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Vernon girls' lacrosse team earns revenge on state power Hunterdon Central

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The Vernon Township High School girls' lacrosse team has enjoyed a season to remember, winning 18 games and losing just one.

But there is nothing to compare with the victory the Vikings gained Monday.

Vernon defeated Hunterdon Central in thrilling fashion, 11-10, in the second round of the NJSIAA Group IV state playoffs, in a win that head coach Steve Carlson called "the biggest win in the history of our program."

"Hunterdon Central is an elite program," Carlson said. "It's really unbelievable."

What makes the win over Hunterdon Central truly special is that just last week, in the championship game of the Hunterdon/Sussex/Warren Tournament,



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Hunterdon Central knocked off the Vikings, 9-6, so the Vikings enacted a little bit of revenge, turning the tables on the Hunterdon County perennial power.

"It really helps us to step up to the elite level," said Carlson, who is in his second year as head coach after spending 11 years as an assistant. "We beat an elite team. It's truly an exciting thing."

The Vikings now have the task of taking on the state's No. 2 team Ridgewood in the sectional semifinals, scheduled to be played Thursday.

"If we play our game, we're very capable of playing with anyone we come across," Carlson said. "Ridgewood is a class program and it's going to take our best."

The Vikings had already defeated J.P. Stevens of North Edison, 17-5, in the first round of the state playoffs. It really has been a magic season.

The Vikings are also in contention to win two

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league championships this season. They have already captured the title in their division of the New Jersey Interscholastic Girls Lacrosse League and will face West Morris for the title in the Northwest Jersey Athletic Conference.



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"Not many teams can say they won two league titles in the same year," Carlson said.

That's the goal. We only gave up nine goals once all season. They've been a great group all year."

One of the main reasons why the Vikings have enjoyed so much success this season has been the play of their defense.

Unfortunately, the Vikings surrendered 10 goals to Hunterdon Central Monday – and still managed to win.

Senior Nadia Womble is the Vikings' goalkeeper. Womble, an outstanding athlete who also plays basketball and volleyball at the school, has been a stalwart in the cage all season.

The midfield group is also very solid and very athletic.

"She's such a good athlete that she's able to win games with her play," Carlson said. "She made some unbelievable saves this season. She's very capable of stealing games with the way she plays."

Junior Brittany Parak is a gritty player who "does all the necessary intangibles," according to Carlson. Parak had one goal in the win over Hunterdon Central, but it was a crucial goal late in the game.

The defensive corps is solid, with senior Erin Decker, senior Iris Saber, senior Jamie Jackson, junior Kelly Smigen and junior Julia Mabey holding down the fort in front of Womble.

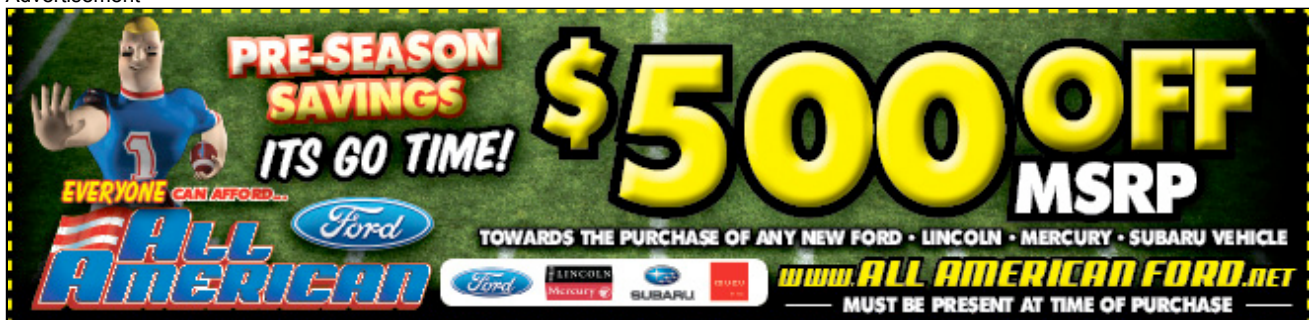
Junior Brittany Ast, another solidly diversified athlete (basketball and soccer) is another stellar Viking midfielder. Ast had three goals in the win over Hunterdon Central.

"We take pride in our defense," Carlson said. "We try to hold a team to under 10 goals.

"Brittany is a big-game player who can take over games."

Senior Alissa Giannini is another basketball

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player who takes her talents to the lacrosse field.

"Alissa came up through the ranks and worked hard to become a key player for us," Carlson said. "She won some crucial draws in the game against Hunterdon Central."

The Vikings play four attack players, led by senior Annie Montero, who is also a standout soccer player.

"Annie is like our quarterback out there," Carlson said. "She sets up the plays and is a vocal leader."

Sophomore Stephanie Peterson is another key contributor in Vernon's forward line. Peterson had one goal in the win Monday.

The other two attack players are prolific scorers, namely junior Jess Mills, who is already the school's all-time leading scorer, and Leslie Warner, who is leading the team in scoring this season.

"They both want to see each other do well and it's fun to watch them play together," Carlson said. "They almost take turns leading us in scoring."

Regardless of what happens the rest of the way, it's been a remarkable season for the



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Vikings.

"I knew that we were going to be pretty good because we had a lot of sophomores last year who gained experience and were coming back," Carlson said. "But I never thought we could win two rounds of the state tournament and be 18-1. I can't say I thought that was going to happen. They've surpassed expectations and really done a great job."

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