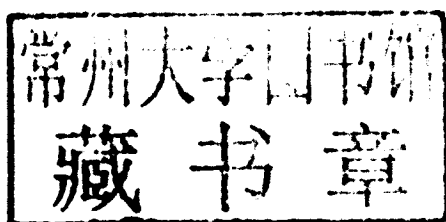NEIL FARRINGTON,
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RACE, RACISM AND SPORTS JOURNALISM

Race, Racism and Sports Journalism

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Race, Racism and Sports Journalism

Beginning with a theoretical discussion of race, sport and media, this book critically examines issues of race, racism and sports journalism and offers practical advice on sports reporting, including a discussion of guidelines for ethical journalism.

In a series of case studies, representations of race are explored through historical and contemporary analysis of international media coverage, including online and digital platforms. The background and impacts of these representations is also discussed through interviews with athletes and sports journalists. Subjects covered include:

- cricket in the UK, Australian and Asian media, with particular focus on Pakistan;
- athletics and media representations of athletes, including a study of the reporting of South African runner Caster Semenya;
- football and the under-representation of British Asians, with an analysis of how race is constructed in the digital arena;
- boxing with particular reference to Muhammad Ali, America and Islam;
- Formula One and analysis of the media reporting, international spectator response and racism towards Lewis Hamilton, described in the media as the first black driver.

Finally, the book analyses the make-up of sports journalism, examining the causes and consequences of a lack of diversity within the profession.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ASA	Athletics South Africa
BAWA	British Athletics Writers Association
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCOMS	Black Collective of Media in Sport
BME	black or minority ethnic
BNP	British National Party
BOA	British Olympic Association
CRT	critical race theory
F1	Formula One
FA	Football Association
FC	Football Club
IAAF	International Association of Athletics Federations
ICC	International Cricket Council
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MP	Member of Parliament
NCTJ	National Council for the Training of Journalists
NFL	National Football League
NOI	Nation of Islam
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
OCA	Otago Cricket Association
PCB	Pakistan Cricket Board
PCC	Press Complaints Commission
PFA	Professional Footballers Association
PR	public relations
SJA	Sports Journalists' Association
TKO	technical knockout

UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WBC	World Boxing Council
WCM	*Wisden Cricket Monthly*
ZRF	Zesh Rehman Foundation

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Sports reporting has a long tradition in the press, but has often been seen as 'soft' journalism. However, during recent times, sports journalism has moved from the toy department to the finance department. Where once the profession was looked upon with amusement or scorn, it is now seen as crucial to the incomes and audiences of many media organizations. As Steen (2008, p21) says: 'Newspaper editors once referred to their sports desks as the toy department. In recognition of the seemingly unslakeable public thirst for information, and the profits engendered by satisfying that demand, the sneering has all but abated.'

Colin Gibson, former sports editor at the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, has noted that:

> Sports and papers have both changed. Gone are the days when sports just meant filling up a couple of pages at the back. Sport is now high profile. It's a serious business involving corporate finance, so papers have to treat it with more seriousness, while appreciating that it's part of the entertainment industry as well.
>
> (cited in Boyle, 2006a, p92)

Sport has become increasingly important to the media (Rowe, 2009). Recent years have witnessed a huge growth in the amount and prominence of sports coverage across broadcast, print and online media. Perhaps the most notable example of this is to be found in the quality press, where there have been huge increases in the numbers of pages and proportion of editorial space devoted to sports coverage. For example, sports reporting in *The Times* almost doubled between 1974 and 2004, rising from 11 per cent of editorial to 21 per cent. Similarly, *The Guardian*'s coverage increased from 11 to 17 per cent during the same period (Boyle, 2006a). Sport has also moved from the back pages to the news pages with stories about corruption, Olympic legacies and financial takeovers becoming staples of television and newspaper headlines. Furthermore, with the rise of celebrity culture, sports stars are no longer confined to

the back pages. Increasingly, they find themselves open to public and media scrutiny of their private and social lives.

