SECOND EDITION

SPORTS JOURNALISM

AN INTRODUCTION TO REPORTING AND WRITING

KATHRYN T. STOFER
JAMES R. SCHAFFER
BRIAN A. ROSENTHAL

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KATHY STOFER
HASTINGS COLLEGE

JAMES R. SCHAFFER
NEBRASKA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

BRIAN A. ROSENTHAL
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

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To my sports fans and journalists of the future: Cassidy, Hayden, Katie and Trista. — KS

To Suzanne, Sarah and Steve, the athletes in my life; and Mary Lynn, their coach. — JS

To the memory of my grandparents, Erwin and Lorene Rosenthal, Donald and Martha Sherman; and my aunts, Delores Sherman and Lois Eona. — BR

Contents

Preface

Would you believe that in the decade since the authors first said, "Let's write that book!" fax machines and handheld recorders have disappeared from the media scene, and the cloud has virtually replaced everything once stored on disks and CDs? And that Twitter feed is not something to nourish animals but is the way your news comes to you — at your fingertips — around the clock?

Enter the second edition of *Sports Journalism: An Introduction to Reporting and Writing*. This book has passed the test of time, been used in classrooms internationally and received approval and praise from professors and students, and now it too has moved into the new environment of sports media. New chapters on social media and topical issues in the sports world, as well as fresh examples and new references to current technology, fill its pages whether you choose to read from a tablet, a smartphone, a Chromebook or on old-fashioned paper bound in a cardboard cover.

Sports reporters are journalists who write about sports. They're expected to understand and speak the idiom but write so those who don't can still feel they're in the midst of the action. Fans and editors expect them to know the rules of the game, plus the rules of journalism, and be able to meld the two into colorful, action-packed game stories, picturesque profiles, informative features and thoughtful analyses in as little as 280 characters.

After teaching a course in sports reporting and writing for several years while searching for a textbook that met our requirements, we discovered we were not alone in wishing for a tool that would provide a basic introduction to a sports reporting career and to the writing skills a novice sports reporter or media relations person needs. So we pulled together the curriculum developed for a three-credit-hour course; added examples, suggested activities and discussion topics for further review; and created a book of easy-to-access information. We made the text timely for each class by supplementing it with current examples, trips to sports events and visits with guest speakers.

Inside this new edition you'll find

- Three new chapters devoted to the evolution from a daily news source to a 24/7 news cycle.
- Interviews with journalists whose circulation is measured by the number of Twitter followers they have.
- A chapter encouraging discussion of ethical issues affecting today's athletes: Should college athletes be paid to compete? Can play be too violent? Is there a level playing field for men and women? How should eligibility be determined for athletes who may be transitioning their gender identity?
- A glossary that includes terms such as "hot takes," "scrum" and "trolls."

The authors intend the introductory chapters of "Sports Journalism" to acquaint students with issues and challenges in sports media and the lifestyle of a sports media reporter today, including

- Evolutions in technology.
- The participation of citizen journalists and bloggers who contribute photos and information via media websites and Twitter.
- An industry-wide scaling back on publications, staff and advertising dollars.
- A shrinking news hole created by an industry in transition and a fluctuating economy.
- The need to balance coverage of women's sports and the revenue and nonrevenue collegiate sports with that of professional teams and local school and club sports.
- The erratic hours and deadline-dictated lifestyle of the sports journalist.

The writing skills chapters in "Sports Journalism" elaborate on news values and the conventions of the journalistic genre as they apply to sports writing while providing simple guidelines for novice sports writers. The core of the book focuses on

- Writing in the journalistic genre from news values to nut grafs, inverted pyramids to Model Ts, simple sentences to headlines.
- Using basic writing tools such as S-V-O, active voice and attribution.
- Building relationships with sources, colleagues and media contacts.
- Interviewing.
- Using numbers and statistics.
- Practicing AP style.
- Understanding legal terms that apply to published work.
- Promoting the ethical standards set forth by the American Sports News Editors and the Society of Professional Journalists.

Checklists and illustrations assist writers with such tasks as

- Story organization.
- Sports news releases.
- Media guide content.

Plus there are

- Anecdotes about athletes and sports media writers.
- Glimpses of historical moments in sports journalism.

Upon Further Review at the end of each chapter

- Provides exercises for practicing concepts and skills introduced in the chapter.
- Stimulates discussion of classic and contemporary issues in sports.
- Suggests activities to accompany chapter content.

The back matter adds a practical, professional perspective via

- A sampling from the AP Sports Guidelines and Style.
- The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics.
- A glossary of sports and media terms.

Assignments that supplement sports reporting and writing classes vary from season to season and school to school, but they usually include

- Writing game stories, features and columns.
- Interviewing athletes, coaches and players.
- Participating in news conferences.
- Exploring print, broadcast and online coverage options.
- Filing stories on deadline from any location.

Every effort has been made to follow the current edition of The Associated Press Stylebook in this volume, as an example to those reading it and preparing to write in that generally accepted journalistic style even when it varies from other style guides and/or dictionaries. AP issues a new edition each year in which it highlights additions and changes. By subscribing to the online version of the AP Stylebook (which includes the AP Sports Guidelines and Style), sports writers will be able to stay up-to-date on style.

Today's sports writer does much more than write about sports. The job description now includes words like blogger, videographer, commentator, talk show anchor and webmaster.

Filled with examples from newspapers, websites, sports books and the authors themselves, "Sports Journalism" is an easy-to-read textbook that can also serve as a handbook to help beginners get started in sports media and media relations careers.

The authors bring a synergistic combination of experience and skills to "Sports Journalism." Among them, they have more than 20 years of professional sports and media writing experience, 50 years of college teaching experience, 12 published textbooks and four graduate degrees in writing and mass communication.

In today's rapidly changing social media environment, the authors recognize that parts of this book are already technologically dated. We also recognize that the fundamentals of writing well and acting honorably and ethically will remain at the heart of the profession, no matter what the medium. For that reason, "Sports Journalism" is dedicated to encouraging those values in journalists who choose to spend their time with the people who play the games.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to our families, friends and colleagues for their faith, patience, encouragement, belief and many times their willingness to handle extra responsibilities while we wrote this book. It truly takes a team to win the game!

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Brian A. Rosenthal extends his grateful thanks to Kathy Stofer for allowing her former pupil the opportunity to share what he's learned from the professor and for her friendship and support; to James Schaffer, whose periodic visits over coffee kept a new author from turning gray before he should; to close friend and colleague Mike Babcock for his knowledge, expertise, wisdom and humor, especially during the stressful and trying times of a sports writer's career; to Ted Harbin, Adam Jardy, Austin Meek and David Plati for their professional insight and help in writing this textbook; and to his parents, Eugene and Donna Rosenthal, and sister, Kimberly Hofmann, for their continuing love and support.

1

Living the Life

When I spent more than 20 years writing sports for three different newspapers, including 16 covering Nebraska football and men's and women's basketball at the Lincoln Journal Star, my friends, family and other readers would generally ask me the same questions about my job.

Among them were "Do you get into all of the games for free?" and "Where do you sit?" and, particularly when I covered the Huskers, "Do you get to fly with the team when they play road games?"

The answers, in order, were yes, the press box and no.

However, in my new sports writing position with the University of Nebraska athletic department, the answer to that last question has changed. I do sometimes fly on the team charter for road games. And let me tell you, once you've flown a private charter, going back to commercial flying is a drag.

Yeah, a rough life, huh?

Well, in fact, being a sports writer can be rough, both for a newspaper and an athletic department.

Long hours. Odd hours. Weekend and holiday hours. Hours waiting in an airport parking lot, hoping to eye that potential coaching candidate being whisked away in a Cadillac SUV with tinted windows. Hours counting the few trees along desolate highways in western Kansas.

Hours getting sunburned at state track meets. Hours in the middle of the night when you awake in a cold sweat, wondering if you remembered to put the score of the game in the story you'd written a couple of hours earlier. Hours that eat up your week but never seem to be reflected in your biweekly paycheck.

Hours sharing with friends your most memorable encounters with famous athletes and coaches. Hours laughing about embarrassing moments. Hours in packed stadiums on crisp fall Saturdays. Hours in warm-weather climates in the dead of winter.

Hours remembering you're glad you're a sports writer, after all.

The career field has expanded over the years, too, which is how I landed my new position at the University of Nebraska. The school figures among a handful of NCAA Division I athletic departments (Colorado, Oregon and Wisconsin are others) in that it's hired its own in-house beat writer to cover its athletic teams. The job differs from a regular newspaper beat writer because, obviously, the message will be slanted toward the school and carry a positive tone, whereas newspaper beat writers must remain strictly neutral and cover both the good and the bad, albeit in a fair and balanced manner.

All sports reporters, whether they're affiliated with the school or not, must adhere to one strict rule: There is no cheering at games. Even so much as a fist pounding on a table is asking for, at the very least, a stern verbal warning from a media relations staff member and, at the most, he or she removing you from the press box.

KNOW YOUR TERRITORY

Preparation is the key to sports writing.

For instance, when in El Paso, Texas for the Sun Bowl basketball tournament, I spent some free time in Juarez.

Lee Barfknecht of the Omaha World-Herald and I walked through the streets of Juarez and reached the city square.

A man, speaking through a bullhorn, had a large crowd of more than 5,000 people pretty excited. It turned out he was elected mayor, but he wasn't from the ruling party and he was not going to be seated.

I knew a little Spanish, and Barfknecht asked me what was going on. I said the man was upset. The crowd was agitated and we needed to leave soon, as we were surrounded by policia, some government troops and German shepherds.

We slowly stepped backward, left the city, walked across the bridge to El Paso and stepped into a bar.

A riot had broken out. Water cannons. The dogs going after protesters. Some shootings.

Nebraska played well in the tournament.

— Ken Hambleton, Lincoln Journal Star

ROUTINE? WHAT ROUTINE?

Another common question about my job: "What is your schedule?"

