

Crean Lutheran refuses to fall in double-OT thriller, wins first CIF-SS crown



Crean Lutheran's Isaiah Johnson (25), right, lays one up over Knight's William Grant (1) during the CIF-SS Division 3AA championship game at Godinez Fundamental High School in Santa Ana on Saturday, March 3, 2018. (Photo by Kyusung Gong/Contributing Photographer)

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SANTA ANA – If Crean Lutheran wins any more boys basketball championships, surely they will come easier than the first one.

The Saints beat Knight of Palmdale 62-61 in double-overtime Saturday in the CIF-Southern Section Division 3AA final at Godinez High.

It was their first time in a CIF-SS boys basketball championship game, following an upset of top-seeded and state-ranked St. Anthony of Long Beach in the semifinals.

Knight had a 61-58 lead with just under a minute left in the second overtime. Crean's Maximus Bo made two free throws with 40 seconds left – a mini-upset in itself, given the Saints' poor foul shooting in the fourth quarter.

Crean then got a Knight turnover, and Jake Conerty, who had made a terrific pass for a Saints basket that forced the first overtime, fed a perfect pass to Gum Majak for a layup with four seconds remaining. It was Conerty's eighth assist.

All Knight could do was a back-court heave from Mehki Smith that was wide left of the backboard.

The Saints had an 11-point lead with 2:53 left in the fourth quarter. Knight outscored the Saints 14-3 in the remaining time to force the first overtime.

Crean Lutheran had its chances to put the game away in the fourth. The Saints missed 10 free throws in the quarter.

Knight took an early four-point lead in the first overtime, and had a three-point lead with 14 seconds to go. Isaiah Johnson made a free throw with 12 seconds left to trim the deficit to two points.

After Knight's Dajour Lewis missed two free throws with nine seconds left, Johnson took a great lead pass from Conerty for a layup that created a second overtime.

"I know my teammates are always going to be there," Conerty said. "We have such a good connection."

Johnson led Crean with 17 points. Majak scored 13 with 14 rebounds and six blocked shots. Bo scored 12 for the Saints.

Lewis led Knight with 21 points and 12 rebounds.

Both teams opened with zone defenses and stayed with them through the first half. Knight had a 10-7 advantage at the end of the first quarter.

Crean Lutheran outscored Knight 16-5 in the second quarter to take a 23-15 halftime lead. Knight made only 2 of 11 shots in the quarter while Crean was 6 for 13 including 3 for 4 on 3-point shots – Bo, Conerty and Derek Bagatourian made the 3s.

Knight made a surge early in the third quarter. The Hawks scored on breakaways off of Crean Lutheran turnovers, including a two-handed slam by Lewis.

Both teams will play in the CIF State tournament that begins Wednesday with the CIF Southern California Regionals. Regionals brackets will be released today/Sunday.