

# Meet the Media: Bri Amaranthus, Sports Journalism, Going Viral + Pinot Noir

## SPEAKERS

Bri Amaranthus, Lexie Smith

### Lexie Smith

Hey guys Lexie here, travel enthusiast, lover of puns, pizza and wine connoisseur and the founder of the PR bar, Inc, and you're tuning in to the pitching and sipping podcast, from behind the scenes interviews with the media, to honest conversations with other PR pros, to look at inspiring brands and entrepreneurs that are rocking the world of PR. In this podcast, we talk tips while taking sips and talking about all the things that make those in the world of PR tick. Let's get started. Today we're talking with Bri amaranth is an Emmy winning producer and reporter currently covering the Dallas Cowboys and Mavericks for Sports Illustrated. Bri actually started her career during undergrad as an intern with NBC Sports Northwest. She quickly worked her way up within the network serving in a variety of positions from beat reporter to digital media producer to primetime host and more. She prides herself on forging relationships, telling stories that create connection and showcasing her friendly and playful personality. In today's episode, she does just that. Bree and I dive into the world of sports journalism, we talk through the evolving responsibilities of a modern day reporter and how COVID has shifted such dramatically the growing importance of online presence, one key ingredient and going viral and the role that kindness plays on your way to the top. Oh, and of course, we end by giving an agreed upon shout out to a very specific regional beverage. So without further ado, it's go time. For those of you who don't know, once upon a time, I thought I wanted to be the next Aaron Andrews and I started my collegiate career out very strongly in pursuit of such meaning. I scored an internship with CBS I became the president of the National Broadcasting society and joined the University of Oregon's TV station, which is where I met today's incredibly talented guests Bri now my dream quickly died when I realized I was beyond mortified, watching myself back on camera that I pivoted to PR but the other hand was an absolute Rockstar and made it to the screen post graduating. So Bree First off, go ducks. I'd love for you to share who Bree is off of screen. Where do you live hobbies, all the fun stuff?

### Bri Amaranthus

Oh my gosh. Well, that was such a kind introduction. Lexie. Thank you so much. Right now I'm living in Dallas, Texas. My fiance and I moved here about a year ago from Portland, Oregon. I was working for NBC Sports Northwest for the last seven years. And now I work for Sports Illustrated. Covering the Dallas Cowboys and Dallas Mavericks. I have a Labradoodle named lady who I love to take on walks, which is what I'm doing actually right now. So if you hear a dog bark, that's lady she's saying hi. And besides that I really like to bake. My fiance and I have been getting into tennis lately, but mostly during COVID we're just kind of trying to stay sane try new things. We've been fishing a lot. And yeah, getting outside is important when you're working from home. I love that remind me Are you from Portland originally? Um, no. So I'm actually from a small town in southern Oregon called Grants Pass Oregon.

So I grew up in a small town. I played softball all of my life and I danced all of my life. And then I got a scholarship to play softball at University of San Diego. And then I transferred to University of Oregon. Just to be closer to family and to get into that wonderful University of Oregon j school.

**Lexie Smith**

So tell me Okay, softball, dance. So obviously, love of sports. Talk me through what kind of led you towards sports journalism.

**Bri Amaranthus**

Yeah, you know, I've just always I've always loved sports. I'm a huge competitor. I definitely got that from my dad and my brothers. In a small town, it was kind of like Friday Night Lights. Like on Friday nights, everybody went to the stadium and we watched football and in softball. We won two state titles my team did we want a western conference or a Western nationals as well. So competing was always really important to me. And because of that I would get interviewed for like, you know, local newspapers or whatnot. I remember getting interviewed one time and being like, you know what, I want to be the person that's doing this, like, I want to be the interviewer. This is so fun. And so I always had that in the back of my mind. And then I realized that softball really wasn't going to be my career in life. So how could I can make a career out of sports? Well, I could do that interviewing thing. And I actually love is definitely still the favorite, my favorite part of my job. Of course, along the way, I've done a lot of other things. But interviewing and telling stories has always been my main passion. And the main reason why I'm in journalism.

**Lexie Smith**

I love it. And you briefly touched upon kind of what happened after college and where you are today. But let's, let's go a little deeper into that. What happened when you graduated from the University of Oregon? Where did you go and talk us through kind of your transition to what you're doing today?