My answer: "What day is it?"

There are no 8-to-5 jobs in sports reporting. That's great during slow times when it might be easy to sneak away on a sunny spring day. It's not so great during state tournaments and coaching searches. And just when you think you're enjoying a Sunday off, a phone call with a tip about a football recruit giving an oral commitment can throw your day out of whack in an instant.

Sports reporting has certainly become more of an "on-call" job. Twitter and social media have turned sports reporting into a 24/7 news cycle. The internet never sleeps. Sometimes, neither do sports writers.

Take this day, for instance. It happened in the middle of my tenure at the Lincoln Journal Star, when I was a secondary beat writer for the football team and the lead beat writer for the men's basketball team.

It's a day I won't forget.

On a cold November morning, the University of Nebraska is expected to fire football coach Bill Callahan. Also that day some 60 miles away, Nebraska's men's basketball team is preparing to play in-state rival Creighton.

Being involved with both events, my day goes like this:

- 6:20 a.m. University athletic department sends out an email, calling for a 9:30 a.m. news conference.
- 6:30 a.m. Arrive on the north side of Memorial Stadium, sitting in my car (heater running) with my coffee cup in my lap and a donut in hand. I notice at least a dozen other reporters. The stakeout begins.
- 6:40 a.m. Step outside my car and make some footprints in the light dusting of snow. Make some small talk with other reporters. We decide it's not likely Callahan or any of his staff members will show their faces here with this much media present.
- 7 a.m. My newspaper colleagues, staked out elsewhere, inform me via cellphone of the "secret entrance" from which Callahan is expected to emerge following his meeting with interim athletic director Tom Osborne.
- 7:20 a.m. Callahan arrives in his Lexus. A security guard opens the gate.
- 7:25 a.m. Osborne arrives in his Chevy Tahoe. He enters the gate.
- 7:35 a.m. Meeting between Osborne and Callahan is over. Callahan leaves and waves to reporters from the windows of his Lexus.
- 7:40-9 a.m. Some furious phone calling, text messaging and typing take place, all to get as many updates as possible on the newspaper's website.
- 9:30 a.m. Attend a news conference at Memorial Stadium, where Osborne announces he's fired Callahan.

- 10 a.m. Gather a few post-news conference quotations from players to assist the main beat writer and columnist in coverage.
- 10:30 a.m. Drive to Omaha for the Nebraska-Creighton basketball game.
- 11:40 a.m. Arrive at Qwest Center Omaha in plenty of time for the 1 p.m. tipoff. Traffic wasn't so bad, what with everyone at home watching the football news conference live on television.
- 1 p.m. Basketball game begins. Creighton takes a commanding first-half lead. I notice Osborne, hours after firing Callahan, is in attendance in a suite. Makes for a good note.
- 5:30 p.m. File story on Nebraska's loss to Creighton.
- 5:45 p.m. Drive through McDonald's. Order the #4.
- 7 p.m. Arrive back in Lincoln at the office. Get up to speed on the latest with football, which is now a coaching search. Make some phone calls to players and offer assistance in other ways.
- 11 p.m. Head home and sprawl out on the sofa.

That's far from a routine day. But in sports reporting, nothing is routine.

A MAN'S BEST FRIEND?

I was at the 1994 Orange Bowl, which started about 8 p.m. and had a halftime that lasted hours, it seemed.

Anyway, Nebraska and Florida State changed the lead four times in the final two minutes or so. I had four 10-inch leads written so I could pop in the score and hit send to beat the deadline for the early edition.

The game ended, our columnist, Mike Babcock, sent my lead, and I headed to the locker rooms for quotes. I sprinted across the field. I didn't notice that police, with police dogs, were surrounding the field.

About halfway to the Husker locker room, a large German shepherd lunged and growled at me. I did a sideways broad jump. Looked back and saw a couple of cops laughing.

I had to keep going. Got my quotes for a better lead story and a sidebar. And after a stop in the Florida State locker room, noticed a bowl of candy in the hallway.

I grabbed a handful, started toward the field to go back to the press box, and threw a handful of candy at the dogs. They went for the candy, and I got to the elevator without the scare.

— Ken Hambleton, Lincoln Journal Star

Whether with the newspaper or the athletic department, for every 16-hour day, there might be a day spent "working" from home. For every recruiting story or coaching search, there's an interview with the next great pro. For every bitterly cold spring junior varsity soccer match, there's a courtside seat at the NCAA Tournament. For every paycheck that you hope lasts until the next, there's a free trip to Los Angeles, Seattle or San Antonio.

And yes, admission is free.

— Brian Rosenthal

TAKEDOWN OR REVERSAL?

Sports writers will find themselves in situations where they need to think quickly and be creative.

For example, I've covered the Kansas state high school wrestling tournament at beautiful Kansas Coliseum in Wichita. The sports writer's challenge, at that time, was one that should not have been a challenge at all: simply gathering results of each match.

The problem was that the Kansas State High School Activities Association, which put an area high school's athletic department in charge of hosting and coordinating the event, was charging media members for typed results of matches. I wasn't the only one who found that practice bizarre, ill-conceived, inconvenient and downright stupid. Who in the world charges sports writers for statistics?

A group of sports writers tried combating the situation by putting one newspaper in charge of obtaining a copy of the official results. The group hauled in a photocopier, had some young volunteers make as many copies as needed, and either handed them out to sports writers or filed them in folders for later use.

It was a fine system . . . until the photocopier croaked (on championship Saturday, no less). Deadlines were fast approaching. Sports writers, having to succumb to the KSHSAA and its member schools' rule for paying for results, were digging through pockets for loose change.

That is, except for one sports writer. He went to the head table, where high school volunteers working for the KSHSAA were forming a line and stapling together final packets of results. Looking young enough to pass for a high school student, he got in line, began piecing together his own packet and went about his business. Nobody seemed to be the wiser.

— Brian Rosenthal

2

Covering the Game

> "I always turn to the sports section first. The sports section records people's accomplishments. The front page has nothing but man's failures."
>
> — Chief Justice Earl Warren[1]

On crisp fall Saturdays in Princeton, New Jersey, 10-year-old John McPhee would run onto the field with the Tigers football team and stand on the sidelines with them. McPhee's job was to station himself behind the goalpost after each score and catch the extra point. That seemingly insignificant job, however, led to a life-changing insight:

> One miserable November afternoon, soaked in a freezing rain, I turned around and looked up at the press box. I saw people up there with typewriters, sitting dry under a roof in what I knew to be heated space. In that precise moment, I decided to become a writer.[2]

You may not have had a flash of inspiration quite like that, but if you're smart enough to come in out of the rain, you're ready to be a sports writer.

A NEW KIND OF SPORTS REPORTER

It just might take a little chutzpah these days to be a sports writer. Dave Portnoy, podcast host and founder of a sports blog "Barstool Sports," bragged that he could play a round of golf just as well as the top pros so long as he could have unlimited mulligans. A mulligan is a free shot; in other words, Portnoy, an average golfer at best, could keep hitting the ball over and over and over again until he found a shot he liked.

Sure enough, the ruling authority of professional golf, the USGA, offered Portnoy a chance to play at Shinnecock Hills, the venue for that year's U.S. Open championship. Portnoy could have as many mulligans as he liked, so long as he finished the round in five hours, 15 minutes.

Insane prediction or something achievable? Portnoy ended up with a score of 66 (four under par), estimating that he used about 10 mulligans per shot, or nearly 700 shots for the round! This publicity stunt was great for Portnoy's blog, but it was also a good boost for pro golf after some of the players had complained that the course was just too hard. None of them would want to say now that they couldn't beat Dave Portnoy.[3]

Although Portnoy is a radio broadcaster, his career offers a good clue as to what the next generation of sports writers must be. Most will be mojos, "mobile journalists," who can compose blogs, shoot video and continue to handle all the traditional responsibilities of print journalists.

The New American Sports Fan

Fans have obsessed over their favorite teams, no doubt, for as long as there have been fans, but the internet has helped create a new generation of committed sports fans. Take Will McDonald, for example.

McDonald, a University of Iowa doctoral student, painstakingly records an account of each game played by his favorite team — the Kansas City Royals — on his blog. The blog has become a popular hangout where Royals fans follow the action and swap opinions.

Many post comments such as:

"$3 million a year doesn't get you much these days."

"Never before seen batting order, the 67th of the season."

"Ha Ha Ha!!! I love it! Right off Pujols' dome."[4]

This interest, one shared by thousands of fans across the country, has blurred the line between sports fans and professional journalists. So much so, in fact, that the NCAA escorted a person out of the press box for blogging a live College World Series baseball game. Chris Thorman, who runs the Kansas City Chiefs' blog at www.arrowheadpride.com, said, "It's totally changing the landscape for sports fans. What separates the mainstream media from the typical blogger is the access. The Kansas City Star's beat writer will have more access, will have nuanced conversations with players, and see things we can't."[5]

Today, major sports teams rarely give credentials to bloggers. But that could change. "I think the time is coming when bloggers will be credentialed and at games," said Will Leith, founder of deadspin.com.[6] In what may be a precedent-setting move, the New York Islanders are planning a bloggers' box for an upcoming season — a press-like area set aside just for them.

