



(Source: © PCN/Corbis)

SPORTS AND THE MEDIA

Could They Survive Without Each Other?

... we're in other businesses besides the business of winning baseball games. . . . We're a media and entertainment company, not just a sports team.

—Larry Baer, San Francisco Giants president & CEO (in Costa, 2015)

We are entering a time of commercial and policy confusion for sports broadcast and advertising. . . . The supplementation, augmentation, or replacement of broadcast sports is a generational time bomb.

—Brett Hutchins, 2015 (in McHugh et al., 2015)

The NFL and the networks don't want us to experience football as a game, but as a hyper-real production of a game, in the way war movies are hyper-real versions of war.

—David Zweig, writer and musician (2012)

Sports is a stealth definer of social values, particularly among young people, and ESPN, the self-described World Wide Leader, is sports's 24/7 purveyor on countless radio stations, TV channels and websites.

—Robert Lipyte, sports journalist (2015)

Chapter Outline

Characteristics of the Media Sports and Media: A Two-Way Relationship
Images and Narratives in Media Sports
Experiences and Consequences of Consuming Media Sports
Sport Journalism

Summary: Could Sports and the Media Survive Without Each Other?

Learning Objectives

- Identify the major forms of media, what they provide to people, and the influence of commercial forces on media content.
- Discuss whether and how new media, including the Internet, change sport spectator experiences.
- Identify factors that influence the images and narratives presented in the media.
- Discuss how sports and the media depend on each other for commercial success.
- Identify major trends in televised sports and media rights fees.
- Identify economic and ideological factors that influence relationships between sports and the media.
- Explain why corporations that sell alcohol, tobacco, soft drinks, confectionery products (candy), and fast foods are likely to sponsor sports in the media.
- Identify ideological themes around which the media coverage of sports is constructed.
- Describe the major differences in the ways that men and women and blacks and whites are represented in media images and narratives.
- Discuss research findings on audience experiences and the media impact on sport-related behaviors, such as active participation, game attendance, and gambling.
- Identify the factors that influence relationships between sports journalists and athletes.

Mass media, local media, and social media pervade our cultures and our lives. Although each of us incorporates media into our lives in different ways, the things we read, hear, and see in the media are increasingly crucial parts of our experience. They frame and influence many of our thoughts, conversations, decisions, and actions.

We use media images and narratives as we evaluate ourselves, give meaning to other people and events, form ideas, and envision the future. This does *not* mean that we are slaves to the media or passive dupes of those who produce and present media content to us. The media don't tell us *what* to think, but they greatly influence what we *think about* and, therefore what we discuss in everyday conversations. Additionally, our experiences are clearly informed by media content, and if the media didn't exist, our lives would be different.

The Internet and social media have added a new layer to our media experiences. They enable us to go beyond consumption and create images and narratives that we incorporate into our thoughts and actions. But this doesn't occur automatically, nor does it empower us unless we use new media in strategic and informed ways to build relationships and change the world around us.

Sports and the media are interconnected parts of our lives. Sports provide content for all forms of media, and many sports depend on the media for publicity and revenues. To better understand these interconnections, five questions are considered in this chapter:

1. What are the characteristics of the media?
2. How are sports and media interconnected?
3. What images and messages are emphasized in media coverage of sports in the United States?
4. How are media involved in our sport participation and consumption?
5. What are the implications of new media for sport journalism and sportscasting?

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEDIA

Revolutionary changes are occurring in the media. The media landscape is changing rapidly and dramatically. Personal computers, the Internet, wireless technology, and mobile communication devices have propelled us into a transition from an era of multifaceted, on-demand, interactive, and personalized media content and experiences; in fact, the time spent each day watching traditional TV is now surpassed by digital media consumption (Hu, 2013). The pace and implications of this transition are influencing our personal and social lives.

Although it's important to discuss new trends and explain what may occur in the future, it is important to understand traditional media and their connections with sports.

Media research in the past often distinguished between print and electronic media. **Print media** included newspapers, magazines, *fanzines*, books, *catalogues*, *event programs*, and even *trading cards*—words and images on paper. **Electronic media** included *radio*, *television*, and *film*. But video games, the Internet, smartphones, tablets, and online publications have nearly eliminated the dividing line between these media forms.

Today, media provide *information*, *interpretation*, *entertainment*, and *opportunities for interactivity and content production*. When media content is provided for commercial purposes, entertainment is emphasized more than information, interpretation, or opportunities for interactivity and content production. In the process, media consumers become commodities sold to advertisers with the primary goal of promoting lifestyles based on consumption.

The media also put us in touch with information, experiences, people, images, and ideas outside the realm of our everyday, real-time lives. But most media content is edited and “re-presented” to us by others—producers, editors, program directors, programmers, camerapersons, writers, journalists,

commentators, sponsors, bloggers, and website providers. These people select for us information, interpretation, entertainment, and even opportunities for interactivity to achieve one or more of five goals: (1) make financial profits; (2) influence cultural values and social organization; (3) provide a public service; (4) enhance personal status and reputation; and (5) express themselves creatively or politically.

Commercial forms of sports and traditional media have always had a close relationship. Long before television, newspapers provided sports information, interpretation, and entertainment. Radio did the same. When television began to show people video images of the action, newspapers and radio, including sportswriters and announcers, were forced to change their approach to maintain sales and ratings. There are similar challenges for traditional media today as they compete with on-demand, interactive digital programming as well as privately produced content.

Power and Control in Sports Media

In nations where mass media are privately owned, the dominant goals are to make profits and to distribute content that promotes the ideas and beliefs of people in positions of power and influence. These aren't the only goals, but they are the most influential. Years ago, media expert Michael Real explained that there was no greater force in the construction of media sport reality than “commercial television and its institutionalized value system [emphasizing] profit making, sponsorship, expanded markets, competition, and competition” (1998, p. 17).

Of course, as the Internet and wireless technology extend content and access, media sport reality is now being constructed in diverse ways. This can be a contentious process as corporations and powerful interest groups attempt to control online access and content. The resulting struggle is a crucial feature of contemporary social worlds.

In nations where mass media are controlled primarily by the state, the primary goals are to influence

cultural values and social organization and provide a public service (Lund, 2007). However, state control has steadily declined as media companies have been privatized and deregulated, and as more individuals obtain online access to information, interpretation, entertainment, and opportunities for interactivity and content production.

Power relations in a society influence the priority given to the five goals that drive media content. Those who make content decisions for mass media programming act as filters as they select and create the images and messages to present. In the filtering and presentation process, these people usually emphasize images and narratives consistent with ideologies that support their interests in addition to attracting large audiences. As deregulation and private ownership have increased, the media have become hypercommercialized and media content focuses more on consumption, individualism, competition, and class inequality as natural and necessary in society. Seldom included in the content of commercial media is an emphasis on civic values, conservation, anticommercial activities, and progressive political action. In fact, when groups with anticommercial messages want to buy commercial time on television, media corporations and networks have refused to sell it to them.

There are exceptions to this pattern, but when people use mass media to challenge dominant ideologies, they often encounter difficulties. This discourages transformational programming and leads people to censor media content in ways that defer to the interests of the powerful.

We saw this in 2013 when ESPN withdrew from a partnership with PBS (the Public Broadcasting System) on a *Frontline* program investigating the NFL's handling of head injuries (Miller and Belson, 2013; Sandomin, 2013a). The two-part program, “League of Denial: The NFL's Concussion Crisis,” had just been completed when the NFL commissioner met the president of ESPN for lunch. Soon after, ESPN announced it was no longer associated with the *Frontline* program, even

though two of its top reporters continued work on the project. Both organizations denied that the \$15.2 billion media rights contract between the NFL and ESPN had been the reason ESPN disassociated itself from the PBS program. However, ESPN reporters received a clear message: censor yourself, or others will do it for you when your news reporting could jeopardize income from entertainment programming (Zirin, 2013c).

This does not mean that those who control the media ignore the truth and “force” media audiences to read, hear, and see things unrelated to reality or their interests. But it does mean that, apart from content that individuals create online, average people influence the media only through consumption and program ratings.

Therefore, the public receives edited information, interpretation, entertainment, and interactive experiences that are constructed primarily to boost

profits and maintain a business and political climate in which commercial media can thrive. In the process, people who control media are concerned with what attracts readers, listeners, and viewers within the legal limits set by government agencies and the preference parameters of individual agencies and the

Ten years ago, if you wanted to connect with fans, you had to go through a newspaper. Now we connect with them directly and immediately.

—Patrick Smyth, director of media relations, Denver Broncos (in Kienko, 2011)

tions that buy advertising time. As they make programming decisions, they see audiences as collections of consumers that can be sold to advertisers.

In the case of sports, those who control media decide not only which sports and events to cover but also the images and commentary presented in the coverage. When they do this, they play an important role in constructing the overall frameworks that people in media audiences use to define and incorporate sports in their lives (Albergoiti, 2011; Boyle, 2014; Bruce, 2013; Dart, 2012; Rowe, 2009, 2013; Wenner, 2013; Zweig, 2012).

Media Representations of Sports

Most people don't think critically about media content (Bruce, 2013). For example, when we watch sports on television, we don't often notice that the images and commentary we see and hear have been carefully presented to create engaging narratives, heighten the dramatic content of the event, and emphasize prevailing ideologies in American society, especially those that reaffirm the interests of sponsors as well as the media companies. The pregame analysis, the camera coverage, the camera angles, the close-ups, the slow-motion shots, the attention given to particular athletes, the announcers' play-by-play descriptions, the color commentary, the quotes from athletes, the postgame summary and analysis, and all associated website content are presented to entertain media audiences and keep sponsors happy. In some cases, sport leagues and their governing bodies hire their own writers and commentators to produce media

content, or they deny press credentials to journalists who present content that sport officials don't like (Jennings, 2010).

Sport media commentaries and images in the United States highlight action, competition, aggression, hard work, individual heroism and achievement, playing despite pain, teamwork, and competitive outcomes. Television coverage has become so seamless in its representations of sports that we often define televised games as “real” games—more real than what is seen in person at the stadium. Longtime magazine editor Kerry Temple explains:

It's not just games you're watching. It's soap operas, complete with story lines and plots and plot twists. And good guys and villains, heroes and underdogs. And all this gets scripted into cliffhanger morality plays. . . . And you get all caught up in this until you begin to believe it really matters (1992, p. 29).

Temple's point is especially relevant today. The focus on profits has increased soap opera storytelling as a means of developing and maintaining audience interest in commercial media sports coverage. Sports programming is now “a never-ending series of episodes—the results of one game create implications for the next one (or next week's) to be broadcast” (Wittboldt, 2004, p. 4). Sports rivalries are hyped and used to serialize stories through and across seasons; conflict and chaos are highlighted with a predictable cast of “good guys,” “bad guys,” and “redemption” or “comeback” stories; and the story lines are designed to reproduce ideologies favored by upper-middle-class media consumers—the ones that corporate sponsors want to reach with their ads. This was apparent in NBC's regular references to athletes' mothers during the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games. This narrative was planned to fit nicely with Proctor and Gamble's “Thank you, Mom” ad campaign that the company created after it became a \$100-million sponsor of the Olympics and paid NBC many millions of dollars for commercial time during the games. It is likely that people at NBC have positive attitudes about mothers, but they had other reasons for making them a centerpiece in the Olympic coverage.

