

MATT NILLES

Officials Category



Matt Nilles' involvement in hockey began in 1969 when his father, John, entered him in skating and house league programs at the YMCA outdoor ice rink in Elmhurst. The finer points of the game were learned in summers spent as a camper at the Wagon Wheel Lodge, the home of the Jim Campbell Power Skating Hockey School. But his career reached a crossroads in 1976. At only about 4'10" and maybe 85 pounds, the thought of continuing on and playing for York Community High School seemed like a treacherous option. So, to stay involved in a sport he loved, Matt turned to officiating.

Over the course of the next 39 seasons, he would work over 2,200 games at every amateur level through Junior A and semi-pro. On-ice highlights included three high school state championship games and three Johnson Invitational tournament championships. Matt was also lucky enough to be among a group of referees to work several Chicago Blackhawks preseason scrimmage games at the old Chicago Stadium, an experience he looks back on as unforgettable.

Grateful for the many ways hockey has enriched his life, Matt increasingly tried to "give back" through off-ice endeavors. He served as an Illinois Hockey Officials Association (IHOA) board member for 12 years, and worked closely with young officials through the IHOA mentoring and evaluation programs. Matt considers his 25 years as a seminar instructor his most rewarding experience in hockey. He was honored to serve as Illinois' Referee-in-Chief and Supervisor of Officials from 1994-1997, and sat on the AHAI Suspension Committee during that time.

With a background in journalism, Matt spent over 30 years writing and editing stories for the IHOA newsletter, USA Hockey's Stripes newsletter, and the nation's signature hockey publication, USA Hockey Magazine. After moving to Urbana in 1997, where he currently lives with his wife, Phyllis, Matt has continued to referee and help out at seminars. He looks back on his 10 seasons officiating University of Illinois games with pride and satisfaction.

Despite a "lower profile" in hockey since moving downstate, Matt is as busy as ever, now in his 17th year teaching fourth grade in the Champaign public school system.