

Alumni Spotlight: Shauna Neary '04

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Shauna Neary's journey since graduating from Hebron Academy in 2004 has taken her to one of the biggest stages in the world of sports. This winter, Shauna stepped onto the ice as an official at the 2026 Winter Olympic Games in Milan, a moment that represented years of preparation, perseverance, and a deep love for hockey.

Even with experience officiating at the highest levels of the sport, nothing quite compares to the moment the Olympics begin. "You think officiating in front of 20,000 fans in the PWHL or at a World Championship prepares you for that first Olympic step onto the ice, but it's different," Shauna explains. "You believe you're ready, but when you step onto the ice for your first Olympic game, your heart races faster and emotions surface."

As officials gathered on the ice for the opening puck drop of the 2026 Milano Games, the magnitude of the moment became real. "My Finnish referee partner said, 'This is your puck drop.' That's when it hit me, I was opening the Olympic Games," she recalls. "It was overwhelming. I'm not even sure I got the puck down flat." Like many Olympic moments, it was emotional, and Neary shared, "There were definitely a few tears that night, and again at the opening ceremonies. As a kid, you watch these ceremonies on television and dream. Standing there thinking, 'This is real. I'm here.' It was overwhelming in the best way possible."

Shauna's path to that moment began long before Milan. After graduating from Hebron, she attended Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, where she played varsity hockey for the Mounties. Following university, she transitioned into coaching, working within Hockey Nova Scotia's high-performance program and leading a U18 AAA female team for two seasons before becoming an associate coach at Dalhousie University, where she coached for five seasons.

While coaching, Shauna noticed something that would ultimately change the direction of her career. "There was a lack of female representation in officiating," she says. "I decided to don the stripes and give back to the game in a different way." What began as an effort to support the sport quickly grew into a new professional pursuit. Her officiating career accelerated through Hockey Canada's national high-performance pathway, eventually leading her to pause coaching and dedicate herself fully to officiating.

Her debut on the international stage came at the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) Women's World Championship in Bulgaria. In 2021, she was promoted to officiate at the top division of the IIHF Women's World Championship, where she would shine for five seasons. Along the way, Shauna also officiated the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL), the former Premier Hockey Federation (PHF), the Professional Women's Hockey Players Association (PWHPA), the Canada-USA Rivalry Series, as well as men's and women's university and Junior A hockey.

Each opportunity sharpened her skills and prepared her for the intense Olympic selection process. Officials from around the world progressed through multiple international championships before a final group was chosen for pre-Olympic qualifying tournaments. Shauna

was assigned to Germany while other officials traveled to Japan and Sweden. From there, a smaller group of referees and linespersons advanced to officiate the Women's World Championship in Czechia, where the final Olympic roster was ultimately selected.

Officiating at the Olympic level requires composure, confidence, and years of preparation. "It's countless hours in rinks across your province and North America," Neary says, adding that "It's time in the gym, sessions with the skating coach, studying the numerous rule books, reviewing video – all so that when the moment comes, you can relax and let the game come to you." When the pressure rises, she relies on that foundation. "Confidence doesn't appear overnight, it's built up rep by rep, game by game." says Shauna.

The lessons she has learned through officiating extend beyond the rink. In her professional career, Shauna serves as a Field Operations Manager with Canada's Department of Fisheries and Coceans, where she manages field operations, people, budgets, and complex infrastructure projects. Many of the leadership skills required in that role were shaped through her experience officiating. "Every game you step onto the ice with a different partner or crew," she says. "No matter the language or background, you must be aligned and working as one team to protect the integrity of the game." Those same skills, she notes, apply when leading teams and navigating complex projects in her professional life.

When Shauna reflects on her time at Hebron Academy, the memories that stand out most are the people who made the experience so meaningful. "I feel nothing but pride to be part of the Lumberjack family," she says. "The moment I stepped on campus, I knew it was the right place for me." Teachers, mentors, and coaches played a lasting role in shaping that experience. Julie Middleton was the first person Shauna met at Hebron and remains an important role model today. "Julie was kind and welcoming, and her family always made us feel at home, whether it was after long road trips, movie nights, or meals at the dorm house." Heather Farrenbach also created memorable moments for students by organizing beach trips, ball games, and other off-campus outings that gave everyone a chance to explore the surrounding community and reset outside the classroom. On the field and ice, Coach Roy and Ridley were equally influential. "They invested countless hours helping me grow not only as an athlete but as a person."

Living in a residence also played a significant role in preparing Shauna for the experiences that would follow later in life. "Living in residence taught me how to live in a community made up of different cultures, backgrounds, and values," she says, "much like officiating, where you must quickly build trust and cohesion with a team." Hebron also helped her develop the time-management skills needed to balance academics, athletics, and personal commitments, a foundation that would enable her to juggle a full-time career while officiating at the elite level.

For current Hebron students, particularly those who love sports but may not see a traditional path forward, Shauna encourages them to keep their options open. "*Being a student-athlete gives you a foundation for life; leadership, resilience, and the ability to work towards goals individually and as a team,*" she says, adding that "there are many ways to stay involved in a sport beyond being a player." From coaching and officiating to training,

performance analytics, statistics, and sport administration, there are countless opportunities to remain connected to the game. “Your path may not be traditional, and that's okay. Sometimes the most meaningful journeys are the ones you didn’t initially plan,” Neary states.

For Shauna, the Olympic Games represent an extraordinary achievement, but she believes the journey itself holds the greatest meaning. “The Olympics may be the pinnacle, but it’s the people, mentors, teammates, and family along the way who make it meaningful,” she says. Neary added that “success doesn’t always follow a straight line. Be open to opportunity, work hard when no one is watching, and trust the foundation being built beneath you.”

Representing her sport on a global stage remains an incredible honor, but she is quick to recognize the people who helped her along the way. Shauna noted that “my family sacrificed so much to help me get here. There were countless nights away officiating and endless hours training.” She also credits Hebron as a foundational part of her journey, sharing that “friends’ families who welcomed me into their homes, teachers who pushed me academically, coaches who guided me athletically, they all played a role. No matter what stage I stand on, *I am still a Lumberjack at heart.*”