**Bri Amaranthus**

Yeah, it's actually probably one of the most asked questions I get, just because there's so many aspiring reporters, especially on camera. So like, you know, how did you how do you land your job? How did you get your first big break? And when I was a sophomore at University of Oregon. I remember I saw a tweet from the J school. And it was like, hey, there's going to be an NBC Sports Northwest manager, he's going to just do sort of a QA from 615 to 630, if you're interested. And I thought, well, that's kind of cool. I had seen some other shows before, just being a duck fan. And so I went and I stayed after and I introduced myself to the guy who was giving the presentation. And that guy, his name's Kevin, he ended up being my manager for the next seven years. So he hired me as an intern. And then, as I was interning, the woman I was interning for actually ended up taking another role. And I was a junior in college at the time. And I called my manager, I said, Hey, I know I'm still in school, but I know everything about how you guys do everything. You know, you know that I'm reliable and responsible. I know, I'm still in school, and I have a lot to learn. But like, I think I could do a great job like you please give me a chance. He's like you're hired. So I started part time, because I still had classes and whatnot. And I double majored in public relations as well as journalism. And so while I was taking my classes, I was also going to duck football games, going to duck basketball games, practices, doing my reports, and I started off awful, totally awful. And then the best, the only way to get better is

just to continue to do it. But yeah, if those early videos ever surface now Oh, my gosh, so bad. Um, but yeah, so then I went into full time, which was awesome when I graduated. And then I made the leap up to Portland, which is where their studio actually is. And when I did that, I tried a couple other different jobs within the regional, I was able to do some social media managing, I helped with digital marketing. I was then a co host of our live primetime show, which was awesome. And yeah, after seven years, I just made the leap down to Dallas, Texas, wanted a little bit of a change a little bit more of a challenge. And Sports Illustrated has been awesome. I mean, covering the Dallas Cowboys, of course, is a dream. Unfortunately, I got here right when COVID-19 hits. So that has changed sports media drastically. And I'm still kind of working through that. But that's kind of how I ended up where I am sorry, that was Wow, really long winded answer.

**Lexie Smith**

But no, that's exactly what I wanted to know. I think it's fascinating and good for you for going for it and undergrad. That's incredible.

**Bri Amaranthus**

Yeah, you know, I think you sometimes I think people underestimate the value of just staying after a meeting and introducing yourself. being nice to people asking for what you want. I mean, if you nobody's gonna ever read your mind. So if you don't ask to be considered for the part time role, or the full time role or the whatever it is that you want, you're never gonna get it.

**Lexie Smith**

Yeah, no, I'm with you. I got my first job at a PR firm my sophomore year of college as well. So I relate to that on the other side, because once again, I literally cannot even stand to watch myself on camera. The only video I'm okay watching is my wedding video that I will watch. Other than that, I just find it mortifying.

**Bri Amaranthus**

Well, that's a good sign, I would say.

**Lexie Smith**

Yes. Okay, so you kind of mentioned and boy, what a time to start with Sports Illustrated. But you did mention obviously sports journalism has changed a lot this year. So my initial question was going to be walk us through a day in the life. But I think maybe a day in the life today probably looks very different than it might have a year ago. But what does your job look like? Are you are you going into the office? Is it all virtual? What is your title as well?

**Bri Amaranthus**

It's so crazy. I mean, it has changed so much. I was at the game. So I think it was March 17. was when the NBA decided to postpone their season because of COVID-19. Utah's Rudy, had just got it. And everybody didn't know what was gonna happen. I mean, there was just such a panic in the world at the time. And the Dallas Mavericks were actually playing as that happened. So they and now they make this big announcement at the NBA. And halftime, Mark Cuban has a Dallas Mavericks owner is sitting courtside. And the reporter walks up to him and says, Hey, did you see what happened? And they

