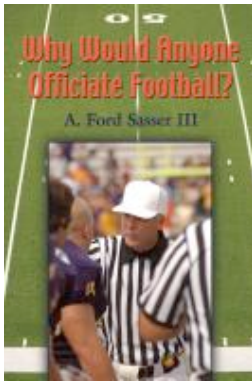


Why Would Anyone Officiate Football?

A. Ford Sasser III





Why Would Anyone Officiate Football? is a light read book about Ford Sasser's experiences as a football official. He explains why he became an official and he outlines what officials do to prepare for their job on the football field. The book is full of stories about his officiating experiences and many are humorous. This is a book that even non-football fans would find entertaining. It does a good job of pointing out the third team on the football field. The next time you watch a football game, you will see the officials differently.

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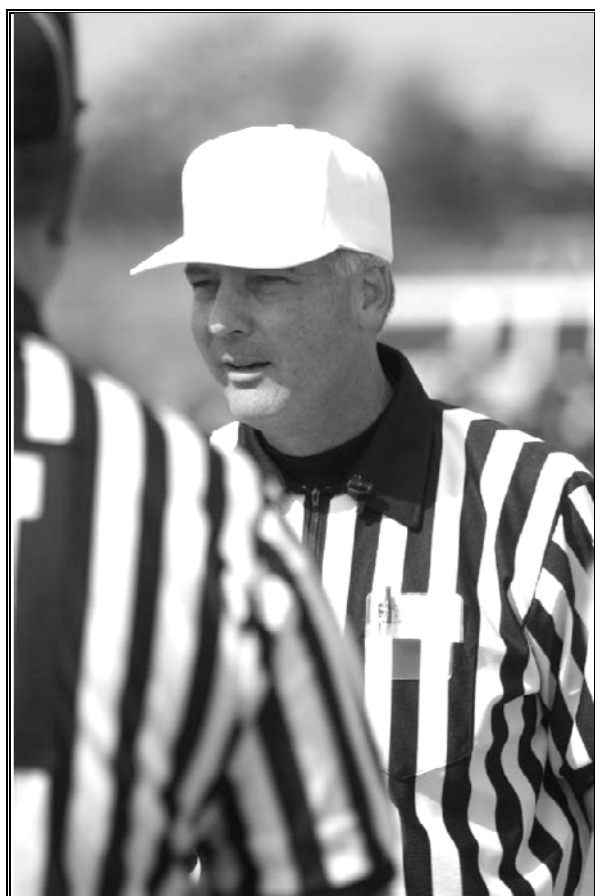
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**WHY WOULD ANYONE OFFICIATE
FOOTBALL?**



Ford Sasser

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-62646-443-8

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-62646-444-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2013

First Edition

CHAPTER 5

Pursuit of a Vision

Bill Shankly was a Scottish soccer player and manager who said, “Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I assure you, it is much more serious than that.”

In those early days, when I started officiating again, I was working as many games as I could. I wanted to get as many snaps in as possible and begin to accumulate the points needed to move up in the TASO Organization. TASO stands for Texas Association of Sports Officials, and it is what replaced the old SFOA. That is the state’s association that provides the training for all sports officials in Texas and particularly football. The association has an annual convention in the summer at different locations around the state, and it also has sanctioned rules and mechanics clinics in the off season. I would go to all the state conventions, and I went to clinics as far away as Blinn Junior College at Brenham, Texas, and Steven F. Austin at Nacogdoches, Texas. In the high school ranks, officials are labeled by their experience level. You are either a Division 5 official, meaning you are the least experienced, or a Division 1 official meaning you are the most experienced. Every year, I would turn in my games that I had worked and the clinics that I attended in order to move up that ladder of divisions. Once I became a Division 1 official, I quit turning in the points, but I continued to go to clinics and state conventions. I found that over the years, you never quit learning. There is always a better or different way that we are being taught to officiate.

