



## Lacrosse: Mounties headed to the Essex County Tournament Finals



*The Mounties celebrate their 9-7 win over the West Essex Knights, which sends them to the county finals. They'll face Glen Ridge on Saturday, May 6 in Livingston.*

*PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA/STAFF*

By Andrew Garda

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It wasn't an easy game, but the Montclair High School girls lacrosse team made it to the Essex County Tournament finals with a 9-7 win over West Essex. The 2-seed Mounties were well ahead and in control at the end of the first half, but the 3-seed Knights came out hard in the second half and MHS found itself in a battle.

The Mounties now meet 1-seed Glen Ridge on Saturday in Livingston at 4:30.

There were a lot of heroes in Saturday's win, but perhaps the one that made the biggest impact was goalie Olivia Lynch, who stood on her head making great save after great save during the final two minutes to keep the Mounties' lead intact.

"That's what you need from your keeper, when it's a close game like that," coach Ann Jennings said of Lynch's play. "When they make that big save that just pumps everybody up and gives you another life. She played great today. Proud of her."

In the first half, it hadn't looked like the team was going to need a big effort from Lynch. West Essex looked out of sorts, while MHS was able to move the ball down the field at will, tearing through defenders, finding an open shot and burying it in the net.

By the end of the half, the Mounties were up 6-3 and looked primed to take on Glen Ridge in the finals.

Maybe they were looking ahead a little bit or maybe the Knights were energized by desperation. West Essex came out of halftime on fire, scoring on back-to-back possessions. Then the Knights added a third goal to pull to within one, down 7-6.

Momentum is a hard thing to quantify, but if it exists, it was clearly in West Essex's favor.

"We knew it was going to be a tough game," Jennings said. "West Essex is always a good team, they're very well coached. They're the type of team which gets better as the season goes on, so we knew this was going to be a battle."

With 14:22 left in the game, Jennings called a timeout to get her team together.

Coming out of the break, the Mounties played with renewed determination, and both teams traded shots, but were unable to find the net until Jill Jennings scored her second goal of the game on a crazy backhanded shot that caught the West Essex goalie off guard.

The Knights kept going, though, and scored after a questionable penalty call to pull back to within one goal with 10:26 left in the game.

Then Nanatte Walls-Tarver scored for the second time in the game off a nice assist by Nora Giordano to give the Mounties a 9-7 lead.

The two teams went back and forth for the rest of the game, and that was where Lynch really stood out as she blocked multiple shots in big moments to keep her team's lead intact.

Now they face Glen Ridge, a team the Mounties lost to, 16-10, back in March. In that game, the Mounties fell behind early and never really got back on track. The talent is there for MHS, but they know the Ridgers will be ready for a hard fight.

Before Saturday, though, the Mounties have two non-tournament games. The first, which took place on Monday, was a wild 13-12 win over Saddle River Day. The Mounties trailed 10-7 at the half, but outscored the Colonial Rebels 5-2 in the second half, before winning in overtime.

They will next take on Millburn on Thursday at home at 4 p.m.

Then it's time for the main event, Saturday in Livingston at 4:30 p.m.