

# Valley Torah basketball wins 6AA title [UPDATE, video] — Jewish Journal

By Ashley Zeldin, Contributing Writer | PUBLISHED Mar 8, 2011 | Community

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First-quarter scores of 17-5 are usually in Valley Torah's favor. Not so against Bishop Diego of Santa Barbara, which seemed poised to end the No. 1-seeded Wolfpack's winning season.

But, as the adage goes, "It's not how you start, it's how you finish."

The Wolfpack finished strong, becoming the first Orthodox Jewish school to win a California Interscholastic Federation championship after coming back from a 44-35 fourth-quarter deficit to take the Southern Section Division 6AA championship title, 58-51.

"It's an incredible feeling to be the first Jewish team to win a CIF championship," star center Aaron Liberman said, "and now other Jewish schools realize it's possible to accomplish what we did."

Liberman tied the game at 46 on a three-point play with just over three minutes to play, and Valley Torah finished the game on a 23-7 spree.

The senior finished with 15 points to match 15 rebounds and five blocks. He clinched the game on his free-throw shooting, and Valley Torah went 10-for-15 from the line as a team in the final frame.

"Aaron really lifted us, and the guys made the plays they needed to make," Valley Torah coach Robert Icart said. "There was a lot of pressure on Aaron. There's so

much focus on him to stop him, but he made a strong move, got fouled and made the free throw. That was a huge play.”

*Video courtesy of aryehstriks.*

The Wolfpack, whose record this year includes 23 wins and four losses, also relied on senior point guard Yosef Grundman, who keyed an 8-0 run in the second quarter to keep Valley Torah in contention after the second-seeded Cardinals took a commanding lead.

Grundman led Valley Torah with 17 points.

“Grundman was epic. He wasn’t afraid,” Icart said. “Because there was so much at stake here, there was this element of pressure on us, and the other guys were afraid of making mistakes. He took advantage of this opportunity.”

Nathaniel Liberman, a sophomore and Aaron’s younger brother, contributed 15 points to the Wolfpack attack.

Bishop Diego’s Noah Tack was the game high scorer with 18 points.

“I knew we were going to win the whole time,” Aaron Liberman said. “We realized we had to step it up or else it’s over, so we focused on locking down on defense and we did what we do on offense and pulled through.”

Valley Torah fans broke into refrains of “mishenichnas Adar marbim b’simcha” (when the month of Adar arrives, we should increase our joy) as the game wound down.

The win sent Valley Torah to the Division 5 state championship tournament, which was scheduled to start at Los Angeles Valley College against Calvin Christian School of Escondido on March 8 at 7 p.m., just after The Journal’s press time.

“We will be playing some very tough teams, but we feel good about our chances [despite moving up a division],” Icart said. “We have the opportunity to achieve more than we had sought.”

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