

Irvine all-city boys basketball: Crean Lutheran's Bagatourian named MVP; profiles and pictures of all the players



The 2017 all-city boys basketball team. Top row, from left, Jacob Huynh, Northwood; Ty Calhoun, Woodbridge; Devin Owens, Northwood; Mitchell Rausch, Woodbridge; Josh Alcindor, Irvine and Akshay Harishankar, Northwood; bottom row, Dylan Thoerner, Beckman; Kevin Yahampath, University; MVP Michael Bagatourian, Crean Lutheran; Alex Bray, University and Ryan Sprosty, Beckman. For more pictures, please go to our web site at ocregister.com and to the Irvine page. (Photo by Matt Masin, Orange County Register, SCNG)

By **TIM BURT** | tiburt@scng.com | Orange County Register

PUBLISHED: May 30, 2017 at 9:47 pm | UPDATED: May 31, 2017 at 9:18 am

MICHAEL BAGATOURIAN, CREAN LUTHERAN, MVP

Michael Bagatourian went to Crean Lutheran hoping to change the culture of the basketball program at the private school in Irvine.

Those who followed him over his four years will confirm that he did just that.

The 6-7 Bagatourian, who averaged 21 points and 9 rebounds a game in his senior year, was named MVP of the Academy League.

Bagatourian, the MVP of the all-city team is headed to Biola University next season to continue his career. But the senior forward leaves quite a legacy at Crean Lutheran after a four-year varsity career. He was a three-time All-CIF first team player, a two-time league MVP and career leader in rebounds, points, blocks and steals.

"Michael was the foundation in building the program at Crean," said Crean Lutheran coach Josh Beaty.

There were challenges this season playing with freshmen who were being tested on the varsity, Bagatourian said.

"Obviously, we would have liked to have gone farther in CIF (playoffs)," he said. "Watching the young guys grow up on our team, it was tough for them and tough for me to adjust, but I feel like we pulled together towards the stretch and we actually strung a really good season together, so I was pretty proud of our guys."

Crean Lutheran finished 23-7 this past season, losing to Burbank, 52-50, in the second round of the CIF 3AA playoffs.

The Saints were 25-5 in 2016, 24-4 in 2015 and 14-13 in 2014, a big turn-around from the previous season when they finished 6-17.

"We tried to change the culture and change everything about it and start winning some games," Bagatourian said. "As a freshman, I started some games; as a sophomore, we really started to take off as a program and I really started to get better as a player."

Bagatourian, who started playing basketball at the age of 5 with the Irvine Youth Basketball League, lived in Northwood's attendance area and said his decision to either attend Northwood or Crean Lutheran, a private school, was "close."

"I can be happy with the way it turned out after four years," he said.

There were a number of games that stood out this season.

"Beating St. John Bosco (82-76 on Monday, Dec. 12); Maximus Bo stepped up big and had 26 points," he said of one of the games. "We don't win that game without him and some of the other young guys who stepped up. And then away at St. Margaret's (a 62-41 victory on Thursday, Feb. 2). I didn't play particularly well, but our freshmen stepped up."

Bagatourian said his favorite NBA team is the Celtics, but his favorite player is Magic Johnson, the former Laker star.

"It's kind of weird to have that connection, but I loved the way he led his team," he said of Magic Johnson. "I watched a lot of (Larry) Bird-Magic highlights in the good old days of basketball."

Bagatourian said he has received special help on his game from his personal coach, Richard "The Glove," Specter.

"He's a lock down defender, so when I work with him, he really helps me out, offensively," Bagatourian said. "He doesn't allow a bucket, it's hard for me to score on him."

Bagatourian, an Irvine resident, is looking forward to playing for Biola.

"I would say they were my number one pretty early on," Bagatourian said. "I had some other options, but I felt most at home there and I felt I can go there and make a difference. I like the coaching staff and I like the way the players play. It fits my style so I think I can go in there and do whatever I can to win right away, and that's what I want out of my freshman year."

Bagatourian credits his parents, his grandparents and his coaches for his development.

"My coaches have been at my school for four years so we've learned the whole process and trying to win together, so it's pretty cool to grow up with them," Bagatourian said.

He also credits his teammates this year and in the previous three seasons.

"I couldn't do it without them," he said.