

Officials' Appreciation Week Profile:

Jeff Cohen

Jeff Cohen's start in basketball officiating was an interesting one.

"I played basketball in many men's leagues after high school," he said. "I would give officials a hard time."

One of those refs, a man named Paul Armstrong, took notice.

"He told me if I know so much, why don't I become an official?"

Cohen took those words to heart, and enrolled in a class. That was in 1984, and he's been calling games ever since.

Aside from his high school officiating, he also worked college games from 1993 through 2008. He's also been a high school football official from 1993 through the present.

He became a local basketball assignor in 2000, handling the officiating assignments for roughly 70 schools, for all genders and levels. He's also a football assignor for sub-varsity levels and chain crews. Additionally, he's been the NJSIAA tournament assignor for South Jersey for the past 10 years.

Cohen is one of eight individuals being inducted this month into the South Jersey Basketball Hall of Fame by the Albert Carino Basketball Clubs of South Jersey. He's being recognized for his work on the court, which includes seven state finals, and for assigning an estimated 50,000 games over the course of his career.

What do you do in your job as an assignor?

I assign all levels and genders for 70 schools in Camden, Burlington and Gloucester Counties, placing officials into assignments working with their experience, level of expertise and a school's needs. I also assign sub-varsity football as well.

What do you enjoy most about being an official?

I love high school sports and love being a part of it. I love being involved, and the camaraderie.

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

I worked the Tournament of Champions final in 2002, St. Anthony's beating Neptune. I've worked numerous Division 3 games and the junior college Philly area final in 2003, but all of the games were/are fun.

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

Leaving the game knowing that you did your best, and did not have any effect or affect on the outcome.



Do you have a particular funny memory of an interaction from a game?

Well, I waved off a basket at the end of a middle school game once in Moorestown. It did not beat the buzzer and the home crowd was not happy. An older woman in her 70's or 80's came up to me afterwards. She was very sweet and asked if I was the ref who called off the basket. I said yes, and then she said that it was her grandson who shot the ball, and she whacked me with her purse!

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

That we care about who wins the game, or that we favor one side or the other. It's not true!

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

You have to have a thick skin, but it's a fun thing to do. You get a workout, you are around young people, you make some money and you stay involved with sports.

***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>***