

Minnesota hockey legend Krissy Wendell skating up the broadcast ranks



By Heather Rule ([/author/heather-rule/](#)) Nov 9, 2017



Don Lucia and his Gopher men's hockey team occupy one bench inside 3M Arena at Mariucci, with the visiting team to the other side. In the between, with a perfect view of the red line, stands Krissy Wendell.

One of the most notable and talented women's hockey players in Minnesota history is there to analyze the game as part of the FOX Sports North Gopher men's hockey broadcast team.

In the middle of the first period between the Gophers and Michigan State on Nov. 3, she jumps in to discuss seniors Leon Bristedt and Mike Szmataula, who each scored their first goals of the season the week before.

"We have Bristedt looking to build off that tonight against a team he's been able to have success against in the past," Wendell says during the broadcast.

For one of Minnesota's hockey greats, it's another step in building a new career around a sport that has brought her so much success.

Wendell, 36, and a University of Minnesota women's hockey alum, made her debut on the Gophers broadcast Oct. 15 for the second home game of the season and is set to broadcast about 15 home games this year. She'll primarily be a second analyst in between the benches but has also been up in the broadcast booth a couple times to get her feet wet.

"It's kind of an evolving position," Wendell said. "We're kind of in a process right now where I'm really learning a lot and how it works."

In just her first few games as an analyst with FSN, it's all about establishing a comfort level. Analyzing the game from ice level provides a different angle of viewing the game, and Wendell enjoys it, she said.

She's learning the flow of when to jump into the conversation with fellow broadcasters, play-by-play man Doug McLeod and fellow analyst Ben Clymer, who's been impressed with how receptive Wendell is to learning the TV sports business.



On the call at Gophers games, Krissy Wendell is right in the middle of the action. (Credit: via FOX Sports North broadcast)

“She’s just been really open to, at times, it’s constructive criticism,” Clymer said. “It’s been nice to have her be so open to want to get better.”

Wendell certainly has the hockey background that can translate to solid analysis on camera. She was a three-time All-American with the Gophers from 2002-05, helping the team to back-to-back NCAA national championships in 2004 and 2005. She won the 2005 Patty Kazmaier Award as the nation’s top female hockey player.

She scored 314 points over two seasons with Park Center High School and was named Ms. Hockey during their state championship season in 2000. In October, she was inducted into the 2017 class of the Minnesota State High School League Hall of Fame.

Her extensive hockey resume allows her to speak with 100 percent validity on what she sees on the ice as an analyst, according to Clymer. He, too, sees the benefit of having a woman who played the game at such a high level being part of a men’s hockey broadcast team.

“I mean, I can’t think of anyone else doing that,” Clymer said.

A fill-in gig turned into a growing TV career

She first connected with FSN last January when she was a color analyst for a girls’ high school hockey game as part of Hockey Day Minnesota. Then they asked her if she’d like to join the Gopher hockey broadcast team. Wendell said she was a little nervous since hadn’t done a lot of live TV before. But she said the tradition of Gopher hockey and the chance to cover a college team was appealing to her.

Though this is a new position with FSN, she’s been an analyst for the past four years for the Minnesota High School Girls’ State Hockey Tournament.

“And I kind of just got thrown into it,” Wendell said.

Her arrival at the tournament desk for Channel 45 was a bit last minute. With another analyst out because of illness, Winny Brodt — another analyst and one of Wendell’s best friends from their college days at the U of M — called Wendell to ask if she’d be game for filling in.

Since they were in a pinch, Wendell agreed and enjoyed the chance to talk hockey.

Tori Holt, a local broadcaster for the state high school tournaments, saw Wendell's work and thought to himself, "Gosh, she's good." It led him to inviting Wendell to co-host MN Prep Spotlight, a local weekly show recapping high school sports, with him a few years ago. They're now in their fourth season together.



Wendell and Team USA took bronze at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino. (Credit: Filippo Monteforte/AFP/Getty Images)

"It took some convincing, but I got her to do it," Holt said.

In addition to Prep Spotlight, Wendell also filled in last year for the Class 1A boys state hockey tournament, getting her first experience in between the benches doing interviews at intermission, an aspect of the job she might bring to Gopher games at some point, once she gets a little more comfortable, she said.