actually have this amazing video of him, like, looking at his phone, his jaw dropping, he's totally shocked. And he was so he gave such a great answer. He was so calm. You know, we're gonna make sure that we handle this correctly, we have to take all of the right protocols. And I remember that I was right there. And then that's the last NBA game that I've been at this season this year. Wow. Yeah. And so it's changed my job dramatically, just based on all of the rules. And with COVID. They're allowing when they were at the NBA bubble in Orlando, there was hardly any media involved. Mostly what it was just zoom interviews. So I hopped on a zoom interview with, I don't know, 20 other people and they set a player or a coach down, and then you can ask your questions that way. And so that's kind of interesting. That's definitely been challenging, especially like with me, I always really proud of giving myself a lot of pride in getting those exclusive interviews telling the story that nobody else is telling. And so that's a lot more difficult. That's for sure. And then, yeah, so I guess a day in the life now would be completely different than a day in a life year ago. A year ago, I would be going to all the games, all the practices, and sitting down for one on ones, and then now it's all mostly zoom. So I'm mostly out of my house. I will meet a co worker every once in a while so that we can go to the Dallas Cowboys headquarters, their practice practice facilities, and kind of shoot a couple videos of us talking about what's going on with the team. But besides that, it's a lot of work from home at the moment.

### **Lexie Smith**

Do you are you just doing kind of on air recording? Or are you writing as well? What does your job I know for some smaller markets, smaller new stations, someone can be wearing all the hats, but for a larger company like Sports Illustrated, you have support with those other things? Are you doing all the things?

### **Bri Amaranthus**

Yeah, you know, it's kind of cool. The way that it's working now is Sports Illustrated. I'm on this team that covers the cowboys and the Mavericks. And we each have our own things that we're really good at. And so one of the my coworker, hers, his name is Mike Fisher, and he's been covering the teams for 35 years. So you can not even imagine the connections that he has, inside scoops that he gets. And so he's kind of like, you know, breaking news guy, he's the ins and outs of everything. But why while I am much more video oriented, because he did not really a video guy, he doesn't quite know how to set up a camera doesn't like he's great at interviewing, but video, you know, he would throw up a 20 minute video on a website. Well, nobody really watches a 20 minute video on a website. So I you know, I had to come in now we gotta go two minutes at most. Make sure you know all of this, all of the little things that I've learned along the way. So most of the time, my main focus is video I really enjoy writing. So I will write probably an article a day as well. But I am always the point of contact for all of the video interviews first and foremost.

### **Lexie Smith**

Okay, that's super interesting. I know that within journalism, there are a lot of quote unquote titles. And from the outside looking in, you might read something like a field producer or host or reporter or content strategist and it's just like a foreign language right? So I love to talk through you know, from people are not within a media company. What kind of is a hierarchy in a media company? Right? What would be an entry level position someone would go for? What would be a top dog position? You know, outside looking in how can one begin to navigate the org chart? So to say.

**Bri Amaranthus**

Yeah, that's interesting. I think it totally, the org charts have kind of just been thrown out the window. I mean, like 20 years ago, there was an old school newspaper org chart, well, that doesn't really exist anymore. 20 years ago, there was a org chart for you know, a TV station, but I guess I in where I'm at. So I'm with a digital publication now. Where you would start with the like a coordinator. So if you're looking into social media, you'd be kind of a social media coordinator. And internships are always a great place to start, and then work your way up. Producers are usually at the top of editors. But yeah, for me, it's not the Sports Illustrated org chart isn't quite, it's not like a is there's not really a hierarchy. If I'm being honest, it's just more about doing what you're good at. And then like at a TV broadcast station, that's a little different, because you have a lot of other moving parts. So when I was with NBC Sports Northwest, you would come in as a coordinator, move up to a manager, a producer. But yeah, it is it you know, it's funny, I've never really thought of it from the outside, it probably is confusing. But if I'm being honest, it's pretty much just as confusing when you're in the inside as well.

**Lexie Smith**

Well, that's funny. And you know, for some context, it's everyone listening before we hit record, I was asking Bri, I said, in your current position, do you ever get pitched and Bri? She said, No, not really, and brief for your perspective, why maybe I would ask about an org chart is for people on the outside, whether that be companies or founders or people within the PR field, we look to that org chart to try to figure out who the heck do we need to talk to right. And so I actually think it's really insightful to hear your perspective for Sports Illustrated, and digital Israel's I know, COVID-19 has changed everything. So who knows where we'll be a year from now.

