

Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

Gary Peckman

Gary Peckman, a longtime NJSIAA umpire and President of the Raritan Valley Umpires Association, is in frequent contact with colleague Keith Hoffman.

He received one phone call from Hoffman last year, however, that was unlike any other. It was an invitation to join Hoffman on the crew that would umpire the Old Timer's Day exhibition game at Yankee Stadium.

"Keith and I have worked a lot of high school games together over the years," Peckman recalled. "He called me up and asked if I'd be interested in doing a game at Yankee Stadium."

Gary naturally jumped at the opportunity, and the lifelong Yankees fan soon had the thrill calling balls and strikes in a fun setting for guys like Mariano Rivera, Roger Clemens, Paul O'Neill, Jorge Posada, Graig Nettles and more.

But while that may have been a tremendous thrill, Peckman gets his greatest joy working games at area high schools.

It's all the culmination of an interest that began formed back when he was a student.

"My interest in officiating started back in middle school," he said. "My physical education teacher, Jim Powers, ran a program called the 'Officials Club,' where we learned the rules of baseball, basketball, and other sports. I always enjoyed understanding the rules of the game and how everything fit together." His interest grew from that early start.

"I also umpired during my high school years, which gave me my first real experience being on the field in that role," he said. "As time went on, umpiring took a back seat while I focused on family and other responsibilities. But the desire to get back on the field never really went away."

Gary wound up watching a local game, and it was truly a life-altering experience.

"One day, I stopped to watch a game at a local park and struck up a conversation with the umpire," he said. "I asked how to get started, and he was kind enough to point me in the right direction."

From that point on, he was back in the game, and enjoying it immensely.

"I've found that the umpiring community is built on people willing to give back and help others get started," he said. "It's a tradition of paying it forward that I've embraced and try to carry on myself."



Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Gary Peckman:

What do you do in your job as a chapter president?

“As President of the RVUA, I organize both Executive Board meetings and general membership meetings. Our primary goal is to prepare, train, and educate our members for the season ahead. I also participate in our cadet training program that helps new members learn the rules and mechanics for high school umpiring for baseball and softball.”

What do you enjoy most about being an official?

“I enjoy being outside, but what I value most is the ability to focus on something completely separate from the every day stresses of life. When you’re on the field, your attention is fully on the game - that’s a great feeling.”

Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

“Umpiring the Old Timers’ Game at Yankee Stadium in 2025 is definitely at the top of the list. At one point, John Flaherty asked me ‘Did you ever think you’d be calling balls and strikes for Roger Clemens?’ Then Jorge Posada came behind the plate when Paul O’Neill was at bat. Paul’s reaction to a pitch I called a strike is something I’ll never forget.”

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

“Being outside and part of the game - it never gets old.”

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

“My first high school game was a freshman baseball game at Hillsborough High School. I was assigned to the bases, but my partner was late. I went back to my car, changed into my plate gear, and worked the game behind the plate. I had been told to always come prepared for anything - plate or bases - and that advice paid off right away.”

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

“The biggest misconception is that you’re constantly being yelled at. While disagreements happen, most coaches and players understand how difficult the job is. Even when they don’t agree with a call, there is a level of respect for what we do.”

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

“Do it. It takes work, but it’s absolutely worth it. Officiating has given me so much:

- The friendships I’ve built have been incredible.



Gary Peckman (far left) worked the 2025 Old Timers game at Yankee Stadium along with fellow NJSIAA umpires Joe Marateo, Keith Hoffman and Rocco Fornaro.

- Things I once thought were impossible became possible. When I first started, people would ask if I'd ever umpire in the pros - I didn't think that opportunity would come.

- I've been a high school umpire for baseball and softball for 14 years and worked NCAA baseball for nine years. In 2025, I was selected to umpire for the New York Yankees, and most recently, I was invited to work a preseason game in the Frontier League for the New York Boulders.

None of this happens without the support of my wife and family - they've been there every step of the way."

***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>***