

CFS Football

For referee Boccanfuso, being nervous for the first time was worth it

This story originally appeared in the Princeton Packet newspaper

By Bob Nuse

Fish4Scores.com

In more than 25 years as a Division I football official, Vince Boccanfuso never felt nervous leading up to a game.

That all changed when he got the word he would be part of the officiating crew assigned to the Football College Subdivision (formerly Division I-AA) championship game that was played last Saturday in Frisco, Texas.

"I was nervous from the time I got the call up until the opening kickoff," said Boccanfuso, a Hamilton Township resident. "So it went from December 12 until the opening kickoff, then the nerves went away."

Boccanfuso was the Field Judge on the crew that officiated North Dakota State's 17-6 win over Sam Houston State before a sellout crowd at Pizza Hut Park.

"It was very intense mentally, physically and the crowd was so loud you couldn't hear yourself think," said Boccanfuso, who started officiating at the Division I level in 1985 and has called 282 Division I games. "The adrenaline kicked in. My wife (Rita) was at the game and she couldn't sit down because people stood up the entire game."

After graduating from Princeton High in 1966, where he played football and ran track, Boccanfuso attended Rutgers University, which is when he began officiating football as a college senior. He started with high school games in 1969, officiated his first college game in 1976 at the Division III level, and then jumped to Division I in 1985.

"My first game was Delaware against Rhode Island and Rich Gannon was the quarterback for Delaware and Tom Ehrhardt was at Rhode Island," Boccanfuso recalled. "They didn't run until the second half of the game. The ball was in the air the whole game."

At that time Boccanfuso never envisioned working a national championship game. But as the years went by he got closer and closer to what became his biggest goal. He officiated in the Colonial Athletic Association, Ivy League and Patriot League, and it was the success of the programs in those leagues that actually kept him and his crewmates from reaching the title game.

"Different years different crews were considered No. 1," Boccanfuso said. "This was the fifth time we were in line for the championship. In the past the commissioner didn't have to give a crew at the beginning. He would wait. But six years ago he said if we get it here are the seven guys that would work it. And then we had a team in the final each time and you can't work the game if a team from your league is in it. That happened four times."

Officiating the FCS championship game capped one of the best years in officiating for the 63-year-old Boccanfuso. He was on the crew that worked the Harvard-Yale game, had a quarterfinal game in the FCS playoffs, and then worked the final.

"There were many times I looked up in the stands and heard the fans and thought this must be a dream," Boccanfuso said. "But you had to be ready to make the call every time. In the last few minutes our whole crew kept saying let's just have a nice easy ending. We had a nice game all the way through and didn't want have problems the last couple minutes."

"Being chosen to work any championship game is the highest honor you can aspire to. So this was a thrill for me."

Boccanfuso still works local high school games when he can fit them into his schedule. This year he was part of the crew for the annual Steinert-Hamilton Thanksgiving Day game, which he has done for the last 20 years.

He was joined on the crew for the final by referee Tony Marcella, as well as fellow crew members Chris Smith, Jeff Cooney, George O'Brien, Lyndell Shelton and John Shigo. Marcella and Shelton are part of Boccanfuso's regular season crew. The others all officiate within the same association.

"We were really treated well by Texas Association of Sports Officials," Boccanfuso said. "They treated us like we were royalty. Two guys drove us around. They drove my wife to the game. They

took us out to dinner. They were great. I got a nice letter from CAA commissioner Tom Yeager congratulating us on the job we did. Our uniform for the game was donated to us by Dick Honig of Honig Sports. And we're going to be getting a championship watch from the CAA."

It was certainly an experience Boccanfuso will never forget. And one he was glad he could share with his wife, Rita.

"If it wasn't for my wife I would not have gotten this far because she let me do it," Boccanfuso said. "It's quite a bit of travel. We go from Maine to Atlanta now. She has always been great about it."

螞