

Electronic Media Research Series

SPORTS MEDIA

Transformation, Integration, Consumption



Edited by Andrew C. Billings

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Sports Media

Looking toward a future with increasingly hybridized media offerings, *Sports Media: Transformation, Integration, Consumption* examines sports media scholarship and its role in facilitating understanding of the increasingly complex world of sports media. Acknowledging that consumer demand for sports media content has influenced nearly every major technology innovation of the past several decades, chapters included herein assess existing scholarship while posing important future questions about the role sports media will increasingly play in the daily lives of sports fans worldwide. Contributions from well-known scholars are supplemented by work from younger researchers doing new work in this area.

Developed for the Broadcast Education Association's Research Symposium series, this volume will be required reading for graduate and undergraduate students in communication studies, sociology, marketing, and sports management, and will serve as a valuable reference for future research in sports media.

Andrew C. Billings (Ph.D., Indiana University, 1999) studies sports communication and mass media, particularly focusing on the portrayal of identity within televised sport. He has received several teaching awards for his work in the classroom. His scholarship has been published in areas as diverse as *Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, and *Mass Communication and Society* and he has won over a dozen top paper awards from conferences for the National Communication Association, Broadcast Education Association, and Southern States Communication Association. He has published over 40 refereed journal articles and book chapters and delivered over 60 research presentations in national and international forums.

Electronic Media Research Series

Sponsored by the Broadcast Education Association

Series editor's foreword

In 2008, the Broadcast Education Association initiated a new program promoting original research. The result was the creation of the BEA Research Symposium and publications. The annual symposium forums, chaired by national scholars, are organized presentations, papers and discussion of leading-edge research within the BEA Annual Conference.

The purpose of the BEA Symposium is as a catalyst for future research. It honors leading scholars of the discipline and features their work along with new and upcoming scholarship.

New to the BEA Symposium in 2010 is a partnership with Taylor and Francis to publish symposium research through the newly established Electronic Media Research Series, created for this purpose. Along with the BEA Research Symposium Series, this publication provides a keystone research text for those researching within the discipline. It will bring the reader up to date relative to the topic, and it reflects the current work within the field as well as providing a comprehensive bibliography and index, facilitating future research.

The BEA launches this Symposium Publication Series with Andrew C. Billings, *Sports Media: Transformation, Integration, and Consumption*. It is the first in the BEA Electronic Media Series and will be a milestone for all future research in sports media.

Sincerely,

Donald G. Godfrey, Ph.D.
BEA Research Committee Chair
Symposium Series, Executive Editor

Preface and acknowledgements

When I first agreed to be the 2010 Broadcast Education Association Research Symposium Chair, I did not realize a book was attached to the project. When I found out that the fruits of the Symposium on *Sports Media: Transformation, Integration, Consumption* would result in a forward-thinking volume of the same name, I was simultaneously overwhelmed and exhilarated by the prospect. Ultimately, the exhilaration superseded any trepidation I felt about advancing a project of this scope. What you ultimately read here should be a minority-portion of “assessment of the field” mixed with a heavier dose of “trends and future directions.” I am honored and proud of the work people contributed to this book that collectively sets a tone for future editions in this BEA/Routledge series.

Sports Media: Transformation, Integration, Consumption is, at its core, a fusion project. Contributions are made by scholars who have been central to sports media discussions for decades, but contributions are also included by newly minted Ph.D.’s and, in one case, a talented and ambitious graduate student. This is also a fusion of disciplinary understandings, as sports media is a field that has been parsed out among many different schools of thought and epistemological underpinnings. The chapters complement each other while, hopefully, exuding a sense of scope for a field that has many tentacles and a rapidly increasing profile.

The dichotomous nature of traditional and new media offerings is certainly present in the subjects explored in the book. What we ultimately know is that new media are doing more to expand the sports media universe than they are being used to replace some traditional venues for sport consumption, namely radio and television. Chapters 1–6 are offered by senior scholars who were invited to the day-long symposium offered by the Broadcast Education Association on April 15, 2010. I selected people for a variety of reasons that range from diversity of scholarship to the ability of their work to transcend national boundaries and provide insight

about nations in the plural sense. I also selected them because they are key contributors to the scholarly discussion and have been for quite some time. The topics and approaches of their scholarship are quite diverse, but what remains uniform is the rigor of their efforts; it is all of the highest quality. Chapters 7–10 were competitively selected papers from a national competition and were vetted by the senior scholars mentioned for Chapters 1–6. Together, they offer a wider range of scholarship as it relates to new media influences, while also giving any “fan” of sports media an opportunity to note the promise of many scholars in the earlier stages of their careers. The future is, indeed, quite bright. Chapter 11 is then a piece I wrote that attempts to survey the field and offer directions for years to come; a shorter version of it served as the closing address for the symposium. The book concludes with a compilation of seminal works in the field, again as broad and diverse as one would imagine for a subject as interdisciplinary as sports media.

