

Pries uses love of sports for successful officiating career

By Ginna Young

You may know him as Sgt. Daryl Pries with the Cadott Police Department, but Pries, a Wausau native, has another uniform to his credit – one with black and white stripes. For the last 31 years, Pries has worn a whistle around his neck as a referee, officiating basketball games on the high school level.

“Baseball’s actually my first passion,” said Pries.

Coming out of high school, where he was a player himself, Pries began his referee work. He even went to professional umpire school in Florida, in 1996, then worked four years professionally, in the Double A leagues.

“When I got back home, I got tired of it my last two years, because it got pretty in-depth,” he said.

With Double A, Pries worked a major league schedule almost every day, and could have worked winter leagues, and even gone to Cuba and Venezuela, but decided not to, because he didn’t know Spanish and didn’t have the right mindset to go.

“When you work in a league, you work every day,” said Pries. “There’s a break maybe once a month, that’s it. You’re there to work and they work you.”

Pries decided he could do high school and college referee work while he got his degree, continuing that once he worked in law enforcement. After he met his wife, Pries stuck with reffing for the first few years of their marriage – basketball in the winter and baseball in the spring – but after the couple decided they wanted to have a family, he knew he couldn’t be gone that much.

He got out of baseball about 15 years ago, but entered back onto the field a few years back. Since then, Pries started to realize it was time for him to step away from the basketball side of officiating, as his knees are giving him trouble, running back and forth on the court.

“I don’t have any warranty left,” he said, laughing.

Pries just finished officiating his seventh State tournament assignment of his career, ending with the WIAA Boys

State Basketball Tournament March 17-19, in Madison. Pries started his State appearances with the girls tournament, then moved to the boys side after a few years.

In order to qualify for the State officiating, a referee has to put in a full year on the court, and is strictly assigned by the WIAA director, who has connections around the state, who inform them who they think would be a good fit. Pries said he was very fortunate to reach the State officiating level, but knew it was time to let go.

“It’s time for someone else to experience that,” he said.

Despite stepping down, Pries will still appear on the court next season, as he has 20 games left on his contract to fulfill. And with a shortage of referees in every sport, Pries wants to do his part.

“I don’t want to put anybody in a bind,” he said.

For him, 20 games in a season is easy to manage, compared to the 50 he put in this year, and the 70 or so back in the day when he was heavily involved, in addition to his full-time job as a police officer.

That doesn’t mean he isn’t involved in officiating in some form, as the college level baseball conferences needed help and liked that he has so much experience.

“I’m working five different conferences at the college level, including the Big Ten,” said Pries.

Since Pries loves to travel, sports gave him the avenue for meeting people. He was even able, in the past, through his connections of working collegiate basketball, to be on the National Officiating Staff for the Amateur Athletic Union.

“So, I would go all over the country in the summer for a week at a time,” he said.

Pries said, while dealing with the crowds at games can be a hassle at times, the hardest part is working with other referees, as each one needs to have assigned areas to watch. If they work together a lot, they get into a rhythm, which helps make for better officiating.

It also helps to interact with the student section, so Pries keeps a pocket full of Lifesavers to hand out to the kids in the

stands.

“You really have to establish a rapport with them,” said Pries.

With the great need for officials, Pries encourages anyone who has played a sport prior, to attend a camp and see if the referee life is for them. He says if a referee has played, it’s already a step up, since they have a player’s mentality and can anticipate what is going to happen on the court.

“That’s just a great thing to bring on the court as a new official, because you will excel,” he said, adding the extra money is not a bad perk. “If I wanted to work every day, I could. What you put into your career, you’re going to get out of it.”



Submitted Photo

Daryl Pries officiated his last boys basketball State game March 19, in the tournament championship match-up. Pries has served as a referee in some capacity for more than three decades.

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