Even though media coverage of sports is carefully edited and represented in total entertainment packages, most of us believe that when we see a sport event on television, we are seeing it “the way it is.” We don't usually think that what we see, hear, and read is a series of narratives and images selected for particular reasons and grounded in the social worlds and interests of those producing the event and controlling the broadcast. Television coverage provides only one of many possible sets of images and narratives related to an event, and there are many images and messages that audiences do not receive (Gally, 2014). If we went to an event in person, we would see something quite different from the images selected and presented on television, and we would develop our own descriptions and interpretations, which would be different from those carefully presented by media commentators.

New York Times writer Robert Lipsyte (1996) described televised sports as “—sportainment”—the equivalent of a TV movie that purports to be based on a true story but actually provides fictionalized history. In other words, television constructs sports and viewer experiences. But the process occurs so smoothly that most television viewers believe they experience sports in a “true and natural” form. This, of course, is the goal of the directors, editors, and on-camera announcers who select images and narratives, frame them with the stories they wish to tell, and make sure they please sponsors in the process.

To illustrate this point, think about this question: What if all televised sports were sponsored by environmental groups, women's organizations, and labor unions? Would program content be different from what it is now? Would the political biases built into the images and commentary be the same as they are now? It is unlikely that they would be the same, and we would be quick to identify all the ways that the interests and political agendas of the environmentalists, feminists, or labor leaders influenced images, narratives, and overall program content.

Now think about this: Capitalist corporations sponsor nearly 100 percent of all sports



“Quick! Bring the camera—the viewers will love this crash!”
(Source: © Frederic A. Byer)

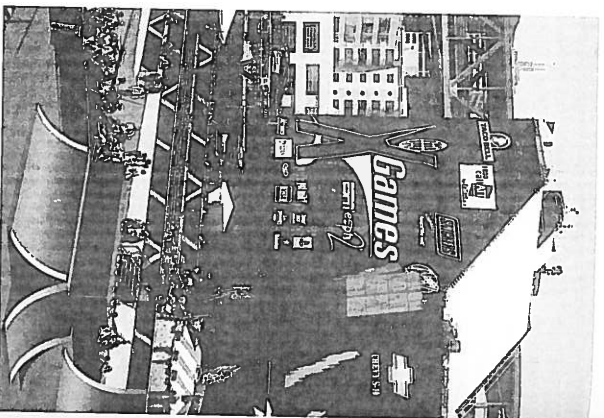
Commercial media representations of sports are carefully selected and edited. Commentary and images highlight dramatic action, even when it's a minor part of an event.

programming in commercial media, and their goals are to create compulsive consumers loyal to capitalism and generate profits for themselves and their shareholders. Says media scholar Lawrence Wenner (2013): "The economic influences of media have changed sport, changed our associations with it, and have affected the stories that are told through sport, both in everyday communication and in the service of commerce." For those who are "tuned in" to the commercial media, their experiences as spectators are heavily influenced—that is, "mediated"—by the decisions of those who control programming and media representations.

New Media and Sports

New media, including all digital and social media, radically alter relationships in the production and consumption of accessible content related to sports worldwide. They make possible individually created and selected information, interpretation, and entertainment. Additionally, online interactivity enables people to bypass the gatekeepers of content in the "old" media—that is, journalists, editors, and commentators—as they construct their own interpretations of events, athletes, and the overall organization of sports (McHugh et al., 2015).

In the case of sports, the recent proliferation of mobile devices and growing connectivity change the way many of us access and respond to sport media content. Additionally, many people now have the ability to produce and distribute sport content and commentary. We can interact with fellow fans, ask questions of players and coaches, follow them on Twitter, identify scores and statistics, and play online games that either simulate sports or are associated with real-time sport events around the world. This transforms media experiences and mediated realities in dramatic ways (Antunovic and Hardin, 2013a, 2013b; Clavio, 2010; Ganz and Lewis, 2014; Hutchins and Rowe, 2009; Liu and Berkowitz, 2013; Mackay and Dallaire, 2013; McCarthy, 2012; Norman, 2012, 2014).



The X Games were created by ESPN. ESPN is owned by ABC. ABC is owned by the Walt Disney Company. The power behind the X Games makes it difficult for the athletes to maintain the culture of their sports on their terms. (Source: © Becky Beal)

New Media Consumption Although people often access online sport content to complement content they consume in traditional media, there is a growing number of others who use new media to replace traditional content (McHugh et al., 2015). This shift in consumption patterns concerns people in media companies that broadcast live sports worldwide, because their revenues in the past have depended on controlling this content and maintaining large audiences to sell to advertisers.

At the same time, sport organizations such as MLB, the NFL, the English Premier Football (Soccer) Division, and others have become more active

in managing media representations of their sports so they can directly control information, analysis, and entertainment to promote themselves on their terms. For example, MLB.com offers a \$130 per year subscription to access real-time coverage of all regular season games on multiple devices. The site also provides game previews, highlights, statistics, and general commentary, among dozens of other video, audio, and text materials on baseball. This enables MLB and other professional sports to provide media content and control the ways that their brands are represented.

Overall, new media allow people to control when and how they consume sports content, but this changes little from the days of traditional media when content was created by a limited number of powerful sources (Dart, 2014). The real transformational potential of new media rests in how people use them to produce content that offers alternatives to traditional media sources.

New Media Production. At the same time that corporations try to maximize control over online representations of sports, YouTube and other sites provide people opportunities to upload their own information and interpretation of sports as well as representations of sports events and performances. For example, for more than three decades now, young people in alternative and action sports have found creative ways to photograph, film, and distribute images of their activities. Photos and VCR tapes were mailed and passed person-to-person, but distribution today occurs online with images accessible worldwide. Although these images represent what may be described as "performance sports," they're central to the media experiences of many young people who find highly structured, overtly competitive sports such as baseball or football to be constraining and uncreative.

In some cases, young people use new media to represent sports involving transgressive actions such as skating in empty private swimming pools at night or doing parkour ("PK"), an activity in which young men and a few young women use their bodies to move rapidly and efficiently through existing

landscapes, especially in urban areas where walls, buildings, and other obstacles normally impede movement (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkour>; www.americanparkour.com/). Research on new media representations of these activities is sorely needed. Such representations of parkour have made it a global phenomenon as young men (for the most part) have become aware of the possibility of using the physical environments around them as "sport spaces" in which they can develop skills, express themselves, and even gain widespread recognition by doing things and posting videos that catch the attention of other parkour athletes.

Researchers in many disciplines are now exploring these possibilities as the media landscape is changing in character and scope at a rate unprecedented in human history. Most of this research deals with how people use new media to complement or create informational and interpretive content related to sports already covered in mainstream media.¹ However, there also are a few studies of people using new media to report on sports ignored by mainstream media (Antunovic and Hardin, 2012, 2013, 2015; Mackay and Dallaire, 2012, 2014).

This research highlights and describes exciting possibilities, but it also identifies factors that may undermine those possibilities. Powerful corporations have a high stakes financial interest in controlling new media and using it to add to their bottom line. This includes massive, monopoly-like companies that provide connectivity; mainstream

¹The major sources I've used to explore this issue are these: Boyle, 2014; Browning and Sanderson, 2012; Burroughs and Burroughs, 2011; Connolly and Dolan, 2012; Dart, 2014; Ferriter, 2009; Frederick et al., 2012; Gally, 2014; Ganz and Lewis, 2014; Hutchins, 2014; Hutchins and Rowe, 2009; Kassing and Sanderson, 2013; Kruse, 2011; Label and Danylchuk, 2012; Leonard, 2009; Liang, 2013; Liu and Berkowitz, 2013; Madianou and Miller, 2013; McCarthy, 2012; Merril et al., 2012; Millington and Darnell, 2012; Norman, 2012a, 2012b; Oates and Furness, 2015; Ross, 2011; Sanderson, 2011; Sanderson and Kassing, 2011; Schultz and Shaffer, 2010; Shaffer and Schultz, 2010; Smith and Bremner, 2012; Wenner, 2014; Whannel, 2014; Zimmerman, 2012.

media companies built around newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and film, and sport organizations that survive or prosper because of their financial relationships with mainstream media companies. Leaders in this industry are using their resources to enter the new media market, and retain and extend their control over how new media are used, who benefits from their use, and how content is regulated. Therefore, they continue to lobby federal legislators on copyright law, definitions of intellectual property, public domain parameters, liability laws, and a host of other issues that they can use to prevent anyone from threatening their financial interests. At the same time, they extend their control by using new media in strategic ways. Fantasy sports and video games are examples of how they enlist people as allies to sustain their power.

The major sociological question related to new media is this: Will they democratize social life by enabling people to freely share information and ideas, or will they become tools controlled by corporations to expand their capital, increase consumption, reproduce ideologies that drive market economies, and maintain the illusion that we need them to provide pleasure and excitement in our lives? The answer to this question will emerge as the struggle for control over the media unfolds. At this point the struggle does not involve a fair fight, because people who will benefit from the potential democratizing effects of new media are not even aware of the fight—and the leaders of corporate media are doing all they can to keep it that way.

Fantasy Sports Consuming sports through the media is a passive activity. People may talk with friends, respond to commentary, even yell at players, coaches, and referees, but these are simply reactions to what is presented by ESPN, NBC, or other media companies. This lack of control can be frustrating to those who follow sports closely and have a deep knowledge of players, game strategies, and the decisions made by coaches and upper management. For people accustomed to being in positions of power and control, it can even be alienating. How can these people use what they

know about sport and feel like they are in control as they consume mediated sports? "Fantasy leagues" have become the current answer to this question.

Although the first fantasy sport league, invented in 1979 by a baseball fan, didn't require online access, most fantasy sports today are played online on platforms licensed or controlled by media and sport organizations, such as ESPN and the NFL. For example, playing fantasy football makes every participant a "team owner" who creates a team roster by taking turns with other "owners" to draft current NFL players for their fantasy teams. The weekly performance statistics of the players on an "owner's" team roster are converted into points so that each fantasy team player competes against other team "owners." Usually, all participants pay fees to one of the online services that compile players' statistics, compute scores, and track team records.

Over 40 million people in the United States and Canada play fantasy sports. Players are mostly college-educated white men (over 85 percent) between eighteen and fifty years old with higher-than-average incomes. Collectively, they spend over \$5 billion annually to obtain data about players and compete in organized fantasy leagues. Owners typically devote six to ten hours per week consuming media sports and another three hours managing their teams during the season (FSTA, 2013; Ruibley and Billings, 2013). They also spend close to \$500 per year for fees to enter a league, draft and trade players, pay the website host, collect information about players, buy prizes for the owner who wins the season, and play challenge matches with other individual team owners (like side bets during a season).

Fantasy football, baseball, NASCAR, basketball, hockey, and other sports transform the relationship between sport media consumers and media content (Schirato, 2012). To "own" players, manage a team, and compete against others in an official league gives consumers a sense of control over the sport they enjoy watching and the media content they consume. Media interactivity provides contact with other dedicated fans, reaffirms fan identities, and provides a forum in which status can be gained and the status of others can be challenged.

The outcomes of real games often matter little to fantasy players who focus on the performance statistics of their players, who are on many different teams. Although they often subscribe to expensive cable and satellite television "sport packages" that enable them to watch their players, they focus primarily on the performances of individuals rather than teams. While they watch, they also scout other players and take note of injuries because during the season they can cut, trade, and acquire new players on their fantasy rosters.

Fantasy sports reposition fans relative to players. For example, they can provide the white men who play them with a sense of power and control over players who are unlike them at the same time that they are connected with fellow "owners" who share their interests and backgrounds.

