

## In This Issue

P. 3 President's Corner

P. 3 Official's Spotlight

P. 4 Another season finale

P. 5 Woman ref thriving in  
a man's world

P. 6 Pitch counts the rule  
in baseball now

P. 7 Retired NSOA ref,  
trainer goes pro

P. 8 Three-sport official  
eyes winter travel plans

## UMPIRE'S 'HEART' BACK IN THE GAME

By Mike Spencer

Barb Beckett says that Ken Allen is an assignor's dream – always willing to go anywhere, work any level and at any time.

The only thing that could stop the trainer and three-sports official in the Northern Sports Official Association is a heart double bypass.

The open heart surgery on March 3, 2016 took the 32-year official out of action last spring. Three months later he was back on the field, doing football again. He worked the boys and girls basketball season and is now completing the trifecta on the softball field this month.

"It changed things, but I keep telling everybody that the man above gave me a second chance and I'm going to take full advantage of it," said Allen, who was told he'd need at least three months to recuperate. "I'm not one to sit around and it was very hard to be idle."

Allen, who has hardly missed a game since Dick Simon recruited him to officiate in 1985, was glad he asked his primary care physician why he was slowing down at the end of the 2015-16 boys and girls basketball season.

Allen's doctor did an EKG and referred him to a heart surgeon, where he underwent a cardiac catheterization. Before the visit with the heart specialist was over, Allen was wheeled up to the second floor for surgery.

"Ken is an 'old-school' die hard," said Beckett, a charter member of the Northern Sports Officials Association, assignor and former officiating partner. "It was tough on him missing the last part of the basketball season and entire softball season. He makes a difference every time he steps on the court or the field."

Allen, who has officiated two state finals in softball and another in football, never thought about retiring.

"I never thought about quitting and I don't have a plan to retire," Allen said. "I'm going to go as long as I can."

"When I can't give the kids a full 100 percent, it'll be time to get out."

Allen had a clean bill of health to officiate football last fall, but he missed two weeks of the season after having his gall bladder removed. He then went on to work the entire boys and girls basketball season, which ended last month. **See Page 2**



*Ken Allen, a 32-year official with the MHSAA, shows off some of the uniforms he has officiating football, softball and basketball.*

“Ken has always been a very hard-working official so it’s no surprise to anyone that he has worked so hard to get back on the field and the court,” said MHSAA assistant director Mark Uyl, the association’s director of officiating. “Ken always had a true passion for officiating, and this passion has helped him recover and has been a source of motivation to get healthy and rehab so he can return to the competitive arena.”

Uyl said life-threatening illnesses and injuries often send veteran officials into early retirement.

“For many other officials, what that Ken endured would have meant retirement or the end of their career, certainly in a sport like basketball,” Uyl said. “It shows how important working with the kids and schools is to Ken that he’s persevered so hard to get back.”

Allen also officiated baseball until the day he lost a coin flip and had to leave his softball game because no one showed up at the baseball field. His softball partner Tom Post tooted his horn departing after two quick softball games and Allen was still in the bottom half of his opener.

Although Allen has officiated two MHSAA softball championship games, football is his No. 1 sport. He worked one state final in football in 2003 as the umpire.

“When I first started out, I was on the chains,” said Allen, who played freshman football at Clio High and ran track and cross country. “Then I decided that I wanted to get in the middle where the action is. I really love it.”

Allen’s taken a few knocks in the middle of the football field, even suffered a couple of concussions. But until the heart double by-pass, he was always able to get back up on his feet without hardly missing a down.

“Ken is a great official because he’s got such good people skills,” Uyl said. “The officiating business is a ‘people business’ first and foremost, and this is why this has been such a great fit for Ken for the past 30-plus years. The MHSAA and all member schools are thrilled to have Ken back.”

Allen, who works in produce at the new Acme Meijer store, credits Beckett for a lot of his officiating development, especially in basketball and softball.

“I’ve met a lot of good people and made a lot of good friends,” Allen said.

Beckett says Allen is truly one of the good officials in northern Michigan.

“Ken manages people and personalities very well,” she said. “And the schools, coaches and players are confident in Ken’s abilities.”

Allen says the fans “don’t bother me none,” but the kids have changed over the years.