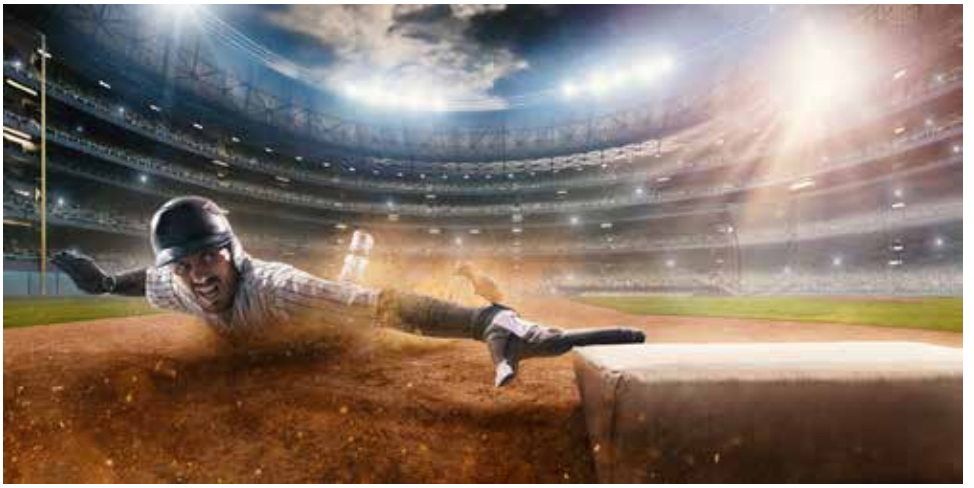

PHOTO 2.1
Stealing third base is one of baseball's most exciting moments.
iStock Signature/Dmytro Aksonov

In fact, nearly all print journalists are facing the same paradigm shift. According to David Dunkley Gyimah, a pioneering video journalist in the U.K., they must learn to understand "visual narrative" and allow it to drive storytelling.

As Gyimah puts it, "Vloggers [video bloggers] will undoubtedly rule the net. Their short, sometimes idiosyncratic productions are well suited for a medium where time is compressed and users' attention spans shortened."[7]

And that's not all. Increasingly, sports writers are finding it necessary to cover a whole range of stories far outside the normal bounds of playing fields and arenas. They must become pharmacists, for example, to understand the bewildering array of legal and illegal performance-enhancement drugs, such as steroids. They must add the police beat to their repertoire, as a significant number of college and pro athletes run astray of the law.

They must also be prepared to follow their sport into whatever bizarre territory it takes them. On one windy morning, for example, a college rowing team needed rescue after wind-whipped waves started to swamp the boat. The reporter soon found himself at the edge of a lake examining what was left of a racing shell.[8] Joanne Gerstner, a sports reporter for the Detroit News, noted, "Sports writing is really about medicine, business, sociology, psychology. It's a lot more than a home run or a slam dunk. I have to be able to decipher contracts. I have to be able to describe a knee injury."[9]

But just because sports writing has evolved to include new, electronic-based media and a wider field of play does not mean that the essential standards have changed. The age-old principles of good journalism — accuracy and objectivity — still hold.

Irrational Pastimes

Most people acknowledge that the United States is a nation of sports nuts. Sports, too, get nuttier and nuttier. From motorcycle racing on ice to rattlesnake rodeos, each weekend fans turn out for another dubious sport. Battle of the Monster Trucks, anyone? John Cherwa, associate sports editor at the Los Angeles Times, explains:

> Trash sports, that's our official name for them. Because they're not traditional and, in many cases, they're not real. Supposedly, in Atlanta, they have a thing called cat chasing. They throw a cat out of an airplane and then different parachutists try to chase and catch the cat. I don't know if it's true, but I've heard of it.[10]

Not all of these activities actually involve sweating. "Poker players used to be guys avoiding their wives," comments author Michael Lewis. "Now, apparently, they are professional athletes."

And yet sports are one thing that gets Americans fired up. Sure, some Americans like C-SPAN, but their numbers are overwhelmed by ESPN addicts. Occasionally, political leaders can inspire, but none causes grown men to paint their faces, tattoo their chests and howl like werewolves. As Lewis writes, "For every little boy or girl who wants to grow up to be a member of Congress there are, oh, about one million who intend to become major league baseball players or professional basketball players or ice skaters or gymnasts."[11]

For this chapter, we'll turn our focus on the main event: the sports contest itself. We'll skip monster trucks, by the way, and concentrate on more familiar sports. For all the hoopla, color and spectacle, the sports writer's first obligation is to get out to the ballpark — to report, in other words, on the game.

ADVANCE STORIES

The three major game-related sports stories include the advance, the recap (or gamer) and the postgame analysis. Sometimes these stories may be composed days apart, but in the harried life of an electronic sports journalist, they may all be due within a 24-hour cycle. A preview of an upcoming game that compares teams and players, discusses team records and gives lineups is known as an advance. The advance story requires diligence, but the deadline pressure is light.

Athletes will tell you that games are won or lost in practice. Sports writers will tell you the same thing about stories — the key work is doing research before a game. The reporter tries to find out all she can about the teams, the coaches and the issues she will be covering. Sports writer Steve Sipple comments, "Background is the one time when I don't have to worry about asking the right question. It's the one time when I'm able to relax and have fun while I familiarize myself with an athlete or an issue."[12]

SOFTBALL ISN'T BASEBALL WITH CURLS

Softball is not just baseball played with a bigger ball. Tennis isn't outdoor ping-pong. Cross-country is the only sport where the spectators run around the course to watch the race. Volleyball and beach volleyball? Two different sports. Sometimes knowing the subtle differences between sports is crucial to covering them effectively.

Take softball. Obviously, the ball is much larger than a baseball and, as a result, the field dimensions are significantly different. The outfield fences are not as deep since a larger ball does not carry as far, and the bases are 60 feet apart, 30 feet closer than for a baseball field.

The game is also played much more quickly than a typical three-hour major league game. Softball games go seven innings, two fewer than professional baseball, and the game moves at a faster pace. Pitchers do not spend much time worrying about runners who cannot leave a base until the ball leaves their hand. So they just concentrate on batters.

"We don't always rely on the three-run homer like many baseball teams," said Kelley Green, then softball coach at Lock Haven University. "You will have more sacrifice bunts in softball than baseball to move runners into scoring position."

Pitching is also vastly different. In baseball, teams require a rotation of four to five pitchers, who need much more time for recovery. Baseball pitchers rarely go beyond 100 pitches in a single game. In softball, pitchers often pitch on consecutive days, if needed. The underhanded motion does not put as much strain on the shoulders and arms, but the windmill delivery results in pitches that are just as fast.

As with anything, you need to fully understand a sport before you can properly cover it. You can learn much by reading the NCAA's rulebook. You can watch some practices and speak to coaches and players for background information. Obviously, the more you cover games, the more you will learn. (Most of these suggestions are gleaned from Joe Gisondi's blog.)

Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

How can you best prepare to write an advance? First, read all the relevant information you can, from professional magazines such as Sports Illustrated to local sources like your rival school's paper. In so doing you will pick up on how others cover sports and discover possible angles you can use. What happened in last year's game? What's the history between the two schools?

Second, get to know the team's vital statistics. This knowledge will not only give you insights into how the game might play out (i.e., one team often gets off to a fast start) but also give you something to talk about during interviews.

Finally, get to know the people you'll be covering. Go to practices and remain afterward to speak with players, coaches and trainers. Try to establish a good working relationship with them. These people should feel comfortable coming to you with their story ideas. In turn, they should be confident that you will represent their comments fairly and accurately.

It's crucial that you prepare well for interviews with sports figures. Athletes and coaches are often too ready, willing and able to respond to questions with pat answers. How often have you heard a coach say, "It was a really big win for us" or "We are playing the games one at a time"? This information is of little use to you or your readers. You must be prepared to ask as many specific questions as necessary until you get the information you need to write a genuine story, one with something new or insightful. Look for trends. If you're observant, before long you will spot changes, changes you can develop into thoughtful, well-informed questions.

Pregame Tips

Mark Derowitsch, a sports writer for the Lincoln Journal Star, once quipped, "You could train a chimpanzee to write an advance." Indeed, professional sports writers sometimes seem to be monkeying around, because their previews of upcoming games are painfully predictable. The lazy sports writer merely notes the time and place of the game, mixes in a few statistics, and adds a quotation from each coach. This formula produces the same stale story week in and week out.

In this respect, sports writing is similar to news writing. "You're looking for information," explains Michael Wilbon, sports columnist for the Washington Post and cohost of "Pardon the Interruption," a sports talk show on ESPN. "You're looking for documents. You're looking for anecdotes. You're looking for good quotes. You're looking for something the competitor doesn't have."[13]

Your advances, however, shouldn't serve as sedatives for your readers. In fact, they should have exactly the opposite effect. Think about the anticipation your classmates share for the contest ahead. Typically, the next game is the most talked-about topic on campus — among the players, the general student body and even the faculty.

How can you add flavor to your advances? Find an angle that your readers might not know about. For instance, New York Times columnist Selena Roberts devoted an entire column to the pressure women tennis stars feel to conform to certain ideas about body types; she wrote, "Serena Williams, the snippy bloggers have remarked, has been carrying too much junk in the trunk after a winter weight gain."[14]

Each advance you write should include something fresh, something new. Put simply, try to spice up or featurize your advances to keep them from sounding the same. Interviews, historical features or short human interest stories can help create a far more interesting sports page. Of course, don't forget to include the basic information about the game.

The following should be included in each advance you write:

- The significance of the matchup. Will this game decide who goes to the playoffs? Will one team finally win its first game of the year? What are some recent trends?
- Both teams' records, background of the rivalry and last year's score.
- Key players, key statistics, injuries and starting lineups.
- Styles of play.

Don't overlook advances on other sports. The tennis, golf and wrestling teams might not attract the crowds that the football and basketball teams do, but they are putting forth as much effort — and often have as much at stake — as the teams that are more visible. They can also attract large crowds; at Iowa and Oklahoma, wrestling teams fill large arenas for dual meets.

Make sure that the sports activities of both males and females are reported. More women sports writers are entering the field, including Christine Brennan of USA TODAY and Lesley Visser of CBS Sports; their voices will help change the sports landscape. The popularity of the U.S. women's soccer team, for example, is a good sign of just how much readers care, so be sure to cover these events just as diligently as men's sports.

GAME SUMMARY

As a sports writer, you often have the best seat in the house. You might be on press row (usually at courtside), in the press box (high above the crowd) or on the sidelines. Your job depends on your ability to see all of the action with minimal distractions. Your goal is to write the second of the major game-related stories: a game summary or recap of what happened. Part of that job will take you deep inside the game.

