

Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

Sherry Popowski

Sports have always been a part of Sherry Popowski's life.

"My family has always been involved in sports," she said. "I knew from a young age that I wanted to be a physical education teacher. When I was growing up, there were not many opportunities for women in sports, so teaching was for me."

She was a three-sport athlete at Sayreville High School, where she was greatly influenced by one of her coaches, Judy Sunski, who was also a softball umpire. She graduated from Glassboro State and earned a masters from East Stroudsburg. All told, she wound up teaching for 37 years and coaching for 25.

But all along, there was also officiating.

"My officiating experience began at the local rec softball league when I was in high school," she said. "Then at Glassboro, a professor encouraged the PE majors to sign up for a basketball officiating course. As my coaching days were winding down, I began field hockey officiating and returned to basketball officiating. And once I retired, I took on the field hockey assignor role for the Skyland Conference."

She began field hockey officiating in 1994 and has been the Skyland assignor since 2014.

Sherry has been recognized several times over the years, including her selection as 2024-25 Field Hockey Official of the Year by the New Jersey Scholastic Officials Association.



Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Sherry Popowski:

What do you do in your job as an assignor?

"As an assignor it is imperative to have good organizational and communication skills. The games are placed on an assigning site and cross-checking with AD's and secretaries begins. Often the game site or time has to be adjusted. Each local assignor is in constant communication since we work to get all our games covered, matching officials with level of play. Assignors are cognizant of officials travel, full-time work responsibilities as well as life issues that may arise."

What do you enjoy most about being an official:

“For me, observing how the game has progressed and the skills the athletes have developed has been a joy. Also, I enjoy interacting with my fellow officials. I have formed many friendships through officiating.”

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

“I was the timer at a county final game in which the opponents had previously played each other twice. Both times the game went into overtime. So, it was expected to be an exciting game. The game did not disappoint. As a former player and coach, the athleticism was outstanding. The officials were at the top of their game and kept the flow throughout overtime. It was one of those games where you hated to see someone lose.”

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

“I really love competitive games where the flow is up and down the field.”

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

“My first basketball game, I was so worried about getting to the school on time (and before GPS), I arrived 1 1/2 hours before the scheduled start time. My first field hockey game, I recall how impressed I was with my partner’s calm demeanor throughout.”

Do you have a particularly funny memory of a game that you worked?

“One of my first state games was at a site quite a distance from home. My partner contacted me to give me a warning that the fans there can be intense. When I arrived at the school, the fans side was very close to the field. I think they could almost reach out and touch me. About 30 seconds into the game, I blew my whistle to indicate a foul. With that, a fan yelled ‘This is the worst officiated game that I have ever seen.’ Well, my partner did give me the heads up about the fans. And she could hear the same comment through my radio. And of course, the game went to a one-on-one tiebreaker.”

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

“Officials really do worry about getting the calls right. I am not alone when I say many officials lose sleep replaying certain situations. We strive for a ‘perfect game.’”

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

“If you love a sport or are a former player or coach, it is a great way to stay involved and give back. You will be offering a service to the school and community. Also, know the rules and mechanics. Game experience with seasoned veterans will go a long way in your development.”

***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>***