

David Klein, Montclair State University, Class of 1957

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David Klein, a Montclair State University alumnus class of 1957 and married to the same woman, Miriam, for 58 years, enjoys playing the field. Furthermore, he thanks his alma mater for encouraging him to do so.

For the past six decades, Mr. Klein has been playing on the softball and baseball fields at high schools and, until recently, colleges, in New Jersey. Mr. Klein is renowned among New Jersey youth sports enthusiasts as an umpire of high school baseball and softball, and as a referee in soccer for almost as long as he's been an umpire. Even though officiating is work not play, Mr. Klein said his work as an official on the diamond and on the field brings him satisfaction as great as any game has he played.



*1973 Amateur Softball Association (ASA) Fast-Pitch World Series, Stamford, CT.
David Klein (umpire)*

His legendary status was on display several weeks ago, when the New Jersey State Baseball Umpires Association (NJSBUA) honored Mr. Klein with the eponymous David R. Klein Award. This is the first year of the award, whose purpose is to honor those NJSBUA members who, “through good standing and active participation in the NJSBUA, make exemplary contributions” (to) the high school communities in New Jersey by participating in baseball and softball officiating.

Montclair State played into his sports officiating career by providing a great college baseball team on which he played left field, as well as the analytical and intellectual skills to pivot from player to officiator right after he graduated. Montclair State also inspired him to pursue his “primary” profession, which he loved “almost” as much as being an umpire. While teaching sixth-grade in North Arlington, he received a master’s degree in elementary education administration from Newark State College in 1960, in between the institution’s transition from New Jersey State Teachers College at Newark to Kean University. He was appointed the principal of two elementary schools in North Arlington in 1967. When he retired in 1993 from his principal profession of being an elementary school principal, he then graduated to devoting all his energy to his secondary career of being an umpire and referee.

His two careers intersect on the level of instilling values to young people, Mr. Klein said. “I love working with kids and teaching by example. As an umpire – and as a principal – I always have tried to build a case for fairness, do the best job that can be done, and never give up – even when a decision or a situation is not exactly to your liking. As an umpire, ball player, principal or student, you have to learn how to give it your all, remain honest and fair, and move forward even when you make a mistake or you feel the umpire has made the mistake I do not do this job of umpiring in order to be liked. The truth is that no matter what call I make, half the people will not like me, so I just have to have confidence in my motivation and fairness and move forward.”

In recent years, he has been distressed by the actions of some parents and the pressure they put on the kids. “The parents see scholarships, see money connected with winning and they lose perspective, particularly when I make a ruling that is counter to what they want.”

Montclair State University, said Mr. Klein, played a role in developing his leadership skills and reinforcing values of fairness and commitment that have served him well in all of his careers, including that of being a parent of three boys. He told the story of when his middle son was in sixth grade and “playing in a baseball all-star game officiated by volunteers, including myself. I had to call my son out on a third strike. I hope he has forgiven me.”

Mr. Klein can be assured that the middle son, Mike Klein, CEO of NJASCU, has forgiven him – kind of. Mike insists that the pitch looked low and away, but in fairness, he has seen his dad consistently call pitches like that a strike throughout his dad’s distinguished career.