Fantasy league players feel empowered by their "ownership" of teams and players—but the NFL, Major League Baseball, and other sport leagues, as well as mainstream media companies, now use fantasy sports to generate new revenues and to "re-entrench" the spectator experience for those who may become bored as they passively watch games week after week, season after season.

When media executives, team owners, and players discovered in 2002 that fantasy sports increased media sport consumption and fan loyalty in addition to generating \$1.5 billion annually, they decided they should control the fantasy business and merge it with their own. Over the next ten years they did just that and began to use their own fantasy league to boost loyalty and encourage consumers to buy expensive cable and satellite packages (at \$60 to \$100 per month depending on service providers) in which all games in the league are available to consumers.

The NFL, which now provides information for fantasy participants on its NFL Network channel, has also created an NFL RedZone channel to provide game-day *only* coverage of every NFL team whenever it is inside the opponent's 20-yard line. At a subscription cost of \$5 to \$10 per month, this enables fantasy league players to see every touchdown scored by every team

each Sunday afternoon. Even the regular NFL announcers have changed their commentary to call attention to "the red zone," and alert viewers of impending scores so they can learn the fate of their fantasy teams.

The power to control the content of media sport and who may access it under what conditions is a crucial issue in the business plans of sport leagues and media companies, including ESPN/ABC Sports, FOX Sports Media Group (Fox Sports, and Fox Sports 1, launched in August 2013), NBC Sports, CBS Sports, and others. Sports today are global phenomena, which means that sport leagues and media companies think in terms of global power and control. The sponsors that buy commercial time on television and ad space in newspapers and websites are not interested in making deals with media companies or sport organizations unless there are guarantees that media sport programming is dedicated to supporting their products and supporting consumption as a lifestyle. This is especially true in the United States, where all sports are broadcast on commercial television. This means that the feelings of empowerment enjoyed by fantasy league participants are an illusion that is actively reproduced by the sport leagues and media companies that use fan fantasies to increase their power and profits.

Video Games as Simulated Sports John Madden, known to football fans over the age of forty as a former NFL coach and longtime NFL commentator, is known to the under-forty-year-old game player as a video game brand. *Madden NFL* games are among the most popular video products on the market. When Madden was asked to comment on the video game craze, he said that designers have made video games that look so much like the games on television that television producers are now using special lenses and filters to make televised NFL games appear more like video games.

Game developers work with athletes so that video game situations and players' movements are lifelike. Leagues and players cooperate because they receive rights fees for the use of players' images and

the NFL name and logo, but players also want to be portrayed accurately in video games. Even unique mannerisms related to their dramatic on-field personas are included in the game action.

Professional team coaches now worry that video games distract players from live games. Some NFL and NBA players prefer to play video game sports over watching live games. NASCAR, Formula One, and Indy Car video games are so realistic that some racecar drivers use the games to familiarize themselves with the tracks and prepare for the split-second responses required during actual races.

The financial stakes associated with creating realistic and entertaining games are significant. This constantly pushes designers to refine graphics, action, and game possibilities. It also leads them to talk with potential sponsors about product placements and advertisements built into the storylines and actions in the games. As more young people play these video games, corporations see them as vehicles for developing outposts in the heads of game players, fostering a commitment to consumption, and generating revenues for game producers.

A major issue for game developers is obtaining the rights to use the names and images of athletes and sport leagues in their games. *Madden NFL 13*, for example, is produced by EA Sports with permission from the NFL and the NFL Players Association, which receive rights fees from sales of the games. But this also means that everything in the game is subject to NFL approval. Midway Games, on the other hand, developed *Blitz: The League*, a video game modeled after pro football, without buying rights from the NFL. Therefore, they could not use references to the NFL, or NFL players' names and images, but they could include images and actions that would not have been approved by the NFL. To heighten the dimension of spectacle in *Blitz*, they incorporated images of blood and gory injuries, near-naked cheerleaders, dirty hits, in-your-face celebrations after big plays, drug use (for energy and strength), and off-field controversies that might boost sales. But Midway Games went out of business just before its 2008 version of the game was released.

Meanwhile, a small but growing number of children are now introduced to sports through video games. For example, children who play games on Nintendo's Wii platform learn rules and game strategies as they play. They see the moves involved in a sport as they manipulate images in the games, and their initial emotional experiences in certain sports are felt in front of computer monitors or televisions rather than on playing fields.

This raises many research questions. After playing interactive video sports, will six-year-olds want to listen to whistle-blowing coaches when they're accustomed to being in complete control of players, game strategies, and game conditions? Will these children bring new forms of game knowledge to situations in which they play informal and formally organized games? How will that knowledge influence the games they play? Will some children simply stay home with their video devices and control their own games without worrying about coaches, playing time, or parental pressure?

Adult game players outnumber children who play, and the majority of players are males between the ages of twelve and thirty. Many male college students are regular game players to the point that status in certain groups reflects prowess in video gaming. Playing games also provides regular social occasions similar to those provided by live sport events, although the players set schedules for video games and can play them when they wish.

At this point, studies of simulated sports and video games indicate the following:

- Gamers often commit many hours to play (Ninman, 2013).
- When they play sport-themed video games, the gamers often create their own narratives or stories that fit their interests and perceptions of sports (Crawford and Gosling, 2009).
- Social relationships are formed and nurtured in connection with video games (Hutchins et al., 2009).
- Digital gaming involves a wide range of experiences, feelings, and understandings

because it occurs on the terms desired by the gamers themselves (Crawford, 2015; Wikowski, 2012).

- Sport-themed video games involve embodied experiences different from those associated with the consumption of televised sports (Crawford, 2015).

Future research will try to answer questions such as these: Does playing video games influence how people play sports or what they expect when they play them? If children are introduced to sports through video games, will this influence their expectations and the meanings they give to experiences in live, real-time games? As new media become increasingly integrated into our everyday lives, they will influence sport participation and consumption experiences? Predicting the future is risky, but it is likely that video game experiences will carry over into real-time sports in some way.

SPORTS AND MEDIA: A TWO-WAY RELATIONSHIP

The media and commercialization are related topics in the sociology of sport. The media intensify and extend the process and consequences of commercialization. For this reason, much attention has been given to the interdependence between the media and commercialized forms of sports (Gallily and Tamir, 2014). Each of these spheres influences the other, and each depends on the other for part of its popularity and commercial success.

Sports Depend on Media

People played sports long before media coverage of their events. When sports exist for participants only, there's no need to advertise games, report the action, publish results, and interpret what happened. The players already know these things, and they're the only ones who matter. It is only when sports become commercial entertainment that they depend on the media.

Commercial sports require media to provide a combination of coverage, publicity, and news. Sports promoters and team owners know the value of coverage, and they provide free access to reporters, commentators, and photographers. For example, the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) accredited 21,000 journalists, media technicians, producers, and camera operators to cover nearly 15,000 athletes during the Olympics and Paralympics; another 6000 to 8000 were credentialled to cover nonsport aspects of the events. NBC sent 2700 people. The BBC deployed 756 staff, and the Associated Press (AP) had 200 journalists and photographers working full time during the games. This made the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games the most comprehensively covered event in history. Credentialled media personnel often are given comfortable seats in press boxes, access to the playing field and locker rooms, and summaries of statistics and player information. In return, promoters and owners expect and usually receive supportive media coverage.

Although commercial spectator sports depend on media, most have a special dependence on television because television companies pay for the rights to broadcast games and other events. Table 12.1 and Figure 12.1 indicate that "rights fees" provide sports with predictable, significant, and increasing sources of income. Once "rights contracts" are signed, revenues are guaranteed regardless of bad weather, injuries to key players, and the other factors that interfere with ticket sales and on-site revenue streams. Without these media rights contracts, spectator sports seldom generate much profit.

Television revenues also have greater growth potential than revenues from gate receipts. The number of seats in a stadium limits ticket sales, and ticket costs are limited by demand. But television audiences can include literally billions of viewers now that satellite technology transmits signals to most locations worldwide. For example, the IOC and sponsors of other sport mega-events seek to package the entire world into an audience that can be sold to sponsors.

Table 12.1 Escalating annual media rights fees for major commercial sports in the United States (in millions of dollars)*

Sport	1986	1991	1996	2001	2008	2015
NFL	400	900	1,100	2,200	3,750	4,950
MLB†	183	365	420	417	670	1,550
NBA	30	219	275	660	765	925
NHL‡	22	38	77	120	70	200
NASCAR	3	NA	NA	412	560	683
NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament	31	143	216	216	560§	771
NCAA (all championships)	NA	NA	NA	NA	18.5	35.7**
WNBA	0	0	0	¶	¶	12

*These amounts have not been adjusted for inflation. Data come from multiple sources, and amounts change whenever new contracts are negotiated.

†Amounts for baseball do not include local television and radio rights fees negotiated by individual teams, national radio rights fees negotiated by the league, or Internet revenues received by the league from individual subscriptions paid to receive games on MLB.com.

‡Includes U.S. rights only for 2001 and 2006; there also are Canadian rights and European rights.

§Includes rights to broadcast on television, radio, and the Internet the men's basketball tournament and other championship events, excluding football.

¶Information has never been disclosed; the new contract that began in 2016 will pay \$12 million annually.

**This includes the women's basketball tournament and all NCAA championships in twenty-four Division I sports each year, excluding football.

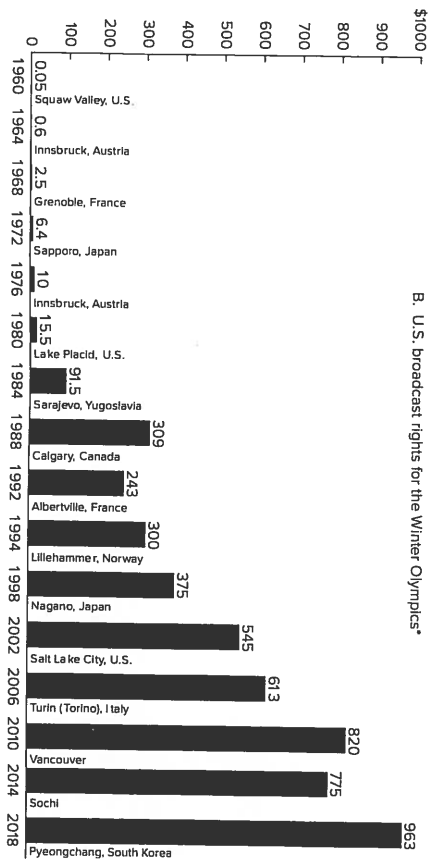
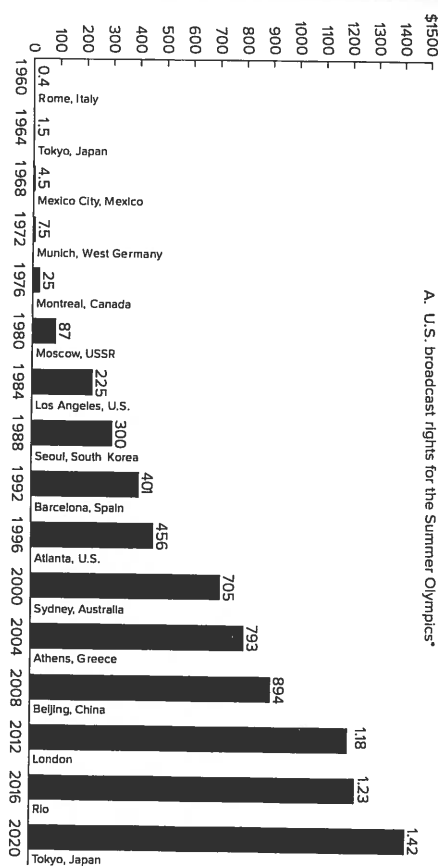
Additional reasons for increased rights fees include the following:

- The deregulation of the television industry
- A growing demand to watch certain spectator sports
- Increased connectivity with satellite and cable worldwide
- Sponsors willing to pay top prices for access to live sport audiences because commercials are seen by people rather than being skipped over in recorded programs
- The growth of ESPN and other cable channels that collect money from cable and satellite companies as well as commercial sponsors, which gives them two sources of income

These reasons have driven the increases in rights fees as shown Figure 12.1 and Table 12.1. In 1986

the NFL received \$400 million in television rights fees, and in 2013 it received over \$4.9 billion. Similarly, the rights fees paid to televise the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles amounted to \$287 million—ten times *more* than was paid to televise the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, and five times *less* than the \$1.42 billion that will be paid to televise the 2020 Olympic Games.

