

Officials Appreciation Week Profile:

Joan Gilland

Quite simply, Joan Gilland is one of the most experienced sports officials in New Jersey.

She's currently in her 35th season of officiating girls lacrosse, and last fall, completed her 54th year of field hockey. Add in a decade of basketball earlier in her career, and she's put in nearly 100 seasons worth of calling sports on all levels from youth to collegiate.

Her athletic career began as an athlete at Archbishop Wood High School in Warminster, Pa., where she competed in field hockey, basketball and softball. She became a high school field hockey official as a 19 year old in 1972. After transferring to Glassboro State (now Rowan University) that year, she also began officiating New Jersey games as a member West Chapter #5.

While officiating field hockey as a college student, Joan decided to go out for the lacrosse team at Glassboro.

"It soon became my first love," she said. "I played my junior and senior year."

After graduating in 1975 with a degree in Health and Physical Education, Joan's first teaching job was at Eastern High School, where she coached field hockey, basketball and lacrosse.

"In 1976, I started the lacrosse program," she recalled. "They said I would never get the kids out because it was a big softball school, but we did and it went on to become a very successful team. In 1979, I also coached the field hockey team to the school's very first state championship. I coached until 1982. I had two babies and retired from high school coaching."

She stayed involved, however, by starting a field hockey program at St. Mary of The Lakes school in Medford in 1992. She also ran the field hockey program for the Medford Youth Athlete Association for many years. In 1993, she started the lacrosse program for the Medford Youth Athlete Association.

And all the while, she was working as an official.

She's been West Chapter 5 lacrosse secretary for the past decade, and was chosen the 2023 Girls Lacrosse Official of the Year by the New Jersey State Officials Association.

Getting to know NJSIAA sports official Joan Gilland:

What do you enjoy most about being an official?

"The camaraderie among my fellow officials. And the growth I see among the student athletes from U14 to collegiate."



Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?

“My daughter was at Shawnee High School and played on the freshmen team. They had a big game with their rival, Moorestown. I went in my street clothes to be a spectator. The official refing the game went down in the first five minutes. Who do they look at but me. I did not want to ref that game. But I put my daughter’s sneakers on and reffed the game, in khaki pants and a jean shirt. I was a sight for sore eyes.”

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

“Watching the athletes grow and mature into young ladies with skills they have mastered. Seeing familiar faces in the crowd. Feeling you did your very best. And when the losing coach comes over and thanks you for a well-officiated game.”

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

“I know I was very nervous, but felt so accomplished when I was finished. I remember thinking that I had a lot to learn.”

Do you have any particular memories of interactions with a coach or player?

“I have been officiating so long, I get to see my players that I coached, their children play, or someone I know, their granddaughter play. It’s just a real thrill for me.”

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

“That we are always correct. And that is not the case. Different angles create different calls. We go on the field, trying the best we can, by being prepared and having 100 percent knowledge of the rules. But we have to make split-second decisions.”

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

“Just do it! It’s not as scary as it seems. Have knowledge about the rules, always be willing to learn, be a sponge and absorb all you can. You are not going to get it right all the time, and each game is a new learning opportunity. Just do your very best and learn from experienced officials and you will grow tremendously. And have fun!”



***Think you might be interested in becoming a high school sports official?
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