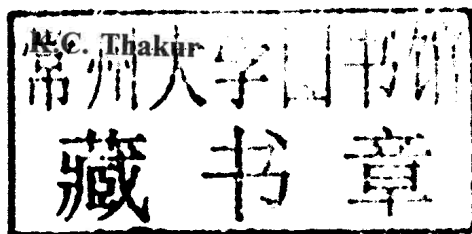


SPORTS JOURNALISM

K. C. THAKUR



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Preface

This Handbook covers the breadth of sports and media scholarship, one of the up-and-coming topics bridging media entertainment, sports management, and popular culture. Organized into historical, institutional, spectator, and critical studies perspectives, this volume brings together the work of many researchers into one quintessential volume, defining the full scope of the subject area. Editors Arthur Raney and Jennings Bryant have recruited contributors from around the world to identify and synthesize the research representing numerous facets of the sports-media relationship.

As a unique collection on a very timely topic, the volume offers chapters examining the development of sports media; production, coverage, and economics of sports media; sports media audiences; sports promotion; and race and gender issues in sports and media. Unique in its orientation and breadth, the Handbook of Sports and Media is destined to play a major role in the future development of this fast-growing area of study. It is a must-have work for scholars, researchers, and graduate students working in media entertainment, media psychology, mass media/mass communication, sports marketing and management, popular communication, popular culture, and cultural studies.

—*Author*

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Introduction

Sports journalism is a form of journalism that reports on sports topics and events. While the sports department within some newspapers has been mockingly called the *toy department*, because sports journalists do not concern themselves with the 'serious' topics covered by the news desk, sports coverage has grown in importance as sport has grown in wealth, power and influence.

Sports journalism is an essential element of any news media organization. Sports journalism includes organizations devoted entirely to sports reporting — newspapers such as *L'Equipe* in France, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* in Italy, *Marca* in Spain, and the now defunct *Sporting Life* in Britain, American magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* and the *Sporting News*, all-sports talk radio stations, and television networks such as Eurosport, ESPN and The Sports Network (TSN).

SPORTS JOURNALISTS' ACCESS

Sports teams are not always very accommodating to journalists: in the United States, while they allow reporters into locker rooms for interviews and some extra information, sports teams provide extensive information support, even if reporting it is unfavorable to them.

Elsewhere in the world, particularly in the coverage of soccer, the **journalist's** role is often barely tolerated by the clubs and players.

For example, despite contractual media requirements in the English Premier League, prominent managers Sir Alex Ferguson (of Manchester United) and Harry Redknapp (first at Portsmouth, now at Tottenham) have refused to conduct post-match interviews with the BBC because of unfavorable coverage by the television channel's news department.

As with reporters on other news beats, sports journalism involves investigating the story, rather than simply relying on press releases and prepared statements from the sports team, coaching staff, or players. Sports journalists verify facts given to them by the athletes, teams, leagues, or organizations they are covering.

Access for sports journalists is usually easier for north American professional and intercollegiate sports such as football, ice hockey, basketball and baseball where the commercial relationship between media coverage and increased ticket, merchandise, or advertising sales, is better understood.

SOCIO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Major League Baseball gave print journalists a special role in its games: They were named official scorers and kept statistics that were considered part of the official record of the league. Active sportswriters were removed from this role in 1980. Although their statistical judgment calls could not affect the outcome of a game in progress, the awarding of errors and wins/saves were seen as powerful influences on pitching staff selections and play lists when coach decisions seemed unusual. The removal of writers, who could benefit fiscally from sensational sports stories, was done to remove this perception of a conflict of interest, and to increase statistics volume, consistency, and accuracy.

Sports stories occasionally transcend the games themselves and take on socio-political significance: Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in baseball is an example of this. Modern controversies regarding the hyper-compensation of top athletes, the use of anabolic

steroids and other, banned performance-enhancing drugs, and the cost to local and national governments to build sports venues and related infrastructure, especially for Olympic Games, also demonstrate how sports intrudes on to the news pages.

Sportswriters regularly face more deadline pressure than other reporters because sporting events tend to occur late in the day and closer to the deadlines many organizations must observe. Yet they are expected to use the same tools as news journalists, and to uphold the same professional and ethical standards. They must take care not to show bias for any team.

Many of the most talented and respected print journalists have been sportswriters.

