

## Press Clippings 04/16/20

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### Former Elgin High principal recalls his start as NFL referee

By: John Radtke



Former Elgin High principal and NFL official Larry Nemmers displays the Art McNally Award he received from the NFL in 2006. Nemmers was the side judge for Super Bowl XXV in 1991.



Kansas City Chiefs coach Dick Vermeil gives referee Larry Nemmers and earful after an unsportsmanlike conduct foul was called in a 2006 game at Arrowhead Stadium.

From humble beginnings in his native Waterloo, Iowa, former Elgin High School principal Larry Nemmers not only became an educator but a decorated football and basketball official, a career that reached its pinnacle when he was the side judge for Super Bowl XXV in 1991.

Nemmers graduated from Waterloo's Columbus High School in 1961, where he played football, basketball and baseball.

His college education came at Upper Iowa University, East Texas University and Northern Illinois University, and it was at Upper Iowa where he first gained an interest in officiating.

Nemmers came to Elgin in 1965 as a science teacher at Kimball Middle School. He later became

an assistant principal at Larkin High School, which led to him becoming Elgin High's principal in 1982, a post he held through 1994. His sons — Shane, Lance and Brett — were all standout athletes at Larkin.

A longtime Illinois High School Association football and basketball official who worked the state basketball championship game in 1980, Nemmers was also a Big Ten football official for nine years, working the Rose Bowl game in 1984 between UCLA and Illinois.

In 1985, Nemmers was hired as an NFL official. He was promoted to referee and crew chief in 1991. He retired from the field in 2007 and finished his career as a replay official, which included working Super Bowl XLVI.

Nemmers, 76, lives with his wife Sherry in Springfield, Mo., where they have made their home the past 27 years.

Nemmers wore No. 20 his entire NFL career, so we asked him 20 questions on various topics. Today, he looks back at his pre-NFL career.

DH: What are a couple of your fondest memories of your time in Elgin?

Nemmers: No. 1 would be the birth of my three sons. All of them were born at the old St. Joe's Hospital. No. 2 is landing my first teaching and coaching job at Kimball in 1965. I coached football, basketball and track and I was paid \$200 for each of those sports. Back then, the ninth-graders were at what we then called the junior highs. I can remember sitting down with (longtime Larkin football coach) Ray Haley and trying to run as much of his offense as I could with the ninth-graders. Next would be being named principal of Elgin High in 1982. I was so excited to get that job and I was blessed with an outstanding staff. A fourth was being selected as a Big Ten official in 1976 and then the NFL in 1985.

Q: As an IHSA basketball official, you worked the 1980 Class AA state title game. What do you remember about that game?

A: It's really a fond memory. The title game was Manley and Effingham. That was a great game (won by Manley 69-61). Effingham had 7-foot-2 Uwe Blab. Russell Cross was Manley's big player at 6-10. Blab went to Indiana and Cross went to Purdue. Both of them went in the first round of the NBA draft (Cross in 1983, Blab in 1985). It was a classic championship game to work. Both teams had only lost one game all year. One of the highlights was I got to work that game with one of my best friends, Denny Freund.

Q: Tell us your thoughts on the state basketball tournaments being canceled this year due to COVID-19.

A: The ones I feel sorry for are the seniors, and that's in all sports. The Illinois basketball tournament is one of the premier high school basketball tournaments in the country, but again it's better to be safe now than sorry for it later.

Q: Who were your favorite football and basketball officials to work high school games with?

A: In high school basketball it was always Denny Freund. And of course, Wally Wetzel. Back then only four officials worked football games and we put together a crew before they even had a state tournament. Dick Sharp from Hampshire was our referee, and there was Wally, myself and Phil Hudgens. I also have to mention Dan Davie of Batavia. I always credit much of my officiating career to him. He was one of the best football officials I ever saw.

Q: As a high school athlete in Iowa, which sport did you excel in?

A: I went to a real small Catholic high school called Sacred Heart my freshman and sophomore year and we only had baseball and basketball. Then, my junior year I went to Columbus and got into playing football then. We only had 600 to 700 kids and we all played three sports back then. I was good at all of them and got a scholarship to Upper Iowa to play basketball and baseball. I played all three sports my freshman and sophomore year then just football junior and senior year.

Q: Which pro athlete did you idolize growing up and why?

A: Mickey Mantle. My dad made me a Yankee fan. He was a huge Joe DiMaggio fan. Back then you didn't see football on TV much but my football hero was Johnny Unitas with his high top shoes.

Q: What are your three sons doing today?

A: Shane, at 55, is the oldest. He's the senior vice president of Corvus Property Management, a company based in Florida. Lance is a mechanical engineer for Hormel Foods in Dubuque, Iowa, and Brett is a financial account manager for Metro PCS in Florida.

Q: What made you get into motivational speaking and how was that career?

A: It's really not a career, it's more an avocation. We had so many people interested in the NFL and it was just natural for me to take my NFL career and my principalship at Elgin High and intertwine the two in my motivational speaking. I always used stories about Elgin High kids and it was fun for me to stand in front of groups and tell stories of those two. It was fun to see people ask questions. It was just a fun thing to do.

Q: Who had the best pizza when you lived in Bartlett?

A: I'm a pizza freak. One of my pet peeves about living in Springfield is nobody knows what a good pizza is. When I lived in Bartlett my favorite was always Lou Malnati's.

- Next: Nemmers' Big Ten and NFL careers.