Lee Barfknecht, a football and basketball beat writer for the Omaha World-Herald, describes his duties this way:

> My job is to take fans where they normally can't go — the sidelines, the field, and the locker rooms. And I have the opportunity to interview the athletes and coaches they don't get a chance to talk to. You have to know how to use the amount of access that you're given.

With access, though, comes responsibility. Fans depend on you to provide insight into the bad news (the cause of the crucial fumble or why the star volleyball player was benched) as well as the good news (a wind-aided home run, perhaps). Most likely, if you're curious about something, your readers will be, too. Almost anything that grabs fans' attention at a game deserves at least a brief description or explanation in your game story.

The key plays may call for more elaboration, too. How, then, should you decide which plays are crucial? The first step is taking detailed game notes that highlight the momentum swings and the key performances. It may seem a bit old-fashioned to "keep the book," but keeping careful notes forces the reporter to pay close attention to the action. For example, look for moments when a basketball team goes on a 10-2 run or when a tennis player wins 12 straight points. Then, see how this fits in the context of the entire game. Prepare to ask pointed questions about those particular moments.

WHOSE SIDELINE ARE YOU ON?

Consider a high school football game where an intense crowd and an overenthusiastic band may have changed the game's outcome. In the closing moments, Fremont High faced a third down and one on their opponent's 7-yard line. The quarterback had to ask the officials to quiet the crowd twice, but when the ball was put in play, one of the Fremont players jumped before the snap, causing a procedure penalty and eventually dooming the drive.

In the Fremont paper, the writer said players had to face "tough odds" on their opponent's home field and left the game with a "sour taste." The Fremont coach was quoted as saying, "Whether it was the noise that caused us to jump, I don't know. It would have been nice if the kids had been able to hear the signals."

On the other hand, the home team's paper credited the win to a "raucous crowd" that "rattled Fremont's effort to overcome a one-point deficit." "The crowd was really enthusiastic," gushed the home team's coach.[15]

PHOTO 2.2
The excitement of the crowd is part of the game story.
iStock Signature/Dmytro Aksonov

When the game ends, a writer on deadline needs to get good quotations quickly. To get these quotes, the writer must ask tough questions — after all, who wants to talk about a loss? In fact, a coach or player may not like many of the questions that he gets, but don't be afraid to do your job. Sometimes you won't get an answer. Sometimes you'll get an angry response. Generally, though, if a question is legitimate, coaches and players will be willing to cooperate.

A Front-Row Seat, but Keep Your Yap Shut

A press pass gets you into the inner sanctum, the holiest of holies — the press box. Usually situated high above the stadium, the press box affords the best seat in the house and munchies galore. Sounds like a fan's dream, right? Wrong. "Sports writers don't root for teams; they root for stories — the more unusual, compelling and head-scratching the better," explains Omaha World-Herald writer Lee Barfknecht.

Sports writers can certainly be emotional in the press box, but it's not the place for shouts of glee or heartrending moans. Working in this venue leaves reporters with only one option: be professional. Cheering for one team or another is a sure way to find yourself getting tossed out of the press box, probably on the widest part of your anatomy. If you cheer, your copy might also be one-dimensional. So, remember: the press box is only for the cheering-impaired.

METAPHORS

"Sports metaphors are everywhere; they permeate all walks of life," says Robert Palmatier, co-author of a dictionary of 1,700 sports metaphors.[16]

"They've always been used because sports are common to all cultures," says Harold Ray, sports historian. "They just make communication easier."[17]

Objectivity?

But a sports writer doesn't have to be completely neutral either. Don't readers expect the local writers to be (secretly, perhaps) rooting for the home team?

Was it the same game? Depends on where you're standing. Sports reporters try to be objective, but they also stress what the players on their team did or didn't do. Writers should avoid taking a hometown angle, unless they're writing a column, and even then they should try to be as even-handed as possible.

Sports Jargon

Good sports writing depends on the same writing and reporting techniques as any other area of the news. But, in addition to following basic style rules, sports writers must also deal with the unique terminology of each sport.

If you've ever been thrown a curve, been driven up the wall or played the field, you can chalk it up to the world of sports.

In baseball, for example, the writer will be expected to use terms such as bullpen, ground-rule double, pitchout, pickle, rundown and sacrifice. In volleyball, fans will expect to see terms such as dink, kill and overhand pass.

On the other hand, beginning sports writers too often rely on jargon and clichés. Jargon is highly specialized language developed for a special use. If you use cagers instead of basketball players or grid mentor instead of football coach, you are using jargon. Your story may be unclear to some of your readers and seem silly to others.

Clichés are trite, overused words or expressions. When you use expressions such as split the uprights or describe a close game as a barn-burner, squeaker or nail-biter, you are merely echoing other worn-out writing. Avoiding clichés will help your stories be fresh and lively.

Postgame Heroics

Dick Enberg, a sports commentator for NBC, once said that "the beauty of all sports is how grown adults can act like little kids." Indeed, sports can bring out the same emotions in 30-year-old professional baseball players as they do in 8-year-old Little Leaguers. Sports writing is about reporting those emotions.

Whether it's a blowout or a close game, every sports event produces at least one prevailing emotion. Capture that emotion in your story. Support it with descriptions and quotations. Make that emotion the theme of your entire story. You'll rarely find a sporting event that doesn't produce some sort of drama you can write about.

How do you evoke that emotion on paper? How do you make the action come alive? In addressing that issue, Daryl Moen, a journalism professor at the University of Missouri, often tells his students the story of a blind newspaper publisher. The publisher would ask reporters to come into his office and tell him about their stories. Often, they would just tell him the facts—the who, what, where, when, how and why of the story. Patiently, the publisher would ask about the emotions that were evident on the faces of the people. He'd leave each reporter with one piece of advice: "Make me see. Make me see your story."[18]

Don't just make your readers see, however. Make them hear the crack of the bat, the rip of the basketball net and the roar of the crowd. Make them smell the locker room after two-a-day practices. Make them feel the volleyball slam against the hardwood floor. Make them taste the bitterness of defeat. In other words, use all your senses — sight, sound, touch, smell and even taste.

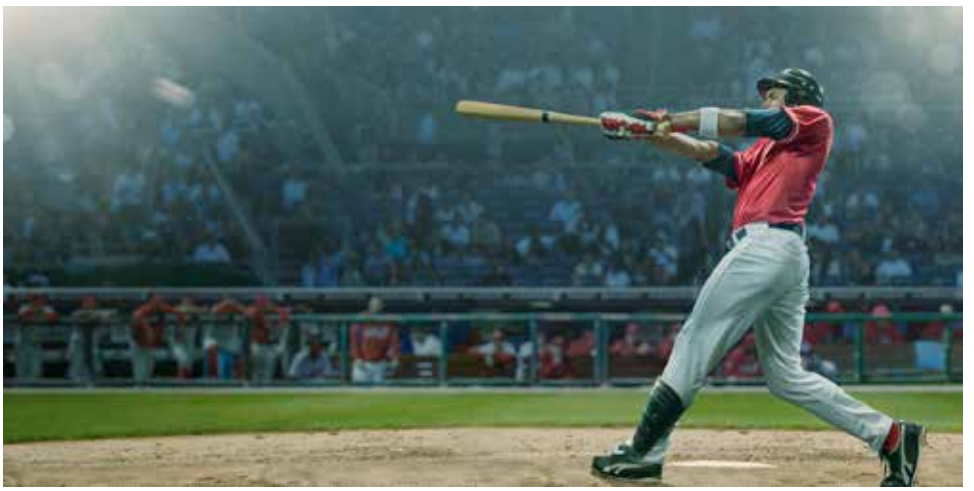

PHOTO 2.3
The crack of the bat means everyone's attention focuses on the field of play.
iStock Signature/Peepo

CATCHING A BREAK

Covering the Nebraska State Games has proven to be one of the most interesting things I've done.

One summer I covered the arm wrestling competition.

Two well-muscled guys, both rookies, were first up.

After grunting, straining and pushing for more than three minutes, one guy's arm broke. Snapped. The loud crack. The blood. The bone sticking through the skin.

The injured guy was too shocked to move. The other competitor got sick. Many in the room ran in panic.

I remembered my first aid training and helped the guy until the paramedics arrived. I got a pretty good interview, too. The injured guy said he'd try again next year — left-handed.

— Ken Hambleton, Lincoln Journal Star

For example, Linda Robertson of the Miami Herald wanted to give some scale to the size of pro football players: "Like American houses, Hummers, and hamburgers, football players are a reflection of the bigness of our society."

Paul Solotaroff, writing for Men's Journal, described the incredible saga of star wrestler Kyle Maynard, who has only stumps for arms and legs:

> If you think a limbless teen can't outpoint his foes, you've never seen Maynard scamper side to side, darting for a hold. Wrestlers may start matches on their feet, but bouts are won and lost on all fours, and Maynard is already down there, waiting.[19]

But don't overdo it. Make sure you support your descriptions. For example, writing that the volleyball players were "down in the dumps" isn't really honest. Unless you're a volleyball player, you don't know how they feel. Instead, ask the players about their disappointment. Describe their distraught faces and the tears streaming down their cheeks. And then capture the emotion with revealing quotes.