“When I played high school sports, I never saw any of the kids talk to the officials – it was the coach’s job,” he said. “But now you see kids bark at you.”

Being an official for more than three decades has taken a toll on Allen, taking him away from his family – his wife, three kids and six grandkids – for hours at a time.

So why has Allen continued officiating.

“It’s not the money,” Allen said jokingly. “By the time you leave the house, and the by the time you return, it’s under \$10 an hour.

“I just love being around people and I like seeing the kids over the years and how they developed and improved.”



*Ken Allen kneels in front of home plate at a Traverse City Central baseball field prior to the girls softball season starting earlier this month.*



*Ken Allen proudly shows off his memorabilia from officiating an MHSAA state football final in 2003.*



## NSOA A LEADER AMONG STATE OFFICIALS GROUPS

By Bill Parker

NSOA members I hope this spring newsletter finds you well and with spring fever.

It is very humbling leading the association.

Over the past several months, I have attended meetings and clinics across the state. We (NSOA) are leading the charge on what an association should be doing, and it is being noticed statewide! This would not be possible without the support of you, our members.

Basketball season, unfortunately, was again a challenge with sportsmanship. As many of you know or heard, we had a situation with one of our crews after a game in a hallway.

Be assured that your board deals with several incidents during each season. After several conversations with the school administration and the conference school administration, I believe we sent a strong message – that the actions that happened would not be tolerated.

I have spoken to each member of that crew, and made sure they are aware that the NSOA is behind each of its officials.

On a positive season-ending note, congrats to Tom Post on his basketball state final! The Class D final was his second in boys basketball and fifth overall – three others in softball.

NSOA was also able to host an Arbiter training for local assignors last month. This training was done at the Grand Traverse Resort, in coordination with the MIAA, Thanks to Karen Leinaar for helping schedule this very important training session to make sure our assignors are well trained. This training was attended by assignors from three other associations as well as ours.

The last thing I would like to leave you with as I complete my first year as your president, is recruitment. While our association numbers are growing, we need to continue to recruit new officials to our great profession/hobby. Before our annual meeting this fall, we will be announcing a new program to reward members in recruiting new members.

If there is something you would like NSOA to do or a program that we should, start please feel free to contact me or Scott Jones, your board member at-large.

I hope everyone has a safe and fun spring sports season.

## FUTURE TRAINING SESSIONS SET



Tom Post, left, reads a rule question at a basketball training meeting earlier this year while Drew McKenna studies the MHSAA exam. NSOA training sessions for the 2016-17 school year are wrapping up with just softball meetings remaining on April 23 and May 7 at 10 a.m. at the Grand Traverse YMCA.

## Official's Spotlight



### Mitch Wilson

Basketball, baseball, football

**Q: When and why did you get into officiating?**

A: I started officiating when I was really young, at 12 or 13 years old. But I've been registered with the MHSAA since I was 16, nine years ago. I got into it because it was another way to be a part of the game and because I quickly realized after high school that I wasn't going to get to the pros as a player.

**Q: What's been the hardest part of being an official?**

A. The hardest part of being an official is acting and officiating in a consistent and professional manner, day in and day out.

**Q: What's been the highlight of your officiating career?**

A: When I got the job offer to be a Minor League umpire.

**Q: What's one tip you'd give first-year refs?**

A: To have fun with it. Officiating is one of the most rewarding and enjoyable professions, when you're enjoying what you're doing.

#### Personal Faves

**Food:** Any seafood; **Color:** Green. **Movie:** The Rookie; **Sports Team:** Green Bay Packers; **Athlete:** Brett Favre

# LONGTIME OFFICIAL REACHES BASKETBALL FINALS STAGE AGAIN

Tom Post of Traverse City, a 44-year MHSAA registered basketball referee, officiated the Class D state boys championship game on March 25 at the Breslin Center, in East Lansing.

It was his second boys state basketball finals assignment after working three finals in girls softball. Tom took a moment to reflect on his second boys basketball final with NSOA newsletter staff.

**Q. Some officials say they are lucky to get one state final. How do you feel about getting a second basketball final?**

A. It was a surprise to receive a final invitation again. Our zone only gets one each year and we have one of the largest zones geographically so in that regard it is difficult to get one. I've had a long career and I feel that I have been one of the top officials in our area since the late 80's, so maybe two finals is not that special.

