

Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

Joe Dziuba

When Joe Dziuba points to officiating having played a major part in his life, he really means it.

“When I was 15 years old, I starting umpiring lower level baseball and softball games for the local Little League and continued through high school,” he said. “I actually met my wife, Kathy, when she was helping coach her younger sister’s softball team. We started dating at 17 and have been together ever since.”

He graduated from Don Bosco Tech in Paterson, and later began a career in the printing industry which culminated in his retirement earlier this year as a Pressroom Technical Specialist for FujiFilm.

He was also active over the years as a youth sports coach, coaching basketball, basketball and football dating back to when he was 19.

“When Kathy was pregnant with our third child, I could no longer commit the time it took to volunteer as a coach. A friend suggested I try officiating football, and I started in the training program in 1995. Through the years, I got involved with the NJFOA-North and served on numerous committees.”

When he’s on the football field, he’s in the center action working as an umpire. What makes his career extra special is that after graduating from the cadet program, he started out on a new crew along with classmate Jim Conte. The crew has stayed almost entirely intact, and this is the 29th year that they’ve been together.

Joe was also recently honored as the 2024-25 Football Official of the Year by the New Jersey Scholastic Officials Association.



Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Joe Dziuba:

What’s it been like working with the same crew for 29 years?

“The best part about officiating football is that you are assigned to games as a crew. Our referee, Jim Conte, and I were cadets together and we started the crew right out of the class. The crew had had some changes over the years, but for the most part the core has stayed together. We are all dedicated and work every game with the intensity the players deserve but we have a lot of laughs and enjoy each other’s company. The members of the crew are some of my favorite people and closest friends.”

What do you enjoy most about being an official?

“I coached youth football for many years prior to becoming an official, so it was a way to stay involved with the game. I work in the middle of the field as an umpire and I get to interact with the players and enjoy that. If you let them know you are there to help, they usually respond positively. We always say that every year we get older, but the players stay the same age, so maybe it keeps me a little younger, too.”

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

“There have been so many great memories over the years that it’s hard to pick one, but our crew has been chosen to officiate multiple championship games at Giants Stadium and MetLife Stadium. Those honors are a recognition of our crew’s hard work and dedication, and I appreciate that.”

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

“To me, it’s the whole process. Jim and I often drive to games together, so we catch up on the week. At the field, it’s the pregame with the crew, the interactions with the coaches and players, the focus during the game and responding to the action around you. Then the wind down at dinner after where you rehash the game and share some laughs.”

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

“My first game came in my provisional year. Back then, it was a two-year training program so you could work a varsity game in case of emergency. I was assigned to work with a legendary North Jersey referee, Jerry Belmonte, and his crew. I was nervous before the game, but I was working as the umpire, so once the game started I felt pretty comfortable. Jerry and his crew were very welcoming and made me feel relaxed. I got a lot of positive feedback and the game went off without any issues.”

Do you have a funny memory from a game you officiated?

“We were working our first championship game at Giants Stadium and as we prepared for the opening kickoff, I took my position on the 20 yard line, only to realize I was on the wrong 20 and had to sprint 60 yards to get in the right position before the ball was kicked.”

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

“I would say the biggest misconception by fans is that officials have a favorite team in any given game. The truth is that we may be the only people at the game without a rooting interest. We are there to ensure the game is played fairly within the rules.”

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

“If you like the game of football and would like to be part of the action, it is a great way to stay involved with the game. There are great training programs throughout the state and they will get you ready to take the field, and you will get to work with a group of men and women dedicated to making the sport we love a great experience for the student-athletes that participate. And if you’re really lucky, you might make some great lifetime friendships like I did.

***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>***