

Officials' Appreciation Week Profile: **Carl Rickershauser**

Few people are more synonymous with the sports of cross country and track and field in New Jersey than Carl Rickershauser.

His track officiating career may have officially launched in 1966, but he actually became involved in the late '50s, while a cross country and track athlete at Montclair State. There were no officials at dual meets back then, but on days off, his coach would send his athletes to nearby schools to help out.

Once beginning as an NJSIAA official 56 years ago, he began a climb that has him very active in the sports to this day.

Over the years, he took on additional roles both assigning and interpreting rules. He's been a New Jersey Track and Field Officials State Executive Board Member since 1977, member of the NJSIAA Cross Country, Indoor and Outdoor Track committees since 1999 in addition to being NJSIAA Cross Country and Track and Field Rules Interpreter since 2001.

In addition to all of that, Carl has also represented the NJSIAA at annual NFHS rules interpretation meetings. He's also served on numerous NJSIAA committees, including the Executive Committee, and received many honors for his coaching and officiating work.

Earlier this year, he and longtime time friend and officiating partner Ed Colona were presented with a very prestigious award, the NJSIAA Award of Honor.

Carl graduated from Union High School in 1954, where he lettered in Cross Country and Indoor and Outdoor Track and Field. He lettered in the same sports at Montclair State Teachers College, where he graduated in 1958.

He worked as an educator, teaching social studies and serving as guidance director, at Edgewood High School from 1958 through '74.

From 1958 through 1966, he was head coach of Cross Country and Indoor and Outdoor Track teams at Edgewood. His teams totaled 17 championships, including Penn Relays, Olympic Conference, Camden County, South Jersey Group 2 and NJSIAA Outdoor Group 2 victories.

From 1974 through '98, he moved over to Collingswood, where he served a variety of posts, including six years as athletic director, as well as vice principal, principal and assistant superintendent.



Carl Rickershauser on the left, with long-time officiating colleague Ed Colona.

From 1989 through 2012, Carl served in the capacity of Educational Administrator Mentor for the NJDOE/ NJPSA/FEA. In that role, he mentored more than 65 elementary, middle school and high school athletic directors, vice principals, principals and district curriculum directors.

All the while, he's been a dedicated fixture at NJSIAA events, whether it be cross country in the fall, indoor track in the winter or outdoor track in spring.

In his role as a rules interpreter and assignor, he's on hand at state meets, and also answers other questions as they arise throughout the season. He also assigns the officials who work state meets.

As a long-time educator on top of his officiating work, he notes a very important correlation between the two that he feels all involved, including the officials, must be acutely aware of.

"They have to realize that it's a privilege to be involved," he said. "And that a meet is an extension of school. That means a responsibility for athletes' health, safety and welfare."

It also means being fair. Track officials sometimes take heat for strict enforcement of rules, especially when it results in a disqualification.

"We don't want to do that," he said. "But we have to be firm but fair when it applies to the rules. We have to consider and treat the athletes as if they are our own. If something happens in a meet, I'll call the coach over and explain it. We want to be fair. We want to make a difference in kids' lives."

He's seen track and field make a difference over the years in watching New Jersey superstars like Milt Campbell, Carl Lewis, Ron Dayne, Sydney McLaughlin and plenty more become world-class stars, but also sees it in the thousands more who compete on annual basis for NJSIAA schools.

"Cross Country and track and field are very social," he said. "It's unique in having boys and girls competing on the same field and at the same time. The competition, the interactions and the lessons learned are important part of their development."

As someone who has been involved for so long, he's also seen his share of funny and interesting moments. There are some which definitely stand out.

"I was at a state meet one time and standing with an another official, and this poor kid walked up to us and asked what direction does he run in. We laughed and explained everything to him."

Even better was the time at a smaller meet, a local relay championship in South Jersey.

"A girls team had their third runner in a 4x400 pass out of the lane," he recalled. "So when they were done, we were calling for their coach. The race was still finishing up, and one of their young ladies came over, and I asked where was the coach, and she said, 'Oh, she's just finishing the race now.' It broke the place up! Because they didn't have a runner, the coach actually ran the fourth leg of the relay! She was in uniform and ran because the girl who was supposed to run fourth never showed up."

He also has advice for anyone thinking of becoming an official.

"It's a privilege," he said. "And it can be very rewarding. You have to understand and appreciate that by becoming involved, you are helping to make a difference in lives of the kids who are out there competing."