

On any given Sunday night in the Oilers Ice Center, players from the OSU ice hockey team are zipping around the ice rink in a sea of orange and black against the cold, white ice

Along the sidelines, friends, family and fans are seated on steel benches; most of them bunched and huddled together with a wool blanket with nothing more than a cup of hot chocolate and cheers.

When the game starts, hockey players from all over the state scramble for one hour to take control of the puck and shoot it free from the goalie's gloves into the net. Players smash, grab and poke each other at speeds up to 20 miles per hour for a small, three-inch piece of rubber.

One player on the OSU ice hockey team, No. 8, plays the right wing position and is constantly after the puck. No. 8 seems to have a distinct ability to not only know where the puck is going to be, but also to be there to receive a pass or steal it from the opposing team.

It is not until after the games, when the team sets off to the locker room away from the fans and rivals that No. 8 takes off the helmet to reveal long, flowing brown hair. No. 8 is Amanda Essary, a female who plays in a predominantly male sport.

Essary is a hockey player who constantly plays the sport she loves harder and more intensely than most players. She has had to play through criticism and doubts to not only prove to her peers, but also to herself, that he can play just as well as everyone else.

Essary was born in Gardnerville, NV, about an hour south of Reno. Essary spent most of her childhood in Nevada, but after high school she decided to move elsewhere.

In 1999, Essary started playing hockey with friends and had been playing ever since. As she continued to play, Essary received scholarships and several opportunities to participate on teams.

Essary decided to go to college in New York. Manhattanville College gave Essary a full-ride scholarship to play hockey for its team. After playing for Manhattanville, Essary decided she didn't particularly care for New York and decided to move, Essary said.

Essary transferred to OSU because her father graduated from there and she was already familiar with the campus. She had no prior knowledge of an OSU ice hockey club until she met Jeff Sykora, who was then the president of the club.

Even though Essary has had success with her hockey endeavors, she has faced several disputes and still does today.

"It's been challenging at times," Essary said. "You have to prove it to them and yourself."

Essary makes several efforts to be treated equally, like changing into her hockey gear in the same locker room as the men.

"Most guys, especially the ones on the OSU team are really cool about it," Essary said.

"I remember when I first saw Amanda," said James Katsumoto, current president of the OSU ice hockey club. "I thought she was some 12-year-old fan until she told me she was on the team. So I said 'locker's over there.'"

As hard as she tries to play, occasionally she will see guy players that still won't have any respect for her because she is a girl, Essary said.

Despite the cheap shots from male players, she still loves the game and said she will continue to play as long as she can.

“Once people can see that you can play, they’ll leave you alone,” Essary said.