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Mater Dei flexes its Trinity League basketball muscles

Written on January 24, 2018 by [Frank Burlison](#)

RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, Ca. – The Mater Dei High Ivy League basketball duo aced its Trinity League test Wednesday night.

Point guard **Spencer Freedman** (bound for Harvard) scored a game-high 20 points, on seven of nine shooting from the field, to go with eight assists, six rebounds and three steals as the Monarchs turned in a near-impeccable performance at both ends of the floor while knocking off the host Santa Margarita Eagles, 67-49.

And teammate **Michael Wang** (a future University of Pennsylvania Quaker) chipped in with 17 points and four rebounds, 12 of those points coming by way of 3-pointers set up by Freedman dishes.

The Monarchs improved to 14-6 overall and 5-1 in Trinity play, moving them closer to making it 5 for 5 in CIF Southern Section Open Division playoff appearances.

And, coupled with St. John Bosco's upset loss at home to Orange Lutheran Wednesday, it moved Coach **Gary McKnight's** crew into first place by itself, one game ahead of St. John Bosco (4-2) and two in front of Santa Margarita (3-3) in the Trinity standings.

All things considered, a casual observer suggested it was the Monarchs' highest quality 32 minutes of play this season.

And an impassioned observer agreed with that assessment.

"It was definitely our best effort of the season," Freedman said after knocking in four of his squad's dozen 3-pointers and taking another step in strengthening the likelihood of his landing a second consecutive Trinity League Player of the Year honor and all-Open Division selection.

"It's the first time we've been completely healthy all season."

With all of the program's extensive travel out of the way after trips to Florida, Oregon, West Virginia and Massachusetts over the past six or so weeks, the Monarchs have been able to settle into a consistence practice routine in their on-campus Meruelo Center.

"That was a huge part of it (the solid demonstration of focus and execution on both ends of the floor Wednesday night)," Freedman added.

"We came into the season not worrying so much about how well we played in December and January but in focusing on playing our best basketball into February and March."

Meet Frank

Frank Burlison is a well-regarded basketball writer who was inducted into the U.S. Basketball Writers Association Hall of Fame in 2005. His opinions on the potential of high school and college players are widely respected and sought by college coaches and NBA scouts, personnel directors and general managers from coast to coast. Oh, yes – he can offer plenty of thoughts on movies, television and pop music. Yes, he can rank those, too. Hint: He's a big The Godfather, Larry Sanders, The Wire and The Beatles loyalist.



To learn more about Frank's scouting services, [click here](#).

Endorsements

"I've known Frank since he was a student at Long Beach State and no writer ever worked harder at studying and understanding basketball. When I was coaching I always put more stock into what he said about (high school) players than anyone I knew. As far as I'm concerned, he's the best there is at evaluating the potential of basketball players."

Lute Olson, Hall of Fame and NCAA Championship Winning Coach

"I have known Frank for 15 years and there is no one outside of those in the Clippers' organization that I trust more than Frank when it comes to player evaluations."

Neil Olshey, Portland Trail Blazers' General Manager

"Frank Burlison has always been a proponent of my talent and, even more so, of my potential – far before it was evident to most. Even as a smaller and determined player who was being overlooked by most high-major colleges and national scouting services, Frank always served as a friendly voice who got me into the door to most events to help me prove my talents."

Russell Westbrook, the No. 4 overall selection in

The Monarchs trailed Santa Margarita (15-6 overall) by five points with about six minutes to go before pulling away after **Jake Kyman** fouled out for the Eagles and prevailing, 68-55, when the teams opened Trinity play at Mater Dei on Jan. 4.

But they were in nothing approaching a precarious situation Wednesday night, never leading by fewer than seven points (at 51-44, after two Kyman free throws with 4:57 to go) following the first quarter.

Santa Margarita's four top scorers, Kyman, fellow junior **Max Agbonkpolo**, sophomore **Ryan Evans** and senior **Jordan Guest**, missed a combined 29 of 39 field-goal attempts with Kyman getting a team-high 17 points (eight of those in the fourth quarter) despite missing 11 of his 17 shots from the field.

Assistant coaches from Pacific 12 Conference programs UCLA (**Tyus Edney**), Colorado (**Billy Grier**) and Oregon State (**Gregg Gottlieb**) were in attendance and, no doubt, had to come away at least mildly impressed by Santa Margarita's junior center **Shenghze Li**, who is improving rapidly after becoming eligible on Jan. 2.

The 6-foot-10, 250-pound Li scored 14 points and grabbed eight rebounds – 10 and seven of those, respectively, coming in the first half – while showing off much more fluidity of movement while tempering the aggressiveness that led him to fouling out in his first two games for the Eagles this month.

The teams are back in Trinity League play Friday night, the Eagles playing host to Servite and the Monarchs entertaining St. John Bosco – the program that snapped its 69-game league winning streak two weeks ago in Bellflower.

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One Response to Mater Dei flexes its Trinity League basketball muscles

Jovan

January 26, 2018 | 3:13 pm

Hey Mr. Burlison I think you left out JSerra who are the under dogs in the trinity league conference as well, they also upset Bosco handed them there first loss of the season and not to mention has a record of 4-2 which puts them in second place along with Bosco. Gotta love being the under dog because no one sees you coming or expects much from you.

Thanks for taking the time Frank Burlison.

“ St. John Bosco's upset loss at home to Orange Lutheran Wednesday, it moved Coach Gary McKnight's crew into first place by itself, one game ahead of St. John Bosco (4-2) and two in front of Santa Margarita (3-3) in the Trinity standings.”

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the 2008 NBA Draft out of UCLA and an all-star guard for the Oklahoma City Thunder

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