One way to tap all your senses is to draw on specific details to evoke a scene. Take, for example, Rick Reilly's description of how close one golf ball came to dropping into the creek:

> One less drop of rain. One more run of the mower. A cup less of fertilizer last fall. One more breath from a nearby butterfly. A blade of grass with weak knees. An eyelash less luck. Any of these things could have cost Fred Couples the Masters. But somehow, some way, Couples' golf ball hugged the steep slope at Augusta National's 12th hole, clung to it the way a sock clings to a towel fresh out of a hot dryer. The ball steadfastly refused to fall into the water.[20]

If Reilly can make a golf shot, of all things, come alive, just think how dramatic you can make your stories. Effective sports writers use crisp, lively words — especially verbs — to describe the action. Consider this example from Selena Roberts on the presence of several women drivers in the Indy 500:

> Three women earned a place on the starting grid of 33 drivers, a first for a race that cut its teeth in 1911. At 25, Danica Patrick is the commercialized one; at 35, Milka Duno is the mysterious one; and at 26, Sarah Fisher is the experienced one. Never have so many jumpsuits been fitted with curves for ladies who dig the turns.[21]

Covering Professional Events

Imagine you're a college reporter who has covered a few events on campus. Usually you wear jeans and a t-shirt, blending in with the other college students on campus. Suddenly, you receive an unusual assignment: Cover the U.S. Open. You're scared to death. How do you act? What do you wear? As one college sports reporter put it, "I guess my biggest fear is when I go to pick up my media credentials, they'll figure out I'm not a pro yet."

In the case of the country's largest golf event, a writer would probably head for the USGA's Media Center, an aircraft-carrier-size collection of tents. One tent contains

the cable-connected desks of 350 journalists who never need to leave the premises to cover the tournament. In fact, they'll probably see more of it if they don't.

That's because their desks face a scoreboard 100 feet wide that presents the hole-by-hole progress of each player. On either side of the scoreboard are two 36-square-foot TV screens where the writers can follow the action as presented by NBC and ESPN.

Does all this work make you hungry? No problem. In one of the tents you'll find a dining area with a dozen TV screens, so you won't miss a minute of the action.

After players finish their rounds, some agree to do a short press conference called a "flash interview," which takes place just outside the locker room. If a golfer has an unusually notable round, he might be invited to a more formal news conference in the Media Center.

But what if you miss a key interview because you're finishing your peanut butter, pickle and olive sandwich? No worries. A stenographer takes notes at each interview, and with breathtaking speed, transcripts of the interviews will have been typed, stapled and placed in wall racks where you can pick them up.[22]

Observe the other professional journalists as they work. In most situations, you'll find journalists swarming around the players after their rounds. Feel free to do the same. You are allowed to record comments made to other journalists, but don't interrupt if a reporter and player are clearly off to the side in a more private setting. You can stand nearby and wait your turn to jump in with some questions. You should try to seek out angles no one else has found. Before the round begins, select two or three golfers to follow — at least for a few holes — so you can get details that won't be visible to the writers in some tent all copying the same comments. Make sure you get out on the course to capture that firsthand flavor.

POSTGAME ANALYSIS

Once the dust has settled and the ink on the game recap has dried, the sports writer has a chance to, as Wordsworth might say, reflect in tranquility, or in other words, analyze what the heck just happened. An analysis is the third kind of standard game article and one that features opportunities for the most writerly kind of prose. Roger Angell, baseball correspondent for the New Yorker, usually files stories months, if not years, after the events they describe took place. He's going for something besides who won and lost:

> When I began writing sports pieces, it was clear to me that the doings of big-league baseball — the daily happenings on the field, the managerial strategies, the celebration of heroes, the medical and financial bulletins, the clubhouse gossip — were so enormously reported that I would have to find some other aspect of the game to study. I decided

> to sit in the stands — for a while at least — and watch the baseball from there. I wanted to concentrate not just on the events down on the field but on their reception; I wanted to pick up the feel of the game as it happened to the people around me.[23]

One thing writers go for in analysis pieces is perspective. They seek to compare current performances with those of the past. So Angell, for example, tries to measure one pitcher's great year against others: "Many observers believe that Bob Gibson's 1.12 earned-run average in 1968 is one of the Everests of the game."[24] Comparing a pitcher's achievement to climbing Mount Everest gives vivid testimony to the scale of his accomplishment.

A sports analyst writes for true aficionados, fans who don't need to have every reference explained. Here's Angell on one of baseball's famous moments: "My father told me about the famous last game of the 1912 World Series, in Boston, and seeing Fred Snodgrass drop that fly ball in the tenth inning, when the Red Sox scored twice and beat the Giants."[25]

The game, *that* fly ball. Presumably, the true fan can supply the missing information. The members of baseball's family, Angell tells us, are "devoutly attached to its ancestors and its family records."

Sports writers love adjectives, and an analysis piece is just the right place to use them. Many writers coin inventive hyphenated modifiers such as pennant-winning, ear-wrenching, and one-base-at-a-time attack. They can also indulge their taste for humorous exaggeration. The artificial turf of a football field might have the "consistency of an immense doormat" while a normally gruff manager might turn from a "grizzly bear to Geppetto."

They open the spigot on the full range of punctuation from dashes to italics and parentheses, not to mention the occasional sentence fragment. Sentence structures become exceedingly flexible and free-swinging. Take the following passage, for example, from a description of a Detroit Lions exhibition football game, by George Plimpton. Plimpton was allowed to play quarterback for five snaps, and he steadily moved the team backward toward its own end zone. On his final play, he pitched the ball to a halfback who was tackled on the 1-yard line. After the final play, as Plimpton trudges wearily toward the bench, he notices that the fans start to applaud. At first he can't believe the people in the stands are clapping for him, and then he begins to understand:

> I thought about the applause afterward. Some of it was, perhaps, in appreciation of the lunacy of my participation and for the fortitude it took to do it; but most of it, even if subconscious, I decided was in relief that I had done as

> badly as I had: it verified the assumption that the average fan would have about an amateur blundering into the brutal world of professional football. He would get slaughtered. If by some chance I had uncorked a touchdown pass, there would have been wild acknowledgment — because I heard the groans go up at each successive disaster — but afterward the spectators would have felt uncomfortable. Their concept of things would have been upset. The outsider did not belong, and there was comfort in that being proved.[26]

Plimpton's description probes deeply into the psychology of the game — the certainty fans have, for instance, that what they see players do is impossibly hard. His sentences resemble those of a philosophy professor, except for a delightful metaphor, one where he imagines a popular mayor waving to the crowd from a convertible. Analyzing a game, season or player gives the writer a chance for sheer exuberance. Why not, for example, stretch a metaphor throughout an entire paragraph as Roger Angell does here?

> Steve Garvey always seems to be standing at attention in the batter's box. As he waits for the pitch, his back is straight and his bat shows not a tremor of anxiety or anticipation. His feet are apart, of course, but perfectly parallel with the back line of the box. When he swings, his head snaps down, as if he were checking the shine on his tunic buttons. What he is doing, of course, is watching the ball — really watching the ball. He swings exactly the same way at every pitch: perfect swings. Last year, he batted .304, which is exactly his lifetime average in eleven seasons with the Dodgers. Garvey is a soldier of hitting.[27]

Long before the reader reaches the punchline, he knows he is being carefully set up. The physical description of Garvey, as if he were in a military inspection, the repetition of "perfectly" and "exactly," and the listing of his hitting statistics all suggest a machine-like consistency. Garvey isn't a player; he is a soldier.

Other metaphors are useful when describing the techniques of each game — throwing, catching and hitting, for example — skills that are simple to the point of banality and yet breathtakingly complex (physicists have yet to fully explain how a curveball works). A split-finger fastball, for example, could be described as "baseball's Rubik's Cube"; fielders must deal with "bazooka shots that are lined past them or at them" or cope with a sneaky bunt, "baseball's shiv in the ribs."

Settling back with one of these analyses, the reader feels the arm of a favorite uncle wrap itself around his or her shoulder and senses the joy of yet another trip out to the old ballpark.

UPON FURTHER REVIEW

1. What new challenges do sports journalists face today?
2. Describe the key elements in preparing to write a story about a game.
3. Can a sports writer take sides? Why or why not? What difference does it make if the writer is doing a story or column?

NOTES

1. This quote appears in Sports Illustrated, July 22, 1968.

2. The story of John McPhee's appearance at a Princeton football game is recounted in his article, "Rip Van Golfer," which appeared in the New Yorker on Aug. 6, 2007.

3. www.barstoolsports.com, May 1, 2018.

4. Will McDonald, "Royals Review," www.royalsreview.com.

5. Chris Thorman, www.arrowheadpride.com.

6. Will Leith, www.deadspin.com.

7. David Dunkley Gyimah created viewmagazine.tv to illustrate how one person could create online broadcasts. This quote appears in "insideSolojos: Videojournalism" on his website, www.mrdot.co.uk/videojournalism_today.html.

8. The college rowing team's mishap was recounted by Algis J. Laukaitis in the Lincoln Journal Star, April 16, 2007.

9. This quote appears in "Getting into the game," by Ed Finkel, Medill, Summer 2004.

10. Cherwa is quoted in Funny Times, an American humor newspaper, www.funnytimes.com.

11. The quotes from Lewis appear in his introduction to "The Best American Sports Writing 2006" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

12. Steve Sipple is a sports writer for the Lincoln Journal Star.

13. Michael Wilbon is quoted in "Getting into the game," by Ed Finkel, Medill, Summer 2004.

14. This quote from Roberts' column appeared in the Sept. 1, 2006, issue of the New York Times.

15. These two stories appeared on Oct. 11, 1981, in the Lincoln Journal Star and the Fremont Tribune.

16. Robert Palmatier's book on sports jargon is "Sports Talk: A Dictionary of Sports Metaphors" (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

17. Harold Ray is the co-author (with Robert Palmatier) of the "Dictionary of Sports Idioms" (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1993).

18. Daryl Moen says that "the goal of all writers is to make readers see and smell and feel and taste and hear."

19. Solotaroff's story on Kyle Maynard can be found in "The Best American Sports Writing 2006" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 1-14.

20. Reilly's article on the Masters, "Bank shot," appeared in the April 20, 1992, issue of Sports Illustrated.

21. Roberts' article, "Sports of the times: Creeping equality, a bit of fraternity and a slick of asterisks at Indy," appeared in the May 27, 2007, issue of the New York Times.

22. This account appeared on Joe Gisondi's blog, onsportz.blogspot.com, which has since been phased out and replaced by sportsfieldguide.org. Gisondi has more than 20 years of experience as a sports reporter and now teaches journalism at Eastern Illinois University.

