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Sports Journalism

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Human beings have a strong propensity towards sports since time immemorial. Women and men belonging to each and every strata of society have always been attracted by various different types of games and sports. Descriptions of different types of games and sports can be found in ancient writings and scriptures. It would not be impertinent to treat narratives of various types of physical training and training of weaponry given to the sons of king Pandu and king Kuru by Acharya Drona through various kinds of games and sports and accounts of competitions of chariot racing and horse racing found in various literary writings of past, as an ancient form of sports reporting.



Instances of sports reporting can also be found in foreign lands as well. Roman philosopher and writer Homer (850 B.C.) has written about a wrestling match between Odysseus and Ajax in his epic drama Iliad. There has been a long tradition and history of sports culture in the western world since the beginning of the inaugural Olympic Games in ancient Rome.

The system that modern newspapers follow to report sporting events and related phenomena is not very old. Taking a cue from the

British newspapers, Indian newspapers also started to give importance to the sports journalism. Initially, sports news was not given in a systematically organized manner in Indian newspapers, but now the situation has changed and almost every major Indian newspaper gives ample space to sports news in its publication.

Objective of Sports Journalism

Basically, the primary objective of sports journalism is not to know about the environment of games or sports, but to present the facts. A sports enthusiast's first concern is the statistics related to a sporting event. Ingenuity of sports writing depends on easy and perspicuous presentation of facts and statistics so that even a person with minimum knowledge about the sports in question can understand it without any special effort. Sports journalism cannot be limited to a single country. This is always done with an international perspective because everyone wants to know about the standards of the sportswomen belonging to other countries.



Sports Journalism: Writing

If you want to become a good sports journalist, then always keep pen and paper handy, so that the thoughts originating in your mind can be put in written words in order to be accessed later at an opportune moment. A lot of communication scholars believe that a journalist should not part with her/his pen and paper even during slumber. Good sports journalists are known for their meticulous compilation of each and every thought. The most important thing is that you must keep everything you have read and

collected handy. This can form a good reference point in future. For this following methods can be adopted:

1. Collection of newspaper and magazine cuttings: When we read any magazine or newspaper, then we should mark and cut important articles and write-ups and arrange them in files according to the topics they deal with. Soon, you will realize that you have a automatically prepared library at your disposal and in this manner reference material for any feature or article becomes easily available

to you without any sweat and more importantly, without losing any time. And, timeliness and clarity are two of the most important attributes of any good sports or games based report. Reference material collected for any news story may also be of immense use in writing any other feature or article. Comments of experts collected through these 'cuttings' can be used as quotations to substantiate your feature or article as well as to inculcate greater acceptability in it. Matter related to different sports or games should be collected in different files. For example, material collected for cricket should be filed separately from the material collected for football in order to save time and systematize your work.

2. Quest for ideas in sports: A competent sports journalist should assiduously endeavour to develop her/his own observational skills and should keep her/his eye open for every interesting event or incident that is unusual or unique in any manner. You may be reading, listening or watching anything anywhere. All these prove to be very useful in enriching your ideas and in substantiating them. Therefore, no data or fact should be considered to be inferior. The only thing that you need is the capability to transform any material according to the demands of the sports page of a newspaper or any other publication. This is part of the training for any sports journalist. S/he should try to learn by watching any game or sporting event. This not only increases our knowledge, but also expands the contours of our mental capabilities. This makes journalists even more sensitive towards the things they view as well as listen to. They watch people; their mannerisms; their behaviour; and every event from a different perspective. A good sports journalist not only establishes herself/himself as a prominent personality in the field of sports, but also grasps the technical intricacies related to various games and sports very quickly. Some ideas are gathered by conversing with different people. Persistent quest of ideas should be the goal. It is better to become friendly with the people quickly in order to get new insights, then to wait for the ideas to come to you and who knows someone among these people may give a brilliant idea.

