



Roberta Flanders

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I am actually a food and nutrition major specializing in hotel/restaurant management. My first work with people of special needs was the Special Olympics my senior year of college, wish I would have known this earlier. I loved it! After graduation I became a scuba diver and eventually became certified as an instructor with “adapted” scuba and that in some weird way, let me to Boccia. I am also a Red Cross Instructor in first aid, CPR/AED as well as a few other certifications from ARC.

My introduction to Boccia took place in 2015 as an “head instructor” for the Western DuPage Special Recreation Association (WDSRA - now known as Synergy). Megan Mack and I shared these duties being present for this program every Sat. afternoon for approximately 9 months a year. As Sam Williams was the official coach but as a volunteer, WDSRA needed an actual staff member at each practice.

In 2016, I was asked to be a PCA to Bridgit Mason, one of their athletes for a competition in Montreal. It was quite an eye-opening experience for me as I was still new to the sport and wasn’t told that I would also be utilized as her Sports Assistant. With the help of Tracey Otis, I was given a quick lesson(s) on the sport and how to best help Bridgit. The hardest part of that was not being able to speak to her.

The following year, after another year of experience at practices, I PCA/SA to another athlete – Michele Lynch. I was much more confident in those skills.

Nationals was being held close to me in 2017, where I was an airport driver and to/from hotels to the venue. I had met several people along the way and was even more taken with the sport.

In 2018, realizing that I was going to have to move out of state to help my parents, I concluded that a 5 hour round trip drive to work for 1.5 hours wasn’t reasonable. Luckily, the Boccia National Championship was being held in the next town over from where I was living, and with even more serendipity, a National Referee course was being offered.

Harold and Cathy were my head instructors for this class, and even more knowledge was imparted. When it came time for the final exam, I was actually more nervous about this vs. when I became a scuba instructor – where I was responsible for people’s lives underwater.

I probably made several mistakes, but Harold wrote that he had been told that “I was making great progress and that I was confident on court” (if he only knew.....). From there I was sold on the sport PLUS I would still be able to see my athlete friends, some of whom I had been with for over 10 year with another WDSRA program. At this point, I moved to be my parents caregiver (but dad didn’t wait for me) and now that my mom is gone, I have a lot of time. When I moved, I quit all my jobs and “retired” early, who knew that my time would be sucked up with all my volunteerism.

As I progressed in refereeing, my longing to do things correctly, I began to make myself “cheat sheets” on different aspects. I ran those by Cathy Drobny who must have liked what I had done as she asked me if we could use these on our referee folder on Google.

I then asked if I could become a member of the referee committee (which I guess that I already was), but was told that I couldn’t be a voting member as they had enough right then. That was okay, I just wanted to become a part of the monthly meetings to keep me up-to-date on new rules.

I do several yearly sanctioned/non sanctioned tournaments because I am asked by the hosts. I have been at several Texas Regional Games, Chicagoland Tournament as well as Michigan Victory Games. As we try to build our community, I have participated at SE Valor Games, various veterans’ events and of course our National Championships. I average 10 events a year representing our organization.

In the summer of 2023, the opportunity to take the International Referee Course in Hong Kong became available. Micah F-S and I traveled there, did plenty of sight-seeing prior to and after the class. I couldn’t have asked for a better travel companion.

However, class brought back the reality that I wasn’t as prepared with 10 years of experience as everyone else in the class, they all had more. I wasn’t expecting that! But with study periods in the evening with my roommate, on-line boccia rules games from one of the prospective candidates, Micah and I managed to make it through the exam in about a half hour and both this passing scores. But we aren’t done at this point, there was still on court evaluations to pass. I only had to do two games to get enough points to pass this aspect as well as the course. So happy.

Since then internationally, I have been to Canada (twice, although one time was prior to the class) as well as Brazil to referee. I am still always learning!

I have also stepped up to do National Referee training as well as regional trainings (short, med. or longer in length, I can adapt). I helped with referee traveling coordination for Nationals this past summer and did my “international” tournament in Birmingham, AL USA!! I am also stepping up to be the point person for any upcoming Move United events where we will be introducing Boccia clinics and tournaments.

This is a super exciting time for our sport!!! Look out LA in 2028!!

