



HOCKEY LIFE

Hockey has been a part of Nicole Staz's entire life. Whether as a player, official, administrator or now a career, the 25-year-old's rapid rise in the game is a reflection of her passion for it.

Now the Coordinator of Central Scouting with the National Hockey League, her journey started almost twenty years ago. The doors have been opening ever since.

Growing up watching her older brother's games at the rinks in Richmond Hill, Ontario, Staz soon laced up the skates herself at just four years old. When she was old enough, she joined the local co-ed house league team and eventually all-girls teams in Vaughan, Markham-Stouffville and Aurora.

Staz stills reflects fondly on her time playing minor hockey. In one of her final seasons, her team won the 2016 Penguins Elite Girls Thanksgiving Classic tournament in Pittsburgh and each player vlogged their experience along the way. From the bus rides to getting ready at the hotel to warming up at the rink, recording those moments proved to be a time capsule for her and her teammates.

“It's a fun memory to look back on and having that memory is really nice.”

~ Staz.

What she enjoyed most was the shared joy on her teams that made it even more fun along the way.

“I think the excitement of going to the rink and seeing your friends, not only during games and tournaments, but practices too. Wanting school to be over and getting home and finishing up what you had to do there, knowing that you can go to the rink and hang out with your friends that had a similar drive for the game.”

During those minor hockey years, she didn't just spend time at the arena as a player. At 13 years old, Staz started timekeeping which allowed her to see the game in a different light. From there, she took it a step further, becoming a certified on-ice official at 15. She attended a weekend clinic with the Greater Toronto Hockey League, crossed over to the Ontario Minor Hockey Association and Ontario Women's Hockey Association and is now a Level 3.

As an official, Staz quickly learned to develop a thick skin. It also gave her an understanding of her own strengths and the confidence in finding her voice, something she says she's been able to carry into her professional career.

“I think my view of hockey was more on the operations side and seeing the structure of hockey. With officiating, loving rules, too, allowed me to look at hockey in a different light and see the structure and rules and know that operations was kind of where I wanted to go.”

After graduating from Brock University in December 2021 with a degree in Sport Management, Staz eventually got her foot in the door with the GTHL, and it was only three months later that she landed her current role.

Her path there started in her Grade 10 Careers class, where she was able to connect with Mike Oke, the General Manager of the Peterborough Petes. It was a valuable conversation and one that stuck with her. Staz knew from there that she wanted to go into sports professionally and pursue it as her future.

“It gave me a perspective of hockey that I never really had.”

That same drive that pushed her as a player and later an official has led Staz to what she

describes is her dream job. She believes her background in officiating and understanding of grassroots hockey (she worked as the Initiation Program Director with Richmond Hill Hockey for two years), along with her quick stop in the GTHL office, helped her land the role.

As the service centre for all NHL teams, Staz's role with Central Scouting is crucial in providing the scouting departments with the most up-to-date information for the upcoming NHL Draft. She manages alerts on injuries, roster changes and game updates on prospects and gets to follow their career path along the way.

As the Draft approaches, her role shifts to working at the Combine and selection evening itself. There, she meets the players she's been monitoring from afar and assists them during the whirlwind week as they approach their draft night.

Staz acknowledges that working in hockey isn't a typical 9-5 job. Despite that schedule, she still finds time to get back on the ice, officiating Junior Girls hockey multiple times a week and playing on two adult rec teams on top of that.

It's important for her to stay involved in the game that has given her so much.

“I really enjoy minor hockey and officiating girls now. It's nice to see the passion and the drive of these players and also for them to have fun at the end of the day it's for the kids and for them to actually have a game.”

For those thinking about becoming an official, Staz has simple advice:

“GIVE IT A SHOT.”

