

FROM AROUND THE DISTRICT

Fort Myers Bankruptcy Attorney Officiates Super Bowl 50

By Luis Rivera, Esq.

You probably noticed that defense dominated the action (or lack thereof) in Super Bowl 50. But, did you notice the familiar face patrolling the line of scrimmage – Fort Myers attorney and NFL Umpire J. Jeffrey Rice? As the Umpire, Rice was responsible for policing the line of scrimmage, where the Broncos and Panthers did most of the battling. And, in a game like Super Bowl 50 where most of the action took place on the line of scrimmage, Rice was a busy man.

Although Rice's father, Bob Rice, was himself an official in the NFL, Rice didn't begin officiating until 1973 when he was a first-year law student at Case Western Reserve University. At the time, Rice figured officiating would be a good way to make some extra money to help pay his way through law school. However, upon graduating from law school in 1975 and beginning the practice of law in Fort Myers, Rice continued officiating as a way to stay active. Rice began by officiating high school and Pop Warner games, but eventually moved his way up to the collegiate level with the former Metro Conference (the predecessor to the current Conference USA).

Rice started work with the NFL in the 1990s as an official in the NFL's World League. Rice made his NFL debut in 1995 and quickly became among the league's highest graded officials. Officials are graded on every play and every call. Only those officials with the highest grades become eligible to work post-season games. And, only those officials graded as the "best of the best" are selected to work the Super Bowl.

Super Bowl 50 was Rice's third Super Bowl appearance. Rice also served as umpire in Super Bowl XXXVI in 2002 in New Orleans and Super Bowl XXXVIII in 2004 in Houston. Rice was also selected and served as an alternate on the officiating crew for Super Bowl XXXV in 2001 in Tampa.

Of course, being an NFL official is only Rice's side job. Rice is the Managing Partner of Goldstein, Buckley, Cechman, Rice & Purtz, P.A. in Fort Myers. Rice emphasizes his practice on commercial law, construction law, and construction lien cases. Rice also often represents both debtors and creditors in cases under all Chapters of the Bankruptcy Code. Asked how he manages to juggle these two demanding roles, Rice said, "I'm very fortunate because I've been around the legal field long enough that a lot of my peers are judges and everybody thinks it's kind of neat what I do, so they've been very cooperative with me in scheduling and working out any conflicts that might occur."