

## Clinton HS Arrows soccer player receiving national recognition

*Special to The Clinton Courier*

CHS freshman soccer player Luke Bryant comes from a family where soccer runs deep. It is not surprising that he had big soccer dreams from a very early age. What may be surprising is how those dreams have been playing out over the last year.

"Being around the sport my whole life made it natural for me to fall in love with the game," said Bryant. "I have always wanted to play at the highest level possible."

His father, Rusty Bryant, is the executive director of Brilla Soccer Ministries. The ministry also operates a minor league soccer franchise that is based in Clinton.

Luke Bryant began his soccer career playing Mighty Mites in the Clinton Soccer Association. He continued playing in the CSA recreational program until he was old enough to try out and play for Brilla Jrs, the Division 1 partnership between CSA and Brilla. He also made the Clinton High School team as a seventh grader.

His soccer journey took an unexpected acceleration after a conversation last Christmas with Brilla Jrs Technical Director Justin Roberts.

"Coach Justin sat me down for my midseason evaluation last year and asked me how far I wanted to go with soccer," said Bryant. "He told me that I had the ability to play at the highest level, so I told him that I wanted to go as far as I could."

Not long after that conversation, Bryant was invited to play on a club team with Birmingham United Soccer Association (BUSA) in Alabama. He has continued to play for that team while also training and playing with his Brilla Jrs team.

Bryant's BUSA team went on to win the Alabama state championship last spring and competed in the Regional Championships last summer. Shortly after, Bryant attended his first ODP (Olympic Development Program) Region Camp with the Mississippi ODP team. His 2002 age group featured 180 of the top players throughout the Southeast region including Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas.

"I really had no idea what to expect at my first ODP camp," admitted Bryant. "Honestly, I had no idea where it was leading me."

At the end of the ODP Region Camp, he was selected to a holdover group of forty players that remained in camp

for three extra days. Later in the summer, he was named to the eighteen-man Region III ODP team from that group of forty players. The region team was invited to Arizona during Thanksgiving to compete against the other three region teams in the inter-regional event.



Luke Bryant

Photo by Johansson Studio

Bryant said, "The Thanksgiving event was really a great experience for me. It is the first time that I have competed with and against players that were all playing at such a high level."

Bryant performed well at the inter-regional event and recently found out that he was named to the eighteen-man All-Star Team comprised of players from all four regions of the country. In addition, Luke was invited to travel with the Region III team to Argentina during spring break. The team trained in Buenos Aires, and also competed against youth teams from professional clubs in Argentina. They also had the opportunity to attend a professional soccer match.

"I'm excited about the upcoming trip, but I am a little nervous about leaving home," confessed Bryant ahead of the trip. "I know that it is a great opportunity and another step in chasing my dream. I have a long way to go, but I'm excited about the future."

What exactly does the future hold for the Arrows soccer standout? Bryant said that he and his family are praying through every opportunity that comes along, and that he is trusting God to open up the right doors as he chases his dreams...no matter how big those dreams may seem.

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