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Clemson goalkeeper George Marks sends the ball downfield during the Tigers' 2-0 victory over Washington on Sunday in Cary, N.C., which secured the program's third national title, and its first since 1987.

'Euphoric'

Tigers capture first national title since 1987

BY MICHAEL CROUCHLEY
THE JOURNAL

CARY, N.C. — After an NCAA Tournament run filled with upsets and penalty-shootout heroics, the Clemson men's soccer team captured its third national championship in program history on Sunday.

After winning penalty shootouts over top-seeded Oregon State in the quarterfinals and fourth-seeded Notre Dame in the Final Four on Friday, Clemson forward Isaiah Reid scored two early goals against second-seeded Washington on Sunday afternoon in Cary, N.C.

Clemson's experienced defense carried it the rest of the way, as the eighth-seeded Tigers earned a 2-0 win and their first national title since 1987 to go along with it.

"Winning the national championship is almost too big of a goal to look

at — even when you say you want to win it, I don't think we know what that means," Clemson goalkeeper George Marks said after Sunday's match. "I think it's going to take weeks to fully set in, but it's unbelievable. It's euphoric. It makes everything worth it."

The Tigers (16-5-2) got an early Christmas gift just 30 seconds into the match. Washington (18-2-2) saw goalkeeper Sam Fowler completely miss the ball on an attempted kick, allowing Reid to run through on goal and poke the ball into an empty net, putting the Tigers up 1-0.

"Before the game,



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Clemson junior Isaiah Reid reacts after one of his two goals in the Tigers' 2-0 win over Washington on Sunday in Cary, N.C.



Unbelievable

The Clemson men's soccer team completed an incredible run through the NCAA Tournament in perfect fashion on Sunday, dominating second-seeded Washington in a 2-0 victory in Cary, N.C., to capture the third national championship in program history. The No. 8 seed Tigers scored in the game's first 30 seconds and never allowed the Huskies to find the back of the net to hoist the championship trophy for the first time since 1987. At right, Clemson senior Callum Johnson lifts the hardware over his head after the victory. To read more about the Tigers' historic victory, turn to page C1.

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TIGERS: Shut out Huskies to capture

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I wanted to be able to start on the front foot and to be able to help my team," Reid said. "When I ran onto that ball, I just thought about scoring, so I'm glad it happened."

While Clemson got a heavy dose of luck for its first goal, the second just 14 minutes later was a moment of brilliance from Reid.

Charlie Asensio crossed the ball into the box,

and Reid headed the ball across the goalkeeper and into the top corner from more than 15 yards out.

"You just have to take your moments," Clemson head coach Mike Noonan said. "They can happen in the first minute of the game or the 90th minute, but when the moments come, you have to be prepared."

After Reid's early heroics gave Clemson the lead, it took a huge performance from the

Tigers' defense to see out the game.

The Huskies grew into the game after Clemson's second goal, holding onto possession for large stretches and putting a lot of pressure on the Tigers' defense, especially in the second half.

Clemson's experienced defense — led by four seniors in Marks, Asensio, Justin Malou and Hermann Trophy semifinalist Oskar Agren — has been the team's strength all

first national title since 1987

season, and that held true on Sunday, as the group held the Huskies scoreless for the first time this season.

"We knew going into this season that we were going to have to rely defensively because that's where our experience is," Noonan said. "The way that we played today showed it. We knew that our experience was at the back."

Clemson has been on the wrong side of penalty

kicks in the tournament for the last two seasons, losing to Stanford in the quarterfinals in 2019 and to Marshall in the third round last season.

This year, it was finally Clemson's time. Noonan said those experiences and his team's resilience paved the way for Sunday's celebration.

"Those 10 seniors have faced some bitter disappointments, and they just stayed at it," he said. "Through those

disappointments grew strength. We knew we were a very good team, and when we came to the tournament this team was tough."

"The preparation that we had for the year really helped us, and at the end of the day it's not about who we play, but how we play. If we do Clemson the way we need to do Clemson, we don't care who we play."

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