

By: Andrew S. Hartwell

28 May 2010

Last October, the International Motor Sports Association (IMSA) and more importantly, the community that is at the heart of professional sportscar racing, witnessed the graceful exit of one of the most admired and respected people to ever have a prominent place in the sport. We refer to Dick Martin, the man who carried out his responsibilities as the head of Pit Officials with an unwavering commitment to administering equitable treatment to everyone and every team.

Martin began his life of officiating with a lengthy run of working high school football and basketball games. Having played football in high school he found his heart pulling him towards filling the role of referee as his own years of pigskin glory wound down. He quickly found he came to love being in the position to administer fair and equitable decisions that kept everyone operating within the rules of the game. In time he would come to seek out new opportunities to help others play by the rules and that search soon led him to what became a 19 year career with IMSA.



Martin told us of his years as an official and how he came to be in a position to build such respect and appreciation from the players in the game, be it football, basketball or auto racing.

"I am a State Farm insurance agent here in Florida and have been for the last 28 years. The benefit I had being an agent is that I had the luxury of being able to go and play with the guys at the race track and come back home and have a regular life. At one job I get a lot of telephone calls while at the other job I only get calls on the radio.

"Way back in the early 70's a friend of mine was a coach for a youth football team. He asked me to become a coach too. As I was coaching they also needed someone to officiate, so what I did was coach my team and then work as an official for other games. After awhile I decided to become an official exclusively and so I went on to become certified by the Florida High School Activities Association and I officiated high school and semi-pro games.

"Funny thing is, just the other night I was a guest speaker at an event for officials from this area of Florida and I talked about what it was like to be an official and what it entails. I told them you want to be able to look back on your career and say it was something you enjoyed. Some of the people who were officials with me only looked at it as a part time job. I always looked at it as something I absolutely loved to do."

Martin's love for carrying out the responsibilities of an official, and his professional approach to the role, took him to the top level of the non-professional ranks and, not wanting to uproot his family by seeking a position at the pro level, he looked around for other opportunities in which he could apply his passion for fair play.

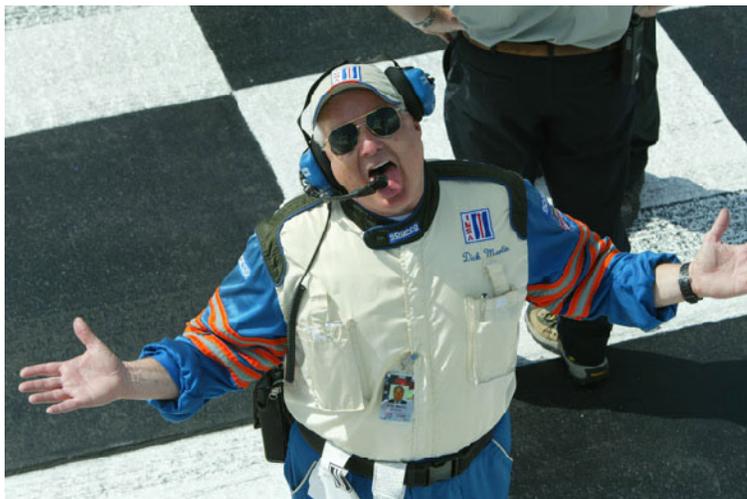
"I went as high as you could go and didn't pursue a pro career because I didn't want to have to travel as much. That led me to look around for another venue. A friend of mine, Barry Fletcher, was working as an official in auto racing so I asked him to tell me about it and I soon landed my first role as a Marshall at the Rolex 24 Hours of Daytona. I later worked pit out at Miami and then at Sebring.

There, a guy named Bob Raymond, who was the head of Camel GT, asked me what I thought about working the pit lane. After a few races he put me in charge of a few cars and over the next few years I worked many races as one of the members of the officiating team.

“At the beginning of 1995 Bob Raymond developed lung cancer. George Silverman (IMSA-VP) and Mark Raffauf (IMSA-President) came to me and asked me to take over the job of running pit lane. Pit Control was the title I was given and I feel my years of football and basketball officiating helped me to step into the role. Many of the other officials did not have the same sort of previous experience working in other sports and so I came into the new role with a different philosophy than what they were used to. I tried to bring in a lot of the concepts that worked in the other sports and for many of my peers this was something they had never seen before.

“One concept I introduced was what we used to call ‘preventive officiating’. If I can see that someone is about to make a mistake – as long as I do it to everybody – I will tell them to think about what they are about to do. I won’t stop them. Once they go ahead and make the mistake I will have to apply the appropriate penalty because you have to be fair with everybody. When the day was ended I wanted everyone to feel they had a fair shot at winning.

“I worked hard to build a good reputation in every sport I officiated. I made some great calls and some better than great calls, but I made mistakes too just as everybody does. I tried to minimize my mistakes. I don’t think I ever made a call that made a difference to the outcome of a football game, but I know I did at a race. One time a team made a mistake on their last pit stop and I had to penalize them. When that happened that car lost and their team car won. I know that the way I treated everyone was the way they wanted to be treated. They wanted me to be fair and give everyone the same opportunity to win.



“Even in State Farm I don’t lie to people or cheat them. Most people will respect you for telling them the truth. They may not like what you tell them but they respect you. After awhile I think most of the teams accepted that when I told them something it was in the best interests of the event. You have to earn that respect.

“In racing, those guys became my friends. But tough love sometimes is just what it comes down to. Sometimes I think they looked at me as Daddy Dick. They may not have agreed with what I was saying but they always knew I was trying to do my best for every competitor and that I had their best interest at heart.

“I never changed my demeanor or my approach. While there are people in the world who will never agree with something someone says, you have to be true to yourself and keep mindful of being fair to everyone. Someone has to be responsible and that means making a decision. It is the same in sports and in business.

“People also want consistency so that the same call you make at Sebring is the one you make at Road Atlanta. I’ve been fortunate to work with the same core group of people at IMSA. The guys know the drivers and the teams and that all works to help all of us to be consistent.”

Dick Martin may have closed the rule book on a big part of his life but he is by no means retiring from life. He and his wife Pat have embarked on a journey that includes travel and enjoying time together. He is looking forward to having one of his sons take over the insurance business in the near future.

To begin this next journey, he first had to finish the last one.

“When I told the guys I was going to retire at the end of last season they were totally shocked. But this was the right time. I had a friend of mine who was a referee and he dropped dead during the second quarter of a football game. Too many people don’t stop soon enough to smell the roses and appreciate their lives.

“My mom is 88 years old and the other day someone paid her a great compliment. They said she lives in the ‘now.’ Not past, not future, but now. I think that is one of the highest compliments you can pay someone.

“I was married for 20 years to Janet but she was killed in a car crash back in 1986. I later married Pat and we are now up to 20 years together. I have two boys from my first wife and have two lovely granddaughters. Pat’s first husband had two boys and we have adopted them. Pat’s brother died at age 36 and we kind of adopted his three kids. It has been good because they all get along.



Dick with Rob Dyson

“Pat and I went on a Christmas cruise to San Juan. We will be attending the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June. I won’t work the race but I will see old friends and we will enjoy two weeks in Europe and just enjoy life.

“You know, it isn’t that life is too short, it’s that death is so long. God gave us a belly button at the start of our lives and he put it in the middle of our bodies. That is how he wants us to live our lives, in a balanced mode.”

For Dick Martin, balance has always been at the center of his life and his work.