It seems like the NFL comes out with rules or mechanics that work well at that level. Then the college supervisors that also officiate in the NFL begin to adopt those philosophies and mechanics, and so they begin to

adopt them at the college level, and then the local state high school associations begin to adopt them. And we see TASO then begin teaching us at the high school level new or different approaches to the game. The game is evolving and the officiating has to evolve with it.

From the time I started officiating, I have worked hard on acquiring and updating my knowledge of the rules. The biggest fear I had from day one was having a coach ask me a rules question and not being able to answer his question. I was in fear of a coach losing confidence in my ability to officiate his game because he did not think I knew the rules of the game or how to apply the rules. By challenging myself that way, it seems like I am always learning something new about the rules. Either I have had a misunderstanding of the application of the rules, or the rules were changing. Sometimes, a play scenario would be presented to me and I would be stumped on how to apply the rules correctly. But I learned who the other good rules officials were and learned from them. Ed Knetig, my friend, said to me one time that his wife said football officials are the dumbest people she knows. She says we have to read the rule book over and over again and never seem to learn what is in it. Well, she is right about one thing, we do read it over and over again because about the time you think you understand all the rules, someone gives you a play situation that stumps you and you are back in the book. She may be right on the other point, too. We may be the dumbest people she knows.

Why do men devote so much time to a game we do not play, only to be criticized on our judgment and never appreciated for the job that we do? The pay is minimal when you consider the cost of our equipment, the cost of our travel, and the time it takes us away from our families. People ask me why I would want to be a football official, and I try and explain it like this:

As I stated earlier, my first choice for a vocation was to be a football coach. Working with young men and teaching them life lessons through the game of football was my dream. But when that didn't work out and I became too old to play, I started officiating. Officiating made me a

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student of the game, and it took me out of the stands and put me back on the field where I could be part of the game I love so much. Officiating is very therapeutic for me. When I am on the football field, the whole world is on that field. Nothing else is going on in my life. I do not think about my work at the bank or any other distractions in my life. For those two and a half to three hours, it is just that game I am officiating. I have met great people through officiating football and I have met great coaches. The game of football has blessed my life in ways that I can never fully explain. It has brought me laughter and has brought me tears. I have few regrets about my officiating life. The only regrets are some of those family times that I may have missed. I thank God that I have a wife that loves me and children that love me, and though they sometimes get frustrated with the time I spend away from home, they've supported me in what I do.

When you first start officiating, you do a lot of junior high school games or middle school games as they call it now. When my older daughter, Amanda, was in the seventh grade, she attended Travis Middle School in McAllen. Travis mascots were known as the Terriers. The seventh grade girls had a pep squad and the eighth grade girls were the cheerleaders. My daughter was in the pep squad. I was officiating a game for the Travis Terriers when they were playing another McAllen middle school. After the game, I asked my daughter if she wanted to ride home with me, but she said that she wanted to ride in the school bus with the other girls from her school, so I drove home by myself. I called my wife on the cell phone and told her I was following the school bus back to Travis Middle School to pick up our daughter. My wife recommended that I go straight home and shower. She said that she would pick up our daughter and get us some hamburgers for supper and bring them home. When they arrived home, my daughter asked if I heard the pep squad do their cheers during the game. I told her that I had. But I didn't really remember her pep squad's cheers. She then asked if I heard the cheer for the officials. I said, "No, I hadn't." She said that she told all the girls that her daddy was one of the referees, so they put a cheer together for that game. I asked her, "How did the cheer go?" She said, "H-E-L-P, Help, Daddy, Help!" After I finished

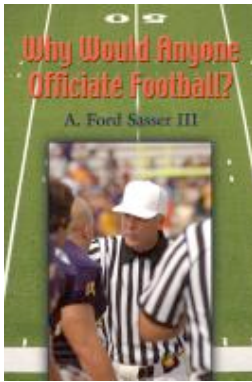
Ford Sasser

laughing, I said, “Honey, your team needed a lot more help tonight than I could have given to them.”

WHY WOULD ANYONE OFFICIATE FOOTBALL?



I am making the announcement of the foul in a game at Howard Payne University with some McMurry University players behind me.



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