SPORTS JOURNALISM IN EUROPE

The tradition of sports reporting attracting some of the finest writers in journalism can be traced to the coverage of sport in Victorian England, where several modern sports - such as association football, cricket, athletics and rugby - were first organized and codified into something resembling what we would recognize today.

Cricket, somewhat like baseball in the United States, possibly because of its esteemed place in society, has regularly attracted the most elegant of writers.

The *Manchester Guardian*, in the first half of the 20th Century, employed Neville Cardus as its cricket correspondent as well as its music critic. Cardus was later knighted for his services to journalism. One of his successors, John Arlott, who became a worldwide favorite because of his radio commentaries on the BBC, and was also known for his poetry.

The first London Olympic Games in 1908 attracted such widespread public interest that many newspapers assigned their very best-known writers to the event. The *Daily Mail* even had Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at the White City Stadium to cover the finish of the first ever 26-mile, 385-yard Marathon.

Such was the drama of that race, in which Dorando Pietri collapsed within sight of the finishing line when leading, that Conan Doyle led a public subscription campaign to see the gallant Italian, having been denied the gold medal through his disqualification, awarded a special silver cup, which was presented by Queen Alexandra.

And the public imagination was so well caught by the event that annual races in Boston, Ma, and London, and at future Olympics, were henceforward staged over exactly the same, 26-mile, 385-yard distance, the official length of the event worldwide to this day.

The London race, called the Polytechnic Marathon and originally staged over the 1908 Olympic route from outside the royal residence at Windsor Castle to White City, was first sponsored by the *Sporting Life*, which in those Edwardian times was a daily newspaper which sought to cover all sporting events, rather than just a betting paper for horse racing and greyhounds that it became in the years after the Second World War.

In France, *L'Auto*, the predecessor of *L'Equipe*, had already played an equally influential part in the sporting fabric of society when it announced in 1903 that it would stage an annual bicycle race around the country. The Tour de France was born, and sports journalism's role in its foundation is still reflected today in the leading rider wearing a yellow jersey - the color of the paper on which *L'Auto* was published (in Italy, the Giro d'Italia established a similar tradition, with the leading rider wearing a jersey the same pink color as the sponsoring newspaper, *La Gazzetta*).

SPORTS STARS IN THE PRESS BOX

After the Second World War, the sports sections of British national daily and Sunday newspapers continued to expand, to the point where many papers now have separate standalone sports sections; some Sunday tabloids even have sections, additional to the sports pages, devoted solely to the previous day's football reports. In some respects, this has replaced the earlier practice of many

regional newspapers which - until overtaken by the pace of modern electronic media - would produce special results editions rushed out on Saturday evenings.

Some newspapers, such as the *The Sunday Times*, with 1924 Olympic 100 m champion Harold Abrahams, or the London *Evening News* using former England cricket captain Sir Leonard Hutton, began to adopt the policy of hiring former sports stars to pen columns, which were often ghost written. Some such ghosted columns, however, did little to further the reputation of sports journalism, which is increasingly becoming the subject of academic scrutiny of its standards.

Many “ghosted” columns were often run by independent sports agencies, based in Fleet Street or in the provinces, who had signed up the sports star to a contract and then syndicated their material among various titles. These agencies included Pardons, or the Cricket Reporting Agency, which routinely provided the editors of the Wisden cricket almanac, and Hayters (now known as Infostrada Hayters).

Sportswriting in Britain has attracted some of the finest journalistic talents. The *Daily Mirror*'s Peter Wilson, Hugh McIlvanney, first at *The Observer* and lately at the *Sunday Times*, Ian Wooldridge of the *Daily Mail* and soccer writer Brian Glanville, best known at the *Sunday Times*, and columnist Patrick Collins, of the *Mail on Sunday*, five times the winner of the Sports Writer of the Year Award.

Many became household names in the late 20th Century through their trenchant reporting of often earth-shattering events that have transcended the back pages and been reported on the front pages: the Massacre at the Munich Olympics in 1972; Muhammad Ali's fight career, including his 1974 title bout against George Foreman; the Heysel Stadium disaster; and the career highs and lows of the likes of George Best and Lester Piggott and other high profile stars.

McIlvanney and Wooldridge, who died in March 2007, aged 75, both enjoyed careers that saw them frequently work in television.

During his career, Wooldridge became so famous that, like the sports stars he reported upon, he hired the services of IMG, the agency founded by the American businessman, Mark McCormack, to manage his affairs. And Glanville wrote several books, including novels, as well as scripting the memorable official film to the 1966 World Cup staged in England.

