

Fryer: Mater Dei, Crean Lutheran look like underdogs in CIF-SS basketball finals



Mater Dei's Spencer Freedman, left, drives to the basket against Etiwanda during the CIF-SS Open Division semifinal on Saturday, February 24, 2018 at California Baptist University in Riverside, Ca. (Micah Escamilla/Correspondent)

It's a mixture of styles Friday when Mater Dei (22-6) plays Sierra Canyon (23-3) in the CIF-Southern Section Open Division championship game at the Pyramid at Long Beach State.

Sierra Canyon (23-3) has the edge athletically, but Mater Dei (22-6) traditionally finds a way to beat bigger and faster teams. For Mater Dei to win, its halfcourt offense has to be great, with patient shot selection. The Monarchs can't leave points at the free-throw line, where this game just might be won or lost.

Prediction: Mater Dei gets excellent offensive production, shooting and passing, from Spencer Freedman, a leading candidate for Orange County player of the year honors, and Michael Wang and superb defensive play from Harrison Butler and his teammates to get a close win.

In the CIF-SS boys basketball Division 3AA championship game, Crean Lutheran again will have to beat an opponent that is faster than are the Saints offensively and defensively when they play Knight of Palmdale on Saturday at Godinez.

Crean Lutheran (22-10) pulled off two of the larger upsets of the winter sports playoffs with back-to-back wins over San Gabriel Academy and St. Anthony of Long Beach in the 3AA bracket. A win over Knight (24-6) in the 3AA final would be another upset. Knight is the athletically-superior team ... but then, so were San Gabriel Academy and St. Anthony.

The key for Crean will be to limit the offensive rebounds the Saints allow, at which they were successful against St. Anthony. The Saints must be attentive on defense, ready to help when a teammate needs it on defense, and they need to make some 3-point shots early. Forwards Jake Conerty and Gum Majak were great defensively and on the boards against St. Anthony and need repeat performances against Knight.

Prediction: Crean rides its confidence and momentum to a close victory which would give a major push to Crean's Josh Beaty as Orange County boys basketball coach of the year.

Taking a look around Orange County high school sports:

- Mater Dei-Sierra Canyon should tip off at its 8:30 p.m. scheduled time Friday. That game is preceded by the CIF-SS Open Division girls championship game, Harvard-Westlake of Studio City vs. Windward of Los Angeles, a 6 p.m. game that will start on time. Separate admission is required for the boys and girls Open Division finals at the Pyramid.
- Tip-off for Knight-Crean at Godinez is scheduled for 8 p.m. Saturday. With five games preceding their game, Knight-Crean is unlikely to start on time.
- The CIF-SS website – cifss.org – has how-to-purchase-tickets information for all of this weekend's CIF-SS finals in basketball and soccer.
- Parking at the Pyramid for the Open Division basketball games Friday is \$8. Parking is free at Godinez.
- Live streaming for the basketball and soccer finals will be at FoxSportsWest.com. The Fox Sports West cable channel will televise the Mater Dei-Sierra Canyon boys basketball game on a delayed basis at 10 p.m.
- The curse of being the preseason No. 1 baseball team continues. The day that OC Varsity labeled Orange Lutheran as the No. 1 preseason team in Orange County baseball, Thursday, Orange Lutheran lost to No. 9 Huntington Beach 1-0. Opening-week losses have struck Cypress, Huntington Beach and a few other baseball teams that got the preseason No. 1 target on their backs in recent years.

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