

IHSFCA History

The IHSFCA was chartered as a non-profit organization on March 30, 1971. Those who originally signed the charter were: Jesse Vail, James Righeimer, Mel Deskin, Joe Devine and Tom Innis. These five became the first Board of Directors with Devine as the President. Ken Geiger, Morton of Cicero, was named the Secretary-Treasurer.

On July 28-30, 1971 a clinic was conducted at the Sheraton O'Hare Motor Inn in Rosemont. The Clinic Director was Ed Zembal with Danny O'Brien handling pre-registration. Featured speakers were some of the most notable leaders in football throughout the country. Notably Head Coaches Alex Agase from Northwestern, Benny Ellender from Tulane, Bob DeMoss from Purdue, John Jardine from Wisconsin, and Jack Wallace from Drake. Others included Abe Gibron the Defensive Line Coach of the Chicago Bears, Bob Gongolo Defensive Backfield Coach of the University of Minnesota and Backfield Coach John Jackson from the University of Illinois. High School speakers were Wayne Lunak of Thornridge, Deek Pollard from Pittsfield and Dr. Robert Muehrcke the Team Physician for Oak Park-River Forest HS.

We conducted our next clinic at Northwestern University in Evanston. The staff of the Wildcats along with a few high school coaches were featured. Slowly growing in membership, the next clinic was hosted in 1977 at the University of Illinois. Between those years, numerous meetings were conducted at various locations throughout the state. Twice, Bill Duchon of Glenbard West served as President. This was the only instance in the history of the organization that a person served consecutively as the president. Several of the meetings in places such as Normal U-High and the Bone Center at ISU were conducted with IHSA Officials during the Football Playoffs. Other meetings at Pontiac and in the Ray Eliot mobile trailer outside the Assembly Hall in Champaign proved to be fruitful. It was during this time Phil Salzer became the Secretary-Treasurer. Also, Ray Eliot challenged Jim Rexilius of Wheaton North to revive the football clinic in Illinois. Rex stepped forward and accepted this challenge. He remained as director of the clinic until his death in 2003. Since that time, George Turnbull and Rick Odgers have co-chaired the clinic.

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes breakfast at the clinic was re-named "The Jim Rexilius Memorial FCA Breakfast."

During the formidable years of the organization much talk revolved around the establishment of a Coaches Hall of Fame. Much was discussed in length in the mobile trailer of Ray Eliot. Such notable coaches as Merv Haycock, Tom Stewart, Paul Shebby, Don Kemp, Warren Smith, Gene Strode, and others voiced various ideas about a state football hall of fame. However, it was Paul Shebby of Danville who led us to the agreement that it should be specifically for high school football coaches. The first selection committee was at Bob Johnson's Restaurant in Bloomington. It was decided in the beginning that only retired or deceased coaches would be honored. Through the driving force of President Gene Strode the first banquet was held with the clinic in the spring of 1977, in the initial class, we honored 12 retired and 25 deceased coaches. Today we have over 600 members.

In 1984 we changed some of the format of the qualifications by allowing active coaches to qualify. Eventually, we expanded this to include assistants as well as those coaches who have made it a career. In 1978, we began what is a service award; it was in honor of Ray Eliot, a man who was the most influential person for high school football in Illinois. Because he was so endearing to us, we thought it was most appropriate to remember him. This service award is for an individual who has done much for high school athletics in Illinois.

The structure of the organization was developed so as to get representation from the entire state. In order to accomplish this, we placed leadership on a rotation basis. We had a president and three vice presidents. Today we have added a fourth. We decided to divide the state into three regions. We had a president from the North, 1st v-p from the central 2nd v-p from the south and 3rd v-p from the North. Each would serve a term and then rotate to the next position. The president would then become a trustee. We also chose class representatives. In the beginning we had five. Today there are 8 class representatives. We believe this has been a unique method in the operation of the organization. Coming on board to assume some of the secretarial responsibilities in the 1980's was Phil Acton.

As we began to become more successful, it was decided we should develop other avenues that would contribute to coaches, athletes and football in Illinois. In the course of the history many of the presidents have stepped forward to initiate something new during their tenure. Some of the things have been insurance coverage and vacancy bulletins. The website, offering postings of game, open dates, communications from the football advisory board and media lines to scores and football articles are just a few of things offered to members.. We also offered a magazine, which was the brainchild of Dan Dillard. This publication, compiled by Larry Lavery for several years until taken over by Jim Innis; who has modernized it through a disc presentation. One of the important developments has been the selection of our All-State and Academic All-State teams. Since its inception, Bob Monken has been the chair of this committee. With the support of Jim Henry and John Belskis they have been able to honor each of the many worthy athletes in Illinois High School Football. We have sponsored the insurance for high school all-star football games for a number of years. At the Spring Clinic we make many awards to coaches. The coach of a championship team receives a ring. The runner-up coach is given a watch. Every coach who has made the playoffs gets a plaque. At the Spring Clinic, a coach is selected to spend a week at a FCA Retreat with his wife. At the football playoffs each year the IHSFCA hosts a hospitality room.