

Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

Matt McNulty

It was back in 1992 when Matt McNulty came to a stark realization regarding his hockey-playing career.

“I attended a free agent camp in Massachusetts,” he recalled. “And I quickly realized that playing hockey wasn’t going to pay the bills.”

A couple of years later, he was also looking for a way to help pay for his wedding.

“On the advice of my father,” he said. “I began to officiate.”

It turned out to be a great decision. Not only is he an in-demand high school ref working out of the NIHOA Metro Chapter, he’s worked since 2011 as a college referee and linesman for the ECAC, and has professional experience as well, working as an ECHL linesman from 2000-05 and AHL linesman from 2005 to 2019.

His NJSIAA assignments have included state championship games, most notably the 2033 Public C state final at the Prudential Center in Newark, when Gov. Livingston/New Providence beat Woodbridge/Colonia/Iselin Kennedy, 5-4, in four overtimes. It was the second-longest game in state history.

“We started at 11 a.m. as we were the first game of the day, and went to almost 2 p.m.,” he said. “Each time down the ice was suspense as neither team wanted to lose. The building was full from all of the other schools coming in.”

Matt was honored for his work last September as the Official of the Year for ice hockey by New Jersey Scholastic Officials Association.

“I’m humbled and very honored to be recognized,” he said the NJSOA event. “I didn’t get here by myself. There are so many people who’ve helped me. You’ve got to know your stuff. There are also coaches that helped me along the way, like Bruce Shatel at Delbarton and Greg Toskos at Don Bosco, and Peter Herms when he was at Seton Hall. With those guys, when I finally got to that level and got to work those games, you better know what you’re doing, and they were helpful. And I can’t say enough about someone like Jack Lally and everyone else in our association.”

McNulty enjoys officiating so much that he’s added another sport. He began working lacrosse last year.

Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Matt McNulty:

What do you enjoy most about being an official?



“I enjoy being out there and seeing good hockey. Skating with some good players and some very good officials.”

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

“The best part is that no two games are ever the same. Just when you think a team is unbeatable, someone comes from out of the blue and does the unthinkable.”

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

“I don’t recall anything special, but I remember who my partner was, Dave Brown.”

Do you have a funny memory of an interaction between yourself and a player or coach?

“I had a coach who was just yelling at me every chance he got. His team was playing poorly and had given up four goals in the first five minutes of the game. He was telling me how I missed several offsides and penalties. He calls a time out and is directing his team. As my partner was getting ready to start play, his team was still at the bench, so I skated over and said to him ‘Hey coach, want me to make the line change, cause it looks like you need a little help’. He didn’t like that too much, but his assistant couldn’t stop laughing.”

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

“People think officials have it out for certain teams or players. Officials are reactive not proactive. We don’t look to get involved in a game.”

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

“If you play any sport and want to stay in the game, this is the best way to do it. It’s a lot of fun to still be a part of a sport I’ve played for years.”

***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>***