



The Clinton Courier



CLINTON SOCCER SPECIAL SECTION

Arrows' soccer success goes back almost 50 years

By Danny C. Davis

Clinton High School soccer teams have had a lot of success, with the CHS Arrow boys claiming their 11th state title recently, and the CHS Lady Arrows winning their first title since 1997, after being close to winning the title the last couple years.

But how did Clinton teams become so successful on the soccer fields?

Well, youth soccer in Clinton goes back about fifty years, to the mid 1970s for the boys and just a little later for the girls.

Early soccer for children was said to be available in the Clinton area as early as 1972, and the youth soccer programs continued at the Clinton YMCA for many years. My son played YMCA soccer as early as 1988, when he was four years old, as did many children during that time period.

But, from much research, this is what I learned.

In the early 1970s, Vicksburg had started a youth soccer program sponsored by the Vicksburg Sertoma Club. It was during this time period that the Vicksburg club met with the local Clinton Sertoma Club and asked the Clinton group to organize youth soccer as a service project. So, about twenty guys organized youth soccer at that time.

Games and practices were held in several places around town, including adjacent to the old Mt. Salus Church and school campus, as well as across from the present Baptist Healthplex on a field that in the 1960s was the Crane Football Field where the Clinton Arrows played football. Other locations included the spot where the present Mississippi College softball and tennis courts are on U.S. Highway 80, and also at the old Sumner Hill football field.

"My dad, Tommy Bobo, was involved with Sertoma Soccer from the start," said Thomas Bobo, who played soccer and for Clinton High School 1984-1986, and who later coached the CHS Lady Arrow soccer team for twenty years. Some of the early Sertoma members in Clinton were George Hoff, Joe Mellon, Ron Har-

vell, Thames Burchfield and Rodney Spears, along with others.

"The Sertoma guys did pretty much everything," said Bobo. "I remember watering the fields at night and lining off the fields with my dad."

As a side note, Sertoma International (now known as Sertoma, Inc.) is a service club organization that does not have a soccer affiliation, but rather has a purpose of meeting the needs of their communities through volunteer service.

The Sertoma soccer program had rapid growth. By the early 1980s, around five hundred Clinton youth were playing soccer.

It was somewhere around this time that Sertoma soccer morphed into the present-day Clinton Soccer Association (CSA) and expanded again. But credit goes to the early members of Sertoma Club for having a vision to start a competitive youth soccer program in Clinton. For several years, Sertoma members still held positions on the CSA board of directors, and members remained involved helping direct the program.

By this time, the City of Clinton Parks and Recreation Department had approved the construction of new youth soccer fields at Traceway Park. The first fields built on the west side of Cynthia Road behind some of the youth baseball fields were smaller fields for younger ages, the eight- and ten-year-olds. I know my son played on U8 and U10 CSA teams in the early 1990s in that location.

During the late 1980s or early 1990s, many new soccer fields were added on the east side of Cynthia Road, along with a building for CSA board meetings and equipment storage. Lights for the fields were added years later.

Those early youth soccer programs



YMCS soccer has contributed to Clinton youth's soccer prowess through the years.



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Pictured (l to r) are members of the Clinton Sertoma Club who were instrumental in starting soccer in Clinton: George Hoff, Joe Mellon, Ron Harvel, Dave Clifton, Clyde Hare, Al Omerza and Ray Rabert. The men, along with many others, volunteered with coaching, refereeing, lining the fields, setting up goals, and overseeing the administration and logistics of early youth soccer teams in Clinton, which gave Clinton a bedrock foundation upon which youth continue to play today.



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The 1991 Clinton Arrow boys' soccer team was the first to win a state championship, the first year Coach Hugh Christian took over coaching a sport he said at the time he didn't know much about.



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Several of Coach Hugh Christian's former players returned to watch the boys' 2023 championship game. Pictured (clockwise, from bottom left) are Dean Farrar, Josh Christian, David Gibbs, Mark Robinson, Matt Thomas, Rusty Bryant, Jason Boutwell and Hugh Christian (center).



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Clinton Soccer Association and City officials pictured in 2016 at a ribbon cutting for lights that the CSA purchased for Traceway Park.

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The Clinton Courier congratulates the 2023 Clinton Boys and Girls Soccer teams on their championship wins!