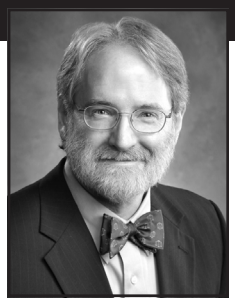
A Profile in Balance



By James G. McGiffin, Jr., Esquire

What Game Is He Watching?: John A. ("Pete") Clark III

If I aspire to be the best lawyer I can be, I must first try to be the best person I can be. I am fortunate to know many lawyers who have succeeded in their work, in part, because they are excellent people. During the course of this year, The Journal *will feature an article on one such lawyer. Each featured lawyer will exemplify the art of balance in life. I have learned much from these people. Perhaps readers will also benefit.*

- Jim McGiffin

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As lawyers, we are familiar with the reputation of our profession. The lawyering profession is often regarded by the general public as one of the least trustworthy professions. This is undoubtedly due to media exaggerations, bad jokes, and the occasional bad apple. As lawyers, we also know the truth: the vast majority of lawyers are good and honorable folks who work hard to do the right thing. Still, why would someone who spends his days in a much maligned and misunderstood profession devote his spare time to a profession even more maligned and misunderstood? This reflection on Pete Clark might help answer this question.

Pete is a lawyer of tremendous experience. He has been with Connolly Bove Lodge & Hutz LLP for 28 of his 39 years as a lawyer. His practice involves family law (talk about being misunderstood!), personal injury, and business law. Why this mix? "I really enjoy representing people and the responsibility which comes with that," Pete explains. Pete has also devoted a great deal of time and expertise to helping various nonprofit agencies, especially those involved with housing people in need, including Bayard House and Gateway House.

Some years ago, but well into his career, Pete was handling some work for the Sunday Breakfast Mission when he met and befriended a man named Rich Kirschner. In addition to working as the Executive Director of the Sunday Breakfast Mission, Kirschner spent many evenings and weekends employed as a high school football official. Pete, who had played high school football (Archmere, class of 1964, where he serves on the Board of Trustees), found himself intrigued by the prospect of renewed involvement in the game. At age 50, Pete began a new phase of life. This fall, Pete will be starting his 15th year as a high school football official.

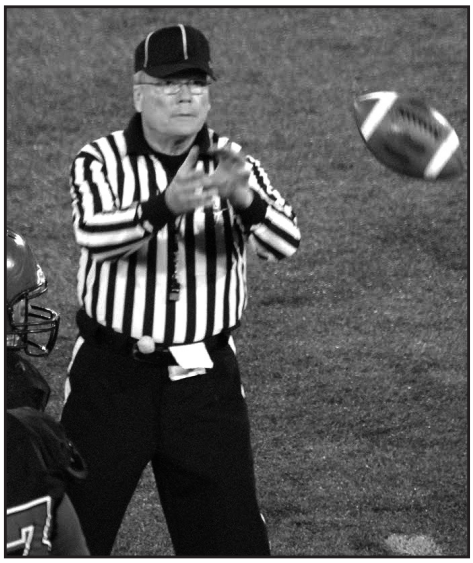

Photo credit: Rich Young

Pete's approach to his avocation suggests that football officiating is anything but a casual pastime. Last year, Pete worked 23 high school varsity games in New Castle County and Cecil County. He also officiates freshman and junior varsity games during the week and youth games on some Sundays. Pete usually acts as the umpire, lining up right behind the linebackers on the defense. Working a varsity game is a big commitment of time. The team of officials arrives ninety minutes before kick-off. They speak to the coaches. The officials then conduct a pre-game review, tuning up for the game. The officials enter and leave the field of play together.

Officials do more than just show up for games. During the season, they meet weekly to continue their education and to debrief each other on significant plays and calls of the week. In the off-season, they have to engage in conditioning to prepare for the next season, which is particularly important for Pete, given his several football-related knee surgeries. He also enjoys playing his "very unpredictable" golf game with friends.

So, why does this successful lawyer subject his body and his ego to the torture that is endemic to the life of a football official?

Teamwork is the element of officiating that is most rewarding to Pete. There are about 70 people in his officiating group. These folks come from all walks of life. They are all very serious about officiating, and they all work hard to do their best. Each time Pete walks out onto the field of play, he does so with a team of colleagues he trusts completely to work the game well and to watch out for each other. The camaraderie helps him to keep balance in his life. It is the antidote to the stress he endures in his emotionally charged practice.

Pete summed it up this way: "There is a lot of personal satisfaction when the officiating crew walks off the field after a game knowing that you've done a good, professional job."

While a football official may be the object of unfair derision from the stands, and a lawyer may be disparaged in the media, Pete Clark knows who he is and why he is there, and the players, and his clients, are all the better for it.