

Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

Lou Riccardi

One of the greatest joys of watching high school sports is the chance to see athletes of all levels perform.

Few people have taken advantage of that more than Lou Riccardi, who has been officiating NJSIAA events since the early 1990s.

Having been a multi-sport athlete at Belleville High School, he began with wrestling, baseball and softball, before adding girls volleyball to his officiating slate in 2000.

In the spring, he works mostly softball, but chips in with baseball coverage to help out with the umpire shortage that's affected the entire country.

He's in demand. With softball season in full-swing, he'll work very frequently. One recent week had Lou assigned games in Essex, Union, Essex again, Morris and then Passaic counties on successive days.

He's also very respected. During his career, he's worked state finals in baseball and softball, and the wrestling state championships in Atlantic City. He's also officiated in state girls volleyball finals.

Last year, he worked the county softball tournament finals in Essex, Morris and Passaic. This year, he'll be on the crew for the Bergen softball final.

This spring will also be Lou's last as an NJSIAA official, since he is relocating to Florida. He strongly advocates others become officials to help fill the void, and he also plans to remain an active official and umpire after he moves.

"Officiating is still in my blood," he said. "I plan on officiating all four sports when I get to Florida, and I encourage people to do the same here."



Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Lou Riccardi:

You work a very interesting mix of sports. What drew you to each one?

"I played baseball and wrestled in high school and I guess umpiring was first, because I helped out my dad who ran Little League in our town when I was in high school. I had also coached wrestling, and softball came next. I eventually added volleyball in 2000 as a fall sport."

What do you enjoy most about being an official?

"Staying involved in sports, making sure that our athletes get treated fairly and engaging with coaches and players throughout the community."

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

“I would probably say my first wrestling state finals at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. I was nervous, but my fellow officials that day were experienced and told me that what I had done to that point had gotten me to that level, so don’t change anything. The whole day went smoothly with no issues.”

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

“Knowing that I could be part of history in the making.”

Do you have a particularly funny memory of an interaction with a coach?

(One of those history-making moments occurred on June 11, 2005, when Lou worked the plate for one of the most outstanding pitching performances in NJSIAA softball championship history. Lisa Sweeney of Rancocas Valley, known for throwing a particularly lethal rise ball, pitched a no-hitter with 18 strikeouts as her team beat J.P. Stevens, 2-0, in the Group 4 final. It gave her a streak of 85 straight scoreless innings and a state-record 520 season strikeouts).

“The last batter of the game came up and the J.P. Stevens coach asked me if there was a rule that a player had to have a bat in the batter’s box, because if they didn’t have one, they wouldn’t be able to swing at her riser.”

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

“That we decide the game. It’s really the players and coaches that do.”

You’re going to be retiring after this spring, and relocating to Florida. What are you going to miss about officiating in New Jersey?

“I’ll miss the coaches and fellow officials. Coaches and I had a mutual respect for one another. Some may yell at me on occasion, but once the next pitch is thrown, it’s forgotten. There are so many who are good for the sports that they coach.”

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

“Definitely do it. We need officials in every sport that are willing and able to keep fair play alive.”



Umpire Lou Riccardi with Hanover Park coach Sergio Rodriguez, West Essex coach Andrea Mondadori Llauguet and their respective captains.



Lou was honored during Winter Officials Appreciation Week by the Mendham wrestling team.

***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>***