

## *Officials Appreciation Week Profile:*

# Charlotte Heenan

Charlotte Heenan's earliest memories of officiating trace back to the most basic of things - playing with the other kids in her neighborhood.

"I grew up in Westville in Gloucester County," she said. "There were tons of kids in the neighborhood and there was always some kind of game on, whether it be kick ball, football, kick the can, hopscotch or games we made up on our own. If the weather was bad, there were card games, board games, jax, hide and seek, etc. Most parents worked so when there was a disagreement, we just had to work it out on our own. I guess that was my initial foray into becoming a referee."

She branched out into organized sports, and ultimately found one that she loved in field hockey.

"In spring and summer, the local rec offered baseball and softball," Charlotte said. "I was the first girl in town to play little league baseball. In the winter it was basketball, in the fall, I played the only sport offered for girls - CYO soccer. And when I got to Gateway High School, and they didn't have a girls soccer team, I went out for field hockey. Being a quintessential 'tom-boy', the coach asked 'Who doesn't want to wear a kilt?' My hand shot up and I became a goalie. From there, I fell in love with the sport and it has helped to shape my life ever since."

In college, Charlotte wound up playing on powerful teams at Trenton State College, where she thrived. In addition to a full career of field hockey, she played lacrosse and softball for one year each.

An inductee into its Athletic Hall of Fame, she is considered the greatest goaltender in program history. She started 101 straight games from 1983 through '86, and set numerous school records.

"I attended Trenton State College, experienced success with two national championships and earning All-America honors in 1986," she said. "I was on the 5 year plan, so when my eligibility was finished, I joined the field hockey coaching staff, where one of my jobs was to read the rulebook. It was my first taste into truly understanding a game that I had been playing for 10 years! I remained on the coaching staff at TSC and eventually became a grad assistant earning a MEd. in Health."

Her coaching career ultimately evolved into officiating.

"From 1992-94, I was the head field hockey and lacrosse coach at Towson State University, and when I returned to New Jersey in 1994, I wanted to remain involved with the sport I loved, so I reached out to Jane Hansen, a leader in field hockey umpiring, and she got me started with officiating. Twenty nine years later, I'm still grateful to Jane for guiding me along the path of officiating and have managed to follow in her local footsteps by becoming the NJSIAA State Field Hockey Rules Interpreter."

During those 29 years, she has worked at the NCAA Div. 1, 2 and 3 levels, including many D2 and D3 Final Fours. She currently focuses on the D3 and high school levels.



## Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Charlotte Heenan:

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

“As rules interpreter, it’s my job to understand and apply the rules as they exist for the good of the game. Along with that comes the responsibility of educating officials, coaches and spectators about the rules of a game that is sometimes not so easy to understand. I field questions throughout the season about uniforms, equipment and rule applications - including video clips of game situations. Usually, I’m called upon to clarify a misunderstanding or provide a ruling when there is a misapplication of the rules. I try work from a preventative platform by giving the officials and coaches all the information they may need in advance of the season so that misunderstandings or misapplications don’t happen.”



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

“I most enjoy the challenge of putting forth my best, most prepared effort for every game regardless of whether it’s an intense, high level game or a middle school game. The players and coaches work hard to prepare and compete and they deserve my best.”

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

“Most of my favorite officiating memories come from tournaments where you get to travel, meet new people, share stories and make lifelong friends.”

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

“When you work really well with a partner, call a fair, competitive game and then having parents (even the parents of the squad that didn’t win) tell you ‘that was the best officiating we’ve seen this season’ as you walk off the field.”

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

“No, but I’m certain I was extremely nervous.”

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

“Once during a college game I was wearing a new pair of sneakers and the laces were just a little too long. As laces got wet due to the waterbased turf, the loops got bigger and I caught my right foot in the left loop and I tripped at full speed sliding head first along the endline. Somehow, I managed to keep an eye on the play and as I popped up, I was able to call a penalty corner. As we were setting up, one of the defenders asked if I was OK, and then showed a baseball “safe” signal. All we could do was laugh.”

### *What do you feel is the the biggest misconception about the job of being an official?*

“The biggest misconception is that people think we care who wins and won’t hesitate to accuse us of favoring one team over another, when in fact our wish is that we have as little influence on the outcome of a game as possible. I have a mantra that I put out into the universe before every game I umpire: ‘Please allow the

players actions to determine the outcome of the game.' Folks need to understand that negative fan comments are the main reason newer officials won't come back for another year, and therefore the reason why we are experiencing a referee shortage right now."

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

"DO IT! It's one of the most difficult jobs on the planet, but it is very rewarding to be involved in a sport you love and give kids the opportunity to participate."

***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>***