

West Jersey softball season in review, 2012

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By **James Kratch/For The Star-Ledger** The Star-Ledger

Coach of the year: Fourth-year **Phillipsburg coach Kristin Boyer's** endless energy and passion for the sport has sparked a turn-around for the long-dormant program.

A year after finishing 8-18, Phillipsburg went 18-10 and advanced to the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 tournament quarterfinals with almost the same team. It was the Warren County school's first winning campaign in over a decade, while the 18 victories were the most in 35 years.

"We had an incredible year," Boyer said. "I give a lot of credit to my seniors. I had an incredible senior class with great, great leadership."

Two of those seniors, **Michele Duffy** and **Zoe Heinke**, will play in college next year. Duffy will play at Kent State, while Heinke is headed to Ursinus. Boyer said the veteran leadership was key in developing a cohesive unit.

"The girls got along exceptionally well, which I think is really key when you talk about girls' sports," Boyer said. "They wanted to play for each other. They wanted to win for each other. That's huge."

Since taking over the program four years ago, Boyer and assistant Alison Robbins, a Phillipsburg graduate, have made it their goal to instill a love of the game in their players. Boyer established a seventh and eighth grade program to better prepare players to play in high school. Now, Boyer said, most freshmen come in capable of playing at the JV level. In addition, Boyer has put an added emphasis on travel ball.

At the varsity level, Boyer's main focus is on the fundamentals of the game and fostering a love for competition through fresh, positive practices.

"If we do the little things correct and focus on the little things," Boyer said, "then the big things are going to take care of themselves."

Phillipsburg recorded two major upset victories this spring: a come-from-behind 2-1 triumph at **Hillsborough** on May 1 and a 4-3 victory over North Hunterdon, Boyer's alma mater, on May 30. The victory over the Lions costs North Hunterdon a chance at the Skyland Conference's Delaware Division crown, which was won outright by Hillsborough. Phillipsburg finished 10-6 in the rugged league, good for a fourth place finish.

"We're in one of the hardest conferences in the state," Boyer said. "The girls want to make a name for Phillipsburg. It's been so long since Phillipsburg softball was even on the map." It's definitely there now, thanks to Boyer.