



E-Newsletter | February 2016

Sports Officials

For us here in Colorado, the big news is that the Denver Broncos are going to the Super Bowl! This causes us to think about sports and sports officials. Two women who have broken the gender barrier and serve as officials in men's professional sports are Violet Palmer and Sarah Thomas. Let's learn about these two pioneering women in this month's e-newsletter.



Violet Palmer

The first female referee in the National Basketball Association (NBA) Violet Palmer got a call in 1995 asking her if she would like to enter training as an NBA referee. At the time, the idea was so foreign to Palmer, who was a top-ranked women's basketball official and had refereed in five NCAA women's Final Fours, that she thought it was one of her friends playing a trick on her. She did attend training and in 1997 became an NBA referee.

Palmer believes one of her legacies is that people don't even notice that there is a female referee out on the floor during the games. She made history in 2006 when she became the first female referee during an NBA playoff game. History was again made in 2014 when she became the first official at an All-Star Game for any of the professional sports.

Palmer grew up in California and played basketball in college (as point guard on the Cal Poly Pomona NCAA Division II championship team). She says she knew she was made to be an official when she stepped on the court in Long Beach to officiate a summer league game.



Sarah Thomas

Like Palmer, Sarah Thomas grew up playing sports. She lettered in baseball in high school, attended college on a basketball scholarship, and joined a men's basketball league after she embarked on her career. After she was told she couldn't play on the men's league any more, and missing her sports involvement, she went with her brother to a meeting of the area football

official's association. She began learning the rules and how to officiate. By 1999, she was officiating at the high school level. In 2006, she decided to step away from officiating but by that time her skills had been noticed. She was invited to attend officials' camp for a college conference and was hired by them in 2007.

The firsts for Thomas started to come. In 2009, she became the first woman to officiate at a bowl game. In 2011, she became the first female to officiate in a Big Ten stadium. In 2015, Thomas made history when she was the first woman to be hired by the National Football League as a full-time official. Her regular season debut was in September 2015 in a game between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Houston Texans.

Palmer and Thomas are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. We are pleased to acknowledge their breaking of gender barriers and we are proud to continue telling women's stories.

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Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America
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