

# Peterson Ready To Help Vikings Chase Playoff Berth

BY JON KRAWCZYNSKI  
AP Sports Writer

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. (AP) — It's all right there for Adrian Peterson now. One more game in his remarkable comeback season, and the only thing that remains on the line is everything. A win against the rival Green Bay Packers on Sunday would put his Minnesota Vikings into the playoffs for the first time since the 2009 season. The milestones of 2,000 yards and Eric Dickerson's single-season rushing record are there to be had as well, along with a potential MVP award that would cement his standing among the league's great players. "It's such a big game when you look at everything that can be accomplished," Peterson said Wednesday. "I'm looking forward to it, man. Most importantly, getting into the playoffs, securing that with a win against Green Bay. Having an opportunity to hit 2,000, having an opportunity to break Eric Dickerson's

record in the same game, it would be great to accomplish." Perhaps the only thing more improbable than the Vikings (9-6) sitting one victory away from a playoff berth is that they have been carried there by Peterson, who tore two ligaments in his left knee just over a year ago. He has already racked up a career-high 1,898 yards rushing this season, leaving him 102 away from becoming the first player to hit 2,000 yards on a reconstructed knee. His inspiring recovery has galvanized a team that has been teetering on the edge of elimination the last four weeks and has put some of the biggest names to play the position in his corner as he runs toward history. Dickerson is on record as saying he hopes Peterson falls a little shy of his 2,105 yards rushing in 1984, but everyone from Jim Brown to Terrell Davis to Chris Johnson — the last running back to rush for 2,000 yards — have come out in support of his pursuit.

"So impressed by everything (at)AdrianPeterson has done this year," Detroit Lions great Barry Sanders tweeted recently. "Big fan of E.D. But really pulling for AP to break the record. Good luck." Peterson needs 208 yards on Sunday to break Dickerson's record, a number that would be considered close to impossible for most running backs in this pass-happy league. But Peterson has topped that twice in the previous four games. He's also rushed for more yards against the Packers than any other team, including 210 yards at Lambeau Field on Dec. 2. "I wouldn't say I'm rooting for him to get it, but I want him to do the best that he can do," said Johnson, who developed a bit of a rivalry with Peterson a few years back when both laid claim to the title of the best running back in the league. "It's just a nice story from where he got hurt last year. I sent him a text to see how he was doing and stuff like that. I wish him the best and whatever he

does, I congratulate him on it and I'll be happy for him." Peterson has been humbled by all the support and is understanding of Dickerson's stance, but there is one player he wishes he could sit down with before he plays one of the biggest games of his career — Walter Payton. "What inspired you to be the best?" he wishes he could ask the Bears great, who died in 1999. "How did he deal with success and fame? If he could do anything different, what would it be? What would he have done?" Peterson speaks to Vikings coach Leslie Frazier about Payton. Frazier was a teammate of Payton's and has routinely said he sees striking similarities between the two, on and off the field. His name is up there with Tom Brady and Peyton Manning in the MVP discussion, and an MVP win for Peterson would break a string of five straight given to quarterbacks. He's certainly showing that an offense can be successful while relying heavily on the running

game and validating the Vikings' decision to invest heavily in him with a lucrative contract extension before last season. "I definitely want to keep the running backs highlighted," Peterson said. "It's started to turn into more of a spread, quarterback-friendly NFL. But just keep letting them know that there are going to be running backs that can do this. "Just give young guys the inspiration to try to be better than me. Just inspire them to get on top of their game to be better so that running backs continue to prosper in this league and have coaches and organizations respect us so we can continue to not only play the game we love, but take care of our family." LaDainian Tomlinson, another running back with Texas roots, won the MVP award in 2006, the last time a non-quarterback has won the award. "It would definitely be nice to do

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Hartington Cedar Catholic senior Lexi Steffen stands underneath several of the school's championship banners earlier this month. Steffen, who led the Lady Trojans to a state volleyball title and was an impact athlete in both basketball and track and field, has been selected as the Press & Dakotan's Female Athlete of the Year.

