



# NJSIAA TRAILBLAZER

Vanessa Watson is a true product of the Title IX generation, first as an athlete and then record-setting coach.

She arrived at the Malcolm X Shabazz High School in Newark as a freshman in 1972, soon after the passage of Title IX, which guaranteed unprecedented educational and athletic opportunities for females. That year, she had the privilege of playing for the first girls' basketball team at the school.

She performed well enough throughout her career to earn a scholarship to Virginia State, where she was a starting point guard and 1980 graduate.

She returned back to her hometown and became the head coach at Shabazz for the 1983-84 season. By the time she retired 31 years later, she had accumulated a 720-107 record, ranking second behind Pascack Valley's Jeff Jasper on the state's all-time girls basketball victory list. Her teams also won 10 NJSIAA state championships and six Tournament of Champions titles. In addition, she coached Shabazz to 18 sectional championships, 17 Essex County Tournament titles, and 16 conference crowns. She also sent numerous players on to successful college and even professional careers.

At the top of her coaching game, Watson also retired, with her final two teams going a combined 66-2 and going unbeaten against the New Jersey competition. Her final seven teams won state championships, with her final two also capturing the school's fifth and sixth TOC titles.

She returned to coaching in 2017 as the head coach at Bloomfield College, where she has continued her success in leading the NCAA Div. 2 programs.

