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Visualizing Victory

Plaintiff's lawyer and hockey player Christian Nickerson brings his competitive edge from court to the ice.

By Skylar Dubelko
Daily Journal Staff Writer

SANTA MONICA — Christian Nickerson is the only lawyer on his hockey team.

"I'm the only lawyer in our league, as far as I know," he said. Noting his teammates are all "pretty successful and have their own careers," Nickerson added, "[It's] kind of cool because we all come from our day jobs in our suits."

Once Nickerson and his teammates lace up their skates, however, and get into the rink, "it's like we're kids again, out there on the ice just having fun."

Raised in northwestern Pennsylvania, about an hour and a half north of Pittsburgh, Nickerson was the oldest of four boys. During his adolescence, the Pittsburgh Penguins won the 1990 and 1991 Stanley Cup Finals. "So hockey was really booming as I was growing up," he said.

In Recess

Speculating that his mother was looking for a way to distract her brood "and wear us out," Nickerson said he started skating at 18 months and was first introduced to hockey at age 5.

"I think ... because the Penguins were successful, my mom thought it was a cool sport, and we seemed to enjoy it," Nickerson said. "I don't think she ever thought it was going to be as crazy as it ended up being."

With four boys playing travel hockey, "one of us would have a game in Buffalo, one of us would have a game in Cleveland, one of us would be in Boston, [and] one of us would have a game in Pittsburgh — all in the same weekend," Nickerson recalled.

During his senior year of high school, Nickerson, the captain of his hockey team, was recruited to play at Pennsylvania State University.

"I ended up only playing for a couple weeks there up until I got knocked on the head," Nickerson said. It was his third concussion in a year.

Nickerson knew he wanted to go to law school and "didn't want to sacrifice [his] brain," he said. So he gave up competitive hockey and started playing for fun, joining a league team with Penn State friends he knew from his high school hockey days.

After receiving his bachelor's degree, Nickerson moved west to attend Pepperdine School of



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Law. While there, he took a break from hockey.

"I was busy with law school, trying to find a job, trying to be an adult," he explained. But after graduating and securing a job at Greene Broillet & Wheeler LLP, the attorney decided to revisit the ice.

"The firm's really great about pursuing a work-life balance," Nickerson said.

In 2012, Nickerson and a friend from Pittsburgh, who also moved to California, decided to join a local league run by the Los Angeles Kings.

Greene Broillet & Wheeler name partner Bruce Broillet describes Nickerson as a "can-do human being."

"There's nothing that he's afraid of; there's no task or challenge that he's been unwilling to take on," Broillet said. "He's a fighter."

Broillet admits to knowing very little about hockey. "But I know a great deal about Christian's passion for hockey," he said, describing his associate as tenacious.

"You can see it in his demeanor when he talks about it," Broillet explained. "He is a very deter-

mined competitor, and I'm just glad that he's in our foxhole."

In his legal practice, Nickerson has demonstrated "all the tools that are necessary to be an effective trial lawyer," Broillet said. "He was taught in sports to visualize the victory and he does that without question."

Greene Broillet & Wheeler partner Timothy Wheeler described Nickerson as "probably one of the more talented young lawyers in the LA area."

Nickerson has co-tried "a number of seven-figure verdicts," Wheeler said, noting his associate is "one of those rare individuals [who] can stand up in front of a jury and be himself."

"He's genuine, he's honest and sincere in his presentation," Wheeler added. "And he's one of those individuals who truly battles for his clients."

Mentioning Nickerson's passion for hockey dates back to childhood, Wheeler said, "Like with anything else, he gives it 100 percent."

The "grit and determination you need in hockey is the same kind of grit and determination you need as a trial lawyer," Wheeler said. "He uses those skills in both arenas."

Initially shocked by how large and "crazy" the hockey community is in Los Angeles, Nickerson said he plays in two "high-level, competitive divisions," in which many of his teammates played college and junior hockey.

"So it's not a joke league at all," Nickerson said. "We play about 80 games a year between those two teams."

Games start anywhere between 9 o'clock to 10:30 at night and are a "great way to blow off steam after a long day," Nickerson said. He admitted that on some days, however, the trek to the Toyota Sports Center in El Segundo, where games are held, can be exhausting.

"But I'm telling you, once you lace up the skates and get out on the ice, it all goes away," he insisted.

In his trial practice, Nickerson focuses on catastrophic personal injury, wrongful death, business litigation and employment litigation.

"I love trial work and being a plaintiff's lawyer because there's really nothing quite like the feeling," Nickerson said, noting his day job is similar to playing a competitive sport.

"When you win it's great, when you lose it's not so great," Nickerson said. "But at the end of the day, you've got to just pick yourself back up and get back in the courtroom — just like you get back on the ice."