**Q. How different was this one compared to the first one?**

A. I liked working the first game of the day instead of the last like I did in 2005.

**Q. Is officiating a state final different than any other game you do in a season? Explain.**

A. You have to treat it like any other game, but realize that it is just a much bigger spotlight for everyone involved.

**Q. Some officials retire when they reach their pinnacle like a state final. Any thoughts on retiring?**

A. I tell people there are two things you can get better at as you age – golf and officiating. Since my retirement from education, I have not been as involved in the behind-the-scenes stuff of officiating, assigning or even NSOA work. I have just been working games. I still enjoy officiating and feel young working. And I plan on continuing as long as my health and family needs are met.

**Q. What piece of advice would you give an official who gets a state finals assignment that has never had one?**

A. It can be difficult for a new person to work a final because all the refs are usually unfamiliar with each other. Most still knew me from previous semifinal assignments and the Class B final and that helped. All you can really do is be yourself and relax. I watched part of all semis on Friday to see the different styles on the court and how you can fit.



*Ann Post Photo*

Tom Post, a 44-year veteran official, poses for a shot outside the Breslin Center prior to the Class D boys basketball finals.



*Tom Post closely observes a Buckley throw-in at the Breslin Center on March 25.*

*Photo Courtesy of MHSAA*

# FEMALE REF THRIVING IN A MAN'S WORLD

By Mike Spencer

Kalyn McPherson's work schedule took her out of coaching the game she loved, so the former University of Michigan and professional basketball player took up officiating to fill in the void three years ago.

"It wasn't a difficult decision," the 29-year-old assistant manager of sales and development at Hagerty Insurance said. "I loved coaching, but I was unable to continue with it.

"So officiating was a great alternative for me to stay involved. And even today, being involved with the sport I love is the best part of being a basketball official."

McPherson, a former basketball standout at Traverse City West and a varsity assistant coach at her alma mater, got the call to officiate from Barb Beckett, the Northern Sports Official Association president at the time.

"Kalyn was always a calm and cool as a high school player," Beckett recalled. "She had the 'right' temperament and people skills, that are needed to be an official."

"Barb had been asking me for years to just try it out," McPherson recalled. "She knew I loved basketball and wanted to stay involved in the sport.

"But it was tougher than I expected to transition from a 'player' mindset to that of an official. I initially wanted to coach the players while I officiated – which is not what we are supposed to do."

Being a former player has helped her officiate the game, she says. And because she knew some of the tricks players used, she's keeping a watchful eye.

"Being able to anticipate the flow of the game is something that has come naturally and helped prepare for plays," she said. "But the key is to not anticipate the call though."

"Kalyn has had a very short learning curve because of her knowledge and awareness of the game of basketball," Beckett said.

McPherson says there are times after a rough game that she's questions why she became on official.

"But just like anything, you just need to bounce back," she said.

The highlight of her officiating career working as part of a three-woman crew in a varsity girls game at Leland with Kim Harcey and Tammy Sedlar. It was a historic night for the NSOA, too – the first time for an all-women's crew – although the feat has been accomplished before in Michigan.

"Being a strong example for girls basketball is such an honor!" she said.

McPherson said the hardest part of being a female official is earning the respect and credibility of knowing your craft.

"Luckily for me, I grew up in Traverse City so I still know some of the coaches in the area," she said. "However, I think this is true amongst us all.

"The kids go out there every season and practice hard to get ready for games. I think when we do that same thing, the season goes really well."

McPherson said she doesn't have a preference working a boys or a girls game.



*Kalyn McPherson, a third-year basketball referee, says her high school and college playing days has helped her development on the hardwood.*

"I enjoy the girls games more because it brings back memories of my playing days," she said. "On the other hand, I enjoy the boys game as it is faster and has the element of above the rim play."

Basketball officiating in Michigan and other states is still pretty much a man's world. McPherson didn't want to comment on what more women haven't joined the officiating community. But she'd like to recruit young adults to get involved in officiating.

"Especially the student-athletes that just graduate from high school or college," she said. "Having the athletic background makes the transition that much easier."