SPECIALIST SPORTS AGENCIES

The 1950s and 1960s saw a rapid growth in sports coverage, both in print and on broadcast media. It also saw the development of specialist sports news and photographic agencies. For example, photographer Tony Duffy founded the picture agency AllSport in south London shortly after the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and, through some outstanding photography (such as Duffy's iconic image of the American long jumper Bob Beamon flying through the air towards his world record at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics) and the astute marketing of its images, saw the business grow into a multi-million pound, worldwide concern that ultimately would be bought and re-named Getty Images.

SPORTS BOOKS

Increasingly, sports journalists have turned to long-form writing, producing popular books on a range of sporting topics, including biographies, history and investigations.

In London, through the 1980s and 1990s, one shop on Charing Cross Road - the area known for its book shops - was entirely devoted to sport, although the growth of online book sales through websites such as Amazon eventually led to the closure of Sports Books.

This was not before, though, the establishment, through sponsorship from William Hill, the bookmakers, of an annual prize for the sports book of the year. This was first held in 1989, when Dan Topolski's book about one of the most controversial University Boat Races was declared the winner.

The status of the awards, and of sports books generally, were enhanced greatly in 1992 when Nick Hornby's first novel, *Fever Pitch*, took first prize. Both *Fever Pitch* and *True Blue: The Oxford Boat Race Mutiny* have subsequently been adapted into feature-length motion pictures. Only one author, Donald McRae, in 1996 and 2002, has won the William Hill award more than once.

Unsurprisingly, given cricket writers' often literary aspirations and the appetite for books on cricket, the summer game has four times been the subject of the prize-winning book, the same number as football.

The award has not been without controversy in recent years. In 2000, the award went for the first time to a "ghosted" book, Lance Armstrong's *It's Not About the Bike*. At the time, some also observed the irony of the award going to the American Tour de France winner, when, in 1990, Paul Kimmage's stern critique of doping in cycling, *Rough Ride*, had been declared the winner.

The judges - the same panel is used each year - were also criticised in 2006 when they chose Geoffrey Ward's *Unforgivable Blackness*, because it had been first published in 2004.

The 2007 winner of the award, announced at a ceremony staged at Waterstones, Piccadilly, on November 27, was *Provided You Don't Kiss Me*, the account of local newspaper reporter Duncan Hamilton working with the controversial Nottingham Forest manager, Brian Clough.

Winners of the William Hill Sports Book of the Year

2008: *Coming Back To Me*, Marcus Trescothick (with Peter Hayter)

2007: *Provided You Don't Kiss Me*, Duncan Hamilton

2006: *Unforgivable Blackness*, Geoffrey Ward

2005: *My Father and other Working Football Class Heroes*, Gary Imlach

2004: *Basil D'Oliveira*, Peter Osborne

- 2003: *Broken Dreams*, Tom Bower
- 2002: *In Black & White*, Donald McRae
- 2001: *Seabiscuit - The True Story Of 3 Men & A Race Horse*, Laura Hillenbrand
- 2000: *It's Not About the Bike - My Journey Back to Life*, Lance Armstrong
- 1999: *A Social History of English Cricket*, Derek Birley
- 1998: *Angry White Pyjamas*, Robert Twigger
- 1997: *A Lot Of Hard Yakka*, Simon Hughes
- 1996: *Dark Trade*, Donald McRae
- 1995: *A Good Walk Spoiled*, John Feinstein
- 1994: *Football Against The Enemy*, Simon Kuper
- 1993: *Endless Winter*, Stephen Jones
- 1992: *Fever Pitch*, Nick Hornby
- 1991: *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, Thomas Hauser
- 1990: *Rough Ride*, Paul Kimmage
- 1989: *True Blue*, Dan Topolski

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND SPORT

Since the 1990s, the growing importance of sport, its impact as a global business and the huge amounts of money involved from sponsorship and in the staging of the Olympic Games and football World Cups, has also attracted the attention of well-known investigative journalists.

The sensitive nature of the relationships between sports journalists and the subjects of their reporting, as well as declining budgets experienced by most Fleet Street newspapers, has meant that such long-term projects have often emanated from television documentary makers.

