

# Officials Appreciation Week Profile: Jim Kavanagh and Pete Hawkins

When it comes to officiating soccer in New Jersey, few referees have as much experience as Jim Kavanagh and Pete Hawkins.

The two well-respected refs have been working games on all levels since the 1970s. In fact, both have been doing it for 50 years.

The pair, who've remained healthy and active in all parts of their lives, often work together, as was the case at a recent girls game that sent Point Pleasant Beach to Point Pleasant Boro. The rivalry game was clean, and flowed nicely.



*Jim Kavanagh (left) and Pete Hawkins (right) have been in-demand soccer officials since the 1970s.*

Both refs have strong roots in North Jersey.

Kavanagh grew up in a soccer family in Harrison, and his uncle, Ted, was one of the founders of the School & College Officials Association (SCOA) in 1950. So were two of his physical education teachers in Harrison - Fred and Walter Shields. SCOA, to this day, is the chapter for high school soccer refs in Essex, Hudson, Morris, Union and Warren counties. Kavanagh was a SCOA official until relocating to the Shore in 1981. His brother, Tim, was also top SCOA ref who transferred to the Shore chapter (SSOA) several years earlier.

“When I left playing soccer at Rider College, my Uncle Ted said, ‘Now you will become a ref,’” Kavanagh noted. “That was in 1974.”

Hawkins, who graduated from Trenton State, began teaching at Memorial Junior School in Whippany in 1974 while home on leave from the Navy. While coaching soccer his first year at Memorial, he met Bob Leary, who was the long-time SCOA rules interpreter. Leary suggested he get involved in officiating, and the rest is history. He made the move to the Shore in 2010.

Hawkins also started umpiring baseball and softball in 1974, and added basketball in 1975.

“Moving to the Shore Conference in 2010 was an easier transition in soccer than the other sports because of the contact with other soccer officials I had worked with in college,” he said. “Soccer is also one of the many sports that has a dire need for officials - ask any assignor!”

While neither may officiate the high-level matches they used to, like NCAA tournament games, both can be found on just about any day working one in Monmouth or Ocean counties. The sport needs refs at all levels, and the two still possess all the necessary skills to effectively handle a match.



"I will only work game that I feel confident in the job I am doing," Kavanagh said. "Some girls varsity and also JV, freshman and middle school. I have enough experience to position myself to try in be in the right place."

Hawkins feels the same way. It's not just about mobility, it's also about having the know-how to manage a game.

"My wife, Diane, and I were lucky enough to have two sons, Brian and Scott, that played soccer at a good level," he said. "Scott played at Lafayette College and had a very successful career. He is presently coaching and officiating for the SSOA. I enjoyed watching good officials I had met or worked with over the years, and how they effectively handled difficult officiating circumstances. The good ones make it look easy."

### **Getting to know NJSIAA soccer official Jim Kavanagh:**

***You've been officiating soccer for a long time. What keeps you coming back?***

"The love of the game has kept me officiating. I also started officiating at the college level in 1981, I became a national-level official in 1986 and retired from college officiating in 2015. Officials are also needed at all levels, and I love the game."

***How have you seen things change since the days when you began officiating?***

"I don't feel officiating has changed as much as the players being bigger and faster. With that said, I was always very vocal talking to players, however today, not so much. You must be more politically correct."

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

"The best thing about being an official is being on the pitch with the young athletes, and seeing a quality match."

***Do you have any particular funny memories of an interaction between yourself and a player or coach?***

"While officiating a game at Brick Memorial, I was on the Memorial side standing next to their coach, Woody French, when one of his players played a beautiful pass down the wing and I caught the ball on the touch line. Woody looked at me and said, 'Jim, what the hell was that?' To which I said, 'The ball was going to hit you in the head, so don't say anything but 'You're welcome.'"

"I also had a young player from St. Benedict's tell me not to call any fouls for him because he will play through them, and sure enough, he did."

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

"I believe everyone thinks being an official is a thankless job, but if you are doing something that you love, it's worth it."



*Jim Kavanagh's soccer roots go back to his days as a player in the soccer hotbed of Harrison.*





*Pete Hawkins has worked eight NJSIAA state finals since starting as an official in Morris County.*

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

“For young people thinking about becoming an official, one thing you need is to have a thick skin. The NJSIAA has given us many tools to deal with players, coaches and spectators, with zero tolerance on berating officials. It’s also a great way to supplement your income. I always say to anyone thinking about officiating, ‘Try it, you may love it.’”

***Getting to know NJSIAA soccer official Pete Hawkins:***

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

“During my tenure as an official, like everyone else, I moved from middle school to freshman, JV and varsity. The summer was a time for managing the town pool and umpiring American Legion baseball. The relationships you build with fellow officials and coaches help keep you in the profession. Like most professions, the time that you spend with fellow officials and the laughs that occur make you keep coming back.”

***How have you seen the game of soccer change between throughout the years?***

“Over the past 50 years, soccer rules have obviously changed a great deal, as has the uniform - moving from lookalike football uniforms to today’s international soccer uniform. The game has become much more skilled at all levels, while players tend to give you more feedback than is necessary.”

***Do you have a favorite memory from officiating an event?***

“Working state final games (eight of them) are some of my favorite memories from over the years. It is always an honor to be selected to work those games.”

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

“When you and your partner or partners work a good game, you know it in your heart. I often tell players that, like them, officials have good and not-so-good games, but the effort always has to be there no matter what level you work.”

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

“The first game I ever refereed in soccer was at Memorial Junior School. No officials showed up and the other coach and I wanted to play rather than cancel. So I worked in the middle and did both coach and ref. We lost, 3-2!”

***Do you have any particular funny memories of an interaction between yourself and a player or coach?***

“I stole a line from fellow referee Tim Wyatt when Tom Wilson, now a SCOA official but then the boys soccer

coach at Whippany Park, said ‘Good call, Tim!’ Tim replied quickly, ‘Coach, they are all good, just some are better than others.’ I still use that line today.”

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

“A big misconception about officiating is that officials always think they are right. Well, hopefully you are right a lot more than wrong, but you do carry the weight of a call that affects the outcome of a game that probably should have gone the other way. Referees have hearts.”

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

“Officiating is a difficult position. There is a lack of officials across the board in all sports. I found that working with other good officials and listening to what they say constructively on the field makes the learning process somewhat easier. Ask for suggestions and keep smiling!”



*Jim Kavanagh and Pete Hawkins talk to the captains from Point Pleasant Beach and Point Pleasant Boro before a recent game.*

***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>***