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## Damien boys basketball can't keep up with Mater Dei

By [Michelle Gardner](#), Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Posted: 12/30/16, 11:12 PM PST | Updated: 3 days ago

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Damien's Cameron Shelton (20) dives for a loose ball against Mater Dei in the first half of a prep basketball game at Damien High School in La Verne, Calif., on Friday, Dec. 30, 2016. (Photo by Keith Birmingham, Pasadena Star-News/SCNG)

LA VERNE >> The organizers of The Classic at Damien couldn't have scripted a better finish to their first tournament.

The home team made it to the championship game, assuring a capacity and raucous crowd. For the opponent it was Mater Dei, a team ranked nationally and a perennial contender each year.

Just for good measure you had the state's two winningest coaches in Gary McKnight of Mater Dei (1,066 wins) and Mike LeDuc (866), in his second stint at Damien with a lengthy stay at Glendora as well.

Well it was the visitors taking advantage of a superior size advantage and chalking up a 82-63 win in the Gold Bracket final on Friday at the Damien Athletic Center and registering another in the column of the state's winningest coach.

"They're just a very good team," LeDuc said. "We didn't play our best but to say we didn't play well and that's why we lost would take away from what they did. We had some things we needed to do if we were going to stay close and we didn't do enough of them."

[VIDEO: Highlights of Mater Dei and Damien final](#)

Damien (15-1) made eight of nine 3-pointers in the first half against Roosevelt in Thursday's semifinal but didn't have the same success against the larger Monarchs. They did make enough to stay close though.

Mater Dei's biggest lead in the first half was 11 at 23-12 after a dunk by Justice Sueing.

The Spartans crept back, getting within one at 24-23 with 3:43 left on a jumper by Cameron Shelton but little went right for Damien the rest of the half. Mater Dei (16-1), whose lone loss this season came at the hands of Chino Hills, scored the next seven points with Damien limited to one shot on four possessions and turning the ball over two other times before it got a 3-pointer from Elijah McCullough to close out the half with Damien trailing 31-26

The Monarchs started the second half with an 11-0 run and the Spartans were not in striking distance again.

"We wanted to beat them up and down the court because they're not faster than us," senior guard Ezekial Alley said. "We also knew we needed to hit out shots but we didn't."

The Spartans didn't give up despite a large deficit. They used a 10-0 run late to cut the gap to 13 at 66-53 but they missed a 3-pointer and the Monarchs capitalized at their end with one by Matthew Weyand with 3:12 to play to thwart any possible comeback.

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Despite the loss, the players enjoyed the opportunity to play quality competition.

"We're going to go back and work on what we didn't do well and get better," Alley said. "This was a great chance to play some good teams and I'm glad we had it."

Spencer Freedman of Mater Dei took Most Valuable Player honors with 13 in the final game. The Monarchs had eight players factor in the scoring and McKnight substituted freely in the second half. Harrison Butler led the Monarchs with 16.

Shelton, McCullough and Alley made All-Tournament team with Alley's 22 leading the Spartans in the final. Shelton added 18 and McCullough 15.

Junior Kessler Edwards of Etiwanda was one of the 18 player named to the All-Tournament team which featured 48 schools.