McPherson said all the refs in the NSOA have "been fantastic," in working with her to get better. She noted that Ross Schuch, Ed McCarty, Jan Veliquette and Harcey have been very impactful on her career.

"They have offered advice, watched my games to give me feedback and taken me under their wings and have been very supportive," she said. "Being able to work with such great people is one of the biggest reasons I officiate."

One of four female basketball officials in the NSOA, the sky may be the limit for McPherson

"Kalyn has all the skills, people, game situation, temperament to take her as far as she would like to go," Beckett said.

As for first-year refs just learning the trade, McPherson offers a few pointers.

"Do your best to prepare and during the games, just be confident," she said.

## BASEBALL MAKES PITCH COUNTS THE NEW RULE IN 2017

By Mike Spencer

The Michigan High School Athletic Association, following the mandate of the National Federation High School Baseball Rules Committee, has adopted a pitch count rule instead of innings pitched for the 2017 season.

The pitching rule change included a point of emphasis to call borderline pitches strikes.

"We have encouraged all of our umpires to call more strikes because of this new pitch count rule," says Mark Stewart, NSOA baseball umpire and trainer. "The rule was designed and implemented to encourage coaches to develop more pitchers and for the safe and proper physical development of young vulnerable athletes."



Mark Stewart

In the past, pitchers were limited to 10 innings per day. This year, pitchers will be allowed to throw a maximum 105 pitches in one day. They will also be required to have three days of rest if they throw more than 75.

"All of the coaches I have spoken with so far this year have been in favor of this rule and are encouraged that we are instructing our umpires to call more strikes," Stewart added. "The umpires like the idea of calling more strikes and even better yet the idea of not being involved in the actual counting of pitches."

Under the new rules, both teams will monitor pitch counts. Both teams will also have to report on their lineup cards any players that are ineligible to pitch (ITP) that day.

The NFHS mandated the rule change to further prevent pitcher arm injuries.

"I don't know how long the MHSAA and the Federation have contemplated this change, but this is a very hot topic considering all of the arm surgeries in baseball pitchers from the Major League down through Little League," Stewart said. "But I am completely in favor of implementing any new rules, points of emphasis, etc. that make the game better and more enjoyable."

Under the new rules, pitchers must have two days of rest after throwing 51-75 pitches and one day of rest after throwing 26-50. No rest is required if a pitcher throws 25 or fewer pitches in one day.

The MHSAA pitch count rule was the result of work by a task force made up of current and former coaches and administrators, including representatives of the Michigan High School Baseball Coaches Association.

# EX-REF, TRAINER FINDS NICHE AS PRO GROUNDSKEEPER

By Mike Spencer

Clint Kerr gave up officiating, his playing days were well behind him and then he got a call from Major League Baseball.

The 58-year-old charter member, former trainer and past president of the Northern Sports Officials Association accepted the call – to be a spring training groundskeeper at the Peoria Sports Complex.

“It’s not something that I have been dreaming about my whole life,” said the former high school and college baseball player after hanging out with professional baseball players for six weeks in Peoria, Ariz. “But in this season of my life, I can’t think of anything that would be more enjoyable.

“The trinity of sunshine, warm weather and baseball is pretty tough to beat.”

Kerr, who officiated high school baseball and basketball, enjoyed the view from the dugout more than any time in his life.

“We could only see if the ball was high or low,” Kerr said. “Rarely did I see a pitch called that made me wince.

“In all of spring training, I’ll bet there wasn’t a dozen pitches that made me wonder if they were correct. That’s pretty darn good, and many of the umpires were the Minor League guys.”

When he played at Leland High and Ferris State University, Kerr didn’t always agree with or like the calls made by the men in blue.

“It got better in college,” he said “And I’ve been a bigger supporter since. It may have been a combination of maturity and that I began officiating.”

Kerr said players and coaches showed a lot of respect for the umpires.

“If I got a chance, I’d say ‘Hi’ to the umpires and ‘have a great game’ or ‘great job guys,’ if our paths crossed,” Kerr said. “I noticed that even the players and coach had very little to say to the umpires.

“Not one manager came out on the field to dispute a call. Even the fans rarely hooted on the blue.”

Kerr, who retired as a lieutenant in the Leelanau County Sheriff’s Department, enjoyed being at the Major League level for six weeks.