In the end, what I hope this book provides is a seminal work appropriate for graduate courses in sports media while also being a guidebook for anyone wishing to embark upon scholarship in this academic area. The goal of any edited volume is to impart a wide variety of insights that no single person could possibly accomplish. I believe we have attained that lofty objective.

Finally, there are so many people to thank. I will attempt to do so knowing that words will not do justice to the mix of support, insight, and enthusiasm they exhibited that ultimately gave me a sense of direction and confidence in a unity of purpose. Typically, when I first hear about a potential project, I take at least a few days – often a few weeks – to determine whether the project is worth the amount of time and effort that will be necessary. When Glenda Williams called me to query if I would be willing to be the Broadcast Education Association Research Symposium Chair, I broke that general rule, eagerly agreeing to the task immediately. While I saw it as an honor to be selected, what really appealed was the opportunity to work with great people (inside BEA and out) and to advance a sub-discipline within our field that I believe to be of great import. Not once did I regret my decision to serve, as the experience has been tremendous. I must thank not only Glenda Williams but also Donald Godfrey, who has been a steady resource while always allowing me a great deal of editorial latitude, and to Heather Birks, who could always answer my questions (and there were many) effectively and immediately. The BEA is in great hands with leaders like this. Couple that with the positive words and constant advocate that is Linda Bathgate at Routledge and my experience has been quite blessed.

I also must acknowledge the tremendous work of seven senior scholars who aided the process every step of the way, including time-consuming tasks such as evaluating the submissions for the paper competition. Those scholars are: Jennings Bryant, Walter Gantz, Marie Hardin, Arthur Raney, Michael Real, David Rowe, and Lawrence Wenner. Their works are represented in this volume not only in their contributed chapters but also with their insights on other chapters and with the extended reference list I compiled at the end. I see a great deal of growth in the

BEA Research Symposium and believe it will continue to grow in scope, participation, and readership in the years to come. This volume begins an annual contribution to the state of the discipline; in establishing this series, BEA and Routledge have partnered for something that should be seminal reading for people in broadcasting and electronic media.

Andrew C. Billings
2011

Contributors

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Dr. Andrew C. Billings (Ph.D., Indiana University) is Professor of Communication Studies and Director of the Pearce Center for Professional Communication at Clemson University. He is the author of over 40 journal articles and six books related to communication and sport, including *Olympic Media: Inside the Biggest Show on Television* (Routledge, 2008).

Dr. Walter Gantz (Ph.D., Michigan State University) is Professor of Telecommunications and Chair of that department at Indiana University. He has been studying sports fans for nearly 30 years as part of his interest in the ways media fit into the context of daily life.

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Dr. David Rowe (Ph.D., University of Essex, UK) is Professor of Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney (Australia). He is author of over 90 journal articles and author/editor of eight books related to media and popular culture, including *Sport, Culture and the Media* (2004).

Jimmy Sanderson (M.A., Arizona State University) is a doctoral student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. His research focuses on sports communication, particularly how social media and computer-mediated communication affects sporting practices. His work has appeared in journals such as *American Behavioral Scientist*, *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, and *Western Journal of Communication*.

Dr. Lauren Reichart Smith (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is an Assistant Professor of Public Relations at Auburn University. Her research focuses on media portrayals, specifically within the realm of sports. She has research forthcoming in the *Journal of Sports Media*.

Dr. Lawrence A. Wenner (Ph.D., University of Iowa) is the Von der Ahe Professor of Communication and Ethics in the College of Communication and Fine Arts and the School of Film and Television at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He is former editor of the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* and his books include *MediaSport* and *Media, Sports, and Society*. His most recent book (with Steven Jackson) is *Sport, Beer, and Gender: Promotional Culture and Contemporary Social Life*.

