

## Nov. 8 CJ IV Boys Soccer



Steinert's Zach Gates dribbles around Rancocas Valley's Jared Gershowitz during today's CJ IV semifinal (Photo by Mike Dill/purchase photos at [www.michaeldillphotography.com](http://www.michaeldillphotography.com)).

### **After surviving a rough stretch, Steinert giving its coach a familiar feeling**

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

**Nov. 8:** On Sep. 30, Steinert beat Lawrence 3-0 to improve its record to 4-3-1, but it was an up-and-down winning record that followed a win-one, lose-one pattern.

A month later, that started to look like a torrid pace.

Starting with a 1-0 loss to Princeton on Oct. 4, the Spartans lost four straight and went 0-5-1 in the next six games. The low point came in a 3-2 overtime loss to Nottingham when Steinert blew a two-goal lead in the final seven minutes of regulation.

It was a team with 16 seniors, and at that point it wouldn't be surprising if they decided to mail it in and get on with their lives.

But those seniors took the opposite approach and, remarkably, Steinert is one win away from its first sectional championship in 23 years.

“Right from the start, it just wasn’t clicking offensively and these guys realized it,” coach Todd Jacobs said. “When you have a record like that, a lot of teams could go in the opposite direction. A lot of things could go wrong. . .dissension, things like that.”

“But these guys always knew they were on the doorstep. We told them ‘You have different seasons.’ Our regular season didn’t go well, in the Mercer tournament we lost to a strong Hopewell team. But here they get their third chance and we’re undefeated in the state tournament and that’s where you have to be.”

Senior defender Pat Remboski said there was no way the Spartans were going to splinter.

“We just knew to keep plugging, it would all come eventually,” Remboski said. “We’re a family, we’re not gonna get down on each other. We gotta do what we gotta do.”

“We started hanging out more. We were with each other off the soccer field, which eventually helped give us chemistry on the field that we didn’t have at the beginning of the season.”

The turn-around actually did not start in the states, but one game earlier.

If ever a Mercer County Tournament consolation game did more than just console a team, it was Steinert’s match with Robbinsville. The Spartans snapped their winless drought with a 2-0 win on a feel-good night in which Nolan Kopec started his first game in goal and got a shutout.



*Connor Moffat takes the ball ahead of RV’s Aaron Muse in today’s sectional semi, while John Powers (8) trails the play (Photo by Mike Dill/purchase photos at [www.michaeldillphotography.com](http://www.michaeldillphotography.com)).*

It seemed to flip a switch, as Steinert learned how to win again and takes a four-game winning streak into Friday’s final at top-seeded East Brunswick.

“That was huge,” midfielder Ryan Lamarca said. “Even though it was a consolation game, we played our heart out and it carried over into the playoffs.”

“That gave us the boost and the confidence that we needed since we were on a losing streak,” Remboski added. “That win picked everybody’s heads up and we had to keep working.”

What’s amazing is that Spartan teams with better records have been derailed before this. Last year it was a shootout to Freehold Township. There were others before that.

“A lot of these guys said after that Freehold game they wanted to get back,” Jacobs said. “They held true with their promise. They could have packed it in long ago.”

“But it’s a positive group. Connor (Moffat), Derek (Shearer) and Zach (Gates), a lot of these seniors who have been there before, have stepped up their game big time.

Derek Shearer has taken command of the field, something he could have done at the beginning of the season but I’m glad he’s doing it now.”

As the momentum builds, Jacobs is getting a feeling he hasn’t had since his sophomore year at Steinert. That’s when he and brother Randy were a lethal scoring combination up front, and Steinert won the CJ III championship en route to a state title.

It hasn’t won a sectional crown since and is in the finals for the first time since Eric Hastings guided the Spartans there in 2001 before losing to Piscataway.

“The last time I remember a run like this with Steinert was being part of that ’88 team,” Jacobs said. “We had a great regular season, but it’s still a different feeling in a tournament. When you’re on a roll, you’re on a roll. Right now this team is rolling downhill and it’s through a lot of hard work.

“Their work ethic is tremendous and we’re getting the goals we need. It’s a different feeling all of a sudden. When we’re on road games these guys are in a routine. They get on the bus, they’re focused and they’re in a zone. They get off the bus and they know how to warm up and be ready when the whistle blows. They didn’t have to be (at Steinert) today until 12:15 and a lot of them were here at 11:30. They’re ready to play, they know where they need to be.”

And they know where they have arrived at.

A place they have not been in a long, long time.