This growth in television rights fees makes commercial sports more profitable for promoters and team owners and increases the attractiveness of sports as sites for national and global advertising. Increased attention allows athletes to demand higher salaries and turns a few of them into national and international celebrities, who then use their status to endorse products sold worldwide. For example, the global celebrity and endorsement value of athletes such as David Beckham, Lionel Messi, Maria Sharapova, Usain

**FIGURE 12.1** Escalating media rights fees paid by U.S. media companies to televise the Olympics (in millions of dollars).

*The local organizing committee for the Olympic Games also receives rights fees from other television companies around the world. Europe, Japan, and continental Asia are paying increasingly higher fees. For U.S. rights for Vancouver 2010 through the Summer Games in 2020, NBC Universal has paid the IOC \$6.39 billion.

Bolt, Ronda Rousey, and Tiger Woods is primarily due to the invention of satellite television.

The rights fees in Table 12.1 do not include certain streaming rights. For example, in late 2013 the NFL signed a four-year \$1 billion deal allowing games to be live-streamed on Verizon phones. But this deal did not include streaming on tablets, which will bring even more money to the NFL, and will force them to define the difference between tablets and smartphones!

The global reach of the web creates new possibilities for large corporations wanting to “teach the world” to consume. However, it also creates challenges because new corporations will compete with traditional media companies for the video rights to sports. This is why NBC developed NBCOlympics.com in 2008, a portal enabling consumers to view events in the 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014 Olympic Games in Beijing, Vancouver, London, and Sochi, along with on-demand replays and highlights. Coverage was available on mobile devices and cable VOD packages, and other features were available for consumers interested in athlete profiles and gaming experiences. As this approach is expanded, rights fees will continue to increase.

Are Commercial Sports Controlled by the Media?

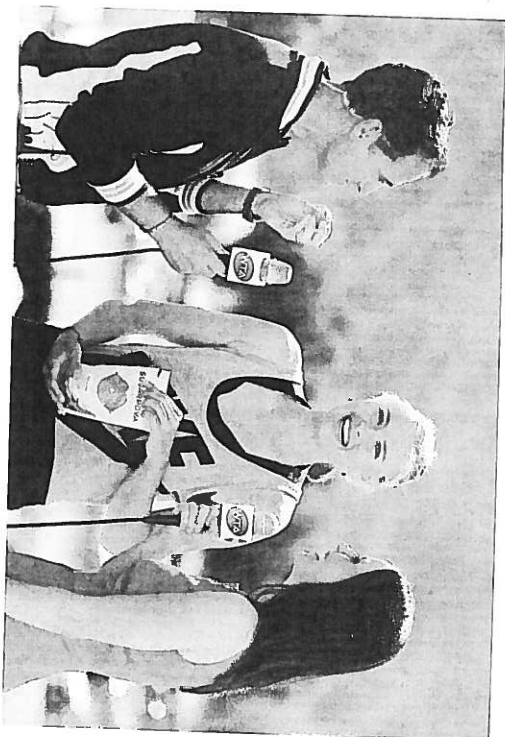
Most commercial sports depend on television and online coverage for revenues and publicity. To accommodate the interests of media companies, commercial television has required numerous changes in scheduling and rules to make sports more “telegenic.” Some of these changes include the following:

- The schedules and starting times for many sports events have been altered to fit television’s programming needs.
- Halftime periods in certain sports have been shortened to keep television viewers tuned to events.
- Rearranged schedules of time-outs have been added to games and matches to make time for as many commercials as possible.
- Teams, leagues, and tournaments have been formed or realigned to take advantage of

regional media markets and build national and international fan support for sports, leagues, and teams.

Other efforts to make sports entertaining for media audiences often go unnoticed. For example, the number of words used by announcers and commentators during games has nearly doubled over the past half century (Biderman, 2010a, 2010b). A former director of media relations for an NFL team notes, “Watching sports is mostly boring. Talking and speculating about sports is riveting” (Pearlman, 2011). He realizes that a typical 200-minute NFL game contains an average of 11 minutes of action and 3 minutes of video replays. That leaves 184 minutes to be filled with entertainment that keeps the audience interested. About 60 of those minutes are used by commercials, and commentators fill the rest with observations, analysis, stories, and anything that hypes the teams, owners, coaches, the city, the league, and the fans. The same is true for Major League Baseball games, which typically involve 14 minutes of action during a 150-minute game. Commercials take up 45 minutes, and the rest of the time is filled by the commentators who have studied what will retain viewers’ interest. As in all mediated sports, the best commentators are the ones who can create a narrative that keeps the viewers engaged until the game is over and the postgame comments have been made.

In the United States, ESPN has developed a unique connection with commercial sports. It not only broadcasts half of all live sports, but it uses dozens of ESPN-branded television, web, and mobile platforms to provide people with 24-hour access to sports and sport information. When players, coaches, teams, or events are discussed on ESPN’s *Sports Center* program, they assume that their public profiles will be enhanced. *Business Week* magazine reporter Karl Greenfield notes that 25 percent of all cable channel revenues in the United States go into ESPN, and it uses its power to shape “the ways in which leagues, teams, and athletes are packaged, promoted, marketed, and consumed by the public.” He adds, “In a real sense, ESPN no longer covers



The media enable some athletes to become global celebrities and benefit from windfall income related to their popularity. They know that their celebrity depends on using and maintaining close connections with the media. Tennis player Maria Sharapova, like many top athletes today, is adept at dealing with the media in ways that work to her advantage. (Source: © DANNY MOLOSHOK/Reuters/Corbis)

sports. It controls sports” (Greenfield, 2012). This conclusion is put in historical context in a book on ESPN by *New York Times* journalists James Andrews and Tom Shales, who point out that television depended on sports in the past, but today this relationship is reversed, so that now sports depend on television and the new media that keep fans connected to sport “infotainment” 24/7.

Media Depend on Sports

Apart from newspapers and magazines devoted to specific sports, the print media do not depend on sports; nor do films, radio, and the video game industry as a whole. The urgency and uncertainty that are so compelling in sports are not captured and represented in any of these media as they are

in visual broadcast media. Overall, the media most dependent on sports for commercial success are newspapers and television.

Newspapers Newspapers at the beginning of the twentieth century had a sports page, which consisted of a few notices about upcoming activities, a short story or two about races or college games, and possibly some scores of local games. Today, there are daily and weekly newspapers devoted exclusively to sports, and nearly all daily newspapers have sports sections often making up about 25 percent of their news content.

Major North American newspapers give more daily coverage to sports than any other single topic of interest, including business or politics. The sports section is the most widely read section



Digital media are especially invasive technologies. Everyone with a smartphone can create media content. Privacy is difficult to maintain, especially among celebrity athletes. They can be represented from multiple and surprising vantage points. This exposes them to scrutiny that athletes prior to this century seldom experienced. (Source: © Jay Coakley)

of the paper. It accounts for at least one-third of the total circulation and a significant amount of the advertising revenues for big-city newspapers. It attracts advertisers who want to reach middle-aged males with ads for tires, automobile supplies, new cars, car leases, airline tickets for business travelers, alcoholic beverages, power tools, building supplies, sporting goods, hair-growth products, enhancing sexual performance, testosterone, and hormone therapies. Ads for these products and services are unique to the (men's) sports section, and they generate needed revenues for newspapers.

As the Internet has become a primary source of information about big-time sports nationally and

worldwide, many local, small-market newspapers have established online sites for breaking news, regular columns, and blogs. Their print editions may contain this content, but they focus more on local sports, including high school varsity teams, small college teams, and even youth sports.

Television "Broadcasting right now . . . is about event television, live television, sports events. . . . That's what's really attracting . . . the real eyeballs and the real advertising dollars." This observation by Jeff Zucker (in Gelles and Edgecliffe-Johnson, 2011, p. 9), the former CEO of NBC Universal, explains why media companies in the United States

have collectively signed deals paying sport organizations \$72 billion for the rights to broadcast their games, matches, and events now and over the next decade.

Such high payouts for sports are a recent development. For example, the NFL's first television contract with CBS in 1962 amounted to \$4.65 million, or \$330,000 per team. In 2015 the NFL received \$4.95 billion—a windfall of \$15.5 million per team. Other sports don't have such lucrative deals, but they have also seen significant increases in their rights fees. For sports that don't share in this media bounty, it is difficult to survive at a professional or elite level.

At a time when television audiences are fragmented and new media capture the interests of many younger viewers, there is a collective urgency associated with certain men's sports and the Olympic Games that creates unified audiences that watch for long stretches without prerecording and editing out commercials. As a bonus for media companies, sports also attract eighteen- to thirty-five-year-old males, a highly sought-after demographic that sponsors cannot reach through other television programming.

Sports now account for a growing proportion of media company income. Half of the operating income of the massive Disney Company is generated by ESPN, as it collects over \$6 billion from fees paid by about 100 million cable and satellite subscribers and it sells commercial time to its programming sponsors. Other channels feature sports programming, but ESPN in 2012 produced 35,000 hours of programming and accounted for half of the live sport events televised in the United States (Sandomin et al., 2013).

In an effort to break ESPN's monopoly-like control of premium sports programming, Fox Sports launched Fox Sports 1 in 2013 as a new 24-hour sports programming channel. However, generating the revenues and viewer loyalty possessed by ESPN will be a formidable challenge. NBC Universal (owned by Comcast) has been successful in retaining its hold on the Olympic Games through 2020. Using its cable channels, CNBC, MSNBC, Bravo, and USA Network, it presented over 5500

hours of the 2012 Olympic Games, although it ignored the Paralympics.

An attractive feature of sport programming for the major U.S. networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) is that events often are scheduled on Saturdays and Sundays—the slowest days of the week for television viewing. Sport events are the most popular weekend programs, especially among male viewers who don't watch much television at other times. For example, NFL games have consistently accounted for 80 percent of the most-viewed television programs during recent years, and they provide sponsors access to young and middle-age males. Nearly all sport programming is ideal for promoting sales of beer, life insurance, trucks and cars, computers, investment services, credit cards, air travel and erectile dysfunction products. Sponsors realize that sports attract men who make purchasing decisions for hundreds, if not thousands, of employees, as well as for family members when it comes to buying beer, cars, computers, investments, and life insurance.

