



ALUMNAE SPOTLIGHT

PRESENTED BY THE PROFESSIONAL ALUMNAE COMMUNITY

Laura Lehmann '02

Emmy Award-winning Production Manager at NFL Films, Coach, Perpetual Learner with a passion for supporting Women in Film and Sports



Can you share a bit about your journey from college to where you are today? How does what you studied in school inform your work today?

I went to college for Communication with a Film Concentration at Messiah University. When I graduated, I knew I wanted to stay on the East Coast. I found out that NFL Films was across the river in New Jersey, so I decided to try for an internship there. I didn't make it in the summer class, but reapplied and confirmed a spot in the fall in their Sales department, which handled non-football content like commercials, tourism videos, as well as other content. I stayed there until 2008 doing seasonal and part-time work.

I then went freelance for a bit, working on commercials and TV shows in the Philly film market like *Cold Case*, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, etc. I was later able to return to NFL Films to do seasonal work, which then turned into a full-time job in their Field Operations Department. In my time at NFL Films, I coordinated many games and more than a dozen Super Bowls, worked on shows like *Hard Knocks* for HBO, the Texans year, earning an Emmy. I also coordinated for shows like *NFL Films Presents, A Football Life, Earnin' it, All or Nothing* on Amazon, etc. I've coordinated various shoots in Canada, France, Chile, Peru, and around the world. During 2016, I was chosen by the NFL to spend 6 months at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in a rotational position and learned so much from them and their leadership. It was a once in a lifetime experience. In 2022, my role transitioned to Production Manager of Football Operations in my department, where I transitioned from managing shoots to managing all our crews at Football games for the season.

In 2014, I decided to go back to school for my masters in Organizational Development and Leadership at St. Joseph's University while working full time. It was a challenge, but something that helped me grow personally and in my career.

What inspired you to pursue your current career in sports filmmaking and production?

I went to school for film and didn't want to leave the area. When I found out that NFL Films was a full production company on the East Coast, I decided to try for an internship there, and the rest is history. I love storytelling, especially in a visual medium, and we get to do it in such a dynamic way.

Were there any pivotal moments or challenges that shaped your professional journey? How did you overcome those?

I wanted to be a camerawoman when I started my career, but there weren't many women in filmmaking at the time, and definitely not many, if any, female cinematographers. When I interned for NFL Films, I ended up more on the production and coordination side of film production, and that's how my career progressed. Since I found myself in the department that hired freelancers for shoots, I tried to make a change that way by hiring more diverse talent when we could. Recently, I've been able to start the first-ever Women in Sports Filmmaking Experienceship. This program brings women from across the country to NFL Films to learn how to shoot or capture sound for sports filmmaking.

What professional achievement are you most proud of?

The professional achievement I'm most proud of is creating the first-ever Women in Sports Filmmaking Experienceship (WISFE) for NFL Films.

My department handles the hiring of freelancers to shoot and record sound for our programming. We work with talent from across the country, but there were not many women. Both film and sports are heavily male-dominated fields. Three years ago, I transitioned into a new role in my department. I had more of a leadership role and a seat at the table where decisions were being made.

I saw an opportunity to make a change and create a program to help women break into sports filmmaking. I truly believe that if you can see it, you can be it. If a young girl can see a woman capturing content on the sidelines, then she can see that that's a possibility for her. I presented my idea of a program where we could invite women who already work in film but hadn't broken into sports to come and learn from NFL Films. The program has been incredibly rewarding. In just 2 years, we've tripled the number of women we've hired freelance across the country for NFL Films.

Each year the program has grown, and we've expanded it to work with Temple University. So we can give women the opportunity to get out there, film, and use the skills they learn during the program and put them to work right away. We just finished up year 3 this past week, and I feel so inspired by the caliber of talent that has attended the program. I can't wait to see what they do next.

How do you measure success in your career and personal life?

I honestly think it's a success when I can make someone's day better. Career-wise, if I can help inspire or create space for new diverse talent, that's gold for me. I believe wholeheartedly that if a company has diverse talent, they will thrive from the ideas generated and the balance of different viewpoints, skills, and talent. That also goes to filmmaking and storytelling. If you want to reach new audiences, you need a variety of talent with different backgrounds to be able to engage authentically with the subject you are filming, but also your audience to whom you want to tell the story.

What advice would you give to women aspiring to follow a similar path in filmmaking and production?

I would encourage women entering filmmaking to learn the skills and techniques of the trade, but then it's all about the networking. Make the connections and grow them. Also, be true to yourself; doing so brings a uniquely authentic viewpoint to any artistic endeavor. That's what can make you stand out and be the thing someone is looking for to tell their story. Your story is important and should be told. You never know who may be going through something similar, but never know that others are too, until you are brave enough to share your tale with the world.

How do you incorporate your experience and expertise in organizational leadership and development into your day-to-day work?

Getting my Master's in Organizational Development and Leadership (ODL) changed my life. It helped me grow personally, but also in my career. I learned how to become a better leader, how to be a changemaker, and how to have authentic conversations. In my day-to-day work, I use the skills I gained through my degree to build up new talent and create a working environment that is a place to collaborate and learn together. I also use the skills I gain in my coaching courses to help mentor the next generation of talent.

How did the foundational beliefs and strengths that you learned and developed at SHA help you find your professional voice and direction?

SHA instilled in me a love of learning and a passion for creating meaningful change. I started out as a Production Assistant getting coffees, doing odd-end jobs for production. As my career progressed, I learned more skills, networked with those in my profession, and grew as a person both professionally and individually. I value education and social awareness.

When I got into a place of leadership, I used my platform to make a change and help other women succeed in a very male-dominated field. I've had women who've gone through my program saying that I've changed the path of their careers and lives. It's so humbling to have something I created make that big of an impact. This work has given me a passion for my job and career, and I can't wait to see what's next.

Laura Lehmann is an Emmy award-winning Production Manager at NFL Films with more than a decade in film production. She attended St. Joseph's University and earned a Master's Degree in Organizational Leadership and Development. Her thesis was informed by her experience as a woman working in the male-dominated world of sports, and focused on a study of the disparity of female leadership in Sports. She leads the New Jersey chapter of the Women's Interactive Network (WIN) for the NFL.