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# JERSEY MAN

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## Bonnie Bernstein

From the Garden State to the Super Bowl



Restaurant: *Impossible's*

### Robert Irvine



**Bill Lyon**

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**GOOOOAL!**

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*Saint Joe's Soccer Standout*

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A photograph of Bonnie Bernstein, a woman with long blonde hair, wearing a red sleeveless dress and several gold bracelets. She is smiling and standing with her arms crossed in front of a large television screen. The screen displays the 'CAMPUS INSIDERS' logo in red and white, with a blue background featuring a grid pattern and some blurred text.

**CAMPUS**  **INSIDERS**

# Bonnie Bernstein

## Playing To Win

**In 1995** she was arguably the most prominent female in sports broadcasting. Today, she's regarded as one of sport's greatest broadcasters, period. For Bonnie Bernstein, the battle for respect in a male-dominated landscape was won every time she did her job... because she was (and still is) just that smart, just that determined, and—most importantly—just that good.

by Gerry Strauss



We [New Jerseyans] have a chip on our shoulders, and we feel that we need to work a little harder to prove our worth.

**I'm okay with that.**

**Bonnie Lynn Bernstein**, born on August 16th, 1970, grew up in Howell, NJ. Even before her professional aspirations came to light, sports were a huge part of her life.

"My parents grew up in Brooklyn, so baseball was their first love," Bernstein chuckled. "We were always raised to say that our two favorite baseball teams are the Mets and whoever is playing the Yankees that day."

With football, basketball and hockey also on the family radar, Bonnie couldn't help but fall in love with sports at all levels.

"I developed a love for sports very early on, and then started playing very early on too," she explained. "I think the combination of experiencing sports with my parents and participating in several of them helped me have this revelation that it was a profession I wanted to pursue."

From the young age of four, Bonnie felt an itch to compete. She scratched it by began taking acrobatics lessons, which led to a 14-year love affair with gymnastics, soccer and track. Although she always prioritized her studies, sports continued to be an important part of the equation.

"In high school, I started out running hurdles," she recalled. "Then they needed someone to throw javelins, so I volunteered and absolutely fell in love with it."

Bonnie's athletic success (she is in Howell High School's Athletic Hall of Fame), along with her academic achievements, made her a desirable catch for colleges around the country. However, for Bonnie's evolving goals, there was only one perfect place for her to continue her studies: the University of Maryland.

"I really wanted to find a place that had a reputable gymnastics team and a reputable journalism school," Bonnie explained. "Geographically, Maryland was perfect because it was far enough from home where my parents wouldn't come down every weekend, but close enough where I could get back home if I couldn't figure out how to do my laundry."

All kidding aside, Bonnie's true interests in UMD went far deeper than its convenient location, some clean clothes, or even their superior athletics program. Before she even began high school, Bonnie had made an important career decision: she was going to be a sports journalist.

"I decided when I was twelve or thirteen that I wanted to write for Sports Illustrated, so everything that I did in the lead-up to my career was tailored towards that goal," she said. "I wrote about sports in my high school newspaper. I did work with The Diamond-back, which was our student newspaper at UMD. I worked with the campus radio station. I worked for the TV station. For my broadcast classes, I invented my own 'beat' called 'Sports Administration' where I covered things going on with the athletic department."

Not content to simply follow the school's curriculum, Bonnie pounded the pavement and scored two internship opportunities that offered her different, but invaluable experiences in preparation for her eventual career.

"One was for 'George Michael's Sports Machine', which was a nationally syndicated program," Bonnie said. "The other was for a government access cable station, and they let me do on-air work. So I came out of college with an actual reel of stories that aired on an actual television station. Having the opportunity to do two vastly different internships gave me some fantastic hands-on experience that gave me a real leg up when I started looking for jobs."

**B**ernstein spent several years climbing the local broadcasting ladder. After serving as the sports and news director at WXJN-FM in Delaware, she leapt back to television (and Maryland) as a weekend news anchor for ABC's local affiliate before earning a slot as Reno, Nevada's first-ever female weekday sports anchor with KRNV-TV.

"I think there's a general curiosity, when



In addition to her busy work schedule, Bernstein is a public health advocate, focusing on reducing childhood obesity in the US.

a woman emerges in a major market, about how knowledgeable she is, or whether her end game is simply to cover sports or if it's leveraging that platform to achieve fame," Bernstein speculates. "From an industry standpoint, I'd like to think that my knowledge and preparation shines through in my work, so credibility among my peers has thankfully never been much of an issue."

