

## Peter Dhima Loves The College Game

In the Fall, Peter Dhima crisscrosses the eastern United States to referee college games. He has even crossed the country many times to pursue this passion.

Peter grew up in Vlore a small town on the coast of Albania and, like all his contemporaries, started playing soccer as a little boy. At around 12, he joined an organized club and rose to be a member of the reserves on his town's pro team. He remembers when his town played the mighty Barcelona in '86 and '87 when they had players like Gary Lineker, Mark Hughes and Andoni Zubizarreta . In '86 the local pro team from tiny Vlore tied Barca 0-0 and beat them 1-0 in '87.

Peter arrived in the United States in 1991 and played soccer, though working two jobs and going to school. He played for Pancyprians in the Mid-Maryland League and started to referee in 1994. He moved up the grades quickly and in 1997 he started officiating college games. At the same time he was moving up in NISOA (the league for college officials) he was also moving up the ranks in USSF and, in 2000, was invited to become a candidate for the National Badge. That would almost certainly have led to officiating in the MLS. However, he decided against it because it required almost total dedication to refereeing and he had a young family and was not prepared to be on the road all the time.



Peter Dhima getting ready to flip the coin on a snowy pitch

“For example,” he explained, “if there was a clinic in Dallas, you had to be there. You have to be all over the country and it’s a long season.”

Yet, he did take a trip to Italy as a NISOA representative to train with the Italian officials.

Whether you are a beginning referee, or you have a great deal of experience under your belt, things can still go wrong. Normally, Peter works in the center, but he recalled an instance recently when he was AR. As he ran down the line, his flag slipped from his hand!

Another example of when things go wrong. In the NCAA quarter final in 2010 he was again in the middle in a game between the University of Akron (Ohio) and Cal Berkeley. At one point, he looked up to see his AR arguing with the Akron coach and, when he went over to see what was going on, the AR told him the coach was disputing a call. He spoke to the coach and calmed him down, then told the AR he thought things should be ok. However, the AR decided that if the coach was staying, he was leaving. He walked off taking the flag with him. The fourth official became the AR and had to use a pinnie as a flag until after half-time.

Peter said that one of the most helpful assessments he ever received was from Turk Emekli, who is also a member of MWSRA and is himself an outstanding referee and coach. He helped him understand that as a referee he should also enjoy the game.

Peter has been on official in the ACC Tournament finals from 2002 to 2005 and was center ref three years in a row. He has also worked the finals of the Colonial Athletic Association, the Big Ten and the Atlantic-10 tournaments.

Reflecting on his philosophy of refereeing, Peter said “If the game is a good game, I don’t show up. I just let them play. When the game needs me, then I show up.” This is reflected in what he counts as one of his most enjoyable games, a division 3 game between Messiah College and Drew University. The players played a very clean game and he got to enjoy a good soccer match.

When he is neither refereeing nor working—he works for Giant Food—he can be found coaching his daughter’s U-12 travel team.

Peter thinks a young referee should not allow him- or her-self to be distracted by team coaches. “Don’t listen to them,” he counsels. “They have no clue.”

Though it is only the beginning of the spring season, Peter already has more than 20 college games on his schedule for next fall.