Her young television career hasn't come without some growing pains, as she called them. Holt recalls that when she started with Prep Spotlight, Wendell didn't know how to read a teleprompter or where to put the inflection when reading a highlight. It's been fun to see her improve from those first rehearsals, Holt said.

“She’s exactly what Minnesota needs in sports right now,” Holt said.

There are a lot of logistics and behind-the-scenes aspects of putting together a live sports broadcast, a challenge Wendell appreciates.

“I tell my husband [former Gopher and NHL player Johnny Pohl] this all the time,” Wendell said. “He’s like, ‘Oh, it’s not that hard, you’re just talking hockey.’

“It *is* hard. I think just the timing of everything and being able to say things. You’re trying to say a lot in a short amount of time.”

But what’s the old saying? Practice makes perfect. With every production Wendell’s worked on, whether it’s as an analyst, sideline reporter or working on Prep Spotlight, she said she’s learned something new.

‘Krissy is Krissy’

Wendell graduated from the U of M with a communications degree, but when she was in college, she never pictured herself being on television.

“It’s funny that now that’s what I do,” Wendell said.

Actually, she said she didn’t always love doing interviews as an athlete either, where she had to talk about herself. Maybe that’s just an example of why Holt said Wendell is “the most humble person” he’s ever met.

“She just doesn’t even get how great she is,” Holt said. “And I just love working with her.”

Holt sees TV sports getting watered down with so many sideline reporters with a “cookie-cutter” path from college-play a sport-intern at ESPN-then get thrown into it at the national TV level at an early age. He sees reporters trying to emulate established reporters, like Lesley Visser, Michele Tafoya or Erin Andrews.

Then he sees Krissy, who doesn’t try to copy anybody.

“Krissy is Krissy,” Holt said. “She’s authentic.”

Her sports television career slowly progressed from that first high school state tournament. Opportunities have come up, plus the timing has worked out well with her family life. She and her husband have three daughters, ages 9, 7 and 5.

Her daughters all play soccer and hockey, though it wasn't something that was pushed upon them, Wendell said. Their oldest daughter developed an interest in hockey when Pohl was still playing, "then it kind of trickled down to the other two," Wendell said.

Pohl started coaching the girls' hockey team at Cretin-Derham Hall in 2011, and Wendell joined him as an assistant coach. Their coaching partnership was "a fun little date night," Wendell said. Once their kids were old enough to play sports however, they shifted coaching gears toward their own girls.

Wendell enjoys seeing the growth of girls and women throughout the sports world, especially raising three daughters. Girls' hockey really flourished when she went through her high school and college years.

Now, there's a whole generation of women who grew up playing hockey and are able to give back through coaching or sports media, Wendell said.

"I think people don't look at it as being abnormal now to have females on broadcasts," Wendell said.

An unforgettable Olympic experience

She had the special honor to play on the silver and bronze USA women's Olympic teams in 2002 in Salt Lake City and 2006 in Torino. Walking into the Opening Ceremony at her first Olympic Games was something she says she'll never forget.

The 2018 Winter Olympics will mark 20 years since the first women's hockey team skated in Nagano, Japan.

"For girls especially, I think ... the opportunities have come so recently," Wendell said. "For me, that was when I was a sophomore in high school."

The Olympics are the pinnacle, the top of women's hockey, Wendell said. The 2018 women's Olympic team will be in town Dec. 3 to play Team Canada at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul in preparation for the 2018 games in PyeongChang, South Korea.

“It’s fun to watch that with our own kids,” Wendell said. “They ask a lot of questions.”

Wendell hasn’t really had a break from hockey, as she’s gone from playing to coaching to television. She had no idea she would still be quite as involved with the sport as she is today. Not that she’s complaining.

“It’s been great,” Wendell said. “The sport’s given far more to me than I ever could’ve imagined, for sure. A lot of memories.”

(Top photo: via FOX Sports North broadcast)

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Heather Rule ([/author/heather-rule/](#)) is a contributor to The Athletic Minnesota. Her work has appeared in outlets such as the Star Tribune, USA Today, Chicago Tribune, USAHockey.com and ZoneCoverage.com. Follow Heather on Twitter @hlrule (<https://twitter.com/hlrule>).

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Nick H. Nov 9, 5:40pm

Really good read. Would like to see more from Heather, please!