Golf and tennis are special cases for television programming. They attract few viewers and the ratings are exceptionally low, but the audience for these sports is very attractive to certain advertisers. It comprises people from upper-income groups, including many professionals and business executives. This is why television coverage of golf and tennis is sponsored by companies selling luxury cars and high-priced sports cars, business and personal computers, imported beers, investment opportunities with brokers and consultants, and trips to exclusive vacation areas. This is also why the networks continue to carry these programs despite low ratings. Advertisers will pay high fees to reach high-income consumers and corporate executives who make decisions to buy thousands of "company cars" and computers at the same time that they invest millions of dollars for employee pension plans or 401k plans. With such valued viewers, golf and tennis don't need high ratings to sell their television rights for high fees.

Women's sports also attract television coverage although the amount pales in comparison with coverage of men's sports. Women's events don't

receive more coverage partly because female viewers of women's games have not been identified as a target demographic by advertisers who reach women through other means. Furthermore, men make up over half the viewing audience for most women's sports, but they also watch men's sports where sponsors already reach them.

Some cable and satellite television companies attract advertising money by covering sports that appeal to clearly identified segments of consumers. The X Games, for example, attract young males between twelve and thirty years old, which in turn attracts corporate sponsors selling soft drinks, beer, telecommunications products, and sports equipment such as helmets, shoes, skateboards, and dozens of other sport-specific products.

Over the past two decades, television companies have paid rapidly increasing amounts of money for the rights to televise certain sports, as indicated in Table 12.1. This includes nearly \$5 billion annually for NFL games and \$1.23 billion for the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This is because NFL games, especially 10-play-off games and the Super Bowl, are the top-10 most watched programs on U.S. television each year, and the Olympics captures high ratings for 16 consecutive days during summer months when ratings are usually low.

Television companies occasionally lose money on sports programming, but potential profits and other benefits are usually worth any risks. Furthermore, regular sports programming is a platform to promote other programs and boost ratings during the rest of the week, and it enhances the image and legitimacy of television among people who watch little other than sports.

As choices for sports television viewing have increased, audiences have fragmented and ratings for many sports have declined, especially during prime-time hours, even as the total number of people watching television sports has remained relatively steady. This means that rights fees for the very large events will remain high, but fees for other events, including "special-interest" events such as bowling, inline skating championships, and international skiing

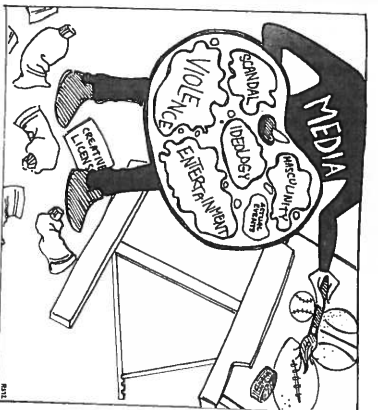
ances will be limited. When interest in special events is especially strong among particular viewers, pay-per-view (PPV) sports programming can push rights fees to high levels; this continues to occur for championship boxing, professional wrestling, and mixed martial arts. PPV can generate massive revenues, but events must be chosen selectively because most people are not willing to pay upfront for a single event on television. In the meantime, pay TV has become part of people's lives in the form of subscription fees for cable and satellite connections and special sports channels and packages.

Sports and the Media: A Relationship Based on Economics and Ideology

Global economic factors have intensified the interdependence between commercial sports and the media. Major transnational corporations need ways to develop global name recognition, cultural legitimacy, and product familiarity. They also want to promote ideologies that support a way of life based on consumption, competition, and individual achievement.

Media sports offer global corporations a means of meeting these needs. Certain sport events attract worldwide attention, satellite technology transmits television signals around the world, sport images are associated with recognizable symbols and pleasurable experiences by billions of people; sports and athletes usually can be presented in politically safe ways by linking them with local identities and then using them to market products, values, and lifestyles related to local cultures or popular forms of global culture. Therefore, powerful transnational corporations spend billions of dollars annually to sponsor the media coverage of sports. This in turn gives global media companies significant power over sports worldwide.

Finally, many male executives of large media corporations are dedicated sports fans, and they like to be associated with sports as sponsors. Masculine culture is deeply embedded in most of the corporations they control, and they use their sponsorship money to receive VIP treatment at sport events and reaffirm the legitimacy of the masculinized



(Source: By permission of Rachel Spiehlberg)

A few powerful global media companies control most of the media representations of sports worldwide. This monopoly has serious implications for what sports we see or don't see.

corporate cultures in their companies. They also use sport events to entertain clients, fellow executives, and friends as they pay with company credit cards. This combination of masculine ideology and government-supported tax deductions for sport and entertainment expenses in the United States is a key factor in the media dependence on sports.

The long-time marriage of sports and media is clearly held together and strengthened by vast amounts of money from corporations whose executives use sports to increase profits and promote ideologies consistent with personal and corporate interests. Ideology is a key factor in the sport-media marriage. This is not a marriage based solely on money, but the goal of the sport-media partnership is to create a global family of eager consumers.

IMAGES AND NARRATIVES IN MEDIA SPORTS

To say that sports are "mediated" is to say that they consist of selected images and narratives.

Much research in the sociology of sport has deconstructed these images and narratives and analyzed the ideas or themes on which they are based. The scholars who have done these studies assume that media sports are symbolic constructions, much like Hollywood action films, television soap operas, and Disney cartoons.

To say that a telecast of an American football game is a symbolic construction means that it presents the ideas that certain people have about football, values, social life, and the characteristics of the viewing audience. Although each of us interprets media images and narratives differently, many of us use mediated sports as reference points as we form, revise, and extend our ideas about sports, social life, and social relations (Bruce, 2013; Crawford and Gosling, 2009; Wenner, 2013).

Because media sports are part of everyday experience today, it's important to consider the following:

1. Media production and representation of sports
2. Ideological themes underlying media coverage
3. Media consumers and the ways they integrate media content into their lives

Media Production and Representation of Sports

When media are privately owned and organized to make financial profits, sports are selected for coverage on the basis of their entertainment and revenue-generating potential. Media images and narratives are selected to represent the event so it meets the perceived interests of the audience and sponsors. Sports that are difficult to cover profitably usually are ignored by the media or covered only with selected highlights.

Sports coverage generally consists of images and narratives that exaggerate the spectacular, such as heroic injuries or achievements. Images and narratives also invent and highlight rivalries and explain why events are important. Furthermore, they create and maintain the celebrity status of athletes and teams. Cultural studies scholar Garry Crawford explains:

The mass-media construction of celebrity often lacks depth of character, as figures are frequently painted in one-dimensional terms. . . . Much of the language used to describe sport stars . . . draws on the narrative of melodrama. Heroes rise and fall, villains are defeated, and women play out their roles as supporting cast members to men's central dramatic roles (2004, p. 133).

Narratives even redeem villains who demonstrate that they can be heroic warriors, with commentators describing them as "loyal blue-collar players"—"willing to take figurative bullets for their teammates"—and "always being there when the chips are down," even if they sometimes have broken rules in the past.

The major media also emphasize elite sport competition. For example, U.S. newspapers and television networks increased their coverage of professional sports through the twentieth century and decreased coverage of amateur sports with the exception of college football and men's basketball. This shift was accompanied by a growing emphasis on the importance of winning and heroic actions and the desire to attract corporate sponsors and a mass audience. It's important to understand this process and the ways that particular images and narratives in media coverage inform popular ideas about sports and about social relations and social life in general.

Ideological Themes in Media Images and Narratives

Sports are represented in the media through images and narratives that are selected from a vast array of possibilities. The traditional media resemble windows through which we view what others choose to put in our range of sight and hear what others choose to say. Therefore, the only way to avoid being duped is to become a critical media consumer or work with others to produce grassroots media representations of sports.

To become a critical media consumer involves learning to identify the ideologies that guide others as they construct media representations for us. In

the case of sports, the most central ideologies that influence what we see and hear are those related to success, consumption, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality.

Success Themes in Media Narratives Media coverage of sports in the United States emphasizes success through individual effort, self-control, competition, teamwork, aggression, adherence to rules, and effective game plans. Also important are big individual plays such as home runs, long touchdown passes, and single-handed goals. The idea that success can be based on empathy, support for others, sharing resources, autonomy, intrinsic satisfaction, personal growth, compromise, incremental changes, or the achievement of equality is seldom included in media narratives, even though these elements exist in sports.

Media representations exaggerate the importance of competitive rivalries as well as winning and losing in athletes' lives. For example, ESPN has organized its coverage of the X Games around the competitive quest for medals when, in fact, many of the athletes and the spectators aren't very concerned about competition or medals (Honea, 2004). Athletes in the X Games and similar events enjoy the external rewards that come with winning, and they certainly want to demonstrate their competence, but they often emphasize self-expression and creativity more than the final scores determined by official judges. Furthermore, friendships with others in the event are more important than media-hyped rivalries and competitive outcomes. However, media narratives highlight rivalries and the desire to win because this reaffirms widely accepted cultural values and can be used to attract sponsors and consumers who may not understand the culture and skills possessed by athletes in action sports.

The success ideology regularly emphasized in U.S. media coverage is less apparent in the coverage that occurs in other nations. Narratives in the United States focus on winners, records, and final scores. Even silver and bronze Olympic medals are often viewed as consolation prizes, and games for third place are seldom played or covered by the media.

The "We're number 1" conceptualization of success that is so common among Americans is seldom used as a media focus in other nations where the scores are acceptable competitive outcomes and aren't seen as the equivalent of "kissing your sister."

Sportswriters and announcers in the United States focus on "shootouts," sudden-death playoffs, dominating others, and big plays or big hits. Rare are references to learning, enjoyment, and competing with others, even though many players see their participation in these terms. Thus, the media don't "tell it like it is" as much as they tell it to reaffirm a discourse of competitive success that closely matches the interests of sponsors and advertisers. This ideological bias does not undermine the enjoyment of sports for most people, but it ignores that there are many ways to enjoy sports, even when they are organized to promote corporate interests.

Consumption Themes in Media Representations of Sports The emphasis on consumption is clear in most media coverage of sports (Gee et al., 2014; Scherer, 2007; Scherer and Jackson, 2008). About 20 percent of televised sports in the United States consists of commercial time. Ads fill newspapers and magazines, and Internet sites use multiple strategies to present ads mixed with content. "TV time-outs" are now standard in football, basketball, and hockey games. And announcers remind media spectators that "This game is being brought to you by [corporate name]."

Commercials are so central in the telecast of the Super Bowl that the media audience is polled to rate them. Audiences for media sports are encouraged to express their connections to teams and athletes by purchasing thousands of branded objects.

Gender Themes in Media Representations of Sports Masculinity rules in media sports (Bruce, 2013; Cooky et al., 2013; Cooky et al., 2015; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; O'Brien, 2015). Keats and Keats-Osborn, 2013; Weber and Carini, 2013). Men's sports receive about 95 percent of sports coverage in the media, and both images and narratives tend to reproduce traditional ideas and beliefs about gender. However, recent media coverage of concussions,

serious injuries, permanent sport-related physical and cognitive impairments, athletes in major men's sports coming out as gay, and athletes supporting gay marriage has led to a more multifaceted media narrative about masculinity in sport (Anderson and Kian, 2012). References to men as warriors doing battle and sacrificing their bodies for victories are now accompanied by discussions of safer sports, athlete health, and acceptance of difference. Of course, one reason for this is to create a more positive media image of sports and preserve lucrative revenue flows for media companies. Research is needed to track media narratives to see if this apparent shift is more than superficial, if it exists across sports, and if it persists over time.