23. Angell's description can be found in the foreword to his first collection of baseball pieces, "The Summer Game" (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

24. The account of Bob Gibson's exploits appears in "Distance," New Yorker, Sept. 22, 1980.

25. This quote appears in "The Summer Game," 293.

26. This description comes from George Plimpton's book "Paper Lion" (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

27. Angell's account of Steve Garvey appears in the May 4, 1981, issue of the New Yorker.

3

Navigating the Twitter-verse

The time is 5:30 a.m., you're still asleep, but daylight is breaking, and perhaps you're awakened by the "thud" your Sunday newspaper makes as your neighborhood carrier throws the heavy bundle of newsprint against the screen door of your front porch on a warm summer morning.

Or maybe you were born after 2000 and have zero idea of this phenomenon known as "newspaper delivery."

Truth be told, you probably get your news these days from the internet or, more specifically, social media sites, like Twitter, that link stories to newspapers' websites.

"It's almost like throwing it on somebody's doorstep," said Austin Meek, a sports columnist for the Eugene Register-Guard in Eugene, Oregon. "You give them a link on Twitter, and they wake up in the morning like I do and check their Twitter feed. That's how they find things they're interested in."

Meek, a 2008 graduate of Kansas State University, formerly worked at the Topeka Capital-Journal in Topeka, Kansas. He specifically remembers a member of corporate management one day addressing the Capital-Journal staff about the importance of engaging readers on social media and, specifically, Twitter.

"I just remember people looking around at each other thinking, 'We're never going to use this, what is this stupid thing this person is talking about?'" Meek said.

Today, Meek said he's embarrassed to admit how much time he spends on his phone each morning when he opens Twitter.

"It's a big part of how I gather news, for sure," Meek said. "Most of the things I read, and certainly any breaking news, I usually see it first on Twitter. It's the first thing I look at in the morning, to catch up on whatever happened when I was asleep. The way I consume news, I rarely go to the site where it originates. I usually get to it from a link on Twitter."

Guess what? Meek, as a consumer, represents most of sports fans these days. If they don't subscribe to newspapers or have online subscriptions, they are monitoring news via Twitter and other social media outlets.

RULES FOR TWITTER

To that end, how should sports reporters, both as informers and consumers, handle Twitter, and what rules should they follow?

Here's a general guideline on the do's and don'ts of Twitter usage for today's sports media journalists:

- Do use discretion in what you tweet. No profanity, and as a sports writer, steer clear of politics.
- Do be accurate. You're a journalist. The same rules apply.
- Do engage with your audience. Respond to their questions. Don't simply retweet your favorite accounts and tweets.
- Do try to maintain a positive, lighthearted approach. While not every news item you tweet will be good news, try to keep a positive outlook, in general.
- Do tweet at peak hours. Normally, before 8 a.m., over the noon hour and after 5 p.m. are prominent times to reach sports audiences.
- Do wait until you have a link to a story if you are tweeting breaking news that you know competing outlets do not have.
- Do sometimes invoke good-natured humor, but do not use Twitter as your failed dream of being a stand-up comedian.
- Do not be too snarky. While sarcasm is a common trait of sports reporters, too much of it can turn off your audience. Plus, an overly snarky comment about the team you cover will assuredly find its way back to sources on your beat.
- Do not be too liberal with the block button. As easy as it is to eliminate critics from your Twitter feed, journalists don't want to develop a reputation as being too "thin-skinned." Only consider removing followers if they are overly rude, vulgar or threatening — not if they simply disagree with you. (The "mute" button is a possible alternative).
- Do not say too much and spoil your content. Provide a link to your media outlet's content when you have breaking news, using the content of the tweet as a teaser of sorts.
- Do not overtweet. While there's no steadfast rule on how often to tweet, use common sense in not flooding your followers' feeds.

Hot Takes

In reality, before Twitter existed in the late 2000s, the term "hot take" likely didn't exist in any sports reporter's vernacular.

Today, the term is prominent. Loosely defined, a hot take is a strong opinion likely written for the purpose of promoting a reaction.

> *Disappointed for Messi but Argentina deserve to go home. Mainly due to Jorge Sampaoli's awful squad selection and poor choices in starting 11 (Agüero and Dybala on the bench?) He should be sacked.*[1]

> *"Paul George actively deciding to spend his prime in OKC as a 5-7 seed is really something."*[2]

Is sending hot takes the primary use of Twitter for a sports reporter or columnist? Many would argue it shouldn't be, but the fact remains some sports writers try to garner attention by stating what some would claim are outlandish opinions.

"If that works for you, great," Meek said. "That's not how I have chosen to use it."

Rather, Meek and most sports reporters choose to use Twitter and other social media outlets as a means of engaging with and informing readers.

"I like engaging with people and I like having reasonable exchanges with people," Meek said. "But I'm not really looking to use it to just promote reaction or to get five million people tweeting back at me."

Even though he's a columnist, Meek chooses to not use Twitter as an outlet to post his opinions. If he did that repeatedly, why should readers subscribe to the Register-Guard or visit its website for his actual, complete work?

"If I really have something to say, I'd rather say it in a column where I can actually develop and support it, versus just kind of blobbing it out there on Twitter," Meek said. "If I was putting a lot of hot takes out there on Twitter, I'd probably be getting a lot of that back."

LIVE TWEETING

One of the most popular uses of Twitter among sports reporters is to inform and update followers of a live sporting event, usually a game or news conference. The reasons vary. Some fans enjoy following along while watching the event, either in person or on television, and look for insight from the reporters on a particular play or call. They also want answers to questions they think the reporter may know because he or she is on-site; sometimes the reporter has an immediate answer: "They are wearing throwback uniforms today." Often the reporter must wait to find an answer if the question is more complex.

Other followers, perhaps on the other side of the globe, may use Twitter as their only means to receive live score updates. Or maybe fans are at work during the hastily arranged news conference of a coach's firing and can only glance at their phone now and then for updates of what the athletic director is telling the media.

PHOTO 3.1
iStock Essentials/relif

Here are five tips for live tweeting from events:

1. Tell your audience.

Twitter followers appreciate a heads-up when you'll be live tweeting an event. Send out a tweet at least an hour or so before your game begins. For example, when first arriving at Allen Fieldhouse, take a picture of the arena with a tweet to help set the scene:

> *This place will be packed 16,300 strong in another 90 minutes when No. 2 Kansas hosts No. 4 Duke in a key non-conference tilt. PG Grayson Allen (sore ankle) is suited and warming up and will likely play, I'm told. Game starts at 7. Follow here for updates.*

You've not only promoted the event you'll be live tweeting but you've also informed your followers of some injury information. Other pregame tweets could include who's

officiating the game, or television information or series history — any tidbit that helps promote what's about to happen.

2. Use hashtags.

Most events have dedicated hashtags and by using the right one, you will ensure that your tweet is added to the overall conversation. One quick search will typically turn up the event's official hashtag — and it might shed some light on unofficial hashtags that the community is using as well.[3]

For example, the previous Tweet you sent out previewing the Kansas-Duke game could include *#KUBBall* to include or attract Kansas fans, or *#GoDuke* if you're seeking the Duke audience. Some events, especially bigger-profile ones, will have official, neutral hashtags, like *#SuperBowl50* or *#WorldCup*.

Hashtags don't have to wait until the end of your tweet. In many instances, they can simply replace the name of the team in the content of the tweet, thus saving you on your 280-character limit.

3. Provide insight.

While it's acceptable to provide periodic score updates and other statistical information, chances are the majority of your followers either already know the score or are following along with some stat-tracking app that tells them individual point totals or team yardage totals. If you're only tweeting the numbers every five minutes, you're likely to lose your audience.

Don't ignore statistics entirely. Remember, there's the dad stuck in a meeting or in the stands at a midget football game who might be sneaking peeks at his cellphone and depending on you for the score. So, in addition to scoring updates, provide some sort of analysis or information your followers may not know.

> *#Jayhawks seem perplexed early by the #GoDuke surprise zone defense. Kansas down 10-2 at the first media timeout. Looks like Bill Self is making multiple subs in this first break. Allen started and his ankle seems fine thus far.*

4. Engage with your followers.

This is easier to do at some times than at others. That initial tweet you sent to preview the Kansas-Duke game may result in some questions or comments about Allen's ankle. Given the game hasn't started, you should likely have time to reply. Other times, followers aren't replying to original tweets but simply tweeting questions or comments about the game.

Some probably elicit a response. Many others don't. That's up to the reporter's discretion — and time — but make an effort to engage with your followers when

possible. You don't want your followers — and, by extension, your readers — to deem you unapproachable.

You can reply directly to the tweet, manually retweet it with your comment or answer at top, or send a private direct message, if needed.

Reporters writing running game stories won't have time to respond to tweets in the final five minutes of the game but may be able to spare some time after the postgame news conference and before writing that final game story. Focus on writing your story, and then maybe take time to engage more on Twitter after your final deadline.

5. Use professional language.

There is a way to abbreviate your words without using unprofessional language. Commonly used acronyms are acceptable, as are abbreviations such as "pro" for professional or "biz" for business. But don't be fooled into thinking a character limit means you can get away with "U" in place of "you" — just don't go there! It's a fine line, but err on the side of professionalism. Remember that every post represents the brand you're cultivating and should maintain the voice you decided upon when creating your social media plan.[4]

Quoting on Twitter

Especially when live tweeting from news conferences, sports reporters will be quoting sources and perhaps attempting to do so directly. As you will learn in chapter 7, a direct quotation is an exact, word-for-word account of what a person says, placed in quotation marks. If you're 100 percent certain you heard every word correctly and in order, as you are tweeting live, then use quotation marks with proper attribution (also see chapter 7).

However, if the person speaking has a longer thought that's pushing your 280-character limit, it may be best to paraphrase what the source says. That means you're summarizing his or her thoughts without quotations, using as many of the same words as possible. It's a safer way of getting the source's message across without the accusation of misquoting under hurried circumstances.

