

Capital Area Officials Association

Tony Payne

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Tony Payne Game - Video Feature

Tony Payne, a veteran official whose numerous MHSAA Finals assignments in football and basketball represent only a fraction of his decorated resumé, died on April 21, 2006, at the age of 44 following a lengthy illness.

A Lansing native and member of the Capital Area Officials Association, Payne was one of the most respected and knowledgeable officials in the state and the Midwest who ultimately ascended to the major college ranks in football and regularly worked a Big Ten schedule.

However, it was his tireless and selfless recruitment and training of young officials which made him more than just another person in stripes.

“Tony Payne was a big time official who worked big time games, but never 'big timed' anyone,” said CAO A President Jeff Spedoske. “Tony would work in front of 100,000 people on a Saturday in the Big Ten and then work a freshman game the following Thursday in order to mentor new officials. He truly cared about the future of officiating, especially in the Lansing area. Tony was my friend and mentor; he was my brother and my partner. He was all these things to so many of us who officiate.”

Payne, a graduate of Lansing Harry Hill High School where he excelled in three sports, also officiated NFL Europe and Mid-American Conference basketball, and seemingly every league in between.

“The passing of Tony "T.P." Payne is a terrible loss to the officiating community not only in Lansing but the entire state,” said CAO A Assignor Mike Conlin. “Tony was an outstanding official and an even better person. He was the partner you wanted on the tough basketball game. He was the umpire you wanted in the middle to control a tough football game. As Tony progressed to the highest levels, he never forgot where he came from. He was always helping the young and less experienced official either by working a subvarsity contest with them or observing and critiquing them at a scrimmage or camp. His legacy will live on in the officials that he influenced throughout his career.”

Following high school, Payne attended Ferris State University on a football scholarship, earning his bachelor’s degree in business administration which led to a successful career in banking.

Yet, nothing could keep T.P. away his first love, athletics, and he channeled that passion into a most prolific officiating career.

“The sure-fire, one-word description of Tony Payne is: excellence. He was a man of strong moral character, full of spirit and love toward everyone,” said officiating colleague Justin Terry. “Tony possessed the ability and willingness to go the extra mile to make everyone look good. T.P. made life real nice on the court with his ability to communicate with the student athletes and coaches. He truly believed that the game was an extension of the classroom and he approached it just that way.”

He will be missed when roll call is taken for that class each fall, when another season begins.