Media coverage of women's sports has never been a media priority, and research suggests that this has not changed over the past two decades. In fact, longitudinal research done by Cheryl Cooky, Mike Messner, and their colleagues at the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California shows that sports news and highlights about women's sports have declined since data were first collected in 1989 (Cooky et al., 2013). Tracking coverage on the three major network evening sports news programs in Los Angeles and coverage on ESPN's Sports Center, the data showed that LA sports news devoted 1.6 percent of airtime to women's sports and Sports Center devoted only 1.3 percent.

When Messner and his colleagues issued the first *Gender and Televised Sports* report in 1990, they found that 5 percent of sport news and highlights were devoted to women's sports, but they predicted that this percentage would increase as more girls and women played sports (Duncan et al., 2005). Significant participation increases occurred over the next twenty years, but the airtime given to women's sports has actually declined. The only positive change is that when women's sports have been covered in recent years, the quality of coverage has improved: it is more likely to be serious, and less likely to involve sexist jokes or comments that trivialize and sexualize women athletes. The most recent data for local sports news programs indicated

that men appeared as anchors 100 percent of the time, and 99.5 percent of all anchors and ancillary announcers were men. Only one woman appeared as an announcer in any of the programs. Women accounted for 11 percent of the news anchors and ancillary announcers on Sports Center in 2009, down from 12 percent in 2004.

These findings indicate that progressive change in the media coverage of women's sports is neither inevitable nor permanent. This conclusion is supported by a recent review of published research on media coverage of women's sports by sociologist Toni Bruce (2013). Bruce notes that the mainstream media message on women appears to be this: "Go ahead and play but don't expect us to pay attention to your activities." Bruce also explains that media workers don't "actively or consciously try to marginalize women's sport"; however, the standard discourses they use to construct knowledge about sports and create narratives revolve around men and men's sports. Therefore, when news is produced, women's sports are not even on their radar. This means that changes will occur only if those discourses can be disrupted and revised to bring women's sports into the field of vision used by sports media personnel at all levels of news production.

When women's sports events are televised, the narratives constructed by commentators today are more sensitive to the physical skills of women athletes. Over time, and with the help of research by sociologists and communications scholars, announcers and commentators have developed a vocabulary and an approach to telling stories that are less likely to involve the following (Bruce, 2013):

Gender marking—that is, referring to men's events as *the* events and to women's events as *women's* events.

Compulsory heterosexuality—that is, mentioning that women athletes are "normal" because they have a boyfriend, husband, or child, and ignoring the reality that some women athletes are lesbians and that sexuality has nothing to do with athletic ability.

Appropriate femininity—that is, highlighting personal characteristics that distinguish women from men in terms of stature, strength, power, speed, emotional control, and vulnerability.

Infantilization—that is, referring to women athletes as *girls* and calling them by their first names in a way that reduces them to a status subordinate to men, who are referred to by last names and never called *boys*.

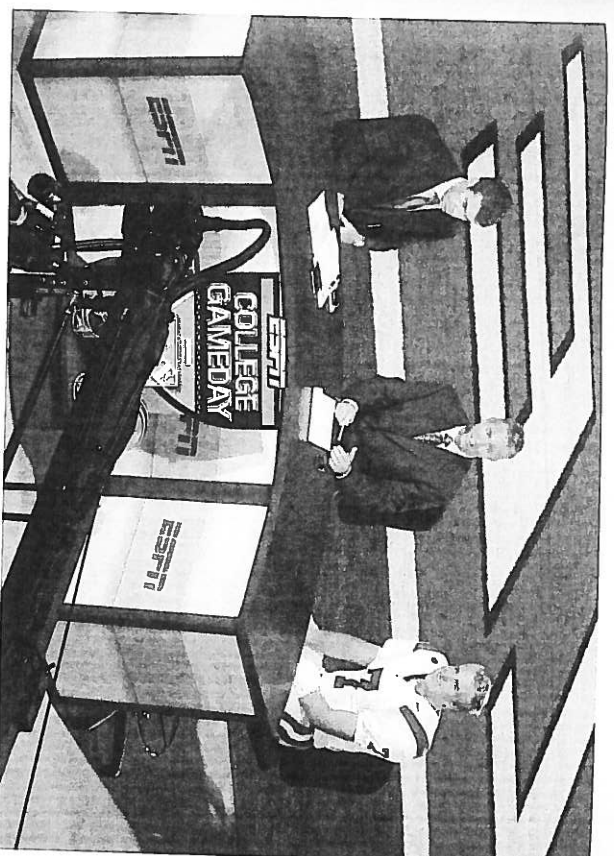
Non sport issues—that is, calling attention to a woman athlete's personality, personal appearance, and personal or family life in a way that makes her athlete identity seem secondary to these important "female matters."

Sexualization—that is, representing women athletes with images that highlight physical attractiveness to the exclusion of sport-related physical attributes, and giving special attention to women athletes who have "redeemed their femininity" by posing for such representations in videos or photo shoots.

Ambivalence—that is, using narratives that recognize and praise sporting skills but also include comments that trivialize or undermine a woman's identity and prowess as a serious athlete.

Toni Bruce notes that coverage today is less likely to involve these things than coverage in the past. But that does *not* mean that they have disappeared or that coverage no longer belittles elite women's sports as deserving less media attention. For example, coverage during the 2012 Olympic Games gave much more attention to Gabby Douglas's hairstyles and her diminutive stature than to her physical strength and fortitude. But the coverage of men's events made no mention of the men's hairstyles or short stature. This is only one example among hundreds of similar cases of media coverage containing stories organized around one or more of the seven factors listed above.

These patterns of media coverage exist worldwide. In an impressive multinational study of 17,777 articles about sports in eighty newspapers from twenty-two countries, it was found that



Football is the most popular media sport in the United States, and the demographics of the media audience for college football are attractive for commercial sponsors wanting to reach young people with higher levels of education and higher than average incomes. The coverage reproduces traditional gender ideology. (Source: © Bobak Hader)

85 percent of the articles were about men and men's sports, with female athletes or women's sports being the central focus in only 9 percent of the articles (Horley and Nieland, 2011; Toft, 2011). Further analysis showed that only 8 percent of the articles were written by women, and this percentage had not changed during the past decade.

Men's sport events often are promoted or described as if they had special historical importance, whereas women's sports events usually are promoted in a less dramatic manner (Kian et al., 2008). Men's events usually are unmarked by references to gender, whereas women's events almost always are referred to as women's events.

For instance, there has always been "The World Cup" and "The Women's World Cup" in soccer coverage. This terminology reflects the male-identified and male-centered orientation used by people in the media.

Traditional gender patterns in media coverage have been slow to change partly because sports media organizations worldwide have cultures and structures that are deeply gendered. They've been organized and scheduled around men's sports, just like the work routines and assignments of sport reporters. Therefore, the coverage of women's events often requires changes in institutionalized patterns of sports media work. Furthermore, the

vast majority of sports media personnel are men, and the highest-status assignments in sports media are those that deal with men's sports.

Female reporters and announcers today understand that their upward mobility in the sports media industry demands that they cover men's events in much the same ways that men cover them. If they insist on covering only women's events or if they are assigned only to women's events, they won't move up the corporate ladder in media organizations (Bruce, 2013). Advancement also may be limited if they insist on covering men's sports in new ways that don't reaffirm the "correctness" of the coverage patterns and styles developed by men. Although women in the print media regularly cover men's sports, very few women have done regular commentary for men's sports in the electronic media apart from occasional "sideline reporters" who often are expected to look cute and talk to the guys as if they were at a "frat house" with no other women around (White, 2005). One of the exceptions to this pattern occurred in 2008 when Doris Burke was a color commentator for NBA playoff games. Online comments, nearly all from men, were generally supportive of Burke and praised her competence. But a few men were upset. One stated, "I just don't want to hear a woman caller announce my game" (emphasis added), and another wrote, "I watched the entire 2nd half on mute because everytime I hear her talk it ruins the game for me." The negative comments were influential, because Burke was removed and neither she nor any other woman has done color commentary on men's games since then.

Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality Themes in Media Representations of Sports Just as gender ideology influences media coverage, so do racial and ethnic ideology and the stereotypes associated with it (Coogan, 2015; Farrington et al., 2012; Ličen and Billings, 2013; Love and Hughey, 2015; Price et al., 2012; Rowe, 2013; Van Sterkenburg et al., 2012).

Research in the 1970s and 1980s discredited the assumed factual basis of racial and ethnic stereotypes at the same time that media studies identified the ways that ideology influenced sport stories

and commentaries, particularly in reference to black athletes. This made white journalists and commentators increasingly aware that the quality of their work depended on avoiding words and inferences based on discredited racial stereotypes. As a result, most of them became more critical about what they wrote and said, and they chose their words more carefully.

But making these changes was difficult for whites who accepted dominant racial ideology and had never viewed it critically or from the perspectives of blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans. Some media personnel made careless or naive mistakes, and a few were suspended or fired for them.

Avoiding stereotypes and covering racial and ethnic relations in an informed way are two different things. Sports coverage today pretends that race and ethnicity don't exist; it assumes that sports is a racially and ethnically level playing field and that everyone in sports faces the same challenges and odds for success. But race and ethnicity are influential to such an extent that people cannot talk about them without discovering real, meaningful, and socially important racial and ethnic differences in what they think and feel. Ignoring this story about real differences allows whites in the media and media audiences to be comfortably color blind and deny the legacy and continuing relevance of skin color and cultural heritage in society and sports.

At the same time, blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans are reminded that mainstream sport cultures have been shaped by the values and experiences of white men, and sport organizations and media companies are controlled by white men. This is simply a fact, and it is not meant to be an indictment of white men. But it does create tension for ethnic minority athletes and unique social dynamics in sports where players are racially and ethnically mixed. This in itself is a newsworthy story, but it would make many people, especially powerful white men, uncomfortable, and it would be difficult for most journalists to tell without being censored. But as long as it remains untold, white privilege in sports will persist without

being recognized. Finally, if ethnic minority players or coaches try to tell the story, they're quickly accused of "playing the race card," being arrogant and ungrateful, promoting political correctness, or being bitter because of "imagined abuse."

Media coverage unwittingly reaffirms dominant racial ideology when whiteness is overlooked. For example, when journalists ignore the dynamics of living in a white-dominated, white-identified, and white-centered society, they unwittingly reproduce racial and ethnic stereotypes at the same time that they claim to be color blind.

Pretending to be color blind in a culture where a skin color-based racial ideology has existed for over three centuries ensures that white privilege is seamlessly incorporated into the media coverage of sports. It allows people in sports media to avoid asking why nearly all sports at the high school, college, and professional level are exclusively white or becoming so. It allows the editors at *Sports Illustrated* to never even think of publishing an article about the underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos in most sports, even when they live in communities where hundreds of high school and college teams in swimming, volleyball, softball, tennis, golf, soccer, lacrosse, rowing, gymnastics, wrestling, and other sports are all white.

It also allows journalists to avoid asking critical questions about new patterns of residential and school segregation and growing income and wealth disparity that deeply influences who plays what sports in the United States today. They can put aside questions about why there are fewer African/Asian/Native American and Latino professional golfers today than there were in 1981—fifteen years before Tiger Woods won his first PGA tournament as a professional in 1996. Most important, pretending to be color blind allows media people to ignore whiteness and all racial issues, thereby maintaining a high racial comfort level among white media consumers and advertisers. In this way, ignoring reality becomes an effective strategy for boosting profits.

