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How Golden State Went to War Over Peanut Butter and Jelly

The Warriors' training staff eliminated PB&Js from the team plane this season. Then the NBA's defending champions fought back



The Warriors won a months-long battle to get PB&Js back on the team plane. PHOTO: EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES

By **BEN COHEN**

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The Golden State Warriors seem to have everything an NBA team could ever want. Until recently, though, they still felt there was something missing from another dream season: peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches.

In an effort to defend their NBA title, Golden State's training staff all but eliminated sugar on the team's private plane this season. The idea was to make the Warriors eat healthier, and the players were willing to accept the changes, saying goodbye to soda, cookies and candy while in the air.

What they weren't prepared for was a PB&J ban. And that began a months-long battle by the Warriors to save their beloved peanut butter and jelly.

"You gotta fight for your rights," Warriors assistant coach Luke Walton said about bringing back the PB&Js. "If you believe in something you gotta fight for it."

The loss of PB&Js may have been the most trouble anyone has given the Warriors all year. Golden State's 44-4 record makes the Warriors, at least at the moment, the best team in NBA history. This is one way to sum up their season: Other teams have real problems, and the Warriors have peanut-butter-and-jelly problems.

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simple American sandwich has become a significant part of NBA culture. PB&Js are as much a part of a player's daily life as the pre-game nap. Even rookies learn to subsist on them right away. New York Knicks sensation Kristaps Porzingis, for one, had never tried a PB&J as a child in Latvia. Now he's yet another addict.

The Warriors are unlike most NBA teams in many ways, but there's nothing exceptional about their consumption of PB&Js. On the training table in their locker room before their games are all the standard ingredients: bags of whole wheat and 12-grain bread, a can of Smuckers strawberry jam, a jar of extra crunchy peanut butter and a bigger jar of creamy peanut butter. The Warriors, for the record, are a Skippy team.

Warriors players, coaches and executives swear by PB&Js. Stephen Curry left a half-eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwich on a plate in his locker as he warmed up for a recent game. Walton has been known to carry several PB&Js with him at the same time.

Warriors general manager Bob Myers may enjoy them more than anyone. “It’s my desert-island meal,” Myers says.

The PB&J prohibition that rocked the Warriors’ came from the strength and conditioning staff that was hired after Golden State won last season’s title. One of the first things the new trainers did was rethink the team menu—which meant no more post-game pizza, no more cookies and, worst of all, no more PB&Js on the plane. “They cleaned house,” forward James Michael McAdoo said. “Sugar has been done away with.”

The PB&Js weren’t the only thing to go. A smorgasboard of cheeses was swapped out for organic chips made with avocado oil. Golden State’s coaches now drink black herbal tea when their coffee runs out. Even the players gave up Gatorade and replaced it with bottles of water sprinkled with Himalayan rock salt.



Warriors assistant coach Luke Walton was a fierce opponent of the in-flight ban on peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches.

PHOTO: STEVE DYKES/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Every team in the NBA is trying to eat healthier, but the stakes for the Warriors are higher than they are for anyone else, and not only because they’re chasing back-to-back championships and the NBA-record 72 wins. There’s another reason for their added incentive: The Warriors will fly more than 50,000 miles this season—the most in the NBA.

That’s why the Warriors weren’t completely opposed to watching what they ate while in the sky. They just couldn’t let the PB&J ban stand.

“We had to get those back,” Golden State guard Shaun Livingston said.

The backlash began with Walton. When he wasn’t coaching as Steve Kerr’s interim

replacement, Walton went out of his way to bother everyone he could about the PB&Js, even though he's well aware of the sugar in jelly, fat in peanut butter and all that awful gluten in bread. "I stuck to my guns," Walton said, "and I kept complaining."

He complained to performance coach Lachlan Penfold. He complained to flight attendants. He complained to anyone who would listen. Walton didn't have to enlist any Warriors in the effort, he said, because he already knew whose side they were on. "Every player loves them," Walton said.



Shaun Livingston said the ban on PB&Js was a move that Warriors players were simply unwilling to accept. *PHOTO: ELSA/GETTY IMAGES*

But he wasn't the only person in a position of power with an opinion on the matter. Myers, too, is picky about his perfect peanut butter and jelly. He likes homemade bread from a farmers' market. He prefers crunchy peanut butter—but almond butter is better. And he always eats the crusts. So any policy outlawing PB&Js would be unacceptable to the NBA's reigning executive of the year.

That left the trainers in a jam. Once they learned that some rituals are impossible to interrupt, the inevitable occurred last month: the PB&J embargo was lifted. The Warriors had won yet again.

“Cookies are gone, soda is gone, all that’s gone,” Walton said as he carried a cupcake into the coaches’ locker room after another Warriors win. “But the PB&Js are back.”

It’s still a mystery to some Warriors players why PB&Js were suddenly available again. They didn’t know if the pressure from Walton really worked or if someone else was pulling strings behind the scenes. “Somebody made a call,” Livingston said. “Probably Steph.”

Golden State guard Andre Iguodala has a similar theory. Iguodala said the Warriors are smart to avoid eating sugar—with one exception.

“Steph likes peanut butter and jelly,” he said, “so we’re gonna let that slide.”

Curry was sitting in the adjacent locker when he overheard Iguodala. He immediately looked up from his phone and over at his teammate. And then he nodded along in agreement.

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