**4,000 Games and Growing: Methuen's highly regarded Ron Annand officiates year-round in four sports**

By Dave Dyer – Lawrence Eagle Tribute – July 11, 2017

One would think that Methuen’s Ron Annand would be washing his umpire shirts on a regular basis at this time of year.

A past president of the Merrimack Valley Umpires Association (MVUA), a highly regarded rules interpreter who gives classes and tests to aspiring officials, and an umpire who assigners strive to secure, Annand could have his pick of games, from Babe Ruth to Legion and AAU ball to adult men’s league action.

And that’s just baseball. Annand is also one of the top softball officials around, and the summer is flush with weekend softball tournaments and recreational leagues during the week.

But, despite the demand for top baseball officials, the 58-year-old Annand umpires very few games in the summer. He’s too busy with one of the other sports — football, which is his favorite.

Annand is one of a handful in the Merrimack Valley who officiates year-round, with only a few weeks off between seasons every March. He began as a baseball umpire in 1988 and three years later began officiating in football, basketball and softball.

That he would start with baseball is not surprising. A native of North Reading, Annand played baseball for legendary Frank Carey, acting as captain in 1976. Two years earlier when he was on the JV team. the Hornets became the only small school of its size to win the state title before the tournament was divided into divisions.

Playing for Carey could be tough but it usually infused a love of the game. That was certainly true for Annand and it’s what motivated him to begin his officiating career.

“I just wanted to stay part of the game,” said Annand. “That and I wanted to stay in shape.”

While officiating in those early years, Annand came across another local multi-sport official, Fred Simm of Salem, N.H. It was Simm who steered Annand to other sports.

“I enjoyed it (umpiring) a lot and I did games with Freddy,” said Annand. “He got me into football and that started it all.”

Since then, Annand has probably officiated well over 4,000 games in four sports. While many officials are most prolific in baseball or softball, some calling well over 100 games per year, he’s surprisingly busiest in football.

“There are so many opportunities now, even in the summer,” said Annand, who does college as well as high school football games. “There are 7-on-7 leagues, flag football, NEFL (New England Football League) and EFL (Eastern Football League) games, Arena Football and scrimmages. In the fall, I’ll do anything from Pop Warner to college and I do (college) scrimmages in the spring.”

ENJOYS FOOTBALL MOST

Although he finds something positive in every sport, Annand gets the most enjoyment out of football.

“My favorite to play was baseball but my favorite to officiate is football,” he said. “It’s the mentally toughest because you have to stay in the game all the time and it can be a real workout, running up and down the field. You’re moving all the time, especially now because a lot of teams don’t huddle any more.

“Plus, what I really like about it is the camaraderie. You’re usually with the same crew and you get to know each other. It’s a lot of fun.”

Regardless of the sport, Annand is known for his encyclopedic knowledge of the rules. Veteran football officials often come to him with questions about rules, which tend to change frequently and be open to interpretation.

Because of his knowledge of each sport, hundreds of officials know Annand. Plenty of coaches know him as well, but not nearly as many. Unlike some of the more colorful officials, he is from the school that believes that it’s best to remain somewhat anonymous.

“You try to blend in and not affect the game no matter what sport,” said Annand. “You try to answer coaches’ questions the best you can and just do your job.”

Regardless of how well you’re doing your job, of course, officials inevitably come under criticism. Annand does his best to not take it personally. Those officials who do take comments personally tend to just put fuel on the fire.

“It (complaints, criticism) is just part of the game, especially in basketball,” said Annand, who does both boys and girls games. “It can be constant in basketball. You have to learn to block it out.”

Perhaps because of this approach, combined with his even-tempered demeanor, Annand has experienced no major confrontations with coaches or fans over the years. And maybe that’s why he is showing no signs of slowing down anytime soon. Nor does he plan to.

Annand’s love of officiating is perhaps one reason why he went through a career change nearly 20 years ago, from being a production manager to a middle school teacher. For the last seven years, he’s taught at St. Michael’s in North Andover. That followed 10 years at St. Mary’s in Lawrence.

Being a teacher not only gives Annand a more flexible schedule to accommodate his officiating duties, it makes them even more enjoyable.

“I like to stay active but I really like being around the kids,” said Annand. “I like to see the kids I’ve had in school when they’re in varsity sports. It’s like watching them grow up.”

MAKING OF AN OFFICIAL

There are many traits that are common for a good official and Ron Annand has them all according to Bob Oreal, who assigns games in football, basketball and baseball and has worked alongside him in every sport. Following are some areas in which Oreal cites Annand along with comments.

Being in good shape to keep up with the flow. “Ron works out daily at the gym.”

Knowledge of the rules. “In all my years assigning, no one has the knowledge that Ron has in football and baseball.”

Game management skills. “How you interact with coaches is critical to the smooth running of any game. Ron can calm down any tense situation and never throws ‘gasoline on a fire.’ Being an educator, Ron knows how to interact with young adults. “

Working any game as if it were the Super Bowl. “Ron always gives the perception that he is working a big game and to those players in the game it is their most important game.”

Being a mentor to younger officials. “Ron is always passing on his knowledge to any younger official he works with and is trying to make a everyone a better official.”

Having common sense. “This is something you can’t teach but Ron has it.”

MEMORABLE GAMES

When you’ve done as many games as Annand has, at every level, some tend to stand out. In his case, there are two in particular that he’ll always remember.

“One of the first Super Bowls I had (he’s officiated them four times) at Gillette I’ll never forget,” said Annand. “It was really cold and it was a great game. Chelmsford came back and won it, by three, in the last minute.

“The baseball game was in the tournament between St. John’s Prep and Peabody, when (high major league draftee) Jeff Allison was playing for Peabody. I was behind the plate and Allison was on third with a lefty batter up when he stole home, jumping over the catcher for the winning run.”