For some, these changes provide further evidence of the *dumbing down* of our media, in which the trivial, entertaining and ephemeral are given ever greater attention (Franklin, 1997). This perspective taps into a traditional view of sports journalists as being nothing more than 'fans with typewriters'. For example, Harcup (2004, p61), in a discussion about journalism's relationship with 'truth', makes the following assessment: 'We might expect sports journalism to be informed by the subjective, even though we trust journalists to be accurate when giving us the score. At the end of the day, it's not a matter of life and death – it's just entertainment. News reporting is different.' Journalism as a whole has long faced questions about its status and whether it can truly be classed as a profession or, rather, as a trade or craft (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2005). Such questions can equally be asked of sports journalists – both in the way that they perceive themselves, and the way in which they are perceived by fellow journalists.

However, there is evidence to suggest that sports journalism is becoming more and more professionalized. A growing number of sports reporters are being professionally trained, using specialist skills and being required to work across different sections of media organizations (Boyle, 2006b). Such characteristics increasingly help to set the professional sports journalist apart from the part-time blogger, citizen journalist or 'fan with an i-phone'. These changes have coincided with the increased economic importance of sport to media outlets. As Boyle (2006a, p167) comments: 'As more space is devoted to sports journalism at the broadsheet/compact end of the market, this area increasingly demands that sports journalists are coming with a strong journalistic background as opposed to simply a passion for sport.'

These changes in the quantity, prominence and perception of sports journalism are due to a number of factors. In the case of newspapers, they must be viewed as part of attempts to gain new and loyal audiences in an ever-more competitive market. As Andrews (2005, p2) says: 'The British newspaper market is the most competitive in the world, and increasingly, that competition takes place on the sports pages.' Investment in sports pages is aimed at attracting younger, professional male readerships (Boyle, 2006a, p51).

This investment has coincided with wider cultural shifts in the popularity and positioning of sport within society. With the ever increasing globalization of media and culture, combined with the global diaspora of peoples, sporting passions have transcended national boundaries. This has led to sport becoming ever more appealing to the media as it has become increasingly interesting to a global audience. For example, more than 16 million people attended UK Football League matches in the 2010/2011 season, compared to 10 million in 1992. The Premier League was also followed by a global television audience of billions, particularly in the Far East, Middle East and Caribbean. Of course, this public appeal is, in part, a consequence of increased media coverage. As Rowe (2004,

2005) has observed, the boundaries of sport and the sports media have become increasingly blurred and their fortunes entwined. In fact, he claims: 'Newspapers and the wider media have become so intimately involved in sport – and vice versa – as to suggest a convergence of these formally (and formerly) separate institutions' (Rowe, 2005, p127).

The third character in this marriage of mutual benefit is television. Andrews (2005, p6) observes: 'Much of the recent growth of interest in sport has been driven by the media, in particular satellite television, which has bought rights to major sporting events and promoted them vigorously as one of the most effective ways of selling subscriptions to its services.' The influx of money into sport (particularly football) in the form of broadcasting rights has created a lucrative feeding ground on which sports stars, sports journalism and broadcasters can all grow fat together. Rather than providing further competition for sports journalism, television has helped to create a culture in which sport, and sports stars as both athletes and celebrities, increasingly take centre stage. The emergence of online, social and interactive media further fuels this appetite for sports news. As Boyle (2006a, p52) says: 'Far from crippling sports journalism in the print media, the growth of sports broadcasting and online coverage has actually helped drive readers to the print media.'

However, despite its increasing prominence, sports journalism has received relatively little academic attention to date. There are some practical guides to sports journalism (Andrews, 2005; Steen, 2008) that provide functional advice on techniques such as match reporting and sourcing. There have also been some limited attempts to place sports reporting in wider social contexts (Boyle, 2006a; Rowe, 2009). However, issues of 'race' and racism, and how they are reported, have received very little attention in these texts. For example, Andrews (2005) in *Sports Journalism: A Practical Introduction* notes that sports journalists should avoid 'isms' such as sexism, racism and ageism. While the tone of this is commendable, it does not really acknowledge the complex nature of 'race' and racism. Once again, these categories are given only fleeting attention.