Direct quoting is obviously easier — and sometimes more effective — in a live tweeting situation if the quote is short and easy to remember.

"I guarantee you we will win this game."

And as always, only quote or paraphrase interesting thoughts or newsworthy details from a live news conference. Don't flood Twitter feeds with every single detail from what you're listening to. Pick and choose the highlights.

RELYING ON TWITTER AS A SOURCE

Adam Jardy, a sports reporter for the Columbus Dispatch in Columbus, Ohio, is young enough in the profession to not remember a time where his job didn't require using Twitter.

"If I'm not on it, I'm going to miss out on things," Jardy said. "It provides a lot of information that otherwise it might take me more time to try to find. If I'm dealing with the (recruiting) class of 2020, the team I'm covering is recruiting 40 kids. Well, keeping tabs on those 40 kids without Twitter can be exceedingly challenging."

Via Twitter and other social media outlets, such as Facebook and Instagram, sports reporters have an easier time keeping tabs on recruits — the future athletes who are considering attending the school a beat writer covers. Even current athletes on the college or professional team a writer covers sometimes will deliver tweets that turn into news — sometimes good, other times controversial.

Any beat writer (see chapter 8) covering a college or professional team should follow as many athletes or coaches on his or her team as possible. You never know for certain when a member of the team you're covering will drop breaking news — he's leaving the program, she's injured and having surgery — or deliver some controversial comments that turn into news.

Conversely, those same people you follow on Twitter may announce positive news that could just as easily result in a news story or feature. In any case, following your sources on social media is an easy way to keep tabs on potential news, or a means of contact in case of a need for an interview or information. A click of the button, and you can direct message a source rather than worrying about securing a cellphone number.

When Jardy had the arduous task of covering a coaching search for the Dispatch, during the time Ohio State was hiring a men's basketball coach, he found Twitter a helpful tool. The agent for eventually named coach Chris Holtmann had followed Jardy on Twitter. The agent, mind you, had a history of not being easily accessible to reporters.

"When he started following me, I was like, 'This is good news,'" Jardy said. "I had a line of communication through the process."

Jardy was able to confirm or deny information throughout his coverage of a coaching search through this means of communication with the candidate's agent.

"It definitely makes you more accessible to a lot of different people," Jardy said of Twitter.

Scooping on Twitter

As you will learn in chapter 8, "scooping" the competition means you have reported a sports news story before any members of your competition. That takes dedication, hard work, solid sources and, sometimes, good fortune.

The Lincoln Journal Star, despite having a much smaller staff, scooped competitors when it first reported Nebraska had suddenly accepted the resignation of women's basketball coach Connie Yori. In the era of the 24/7 news cycle, having a scoop for a significant period isn't easy, yet the Journal Star had a 1,600-word exclusive story, confirming through on-record sources that Yori had resigned after an athletic department investigation. It was hours before the larger Omaha World-Herald was able to confirm the story and report it on its website.

For Jardy, the biggest scoop of his career was first reporting the hiring of Holtmann as men's basketball coach at Ohio State. Of course, in 1990, newspapers such as the Dispatch would have breaking news for their print edition in the morning; without the existence of a website to update, competing newspapers had no choice but to wait until the next day to follow with their late story.

"I think about how unbelievably different that would be," Jardy said. "I can't even imagine what that world was like."

Frankly, if you were the reporter on the wrong end of the scoop, the situation was horrifying.

Today, in the 24/7 news cycle, news outlets are lucky to have a scoop for more than 10 minutes before others report the same story — thanks to social media outlets, like Twitter.

"As soon as you break something, it's literally going to be everywhere, like moments later," Jardy said. "There are times where I might have something, but I'm waiting for it to finish publishing on our website before I even tweet it, because there's no point in tweeting something that doesn't have a link. If it's going to be retweeted hundreds of times, you've got to make sure you've got a link in there, too. That certainly impacts how you're choosing to break it."

In reality, the 24/7 news cycle has all but deemphasized the importance of "having it first," although having the story correct is, and always has been, most important.

"If you have it first or you have it second or you have it third, chances are it's all going to be within a very short time frame," Jardy said. "You still have the pride where you want to be first, but it's not like if you're going to get beat, you're going to get beat by an entire day."

There are times where saving an exclusive story — a story competitors do not have — for the newspaper's print edition and then its website can still work. Jardy once wrote a story about an Ohio State basketball player whose mother was murdered when he was a child. The reporter had built a relationship with the athlete and put in a lot of time to where he could bring up the topic and perhaps have the athlete open up for a story.

"He did," Jardy said, "and I had this exclusive story about his upbringing that we held for print. We had a special play, prominent placement. Stories like that, you can hold for print, absolutely.

PHOTO 3.2
Sports fans often follow the game, whether at home or in the stadium, with some sort of electronic device, usually a cellphone or tablet.
iStock Essentials/gpointstudio

"But even then, in those cases, it's, 'Oh, you're running it Thursday? Can we run it Wednesday?' I don't like sitting on things. It's just my general nature. But, if it's something you are confident enough that you think is unique, you can sit on things. You can't sit on breaking news, almost without exception. It's hard for me to envision a scenario where I know Ohio State is hiring its next men's basketball coach and the exclusive will be in Tuesday's paper. That would certainly never happen. But when you're dealing with features and enterprise stories — how much money they spend on recruiting — that type of story isn't going to be broken on social media. There are still times where we specifically plan on having a big print presence and breaking the news, or having the exclusive story that way. Of course, it runs concurrently online."

SATISFYING YOUR TWITTER AUDIENCE

It's important to know your Twitter audience, whether your account has 500 followers or 50,000 followers. Why, primarily, are they following you? What information, analysis or opinion do they seek from you?

As a beat writer for an area college football team that you may know well, it's easy to have a grasp on what your Twitter followers want to read. Football is a mainstream

sport. Essential information on Twitter would include recruiting items, score updates and analysis during games, and other breaking news items.

What happens if you are covering a sport with which you are not familiar? Gymnastics? Wrestling? Jardy faced this challenge when he began covering the Columbus Crew soccer team.

"The people who knew me knew I didn't have a soccer background," Jardy said. "In the world of soccer, if you don't have that background, people are generally skeptical of you and why you would cover their soccer team. I dealt with a lot of angry people who just had no belief whatsoever that I would be able to cover the team they cared about. So I got a lot of angry messages from people on Twitter at that time."

Count this as one reason a sports reporter might wish Twitter didn't exist: backlash from followers and "trolls" — Twitter users who simply send negative tweets to garner a reaction from the original person who tweeted.

"It can help. It can hurt. It can be very frustrating," Jardy said of Twitter. "People picking fights with you, or people taking exception to a phrase you might use, then they just stick on that. I remember I had an ongoing argument with a Crew fan because I was talking about the team's depth chart. This guy was like, 'You're a moron, there are no depth charts in soccer, you clearly don't care about this sport.'"

Jardy told the follower to email him, which he did, and eventually the two had a civil conversation over the matter.

"[Twitter] enables me to get to know my audience better, and vice versa," Jardy said. "I feel these days, you can't have a byline and hide behind it. You have to put yourself out there a little bit. I don't mean from a 'I have to be a personality' type of thing, but I can use Twitter to occasionally post things about my kids, or 'I just bought this album.' I feel those kinds of things show your readers who you are, and they kind of get to know you a little bit."

Twitter is part of the 24/7 news cycle. Long gone are the days of sports reporters writing one game story and heading home or to the nearest pub. No longer do sports reporters attend a news conference at 10 a.m., go home to mow the lawn in the afternoon, take a nap and come back to write the news conference story to beat the 10 p.m. print deadline.

"I think about my game day experience these days," Jardy said, "where I've already written something for the morning, and I've written a pregame blog post, and I've been on Twitter all day and I get to the arena, so I'm getting all my pregame stuff done and getting ready to file my running gamer.

"Then as soon as my game is over, I'm going to interviews, then updating the game story (with quotations), plus write a sidebar, plus a postgame blog, and then there's something that will usually come out of it that I'm trying to write for the next day. You're talking about, for one game, seven or eight different pieces of content."

TWITTER IN THE CLUTCH

Sometimes sports reporters must quickly shift gears and use their reporting skills for breaking events that are not at all sports-related.

Thanks to Twitter, Adam Jardy was able to produce and update a news story for his newspaper, the Columbus Dispatch in Columbus, Ohio.

Serving then as the beat writer for the Columbus Crew, a professional team in Major League Soccer, Jardy was covering a home game when a fierce thunderstorm developed. Not only did the severe weather delay the game, it created a news story.

"We all saw the bolt of lightning from the press box, and the game was delayed for obvious reasons," Jardy said, "and then I saw somebody tweeted me and said there was a man struck by lightning."

Jardy's first course of action was to ask the public relations staff of the Columbus Crew, although they were not able to confirm.

"But then they got a message in their headset, and this guy goes running out of the press box, so I grab my umbrella and I go running, too," Jardy said. "There are like seven or eight ambulances on their way to the parking lot. I head out there, and I cover the thing from the scene."

Indeed, lightning had struck a man in the stadium parking lot. The man was an off-duty fireman.

Jardy did what any good reporter would do. He interviewed witnesses, talked to police officers and firefighters on hand and carefully looked over the scene. He was able to gather various bits of information and write a breaking news story for the Dispatch website.

"Then I'm walking around the stadium, and I find the coach, and he has some more information," Jardy said. "They end up postponing the game, because it's very touch-and-go whether this person is going to pull through or not."

Jardy was in the press box, rewriting his story with new information, when he received another tweet from a reader. He then followed the person on Twitter, "and it happened to be one of the paramedics that was literally in the ambulance with the person who had been struck by lightning."

The paramedic contacted Jardy because he wanted to clarify a medical term Jardy had incorrectly used. Jardy was thankful the paramedic was not only cordial and understanding but also able to provide more information.

