Zackary Swoboda

Sports Industry Careers

Prof. Novak

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Informational Interview with Larra Overton

I interviewed Larra Overton over the phone, who has made quite the name for herself in the sports broadcasting world. We talked for an hour and forty-five minutes, so although I don't have all my questions written down, I gained a lot of information from her story and our conversation. I asked her why she picked Indiana University, and she came here because of the strong reputation in journalism, along with the chance to run track and field here. She has had some great opportunities in her career so far. She has worked with Pacers Sports & Entertainment, and Fox Sports. Most currently her two positions are with the Indianapolis Colts as a producer, host, and reporter and with ESPN as a freelance track and field analyst. I also asked how she got involved in sports and when. She told me that she was always surrounded by sports as a kid since both her parents were coaches. Her family is from Louisville, and most of her work has been in Louisville, Terre Haute, and Indianapolis with some extra coverage in college cities like Bloomington.

With all of Larra's experience, I had a lot of questions to ask her. As a woman in sports and me being an openly gay man, I asked her if she has had a difficult time being a minority in the sports industry. She actually told me that she has not faced too much discrimination, but that being different from all of the other sports broadcasters can give me a huge advantage. Larra advised me to stay true to myself because people will notice me for not fitting the mold; she also

said that it can help people be more open, and I can help diversify sports for people. I viewed this as super inspirational, and it gave me a ton of confidence in being myself while on camera covering sports.

The conversation then turned to what her biggest challenges were, and she told me that in local news, she got so many comments about her looks, outfits, and makeup. They were really hard for her to handle at first, but then she learned to let them roll off like water on a duck's back. She said only three to five opinions really matter about your work/reel – your own opinion, your bosses' opinions, and a select group of people you trust to give you feedback. Nobody else's negative comments should affect you because they frankly do not matter. I feel that these pieces of advice will be so crucial for me to remember because I am a bit sensitive.

I asked Larra her favorite and least favorite parts of the job. Her favorite part is all the people that she has met and built relationships with. Larra said, "the games stand out, but the people are special." She said her valued relations have really made a difference for her, and I think that this will become my favorite part of the business as well. Larra's least favorite/hardest part is not comparing your journey to anybody else's journey. Larra said it is very easy to see other people and compare your experiences to where other people are in their lives. I think this would be a super difficult part for me because I get jealous pretty easily.

Larra then gave me some advice when I asked her about breaking into the industry after college. She gave me three key pieces of advice. The first was to not be afraid to ask questions for clarification. The second is do a lot of different jobs and that versatility in producing, editing, and anchoring is key. The last is to define your dream job by skill set and not a title. This last piece of advice about dream jobs is something that I have never heard before, but I think it is so valuable. I will definitely be taking these pieces of advice with me going into the industry.

There were a ton of takeaways that I got from Larra and I's conversation. One of the biggest ones that I was a bit worried about was having complete knowledge of the sport. Larra told me that you will never have to have a complete, all-encompassing knowledge of the sport you are covering, especially because you may be covering a variety of different sports starting out (or for your entire career). Instead, she said you just need to know the sport as it relates to your audience. In other words, it is important to have a working knowledge of the sport and keep adding to that knowledge as you grow and progress in your career. Larra told me that a good question to ask myself would be, "Can you walk away from a football game and give a detailed 45-second recap?" This tidbit of information greatly calmed my anxieties of someone whose main sport is a niche sport – volleyball – and does not know every single fact about bigger sports like football and basketball.

Another big takeaway was adjusting to all the new technologies and medias that keep popping up. I was curious to ask Larra about this because Instagram and Twitter were nowhere near as big ten years ago, but now, they are pretty crucial to the sports media world. Larra said the best thing to do is ask others around who are more knowledgeable in those topics to gain their techniques and opinions. Based on what Larra said, I realized that you do not have to be a master of every social media platform that is out there. Instead, you should, like different sports, have a working knowledge of all the platforms out there. It is essential to monitor and analyze where you get the most return and use those applications in the most effective ways that you can. For example, if you realize that you do not get much interaction or views on Facebook, you should not focus a ton of your energy on that platform. Instead, you should focus on sites such as Instagram or Twitter where you know you can get the best return. Larra gave me so much knowledge, and I honestly feel so much more prepared going into the industry after this talk.