

## Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

# Kathy Spear

Kathy Spear was a three-sport athlete growing up, participating in softball, volleyball and track while attending Lakeshore High School in Michigan.

One of those sports, however, captured her heart, to the point where it's what she played in college at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, and is still a part of her life as an adult player and NJSIAA game official.

"Volleyball was the sport I loved and continued to play in college and continue to play today," she said. "I've attended many adult national championships and my first National Senior Games in New Mexico, when my team finished in 14th place."

Much of that appreciation traces back to what Kathy learned from her high school coach, Dianna Davis.

"My high school coach was phenomenal," she said. "I would not be the player or person I am today without her guidance, leadership and faith in my abilities to learn and grow as a volleyball athlete. So my first thought when giving back to volleyball was through coaching."

She moved along the way to New Jersey, and her first coaching job was at Whippany Park High School.

"I coached at Whippany Park, but my work schedule conflicted with coaching, so I then turned to coaching club volleyball," she said. "Fifteen years later, work yet again interfered with coaching, so I looked at how I could continue being involved and supporting volleyball."

The answer, she figured, was to become an official.

"I wouldn't have been able to play all those matches, multi-day competitions, and have my life long friendships with my teammates without officials supporting volleyball," she said. "So I looked into officiating. I had been officiating at the college level being a line judge and scorekeeper for several years already, and now looked to expand into being an official for college, club, and high school. Some days I still miss coaching, but love being an official."

### Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Kathy Spear:

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

"I enjoy being part of a sport I love and giving back to today's young students and athletes, and provide them the same opportunities I received playing high school sports."



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

“It is hard to chose between these two. One was a varsity kid being a line judge for a freshman game. He was cheering when his team scored. I reminded him that as part of the officiating team, he needed to be unbiased and could not cheer. The next really great spike that occurred, he just smiled and pointed to the number on his shirt. It was the same number as the kid who spiked the ball.

Another was when a girl who didn’t often play during matches was subbed into a match. The entire team cheered so loudly. And then she served the ball in bounds. Even more cheers engulfed the gym. Those are the lessons you learn and stay with you playing team sports - school spirit, teamwork, supporting younger players, and all contributing to a team effort, not the wins and loses.”

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

“Over the seasons, it’s great to see familiar faces and watching the athletes grow as individuals and improve their skills.”

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

“Yes. Thinking WOW! There is a lot more to this game to learn. Even though I had been a player for 40 years and a coach for 20 years, becoming an official opened my eyes that there are more parts to volleyball to learn. Running and ownership of a match, procedures, and protocols, things I had never paid that close attention to before becoming an official.”

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

“Volleyball is the only sport where we ask student athletes to be part of the officiating team and assist with making calls. On two separate occasions, I was officiating a club match and we needed the parents to step in to be a line judge. Afterwards they all said it’s much harder than it looks! I just had to smile because it’s true and I hope they remembered that when they returned to the stands as a spectator.”

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

“That we don’t always make the right calls. We have a different view from a player, a coach, or a parent or fan in the stands. Plays make look different from different angles. Also, there are the rules that we all apply to when officiating, but there is also the spirit of the rules in which we apply when officiating. We assess the level of the competition, the ability of the athletes, and even the score when whistling judgement calls. As an official, I think the teams should decide the outcome of the match and earn the points, not the official calling every minor judgement call. Let the players play and earn those aces, kills, blocks, and digs.”

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

“Do it! It’s not as scary as it may seem. But be willing to give 100%. Know you won’t always be perfect and get every call correct, but do your best, be open to feedback, learning, and growing as an official.”

***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>***