



Arrows' soccer success goes back almost 50 years



Special to The Clinton Courier

CHS yearbook pages celebrating the 1991 champs

started by Sertoma and continued by the Clinton Soccer Association paved the way in the coming years for success and championships at the high school level.

During the 1980-1981 school year, Clinton High School formed a high school boys' team. Danny DeYoung was one of the early CHS soccer team players. Jerry Mahon, a CHS assistant football coach and later CHS head football coach, coached the soccer team until 1985. The team finished in 9-2-1 in 1985.

The team was composed of a lot of "club soccer," or select soccer players, as well as recreational players from Sertoma and CSA. Early teams

had success, but there was not a MH-SAA-sanctioned championship until 1989.

The Clinton High School team had a winning record each year. Ray Barnett, who taught at CHS, followed Mahon as the head soccer coach in 1986 and finished 8-2-1 that year. Barnett also coached the team in 1987 and 1988. Gordon West, who also taught in the school district, coached the CHS Arrow soccer team in 1989 and posted a 13-2-2 season, and the team went 10-5 in 1990.

Hugh Christian, who was a Clinton High offensive line football coach, took over the Arrow boys in 1991.

"Coach Sloan [Clinton High athlet-

ic director and head football coach] called me and asked me to coach the boys' soccer team," said Christian, now retired but still a Clinton resident.

"I told him I did not know much about soccer. He said, 'All you need to do is to discipline the team and get them in shape to play,' and I told him I could do that."

"The kids all played club soccer and knew what to do," said Christian. "I went to soccer clinics and learned the game. We really had a lot of good players on the team."

"We told Coach Christian we knew how to play the game and had the skills," said Matt Thomas, a junior on the 1991 soccer team.

"About nine of us on that team had all played soccer together since we were seven or eight years old," said Brian Burchfield, a 1991 CHS graduate. "We just needed someone to put us together, and Coach Christian did a great job."

Indeed, Christian did have talented players on his team. That year, 1991, began the start of great things to come for the Clinton High boys' soccer team. To say that during the Christian-coached years that Clinton dominated boys' high school soccer would be a gross understatement.

For the next eight years, 1991-1998, Clinton won five MHSAA Boys Class 5A Championships (1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, and 1997), and they were MHSAA runner up state champs in 1995 and 1998.

This was really an unbelievable run under Christian, whose coaching record at CHS was 157-9 in those eight years as head coach!

After the 1998 season, Christian resigned to coach Clinton High School baseball, and 1991 CHS graduate Ryan Webb coached the team for the 1999 season.

Beginning in 2000, former Clinton Arrow baseball standout Jeff Long coached the Arrow boys' soccer team for thirteen years until 2012. Long guided the Arrows to four state championships - 2005, 2006, 2009, and 2012.

"I took over after Coach Christian had established a tradition of winning state championships in the 90s," said Long. "I definitely felt the pressure of maintaining that tradition. I am proud of what we accomplished in those thirteen years. After the back-to-back years in 2005 and 2006, the 2007 squad went 27-2 and lost in penalty kicks at Tupelo for the North half. They defeated Brandon easily for the 2007 title. We were so close to a three-peat. But to go to the finals five times in thirteen years, winning it four times, I feel like we maintained the tradition and expectations of the program."

Former Arrow soccer standout Michael Brown coached the Arrow soccer team in 2013, then current coach Tyler Wade took over the program in 2014 and has led the Arrow boys to back-to-back championships in 2022 and 2023.

The future looks bright again for the Arrow boys to compete for a third straight championship in 2024, with all but one starter returning next year.

"It's great to see the program back on top," said Long, "and Tyler is doing a fantastic job. I hope they get the three-peat next year."

AMR congratulates the Boys and Girls Soccer team on their 6A State Championships!



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Boys and Girls State Champions!



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Way to go Arrows!

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