

# Officials' Appreciation Week Profile:

# Billy Martin

Billy Martin offers proof that there many ways to get involved in athletics as a high school student. And in addition, that involvement can pay off later in life.

As a student at Gateway Regional High School in Woodbury Heights, he was the official scorer/statistician for the boys basketball team. In that up-close role at games, he took notice of the work done by the game officials.

"I realized their mechanics were scripted and easily mimicked," he said. "I jumped into refereeing gym class basketball games as a 16 year old junior in high school. Once graduating, I joined the local IAABO basketball organization (Camden Board 34) as an 18 year old. And now, 45 years later, I'm still grateful to have the desire and physical ability to officiate high school basketball. In addition, I became a high school soccer referee and softball umpire."

Martin has progressed to become an accomplished NCAA umpire, working multiple championship tournaments in college softball.

Over the past 45 years, he has served in capacities of Supervisor of Officials, Cadet Trainer for new officials, and most recently, the NJSIAA State Basketball Rules Interpreter. He's also the local rules interpreter for South Jersey Board 196, which covers Cape May, Atlantic, Cumberland and surrounding South Jersey counties.

"Beyond officiating, I'm really passionate about educating other officials," he said. "We've launched several key projects, including Ref60.com for basketball officials, the IAABO Video Basketball Simulator and I've also co-authored six different top-ranked sports officiating books on Amazon (basketball and softball)."

He's been the NJSIAA basketball rules interpreter for the past four years.

## ***What do you do in your job as rules interpreter?***

It's all about supporting the other New Jersey chapter interpreters. We have an amazing group of talented officials that offer their time and talent to support their local chapters. As a collective group, we make sure there is only one rule interpretation no matter what part of the state teams compete in. We all try to educate our officials by knowing the rules for every situation.



***Billy Martin (right) and Gene Steratore, NFL Analyst for CBS Sports***



***What do you enjoy most about being an official?***

By far, it's about the camaraderie and brother / sisterhood. You meet some lifelong friends when you join an officiating organization. It's a lifelong family experience. We travel together, vacation together, and grow old together.

***Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?***

A Camden vs Woodrow Wilson boys playoff game about 20 years ago. Packed house and it was a two-person crew. I can still remember the Woodrow Wilson player coming down the lane toward me to win the game, hoping if being fouled, it would be a good one, that everyone saw. But no contact and the ball rolled around the ring, and Camden won. Hundreds of fans poured onto the floor. Those types of competitive matchups are the ones you remember.

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

I love the preparation and pre-game discussions we have as a crew. These are all teaching moments and provide opportunities to bring along less experienced officials. It's about "staying green" and continuously learning, every time out on the floor.

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

I was 18 years old, and it was a Freshman Christmas Tournament game at Pennsauken High School. We were all cadets, piled into the dressing room to be run out on the floor for one-half of a game to be observed. Basically to see if our learning the previous months had stuck. I was fortunate to have a great first time on the court, and was asked to stick around and work the championship game later that afternoon. It's something you don't forget.

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

As a young official, a coach tried to bust down the door to the official's dressing room to get at us. My colleague was saying, let him in ... but we didn't. He was a young coach as well. Roll the clock forward ... we're both still working (as an official and coach) and have an amazing amount of mutual respect for one another.

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

That it's easy. The amount of preparation to learn the craft and refine your skills every year is incredible. As we get older, it's important to focus on staying in shape --- as the athletes never age ... only the officials.

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

If you make the choice, make sure to embrace all the greatness. Try to block out the interference of fans, players, coaches and focus on the job. It's about knowing the rules, like it's nobody's business. Work games at every level to see as many live plays as you can, since that builds solid judgment. And never allow a coach, player, or spectator to challenge your integrity. Sports officiating is a lifetime avocation that brings so many rewards, it's hard to describe. Take the leap ... you won't regret it.

***Think you might be interested in becoming a high school sports official?  
Check out this link to learn more: <https://www.njsiaa.org/officials/become-official>***