**Bri Amaranthus**

But right, you know, and as I started thinking about that, like I, I guess I do get pitched in a way. Like, a lot of times, especially with professional athletes or agents will reach out to me specifically, after they've seen some of my work and say, Hey, I don't know if you know this, but so and so has a foundation and he's feeding homeless people at this time and date, like, would you want to cover that? And of course, my answer is always Yes. So I guess in a way I get pitched, but mostly it's from professional athletes, agents, right?

**Lexie Smith**

Yeah. Okay. Well, yeah, that makes sense. That makes total sense. I have some some publicists in my network who do represent agents. So if you're listening, guys, there you go. Hit me up, especially if they're a part of the Mavericks, or the Cowboys. There you go. So kind of, on that note, but also shifting a little bit. In my personal interview prep, once again, I was going through LinkedIn, and I saw a stat on your profile, and it said, you were a content creator for the most viewed team website throughout the entire company, surpassing digital traffic goals by an average of 35% each month. So first, kudos. Let's break down what that means exactly. And how traffic relates to your job as a journalist.

**Bri Amaranthus**

Yeah, that's so funny, because, um, we, you know, that's one of those things you put on your LinkedIn or your resume, and it's suddenly kind of forget about, but it's, it's true, it's really cool. We just actually

learned I need to update that stat. We hit 3 million views, which is I got to figure out the percentage, but 3 million views in a month is a lot more than 35%, or whatever it was. It's insane. Yes. So our cowboys website, the way that Sports Illustrated has is they have a whole bunch of team websites. And our cowboys website is the number one website and it's so cool, because every month we get these numbers, and we're just always trying to beat ourselves and our Mavericks websites out there too. So it's pretty cool. For me personally, it's more of just like a competitive, trying to get my stuff viewed. You know, there's a difference between getting stuff that's like, you don't want to become click Beatty, and you want to have the good stories. And then you also have to have all the news. And so you definitely have to walk that thin line of making sure that you have everything while also still being interesting and different. So yeah, I think we do a really great job of making sure that we have everything, like if you're a Cowboys fan, and you come to our website, like, hopefully, you don't feel the need to go anywhere else. Um, and hopefully you learn something that you wouldn't have learned anywhere else. So that's kind of how it works for us. And then there's incentives, the way that the organization kind of pays out, the more views you get, the more money you get at the end of the month. So there's that as well.

### **Lexie Smith**

Wow. Okay. Backtracking for a second, because I think what you said was just so important for everyone to hear, journalism is changed PR change media has changed a lot. And something I am a lot meaning over the past 12, heck even past five years. But something I say to my clients a lot or just speaking with people in the industry, you have to remember, it's about the reader. Right? So I think what you just highlighted is that part of a journalist or a reporter, you know, insert titles job is to create content that gets viewed, because it is a business Sports Illustrated is a company and they need viewership, because they need I'm assuming that viewership, you know relates to ad dollars, etc, etc. But I think sometimes people don't recognize that the writer, the editor, the reporter, they are personally being, what's the word looked at, or evaluated based on the viewership of their content. So that's, that's a pretty big thing to highlight that I don't think a lot of people necessarily recognize from the outside looking in.

### **Bri Amaranthus**

Oh, yeah. And that's why when you can get those stories of, I mean, my favorite kind of stories to read, of course, I love the game stories. I love knowing the stats, and how many touchdowns so and so through for but also, what I want to know is, I would love to hear about his family or what he does on Saturdays or Tuesday nights, or, you know, you you want to get to know people deeper than just what they're doing on the field. And so COVID has made that extremely difficult this year, just because we're all kind of holed up and you can't go do do a lot of things. So when you can get that story of, okay, there's a guy who's painting a mural 40 foot mural of Dak Prescott, well, you better interview them, even if it has to be via zoom, which is something I like literally did just last week.

### **Lexie Smith**

Okay, so you kind of just teed me up for this next question. I'd love to understand how you go about deciding if something is worthy of coverage? Or in other words, what makes something newsworthy? In your opinion?

### **Bri Amaranthus**

Ooh, that's a really good question. Are you sure you didn't go into broadcasting? I'm just kidding.

### **Lexie Smith**

I double majored, but nope I can't watch myself. Thank you.

