



Rockne and Yost Took It Seriously; Do You?

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As officials we solicit assignments, accept assignments and complete assignments. It's what we do -- but it begs the question: Do we prepare for our assignments with the same zeal as we covet them? Ask yourself if legendary coaches like Knute Rockne, Fielding Yost or Lloyd Olds would have thought much of your preparedness?

The preparation we put into an assignment says a lot about our industry standards today, but the modern-day assignment process, the preparation requirements and the expectations placed upon officials pre-date most us back to a time of telegrams, penned letters and plow horses. In the post World War I days at the University of Michigan and University of Notre Dame, Michigan's Yost and Notre Dame's Rockne would often pen one another in the cold winter months and spring thaw about their upcoming football seasons. Many times these letters and telegrams discussed officials, and specifically, which officials were better suited than others to work certain games.

The two men, regarded as pioneers at their respective universities, bantered to and fro about officiating standards, offered each other opinion on officials in their respective areas, discussed the school each official hailed from and what their strengths and weaknesses might be. Sound familiar? Does a background check sound that much different in today's officiating industry jargon? Yost and Rockne prepared for the season and they expected contracted officials to treat their games in the same manner they expected from their own players.

Enter Dr. Lloyd Olds, a coach, educator and referee from Michigan State Normal College (MSNC), a teacher's college located just six miles from the University of Michigan in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Today MSNC is better known as Eastern Michigan University, where the school's track & field teams were established as a nationally-respected program by Olds.

Olds was already a well-respected referee for working football games for Yost and Rockne in the fall. Michigan State College (now Michigan State University) hired Olds to work a Michigan State football game with visiting University of Arizona, circa 1920. Olds wore white knickers and a dark green blouse, a choice undoubtedly influenced by the availability of the school colors worn by his Hurons at Michigan State Normal. Olds was positioned not far from the quarterback that day when the Arizona quarterback took a snap and stuck the ball in Olds' midsection, unaware of Olds being a referee and not a player. Olds fumbled the ball and the Arizona quarterback fell on the ball to the great relief of Olds.

Olds returned to Ypsilanti after that game and asked George Moe from Moe's Sport Shop in Ann Arbor to craft a shirt for him that would be of 'great contrast' in vertical stripes, opposite of the popular horizontal striping many

teams football teams were outfitted in. Olds debuted in his striped shirt a few months later in Detroit at the Michigan High School Athletic Association's basketball championships, an event Olds worked 12 consecutive years. Olds recalled, "When I appeared on the court in the shirt for the first time I received plenty of boos from the crowd," but the shirt, made of wool, caught on with the moniker 'zebra shirt'. Olds later sold the design to Wilson Sporting Goods, who manufactured the first retail referee shirts. Ironically, Wilson no longer makes referee apparel.

The point to this story, of the precursors to the modern-day assignment process, is one of preparedness. Lloyd Olds was highly thought of because he was a good official who had a reputation of being prepared. It was that preparation that landed him assignments at Notre Dame, Michigan and Michigan State. Being in the right place, at the right time and prepared with the right idea, Lloyd Olds is remembered for a significant contribution to the officiating industry. Lloyd Olds was prepared.

Cliff Keen Athletic is cut from the same cloth as Olds, Rockne and Yost. Coach Cliff Keen, the company namesake, was a legendary wrestling and football coach at the University of Michigan for 44 seasons. Like Olds before him, Cliff Keen was an official and later an advocate for the high standards we use today in officiating. Cliff Keen Athletic knows you take your assignments seriously. We know you can only be your best if you look your best and feel your best. Cliff Keen Athletic constantly strives to create shirts, pants, jackets and hats to the most exacting standards of the best officials.

We make great officiating gear for great officials. It's what we do.

(Historical information courtesy of Referee Magazine)



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Collegiate officials Larry Martin, Tony Love and Rex Forsyth are immersed in pregame preparation before tip-off.