



Crean Lutheran shows grown-up effort in semifinal win

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IRVINE - Four years ago, Crean Lutheran freshmen **Andy McFarlane**, **Riley Evans**, **Nick Ellwein** and **Isaac Blair** hadn't played a lick of volleyball, and **Nate Brown** had only dabbled a bit in junior high.

This year the five seniors helped the program win its first Academy League title and reach the CIF-SS Division 4 quarterfinals and semifinals for the first time.

On Wednesday, they led second-seeded Crean Lutheran over No. 3 seed Flintridge Prep of La Cañada Flintridge, 25-20, 25-23, 25-15, to seal the program's first CIF-SS Division 4 championship berth.

"It's an accumulation of all four years of work," said Brown, who recorded seven kills and five digs.

"From freshman year, when we were kind of a scrubby team (with) a bunch of new guys (and) only like three returners, to get this point it's a testament to how hard we've worked over the past four years."

McFarlane finished with 10 kills and seven digs, Evans had eight kills and Ellwein added 15 digs.

The Saints will play top-seeded Saddleback Valley Christian in the championship game Saturday at Cerritos College. SVC swept Cypress in its semifinal.

Crean Lutheran (26-2, 13-0) neutralized Flintridge's No. 1 threat, **Dante Fregoso**. After having 31 and 36 kills in Flintridge's previous two playoff games, he was held to 11 by Crean Lutheran.

"Our goal was to have four arms up every time (Fregoso) swung tonight, and we were pretty close to doing that," Saints coach **Eric Olson** said.

The rest of Flintridge (24-5, 8-0) combined for 20 kills.

Crean Lutheran blocked seven hits, including two in the final five points of the third set. When hits got through a block, the Saints dug it more often than not, finishing with 43 team digs compared to Flintridge's 31 team kills.

"Even when we got good hits off the block they were able to track it down a lot of the time, and I think that hurt us a little," Rebels coach **Sean Beattie** said. "Points we were used to getting we weren't getting today."

Flintridge has lost in the semifinals two years in a row, but it set program records in wins and fewest losses this year.