## Press & Dakotan Female Athlete Of The Year

# Steffen Key To Cedar Success



## Three-Sport Star Led Lady Trojans To First Team Title In 23 Years

BY JEREMY HOECK  
[jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net](mailto:jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net)

HARTINGTON, Neb. — The drive back from the school's first main-sport state championship in 23 years was littered with awkward encounters and eerie moments for Lexi Steffen and her teammates. As if winning the Nebraska state Class C2 volleyball title wasn't enough, the volleyball players on that bus were tested one more time. First was a run-in at a buffet with the team Hartington Cedar Catholic had just beat in the finals, Lutheran High Northeast, followed by ominous dark clouds near their hometown. Then came the bus breaks giving way just as the team pulled back into the school parking lot. "It was really spooky," Steffen said during an interview last week in Hartington, Neb., where she has developed into one of the state's top volleyball, basketball and track athletes. For her effort in all three sports, Steffen has been named the Press & Dakotan's 2012 Prep Girls Athlete of the Year, as voted on by the sports department staff. Admitting that volleyball is her favorite of the three sports, Steffen pointed to — of all things — the bus rides as most enjoyable during a memorable fall season that was capped off by the Trojans winning the school's first volleyball title since 1989. "I just love being with my friends," she said. "We're always goofy on those trips. We're never a boring team." Nor has Cedar Catholic been unsuccessful in Steffen's career, particularly in volleyball. The Trojans lost in the 2010 Class C2

championship match, to Lutheran High Northeast, when Steffen was a sophomore, and last year returned to state but lost in the first round. This fall, however, HCC did one better. "Things keep happening here in town. It's hard to explain," head coach Adam Kuntz said. "It's one small thing after another that made the season special. It's weird to sit back and think, 'Wow, look at what these girls did.'" Not only did the volleyball team win 31 of 36 matches, they cracked a 23-year skid for major sports at Cedar Catholic. There are plenty of state runner-up banners inside the gym, but no state title banners for boys' basketball since 1984, none for girls' basketball since 1986 and there had been none for volleyball since 1989. "When you think before we accomplished it, we used to think, 'Oh, who can win the state title,'" Steffen said. "It's such a big thing. You have to go through so much to get to that point. "It wasn't something magical, we just did it." More than just in volleyball, Steffen has played key roles in the Cedar Catholic track and basketball programs over the last 2-3 years. The Trojans lost in the basketball sub-districts last season, coming up short of the state tournament — where HCC finished third two years ago, when Steffen was a sophomore. "It wasn't that awesome last year," she said. "We were all young, new starters, and wanted to have fun." At last spring's state track meet, Steffen — as a junior — took seventh place in the high jump (5-foot-0) and eighth in the triple jump (34-feet-9). There was one particular day during the spring when Steffen found herself pulled in two varying directions — evidence of her multi-sport talents. While working on her jumps during a prac-

## Past Honorees

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|------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2006 ..... | Amber Hegge, Crofton                |
| 2007 ..... | Amber Hegge, Crofton                |
| 2008.....  | Abby Burbach, Yankton               |
| 2009 ..... | Bethany DeLong, Laurel-Concord      |
| 2010.....  | Chrissy Strassburg, Elk Point-Jeff. |
| 2011 ..... | Devon Brecke, Wagner                |
| 2012 ..... | Lexi Steffen, Cedar Catholic        |

tice in Hartington, Steffen lost track of time and found herself running late to a club volleyball practice in Laurel, Neb. "I spced the whole way, honestly," she said. "Plus I forgot my volleyball shoes, and I wasn't about to play in my spikes. Then I got there and the door was locked. It was crazy." Steffen has put so many hours in club volleyball, camps, practices and matches into the sport of volleyball that it has naturally become her best sport — and the one she will likely play at the next level. She has still yet to decide on a college, but has received interest from Nebraska-Omaha, Doane and Nebraska-Wesleyan, among others. "It's a hard decision," Steffen admits. Of course, she still has five months remaining in her high school career, and although basketball and track seasons still loom, the moment that stands out most from her senior year? That memorable bus ride on the way back from state volleyball in Grand Island, Neb. "We were all so tired," she said. "I thought we were going to sleep a while, but it didn't work out."

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at [twitter.com/jhoeck](https://twitter.com/jhoeck)