

Finding balance off-ice challenges Potter family

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by Jason Olson

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Trying to balance an international-level playing career, high school coaching and running a small business while meeting the demands of parenthood often involves coordinated chaos for the Anoka-based couple.

Jenny Potter, Anoka resident and Edina native, will skate in her fourth Olympic Games as Team USA captain in February. She skates here Dec. 30 in a loss to Team Canada at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul.

"We've had some pretty crazy schedules that needed figuring out," said Jenny Potter. "Who is going to pick up the kids is a question that came up a lot."

The Potters' scheduling crunch was eased somewhat by a logistical change made by USA Hockey, the sport's national governing body.

The U.S. women's national hockey team recently completed a year-and-half of training for the 2010 Winter Olympics at the Schwan Super Rink in Blaine.

"That decision was huge and it obviously made my life easier," Jenny said. "Blaine's a great city for people to have enough space to spread out if they want, it's affordable and to have it located in the state of hockey, you can't beat that."

According to Rob, who coaches the Coon Rapids High School girls' varsity hockey team, said having the Olympic training so close to home helped keep kids Cullen and Maddie a lot closer as the family worked out its daily and weekly routine.

"We worked it out so I was at home with the kids in the morning," he said. "She would be practicing until 1 or 2 p.m., then came home to take over so I could get to practices or games."

Rob said a lot of family support was needed to make the schedule work.

"It's more complicated now with two kids and getting multiple schedules to work," he said. "They also spend a lot of time at grandma and grandpa's house, too."

As Team USA wrapped up its Blaine stay, a last-minute media crush for face time made the Potters' routine fly a bit differently.

"We did a lot of the media stuff at the last minute, like commercials for Fox Sports (North) and interviews with NBC," Rob said.

For example, one Friday afternoon, Jenny was completing a training session in Blaine before heading to downtown Minneapolis for a yoga training session.

"It's been a really cool experience, but yea, it's been hectic," she said.

Jenny celebrated her 31st birthday by helping Team USA down the University of Minnesota 8-5 Jan. 12.

Potter is one of the players Team USA will rely on for scoring as well as leadership. She was third on the team in scoring during the exhibition Qwest Tour which wrapped up against Finland in Colorado Springs, Colo., Feb. 4.

Jenny said Team USA players have a unique level of respect for each other because they have played together so much."

"I've been around a while and I just put in my hard work," she said. "I'm the kind of person who leads by example."

Potter was recently named an alternate U.S. women's hockey team captain, joining fellow Minnesotan Natalie Darwitz.

Jenny is the lone mother on this year's team. She matches teammate Angela Ruggerio in terms of Olympic experience. Both players are making their fourth appearance for Team USA.

She joined the national team in 1997 and has played at Nagano (1998), Salt Lake City (2002) and Torino (2006).

Rob said Jenny has passed on some of her international ice hockey knowledge to other players. "She's tried to help them along during practices and in game situations," he said. "It's kind of like being a mentor as well as player.

Both Potter children have joined their parents at various team functions.

"The kids really like [the players] a lot," Rob said.

Cullen and Maddie were able to spend time with other members of the team partly because the Potters hold off-season training sessions at Cook Arena, Coon Rapids, or other off-ice training facilities.

Heading into Team USA's final pre-Olympic matches, Potter was third on the squad with 14 points. She has 207 career points (88 goals, 119 assists) in 179 games.

Rob said Jenny is the type of center who might get the glitz and glamour, but is always around the net with the puck, either setting up scoring chances putting the puck home herself.

"The center has to be the most versatile player on the ice," he said. "You build your team around those players. They are cogs that create interaction."

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