

Former Hawk Smith officiated BCS title game

Written by Randy Krejci

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It has been quite a week for Robert Smith Jr., a former University of Iowa football star who now works at the University of Northern Iowa.

The Big Ten Conference had the assignment for the officiating crew to work the BCS National Championship Game in Glendale, Ariz., Monday night and Smith was the back judge.

Smith, originally from Dallas, played football at Iowa from 1983-86 and was aware that former UI coach Hayden Fry broke the color barrier in the Southwest Conference when he was at SMU in the 1960s, giving Jerry LeVias, the first African-American player, a scholarship in that league.

"That meant a lot to me and so did Coach Fry, as early as when he recruited me and what he stands for and what's right for kids," Smith said.

Smith just completed his ninth season as a Big Ten official. His fleet-footed action on the field helps keep him in tune with receivers in the "big time."

Smith is well-known around the Mississippi Valley Conference as an outstanding basketball official. He has worked both the boys and girls state tournaments at Veterans Auditorium in Des Moines and the newer Wells Fargo Arena.

He also worked several state championships in football prior to getting his bid to be a Big Ten ref.

"All games are big games, particularly in the Big Ten," he said after the national championship game. "This game was different as to how other people reacted to it, but I always approach every game as a big game due to the importance for the young people, schools and communities involved."

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Smith has aspirations of working in the National Football League, but high school and college games have dominated his schedule so far. This was his first national championship game, but he worked a handful of bowl games before this year.

"I approached this game like any other and will certainly do the same this coming Friday night when I return to action in the Washington-Linn-Mar boys basketball game," he said. "High school athletics are fun and very important to so many people.

"My goal is simply to 'get 'em right,'" he said, "and I will continue to make that my focus while on the gridiron or basketball court."