

Officials' Appreciation Week Profile: **Mike Bartram**

Like many officials working high school football games, Mike Bartram's love of the sport began as a player.

"I played my high school ball right here in New Jersey at Notre Dame in Lawrenceville," he said. "After that, I played one year of prep school at Hargrove Military Academy in Virginia."

His football playing career ended at that point, and he went on to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. After graduating, he was commissioned as an Ensign and served two sea tours as a Surface Welfare Officer.

"My final two years in the Navy were spent back in Annapolis as an instructor," he said. "While there, I had a chance to work with the Sports Information Department for home football games.



Being a part of the game day experience started me thinking about how I could get more involved with the game. When I moved back to New Jersey, I did some research about officiating and I decided I wanted to try it. Right now, I only do football, but would do another sport if my work schedule allowed."

This is his 16th season as a varsity official and his first as NJSIAA state rules interpreter. He's naturally suited for that role, since he had taken on various leadership duties in his local chapter, while always having a special interest in rules.

What do you do in your job as the rules interpreter for NJSIAA football?

"As the NJSIAA rules interpreter, there are a few responsibilities. At the start of the season, I need to brief all our officials on the rule changes for that season. I also need to be available to officials, coaches, and administrators for any questions they may have on a rule or procedure. I am also the point of contact for New Jersey and the National Federation of High Schools."

What do you enjoy most about being an official?

"There are two things. First, I am very glad to be part of a game that I love. The second is the friendships I have made with my fellow officials."

What's the best part about any given day of officiating?

"I really love all that goes into high school football; the fans, the bands, the atmosphere. I always try to take a minute or two before every game to take it all in."

Do you have any memories from your first game as an official?

“That first varsity game, I think I was too nervous to have a memory! What I remember most was how helpful and supportive the other officials were, knowing it was my first varsity assignment. They were very welcoming and made me feel like part of the team.”

Do you have any funny memories of an interaction between yourself and a coach?

“My first season as a cadet, I was working a freshman game with two other first-year officials (because of a scheduling mixup). It was very early in the season, and the opening kickoff went out of bounds. Now we knew it was a foul, so we throw a flag, but the problem was, we hadn’t got to that chapter of the rule book. The coach of the offended team yelled ‘We’ll take the ball at the 35.’ I looked at the other officials and said, ‘Put it on the 35.’ I think that if that coach yelled ‘Put it on the 50 and give us 3 points,’ that is what we may have done!”

What’s the biggest misconception about the job of being an official?

“I think many people believe that we just show up, work a game, and leave. There is a lot more that we have to do to prepare for the game. We are on site at least 90 minutes and sometimes two hours before the game. We spend that time discussing any situations from the previous week and reviewing our responsibilities for that night. Then once the game is over, we start getting ready for the next week by reviewing film, going to our weekly meeting, and putting some time in the rule book.”

What would you say to anyone thinking about becoming an official?

“Do it! You won’t regret your decision!”