



Madeira Board of Education, 7465 Loannes Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45243  
Kenji Matsudo, Superintendent  
Dave Bergan, Assistant Superintendent  
Diane Nichols, Public Relations  
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## Bananas to Benevolence

During the 2002-2003 school year, three Madeira High School (MHS) students started a spirit group to cheer on the Madeira Mustang and Amazon Varsity Basketball teams. Seventeen years later, the group they started is still supporting Madeira athletics – and has been incorporated into the school’s Entrepreneurship class which has donated over \$70,000 to charities.

In the winter of 2002, spirit for the men’s and women’s basketball teams was flailing. The Mustangs’ white game jerseys had been replaced by new yellow ones, which lead to comments that the players looked like bananas. MHS Class of 2003 seniors Andy Nichols, Chris Nolan, and Jeff Stambough had witnessed Reading High School’s ‘Blue Crew’ fans’ enthusiasm during their high school football and soccer careers. The three decided to create a spirit group, and banking on the banana comments named it The Banana Bunch. Nichols, Nolan and Stambough paid to have bright yellow t-shirts printed, which they sold to students to wear to the games. Shirt proceeds above their costs were used to purchase three-foot inflatable bananas from the then Cincinnati based Chiquita Company. They passed the bananas out at all home and away Madeira Varsity basketball games, then collected and deflated them after the game ended. As the group’s popularity grew and they sold more brightly colored yellow shirts, they bought more bananas. Students wearing the bright yellow shirts sat together at the games, waving bananas to cheer the teams on. Andrew Donaldson, a reporter for Madeira’s school newspaper, stated in a 2003 article, “The Banana Bunch is a great start to reviving school spirit at Madeira High School. No longer do fans sit down and not pay attention to the game; they are standing the entire game cheering.”



*Inaugural Banana Bunch members at a 2003 Madeira basketball game*



*Entrepreneurship students selling Banana Bunch t-shirts at a recent Madeira basketball game; Jacob Constantini, Haley Hartung, Sam Eppert, Joey Jallaq, and Naomi Simmons*

The school’s Entrepreneurship class, designed to integrate essential elements of entrepreneurship into a competition between teams, stepped in the following year. Students in the class learn to create and execute a business plan for a non-profit company focusing on sales, marketing, promotions, charities, finance, advertising pitches, management, and business plans. Money raised from the sale of the winning team’s product is donated to a charity they’ve selected.

At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, students in the Entrepreneurship class asked business teacher Jennifer Jordan if they could design and sell a new Banana Bunch shirt to

continue the spirit group that had started the year before. The rest is history. From the 2004-2005 school year on, the new Banana Bunch t-shirt design has been an official part of entrepreneur students' team competitions. Each of three 'companies' creates and designs a shirt, then pitches their concept to the girls and boys basketball players, cheerleaders, and student government officers. They select the winning design which has been made into shirts and sold to students during the past 16 basketball seasons.

The Entrepreneurship class now also hosts an annual event where students wearing Banana Bunch shirts to a game are entered into a halftime raffle, and old and new shirts are sold. What started as a way to encourage Madeira basketball fans to root for their team now helps encourage students to become successful entrepreneurs.