



## Best in Stripes

Pearls of wisdom from two top college umpires

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Most people think of a college preseason edition of *Lacrosse Magazine* as focused only on players and coaches, but officials are in preseason mode too. LM sat down with two of the most highly regarded umpires in the women's game today. Jen O'Donnell and Patti Klecha-Porter have officiated countless NCAA world title games between them. Emulate them. You won't regret it.

### How did you work through the ranks?

**JO:** My father was a basketball official and always loved it. One day while I was in college, I received a letter in the mail, inviting me to a lacrosse officiating meeting. Anne Gasser was the contact. I called her, met her and Linda Bensing, they took me to the meeting and the rest is history. Now I love it!

**PKP:** I am truly fortunate because I was a collegiate player, a coach and now umpire. As a physical education major, in every coaching course we had to take the rules exam for that sport and umpire class scrimmages. From there I've been fortunate to learn from pioneer women like my peers, mentors and role models Susan Ford, Susie Ganzenmuller, Judy Wolstenholme, Marge Garinger and Jackie Hufnell. When you work with a better umpire, it brings your level up.

### What separates the best from the rest?

**JO:** Mechanics are so important, because they communicate to both benches at the same time what happened and who has possession. Good signals make your life so much easier. As far as judgment and decisions are concerned, there are rules and there is advantage. As officials our job is to enforce the rules and to maintain fair and safe play during the game. These things are always in my mind. Was it safe? Was it fair? Is it a rule? The faster you can process that, the better and more decisive you are on the field.

**PKP:** I will always remember my first World Cup experience. We were told signals would be the communication that all countries will understand, and verbal communication should be minimal. It made my signals sharp and big, and verbal directions short and quick. As for decision-making, this is where playing and coaching has made me a better umpire. I can appreciate what the athlete's objective is and I can anticipate the next event.



### **Any advice for younger officials?**

**JO:** Work as many games as you can, no matter what level. Watch higher-level games than the level you are working. Watch the officials' demeanor, signals, positioning, how they handle themselves with players and coaches. Pick out the official you aspire to be like and mirror what they do, pick their brain, listen when they talk about calls and games. I followed Jackie Hufnell and Judy Wolstenholme around and listened to every word they spoke. I wanted to be where they were – at the top.

**PKP:** Stick with it. The more experience at umpiring you get, the better you will become. Have a fellow umpire who you can review game situations with. Review the rules often. Watch, listen and learn by attending clinics for improving your knowledge of the game, skills and abilities. Get out of your comfort zone and make changes.

### **Any pregame rituals?**

**JO:** I polish my shoes. My last dressing issues is putting my visor on, then it's out on the field to walk the field, stretch, run, dynamic stretch, run again forward, backwards and sideways, and I'm ready to go.

**PKP:** When I take the warm-up run across the field, I must touch the sideline. It makes me think to myself, "No short cuts."