

## Dec. 2 CJ III State Football Final

### Principal Mattis takes pride in the impact Spartan football team is making

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

**Dec. 2:** Sometimes it's just fun to be the principal.

Kelly Mattis is loving her job these days, as the hallways of Steinert have been alive with excitement during the football team's exhilarating run to Saturday's Central Jersey Group III championship game at Rutgers.

And if anyone loves Spartan sports, it is the former Steinert-student-turned-principal, as her brothers Todd and Randy helped the 1988 soccer team to a state title and Todd is the current boys' soccer coach.

"There is a palpable excitement in the building," Mattis said. "The students and staff alike are really pumped up about the success of the football team. I have always noticed support for the football team because the games are fun to watch and the athletes and coaches are very visible in the school in a positive way.

"Even as a student, I remember how much we would look forward to going to the games. However, now, the support and followers are even more evident, as the success of this team is what Spartans are talking about."

Steinert has had its share of state titles over the years, but this run is unique in that it is the first championship the school is trying to win in the sport most closely connected with high school spirit.

A Spirit Week has helped in that regard and, as Mattis noted "There are more students involved in the football program than in other sports. In addition to our talented players, we have teams of cheerleaders and the marching unit contributing to the spirited atmosphere, not to mention all of their parents."

The head Spartan said that the pride and morale of the entire school community seems to be lifted by the football team's accomplishment.

"In some ways we are experiencing their success vicariously and it just feels great," Mattis said. "The students and faculty definitely have more bounce in their step."

But success on the athletic field can mean more than just recognition in the newspapers, free Fish4Scores t-shirts or the player's pick of dates for the next dance. As a veteran educator, Mattis sees a direct correlation between doing well on the field and in the classroom.

"I do believe that students who feel successful and confident with their performance in one area definitely extend those feelings into other aspects of their lives," she said. "It makes sense that when we are feeling positive, people around us respond positively.

"These young players on the team have worked hard and proven themselves. They can accomplish great successes on the field and in the classroom."

What should make Steinert supporters feel especially proud, is that this group of players does more than just win games. It represents the school in a positive manner.



*As a former Steinert student, Principal Kelly Mattis feels a special pride in what the football team has done this year, both on and off the field.*

Now, that might sound naïve considering what happened with police in October. But that was an isolated incident and Mattis said that as whole, the team handles itself with class.

There are exceptions, of course. No football team of 60-plus players can have all angels. But the principal is adamant in her praise of the players' character.

"I am incredibly proud of this group of students," she said. "They represent Steinert High School well. They are proud and humble at the same time.

"They clearly act as a team on the field and off. They have demonstrated that by working together with the guidance of a strong coaching staff and support of our wonderful parents, that they could accomplish what they needed to get them to the championship game."

It starts at the top, of course. And Mattis couldn't be happier with the job one of her social studies teachers does while moonlighting at his other job.

"Dan Caruso is first an educator, then a coach," Mattis said. "Whether he's in the classroom or on the field, he's teaching his students.

"He is a gentleman and he has taught his athletes to play, learn, and act in a manner of which they would always be proud. Mr. Caruso is a very giving person and I see him giving his players his all, just as he asks them to give him their all. His entire coaching staff is to be commended."

There you have it.

With comments like that, you get the feeling a trip to the principal's office isn't necessarily a bad thing for the Steinert football team this year.