

This week we have the pleasure of having Nichole Kramer for the interview of the week. To start off, could you tell us a little bit about yourself like where you were born, where you were raised, what you study now, and so on.

Kramer: Well, I was born in Parma, Michigan, it's a small town just outside of Jackson, Michigan. I grew up there all through high school and everything like that. I now go to Michigan State University, studying mechanical engineering, going into my fourth year, so almost done. Other than that, kind of... what...for a job right now, I just got off with a summer internship with a power plant company, and now I'm taking up refing soccer again just for some money, in between well, taking classes and stuff.

Okay, so what exactly do you study when you say mechanical engineering?

Kramer: With mechanical engineering, it's kind of a board degree, so you can go any which way, either design or application of it, and right now, I'm going towards more of the application with the power plant industry and stuff like that, so working with pumps, turbines, valves, all of that stuff.

What other fields do your friends possibly go in the future?

Kramer: A couple of my friends are going into the biomedical industry, so they will be doing more of like the design portion of like prosthetics and stuff like that, other ones are going into car industries, and then some even go into like oil.

So you mentioned studying as well as refereeing or playing soccer, so there must be some sort of way for you to balance between having fun and doing well at school. So what are some of the things that you think about when it comes to having fun while being a successful student?

Kramer: A lot of the times what I try and do is definitely during the middle part of the week, so Monday through Thursday, Friday focus on school work, and being like, studying all of that fun stuff, while then on the weekends it gives me time to relax and have fun with friends, go out, just be able to take my mind off of all this school work and everything like that. When I need to, I can rearrange that, when, like, I can reprioritize when I need to, so when I have exams coming up, or other big projects coming up, I can, I tend to reorganize, and focus more, okay, so for this weekend, I'm

going to have to just study and everything like that, work with the group, do whatever, while then once that's over with I can kind of backtrack and go back to my normal schedule of relaxing and what not, and while doing that during the week and everything, I can figure, at the beginning of the semester I can normally figure out how much time I can afford to work and make some extra money, and then also with just reffing, or some of the other jobs on campus, there're flexible hours, so if you figure out oh man, I'm doing too much right now, you can back off and so that way you're not overloading yourself.

Okay, so we have this stereotype about American students that unlike Japanese college students, American students work a lot, actually. It seems that in the United States, people think that the Japanese people are harder working people, but in reality, in Japan, people do not think so. So how much work do you usually get from school, or classes, while you're, while you have classes?

Kramer: For my ma-, well, for mechanical engineering, especially now that we're, or that I'm in the later years of it, we have a lot of projects that are kind of ongoing, and so that can have its highs and its lows, with work load and stuff, but a lot of times I'll have probably one to four hours every night of homework just depending on what classes are coming up, what projects are going on, labs, all that stuff. And if it's on the lower end, yeah, I can add some extra work hours in there or two, make some extra money, if it's on that upper end of four hours plus, I can back off and reprioritize and just focus on school for the time being.

Okay. So now I want to ask a little bit about your family. You mentioned that you're from Parma, Michigan, but is everyone in your family from that area?

Kramer: They're not. They're actually from the thumb of Michigan, and from little tiny towns called Minden City and Harbor Beach. My parents each had ten brothers and sisters, so (laugh), really large families, and tons of cousins running around and everything. Ironically, I'm an only child, so (laugh)... but, we were always really close with my mom's sister's family, she had two children of her own, so I have two cousins there, and they ended up like being brothers and sisters. We went out on a lot of trips and stuff like that.

So where did you go, for example?

Kramer: Well, every year we had multiple family vacations and all that fun stuff. We always made sure to go to Cedar Point once a year, that was normally in August, like right before school started back up, so it was sort of like a last big hurrah before going back to school. And then, we'd go somewhere during the spring, for spring break, or during the summer, we'd have one large vacation. We've gone to like Disney World, multiple states, just randomly visiting (laugh)...

Do you usually drive? Or did you usually drive there?

Kramer: When we were younger, about four or five years old, we would fly. But then, as we got older, our parents learned that it was cheaper to drive, so (laugh)... then we got to do the fun twelve-hour trips (laugh), driving there.

What about the west? You, I know you've been to the west, but how was the trip like?

