

FRIDAY, AUGUST 11, 2017

Ice Warrior

Seyfarth Shaw partner Candice Zee applies lessons from the ice to stress, clashes at work.

By Shane Nelson
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Labor and employment attorney Candice T. Zee was the only girl on her high school's roller hockey club team, but apparently that gender discrepancy wasn't all bad.

"At that age, hockey appealed to me because it was something other girls weren't doing," the Seyfarth Shaw LLP partner explained.

"And my parents had told me, 'No, girls don't play hockey. We don't really want you to play,'" she added. "So of course that only made me want to do it more."

Zee said her first high school club practice ended up being more of an audition.

"We did all kinds of drills in the parking lot and pushups on our skates — it was tough," she explained. "Later I realized it wasn't a regular practice at all. The guys had just done it to see if I could cut it and keep up with them."

She aced the unofficial tryout because afterward she said the teenage boys "all accepted me" and would even "stand up for me if necessary."

Zee's first exposure to hockey came around age 12 thanks to her father, who regularly took her to LA Kings games after Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky's arrival put the sport on the map in Los Angeles.

Rollerblades also became popular around the same era, according to Zee, and soon after Manon Rheame, the first female to play in the National Hockey League, handled goaltending duties in a 1992 Tampa Bay Lightning preseason game.

"That really captured my interest because it showed everybody women can actually play hockey," Zee said, noting she's not only since met Rheame but also spent a fair amount of time with the trailblazer. "Before I started studying law, I



Juliane Backmann / Special to the Daily Journal

actually helped promote women's hockey with Manon."

Zee, who would Rollerblade for hours as a teenager on the street in front of her Rancho Palos Verdes home, continued to play roller hockey frequently during her undergraduate work at UCLA, traveling regularly with a women's team to matches around the state before graduating in 2000.

She didn't make the jump to ice hockey until after enrolling at Loyola Law School, where she completed her law degree in 2003.

"Ice hockey is definitely faster," she said. "The pucks are heavier. The passing is faster. The shots are harder because you've got a frozen rubber puck as opposed to the lightweight puck you play with in roller hockey."

Today, Zee is team captain for two different women's ice hockey league teams, generally playing matches a couple times each week.

She also spends time from September to April playing for the LA Traffic, an all-women's club team which competes each year for a spot in USA Hockey's national amateur championship tournament, often facing off against all-men's teams.

"Candice is an amazing hockey player," said Jennifer K. Chun, a corporate transaction attorney who handles media licensing deals for the National Basketball Association.

"She's a great skater and stick handler," added Chun, who first met Zee on the ice more than 10 years ago during a women's league match in El Segundo. "She also shoots often and accurately, so she's a great goal scorer."

Chun's husband Dan Kim, who is senior vice president of media distribution and strategy for the NHL, has also spent a lot of time on the ice with Zee, and he not only praised her "absolute passion" for the sport but also her skill level.

"There are a lot of people who look clunky when they skate," Kim said. "But Candice is incredibly smooth on the ice."

Respect from male counterparts can, at times, be tough to come by, according to Zee, who noted competing against men still poses distinct challenges. And at five foot five and 130 pounds, Zee often gives up a substantial physical advantage to male opponents, whose egos make occasional ugly appearances.

"If you take the puck from a guy, there are sometimes repercussions," Zee explained. "Some of them seem to get more frustrated by that if you're a woman, and they take it out on you by being more physical."

All those years competing against men, either on Rollerblades or ice hockey skates, has helped Zee handle a variety of confrontations in her legal career, especially when it comes to labor negotiations and litigation.

"There aren't as many women who practice traditional labor law compared to men," she said. "So I've definitely applied some of what I've learned in the past with hockey to dealings with the union. ... Posturing doesn't really faze me much. It's not worth letting that bother you because it will just affect your performance. You've just got to let that stuff go."

Diane M. Goodman, an Encino family law attorney and mediator who competes regularly against Zee in all-women's ice hockey league matches, praised the labor attorney's intellect.

"Candice is a really smart lawyer," Goodman said. "In hockey, you're looking for openings to move the puck or make a pass or score, and my sense of her as an attorney is that she uses some of that same strategic hockey approach to look for openings to settle cases when it's possible and find creative ways to get things accomplished."

Like Goodman and Chun, Zee extolled the stress relief regular ice hockey competition can provide for a frazzled attorney putting in long hours at the office, insisting the sport has been tremendous for both her sanity and physical health.

"Once you start skating, you just don't think about anything else," Zee said. "You're so focused on the game, where the puck is and who's around you that there's just no room for work to enter your mind."