

He's a Mater Dei leader and future Ivy Leaguer

**ERIC SONDHEIMER
ON HIGH SCHOOLS**

With a 4.2 grade-point average and the ability to think clearly and make wise decisions in pressure situations, senior point guard Spencer Freedman of Santa Ana Mater Dei fits the mold of a future Harvard student.

"One of his goals is to be president of the United States," coach Gary McKnight said. "I would have voted for him this year without a doubt."

Freedman is not quite ready to put the weight of the world on his shoulders. He'll settle for making Mater Dei the best basketball team in California, and that's very much a possibility. The Monarchs are playing in this week's Fairfax summer tournament and will take on Pasadena in a semifinal matchup Friday at 7:30 p.m.

Freedman is still receiving congratulations for his commitment to Harvard three weeks ago. He had scholarship offers from Pac-12 Conference schools Washington and USC, among others, but decided he didn't need to stroke his ego or fear heading to the East Coast.

"I definitely feel it's the perfect fit," he said. "Academically, it's an incredible place and the basketball is tremendous as well. The Ivy League is an up-and-coming league. Of course, getting to stay home and closer to L.A. is a little tempting, but having the opportunity to go to a place like Harvard



ERIC SONDHEIMER Los Angeles Times

HARVARD-BOUND Spencer Freedman was Trinity League's basketball player of the year as a junior.

is something I've always wanted."

Freedman was the Trinity League player of the year as a junior. His outside shooting has become so good that earlier this week, he'd throw up a three-pointer, it would swish, and he would hardly take time to watch the ball go through the net before heading back on defense. He's playing with great confidence and at a comfort level that is difficult to disrupt.

It makes me reminisce about the game that exposed Freedman and his Mater Dei teammates like none other. It happened on Feb. 26, 2016. It was a semifinal playoff game, and Chino Hills defeated the Monarchs, 102-54, in the worst defeat ever inflicted on a McKnight-coached team.

Freedman was overwhelmed going against future Lakers guard Lonzo Ball.

In hindsight, it was a hard but necessary teaching moment in letting Freedman know what he needed to do to compete against the best.

"It was a big lesson," he said. "It wasn't a great game and pretty tough on us, but having the opportunity to play a team that was so good and getting the chance to see what it's like to be on the court with players of that caliber ... it's just been a really good lesson for me to see how I have to improve and see where I need to be at to be at my best."

"Afterward, I analyzed it for a little while and just realized I have to improve and we as a team have to

improve. But seeing what level they were at and how good they were was a good measuring stick what we wanted to be like."

Last season, Freedman and Mater Dei defeated Chino Hills, 83-80, in overtime before a sellout crowd at Galen Center in one of the most entertaining games of the season. And the schools are set to meet again in the featured game of the Nike Extravaganza on Feb. 3 at Mater Dei. People might want to start lining up now for tickets to that one.

Freedman enjoys being the player who gets the ball to 7-foot-2 Bol Bol, who is expected to be the No. 1 center in California in the coming season.

"It's a lot of fun," he said. "He makes it real easy. He's as tall as they come. He's fun to play with."

Freedman received good preparation for college last season by going up against the likes of Torrance Bishop Montgomery, Chino Hills and Chatsworth Sierra Canyon. We'll be watching many of the players on those teams on television in the coming years.

"It was so competitive," he said. "Coach McKnight tells us there's never been a year like that before. It was special to be a part of that."

Freedman plans to study business at Harvard, but don't expect him to become a lawyer like his father, Bryan.

"I'll leave that to my dad," he said.

eric.sondheimer@latimes.com
Twitter: @latsondheimer