Dr. Chris Wood (Ph.D., University of Georgia) is Owner and President of JWA Public Communications in Athens, Georgia. He has 20 years of professional experience researching, planning, executing and evaluating public communications campaigns, which often provide stimuli for scholarly work. In addition, he has published a handful of conference papers, journal articles, and/or book chapters, while teaching part-time and serving on the advisory board of the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia.

Contents

<i>Series editor's foreword</i>	vii
<i>Preface and acknowledgements</i>	viii
<i>Contributors</i>	xi
Introduction	1
<i>Andrew C. Billings</i>	
1 Keeping Score: Reflections and suggestions for scholarship in sports and media	7
<i>Walter Gantz</i>	
2 Theorizing the Sports–Television Dream Marriage: Why sports fit television so well	19
<i>Michael Real</i>	
3 The Power of a Fragmented Collective: Radical pluralist feminism and technologies of the self in the sports blogosphere	40
<i>Marie Hardin</i>	
4 Mocking the Fan for Fun and Profit: Sports dirt, fanship identity, and commercial narratives	61
<i>Lawrence A. Wenner</i>	

5	Fair Ball?: Exploring the relationship between media sports and viewer morality <i>Arthur A. Raney</i>	77
6	Sports Media: Beyond broadcasting, beyond sports, beyond societies? <i>David Rowe</i>	94
7	Tweets and Blogs: Transformative, adversarial, and integrative developments in sports media <i>Jimmy Sanderson and Jeffrey W. Kassing</i>	114
8	From Analysis to Aggression: The nature of fan emotion, cognition and behavior in Internet sports communities <i>Lance V. Porter, Chris Wood, and Vincent L. Benigni</i>	128
9	The Less You Say: An initial study of gender coverage in sports on Twitter <i>Lauren Reichart Smith</i>	146
10	Sport, Identities, and Consumption: The construction of sport at ESPN.com <i>Lindsey J. Meán</i>	162
11	Reaction Time: Assessing the record and advancing a future of sports media scholarship <i>Andrew C. Billings</i>	181
	<i>Appendix: Contributions to sports media scholarship: a comprehensive reference list</i>	191
	<i>Index</i>	209

INTRODUCTION

Andrew C. Billings

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

Perhaps the most telling formula for the success of a popular culture artifact regards the pairing of two concepts: ordinary person, extraordinary circumstance. Films such as *Titanic*, television shows such as *Lost*, and virtually every John Grisham novel have utilized the formula to great effect as they take a group of highly relatable people and place them in a situation far removed from the viewers' daily lives. We want the people to be like us (in a way that allows us to almost place ourselves within the narrative) but we want the circumstances to be epic and unique (to allow us to imagine what we would do in a similar predicament). The formula is time-tested and proves out in the billions of dollars that funnel through the system of popular culture each year. Fiction writers know how effective the premise of ordinary person/extraordinary circumstance works in a multitude of genres.

The nonfiction equivalent plays out quite effectively as well ... in sports media. Parasocial relationships (see Horton & Wohl, 1956 and later Auter & Palmgreen, 2000) form between the consuming audience and the narratives that take place within the mass mediated sports event. Sports fans seek any sort of connection to the players, ranging from the simplest of casual conversations to a piece of autographed memorabilia to, more recently, following their favorite athletes on websites and through social media such as Twitter and Facebook. We shower our favorite athletes with praise, offering comments about how they are "down to earth" or a "normal guy" or are just "cool." Yet they are our heroes not just because they are down to earth, but also because they tend to enact unearthly feats rather routinely. Ordinary person; extraordinary circumstance. Snowboarder Shaun White became the epitome of "cool" at the 2006 and 2010 Winter Olympics because he seemed so approachable – and then proceeded to nail a backside 1080 halfpipe trick. Indy racer Danica Patrick rose to fame by embodying an attractive feminine persona while racing at 220 miles per hour in a cluttered straightaway. We love them because they could be us, yet decidedly, in their actions, are not us.