### **Bri Amaranthus**

It's so funny, because I'm usually doing the interviewing. So it's very funny to be on this side of it. Let's see what how do I decide something newsworthy. I think most of the time, it's just a natural thing. Like you just kind of have had it. And then you get an experience along the way, where, you know, you'll cover something and you're like, dang, that was a total flop. Or you'll be like, wow, I really should have taken the time to pursue that story a little deeper. I think some of the best advice I give whenever I talk to young journalists is try to give your viewer, your reader, your listener, whatever it is, however, you're getting your content out, try to show them something that they couldn't see themselves. So if you're watching the game of football, you know, we're all watching the same game. But maybe while I'm physically there, I see something happened in the stands, or I see something happened on the sidelines or in the locker room afterwards. Like those are the stories that I like to tell the most. And those are always newsworthy, because that is something that the 90% of the population doesn't have access to. So I think that's a good way to decide if something is newsworthy. But yeah, I think mostly it's just, you kind of learn along the way. Yeah, it's just kind of it's intuitive. It becomes intuitive in a sense and just part of the craft I suppose. And I love that show them something new or a new perspective they have not seen before,

### **Lexie Smith**

I think that's really powerful, super interesting. Can you give me maybe an example of something on that line of thinking? Or on that train of thinking, a story in your career that just kind of what's let's say went viral? Or just did really, really well? That may be surprised you? Flipside maybe have you ever had a story kind of flop that you're like, what the heck, I thought that was going to do really well.

### **Bri Amaranthus**

Let's, um, let's see, I think I've got two that come to mind that did really well. One was just a video I took. So when you know when the duck team would win when the football team would win, and go on to the field, try to grab a couple of videos, you're not allowed to actually interview players on the field, you wait till after in the press conference or in the locker room. But you can catch a lot of great reaction on the field. And so I'd always get my camera out ready to go filming. And I got this video of pinay Sewell, who was an Oregon offensive lineman hugging his brother Noah school, who was on the other team. And they were both hugging each other and like thing he's really powerful words to each other. kinase team, Oregon had just beat Noah's team to end up to go to the Rose Bowl and to and no was a senior, she was a very emotional moment. And that video went so viral I had no idea. I was like, oh, wow, look at this tool brothers, right. But that's a total instance of people wants to know, they people know they were brothers, but they didn't know the closeness of them. Or Wow, younger brother just ended older brothers career. And now younger brother gets to go to the rose. But like, those type of moments are really powerful. Another story that was one of my personal favorites, is Tyler shuck, who is Oregon's current quarterback. And his mom had a long fight with breast cancer. And she actually like ran into my mom and dad at a tailgate at one point. And she recognized. I don't know how, but they

ended up talking about me. And she's like, oh, I've seen some of her videos and articles about Pilar. And then my, my parents were got to know her and like, Oh my gosh, did you know her story like, she's an incredible survivor of breast cancer, like Know what? So I reached out to her. And she lives in Arizona, but I was able to sit down and do a long hour interview with her about the process. And I mean, Tyler was just a young kid, while his mom was fighting breast cancer. And then I was able to sit down with Tyler as well. And you know, there was tears involved there was, it was just so emotional. And so to be able to put that feature together, was one of my favorites. And if he just lives, his life in the way that he saw his mother fight for cancer, it's kind of his own fight as well. So those are two stories that did really well. And that were important to me, and trying to think of a flaw.

**Lexie Smith**

Let me ask on that note, you know, what I'm hearing this stories that really focus on powerful emotions or human connection seem to do to do well, is that is that a fair assessment?

**Bri Amaranthus**

I think I think that's it, it also could be a personal thing for me, like, that's always been my guiding light as a journalist is. I'm not the person who wants to break down the play. Like, I really want to get to know the people. And I think there's room for both journalists in the world. I think there's a need for both types of journalists in the world. But for me, I'm more of a features Journalist. So maybe that's why those are the two examples I gave.

**Lexie Smith**

Okay, here's a question for you, in your opinion, because I don't know if then maybe, actually, maybe there is a right or wrong answer to this. But in COVID, in this world we're in there's obviously a lot of negative news. And sometimes you turn on the news, and it all just seems like bad. Bad news. does bad news, sad news, negative news do better than maybe positive news, when you kind of relate that back to the human connection?

