

The Portsmouth Times  
September 5, 2019

By Jacob Smith

MINFORD – As the game of soccer continues to grow across the nation and in the state of Ohio, the Minford School District and Minford Athletic Department are taking steps to continue that trend in Southeastern Ohio.

At the beginning of this fall sports season, Minford became the first school district in Scioto County to offer the chance to play for separate school-affiliated boys and girls junior high soccer teams.

This fall season marks the first OHSAA sanctioned junior high boys and girls soccer teams in Minford's history.

"We were looking at the development of youth sports, especially on the girls side," said Minford varsity girls soccer coach Shane Tieman. "We recognized that the club or academy presence in our area isn't really that strong for soccer. When kids get to that junior high level, kids really want to identify with playing for their school."

While these teams have been in existence at the youth level, there was no school affiliation tied to the Minford youth soccer movement. Affiliating these teams with the school district and the OHSAA is purely positive, according to Tieman.

"For a lot of them, soccer is a really important part of their life," Tieman said. "Previously, the teams weren't recognized by the school, it wasn't in the yearbook, it wasn't at the awards banquet. There was an acknowledgement by the players, the parents, coaches, and the schools that we wanted to make this a part of the schools."

Ryan Montavon, Megan Killingsworth, and Emma Shoemaker are the coaches for the Minford junior high girls' program while Matt Brooks and Chad McHenry lead the junior high boys program. At the time of the interview with Tieman, Minford's junior high girls team had 15 players while the boys team had 13 players.

When the discussions came up regarding the possibility of taking these steps to make their junior high programs school affiliated, Tieman said those discussions were very open and goal-oriented.

"The school district was very receptive to it, it was a unanimous decision to approve it on a pilot program basis to see where we can build this. We're going to self-fund and see where it goes from there, I have a feeling it's just going to keep growing. Our community is very excited about it and so are our teams."

Instead of going the route that some schools have with developing a single junior high team that includes both boys and girls, Tieman noted their focus and the importance of creating two separate teams for both boys and girls.

“It was important for us to have two separate teams. At the age of 13 and 14, the physicality of the two different programs based on gender is different. This way they can grow on and off the field as a team and get ready for the high school level.”

Minford’s teams have plans to play local, non-Scioto County teams that are junior high OHSAA affiliated including Alexander, Jackson, Circleville, Chillicothe and Scioto County teams such as Northwest, South Webster and New Boston.

After being at the forefront on the movement to develop both boys and girls junior high soccer teams, Tieman believes other Scioto County schools will soon follow Minford’s lead in that regard.

“Northwest has a boys team with girls on it, they kind of blazed the trail for that. Now South Webster and New Boston have junior high boys teams, and I hope that other schools follow suit. Soccer is getting bigger and bigger in the United States, and the success of the US Women’s Team is really big for the growth of girls youth sports.”