

# Still Standing: Oklahoma Referee Is an 'Inspiration'

By Steven L. Tietz

Longtime Oklahoma football referee Randy Jeffers believes he was born for a reason, so he simply refuses to quit.

A heart operation 10 years ago hardly made a dent.

A diagnosis of prostate cancer seven years ago is treated regularly but does not get in his way.



Referee Randy Jeffers has overcome heart surgery, prostate cancer and a broken neck to remain a fixture at Oklahoma prep football games.

And in mid-August 2018, about nine months after a collision with a pair of players in a game broke his neck, left him temporarily paralyzed and required two surgeries, he stepped onto the field for opening scrimmages of the new prep football season and hasn't slowed down since.

It's no wonder that Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association (OSSAA) Director of Officials Todd Dilbeck calls Jeffers "a great inspiration to all officials."

"I'm doing great," Jeffers said. "My strength isn't what it should be yet, but I'm still getting up and down the field with 16- and 17-year-olds.

He sees himself as a role model.

"I've got a large family," Jeffers

said, "and I want them to see my fight, because I want them to persevere when things get tough, too."

It's the same attitude that's carried Jeffers through more than 40 years as a football official. While in college in Tulsa in the early 1970s, Jeffers, 66, said a trusted coach told him officiating was the best way to stay involved in football.

So that's what he did, getting in touch with the Greater Tulsa Officials Association (he is currently an officer on the board) and never looking back. He worked his way up to referee status about 20 years ago.

Jeffers worked small-college football for a time and has been a fixture on high school Fridays for as long as he can remember.

And he will continue to do so. After the collision in 2017, he spent 16 days in the hospital. Following the surgeries, with rehab still ahead of him, he walked out under his own power (albeit with some help).

His long-term goals were to be able to play with his grandchildren and then get back to officiating ASAP.

"He (my doctor) did not commit, but he was in my corner," Jeffers said.

By Aug. 6, 2018, Jeffers had met or exceeded every therapy goal.

"My doctor then said, 'Who am I to stand in your way?'" said Jeffers, and 10 days later he was working the scrimmages.

"I don't want to be defined by my circumstances (illness and injury)," he added. "Officiating has kept me active and I really think it prepared me for all the situations I've faced.

"I want to be a witness for fighting and not giving up."

When he does step away, it will be on his terms.

"I've been blessed," he said. "When it's time I will know it, but as long as I can be active I'll do it. I've been put here for a purpose (by God) and I'm going to keep going."

Steven L. Tietz is an award-winning sportswriter from Milwaukee. □

## Four Sports Suit Havercroft



**Rick Havercroft**  
Age: 66  
Saginaw, Mich.

A veteran of 54 years of umpiring, Rick Havercroft was recently inducted in the Saginaw County Sports Hall of Fame for his multi-sport efforts. He is still working in basketball, football, baseball and softball after starting at 12 when he worked a Little league game and allegedly told his future insurance agent, who stood 6-foot-5 at the time, "to sit down and shut up." "I don't remember that but he sure did," said Havercroft with a laugh. Havercroft is also in the Michigan Amateur Softball Association Hall of Fame after a career that included 14 International Softball Congress World Tournaments. He's a regular at Michigan prep football and basketball games too. "Officiating gets in your blood," he said.

SOURCE: SAGINAW SPORTS

## Zender Into WOA Hall



**Mike Zender**  
Age: 66  
Bellingham, Wash.

A 45-year football and basketball veteran, Mike Zender was inducted into the Washington Officials Association (WOA) Hall of Fame this past summer. He officiated 12 state tournaments in football and 15 in basketball and in 2003 was named WOA Official of the Year for football. Zender was also instrumental in starting the WOA camp for football officials and continues to give back to the association by assisting in the evaluation and mentoring of younger officials and local summer camps. He served on both the football and basketball association boards for Whatcom-Skagit counties for 25 years and as the president of each for four years. He said he'll keep officiating as "long as his body holds up."

SOURCE: LYNDEN TRIBUNE

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