In contrast, the relationships between sport and 'race' have received far more analysis (Carrington and McDonald, 2001b; Ross, 2005; Hylton, 2009; Burdsey, 2010; Carrington, 2010; Hundley and Billings, 2010; Spracklen and Long, 2010). However, most of these studies only give passing attention to the role of the media. Where the media has been more foregrounded, studies have tended to come from the wider fields of sociological, media and communications research rather than journalism studies directly (Wenner, 1998; Brookes, 2002; Bernstein and Blain, 2003; Rowe, 2004; Boyle and Haynes, 2009; Kennedy and Hills, 2009). Research in this area has tended to focus on certain elements within sports coverage, such as stereotyping, portrayals of national identity and representations of gender. Researchers have done empirical work looking at 'race' and racisms in sport, analysing issues such as participation and spectatorship, and interviewing professional athletes. Significantly, though, few

studies have historically analysed the shifting nature of 'race' and racism in *sports journalism* with the aid of extensive empirical work. This is an important gap in research given the increasing social and cultural prominence of sports journalism and the fact that sports reporting has the power and ability to shape people's opinions on contentious issues such as 'race', racism, ethnicity, nationalism and belonging (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). It is a gap which this book seeks to start to address.

Reporting 'race': Guidelines and regulation

In the UK, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) sets out guidelines for the reporting of 'race' in its code of practice. The guideline on discrimination states the following:

1   The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.
2   Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.

There are three key aspects of this for journalists to have in mind. First, reference to someone's 'race' must only be made if it is deemed 'genuinely relevant' to the story. Second, if such reference is made, it must not be 'prejudicial or pejorative'. Third, the regulation only applies to the reporting of an individual and therefore does not cover, for example, references to groups or nations of people.

This third aspect of the guideline is contentious and has provoked criticism of the PCC. As Frost (2004, p114) commented:

> The PCC's insistence that only discrimination against individuals breaches the code and that complaints about racism affecting groups of people are really a matter of taste and decency, and therefore not something on which it can adjudicate, begins to look perverse at a time when there is considerable public concern about perceived racism in some reporting of asylum seekers, the Iraq war and terrorism.

Some of the most controversial reporting of this kind surrounded England's match against Germany in the Euro 96 football tournament. A number of tabloids used the discourse and metaphor of war in their coverage, including *The Mirror*'s infamous headline:

> ACHTUNG! SURRENDER For you Fritz, ze Euro 96 Championship is over.

The PCC received hundreds of complaints about the coverage, but ruled that it could not uphold them on the grounds the reporting was not directed at an individual. Instead, it issued guidance to editors in an attempt to avoid similar coverage during the 1998 World Cup. The statement, by then PCC Chairman Lord Wakeham, said:

> Of course newspapers have every right to report on events in a robust and partisan fashion; indeed, the Code of Practice protects that right. But that right must be balanced by responsibility. Editors should therefore seek to ensure that their reporting and their comment does nothing to incite violence, disorder or other unlawful behaviour, or to foster any form of xenophobia that could contribute directly to such incitement.

The PCC claims that the guidance had a positive impact upon toning down the nature of reporting and reducing the levels of 'jingoistic' journalism. However, it did not prevent the *Daily Star* from running a leader comment headlined: 'Frogs need a good kicking' (*Daily Star*, 2 March 1998). The leader argued that the fact that the French had 'grabbed the lion's share of World Cup tickets is typical of their slimy continental ways ... As we proved at Agincourt and Waterloo, a good kicking on their Gallic derrieres is the only language the greedy frogs understand.' Again, the PCC received complaints about the story and, again, it rejected them. Its ruling stated:

