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The Challenges of Journalistic Principles to Sports Journalism

The football World Cup represents an unrivalled highlight to sports journalism. As the world's largest sports event, it magnifies the structures underlying the journalistic profession and allows a look ahead to the future of sports journalism. Following a brief glimpse on the international aspects which the World Cup adds to media reporting, this paper focuses on examining the challenges of common journalistic principles to sports journalism. Generally, sports journalism is governed by very similar rules than any other kind of reporting; however, it can be regarded as a specific form of journalism for a number of reasons. Firstly, 'sport' resembles areas of life characterised by elements of 'play', 'game', and '(physical) culture'. For this reason, and because of its originally entertaining functions, sport represents a domain of recreation. Secondly, sport has been transformed to media sport (or sport in the media); hence, we are now dealing with a strongly media-driven subject area. Sports journalism today is, therefore, operating in difficult, yet partially self-evoked, terrain.

On the grounds of these observations, the criticism voiced about contemporary sports journalism can be subsumed under the following (simplified) claims: sport reporting has increasingly degenerated towards entertainment; sports journalists resemble sellers of entertaining commodities rather than represent critical onlookers; and they act like fans rather than resuming their role as neutral observers. Indeed, some of these issues raise crucial questions about the quality of sports journalism; although the notion of quality in journalism generally remains controversial. Nevertheless, the suggested claims can be recognised as representing seven forms of deviation from common journalistic principles. I refer to these as (1) the patriotism challenge; (2) the monopoly challenge; (3) the issue challenge; (4) the emotional challenge; (5) the dependency challenge; and (7) the advertisement challenge.

Table 1: Survey of journalistic principles and the challenges they pose to sports journalism

JOURNALISTIC PRINCIPLE	CHALLENGE
Diversity of providers/views	Monopoly over broadcasting rights of sports events (tv, radio)
Relevance	Concentration on national heroes, top-class sport, media sports (excessive reporting/stylisation/staging)
Professionalism - Neutrality - Truthfulness - Analytic Quality	- Partiality, nationalism - Nicened-up short reporting - 1:0, set-phrase journalism, stereotypes
Balance	- Under-representation
Independence - on the level of individual	

organisations - on the level of individual actors	- Co-organisers - Distance/closeness struggles (<i>embedded journalists, experts</i>)
Separation of advertising and editorial content	- Sponsoring, infomercials
Separation of facts and opinion	- Emotionalisation, commentary

Having established these relations, I finally suggest important future developments in the field of sports journalism:

- (1) As a consequence of stricter legal regulations, the hierarchy of sports media increases. This leads to a differentiation of roles in sports journalism. Essentially, three different occupational roles emerge: (1) the submitter (tv, radio, live sport texts); (2) the explainer (print media, tv-experts); and (3) the mediator (blogs, social media etc.)
- (2) Due to the increased monitoring of reporting (FIFA regulations; different media specialising in certain coverage), sports journalism is in need of a controlled loss of control with regards to the issues covered and the organisation of content.
- (3) A result of amplified speed within the media in general, sports reporting faces a dispartment: on the one hand, it will have to become faster and faster; on the other, it will re-discover slowness.
- (4) Finally, particularly as a consequence of the electronic media, traditions in sports journalism will be transformed.