

## Swardstrom sinks back-to-back shots to lift Crean Lutheran into Division 3AA semifinals



Crean Lutheran's Chris Swardstrom hit the game-winning shot in a 42-40 victory over San Gabriel Academy on Tuesday night, Feb. 20.

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IRVINE – Crean Lutheran junior Chris Swardstrom made just three baskets Tuesday night, but he sank two of them in the final nine seconds to lift the Saints to a 42-40 victory over San Gabriel Academy in the quarterfinals of the CIF-SS 3AA playoffs at Crean Lutheran High.

The victory sends Crean Lutheran (21-9) into the semifinals for the second time in school history and the first time since 2016. The Saints will face St. Anthony Friday night in Long Beach.

With the score tied 40-40, Crean Lutheran got the ball with 2.7 seconds left following a travelling call against San Gabriel Academy. The Saints passed the ball the length of the court and got it to Swardstrom, who coolly sank the fade-away outside jumper at the buzzer and was mobbed by the Saints students.

"That's the way coach drew it up and we ran the play," Swardstrom said. "I got an open shot, so I shot it."

Swardstrom's 3-pointer with nine seconds remaining tied the score 40-40.

"I was confident I could make that shot," Swardstrom said of the 3-pointer. "I do it every day at practice."

Swardstrom wound up with eight points. Jake Conerty (18 points) and Isaiah Johnson (13 points) led the Saints' scoring.

San Gabriel Academy (26-5) was led by Malakhi Jensen with 10 points.

"It was a great game," said Crean Lutheran coach Josh Beaty. "Chris Swardstrom had a huge game for us. It's awesome to see. I'm so happy for him; I'm very proud of him. He's had some ups and downs, so to see him step up when it matters most and have the confidence to make those big shots, it was very rewarding to see that."

San Gabriel Academy led 16-6 after one quarter and 25-17 at halftime.

Crean Lutheran battled back, outscoring San Gabriel Valley 10-7 in the third quarter to cut the lead to five going into the final quarter.

A dunk by Johnson early in the fourth quarter cut the lead to three and got the home team fans fired up.

Crean Lutheran tied the score 37-37 with 2 minutes left on a basket by Johnson.

San Gabriel Academy moved ahead 40-37 on a basket by Ian McCloskey with 57.9 seconds left before the Saints rallied.

"Everyone was nervous, understandably so (in the first half)," Beaty said. "We just never really got settled in. It took a half until we got settled in. It was a grind, it was hard to score tonight. Luckily, our press opened things up and got us some easy baskets.

"We've got good players and good kids. I feel fortunate that we're in the situation that we are."

Beaty praised the play of sophomore guard Derek Bagatourian.

"Early, when things went really poorly for us, we were having a hard time scoring, he took three charges in one quarter," Beaty said. "That is the most important game changing sequence because if they would have scored those buckets, we would have been down by 20 at halftime."