> Sporting events – and matters relating to them, such as ticketing arrangements – are bound to excite considerable emotion. Newspapers will inevitably reflect that – even if they do so in a way which some people will find offensive ... The Code is not intended to stop such robust comment. Indeed, the purpose is to protect individuals from prejudice – not to restrain partisan comment about other nations.
> (PCC: Report 42, http://www.pcc.org.uk/news/index.html?
> article=MjAwMg==)

The PCC's position is that to rule on generalized comments about groups of people 'would involve subjective views, often based on political correctness or taste, and be difficult to adjudicate upon without infringing the freedom of expression of others'. However, such arguments could be used against its existing regulations. All reporting guidelines, to some extent, 'infringe' on freedom of expression. Furthermore, decisions about whether a reference to someone's 'race' is 'genuinely relevant' or, indeed, 'pejorative or prejudiced' are inherently subjective. The fact that the PCC chooses to apply them to individuals, rather than groups, does not make them less so.

Another potential criticism of the PCC lies in the number of 'race' discrimination cases that it has addressed throughout its history. In 2010, just over 3 per cent of the 7,000-plus complaints made to the PCC were on the

grounds of discrimination. Yet, despite receiving dozens of such complaints each year, the PCC has never upheld a complaint made about discrimination in terms of 'race'.

Chris Frost (2004) made a similar observation in his review of the first ten years of the PCC. During that period, complaints about discrimination in the press rose from 1.7 per cent of PCC complaints to 10.6 per cent. But Frost found that out of an estimated 1440 complaints about discrimination, only 38 were adjudicated by the PCC, and only 6 were upheld. Three of these were about sexuality and three related to the reporting of mental health.

An explanation for this lies partly in the way that the PCC operates. It declines many complaints on the grounds that they do not properly fall within the remit of its code. Furthermore, it seeks to informally reach agreement between the complainant and publications, meaning that many do not reach the stage of being officially ruled upon. For example, in 2010, of the 7,000-plus complaints received, the PCC accepted that 750 fell within its remit and managed to successfully mediate an agreement in 544 of these cases. A spokesman for the PCC said: 'The PCC attempts wherever possible to successfully resolve complaints by mediating between complainants and publications. Whether there is an "upheld adjudication" is therefore only one small part of an overall picture.'

Another factor is that complaints which may be thought matters of discrimination are sometimes dealt with in relation to other parts of the PCC code, such as accuracy. For example, the commission has upheld a number of complaints against publications for using the term 'illegal asylum seeker' on the grounds that this is an inaccurate and nonsensical phrase.

So what does lie behind the PCC's lack of rulings on 'race' issues? Is it a case of *institutional racism*? Or does the lack of rulings reflect a lack of *overt racism* in media coverage? If this is the case, is the PCC missing more instances of *inferential* or *covert racism* within the media? These concepts will be defined and explained in the following chapter and the questions discussed throughout this book.

Outline of the book

This book examines the extent to which 'race' and racism remain live issues in the sports media and analyses how they are handled across a range of sports journalism. In approach, it seeks to combine theoretical perspectives with more practical aspects of the subject. The authors believe that theory and practice can, and should, be mutually beneficial to our understanding of the world. Theory taking no account of practice can be hollow, while practice blind to theory can be parochial. To understand concepts such as 'race' and racism, or even racial categories, one must examine the historical, social and cultural contexts in which these terms have been constructed. For example, it could be argued that the term 'negro' was acceptable up until the 1960s as a

racial description; however, in a contemporary context one now realizes that this term was based on racist understanding of human difference.

Previous literature on journalism has been 'too often polarised between journalists (practitioners) who feel academics have little to teach them, and academics whose focus on theory is in danger of denying journalists any degree of autonomy' (Harcup, 2004, p7). This book seeks to address such weaknesses in its approach. It is aided in this by the diverse backgrounds of its authors. Two of its authors come from a traditional academic background and are steeped in the theories of media and 'race'. Its other two authors come from a background of practising journalism and combine the discourses of the newsroom with those of the lecture theatre.

