

## SWAPPING JERSEYS FOR STRIPES

Family duos officiate together on ice

By Jamie Lund  
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Hockey isn't just a game — it's a way of life for some.

"When hockey is over, the passion doesn't just leave you," Jestina Vichorek said.

The 28-year-old has been refereeing hockey since her college hockey career ended. The reason was twofold. She had student loans to pay and she still loved the game she had grown up playing in St. Paul. It didn't hurt that her father has been a referee for more than 25 years and offered her encouragement and support.

Adam Kangas, 21, grew up playing hockey in Cloquet. He began officiating when he was a peewee to make extra money. He decided to trade in his hockey jersey for a whistle and stripes when he was a junior in high school.

"It's a good way to make money and stay involved and see the teams in the area," Adam said. "The other refs think my dad is a bit of a goofball. I think we work well together."

He noted some rules have changed in the last few years.

Checking is no longer allowed at the peewee level.

Icing is no longer allowed during a penalty kill up through the bantam level because simply icing the puck during a penalty doesn't help players improve their skills. Now, they need to handle the puck while short-handed.

Adam's father, Kevin, 50, drove Adam to and from games. After a short time, he decided to take the classes and join his son on the ice. Youth can only officiate players younger than themselves. As he got older, Adam worked games at higher levels and plans to referee college games someday.

The father-son duo still work games, even though Adam no longer lives in the area. He moved to southern Minnesota for college and continued to work after classes. When he returns to Cloquet for the holidays, Kevin and Adam take up where they left off and officiate games together around the area.

Jestina met her husband, Taylor Vichorek, now 30, while playing hockey at Hamline University in St. Paul. Taylor grew up playing hockey in Moose Lake along with his younger sister, Montana. Their father, Mark, coached many of the teams through the years. Taylor began to officiate as a youth hockey player in Moose Lake.

Taylor and Montana moved to Cloquet and continued playing through high school.

Once out of high school, Taylor played junior hockey



Submitted photo  
Married couple Taylor and Jestina Vichorek take a selfie before working a hockey game.

### NEED FOR OFFICIALS

There are 102 active officials, and nine are women, in the Northeast Hockey Officials Association.

There are an average of 2,500 games per year to cover.

Officials range in age from 12 to over 60, with the average age of 30.

There is a huge need for officials in Silver Bay and Two Harbors as there are only six, and half play on the high school hockey team.

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for the Fairbanks Ice Dogs. When he finished juniors, he went on to play at Hamline University.

The 6-foot-8 defenseman was signed by the American Hockey League's Norfolk Admirals in 2010. At that time, the team was affiliated with the Tampa Bay Lightning.

After a lockout from September 2012 to January, 2013, upcoming players created more competition and Taylor floated around to a few teams. He discovered the teams were no longer interested in him as a player, but wanted him to participate in more of an enforcer role.

He decided to move on and joined his young wife as an official. The couple moved to Carlton, got jobs and continued being a team on the ice. They discovered they had a knack for officiating.

"We were both good at it," Jestina said.

They worked together often, Taylor as a linesman and Jestina as a referee at center ice. They began at youth level and worked up to high school, then college.

Jestina was told that men's college hockey is not accepting of female officials yet. Instead, Jestina works women's college games and the National Women's Hockey League, where she has officiated games in which former Cloquet-

Esco-Carlton player Sadie Lundquist played.

Women are not allowed to officiate for the Stanley Cup playoffs, so Jestina is going for the gold at the Olympics.

Taylor's goal is to referee at the National Hockey League level.

The couple travels to games all over Minnesota, northern Wisconsin and northern Michigan.

They were working a summer league game when Jestina said she had her first real experience with sexism.

"I didn't even know sexism existed before reffing," Jestina said, quickly adding that most of her experiences have been positive.

She explained that at one of her games early on, a coach started yelling at her. When he first motioned for the ref to come to the players' bench, Taylor accompanied her. The coach motioned for him to leave. They both left, then the coach called Jestina back. He started yelling at her, saying she was the reason his team was losing the game and women should not be allowed to referee.

In the end, Jestina kicked the obnoxious coach out of the game. His team of U19 girls thanked her.

There is work off-ice as well. All hockey officials are required to complete classes before they begin working.



Jamie Lund/Pine Journal

Kevin Kangas calls the goal after an attempt by the peewee goaltender to fall on the puck and freeze it failed during a peewee tournament in Cloquet.



Jamie Lund / Pine Journal

Father and son duo Kevin and Adam Kangas skate back to their positions after a break between periods during a recent peewee tournament at Northwoods Credit Union Arena.



Jamie Lund / Pine Journal

Forest Lake peewee coaches question referee Kevin Kangas about a call made. Most of the time, the coaches are respectful of the referees' explanations, but once in a while, a coach will yell at a referee and get kicked out of the game.

The Vichoreks continuously update their training each year and are required to take additional training for different levels of games.

Not only do the different levels have different rules, they also have different handbooks and uniforms. The Vichoreks each have about six of the striped uniforms at about \$100 each. Officials are also required to purchase and wear protective gear, similar to the players.

Jestina has traveled to

other countries to officiate, including Mexico in 2016 to officiate in the pre-qualifying Olympic games and China for the National Women's Hockey League. She is currently in Japan officiating the U18 Women's world championship, a part of the International Ice Hockey Federation.

As for injuries incurred while officiating on the ice?

"We compare bruises when we get home," Jestina said with a laugh.

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