3. Think and Write: Think hundred times before writing anything. If you are not sure about the message you want to convey to your readers, then you will not be able to leave any impact on their hearts and minds because it is possible that they may not understand what you want to say to them owing to your own confusions. Therefore, for good and effective writing, it is imperative that you

write only when your mind is at peace and you are in a blissful mood. If you fail in your endeavour to present clear and pristine ideas in form of good writing, then you will be able to present to the readers only a muddled picture of your hotchpotch ideas. There is no better method to improve your writing skills than self-criticism.

Style of Sports Journalism

A journalist should choose the style of essayistic description for sports reporting. Simple words should be used and general writing style should be employed. Use of technical and literary words in sports reporting should be avoided.

1. Importance of new perspectives: Every sports journalist faces the problem of presenting any sporting event with a unique perspective and a distinctive flavour. A sports journalists should meticulously delve upon the importance of the wicket for which an outstanding partnership was made in a cricket match; a catch that changed the course of a match; a goal scored in the dying moments of a hockey match; a crucial point earned in a badminton tie or a service break that transformed a dull on sided match into a riveting contest. If a sports journalist possesses correct and practical point of view, then there is not an iota of doubt that her/his reports will be admired by the readers.

2. Keep your eyes and ears open: Even if a journalist is endowed with excellent writing skills, possesses the capability to express her/his ideas cogently and has an extensive network of sources at her/his command; the importance of assiduously searching for news cannot be overlooked. It is imperative for an enlightened journalist to keep her/his eyes and ears open at all times. Sometimes one gets an opportunity to lay her/his hands upon an exciting news story during a seemingly dull informal gathering or a cocktail party.

3. Commercial Access: Report given by a sports journalist should give equal coverage to every dimension of any game:

- A reporter reports for those who are not fortunate enough to watch a game live.
- If readers are watching or understanding a game live through electronic media, then they use the report by journalists for a more profound analysis of the game as well as to know about the facts they do not know or are hard for them to understand without a simple accompanying description.
- A sports journalist should always be conscious about that important point about any sporting event, while reporting about

that event, which s/he wants to highlight in the intro of her/his report. If the report of any sports journalist portrays the reality in a novel and unique manner, then readers are bound to like that report.

4. Writing within limits: It is important from the point of view of sports journalism that a report is written in summary format. Conciseness of a report is directly linked to its readability and receptivity. That is pithier the report, greater the readability as well as the receptivity. Also, this is the age of science. Readers do not have time to choose and read relevant excerpts from a cumbersome report. While writing a sports news, a sports journalists should have basic information about the game and pertinent information important related to that specific event which s/he is writing about at her/his fingertips. S/he should try to give succinctly a well balanced account of the events in the report so as to render it easily readable. The point mentioned above is the most important aspect of sports journalism. This becomes even more important when there is scarcity of space and a sports journalist has no option but to present her/his story within that limited space. In other words, a sports journalist should master the art of striking the right balance between the space available and the ideas s/he wants to put forward. Therefore, it is imperative that a report is read and reread before handing over the copy to the sports desk. This will help make your copy accurate and error-free.

Availability of the space depends upon the relative importance of the sporting event for the target group. For instance, a paragraph will be more than enough for a sporting event organized by a local educational institution but when it comes to important international events such as the Olympics, the Davis Cup, the Football World Cup and the Cricket World Cup sometimes even special supplements are published to satiate the demands of the readers. Important thing to keep in mind is that the report should always be written as succinctly as possible so that it does not become tedious.

Writing Sports News

Sports journalists must know about important milestones achieved in the history of a sport before writing about any event related to that sport. They should know about the rules and regulations of the game they are writing about as well as the legendary players who were involved with any particular game. Also, they should have list of important clubs, organizations and related office-bearers along with their addresses and contact information, such as phone numbers,



e-mail ids, etc, of the game they are writing about, in order that they may easily contact and procure relevant information from them in case the need be.

Sports journalism includes everything from college level sporting events to amateur and professional sporting events. Regional, national and international sporting events come under its purview.