All of this relates to this volume entitled *Sports Media: Transformation, Integration, Consumption* because, at its core, this book is about analyzing what appeals and what doesn't, what sells and what doesn't, what works and what doesn't, what is fair and what isn't. This book incorporates many points of view that jointly explore the power inherent in a sports event, whether it is a megasports event such as the Olympics or World Series that is viewed by millions, or a niche sports event such as a college volleyball game that still has been found to have a demonstrable and loyal following. Wenner (1998) coined the term "mediasport" to represent the fusion of these two entities. This book evolves from Wenner's conception, as it covers the national and the international, the male and the female, the athlete and the fan, the traditional and the new. Nevertheless, within all of these wide-ranging issues, the book still underscores information that answers fundamental questions for academics, including:

- Who consumes mediasport?
- Why do they consume mediasport?
- What are the perceived benefits from consuming mediasport?
- What is the difference between watching and consuming mediasport?
- How do traditional media interact with new media to form modern notions of mediasport?
- What trends are increasing within mediasport?
- What trends are dissipating within mediasport?
- What are the effects of mediasport within modern society?

And, perhaps most importantly:

- What can the academic community do to advance the understanding and knowledge base within mediasport scholarship?

The contributors in the book range from senior scholars who have been interrogating these complex issues for decades to new assistant professors who build on this scholarship in new and fascinating ways. They all have some sort of grounding in the communication discipline, yet they almost all interact (at academic conferences) and incorporate (in their scholarly writings) a merged interdisciplinary approach. A topic such as sports media necessitates such a broad understanding. This book advances that understanding in useful ways simultaneously theoretical and applied.

The book opens with a different type of chapter from the others that follow – a broad-view assessment of the field by Walter Gantz in Chapter 1. Gantz has been working in the field of sports communication for several decades, often posing the difficult questions about measuring and understanding audiences for sports media telecasts. The chapter sets the table for what Gantz calls the "feast" that is to come in the rest of the chapters. First, he offers a sense of context – both for the state of sport scholarship and also the current place in which convergence media (the

combination of traditional, new, social, and user-generated) has come to the fore at the time of this writing in 2010. Gantz offers a top 10 list for mediasport research that is informed by the seminal transactional model offered by Wenner (1989) that includes: (a) the media sports production complex, (b) the content of media sports, (c) the audience, and (d) the social system in which these elements relate to one another. Gantz then rightly blurs these issues, noting that “expanded options, shifting demographics, and advances in technology are likely to affect each of the elements.” The result is an informed and forward-thinking chapter that sets the stage for the various research chapters to come.

Chapter 2 features a detailed sense of history and theory offered by Michael Real. The pairing of sport and television is portrayed as one of maximum convenience and impact, essentially arguing for a synergy that made the fit between sport and television so beneficial in the latter part of the 20th Century. Real queries, “What do we find when we deconstruct the components of this arranged marriage?” The answer offered in the chapter involves notions of suspense, intimacy, intertextuality, and more that result in the “enriching the sense of witnessing, understanding, and feeling the physical reality.”

Chapters 3 and 4 mesh nicely with each other, examining the role of gender in divergent and yet ultimately complementary manners. First, Chapter 3 is written by Marie Hardin, focusing on the creators and authors behind prominent women’s sports blogs. Incorporating the work of Michel Foucault, Hardin interviews contributors to Women’s Talk Sports, a blog collective devoted to the advancement and promotion of women’s athletics. Deflecting direct notions of who is to blame for the diminishment of women’s sports within mainstream media, the respondents ultimately gauge equity in many ways, asking questions such as “Does it flip?” when bloggers ask whether certain depictions or narratives could ever be applied to men athletes. Hardin concludes that such forms of new media allow both men and women to reshape traditional notions about feminism, “reforming their own identities, engaging in ethical practices, and countering technologies of power” in the process.

Lawrence Wenner’s writings offer a natural transition in Chapter 4, as he tackles gender from the perspective of the potential impact on perceptions of masculinity. Wenner notes that “narrative constructions of the sports fan, alongside those of other kinds of fans, continue to pathologize fanship as obsessive, hysterical, or as a form of psychological compensation.” This becomes one area in which mediasport being predominantly male results in a mocking of the sports fan that is inherently masculinized. Wenner uses popular television advertisements as the artifacts to create five archetypes, exploring the commodified male sports fan as: (1) nut case, (2) loser, (3) juvenile, (4) relationally deficient, and (5) emasculated. The result is a highly compelling case for “the strategic use of the mocked sports fan in advertising narratives to help sell to those being mocked,” namely the male sports fan.

Chapter 5 introduces the corollary often integrated into many sports narratives: the infusion of morality into the layered discussions that surround how we interpret