

The People Make the Game

By Rich Frongillo, past SRA

March 15, 2002 - For most of my thirty something years, it was the game of soccer, the actual playing, that thrilled me. I've loved to play since I was small. The game has satisfied my need for fitness, my enjoyment of team cooperation, my bent towards competition, and my nurturing of self-esteem. Although my passion for the game continues, I find that another element of my involvement pumps life into me.

Perhaps as a sign of age or as a reflection of my new role as State Referee Administrator, I see that the people I've met around the game create in me a similar sense of excitement as the game itself does. Soccer attracts remarkable people -- players, coaches, administrators, volunteers, and referees. As I go about the state, I am impressed by the commitment and energy put forth by so many on a daily basis.

The referee community is arguably the most impressive group within our game. Referees have a tremendous "fraternity": men and women, boys and girls, toiling at a task, motivated by the challenge of guiding a game towards pure enjoyment and safety of all involved. It is difficult for those that have not been a referee to truly appreciate the spirit that moves individuals to strive for continuous improvement in an environment inherently wrought with controversy. The common experiences of referees binds the individuals into a family.

Like any family, the Massachusetts referee family has noteworthy members, individuals who typify the spirit and strength of the group. Former FIFA officials Angelo Bratsis of Norwood and Dilvo DiPlacido of Westwood have carried the torch of excellence for decades. Through his achievements and humble demeanor, former FIFA official Ed Resendes of Swansea has been a role model for young referees. Others have poured in countless hours to help referees develop as officials and as people: Ted Carlson of Bedford (current SDA), Ed Rae of Westwood (current SDI), Andy Weiss of Kingston (former SYRA), Pasquale Puleo of Watertown (former SRA), Jack Duffy of Holliston (former Committee Chair), David English of Rochester (former SRA), and Al Cosentino of Chelmsford (former SRA). When I consider these people that helped shape my own referee career and experience, I see that they are the same people that have defined what it is to be a soccer referee in our state for ALL referees.

Playing the game is still the flame that burns inside me, but I see that it is the relationships built around that flame that provide fuel to keep it burning bright. Good luck and all the best to those in our fraternity as we pull out our whistle and head off to the season.