Writing sports news is slightly different from writing general news stories as there is comparatively greater scope for sports journalists to inculcate their personal opinions in their reports. Only the best and the most experienced sports journalists can take proper advantage of this sort of rare journalistic freedom. Report of a sports journalist should incorporate physical fitness and skills of a sportsperson; points scored; personal contribution of a sportsperson; technique and strategy employed and excitement of the contest. A unique point of view and a distinctive style of writing are indispensable traits for any sports journalist who wants to create a niche for herself/himself in the field.

While writing about famous sports personalities, one must select the words very carefully. Before writing about their “off the field” activities, whether good or bad, one should meticulously go through evidences and ascertain their veracity.

Following suggestions may be beneficial:

(i) Need for Expertise: The arena of the circus named sports journalism is quite extensive. One cannot be an expert of each and every game, but as a sports journalist one should have a basic knowledge about almost each and every game. After that, one should

try and develop her/his expertise in one or two specific games or sport which interest her/him most. For instance one can build up expertise in Cricket, Hockey, Football, Tennis, Badminton, Table Tennis, Athletics, Racing, Gymnastics, Swimming, etc. The choice of sports to gain expertise upon depends upon personal predilections and interests of a sports journalist. While receiving the training to become a sports journalist, one realizes that there are one or two sports about which s/he can write with minimal efforts and produce great results when compared with other games or sports. Therefore, an aspiring sports journalist should first try and identify the sports s/he is most comfortable with and then try to develop her/his expertise in it.

In the beginning of their careers, sports journalists have to write about each and every sport and the concept of expertise arrives much later in their careers. They are required to develop their expertise in one or two specific sports besides writing about all the other sports.

(ii) Compiling Facts for the Advance Copy: A journalist can find classification and compilation of data and facts in the context of the advance copy from her/his own library. Besides, for exclusive news a sports journalist is dependent upon the office-bearers, the coaches and the managers of sportspersons or teams. The better the relationship of sports journalists with the above mentioned officials, better will be their chances of receiving exclusive important information. In the moments of defeat it is possible that an official may make a statement which you can take advantage of, while in the moments of victory anyone can be quoted. The fact of the matter is that quoting or not quoting someone depends upon the degree of importance of your relationship with that person in the future. Sports, especially international contests, are not won merely by the physical capabilities. In facts, these games are won or lost at the psychological level. The contribution of psychological strength of players is not secondary in any manner to the contribution of the technique and skills in winning any competitive sport. Some teams or players go astray under-pressure, whereas some teams or players show their mantle under severely testing conditions and come out with flying colours. This is the most important aspect of any sporting contest. As a sports journalist, one must thoroughly study and understand this aspect of various games and sports. Finally, a sports journalist should know the art of extracting information from the officials. Before asking questions from coaches and managers, the situation must be carefully gauged.



(iii) Reporting an Ongoing Sporting Event: While reporting any live game, sports journalists should systematically prepare notes in an orderly fashion. Any sporting event should be viewed with neutrality and without becoming too excited. While writing sports based reports, do not unnecessarily endeavour to show your exquisite grammatical skills or get overtly technical. There is no need to make your report very colourful or dramatic if not absolutely necessary in the given context. If a match was insipid and boring, then state the facts blatantly. There is no written rule book for sports journalists but certain traditions or trends are followed by the professionals and these are following:

- Lead or Intro – Who won? Where? When? Why? And How?
- Body or Main Description – Should incorporate information about the star performer; the interval; the weather; etc.
- Minor Details – Behaviour of the audiences and the players, etc.
- Other Details – Statistics, Substitute players, etc.

Generally, lead comprises a summary of the game. Score, main description, etc. which the journalist wants to portray or publish should be in small sentences. For instance, injury to a player, strategy employed or the turning point of the match are described in the report. Soft lead proves to be quite effective in case of sports based news. Main news should be written after smaller or relatively less important stories. A sports journalist should practice writing her/his reports keeping in mind the pressure s/he has to face in the field and the importance of meeting the deadlines.

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