



JOHN OPOKA *Referees' Category*

John played hockey in high school and started to officiate while in college at the age of 19. At that early age, John feels fortunate to have had his officiating advance primarily because of a man who he greatly respected, admired, and strived to emulate...Mr. Chet Stewart. Chet recommended John, and at that point he was voted into the collegiate chapter (NIHOA). The membership list was short, only twelve officials.

John is proud of his affiliation with both IHOA and NIHOA. He always strived to do his best in all games, and especially the state playoffs, various tournaments, state finals, and national tournaments that he was awarded to work. His on ice career spanned 34 years.

Ken Michel, Don Olynyk, and John headed the college chapter for nearly three decades. John was referee-in-chief for both the Illinois-Wisconsin Collegiate Hockey League, as well as referee-in-chief for the Central State Collegiate Hockey League. He was instrumental in affecting change to NCAA ice hockey rules. Also during this time, John conducted seminars for rules interpretation for the NCAA at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, University of Notre Dame, Lake Forest College, and other local Illinois programs.



John represented a businesslike attitude on and off the ice, his commitment to preparedness and time management was always evident. He was most likely the first official to arrive, always dressed the part, and devoted himself to consistently maintain the image of a professional official.

As a member of the IHOA Board of Directors, John served as Ethics Chairperson and Seminar Coordinator. His creation of the first "Super Seminar," was an important contribution to the IHOA program. By bringing all levels of officials together at one site, exchanging electronic medium and personnel served as a model for other states to follow. John was a speaker with the Society of Manufacturing Engineers, and used his seminar leadership knowledge to enhance the natural evolution for the program.

While John was officiating, he also was an avid gardener (after his baseball career was over), and belonged to the Western Chicagoland Rose Society where he served as president for five years. He is still very active in gardening and continues to give rose seminars for Alsip Nursery at their various locations.

After John's on ice officiating career was over, he became active and is now a leader in the Community Emergency Response Team in his hometown of New Lenox. He accepted the team's Governor's Home Town Award in 2011 at the Executive Mansion in Springfield, sponsored by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity for Preparing Citizens for Emergencies and Disasters.

John thanks IHOA and AHAI for the hockey memories that will last forever. He thanks the Hall of Fame Committee for honoring him with such a great tribute to be inducted into the Illinois Hockey Hall of Fame. John plans to continue being an ambassador of the great values of officiating ice hockey.