

## Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

# Tanisha Cooley

Tanisha Cooley has come a long way during a relatively short time as basketball official, taking it from an initial chance to make good use of spare time and turning it into much more.

"I started officiating during the 2014-15 season," she said. "At first, it was a way to stay in shape and make extra side cash. But I realized very quickly that the game of basketball is much more than that. As an official, I've developed patience, resilience, communication skills and how to judge the game off a set of standards. Officiating quickly evolved into skill building, commitment to rules knowledge, and enjoyment of the game. Each game I get a 'front row' seat to a set of players and coaches leaving it all on the line to demonstrate their talent."

She was named Rookie of the Year by her chapter, and after a few years, began working many high-stakes games, including county finals and sectional, state semi and state championship games.

She was also honored in September by being named a 2024-25 Official of the Year for girls basketball by the New Jersey Scholastic Officials Association.

Tanisha had also been rewarded for her work in other ways.

"In my rookie season, I officiated multiple games for a charity event for a local church," she said. "It was a men's league and the organizer let the participants know that I was new, and surprisingly, all participants were patient with me and complimented my good calls, but more importantly, gave me constructive feedback in a way that was easy to receive. By happenstance, one of the players saw me officiate my first state final, and complimented my progress."

### Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Tanisha Cooley:



#### ***What do you enjoy most about being an official?***

"I enjoy the challenge of officiating. As an official, you must use your mind and body simultaneously in order to have optimal ability to be in position and judge a play. Officiating makes you push your mind and body in a way that almost compliments daily activity. With officiating, you're able to take emotion out of the way and think objectively using a set of standards."

#### ***What's the best part about any given day of officiating?***

"The best part about officiating is the atmosphere. Each team, each player, each coach, and each fan brings an unbridled



energy. As an official, it makes you feel honored to be a part of a moment that will create memories for you and others. As each participant celebrates or even boos (sometimes at an official), you can feel the energy of competitiveness and hope, which as an official, makes me rise to the occasion.”

***Do you have any memories from your early days as an official?***

“My first games as an official were mentally challenging. The games seemed fast, and mentally and physically I had to keep up. In the beginning, I found it difficult to communicate with coaches and players, because I didn’t know how often and when I should communicate, and I didn’t have the basketball terminology to use. As I delved deeper into the rule book, and began to recognize plays, I was able to build the confidence to communicate effectively with coaches and players. And while they didn’t always agree, the mere fact that I was able to communicate with them using certain terminology helped build a trust.”

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

“The biggest, and most obvious, misconception is that officiating is easy. Officiating is a combination of 100 percent rule knowledge, and game management. Having rule knowledge is much easier than managing a game. Managing a game includes communicating effectively with all involved (other officials, coaches, players and scoring table), understanding time and game situations, understanding player advantage and disadvantage, and understanding that each game is important for everyone. Officiating is a great task of mental and physical resilience that takes time to develop.”

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

“To anyone considering becoming an official, I suggest you have thick skin, and the ability to abide by a set of standards. Officials are expected to maintain professionalism and objectivity at all times. This can be achieved by being rooted in the rules and expectations that govern the game, and the ability to adjudicate them correctly, while also having the ability to deal with the adversity that may come from our judgment and ruling on a play. While we as officials are human beings and have feelings, too, we must intentionally chose to be the ‘bigger person’ and not allow the emotions of others disrupt what is expected of us.”

***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>***