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Mats Fall to Moreau in NCS final, Earn CIF Division III Berth

By Spencer Silva



Ethan Fishler Photo Gint Federas

from 20-feet to power forward Oscar Frayer, who finished the play with a one-handed dunk befit of an NBA superstar.

"They're best I've seen in NCS for a few years." said coach Drew McDonald, who saw the game as learning experience and good preparation for the upcoming CIF state tournament. "As painful as it was tonight, it's a huge experience for my guys."

The Mats relied on senior stalwarts and four-year starters Eddy Ionescu and Ryan Anderson, who both finished with 21 points. Anderson flew around the court like a buzzard, forcing two first-quarter steals, and slamming home a reverse dunk off a turnover.

Despite the loss, the Mats have plenty to build on. With the strong finish, the Mats earned the fifth seed in the Division III tournament, the highest seed awarded to an NCS team in the tournament - the Mariners, in turn, will play for the state title in the Open Division. The Matadors earned a first round bye, and will travel to Atherton to take on No. 4 Sacred Heart on March 12.

The Mats are peaking at just the right time. McDonald pointed to recent contributions from his younger players, especially sophomores Ethan Fishler and Enzo Jiannatone.

"(They) weren't big contributors earlier in the year," McDonald said.

McDonald worked to instill poise in his team all season, and last Thursday, that virtue paid big dividends.

In the NCS semi final against Albany, the Mats overcame the No. 2 seed Cougars - whose colors eerily recalled those of the Mats' most battle-tested rival, the Campo Cougars - by an overtime score of 67-63.

Ionescu was the beast of burden in that game, scoring 38 points, including a game-tying layup he took from half court, through traffic, with 2.7 seconds left in regulation. The crowd-stifling drive

It was raining threes at McKeon Pavilion (St. Mary's College) on Saturday night (March 5), during the boys' Division III NCS Championship game.

Unfortunately for the Miramonte Matadors (19-10), the downpour was mostly one-sided. The No. 1 seed Moreau Catholic Mariners (25-4) felled the Mats by a lopsided score of 98-67.

The underdog Matadors were aggressive early, stealing passes and transitioning for quick baskets, but it was only a matter of time before the Mariners' sharpshooting placed a permanent wedge between the two teams. In the first half alone, the Mariners were 10-for-14 from three-point range - overall, they shot a remarkable 14-of-24 from beyond the arc.

Mariners junior guard Demari Millstead led all scorers with 35 points, which included an alley-oop

sent the game to overtime, where the Mats eventually prevailed.

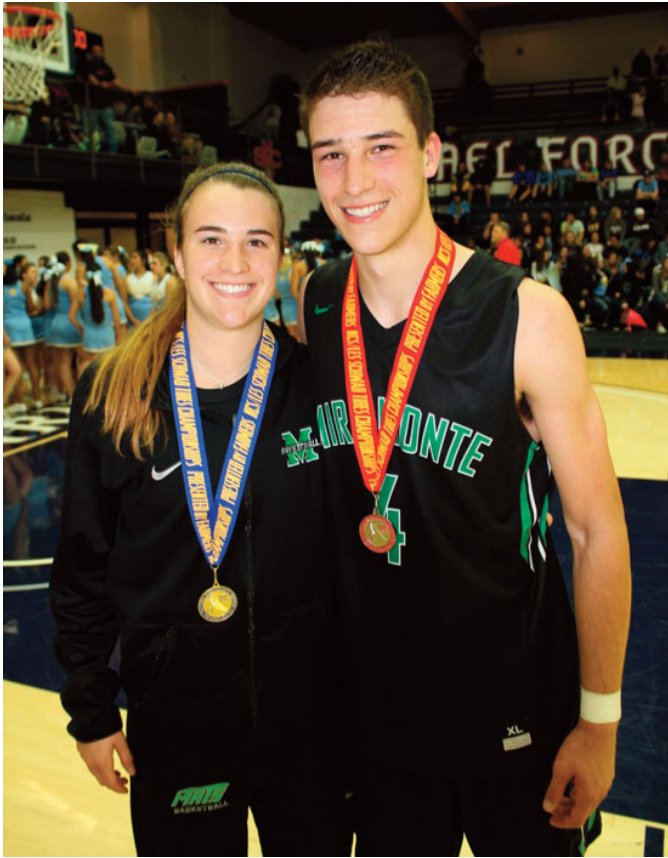
"It just came to it where I had to go get that one," Ionescu said of his late-game heroics.

Though McDonald was "as bitter as bitter can be" after the loss Saturday, he remains optimistic about the teams' prospects at the next stage.

"I'll be thrilled to have a NorCal home game. In prior NorCals, we've been on the road because we didn't have a high seed," McDonald explained. "The competition in (the CIF tournament) will be fierce, but I'm really looking forward to it." McDonald added, "I think this group is still getting better."



High-flying senior Ryan Anderson scored 10 points in the first quarter of Saturday's game. Photos Gint Federas



Twin siblings Sabrina and Eddy Ionescu pose for a photo after Saturday's NCS action

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