



# Boys volleyball sectional final features two women coaches

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At first glance, the NJSIAA South Jersey, Group 1 boys volleyball sectional final sending McNair Academic to St. John Vianney didn't seem too out of the ordinary.

But upon further review, there was something unique about the matchup. The head coaches of both teams are women.

St. John Vianney, which was a 2-0 winner in the June 3 contest, is led by 13th-year coach Jessica Gadaleta. McNair is coached by Jalia Carter, who is in her second year coaching the boys at her alma mater.

There's actually a small percentage of boys volleyball programs in the state coached by women. Many of them, like Gadaleta and Carter, also coach girls teams at their schools in the fall.

But the fact that two women coaches were leading teams with a state championship berth on the line made this one notable, especially since it was the second straight year that they met in the sectional final. St. John Vianney won last spring also, and went on to capture its first Group 1 championship. Gadaleta was named NFHS Boys Volleyball Coach of the Year for New Jersey.

"This represents a such a great stride forward for females in athletics," Gadaleta said of the matchup. "We see right now that female sports are on the rise, so to be able to coach across from her makes it extra special. She's put together a great team and I have so much respect for them. It is different to see two female coaches this late in the tournament. But I think it's a testament to how far women have come in sports. You think it was only 50 years ago with Title IX, and now you see women coaching high level men's athletics. I think that's a very good thing. It can only make sports stronger."



**McNair coach Jalia Carter talks to her players.**



**St. John Vianney players listen to coach Jessica Gadaleta during a time out.**



Gadaleta is the founding coach of both programs at the Holmdel school. She played girls volleyball at Colts Neck High School, but competed on co-ed teams during the off-seasons.

“Back when I was playing in high school, there weren’t a ton of female club programs, so I hopped in on a club team with boys,” she said. “I’ve always kind of jumped in and played with boys.”

Carter is a 2014 graduate of McNair, where she played on the girls volleyball team under coach Sharon Felton, who was so respected at the Jersey City school that the gym is now named in her honor.

Both acknowledge plenty of differences in coaching boys and girls volleyball. But at its core, the point of the game is the same, and they love to coach.

“There are definitely differences,” Carter said. “The cultures of the two teams are different. The boys hustle a little more than girls do, but the girls are louder. They have a lot of energy.”

“The girls game is different from the boys, so we always have to reframe going from season to season, but both teams execute at a high level,” Gadaleta said. “That’s a testament to how great our athletes are.”

Carter’s players simply see her as coach, and a very good one.

“It’s not any different to play for her,” said Yaw Asante, McNair’s senior captain. “If anything, she’s better.”

The St. John Vianney players have a similar view toward Gadaleta.

“It’s great to play to her,” said sophomore Isaiah Boone. “She does a really good job getting us prepared for games and always has something positive to say.”

“I love that my boys don’t treat me like a female coach,” Gadaleta said. “They see me as coach. Gender is not part of the equation. That’s why we do what we do. They have a great deal of respect for me, just like they would for any other coach in any other sport.”



***Jessica Gadaleta of St. John Vianney was honored in January as the 2023 New Jersey Boys Volleyball Coach of the Year.***