**Bri Amaranthus**

Hmm, that's an interesting, interesting question. I think in news, probably. I'm not in news. So I had nothing to back that besides the fact that that's what I see when I turn on the news. And I think that Yeah, like if if you turned on the news, and they just told you Hey, everything's great. The world's wonderful today, you probably just turn the the news off and go live your day. So I'm not sure about that. Like that's just my personal opinion in sports. I think it's about the same, I think You know, as many people are going to click on your story about the player who got kicked off the team, or that got injured, that the same amount of people will click on your story of a hero type story. So I think it's a little bit more balanced when it comes to sports.

**Lexie Smith**

So interesting. I wonder the psychology behind that, because I think you're right, right, I think of my husband, who's a huge sports news consumer. And yeah, he reads both were on World News. It's all just doom and gloom and depressing.

**Bri Amaranthus**



You know, it could be because sports are supposed to be that escape, you know, they're supposed to be that entertainment value. And so maybe you kind of like, you want you you click the bad stuff, but you really are interested in the good stuff, because it's supposed to be more of a hobby for most people.

**Lexie Smith**

Yeah, I think that's really smart. So

**Bri Amaranthus**

It's almost like I've been in the sports industry for 10 years.

**Lexie Smith**

Yeah. I kind of have one more sports or career related question for you than a couple fun wrap ups. For anyone listening right now, who is an aspiring journalist, and perhaps they were a little Lexie, who wanted to be Aaron Andrews. What What advice do you have for someone looking to get into the field these days, right, 2020?

**Bri Amaranthus**

Yeah, I think Always be aware of your online presence is a good one. That's more important now than it was, you know, eight years ago, when I was trying to break into the market, I will say the best advice I can always give young journalist is to over prepare, but to make sure that you're not so over prepared that you're not yourself. There's been you know, in the beginning of my career, when I was doing live TV, I was so nervous that I was like, I have to know everything. I got to make sure I get every single point that I learned out on TV. And then as I have grown as a journalist, it's like, okay, no, like, you definitely need a couple talking points. But if you're over over prepared, you just sound like a robot. It sounds silly. And then last, but not least, be nice to people. It's a smaller industry than you think. And you never know who I mean. Shoot, how long ago did you and I mean, like, if we would have won, right? Wouldn't have been nice to the other we wouldn't be sitting here chatting right now. Um, and I think that goes in bigger and bigger situations than this. But um, you just you never know, like, just show people kindness. It goes a long way. I preach that all the time. So I'm with you just a human. It's It sounds so simple, but it I feel like it's been a huge part of my career. And that can transcend industries, you You never know where someone's going to end up to. So yeah, Don't be a jerk. Don't write anyone off. Well, especially in sports reporting, like, you get you find yourself in these situations where it's really late. You've been working for 12 hours, you're all trying to get the same interview, you're squeezing this little tiny press conference room. It smells bad, you're tired, you're hungry, and like it would be easy to not be nice, right? But like, that's the moment where like, I I say this all the time. You have to just be kind. You have to.

**Lexie Smith**

I'm with you there I believe in that this world needs that too. So last little question here and then I will let you get back to walking Lady or if you are still walking Lady. So this is called the pitching and sippin podcast. So what can we find you sipping? Do you have a favorite beverage? It can be alcoholic or non alcoholic?

**Bri Amaranthus**

Ooh, well as an Oregon gal, I think a Pinot Noir is probably my drink of choice. Specifically from a vineyard called Eros.

**Lexie Smith**

Oh, yes. I'm very, very familiar with Pinoit Noir from Europe.

**Bri Amaranthus**

Yes, it's my favorite.

**Lexie Smith**

Love it. Yeah. And just for those listening, the Portland area, the Pacific Northwest Willamette Valley that that whole area is very well known for their pinos so highly suggest.

**Bri Amaranthus**

For sure, you can get that bottle like literally any grocery store.

**Lexie Smith**

Yeah. Amazing. Well, Bree, thank you so much. I know you're so busy. I really appreciate you chatting today. I'm glad we had a chance to reconnect and I hope you can get back on the field. Very, very soon.

**Bri Amaranthus**

Oh my gosh, you and me both sister.

**Lexie Smith**

All right. Thank you so much.

**Bri Amaranthus**

Yeah, thank you for having me. I really had fun

**Lexie Smith**

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