"So he helped me out with that, but then they were also giving me updates," Jardy said. "'Yes, he's alive, yes, he's conscious; we're going to the hospital.' I got a sizable amount of information that made my story from direct messaging with an EMT who was in the ambulance with this person.

"That never would have happened without Twitter."

— Brian Rosenthal

During the search for the men's basketball coach that eventually ended with the hiring of Holtmann, Jardy constantly updated his Twitter feed and the Dispatch website every day, three to four times a day. The more a beat writer calls and texts and digs, the more often he or she will have the latest information to update readers.

"We wanted to have the newest information on our website to drive people there," Jardy said. "I might learn that an assistant coach had interviewed for the job and nobody else knew that. That was like a midday update on our Ohio State coaching search. That morning, it might have been, 'These are the candidates they have expressed interest.' Then 2 o'clock, they've interviewed one of the assistants, and by the evening, they still don't have a coach, so you're just summarizing, and by nighttime, it was everything that had happened that day for print the next day: What have we learned since the last time we printed a newspaper?

"For that week when they were searching for a coach, I probably updated my main story to the web three or four times a day."

MESSAGE BOARDS: SOURCE OR NOT?

Some sports reporters might deny they ever visit fan message boards. Fans of college or professional teams can visit a certain website, usually recruiting-related, and express their thoughts and opinions, converse with other fans — or fans of the opponent — and do it all under the nice, tidy anonymity of a goofy name like "Bobcatbob327" or "Weluvthedawgs!"

Even high school coaches and athletes are not immune to the crazed fan who praises, criticizes or spreads gossip — sometimes true, most times not — under an anonymous screen name.

Time used to be when such rumors highlighted visits to coffee shops or the local barber. Regardless the locale or format, the rumors begin, then grow and then somehow gain credibility with some fans or perhaps innocent bystanders who know no better. The problem, of course, is that nobody is held accountable, whether the information is accurate or simply a hoax. Hence, many sports reporters will say they would rather deal with a migraine on deadline or chew tinfoil than associate themselves with message boards.

However, those beat reporters who say they ignore message boards entirely are probably fibbing. If they are really telling the truth, they should probably face reality and admit that, like it or not, anonymous message board posters — sometime referred to as citizen journalists — are part of their job.

For example, perhaps Bobcatbob327, a regular on his favorite fan message board, posts something he has heard about his team — the Bobcats, of course — and the prized freshman quarterback who is deciding to transfer because he is unhappy with playing time. The rumor spreads quickly. You, the beat reporter (see chapter 7), receive a text message from your friend, who has read this hot item on a message board. The rumor has probably made the rounds on Twitter, too.

Can you afford to ignore this tip simply because it appeared somewhere anonymously? Probably not. Do you immediately write a story using the message board as a source? Definitely not. But as with any anonymous tip, you, the beat writer, begin digging, asking, checking and verifying.

Bobcatbob327 might be right, and even though some of his message board buddies will praise him for the scoop, other fans will wait until you, a responsible beat reporter who is held accountable, verifies and reports the news.

What if your late night, last-minute digging is all for naught, and Bobcatbob327 turns out to be wrong? Well, this is a good time to remind yourself of one of the perks of being a beat writer, and you can look forward to a bowl game trip to San Diego. In other words, this is just a normal headache beat writers must handle.

Ideally, beat reporters would have such information about freshmen quarterbacks before it finds the fingertips of a rapidly typing anonymous message board regular. But let's face reality: In a 24/7 news cycle, even the most astute and responsible beat writer can't possibly know of every little detail before cyberspace does.

These are not necessarily everyday occurrences for beat reporters. But a thorough beat reporter will at least keep tabs on some message boards, whether for possible tips or just to gauge the pulse or feeling of the fan base. Some topical feature stories could result, too.

None of this, however, means beat reporters should depend solely on message boards for information. Nor does it mean beat reporters need to or should interact on message boards, anonymous or not.

TWITTER FOR MEDIA RELATIONS

Ted Harbin, owner and editor of Rodeo Media Relations, said social media has become the go-to medium to help promote anything that needs it. He utilizes his news and information website, TwisTedRodeo.com, as a hyperlink to share the stories that he produces for clients on social media platforms.

In addition, anyone involved in promotion must understand the keys to reaching people via social media while also maintaining the appropriate budgets, Harbin said.

One aspect of what Rodeo Media Relations does is focused on social media marketing. Whether it's creating memes or sharing stories, photos and videos, the goal is to get a message to as many viewers as possible.

In event promotion, the primary purpose is to sell tickets to that event, to entice potential buyers that the rodeo performances are worth their money. "It's not just about the posts, though; It also is about the reach and boosting that reach as well as possible. I share my posts with as many of the appropriate people as I can," Harbin said.

Each client has specific needs, though. For some rodeos, it's beyond putting butts in seats. They want to be recognized nationally. Each year, 20 rodeos from across the country are recognized as the very best — five events in four size categories: large outdoor, large indoor, medium and small.

"To obtain those honors, votes are tabulated by the card-carrying members of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, most of whom are the contestants," Harbin said. "To that end, my job is to reach out to as many voters as possible on behalf of those clients. Social media is the best way to do that."

For media relations departments at athletic departments of major colleges and universities, the proper use of social media is emphasized to student-athletes, particularly to those of higher-profile sports.

The University of Colorado media relations department has a handbook for coaches and student-athletes, and also speaks to student-athletes about what to tweet and — more importantly — what not to tweet.

"The underlying theme we tell them in person is, 'If you're tweeting something your mother wouldn't want to see, you probably shouldn't tweet it,'" said David Plati, associate athletic director with sports information at the University of Colorado. "It's kind of like taking your photo. Does your mother really want to see your photo with that frown on your face? When in doubt, you refer to what Mom wants, and it's usually quite effective."

Even a tweet that exists for a mere seven seconds before being deleted, if it's controversial in any way, shape or form, will still likely be nabbed on a screenshot and exist for eternity. Specifically, political, sexist and rude comments, or unflattering comments about the upcoming opponent, could result in punishment for student-athletes.

UPON FURTHER REVIEW

1. Log on to Twitter and follow 10 national sports writers or columnists, and also follow 10 local sports writers or columnists responsible for a particular team or sport. How do their tweets compare and contrast? What type of insight do they provide?
2. Create a Twitter account and attend a news conference or live sporting event and provide updates using appropriate hashtags specific to that audience. See how many more followers you have by day's end, and interact with a couple of them.
3. Follow 10 professional athletes over a month's time, or longer. Compare and contrast their content, paying particular attention to any potential newsworthy items.

NOTES

1. Tweet from Joseph Mechling, @JMechling_36, June 30, 2018.

2. Tweet from Dan Wolken, @DanWolken, June 30, 2018.

3. Laura Dugan, "10 Tips for Tweeting During Live Events," July 11, 2015, https://www.adweek.com/digital/10-tips-for-tweeting-during-live-events/.

4. "Ten Tips to Up Your Twitter Game," undated, http://blog.stickyalbums.com/10-tips-to-up-your-twitter-game.

4

Choosing the Words

Every sport has rules, and every player knows the penalties. Break an NCAA rule and your team may have to forfeit a game. Make too many fouls, and you will be out of the game. Step out of bounds and the play ends.

Sports writing has rules, too: grammar rules, spelling rules, punctuation rules.

You may not be thrown out of the game for breaking a writing rule, but there is a penalty. With each mistake, you lose credibility with your audience and your employer. Make too many mistakes that someone else has to fix or that get into the media, and you will lose your job.

Not only are there rules to learn, there's a sports idiom to master. The sports idiom is a language spoken by insiders and somewhat familiar to followers. It's a combination of sports terminology, slang and cliché that has grown up within the world of sports over the last century or more and has become sportspeak in broadcast, particularly play-by-play. The idiom is so pervasive that some of it has leaked into everyday conversation. Calling something par for the course comes from golf, to strike out or touch base comes from baseball and how about that photo finish that horse racing chipped in? You make a pit stop, spin your wheels or win by a nose. Or you might be thrown a curve, driven up the wall or find yourself behind the eight ball.

Professional writers take language rules very seriously because they know their audiences and their editors respect good writing. Bloggers, emailers, tweeters, scriptwriters, news release writers, sports writers and columnists who use correct grammar and spelling in everything they write will be regarded as professionals by everyone who reads their work.

In addition to knowing and using grammar rules, sports writers are challenged by the complexity of their audiences. Sports fans range from the novice to the know-it-all. The sports writer must craft stories informative and entertaining enough for the novice to enjoy and complete, accurate and technical enough to hold the attention of the die-hard sports fan.

WRITING IN NEWS STYLE

Sports reporters are journalists who specialize in writing and broadcasting about sports and the people who participate in them. Sports stories are based on facts and verifiable information and are written in journalistic style.

Look carefully at the structure of sports stories online, in the newspaper and in sports magazines. In general, a journalistic-style story will have

- Facts and information.
- Short, subject-verb-object sentences.
- Short paragraphs.
- Short words with precise meanings.
- Action verbs.
- Quotations with attribution.
- Numbers and statistics.

And it will not have

- Misspelled words.
- Grammatical errors.
- Misplaced modifiers.
- Weasel words.
- Clichés.
- Euphemisms.
- Redundant phrases.
- Gender-biased language or -isms.

Facts and Information

Sports stories are based on facts, information and quotations. Information is gathered from sources or observed by the reporter. If the information is used in the form of a quotation or paraphrase, it is attributed to the source. Quotations may contain the source's opinion, if the source is identified.

Stories do not include the reporter's opinion. Opinion is reserved for columns and should be clearly labeled as such. In print or online, a column is identified by the writer's column head and byline. In broadcast, opinion segments are introduced as opinion and often delivered by the author in a neutral setting so viewers have audio and visual cues by which to identify opinion as different from game coverage or sports news.

The difference between a fact and an opinion can be as simple as a few words.

Fact: The game went two extra innings during which the Cubs changed pitchers three times.