



**I'm suspecting  
I'll die anyway  
and I'd rather do it  
with a cup of java.**

## LEARNING THE ROPES OF THE RULEBOOK

HER EYES WERE OPENED, HER **MUSCLES SHREDDED**, BUT WRITER SONYA EWAN MANAGED TO SURVIVE SKATING WITH THE ZEBRAS  
BY SONYA EWAN

**HOW MANY OF US** have sat near that certain fan in the stands at a hockey game, the one we're sure will bust a blood vessel or spontaneously combust at any moment? He isn't voicing his excitement for the game, though.

He's bashing the officials.

That led me to wonder, **who are these officials? And how hard could it be to make the perfect judgment call?** There was one way to find out: Go to camp. There was just one teeny, tiny issue. Me. At five feet tall, I look up to almost everyone. And I'm female. Could I cut it?

"I'm not sure about your chances of actually becoming an official, but I won't tell you not to try out," says the Central League's supervisor of officials, Wayne Bonney, when I contact him to participate in the 2007 Officials Camp just outside Dallas.

With that endorsement, I'm off to camp.

**DAY 1** At my seat for the first classroom session, I scan the room of about 40 returning and prospective officials and it strikes me these guys

look much more like players than the rule book-worms I expected. Evidence of gym memberships bulge from their sleeves.

After reviewing the first of eight hours of clips illustrating penalty situations, Bonney breaks up the monotony with a game. Each person tells the group two truths and a lie, and the group must guess the lie. I announce I've been a USA Hockey official for five years, I play defense and "I can skate better than all y'all!" What was meant as a joke is taken as a challenge. I'm in trouble.

**DAY 2** An early alarm jolts me awake. I join the group for a quick breakfast, but there's no time to stop for coffee. NHL referee prospect Mark Lemelin explains, "They'll kill us if we're late on the ice." After my faux pas the previous night, I'm suspecting I'll die either way and I'd rather it be with a warm cup of java inside.

We hit the ice at 8 a.m. to the warning: "Warm up good! Don't pull your groin!"

Immediately, two guys blow past me and chuckle, "Oh yeah, you skate better than us for sure."

Right. I'm about half their size. "That was my lie! Duh," I answer. Sure enough, the guys are skating much faster than I can keep up with. As the speed increases, my form is sacrificed.

"Bend your knees," someone suggests. Like I don't know that. It's just that I can't focus on bending my knees *and* going super fast *and* transitioning forward to backward *and* stopping hard on the blueline.

Bonney tells me not to worry – the officials should be paying attention to their own skating. But I'm skating for my life.

Back in the classroom I stretch my legs. Naturally, I've shredded my groin muscles. One skating session and it's already apparent I won't be participating in the test tomorrow morning.

"Why don't you sleep in a little," Bonney hints. I think I'm getting the message.

**DAY 3** I catch up with referee Tudor Floru at breakfast. He spent the previous night officiating an AHL game in San Antonio.

"You can definitely hear the fans," Floru admits of heckling. "But honestly, I'd rather have 10,000 people booing me than three moms sitting in a corner yelling at me. We get pumped up just like the players when we go into a big crowd. It's a good part of the game, not a negative thing.

"Like everybody, you go through highs and lows, periods when you have good games or times when you feel like you're not seeing things, like I'm always having to look through guys. After those games, you just have to move on. Start fresh. Put out a good effort even if you're tired."

Meanwhile, Bonney breaks the inevitable news to me gently after the clinic:

"You're no good. You got a day job?"

He also shares: "You're not the worst we ever had. Some kid showed up who was hugging the wall during the skating."

Bonney has obviously recognized my potential and I'm beaming on the inside. Surely I'll return to the stands as an ambassador for an extremely knowledgeable team of professional, character guys, who possess that unique appreciation for the game only officials have.

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