

Officials' Appreciation Week Profile:

Sharon Hughes

Sharon Hughes has spent most of her life around high school sports, with much of it involving officiating.

After graduating from Montclair State in 1976, she began her coaching career soon after with the women's basketball team at Rutgers Newark. At the same time, she took the test to become a volleyball and basketball official.

She's been an active teacher, coach and administrator, as well as an official, ever since.

She taught physical education, coached basketball and softball and served as athletic director at Immaculate Conception-Lodi and Paramus Catholic, and taught, coached softball and served as athletic director at Passaic Tech.

She's been involved in various NJSIAA committees, including the Executive Committee, and is Executive Director of the Big North Conference.

She has been NJSIAA volleyball rules interpreter since 1994 and served as state tournament director and assignor from 1994-2021.



What do you do in your job as an assignor and rules interpreter?

Since I do both, each involves answering phone calls, emails and text messages from athletic directors, coaches, and officials. Each duty has its challenges. Whether it is trying to ensure all matches are covered as assignor or overseeing a rule controversy, the job is exciting and rewarding but sometimes exhausting.

What do you enjoy most about being an official?

There is nothing better than dealing with high school athletes and coaches. It has been my life for 46 years. I have been lucky enough to have been involved in all aspects of athletics as a player, coach, athletic director and official. All these experiences have given me the tools I need to be effective in my present roles.

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

There are so many and it is difficult to pick just one. I really enjoy what I do and like to have some fun. Years ago at a match at Hawthorne High School, my partner, Pete Lukach and I both were wearing Claddagh rings and he convinced the players at the officials table that we were married. His wife still calls me his volleyball wife.

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

This might sound trite because it is just a small facet of a match, but I really enjoy getting to know my line judges during timeouts. I question them about their likes and future plans.

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

Fear is the first memory that comes to mind. The first few years, every match felt like it was the championships. I was happy to have understanding officials and coaches, which assisted in my development.

Do you have a particular funny memory of an interaction between yourself and a player or coach?

I had just finished a match and was signing the scorebook when an older man came over to voice his displeasure in a call. When he finished, I replied "Thank you." This isn't the funny memory. I decided I should let the coach know. When I informed the coach of this exchange, her response was "Doesn't he know who you are?" This has really stayed with me, because most spectators have no idea how many years you have worked or what roles you may had.

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

As a volleyball official, I hear a lot that your job is easy. Just because there isn't an obvious physical component doesn't mean it is easy. There are many calls involving ball handling, alignment and back row play which must be monitored on each rally.

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

It is the best decision you can ever make. It is a great way to stay involved in the sport that you may love because you played it or have watched. The camaraderie with your fellow officials and experience with players and coaches are profound.