In this spirit, the book combines practical advice, with discussion of the sports journalism profession and its practices, and an examination of their wider social and cultural implications. New empirical material in the book comprises analysis of a range of media texts and interviews with journalists, athletes, campaigners and politicians.

The thoughts and opinions of the following people will appear throughout the book:

- Steve Cram, BBC athletics commentator, 5 April 2011;
- Steven Downes, secretary of the Sports Journalists' Association, 15 August 2011;
- Greg Gobere, sports journalist, 18 January 2011;
- Rodney Hinds, *The Voice* sports editor, 18 January 2011;
- Anna Kessel, *The Guardian* sports journalist, 10 March 2011;
- Danny Lynch, *Kick It Out*'s media and communications officer, 19 January 2011;
- Leon Mann, sports journalist and founder of the Black Collective of Media in Sport (BCOMS), 19 August 2011;
- Dean Morse, *Mirror* Newspapers head of sport, 20 August 2011;
- Lord Herman Ouseley, chair of *Kick It Out*, 18 April 2011;
- Simon Parker, *Telegraph and Argus* sports journalist, 27 April 2011;
- Rob Steen, sports journalist and senior lecturer, 6 July 2011;
- Rob Tanner, *Leicester Mercury* sports journalist, 5 May 2011;
- Simon Turnbull, *The Independent* athletics correspondent, 24 February 2011;
- Anwar Uddin, Barnet FC Anglo-Asian footballer, 7 April 2011;
- Dean Wilson, *The Mirror* cricket correspondent, 19 July 2011.

The following off-the-record interviews have also been conducted:

- British Asian journalist, 6 April 2011;
- white British scout, 2 June 2011;
- British Asian scout, 27 May 2011;
- former professional British Pakistani footballer, 19 March 2011;

- British Indian semi-professional footballer, 3 May 2011;
- British Pakistani coach, 8 June 2011;
- British Indian semi-professional footballer, 6 May 2011;
- British Indian grassroots coach, 4 April 2011.

Chapter 2 of the book provides a theoretical foundation for discussions in later chapters. It seeks to define and discuss concepts of 'race', racisms and national identity, and to contextualize them within the fields of sport and sports journalism. The chapter highlights how such terms have evolved and examines the interconnections between them. Following this, it looks at the relationships between media and minorities and theorizes how minorities, non-whites or 'Others' are represented within sport and the sports media.

Chapter 3 examines the issue of diversity, or lack of it, within sports journalism. It provides the latest statistics on the numbers of black and minority ethnic people working as journalists and taking part in journalism education. Then, through a series of interviews with reporters, editors and campaigners, it discusses the reasons behind the lack of diversity in sports journalism and looks at what can, and is, being done to improve the situation.

Chapter 4 looks at athletics. The stereotype of the 'natural' black athlete has been prevalent in the sport for decades and the chapter explores the extent to which 'race' remains an issue in contemporary reporting. It does this through three case studies. The first discusses coverage of 800m runner Caster Semenya and claims of racism from South Africa over her gender testing. The second examines reporting of sprinter Christophe Lemaitre, dubbed the 'fastest white man' after running under 10 seconds for the 100m. The section questions whether such reporting can be justified. Finally, the chapter looks at the case of Christine Ohuruogu and the extent to which 'race' played a role in some coverage of her return from a drugs ban.

Chapter 5 explores the changing representations of 'race' throughout the history of boxing. It does this through case studies analysing the discourses around three boxers from different eras: Jack Johnson, Muhammad Ali and Amir Khan. The chapter explores how each athlete has been discussed within popular culture and the sports media, analysing how each has taken a different approach to their complex, and often problematic, racial portrayals.

Chapter 6 looks at issues of colonialism, 'race' and racism, ethnicity, national identity and religion within cricket and its coverage in the media. It examines how cricket journalism was initially informed by the overt, albeit paternalistic, racism of Empire and discusses the extent to which mediated cultural and physiological stereotypes have contributed to the decline of black English cricketers during the last 10 to 15 years. In contrast, the recent emergence of