

Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

Mark Bitar

Mark Bitar's interest in officiating began in the most basic of ways.

As a student at Clifton High School, he was conversing in a class about the cool portrayal of a football referee in a TV commercial. One thing led to another, and the teacher told him that there was another teacher in the school who was the head of the local officiating chapter.

"I connected with him," he recalled. "I learned how to sign up for classes, and the rest is history."

The fact that Mark wasn't a football player (he played lacrosse), didn't matter. And it shouldn't matter for anyone else thinking of becoming a football official.

After completing the classes the spring of his senior year in 2006, he started to officiate that fall, just as he was beginning his college studies at Seton Hall.



Over the following years, he progressed working on the high school level, and eventually in college. His NCAA assignments expanded from Div. 3 right up to working Div. 1 at the age of 26.

He ultimately became a NFL replay official, for three years traveling to a game site each week as part of the on-field officiating crew. He has a new replay job this year, back in college as the Replay Supervisor for the Atlantic Coast Conference. Each Saturday, he runs the show at the ACC's replay command center in Charlotte, N.C..

At the same time, he does plenty back home in New Jersey during the football season.

For one thing, he serves as the assignor for three conferences - the Super Football Conference, North Jersey Interscholastic Conference and Big Central Conference. He is also the assignor for the NJSIAA playoffs.

He also has another important role with the NJSIAA, serving as the recruiting coordinator to draw in new football officials. As part of that, he significantly upgraded the outreach methods for potential recruits to engage with officiating chapters, through increased use of social media platforms and upgraded websites for additional outreach.

While there's still an officiating shortage in football and in all sports, the new engagement methods have brought in more recruits. But others still retire, so it's a never-ending process.

"When Covid hit, a lot of people left and never came back," he also noted. "We have to keep recruiting no matter what."



Football is also the sport that's watched by the most people who've never played the game. An important thing, as his own career demonstrates, is that playing experience isn't a requirement to becoming an official. Neither is age, or even gender, since a number of women have become football officials, from New Jersey right up to the NFL.

In the case of Bitar, after the early start, his passion for officiating never waned.

After graduating from Seton Hall, he became a teacher and lacrosse coach at Mahwah High School, where he worked for 10 years.

In addition to officiating football, he also works games in basketball and lacrosse. He also assigns basketball for a number of conferences and county tournaments.

His BA from Seton Hall was in Chemistry, and he also earned a Masters from Montclair State in Educational Administration. He's now the K-12 Supervisor of Math and Science for the Fort Lee School District.

Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Mark Bitar:

What do you do in your job as an assignor?

"My job as an assignor involves a variety of responsibilities, including coordinating and scheduling qualified officials, communicating game details, providing rule interpretations, and handling administrative tasks to ensure smooth and fair officiation of high school sporting events."

What do you enjoy most about being an official?

"What I enjoy most is the opportunity to witness the growth and improvement of players, and to be part of the sports community. As an assignor it's great to be able to facilitate experiences for both referees and athletes, ensuring that games are officiated smoothly and professionally."

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

"My favorite memory was working a Princeton vs. Dartmouth football game at Yankee Stadium where my family and friends attended. It was a great experience."

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

"The best part about any given day of officiating is witnessing the dedication, skill, and sportsmanship displayed by the athletes on the field."

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

"I remember the excitement of being on the field and having all eyes on me to make critical, split second decisions that could potentially alter the outcome of the game."

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

"The biggest misconception about being an official is that it's solely about enforcing rules, when in reality, it requires exceptional communication, quick decision-making, and a deep understanding of the game's flow."

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

“It’s a great way to stay close to a game you love and be a part of the action. I would highly recommend 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>***