

Officials' Appreciation Week Profile: Craig Yetman



Craig Yetman's introduction to a baseball umpiring was like that of many others.

The difference in his case is that it resulted in an on-field career that lasted nearly 50 years, and administrative role that is ongoing.

"I started working Little League games at 14 as a way to make some cash," he said. "Then I took a course in college about coaching and officiating. That, and a veteran umpire took me under his wing to join a Chapter at 18."

He would up umpiring for the next 47 years. And not only that, he officiated basketball for 45 years.

He has also been involved off the field in administrative roles, and now serves as Baseball Rules Interpreter for the NJSIAA.

What do you do in your job as a rules interpreter?

As baseball interpreter for the NJSIAA, I help with the writing of the baseball regulations and tournament procedures. I also clarify rules for coaches and umpires when a ruling is questioned.

What have you enjoyed most about being an official?

It was rewarding to stay connected with the game and being around student-athletes. The relationships developed over my career with fellow officials endure today and I count them as some of my best friends.

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

One of my most memorable moments officiating was the first state final that I was chosen to work. It was a thrilling 2-1 game with a walk-off hit in the bottom of the seventh.

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

For me, it was the lead-up to a game. Making sure your uniform and equipment is ready, thinking about the matchup and meeting with the officiating crew.

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



Craig Yetman's final play as a NJSIAA baseball home plate umpire

My first varsity game was a play-in county tournament game. Talk about being thrown into the fire. I recall one coach looking at me and saying, "How old are you?" For the record, I was 19.

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

My partner beat me to an appeal play where the runner missed first base. When the out call was made, the coach came out arguing loudly. They went nose to nose. This was before disqualification meant a two-game sit out. As the coach left the argument on the way back to the bench, he said to me, "Remind me to never argue with that guy again."

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

We are there to ensure that an interscholastic sporting event is played fairly and in accordance with the rules. We are not there to hurt a school or individual, and sometimes errors are made. We take it harder and more personally than any coach, player or fan does. It sticks with us a long time.

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

Officiating high school sports is rewarding and a great way to stay connected with a sport you love. It is tough at the beginning, but if you work hard, study rules and mechanics, you will begin to get recognized by schools, coaches and fellow officials.

***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>***