

OBITUARIES

BOB BROWN 1936-2012

High school ref kept games fair for 5 decades

He officiated many sports, other referees

BY RONNIE REESE
Special to the Tribune

High school referee Bob Brown officiated football and basketball games in Illinois and his native New Jersey for more than 50 years.

He worked 655 varsity football games and, as assignment chairman of the Northern Officials Association, assigned referees for North Suburban Conference wrestling, football and boys basketball for 40 years.

Mr. Brown, 75, a retired Illinois High School Association official and member of the Lake County Sports Hall of Fame, died of complications from cancer Tuesday, Jan. 10, in Northwestern Lake Forest Hospital, said his daughter, Deane.

He played sports and was a manager for teams at his high school in Elizabeth, N.J. He began refereeing in New Jersey before graduating from the University of Michigan, marrying and later moving to Highland Park in 1966.

Mr. Brown's primary business was wholesale

food brokerage. He started his own company, Able Men Associates Inc., a name created more out of advertising savvy than any business model, his daughter said.

"I think because he wanted to be listed first in the phone book or something," she said with a laugh. "It has nothing to do with the turkey products" he sold.

From 1966 to 2008, Mr. Brown officiated high school football and basketball games in Illinois and assigned referees for the Fox Valley, North Suburban and Central Suburban conferences.

As a veteran with the Northern Officials Association, he gave many young referees their first breaks, and he became known for his dedication to the fairness of competition and making sure games were played by the rules.

Mr. Brown also was admired for his sense of humor and photographic memory.

"Great mind and great friend," said Rocky Nelson, chairman of the Northern Officials Association. "He could tell you what your schedule was when you couldn't even remember what it was, sometimes."

"Bob cared very much



Bob Brown joined the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association's Hall of Fame in 2009. "He cared about the kids and he cared about officials," a colleague said.

about high school sports," said Phil Schmidt, Mr. Brown's basketball referee partner for more than a decade. "He cared about the kids and he cared about officials."

But Mr. Brown wasn't above stretching the truth a bit when it came to watching Cubs games with his family at Wrigley Field, his daughter said. "When I was 5 years old, he convinced me that the ladies room was closed until after the ninth inning, so he wouldn't have to get up,"

she said. "And I believed him until I was, like, 13."

In 2004, the Bob Brown Scholarship Fund was created to honor a student in the Crystal Lake High School District. Mr. Brown was inducted into the Lake County Sports Hall of Fame in 2008. The next year, he got the same honor from the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association.

Mr. Brown also is survived by his wife of 53 years, Linn; a son, Michael; and three grandchildren.

Services have been held.