

Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

Tom Wilson

When Tom Wilson retired from teaching and coaching at Whippany Park High School at the conclusion of the 2015-16 school year, he had every reason to step away from sports to enjoy some well-earned leisure time.

A graduate of Morristown High School and Lehigh University, he became a teacher at Whippany Park in 1980, after briefly working in the business world.

He also became the boys soccer coach immediately, added girls basketball head coaching duties in 1982-83 and the head softball job in 1985.

His time at Whippany Park couldn't have been much better. He met his wife, Sue, on the job. They lived in a house within walking distance of the school, and he was able to coach his three children - Jeff, Jocelyn and Shannyn.

As far as achievements go, he was also one of the most successful multi-sport coaches in state history.

Consider the following:

He retired from softball after 16 years with a 367-66 record that included four state championships and a still-standing state-record winning streak of 75 games from 1989 into 91. After the streak-ending loss, Whippany Park won its next 30 games.

He coached boys soccer continuously through 2015, except for two years spent leading the girls team in the 1990s. His overall boys record was 406-231-49, with two state championships. He was 23-14-2 with the girls team.

In girls basketball, he's the all-time winningest coach in Morris County after going 577-310. His teams reached three state championship games.

His overall record was 1,373-621-51 More than 80 percent of his teams finished with winning seasons.

Throughout his coaching career, he maintained excellent relationships with everyone he worked with, including officials. His teams also earned several sportsmanship awards.

Still, upon retiring, Wilson wanted to remain active, so he pursued officiating. He started working in soccer, basketball and girls lacrosse.

He now focuses on soccer and basketball, and enjoys it greatly.





"I joke that I was always helping the officials while I was coaching, so transitioning to officiating when my coaching career ended was a natural," he said. "It allows me to maintain some contact with the sports I spent so much of my life involved with. I also get to see former colleagues and sometimes former players."

Wilson, who also remains active through things like playing high-level Over-50 and Over-60 softball, also enjoys the physical activity involved with officiating.

"I prefer to officiate games which allow for exercise," he said. "Soccer and basketball are the sports I know best which require running up and down the field or floor, so those are the sports I enjoy officiating."

Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Tom Wilson:

When you coached, how much did take notice of the work that officials do, and how much did you enjoy interacting with them?

"There isn't a lot of time for interaction, but I always tried to be cordial pregame. There are times I wish I was a little more cordial during the game!"

Do you have any funny memories of dealing with an official when you were a coach?

"I was wearing black pants while coaching a game. Before the game, an official - who was about my size - told me his referee pants had a split in the rear. He asked if we could switch pants. I wore the dress pants he had worn to the site. He wore my black pants to officiate in."

Now that you're officiating, what do you most enjoy about it?

"I really enjoy the exercise I get from officiating. I enjoy seeing the talent that high school kids have developed. I enjoy doing my best to manage the game so that everyone has the best possible experience."

Is there anything from all of your years being on the fields/court as a coach that helps you deal with coaches and the games themselves now?

"I know how much time and effort coaches invest in the season, so I always want to give them and the players my best effort. If there is occasional complaining, I understand. If there are rules questions which can be answered without disrupting the flow of the game, I'll try my best to do so."

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

"I officiated a girls basketball game at the Prudential Center. They only have a men's college 3-point arc, so everyone decided that if anyone's foot was on the line, it would count as a 3-point attempt. The shooters, however, just shot beyond the men's arc...none went in."



Also, do you have a favorite memory from dealing with a ref or umpire when you were a coach?

“I had a state tournament game in softball after which I was planning to attend an umpire’s association banquet as their guest. During the game, there were two close plays at the plate. I thought both times my runner was safe, but both were called out. We lost by a run. Later during the banquet, the home plate umpire and I sat together at the head table.”



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

“I have always enjoyed sports, so the best part of officiating is being on a soccer field or in a gym with student athletes and coaches who have prepared for the competition that’s about to unfold, and then getting to witness it first-hand with the best seat in the house. And if I get to see a former colleague, or a former player whose son or daughter is participating in the game, that’s a bonus.”

Do you have any particular memories from your early time as an official?

“I had a freshman girls basketball game very early in my career and having a player attempt a shot at the opponent’s basket, and having the opponent block the shot attempt.”

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

“I think the biggest misconception about officiating is that officials are subject to constant abuse every time they officiate. Certainly there are coaches, players and fans who will disagree with calls, but the vast majority recognize that most officials are doing their best, and accept their decisions.”

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

“I really encourage everyone, but especially young people, to give officiating a try, especially if they are former athletes who may already have a pretty good handle on the rules. There is such a shortage of officials in almost every sport that games at the lower levels are being cancelled or are being officiated by a single official. The pay is good and going up every year, so it is also a great way to supplement income.”

***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>***