Scholars in ethnic studies explain that this self-declared colorblindness denies the real history and relevance of skin color and ethnicity in societies

where previously unquestioned racism has shaped the distribution of income and wealth and the everyday living conditions of nearly all people. When a color-blind approach governs the coverage of sports, media stories miss significant sport realities and reproduce the racial and ethnic status quo. This allows people in dominant racial and ethnic populations to see and use sports as forms of social escapism—as whitewashed worlds devoid of the complex, messy issues that characterize everyday life.

At the same time, a color-blind approach constantly reminds people in racial and ethnic minority populations that their histories, heritages, and experiences are unrecognized in sports. As a result, some ethnic minority people avoid some or all sports, or they use sports as sites for seeking recognition and respect in the dominant culture. When we view media critically, it becomes increasingly clear that they don't "tell it like it is" as much as they tell it as their target demographics and advertisers want it told.

Ethnicity and Nationality in a Global Context Themes related to ethnicity and nationality also exist in sports media coverage worldwide (Malcolm et al., 2010; Rowe, 2009, 2013). Although some sports reporters and broadcasters are careful to avoid using ethnic and national stereotypes in their representations of athletes and teams, evidence suggests that subtle stereotypes regularly influence sports coverage (Coogan, 2015; Kelly, 2011; Price et al., 2013; Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). For example, some media coverage has portrayed Asian athletes as methodical, mechanical, machine-like, mysterious, industrious, self-disciplined, and intelligent. Their achievements are more often attributed to cognitive than to physical abilities, and stereotypes about height and other physiological characteristics are sometimes used to explain success or failure in sports. Latinos, on the other hand, have been described as flamboyant, exotic, emotional, passionate, moody, and hot-blooded.

The sports journalists most likely to avoid such stereotypes are those who have worked to learn about national and ethnic histories and those parts

of the world in which teams and athletes live. This is what all good journalists do when they cover events and people. For example, when 28 percent of MLB players are Latino and more players are coming from certain Asian countries, it is reasonable to expect the journalists covering baseball to do their homework and learn about the cultures and baseball histories in those countries, and about the experiences of the athletes who have grown up there.

It also would be professionally responsible for media companies to hire sports reporters and broadcasters who are bilingual and culturally informed so that they could talk meaningfully with players whose lives on and off the field are not understood by most baseball fans. These are important stories as all sports become increasingly globalized. For the media to ignore them is to ignore the reality of sports today.

The most effective way to reduce subtle forms of racial, ethnic, and national bias in the media is to hire reporters, editors, photographers, writers, producers, directors, camerapersons, commentators, and statisticians from diverse racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds. Lip service is paid to this goal, and progress has been made in certain media, but members of racial and ethnic minorities are clearly underrepresented in nearly all sports newsrooms and media executive offices where over 85 percent of the full time reporters and editors are white (Lapchick, 2013).

This skewed pattern is unfortunate because ethnic diversity among media people would enrich stories and provide multiple perspectives for understanding sports and the people who play and coach them. Of course, neither skin color nor gender precludes knowledge about sports or the people involved in them, but knowledge is based on a combination of experience and the richness of the perspectives one uses to make sense of the ethnically and racially diverse social worlds that constitute sports today.

EXPERIENCES AND CONSEQUENCES OF CONSUMING MEDIA SPORTS

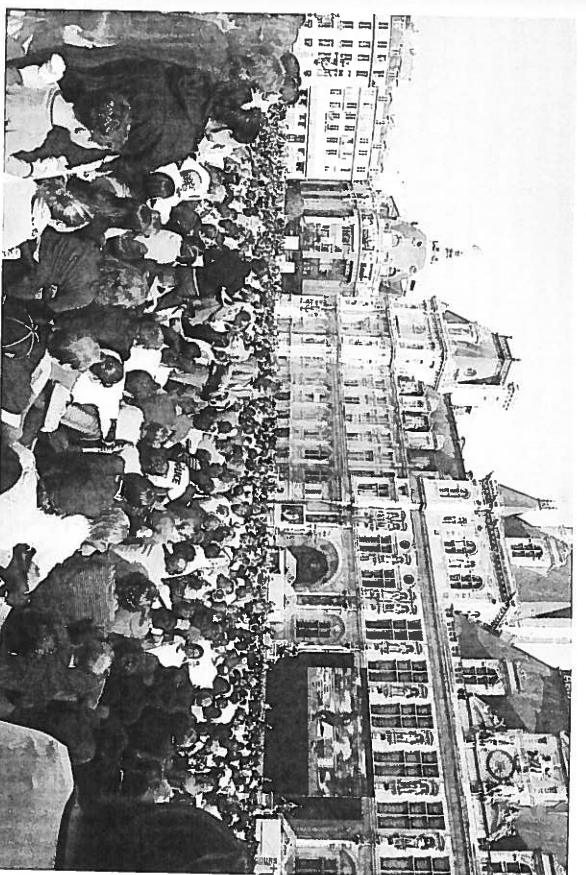
Media sports provide topics of conversation, occasions for social interaction, a sense of belonging and

identity, opportunities to express emotions, and an exciting distraction for those who are passing time alone. However, few studies have investigated audience experiences to see how people give meaning to media sports coverage and integrate it into their lives. Similarly, we know that media images and narratives influence what people feel, think, and do, but few studies have investigated the consequences of media sport consumption at the individual or collective level.

Audience Experiences

Studies of audience experiences suggest that people interpret media content and integrate media sport consumption into their lives in diverse ways (Bruce, 2013; Gantz, 2013; Wenner, 2013). More men than women are strongly committed to consuming media sports, and strongly committed consumers constitute a relatively small segment of the overall population in most societies, including the United States and Canada (Adams, 2006). However, these studies don't tell us much about the ways that people give meaning to and include the consumption of media sports in their lives.

One exception is a creative study of twenty white men and a few women who had grown up in various towns in western Pennsylvania but had moved to Fort Worth, Texas (Kraszewski, 2008). By various means each person joined with others who had started a tradition of meeting in a sports bar where they watched Pittsburgh Steelers games from August through December. As they met each week their interaction focused on rekindling and nurturing their sense of western Pennsylvania as "home" and their identities associated with their geographical origins. In the process they created a place-image of western Pennsylvania that matched the blue-collar, white European-American, steelworker image of the Steelers. They wore Steelers jerseys, drank Iron City (Pittsburgh) beer in aluminum bottles, and were identified as Steelers fans by the Dallas Cowboys fans in the bar. They avoided talking about social class, race, and jobs and focused on "where they were from"—talking



As outdoor screens are used to televise major sport events, such as the Rugby World Cup in Paris (2007), there are new social dynamics associated with media consumption. This crowd was predominantly French, but it also included groups of fans from at least ten other nations. Access to this plaza was open, and spectators were orderly despite a packed crowd and no reserved seats. No sociological research has been done on this phenomenon. (Source: © Jay Cokley)

about roads, towns, and other features of the landscape of western Pennsylvania. For them, watching the Steelers on television was a social occasion for interacting with others who reaffirmed their sense of home and their regional identities, despite living over 1200 miles away from where they grew up.

When media scholar Walter Gantz (2013) studied male-female married couples in the United States, he found that they often watched televised sports together and that this usually was a positive activity in their relationships. Men watched sports more than women did and were more likely to be committed sports fans, but when women were

committed fans, their patterns of watching and responding to sports on television were similar to men's patterns. Gantz did find that some couples experienced conflicts related to viewing sports, but most resolved them successfully. Partners usually learned to adjust to each other's viewing habits over time, and when they didn't, it usually meant that they had general relationship problems unrelated to watching sports.

In another study of viewing habits, Whiteside and Hardin (2011) found that even though women participate in sports more often today than in the past, they don't regularly watch women's sports as

media spectators. Data indicated that women's leisure time is often spent doing things that fit the interests of other family members rather than using their leisure time for their own interests. They watched men's sports because they watched with the men in their lives. Under these conditions, watching women's sports seldom became a high priority for them.

Future studies will tell us more about the ways that people integrate media sport experiences into their lives and when media sports become important sites at which social relationships occur. For example, we know that social media magnify the voices of sport spectators and provide opportunities to raise their own issues in connection with sports (Millington and Darnell, 2014; Norman, 2012, 2014), but we don't know what that means in terms of their relationships and everyday lives at home, work, school, and in their own sport participation. It will be important to include the use of the Internet and video games in future studies.

Consequences of Consuming Media Sports

Research on the consequences of consuming media sports has focused on a wide variety of issues. Here we'll focus on three: active participation in sports, attendance at sport events, and betting on sport events.

Active Participation in Sports Does consuming media sports lead people to be more active sport participants or turn them into couch potatoes? This is an important issue, given the health problems associated with physical inactivity in many societies today.

When children watch sports on television, some copy what they see if they have or can make opportunities to do so. Children are great imitators with active imaginations, so when they see and identify with athletes, they may create informal activities or seek to join youth sport programs to pursue television-inspired dreams. However, participation grounded in these dreams usually fades quickly, especially after children discover that it takes years

of tedious, repetitious, and boring practice to compete successfully and reach the victory podium.

Research examining the legacies of the Olympics for people in the country hosting the games has shown consistently that watching sports on television is more likely to lead to more television watching than actively playing sports (Com, 2012; Donnelly, 2008; Green, 2012; Korteakas, 2012; Thorndy, 2013). In light of this evidence it appears that a positive link between watching and doing sports may exist only when parents, teachers, or physical educators strategically connect media representations with everyday sport participation. Research is needed to explore this possibility. In the meantime, an ad for late 2012 told viewers that the network had so much sports programming that "there is no need to leave your couch all month long."

Many adults don't play the sports they consume in the media, but some do. Research suggests that those who are not regular participants use media sports as entertainment, whereas those who are avid participants are the ones who use media sports as a source of inspiration for their own participation. In the absence of more research on this topic, we can say only that consuming sports through the media may be connected with activity or inactivity in different situations and with different people.

Attendance at Sport Events Game attendance is related to many factors, including the consumption of media sports. On the one hand, many people say that they would rather watch certain sport events on television than attend them in person. On the other hand, the media publicize sports, promote interest, and provide information that helps people to identify with athletes and teams and become potential ticket purchasers for events.

Although consuming media sports has generally been positively related to attending live events, this may be changing with widespread use of new media and the existence of large HD televisions. Whereas media companies in the past tried to duplicate the live-event experience on television, now stadium managers try to duplicate the

home-viewing experience for those who attend live events. Spectators now want broadband Wi-Fi and high-speed mobile phone connections in stadiums, large HD replay screens, and video screens by concessions and in restaurants so they don't miss the action they paid to see. These stadium upgrades are costly, but without them, more people may choose to stay at home, where they have access to everything they want during a game.

Additionally, there may be circumstances when people who normally pay for their ticket at the gate will stay home to watch a televised game rather than go to the stadium. This might occur when they expect that there will be a large crowd at the game, violent or uncivil behavior on the part of other fans, or bad weather.

Gambling on Sports Consuming media sports is clearly connected with gambling, but there is no evidence that it causes gambling.

Formal gambling on sports dates back centuries and continues today at horse and dog tracks, in limited terms in Delaware, and in Nevada where people may bet legally on nearly every possible outcome in sport events—such as number of points, who scores first, points in first half or second half, who beats the point spread, and so on.

It has been estimated that sports wagering in the United States amounts to as much as \$380 billion annually with over \$2 billion bet legally in Nevada during 2014. Sport gambling is most popular among younger men who have above-average income and at least some college education. Male college students have higher rates of gambling than other categories of people, mostly because they think they know more about sports than others.

