

Pioneer Sports Group Turns 100

Chicago, Illinois (February 1, 2017) – The Athletic Officials Association (AOA), the oldest referee training organization in Illinois, and thought to be the oldest in the United States, celebrates its 100 year anniversary in 2017.

In the 1920's the AOA Advisory Board included **Alonzo Stagg, Knute Rockne**, and other Midwestern college coaches and administrators that helped lead the AOA in training referees for basketball and football. Today the AOA has 465 members with training programs in baseball and softball as well as basketball and football. The AOA referees are all registered with the Illinois High School Association, with many members working multiple sports just as their predecessors did.

All members are trained in rules, mechanics, professionalism and philosophy with extensive use of video as part of the training process. "Any organization that thrives for 100 years or more has to periodically reinvent itself to remain relevant" said Ted Lepucki, Chairman of the Board of Directors that oversees all the sports divisions. "For the last two years, AOA has provided its football members on-line video of the games that they work. Now the training is much more timely and relevant. It's very personal and humbling, but the end result is continuous improvement. Our goal is to have the best officials on the games."

Many AOA alumni worked collegiate and professional contests in games with **Red Grange** and **Bronco Nagurski**, including the 1932 Bears-Packers game. Today AOA continues to have member officials appointed to state finals in all of the 4 sports divisions. These officials build on a deep tradition of excellence and pride. Here are a few examples:

Walter Eckersall University of Chicago All American Quarterback and worked as Referee for the First Tournament of Roses Game, was the First AOA Football Division President in 1917. He was a reporter for the Chicago Tribune and instrumental in forming the Chicago Tribune Athletic Association that recognized sports officials.

Hugh Ray AOA Football Division Rules Interpreter, Division President (1929-'35), Vice Chairman of the Board (1930-'32) and only Football Official Inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame. Recommended by George Halas and worked as Technical Rules Advisor for the NFL from 1933 to 1952. Developed rules by example that became the official's casebook. Mr. Ray was an AOA Football and Basketball official.

Irv Kupcinet AOA Basketball and Football official, who had a brief career as an NFL player. In 1940, Mr. Kupcinet was the Head Linesman for the historic Bears – Washington NFL championship game where the Bears scored 73 points, the largest winning margin in NFL history. He was a Chicago radio and TV personality and worked for the Chicago Sun Times.

Tommy Kouzmanoff AOA Basketball and Football Official worked IHSA state Basketball finals in 1953, '54 '55 who served as the longest running Football Division President for 15 years. He was a newspaper reporter who worked for the Chicago American and he covered 31 IHSA state final basketball tournaments.

About the AOA

AOA is a non-profit training organization for sports officials in the greater Chicagoland area and holds sessions at Fenton High School in Bensenville, York High School in Elmhurst, and Naperville North High School. The focus of the AOA is training for high school sports, using rules and mechanics from the National Federation of High Schools and the Illinois High School Association. AOA will hold a Centennial Banquet & Reunion on May 20, 2017.

For more information contact:
Ted Lepucki 847-322-0112
Laurie Jordan 630-640-8401