

Sports Data Analytics vs Sports Journalism

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Abstract

In this paper, I will be comparing careers in sports data analytics and sports journalism based on the average work day, education and skills required, typical salary, and future outlook to determine which path would suit me best. With college approaching, I will soon be pursuing an education in a specific field. The expectation is that I will use that education to find a job and provide for myself and my future family. Before all of this, I will have to decide what I would actually like to study. My interest in sports has made a career in sports data analytics and a career in sports journalism appeal to me. I performed intense research on these two careers through databases and credible websites. While both of these careers involve sports, they are very different. Sports data analytics has a math and computer background, whereas sports journalism has an English and communications background. I have found that while becoming a sports data analyst may require me to have a more difficult education, it will provide a higher salary and allow me to work with mathematics; therefore, sports data analytics might be a better fit for me. Comparing these two careers on the basis of average work day, suggested skills and education level, average salary, and future outlook helped me determine which career I should pursue.

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Sports Data Science vs Sports Journalism

Choosing a career is a monumental step in one's life. While it is a non-binding agreement, at some point everyone must choose what he would like to do with his life. This decision will have major implications on one's future. Personally, I am struggling with making this decision. That is why I took this opportunity to further investigate data analytics and journalism, two careers in which I could utilize my passion for sports. While I would focus each in the path of sports, data analytics and journalism would provide two very different lifestyles for me. It is now time to choose which career suits me best based on my research of the recommended skills and education, typical work day, average salary, and the prospects of finding a job in each field.

Required Skills

A career in sports data analytics would require skills in areas that I am already strong in, as well as in areas in which I do not have much experience. Data analytics involves a lot of mathematics. According to "Master's in Data Science," it will be important to have skills in algebra, calculus and statistics (2017). I already have a strong understanding of these subjects as I have excelled in these classes in high school. While I have these skills, there are other skills that I would need to learn. Software engineering skills and other computer skills are also important in becoming a data analyst. I currently do not have much experience using different computer programs, but I have plenty of time to learn. Sports statistical scientist Keith Goldner said, "I also learned to do computer programming, which is not essential, but I highly recommend it. I didn't know any when I started out, but it has been extremely helpful in making sense of the data" (Vilorio, 2015, How did you prepare for your job? para 2). Knowledge in these areas is critical toward being able to break down and analyze data.

A career in sports journalism could be taken in many directions. Although I would love to be a commentator or broadcaster for ESPN, the odds of that are just about as good as playing professional basketball. I would take sports journalism in a writing direction. This would obviously entail skills in writing; however, it would also demand communication skills. According to Career Cruising, “They need to have excellent writing skills, and be able to interact comfortably with people from all walks of life and gain their trust” (2017, Education). With the advancement of technology in recent years, many newspapers and magazines have moved to the internet. Therefore, computer skills would be useful as well as experience with desktop publishing software.

Based on my current skills, I believe I would be prepared for both professions with a slight preference toward sports data analytics.

Education Required

An education is not necessarily required to become a sports journalist; nevertheless, it is certainly recommended. “Most employers prefer to hire candidates with at least a bachelor’s degree” (Career Cruising, 2017, Education & Training). Most colleges that I am considering have degrees in journalism.

On the other hand, sports data analytics will require a much higher level of education. In a study conducted by Burtch Works, it was determined that “88% of data scientists have a master’s degree and 46% have a PhD” (“Master’s in Data Science,” 2017, What kind of degree will I need?). These degrees are usually in statistics or computer science. I would most likely choose the statistics route since that is where I excel the most. However, some of the smaller schools that I applied to do not have a data analytics program.

While both professions would require a degree earned over several years, the education

demanded to become a sports data analyst would likely be much more rigorous.

Typical Work Day

A sports journalist would often be on the move, traveling to different practices and games. Here is where the communication skills discussed earlier will come into play. Sports journalists need to get the inside scoop from players and coaches. Often times, it is helpful if they can build trustworthy relationships with these players and coaches to get them to speak openly. Outside of gathering information for stories, journalists can either work from home or from an office. They often have irregular and busy schedules, often working up to 40 or 50 hours a week (Career Cruising, 2017).

A major portion of a data scientist's day involves determining what questions must be answered, doing research, and writing algorithms to answer these questions. One can expect to work in groups while sorting through the data. Afterwards, data scientists can expect to put their conclusions into a presentation (Glover, 2015). It is important to be able to clearly explain the results to others who may not understand the process.

In recent years, analyzing data has become a critical part of sports. Data analysts work with team organizations and use data to help the team determine which players they should draft as well as what strategies they should use to give them the best chance of winning. The Houston Rockets are a perfect example of this. Through data, they have determined that they should avoid long-range two-point jump shots. These shots do not have a great probability of going in, and they will not be rewarded a third point. They believe that it is wiser to take closer shots or shots worth three points (Ross, 2015). This is the type of work that I find intriguing. I would enjoy looking into players' efficiencies and different complex statistics that the normal viewer would never consider.

Salary and Outlook

Although journalists' salaries can vary greatly, the median salary is around \$35,000 (Career Cruising, 2017). It is possible to live on this but certainly not with much margin for comfort. Journalism will be seeing a lot of changes in the near future as technology advances. Traditional print news organizations are facing and will continue to face hardships as everything shifts toward the internet and social media. The way that news is produced and consumed is rapidly changing. Reporters have more access to information and pictures through the web. While print journalism may be coming to an end, journalism will still exist through the internet. All in all, journalism's 10-year job outlook is at -9% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015), which is not very promising.

The outlook for data analytics appears to be much brighter. According to "Master's in Data Science," a data scientist's median entry-level salary is around \$100,000, and his average salary is around \$119,000 (2017). This is a position that will be in high demand in the future as well. "In an oft-cited 2011 big data study, McKinsey reported that by 2018 the U.S. could face a shortage of 140,000 to 190,000 'people with deep analytic skills' and 1.5 million 'managers and analysts with the know-how to use the analysis of big data to make effective decisions'" ("Master's in Data Science," 2017, Data Scientist Job Outlook). Not only are businesses and companies looking for data analysts, but sports teams are as well. As crunching data becomes an integral part of sports, more teams will be looking for data analysts.

Four Factors

	Education	Schedule	Salary	Outlook
Sports Data Analytics	Master's degree	Predictable	\$119,000	Positive
Sports Journalism	Bachelor's degree	Irregular	\$35,000	Negative
Advantage:	Sports Journalism	Sports Data Analytics	Sports Data Analytics	Sports Data Analytics

This table compares important features of sports data analytics and sports journalism side by side. It also states which career has the advantage in each individual category. Overall, sports data analytics has the advantage in three of the four categories. Table generated from multiple sources. (Career Cruising, 2017 and "Bureau of Labor Statistics," 2015 and "Master's in Data Science," 2017).

Conclusion

Based on the information I have found about sports journalism and sports data analytics, I believe that sports data analytics would be the best option for me. I enjoy using statistics slightly more than I enjoy writing. A career in sports data analytics would allow me to use my mathematical skills and my love for sports every day. Although I may not be playing on the team, it would be very exciting and rewarding to help a sports team organization by breaking down data. I would also have a regular schedule and comfortable lifestyle, as data analytics has a much higher average salary and a more promising future than sports journalism. After considering all of the factors, I now know in which direction I will be headed.

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