

## Saints stop President's College to take United Insurance Challenge trophy

Written by Ras Abdalla

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ST Stanislaus College held off a spirited second-half challenge by President's College (PC) to ensure the United Insurance Challenge Trophy remains at the institution on Brickdam with a 41-38 victory in the final of the 12-team Mashramani Schools Basketball Tournament which was contested at the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall (CASH) on the eve of the country's 41st Republic Anniversary.

The tournament's hosts had their teachers and schoolmates in attendance on the edge with 2:22 to go, as tournament's MVP Nyamebekeyre Bacchus hit a perfect two from the free-throw line to give PC a 36-35 lead.

Moments before, Kevin Higgins was 0-2 from the line and missed the opportunity to regain the lead for the eventual champions when he drew another foul and with one minute and 43 seconds left, he repeated his mistake, much to the disgust of his team's band of supporters. Captain Neil Gordon then showed why he was later voted the MVP of the final as he took centre stage to safely pilot his side to victory. Both sides made unforced errors and even missing from the line in the dying moments of a close encounter.

The point guard first drove from the baseline to the board and off the glass to bring his side within one with 1:13 remaining.

His opposite number Devon Warren then had the chance to increase PC's lead, but he muffed both free throws and the Saints fans breathed a sigh of relief after chanting 'brick'.

Darroll Williams was next to the line and a chance to give Saints the lead with one minute remaining on the clock. His first attempt was perfect while the other had to be polished off by Gordon whose rebound and lay-up silenced the PC fans for a Saints 40-38 lead and 51 seconds left on the game clock.

With 37 seconds left and nerves clearly evident on and off the court, PC had the chance to tie the game but Shaquille Garrett was off target from the line and Bacchus was denied twice, after grabbing the offensive rebound, as the St Stanislaus players swarmed the paint in defence of their lead.

Charlton Gaspar was then fouled with 12 seconds on the final clock, but could only hit one of two to perform the final rites for the thrill of victory, 41-38.

Earlier, both teams were tentative in the opening 15 minutes and were guilty of unforced turnovers mainly due to poor passing and easy misses to the basket.

After 15 minutes and 17 seconds of play, with St Stanislaus holding a 14-11 lead, the first of two power outages stopped the contest for close to 12 minutes and when play resumed, St Stanislaus, led by the burly Hylton Moore, went into a different drive to end the first period with a 23-18 lead, Hylton scoring 13 of those points.

On the resumption, PC who boosted their Championship challenge with past student and ex-

national U-19 Kiev Chesney in a coaching role, took the fight to Saints with their 'Big-man' Bacchus personally man-marking first-half star Moore.

Higgins opened the scoring for Saints to give them their biggest lead of the game at 25-18 and after 10 minutes of the second half, Saints held a slim one-point lead, 27-26, which soon turned 30-28 in favour of PC as they slowly took the lead for the first time in the contest, before another power outage forced a halt in proceedings with 9:22 remaining.

Unlike the first stoppage, the second one lasted for seven minutes and when play resumed both sides continued to show nervousness in ball-handling resulting in lots of turnovers. In the end, it was the tournament's hosts who held their nerves to snatch a deserved victory.

Bacchus and Garrett both had the game-high of 15 points each while for the victors Gordon scored 14 and Moore 13. In the 3rd place play-off played before, Marian Academy had the better of Plaisance Secondary 49-41 with Tequain Veira netting 16, Nile Beresford 13 and Jonathon Beepat 11, while for the losers Nikoli Smith had 22 points.

Saints coach Uzzi Yisrael in a post-game comment told Chronicle Sport that the win was inevitable.

"It was an expected win, but I must compliment PC for being a worthy opponent. The game got close because players forgot the game plan and adjusted to their game plan individually. We were forcing them to make turnovers but we were in turn returning the ball to them. I think the game got to some players' head.

"I think both MVPs showed their worth in this game, Bacchus (tournament) dominated the boards and Gordon came up big when needed. It is good to see students from such elite high schools excelling in sports," the dreadlocked Yisrael stated.

Captain of the losing side Warren cited the power outages as a distraction and probable cause for loss while praising the champions.

"It was a good game, though I think the two blackouts affected our concentration. I thought our team played their hearts out, but Saints wanted it more because we took the fight to them and they responded. We missed our support maybe if they were present it might have been a different result".