A 2012 NCAA study (Paskus and Derewinsky, 2013) of more than 23,000 students across all three NCAA divisions showed that nearly 60 percent of male students reported gambling for money and 26 percent of the male athletes had bet money on sports, which is a violation of NCAA rules. About one in twenty athletes reported being contacted by outside gamblers looking for inside information they could use to guide their bets on college games. About

60 percent of male athletes and 40 percent of female athletes approved of betting on sports, excluding their own games, and most thought that people could consistently make money by betting on sports.

Sport gambling debts can have destructive consequences, but betting on sports is not generally seen as an important moral or legal issue. Many people today are accustomed to buying state lottery tickets and going to casinos, and they don't favor new restrictions that would limit or ban betting on sports, not are they seduced by online betting opportunities. However, gambling constitutes a threat to sports because it elevates the stakes associated with competitive outcomes and may lead people to seek an edge by convincing one or more athletes to control the scores of games and matches so that bets can be won when point spreads are not covered by favored teams or athletes. Even a rumor of game or match fixing or point shaving seriously threatens the integrity of competitive outcomes and destroys the foundation for much sport spectatorship. In this sense, consuming media sports does not influence gambling as much as gambling could influence media sport consumption.

SPORT JOURNALISM

Some people trivialize sport journalism by saying that it provides information about people and events that is entertaining but unrelated to important issues in everyday life. However, sports do matter—not because they produce a tangible product or make essential contributions to our survival, but because they represent ideas about how the world works and what is important in life.

Sports are not merely reflections of social worlds; they also are constitutive of those worlds—that is, they're sites at which social worlds are produced, reproduced, and changed. Sport journalists are key players in these constitutive processes, because their representations of sports can influence the ideas and beliefs that people use to define and give meaning to themselves, their experiences, and the organization of social worlds.

Sport Journalists Are Not All the Same

Entertainment is a focus for nearly everyone working in commercial media. Sportswriters generally provide specific information and in-depth analysis, whereas the announcers and commentators for visual electronic media usually focus on providing images and narratives that create anticipation and a sense of urgency among their audience. Exceptions sometimes occur in sport talk radio when analysis and “call-in” interactivity are structured into program format. Additionally, television also includes some sport programming that provides in-depth analysis, but this is relatively rare in its overall programming format.

As athletes, agents, team publicity directors, bloggers, and others contribute online content, traditional sport journalism is changing. Independent investigative journalism has nearly disappeared in favor of entertainment journalism that focuses on personalities and “celebrity chasing” rather than social and political issues in sports. Flashy

infotainment now takes the place of hard news, media personalities present opinions rather than fact-based stories, and stories holding the powerful accountable for their actions are killed, censored, or never produced.

There are capable investigative journalists working at *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN, but the entertainment side of these media companies limits independent reporting or fosters self-censorship by reporters (Miller and Belson, 2013; Sandomir et al., 2013; Zirin, 2013e). Independent journalists produce stories for blog sites such as *Deadspin* and *SB Nation*, but they are paid as contract workers and rarely have resources for sustained investigative work.

Investigative journalism does not provide a good return on investment for media companies. ESPN is owned by the Walt Disney Company, the largest media conglomerate in the world, and they can make more money providing entertainment than presenting detailed investigations of concussions, tax-avoidance scams, media influence on sports, institutionalized forms of corruption, and other important issues that require critical analysis. They now make more money than ever before, but they are cutting or shortening contracts for their investigative reporters. The same is true for CNN/Sports Illustrated, owned by Time Warner, the second-largest media conglomerate in the world.

As big media exert more control over sports worldwide, those of us who participate in and consume sport can expect fewer media stories about the meaning, purpose, and organization of sports apart from how they are represented by those who control and profit from them.

Sport Journalists on the Job: Relationships with Athletes

As the amount of video coverage of sports has increased, sportswriters have had to create stories that go beyond describing action and reporting scores. This leads them to seek increasingly intimate information about the personal lives of athletes, and this creates tension in athlete-journalist

relationships. Athletes today realize that they cannot trust journalists to hold information in confidence, even if the disclosure took place in the privacy of the locker room. Furthermore, the stakes associated with “bad press” are so great for athletes and teams that everyone in sport organizations limits what they say when talking with journalists. As a result, sport stories tend to contain similar and meaningless quotes from athletes game after game, week after week, and season after season.

Salary and background differences between journalists and athletes increase tensions in their relationships. Highly paid black and Latino athletes without college degrees have little in common with middle-class, college-educated, white, Euro-American journalists. As a result, some journalists don't refrain from disclosing personal information about athletes to enhance stories, and athletes define journalists as “outsiders” who can impact their lives without fully understanding who they are and what their identity as an athlete means to them.

Team owners and university athletic departments are so conscious of tensions between athletes and media personnel that they now provide players with training on how to handle interviews without saying things that might sound bad or be misinterpreted.

These tensions also call attention to ethical issues in sport journalism. Many, but not all, journalists are aware that they should not jeopardize athletes' reputations simply for the sake of entertainment, and they should not hurt them unintentionally or without good reason. Latino journalist Dan Le Batard, who works for ESPN and the Miami Herald, explains that he tries to be “nonjudgmental” when he covers athletes because all people have flaws and exposing the flaws of athletes who disappoint you with their actions smacks of self-righteousness and raises the ethical issue of invasion of privacy (2005, p. 14). However, journalists constantly face gray areas in which ethical guidelines are not clear, and the need to present attractive stories often encourages them to push ethical limits. As a result, tensions will remain in athlete-journalist relationships.

summary

COULD SPORTS AND THE MEDIA SURVIVE WITHOUT EACH OTHER?

Media and media experiences have become ever-present in the lives of people living in many parts of the world today. This is why we study the relationship between sports and the media.

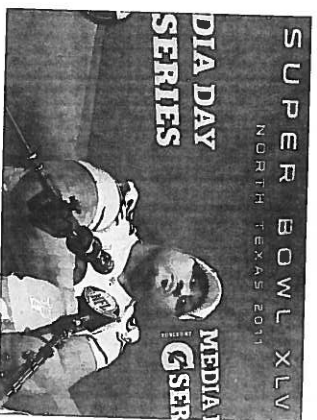
Media sports, like other aspects of culture, are social constructions. They're created, organized, and controlled by human beings whose motives and ideas are grounded in their social worlds, experiences, and ideologies. The media represent sports to us through selected images and narratives that usually reaffirm dominant ideologies and promote the interests of wealthy and powerful people who own media companies.

New media have altered the way people receive news, consume media content, interact with others who share their interests in sports, connect with athletes and teams, and even express their feelings about everything from on-the-field action to off-the-field management decisions. Therefore, new media extend the boundaries of what we study in the sociology of sport.

People now have access to sports content 24/7 on television, smartphones, tablets, and any Internet-connected device. This means that a person's identity as a fan can be reaffirmed at anytime, anywhere. Fans can also follow athletes on digital sites like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, and blogs. This eliminates the mainstream media filter and provides them with information that comes directly from athletes.

Fantasy sports and video games are an important component of new media. At this time, they complement existing media, but they're beginning to provide unique sport-related experiences unlike those occasioned by traditional media.

Sports and the media have become increasingly interdependent as both have become more important parts of social worlds. They could survive without each other, but they would be different from the way they are now. Commercial sports have grown



There have always been tensions between elite athletes and journalists, but athletes tolerated journalists because they needed them to communicate with fans. Today that is no longer the case. Social media puts athletes in direct contact with fans so some of them, like this Super Bowl player, have little patience when forced to deal with journalists and their “name” questions.

(Source: © AP Photo/Eric Gay)

and prospered because of media coverage and the rights fees paid by media companies. Without the publicity and money provided by media, commercial sports would be reduced to local business operations with much less scope than they have today, and less emphasis would be placed on elite, competitive sports in people's lives.

Media could survive without sports, but newspapers and television would be different from their current format if they did not have sports content and programming to attract young male audiences and the sponsors who wish to buy access to those audiences. Without sports, newspaper circulation would decrease, and television programming on weekends and holidays would be different and less profitable for television broadcasters.

The symbiotic relationship between sports and the media in most societies today exists because certain sports can be used to attract audiences that sponsors want to convert into consumers of their products and services. The dynamics of this relationship are also influenced by the interaction that occurs among athletes, agents, coaches, administrators, sport team owners, sponsors, advertisers, media representatives, and a diverse collection of spectators. Power relations are a crucial feature of this interaction process, and it is important to understand them when studying the sports-media relationship.

Research indicates that media coverage of sports in the United States emphasizes images and narratives reproducing dominant ideologies related to success, consumption, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. As a result, current patterns of power and privilege are portrayed as normal and natural and remain taken-for-granted.

Future research utilizing cultural, interactionist, and structural theories combined with a critical approach will tell us more about the various ways that people make sense of the media representations they consume. This is especially important in connection with the Internet and video games. Patterns of media sport consumption are changing rapidly, and it is important to study them in ways that promote critical media literacy rather than the

uncritical celebration of media technology and the promotional culture of most sports coverage.

Few studies have investigated the experiences and consequences of consuming media sports. We know that people make sense of sports media images and narratives on their own terms and that this interpretive process of sense-making is influenced by the social, cultural, and historical conditions under which it occurs. People also integrate media sport experiences into their lives in diverse ways, but we know little about the patterns and consequences of this integration process. For example, research is needed to help us identify the conditions under which the consumption of media sports influences active participation in sports, attendance at live sport events, and gambling on sports.

To understand sports and the media, it helps to become familiar with basic features of sports journalism today. Journalists are key players in the overall process of representing sports to large audiences. In the process they influence ideas and beliefs about sports and social worlds. The interactivity made possible by new media makes journalists more accessible to their audiences while bringing members of the audience into the process of creating media content. Additionally, the need to create stories that capture the attention of media consumers has led journalists to seek stories that disclose private and personal information about athletes. This creates tensions between journalists and athletes, which then influence media representations of sports and the people who play them.

Sports and the media need each other, especially when making profits is a primary goal for each. The sports-media relationship changes as it is negotiated by athletes, facility directors, sport team owners, event promoters, media representatives, sponsors, advertisers, agents, and spectators. Studying the dynamics of this relationship helps expand our understanding of sports in society.

SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

Reading 1. New media: Consuming sports 24/7
Reading 2. Putting media to use: The NFL as a marketing machine

Reading 3. Live by the tweet, die by the tweet:

Learning to use new media

Reading 4. Virtual sports: Play safe, stay home

Reading 5. Media rights deals: What sport has the best deal?

Reading 6. The stronger women get, the more men watch football: A prediction from 1990

Reading 7. People who don't watch sports on TV subsidize those who do.

SPORT MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- Athletes at your university have gotten into trouble using social media. You have been hired to create a social media policy for the athletic department. Identify the three main components of the policy, and describe how you would explain to the athletes why you created each of them.

- You're a new editor at *Sports Illustrated*. At your first editorial meeting the major item on the agenda is the February swimsuit issue. It is decided that it is economically unwise to drop the swimsuit issue, but it is also decided that if the swimsuit issue is continued, there must be other changes in the magazine to present a fair image of women in sports. As a new editor, you are called on to make some suggestions for changes. How would you respond?

- You are called in as an advisor to the President's Council on Fitness and Sports. The two topics being discussed are (1) whether television sports are turning people in the United States into couch potatoes, and (2) whether the television coverage of professional sports is destroying people's interests in local high school, college, and amateur sports. The Council wants advice from you. What do you tell them?