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Lady Arrows win first soccer state championship since 1997

in 2021.

CHS went on an amazing late season surge in wins to win the championship. Clinton stood just 6-5-1 on December 16 at about the season mid-way mark. But the Clinton girls were on fire the final eleven games of the season on the championship run, going on a 9-1-1 run to finish 15-6-2. Gulfport finished 19-2-1, with their only other loss being against coast rival Ocean Springs.

The lone goal for CHS came from sophomore Isabella Jones with 7:45 left in the first half. Jones hit the back of the net on a 20-yard shot after receiving a cross from Breanna Richards.

"The shot just happened so fast," said Jones. "It was there, and I just hit it, and it was so amazing when it went in. As soon as it hit the back of the net I thought, "Oh my gosh, we scored and might win the championship this year!"

After Jones' goal the Lady Arrow defense shut out the #1-ranked Lady Admirals for the final 47 minutes and 15 seconds. Gulfport only had five shots on the goal against the Lady Arrow's defense.

"We knew coming into the game that Gulfport's strength was their offensive attack, and our strength was our defense," said third-year Lady Arrow head coach Elliot Rimmer. "Gulfport had only one loss and one tie during the regular season, and we were the team that tied them 0-0. So, we knew we could play with them and would have a good chance if we could come up with a little offense."

The win was extra sweet for the three seniors on the team that had been so close twice before, including senior Molly Lenow.

"I got real excited when we got ahead; but I also knew that Gulfport was a great team, and we would have to work hard to win it. I was a freshman when we lost to them three years ago, so this is a very special way to go out. As seniors, we feel we have made our mark, and they have a good chance to get back next year."

The other two seniors on the team this year are twins, Brooke and Breanna Richards.

Lady Arrow goalkeeper Sarah Polk played a key role in shutting out the Lady Admirals from scoring, along with Clinton's back line defense.

Polk continued to stop Gulfport in the second half to preserve the 1-0 lead.

"I was actually not nervous tonight like I was in the past years we played for the championship," said Polk, a junior. "In my opinion, there was just no other option but to win tonight. They [Gulfport] were not producing up top very good tonight, so I just knew if our defense could just stay focused and I could just stay focused, that we were going to win."

"We knew coming in that Gulfport was an excellent team at attacking," said Rimmer. "So we challenged our back line by telling the girls that 'if you guys can keep Gulfport bottled up, then we will have a good chance to win this thing with just one goal.'"

"On our back line were juniors Mckenzie Price and Jada Watson and sophomore Mandy Leach. In front of them was junior Cooper Holmes and senior Breanna Richards, who really kept Gulfport bottled up, and Sarah back in the goal that made so many saves."

"When we got ahead 1-0, I really was thinking that it was going to take two goals for us to win it," said Rimmer. "But, all year long, we seem to have always done it the hard way. So, the hard way got us the win tonight."

"We felt like our standards are what they are; and, at the first of the year, we felt like we had a good chance to win the state championship this year. This was our third appearance in the championship game in four years, so we just felt like this was our year. We were ready and felt like the stars were aligned after twenty-six years to win it all."

For the younger Lady Arrow players, the future already looks bright again for next year.

"It is a great feeling to win the championship for the first time in a long time," said sophomore defender Kate Crisler. "And we only have three seniors on the team, so we feel we have a great chance to get back to the championship again next year."



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