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If I had to describe myself in hockey terms, I'm like Jay Beagle, probably replaceable talent wise, but I'm going to carve out my spot on the team by working harder than anyone else.

I've wanted to be a sportswriter since I was a sophomore in high school. I started watching professional football with my dad and I remember thinking to myself 'I'm a strong writer. I could be a sports journalist. It's the coolest job ever, you get paid to watch and write about sports.'

I was born in Chattanooga, Tenn., to two Ukrainian immigrants. I'm a first generation American citizen and up until my first day of pre-kindergarten, I only spoke Russian. My parents forgot to teach me how to speak English, but thankfully I can now. My family moved to New York City when I was 6-years-old to a neighborhood called Brighton Beach or "Little Odessa," a tightly knit community of Russians and Eastern Europeans in Brooklyn. We moved again before seventh grade to the very small town of Walhalla S.C. with my grandparents. I've lived all over the place, but South Carolina is home.

After realizing I could make a living doing what people do for ESPN and Sports Illustrated, I immediately tried to get my foot in the door. My first job at a paper was at the *Daily Journal* out of Seneca, S.C. I "interned" there for a class period every day during my sophomore year as a part of a school program. They only ever let me transcribe so the next year when I started covering my high school sports teams for the *Keowee Courier*, the *Journal* was shocked to learn their scribe could also write. Covering Walhalla High School sports was my first reporting beat and I took myself very seriously. I went to every game I could, stood on the sidelines, interviewed the coaches and players and never cheered. Even when I was just starting off, I knew I never wanted anyone to accuse me of being biased. They paid me \$50 a month for five stories a week. I was doing it for the experience, but getting paid to do something I enjoyed doing was nothing to complain about. I decided to go to the University of South Carolina to pursue my journalism degree. By the way, I was the valedictorian.

The first day I was on campus at South Carolina in 2010 I brought my portfolio with all of my high school clips to the *Daily Gamecock* and told them I wanted to be a sports reporter. I got the job on the spot because at the time, there was no application process and they were desperate for writers. My first assignment was the men's soccer beat reporter then I started covering football and women's basketball. I became the sports editor within two years of joining the paper. I was a sophomore and I went to every

media availability and press conference. I skipped classes to go to them because I knew I was setting up my future. I was in the newsroom three to five nights a week and I think I moved up the chain so quickly because everyone saw how dedicated I was. Not everyone wanted to write for a living or work for a newspaper and that's OK, but I did. I wanted to be a journalist and I wanted to do everything sportswriters did. I never rooted for South Carolina nor was I a fan, despite seeing baseball win an NCAA championship and having Steve Spurrier's cell phone number and calling him for one-on-one interviews.

Once I was out of college and I was assigned a separate beat I let myself become a fan. I stopped writing for the *Daily Gamecock* during my junior year and I started freelancing for *The State* newspaper, a daily published in Columbia. They were paying me \$75 a story to cover South Carolina Athletics and high school sports. It wasn't much different than working for the student paper, the only difference was I didn't have all of the responsibilities of an editor and I was getting paid more money than I knew what to do with at the time.

My first internship was in 2012 at *The Daily Press* in Newport News, Va. I was only there for the summer, but I wrote about anything and everything from horse racing to a Tim Tebow visit. I didn't have a clue about horse racing, but I always welcome a challenge. I wrote 68 stories that summer, some game stories for high school football, others were features, but I wrote more stories than any reporter in the newsroom during those 10 weeks.

The following summer I applied to the Sports Journalism Institute, a non-profit that places women and minorities with different hiring internship programs. I was placed at ESPN.com where I worked under Rob King and that's where I got my big break. I have always been interested in investigative and enterprise stories so when I was given the opportunity to work with Outside the Lines, I jumped. I went to Newtown, Conn., and worked on a piece about how youth sports have changed since Sandy Hook. I proved to myself that I was qualified enough to write homepage-calibre stories as an intern.

When I was in college, my goal was to intern at the *Washington Post*. During the spring of my junior year, I applied for the *Post* internship but I didn't get it. I had my application package ready in 2014 but on the day it had to be postmarked I realized I was missing three letters of recommendation. I reached out to all of my references and called in my favors. It was a little awkward asking people to write and send back their letters in one day, but thankfully everyone was happy to help me out and I was able to get my

application in on time. A few weeks later Matt Vita, the sports editor for the *Post*, called me, offered me the job and the rest is history.

I was a general assignment writer and I wrote every single day. The first day I took off wasn't until August. I wanted to show the senior editors that I was dependable and they could count on me. I covered the Nationals, the first week of the U.S. Open and some tennis and golf tournaments and the and other sporting events across the Washington D.C. area but the most fun story I did was about blimp pilots. Every sports writer has written that story about the point of blimps at golf tournaments but I was curious about the lives of the people who pilot them. I got the opportunity to go up into a blimp and talk to the pilots about their personal lives, which was pretty sad because I found out they are never home. Fun fact, there are more astronauts than blimp pilots. As my internship started to wind down, I was offered a great job covering South Carolina sports with one of the biggest papers in the state, *The Charleston Post & Courier*. Almost at the same time, a high school sports reporter position opened up at the *Post* and I remember walking into Matt's office and bringing up my offer but telling him that I really wanted to stay. He said he had been holding the job open for me for months.

I covered high school sports until 2015 when the Washington Capitals made a run in the playoffs. At the *Post*, they like to have at least two writers covering a beat during the postseason and because I can speak fluent Russian and it was Evgeny Kuznetsov's rookie season in the NHL and his English was shaky, Matt thought I was the perfect candidate. Later that summer, the Capitals beat writer Alex Prewitt was offered the job as a national hockey reporter at *Sports Illustrated* and I was the next in line. Outside of the 18 games I covered during playoffs, I knew nothing about hockey.

I already knew I wouldn't be able to fake it because my editors, readers and the players would know I had no idea what I was talking about. The only way I was going to learn was to ask for clarification when I was talking to the players or coach Barry Trotz. There were a few times when Jay Beagle and Brooks Orpik physically demonstrated what they meant when they said they went low to block a shot or what the difference was between taking a draw with the right and left hand. The turning point in my reporting happened when Barry sat me down for two hours and gave me a technical breakdown of film and their systems. He still takes credit for me knowing anything about hockey.

I stopped covering the Capitals as their beat reporter after I accepted the job as the *Post's* Moscow correspondent. For the time being, I am done covering sports. My last sports assignment was covering the Nationals in the World Series. Ironically, I don't know anything about baseball, either. But I have learned that it's good to feel nervous

and uncomfortable. It keeps you on your toes as a reporter. Working in a country where I don't have any family, don't know anyone is scary, but I am so excited to embrace the challenge. Young reporters should be open and willing to try new things because you never know what opportunities will present themselves because you put yourself out there. You have to find a way to stand out.