Kramer: We took a two-week trip out west, starting in Michigan, going up into Minnesota, around through the Dakotas and then working our way down eventually to the Grand Canyon. In between there we made numerous stops, I can't even count all of them, but (laugh), and... it was just kind of a bunch of driving around and stopping in places, living out of a suitcase for two weeks (laugh)...

Do you see yourself doing the same thing in the future once you have a family?

Kramer: Probably. It will be one of those kind of like "well, we did it as kids, so you guys are going to have to, too" (laugh)...

And you said that your parents have ten siblings each, but do you see all your uncles and aunts and do you see your cousins quite often?

Kramer: We try to. It's a lot less now when, with all those kids kind of grown up, it's hard to coordinate schedules and everything like that. But for all the major holidays, like Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, we all definitely get together for those. And then we have a couple of, minor like family reunions and stuff like that. And for Labor Day, there's a church picnic up there that we all try and make it up for, and...

How many people do you, I mean how many people do you usually have at those events?

Kramer: It can range anywhere from like 20 upwards of 50 (laugh).

It's almost 60 people from the same family, basically.

Kramer: Exactly.

That's a lot of people, that's a lot of people. Now just to ask you a few other things, what about your soccer and the refereeing? When did you start playing soccer or refereeing soccer?

Kramer: I started playing soccer when I was three or four years old, just with like little youth leagues, and everything like that. And I played up through high school, and after that I still play once in a while but it's more for like just for fun, pick up games, and stuff like that, if I want to get outside. Refeing, I started about when I was 16, I realized I can drive and run around and make money that way (laugh), it's a pretty easy way of making some spare cash, and paying for gas money, and everything.

I heard that you once won an award, or actually two awards, in the past, one from the State and one from Minnesota, so could you tell us about that a little bit?

Kramer: Well, the one from Minnesota, it was from, it was at the U.S.A. Cup, and with that one, it was just a youth ref award for I guess doing well during the week while I was there and everything like that. So that was kind of cool, I got a nice little whistle, a golden whistle.

Very nice.

Kramer: I got my name up on a plaque now (laugh).

That's good.

Kramer: It was kind of the same thing for the State, it was another youth one, for just basically, kind of doing well and excelling, so...

What kind of games do you ref now?

Kramer: Anywhere from younger kids up through old guys (laugh).

Are they fun?

Kramer: They are. They're definitely different challenges. The younger ones are more just kind of teaching them, and helping them along, where with the old ones, it's (laugh)... being able to actually communicate with them and just getting them to stop complaining (laugh).

And do you, have you made friends through refereeing or playing soccer as well?

Kramer: Yeah. That really helped me for getting into college and everything like that. It introduced me to a lot of new people. And different depar... not only like in, with professors, on campus and stuff like that, but also with just other students my age, and getting me friends outside of like the mechanical engineering major.

Okay, so you can hang out with a whole different group of people.

Kramer: Exactly. One of my good friends here is a political science major, which is a completely different path from mechanical engineering ...

That is very true.

Kramer: It's nice to hang out with people that are not just math and science oriented.

Are there any skills that you acquired through refereeing that you feel maybe they're useful in other parts of your life?

Kramer: I would say definitely being able to talk to different types of people, like just being able to switch and adapt and everything like that. In any situation, like it could be, you have people yelling at you, okay, what can you do to get those people to stop yelling (laugh), what can you say? And...

So what's the best way to make people stop yelling at you?

Kramer: There isn't one (laugh).

There isn't one? It'll be nice to know how you can stop somebody yelling at you, I guess. Okay, so the last set of questions, here, so we will be, we are recording this interview for people in Japan that are studying English. Now, would you like to visit Japan one day?

Kramer: I think it would be fun. It would definitely be interesting to see, I guess the food difference from what we consider as Japanese food over here in the U.S. compared to what actually Japanese food is in Japan. I've heard it's quite a bit different, but...

It is true, there's a huge difference between the two, that's for sure. So do you have any plans to go to Japan at this moment, or you're not sure?

Kramer: I'm kind of up in the air right now. But maybe someday once I get out of school and everything and have some time again. It's kind of hard to take a week off or so. I feel like I'd need a week or two at least, over there, to at least adjust to the time difference (laugh).

That is true. There's 13 to 14 hour difference.

Kramer: Exactly (laugh).

That's very true. Well, I would like to thank you for your time, and hopefully all the listeners enjoyed your interview.

Kramer: Thank you for having me.

Thank you very much.