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## Olympic hockey star begins quest to become Trump's apprentice with high hopes of ...

### Icing the competition

BY BRAD A. GREENBERG, Staff Writer  
LA Daily News

For her first summer job, Angela Ruggiero built cardboard boxes and scrubbed floors in her mom's Encino office. Today, she begins her quest to be Donald Trump's apprentice.

The gold-medal-winning Olympic hockey star has returned to her native Los Angeles to battle 17 wannabe moguls on the sixth season of NBC's "The Apprentice," which is being filmed in Los Angeles for the first time.

"That is the ultimate job right now. ... If I were to win 'The Apprentice,' I'm probably done with hockey," said Ruggiero, 26, once a denizen of Panorama City and Simi Valley and the youngest member of the 1998 gold-medal-winning women's ice hockey team.

She's been gone 12 years now, since attending prep school in Connecticut and going on to win three Olympic medals. She's glad to be back, out of the cold and in the presence of palm trees.

"I had a palm tree growing up and I hadn't seen one since," she said, then quickly noted how much worse traffic seems now. "Hopefully that won't make us late on a task."

During the Turin Olympics in February, NBC invited viewers to pick one of 12 American athletes to be the final member of "The Apprentice" cast. Ruggiero topped the list.

"The results are in, and I'm thrilled with the viewers' decision," Trump said in a prepared statement. "We'll see if Angela can ice the competition as we take the boardroom to the West Coast."

It's not inconceivable. She's got brains to go with brawn.

After graduating from Harvard University with honors in 2004, Ruggiero began writing her autobiography, "Breaking the Ice," published last fall. She's also established her own girls' hockey school in Michigan, where she now lives, and was the first female nongolaltender to play in a men's professional hockey game.

But she wasn't always such a standout, said Dominic Nenton, who coached her in the Pasadena Hockey Association in the late 1980s.

"She was just a skinny, little kid," he said.

That's something no one would dare claim today. Ruggiero, widely considered the top female hockey player in the world, is a 5-foot-9-inch brick wall of a defensewoman. She's 190 pounds of muscle and tenacity.

"To get where she is today, that didn't happen by chance," Nenton said. "She had a commitment, a strong work ethic and a desire for success. That's why she's a gold medalist."

Ruggiero considered returning to Harvard for an MBA when her sports agent called last week with news from Trump.

"My mom was home, my sister was home - they started screaming, of course," Ruggiero recalled. "I was trying to keep it cool. `OK, I've got to get ready. I've got to get in business mode."

Adding an Olympian to the cast is one of many changes "The Apprentice" is undergoing as it strives to stabilize its slipping popularity.

Since golden boy Bill Rancic was hired at the end of season one, no apprentice has quite matched up. The show was moved from its Thursday slot, is switching to a once-a-year schedule and has sliced ad rates.

"`The Apprentice,' of course, is kind of a gasping property," said Robert Thompson, a professor of television and popular culture at Syracuse University. "It needs some juice right now, and (casting Ruggiero) is the perfect way to do it."

Looking for a change of scenery, it moved out of New York, with the final episode of season five to be televised live from Los Angeles on Monday. Season six films here during the next six weeks and begins airing in January.

"A million things could come out of this," Ruggiero said. "I'm ready for whatever."

[brad.greenberg@dailynews.com](mailto:brad.greenberg@dailynews.com)

(818) 713-3634