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Rising Star: Ben Cohen, Wall Street Journal

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) August 2, 2017



When you're in a locker room with hundreds of other reporters, you have to do something different. That's exactly what sets Ben Cohen apart from the competition. He is the first NBA reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* and a 2017 News Media Alliance Rising Star. He suggests getting away from the pack as much as possible and seeing what's not being covered.

"Do what you think is interesting, even if nobody else does," he advises. His favorite, and best, stories are those that nobody else was going to do. He broke a story about the Golden State Warriors working as a team to get PB&J sandwiches back. He wrote about a lucky toaster and a small high school in Minnesota changing the game. One article focused on the birthday traditions of the Warriors, buying elaborate birthday cakes and celebrating together.

He admits these are all weird examples of basketball articles. "They sound silly and surprising," he says. "But teams are successful because they have this culture."

He looks for things counterintuitive, funny and interesting. He doesn't want to write about things his readers already know or can find elsewhere.

"The cool thing about *The Journal* is that nobody expects us to write about weird, quirky topics, so they almost become funnier," he says.

Basketball has changed radically over the last decade. Ben uses the new statistics and information in his articles. He meticulously calculates relevant statistics, trying to explain and uncover secrets of the game.

When he's not mired in numbers and explaining the idiosyncrasies of teams, he enjoys writing the A-heds, the quirky stories on the front page of the *Journal*. Last year, he wrote more than any other staffer.

"It's really fun for me to be able to explore my own curiosity," he says.

For as long as he can remember, he has wanted to be a journalist. He's had a lifelong obsession with sports, but laughingly admits he was never going to be a shortstop for the New York Yankees.

He wrote at Duke University, where sports are sort of a big deal—especially basketball. From there, he came on the *Journal* as an intern, a year after they started daily sports pages. He has covered the NBA for the last three seasons, as the *Journal's* first NBA reporter. He has a good sense of what readers like in a story.

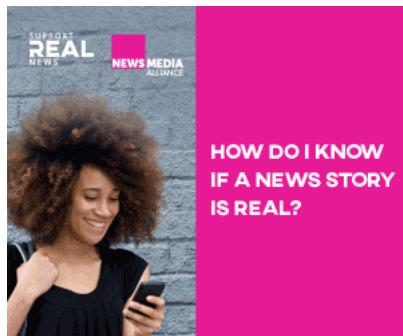
Basketball is exploding as a business and the teams are highly scrutinized these days. He strives to write about these businesses blowing up spectacularly, using numbers and funny anecdotes to create a good story.

He believes good stories are never going out of style. Even as mediums and methods of storytelling change, Ben is positive there will still be a demand and hunger for “smart, interesting, delightful” articles.



Kirsten Ballard

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