



## Forging a path all their own: Lady Arrows soccer

By Danny C. Davis

Even though boys soccer started in Clinton in the early to mid 1970s, girls teams have been around a long time, also, and the Lady Arrows recently won the 2023 Class 6A MH-SAA state championship, as did the boys. It was the first time since 1997 that both Arrow soccer teams won the soccer state championships.

Early Sertoma boys soccer teams organized in 1975 and often had girls playing on the boys teams in the beginning.

But, by 1984 or 1985, all girl teams were playing girls soccer, and somewhere around this time Sertoma Soccer had morphed into the Clinton Soccer Association.

By the early 1990s, there was lot of interest in starting girls soccer at the high school level.

A petition by Clinton parents got the program started in 1993. That first year, Coach Hugh Christian served as both the CHS boys' and girls' team coach.

"When we started the girls program, it was still not MH-SAA sanctioned; so we started the girls' soccer league up with the same local teams that we were playing in the Little Six Conference in eighth- and ninth-grade sports," said then-CHS Athletic Director David Bradberry. The schedule consisted of Warren Central, Vicksburg, Pearl and Brandon, with St. Andrews and Jackson St. Joe added. The team played 15 games and finished 8-7.

According to Bradberry, the first couple of years, the team played the games in late March, April, and May, in warmer weather months. When the girls' program officially became sanctioned by the MH-SAA, the girls changed schedules to follow the boys' schedule of late November through early February- which



Lady Arrows soccer began in 1993, with the team playing fifteen games



In only their second year of play, 1994, the Lady Arrows took home the state championship, in a program that had still not yet been sanctioned by the MHSAA.

they continue to do now.

CHS assistant football coach Ronald Greer coached the Lady Arrows in the spring of 1994 and 1995 with a lot of successes. The team claimed two

Central Mississippi state championships those years (prior to an MHSAA official girls state championship).

According to the Arrow 1994 yearbook, it was a big accomplishment for the Lady Arrows to win the Central title championship in only the second year of having a team. The 1995 team defeated rival Warren Central in overtime to go a perfect 21-0. The girls received championship rings as the official state champions.

Jane Halbert Jones began playing on the Lady Arrow soccer team as a goal keeper in the ninth grade in 1994.

"A lot of the girls that were on the first teams played on a local Club Team (travel team) called the Sparks coached by Louis Walsh, but some of the girls were from other area schools, and some were from recreation soccer teams," said Jones. "It was a good nucleus of good soccer players to get the girls' soccer program started."

Elizabeth Hayman Carite played on the first team in 1993 and was instrumental, along with others, in talking the Clinton school administrators into starting the girls' program at CHS.

After Coach Greer left Clinton High, the team was coached in 1996 and 1997 by Tonni Ratliff.

In 1996, the MHSAA officially recognized a girls state champion. That year, Coach Ratliff led the Lady Arrows to the first state championship game but fell to Tupelo in the title game, which was one of only two losses the entire season.

But the Lady Arrows made history the next year, in 1997, under Ratliff, winning their first MH-SAA Girls State Championship trophy. That game was played on a cold rainy February day against the Vicksburg

Missy Gators. And what a game it was.

Jane Halbert Jones was a senior and had started for three years as goal keeper and had played that position on Club teams since the sixth grade.

"We were tied 0-0 at the end of regulation and then went to two (10-minute) overtime periods. Vicksburg scored and was up 1-0, and then we scored with about fifteen seconds left in overtime to tie up 1-1," said Jones. The game eventually went to a penalty kick overtime.

"We made three or four of our penalty kicks, and I was just able to block one more of their shots to help us win," said Jones. "But it was truly a team win. We were so excited to win it the second year that a state champion was recognized."

In 1998, Ryan Webb coached the Lady Arrows, and Melissa Ring was the coach in 1999.

In the summer of 1999, Arrow Athletic Director David Bradberry hired Thomas Bobo as the sixth head coach of the Lady Arrows. It proved to be a good long-term run for the Lady Arrows, as Bobo led the team for twenty-one years, from the 2000 season through 2021. The Lady Arrows played for the state championship in 2003 at Roy Burkett Field in the rain and mud for the title and also



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Current Lady Arrows Coach Tyler Wade

fell to Gulfport for the state championship in 2020. But Bobo had brought the program back to get to the title game. Bobo retired later in 2020 after a very successful long run with the program.

Elliot Rimmer, an assistant coach under Bobo, became the seventh Lady Arrow head coach and led CHS to the state championship this year in February, defeating #1-ranked Gulfport 1-0 for the state title.

"I am proud to have been a part of a great program with a lot of girls who were really good players for a long time," said Bobo, who played on early Arrow boys soccer teams in the early and mid 1980s and played college soccer in Florida. "I am so happy for Coach Rimmer and the girls winning the championship this year. I feel like we helped get the program headed in the right direction, and good things are ahead for boys' and girls' soccer teams at Clinton High School."



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**CONGRATS ARROWS!**

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*Congratulations to the State Champion Clinton Boys and Girls Soccer teams!*