Tom Bower, with his 2003 sports book of the year *Broken Dreams*, which analyzed British football, followed in the tradition established a decade earlier by Andrew Jennings and Vyv Simson with their controversial investigation of corruption within the International Olympic Committee. Jennings and Simson's *The Lords of the Rings* in many ways predicted the scandals that were to emerge around the staging of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City; Jennings would follow-up with two further books on the Olympics and one on FIFA, the world football body. Likewise, award-winning writers Duncan Mackay, of *The Guardian*, and Steven Downes unravelled many scandals involving doping, fixed races and bribery in international athletics in their 1996 book, *Running Scared*, which offered an account of the threats by a senior track official that led to the suicide of their sports journalist colleague, Cliff Temple.

But the writing of such exposes - referred to as "spitting in the soup" by Paul Kimmage, the former Tour de France professional cyclist, who now writes for the *Sunday Times* - often requires the view of an outsider who is not compromised by the need of day-to-day dealings with sportsmen and officials, as required by "beat" correspondents.

The stakes can be high when upsetting sport's powers: when in 2007, the English FA opted to switch its multi-million pound contract for UK coverage rights of the FA Cup and England international matches from the BBC to rival broadcasters ITV, one of the reasons cited was that the BBC had been too critical of the performances of the England football team.

SPORTS JOURNALISM ORGANIZATIONS

Most countries have their own national association of sports journalists. Many sports also have their own clubs and associations for specialist journalists. These organizations tend not to operate as trades unions, but do attempt to maintain the standard of press provision at sports venues, oversee fair accreditation procedures and to celebrate high standards of sports journalism.

In Britain, the Sports Journalists' Association was founded in 1948. It stages two prestigious awards events, an annual Sports Awards ceremony which recognises outstanding performances by British sportsmen and women during the previous year, and the British Sports Journalism Awards, the industry's "Oscars", sponsored by UK Sport and presented each March.

Originally founded as the Sports Writers' Association, following a merger with the Professional Sports Photographers' Association in 2002 the organization changed its title to the more inclusive SJA.

Its President is the veteran broadcaster and columnist, Sir Michael Parkinson.

The SJA represents the British sports media on the British Olympic Association's press advisory committee and acts as a consultant to organizers of major events who need guidance on media requirements as well as seeking to represent its members' interests in a range of activities.

In March 2008, Martin Samuel, then the chief football correspondent of *The Times*, was named British Sportswriter of the Year, the first time any journalist had managed to win the award three years in succession.

At the same awards, Jeff Stelling, of Sky Sports, was named Sports Broadcaster of the Year for the third time, a prize determined by a ballot of SJA members. Stelling won the vote again the following year, when the *Sunday Times*'s Paul Kimmage won the interviewer of the year prize for a fifth time.

The International Sports Press Association, AIPS, was founded in 1924 during the Olympic Games in Paris, at the headquarters of the Sporting Club de France, by Frantz Reichel, the press chief of the Paris Games, and the Belgian, Victor Boin.

The first statutes of AIPS mentioned these objectives:

- to enhance the cooperation between its member associations in defending sport and the professional interest of their members.

- to strengthen the friendship, solidarity and common interests between sports journalists of all countries.
- to assure the best possible working conditions for the members.

AIPS operates through a system of continental sub-associations and national associations, and liaises closely with some of the world's biggest sports federations, including the International Olympic Committee, FIFA, football's world governing body and the IAAF, the international track and field body.

FANZINES AND BLOGS

Through the 1970s and '80s, a rise in "citizen journalism" in Europe was witnessed in the rapid growth in popularity of soccer "fanzines" - cheaply printed magazines written by fans for fans that bypassed often stilted official club match programs and traditional media. Many continue today and thrive. Some authors have been adopted by their clubs - Jim Munro, once editor of the West Ham United fanzine *Fortune's Always Dreaming*, was hired by the club to write for its matchday magazine and is now sports editor of The Sun Online. Other titles, such as the irreverent monthly soccer magazine *When Saturday Comes*, have effectively gone mainstream.

The advent of the internet has seen much of this fan-generated energy directed into sports blogs. Ranging from team-centric blogs to those that cover the sports media itself, Deadspin.com, ProFootballTalk.com, AOL Fanhouse, the blogs in the Yardbarker Network, and others have garnered massive followings.

Blogging has also been taken up by sportsmen and women such as Curt Schilling, Paula Radcliffe, Greg Oden, Donovan McNabb, and Chris Cooley.

How objective is our journalism?

We, as sports journalists, stand accused of complicity by the latest issue of the *British Journalism Review*. We are said to be witting