



By [ARTHUR UTLEY](#)

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Lauren Vinson had one thing in mind when she let the pitch go to Great Bridge batter Kaitlynn Szczepanski in the semifinals of the Virginia High School League Group AAA softball tournament: get ahead in the count.

Vinson's Prince George team was locked in a scoreless battle in the bottom of the seventh inning.

"I didn't really know what she had done for their season. I didn't know she was one of their big hitters," said Vinson, who had struck out Szczepanski in her previous at-bat. "I wasn't as cautious as I should have been. I should have pitched away from her. When I saw the bat make contact, I was like 'that's outta here.'"

Vinson, a junior, recalled the blast that ended a storybook playoff run following an All-Metro team photo session. Her pitching and timely hitting were primary reasons for Prince George's success. She is The Times-Dispatch softball player of the year.

"I was proud of all of us. It wasn't the best way to end that game, but we hung in there and were there until the seventh," Vinson said. "[The game] could easily have gone our way if one of us had gotten the same hit. We had a great season. Nobody expected us to do anything. We were pretty much the underdogs in the whole tournament."

Vinson has been the Royals' pitcher for three years and is one of the best in the Central Region, but she's in the same district (Central) as Thomas Dale's Lacey Waldrop, who has been pitcher of the year in the district and for the All-Metro team the past two

seasons. The Central District recognized Vinson as the player of the year this season as a utility player.

Vinson and Waldrop split their last two meetings. Vinson won in eight innings to clinch the district title, and Waldrop won in 11 innings in the district tournament final. That was PG's last loss before the state semifinal.

To win PG's first region championship, Vinson pitched 21 innings in one day, 14 in the semifinal victory over Cosby, and seven in the title game win over Atlee.

Her arm recovered, "but it wasn't feeling so great after that day," Vinson said.

The victory over Cosby was the highlight of the season for her.

"I knew we were going to states. . . . I didn't really expect much this season. I thought we were going to have to wait until next year when we will have some better players come up from JV," she said. "I didn't think we had that strong a team. As the season went on, we really grew. We had girls who learned more about the game. They matured a lot, and somehow we pulled it all together."

Vinson struck out 290 batters in 173 innings and gave up nine earned runs (0.36 era). She was 20-4 (team was 21-5). She hit .366 (30 for 82), had five doubles, two triples and 17 RBI and scored 16 runs.

"She did a tremendous job for us," PG coach Pat Waguespack said. "It's hard to put into words. I know she's deserving."

Vinson comes back next year with up front expectations.

"I think we'll be good from the beginning." As for making the state tournament again: "That's something you have to earn."

GETTING TO KNOW LAUREN VINSON

School: Prince George Position: Wild Card (pitcher)

Why she won: The T-D and Central District player of the year. Was the key factor in Prince George winning the first region title and reaching the state semifinals. The junior hit .366, had seven extra base hit, scored 16 runs and drove in 17. She pitched 173 innings, struck out 290 batters and had a 0.36 earned run average.

What you don't know: "My grandmother is a pilot, and I've been flying with her since I was 3 years old [in a car seat]. I want to get a pilot's license some day."

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