

Saturdays in the South: Local Author Chronicles His Time

# Memoirs of a Football Official

BY GUS MORRIS | PHOTOS BY BY GUS MORRIS



Football officials are the least understood, unsung necessities of the game, ensuring fairness and upholding the game's integrity, even amid a downpour of vitriol hurled their way. I spent an incredible 31 years as a Head Linesman in the Southeastern Conference, unquestionably the most prestigious and dominant league in the country. My journey as a football official was a rollercoaster of great moments, challenges, and unforgettable experiences. In my book, "Saturdays in the South", I pull

back the curtains on the lesser-known aspects of the game that most people don't understand.

My officiating career began as a casual endeavor in 1986, working middle and high school football to stay active, remaining involved in the sport, and to have fun. As a former player, through college, my background provided a solid foundation of the game, but I knew I needed to master the rules and subsequent penalty enforcement, so I devoted endless hours to studying. The opportunity to officiate lower division college football came knocking, and with the encouragement and mentorship of seasoned officials, I found myself progressing steadily.

Then, in the lead-up to the 1990 football season, a call came that changed everything - an invitation to join the Southeastern Conference Football Officials Association. Stepping into the SEC was a big leap, but with the guidance of veteran officials, I adapted to the increased player size and speed. The magnificence of SEC football was awe-inspiring - from colossal stadiums, roaring crowds to marching bands that painted a vibrant backdrop to the game.

Officiating football extends far beyond game day itself. Countless hours of rules study, attendance at clinics, and maintaining physical fitness were crucial elements of the job. Balancing officiating with family life and other commitments demanded attention to detail, ensuring that my focus remained unwavering on game day. The experience as an official also honed my people skills, enriching my everyday interactions.

During my time as an official, my experiences spread beyond the confines of game day. The demanding schedule involved flying, driving, dealing with rental cars, restaurants and staying in hotels, all of which left a lasting impact and deserve mentioning. Along the journey, I formed close bonds with some fellow officials, leading to



the creation of unique and memorable moments together. As my children grew older, they had the opportunity to accompany me on some trips, witnessing the action firsthand. Throughout it all, family and friends played a significant role, their support and presence becoming an integral part of my journey as an official. Regardless of the topic, officiating served as the common thread that bound all my experiences together.

Originally, I began writing my stories as a legacy for my children and grandchildren, sharing the diverse experiences I had as an official. The moments I cherished, the individuals I met, the esteemed coaches I worked with, and the extraordinary players I encountered - all of these I wanted to immortalize on paper. Encouraged by others who read my tales, I ventured into the realm of writing a book, "Saturdays in the South". It became a reality 24 months later, thanks to the support of my publisher, BookLogix.

Two vital pieces of advice guided me throughout my career. First, arrive a little early and try not to be in a rush to leave. Second, selectively filter the feedback you receive and dismiss criticism from those you wouldn't seek advice from. These principles kept me grounded, allowed me to cherish each experience, and enabled me to lead a life enriched by officiating.

If you're a college football enthusiast, I invite you to read "Saturdays in the South". While I may not alter your perception of officials, the book will provide a fascinating insight into the hidden facets of the game. As officials, we live amongst the fans, sharing our passion for football and striving to contribute to the sport we love.

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