

When the position of head boys soccer coach at Mendham High School opened earlier this year, there was only one serious candidate for the job.

That person was Lindsay Schartner, the program's assistant coach since 2015, who happens to be a woman.

Schartner's hire coincides with the 50th anniversary of Title IX, the federal civil rights law that affords equal opportunities for females. While the coaching selection shows how opportunities for women in sports have grown exponentially, the direct message the school was sending in hiring a woman to coach a team full of boys was that it was seeking to continue a level of excellence that has been present throughout Schartner's time with the program.

In her six years as an aide to prior coach Russ Raffay, Schartner was entrusted with much of the team's daily strategy. Her work helped the Minutemen win NJSIAA Group 3 state championships in 2015 and '17.

Now, the Morristown native and mother of two is the one in charge, and not only that, her assistant, Alyssa Shannon, is also a woman, giving Mendham a unique distinction in Morris County and beyond.

"Lindsay was a natural choice," Mendham athletic director Ned Panfile said. "She's been with the program for a number of years. She had an interview and was off the charts. It was an easy transition. It's not a male/female thing at all. The only thing the kids care about is that they are being coached."

That sentiment is echoed by her players.

"This is nothing new," said junior defender Jack Mclaud. "For as long as I've been in the program she's been running formations and other stuff. None of us think anything of having a woman as our coach. It's been normal for us."

Soccer is one the few high school team sports with no differences between the sexes. Games are the same length, the rules are the same, and even in comparison to a sport like basketball, the size of the ball is no different.

"I'm not a female coach," Schartner said. "I'm a coach. Additionally, I think from what I know of my players, so many of them have strong, female role models in their families, we also have strong female administrators and teachers in our schools and we have a community that supports empowering all people, so it's not unusual for our players to see women in leadership roles. As a result, it just isn't a big deal to them."

Schartner, who graduated from Providence College in 2006 with a major in Political Science with a double major in History and Business Studies, has been coaching soccer since she was 13, when she enrolled and received her USSF "F" coaching license.

"My little cousin was starting rec soccer and they needed another coach, so I went and got certified and coached her team as an 8th grader," she said.



NJSIAA TRAILBLAZER



Schartner coaching Mendham High school boys soccer.

Schartner endured major adversity as a senior at Morristown, when she suffered a broken back. The injury ended her promising playing career, but steered her further toward coaching.

"I couldn't play anymore, and I was asked to help out with a 4th grade travel soccer team at Morris United," she said. "I absolutely loved it and continued to help out when I came home from college. I never originally planned to go into teaching, but my love for coaching made me realize I also loved working with young people. I came back and coached with my former high school coaches, Jen and John Furphey, and started coaching club soccer and continuing my coaching education. Since then I have continued to work on that and just received news two weeks ago that, after completing a five-month course, that I earned my USSF "C" license."



TITLE IX 50
Celebrating and Growing Opportunities

Schartner is also an active mom. Her husband Mark, (they met as students at Providence) is the head boys basketball and golf coach at West Morris. Their children, Jack (10) and Emily (6) are always close by. She had been a girls soccer assistant at Mendham for eight years after graduating from college, but upon having her second child, figured it was time to step aside to spend more time with her young family. But a month into the next season, Raffay's assistant became ill. He was looking for some help for Mendham's next game, which happened to be against a Morristown side whose assistant coach was Lindsay's brother, John Weber.

"Russ, knowing how competitive I am, asked if I wanted to help beat my brother, since his assistant was unable to attend," she recalled. "I couldn't turn that down, had an absolute blast coaching the boys, and then was there every day after as a varsity assistant coach. It made me realize how much I loved coaching soccer and that I really missed it. I think because of the way I was brought into the staff, it never really phased me to coach boys."

Now that she's the head coach, Schartner - who is Mendham's International Career Programme Coordinator and also teaches a Personal and Professional Skills course - is finding a few differences from her prior job as assistant.

"I think the biggest difference is that as an assistant coach, my role was to just worry about the technical and tactical details. I just 'coached.' But as a head coach, there is so much more you have to consider: the paperwork, communication, and probably the biggest is enforcing and shaping the culture of the program. It is a balance that I am still learning and working on every day. I feel so fortunate that I got to learn about these additional things from great mentors and role models in Russ Raffay, and Jen and John Furphey."

Schartner is also fortunate to be a part of the generation that has benefited from Title IX.



Schartner coaching Mendham High school boys soccer.

"I am so grateful to be a part of the Title IX generation," she said. "Growing up, my teammates and I had real opportunities to fully immerse ourselves in the game. I was able to play soccer at the highest youth club level, travel all over the country with my team at PDA and be recruited by Division 1 college schools. Unfortunately, due to my back injury, my career was cut short and instead of playing in college, I had two surgeries on my back during my freshman and sophomore years in college. However, I fully recognize the effect that Title IX had in growing the opportunities I was given as a player. During my senior year at Morristown, my team made it to the Morris County Tournament finals and I so clearly remember the large crowd that came out to support a girls high school soccer game. My mother always said there would be moments like that game that would give her chills on how much things changed for female athletes. She was an incredible athlete and expresses to me all the time how she wishes female sports were given opportunities when she was in high school and college in the mid '70s."

Schartner is also excited for the possibilities for females in sports going forward, especially for her own daughter.

"While there is still so much that can be done to support women in sports, it is nice to see female athletes and coaches being talked about and celebrated so that they are visible role models for young girls," she said. "It is an exciting time and I can't wait to see the opportunities my own daughter will have in the coming years due to the continued impact and growth of women's sports as a result of Title IX."

