a bit but still put away the game on a winner by Tjepkema on the fifth game point.

The third game was the tightest of the four and was even for the last time at 22. A poorly timed service error gave the visitors a 23-22 lead and they notched the next two points, taking a 2-1 lead on a winner by Petchul.

Crean Lutheran led the final game by as many as nine points, that advantage coming at 21-12. Damien got a bit closer but never really challenged.

“We came a long way,” Bohlmann said. “We only lose two guys so we should be pretty good again next year. Hopefully we can start another streak.”

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