“I umpired some college games but I never had the dream to go any higher and really didn’t think I was good enough to be a pro,” said Kerr, who got married and started a career in law enforcement. “Looking back, I probably could have moved up the Minor League ranks if I would have pursued it.

“It’s hard telling how far I would have advanced – maybe single or double A.”

Kerr’s daily routine included dragging the infield after the third and sixth innings and then watching the players and the game until it’s over. Depending on his shift, he also prepped the fields for the game or cleaned them up after the game.



*Clint Kerr, former NSOA trainer and official, watches a game and hangs out in the dugout waiting to groom the fields again at the Peoria Sports Complex last month.*



*Clint Kerr put his hat on the dugout steps before taking this photo of one of the Major League fields where he was a groundskeeper in spring training.*

“It was a pretty good gig!” said Kerr, who was assigned to the Major League Stadium for every weekday game and had weekends off.

Kerr returned to his home in Leland a couple days ago, but has plans to go back to Arizona again next spring.

“Major League Baseball, warm weather, sunshine daily and no snowblowing, what’s not to love about it?” Kerr said.

Kerr, who retired in August of 2015, got the groundskeeper idea after watching spring training games in 2016 at the Camelback Ranch – home for the Los Angeles Dodgers and Chicago White Sox.

“The green grass, blazing sunshine and sparkling uniforms convinced me that I should be a part of it,” he said.

Kerr went online to land the part-time, minimum wage groundskeeper’s job, although he also applied for security jobs and community service positions with various clubs.

Kerr was one of 33 groundskeepers at the Peoria Sports Complex that included eight full timers. The site is home to the San Diego Padres and the Seattle Mariners. There are 12 practice fields and pitching galleries – with six mounds – and four practice infields to be prepped daily.

Kerr, who officiated high school sports for more than three decades, once said that officiating “fills up,” his happy place.

What about groundskeeping?

“This job seems to be just like officiating in that it is the right situation at the right time in my life,” he said. “Officiating gave more self-gratification and a sense of accomplishment but being around MLB and loving the sun and warmth were the perfect things for me at this point in my life.”

# VETERAN REFEREE, TRAINER THRIVES ON BASKETBALL'S INTENSITY

By Jeff Brunner

One of the fixtures on the northern Michigan sports scene is Ross Schuch, a veteran of 29 years of officiating year-around.

Ross, who has officiated high school state finals in baseball and softball along with a semifinal in football, sat down with the NSOA Newsletter staff to share his thoughts on his career and the state of high school sports officiating.

**Q. Of the four sports that you are officiating today – football, basketball, baseball and softball – which one is your favorite and why?**

A. I love them all, but if I had to choose one, it would be basketball. I love the intensity, quick action and the physical demand of the game. I also have to work at keeping in shape for basketball more than the others.

**Q. Why did you get into officiating and when?**



A. I started officiating church league softball in 1987. I wanted to learn more about the sport so I called Barb Beckett to join the local association and she talked me into doing high school sports the following year. We have been friends ever since! I started with the MHSAA in baseball and softball the first year, and added basketball the next season and football a few years later.

**Q. What's the one big piece of advice you would give a first-year referee?**

A. Have fun, get in the rules book and hustle to show coaches that you are trying to do the best that you can. I would also tell them to hook up with a veteran official and learn as much as you can!

**Q. In your opinion, what has changed the most from the start of your officiating career?**

A. The speed and intensity of the game. It's much faster than it used to be!

**Q. What is the thing you like best about officiating?**

A. The comradery with other officials and helping new officials get started.

**Q. If you could change one thing about officiating — whether in general or something specific to a sport — what would it be, and why?**

A. The fans! They need to become more educated about the game and the rules.

**Q. Do you have any plans to retire in the near future? What other options are you considering for the next several years?**

A. I am planning to retire from basketball here in Michigan because of our plans to travel south for the winter months. I may officiate college softball in Florida or maybe basketball in Texas during the winter months. As of right now, I have no plans to retire from the other sports. I just enjoy it too much!



*Ross Schuch, center, enjoys a light moment with his crew and table personnel during halftime of the Leland/Benzie Central boys basketball game. Also pictured are Mike Reid, left, and Mitch Wilson.*