

COOKING UP A SPORTS FEATURE STORY  
Dissecting the writer-editor decisions and operations that lead to sports features  
making it to publication

Mark Selig

Jacqui Banaszynski, Committee Chair

**Abstract**

As story structures and distribution models in journalism change, storytelling remains a valuable asset to writers and editors, especially in sports departments.

But before you can tell a story, you need a topic. I aimed to answer two questions: How do sportswriters and editors find story topics to potentially cover? And then how do they select which ideas they'll move forward with?

The theoretical framework I used is the Gatekeeping theory, which focuses on the points of decision-making in the production of news. I used semi-structured interviews to reveal more about the thought processes of writers and editors at three medium-to-large newspapers and three big sports websites.

While writers and editors receive increasing information on their audience's reading habits, they still — for the most part — rely on experience or their feel for what will work. Analytics haven't provided a formula for the dozen journalists I polled.