The rest, as they say, is history. Bernstein joined the mighty ESPN in 1995, and she's been a fixture on the national sportscasting scene ever since. During her early years with the cable powerhouse, she covered everything from Michael Jordan's 1996-1998 championship dynasty to the MLB playoffs, along with plenty of college sports.

"I first started embracing college sports at UMD because ACC basketball was so prominent, and I've come to appreciate that the fan bases are unique from those of pro sports," Bernstein smiled. There are generations of people in the stands whose allegiance is born from years of personal experience with a particular university. It's a different type of passion."

In 1998, Bonnie's career skyrocketed to an even higher plateau: CBS. During that year, she became the lead sideline reporter for the NCAA Men's Basketball Championships and—even more notably—NFL games broadcast throughout the country. She helped cover the

Super Bowl in 2001 and 2004, and even made history during the latter by becoming the first-ever broadcaster to cover the game for network TV and radio simultaneously.

These days, Bonnie is doing exactly what she's always done...staying ahead of the curve. She's come full circle by focusing on collegiate sports coverage, but with a forward-thinking twist.

"With more and more networks livestreaming events online and rolling out content apps for smartphones and tablets, people are no longer tethered to their TVs," she speculated. "It's a no-brainer that digital consumption of sports will continue to increase every year. People want a tailor-made experience and they want to watch it whenever they feel like it. That's the world we now live in, right?"

Her new home, Campus Insiders, is a 24-7 online hub for collegiate sports coverage, offering news, analysis and live broadcasts from all around the country in an immersive manner that captures the true essence of scholastic athletics. Instead of simply lending her on-air experience to the network, Bonnie has stepped into a much more influential role within the organization.

"At first, Campus Insiders approached me about being the face of their network, which was beyond flattering," she beamed. "I asked if they'd consider creating a hybrid position where I'd host during the college football season and



Bernstein was a 4-time MVP of the Howell High School (NJ) gymnastics team. She still tries to hit the gym 4-5 days a week.

Photo: Cat Conrad

March Madness, but focus the rest of my time on helping build the business. The result is the position I hold today—VP of Content and Brand Development—and it's the most challenging, yet fulfilling, job that I've ever had. "

After 17 years of network experience, Bernstein truly enjoys the opportunity to utilize her industry knowledge in an entirely new

way. In fact, she calls it the 2.0 version of her career, and her responsibilities have taken her places that most of her on-camera peers have never even considered.

"I attend pitch meetings to bring in new sponsors," she said. "I'm part of the team formulating our PR and marketing strategies. I'm coming up with show ideas that will hope-



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Bernstein preparing for a Campus Insiders interview with NBA Commissioner Adam Silver.

fully resonate with our audience. I speak at industry events to raise awareness of our network. I'm doing whatever I can to help ensure that our corporate partnerships continue to solidify and grow."

Despite her long relationship with Maryland and other sports strongholds around the country, Bernstein is still a Jersey girl at heart. In

fact, she attributes much of her success to her Garden State upbringing.

"As tough as my business is, it's the character I developed as a New Jerseyan that has enabled me to persevere and thrive in a man's world," she stated bluntly. "I think the fact they we're a small state sandwiched in between New York and Pennsylvania serves us

well. We have a chip on our shoulders, and we feel that we need to work a little harder to prove our worth. I'm okay with that."

With a hall-of-fame-worthy legacy and ever-evolving career, Bernstein's success hasn't escaped her...nor have the reasons why she was able to achieve so much. With a keen understanding of today's broadcasting landscape, Bernstein believes that there are some crucial and timeless steps that aspiring journalists need to take in order to win the day.

"Work to become as diverse as you can possibly be, not just in the number of sports you're familiar with, but in the skill sets you're developing as you prepare for your career," she advises. "The newspaper, radio and TV industries used to exist in separate silos. Now, with the emergence of multi-platform journalism, you have to be able to do everything. And shoot. And produce. And edit. And showcase your personality. And build your social media presence. The great news is, thanks to the ability these days for any of us to start a blog or create a YouTube channel, you don't have to wait for your first job to get valuable experience! I'd advocate taking the initiative to create a platform where you have a voice. Not only will you be honing your skills, but you'll show any potential employer that you're serious about having a career in an industry as competitive as ours." ■



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