

August 27, 2022

Dear WIAA:

This letter is to recognize the outstanding sportsmanship displayed by the Athens Blue Jays and the Cornell Chiefs on Friday, August 26, 2022 in Athens as they started Week 1 of the 8-man football season.

First, it's a pleasure to work with Athens Athletic Director Craig Diedrich. His communication and ability to work with officials is outstanding. Second, Head Coaches Todd Diethelm and Craig Braaten teach positive sportsmanship to their coaching staff and players. Both team's sidelines were encouraging, great to communicate with, and kept their sidelines clean during the play; this really helps keep officials safe and able to do their job. Questions were asked and the coaches appreciated the explanations given. Third, the players did an amazing job on the field. They worked and communicated well with officials, motivated their own teammates, provided the opposing team with words of praise, and helped each other off the turf. It was easy to see the sense of humor of their coaches rub off on them. As a crew, we concluded that these athletes were some of the most respectful, positive, and grateful athletes we have encountered over decades of officiating; plus, they adhered to playing safe football regarding blocks and defenseless players. Last, those typically not in the spot light did an exceptional job. The chain gang was competent and listened well, the announcer positive, the clock operator spot on, fans positive and constructive, and the athletic trainer from Marshfield Clinic caring during her busy evening.

This is our first time officiating the Cornell Chiefs; however, we have had previous positive experiences with the Athens Blue Jays and have written sportsmanship letters on Coach Diethelm's teams in the past. As there becomes fewer and fewer officials, it is contests like these that make the task of officiating rewarding.

Our crew tips it cap to the communities of Athens and Cornell and the educational leadership of those schools. It takes time and effort to train our youth on the importance of education, sports, leadership, and exhibiting positive sportsmanship.

Please stay healthy and happy!

Sincerely yours,

Shawn Umland
Buck Steiniger
Kevin Kirby
Randy Quade
Tom Meyers