

The Challenges of Access to College Athletes

Chris Martucci

Missouri School of Journalism

University of Missouri–Columbia

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Presented to:

Professor Scott Swafford, committee chair

Professor Jeanne Abbott, committee member

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Chapter One

Introduction

College sports have become more important within the media since the turn of the century. The College Football Playoff and the NCAA Basketball tournament, known informally as “March Madness”, have become large media events not only in television ratings — the 2021 men’s tournament final between Gonzaga and Baylor had 16.9 million viewers tune in, per Nielsen ratings (Young, 2021) — but also in the number of articles written about the teams that compete in them. This increased attention, as well as the rise of internet news sites devoted to coverage of sports, has led to the growing number of media requests for interviews with student-athletes. Knowing that they can’t say yes to every request, sports information directors at university athletic departments have become more selective about which reporters they allow to have access and how long the reporters are able to speak to student-athletes.

But, are sports information directors using this as an excuse to assert more control over media access? Are there legitimate reasons to limit access to student-athletes, or are these sports directors becoming gatekeepers who control the messages being presented to the public?

To learn more about this, I interviewed six experienced reporters who cover college sports and five sports information directors from universities primarily in the Midwest, split among tiers — three Division I and two Division II universities. I asked the six reporters whether complete access had been the norm in the past, how access is perceived now, what challenges they face to gain that access, and where they see the situation heading in the future. I asked the sports information directors about their

policies, how they implement them, the rationale behind them, and how policies could evolve.

I recorded each interview, which employed a uniform set of questions: one set for reporters and another for the sports information directors. The results were not surprising but revealed how the two sides frame access to college athletes. The reporters agreed that access is much more restrictive now than before and that restrictions have led to an almost “adversarial” relationship with university athletic departments and sparked competition among print and television journalists.

Chapter Two

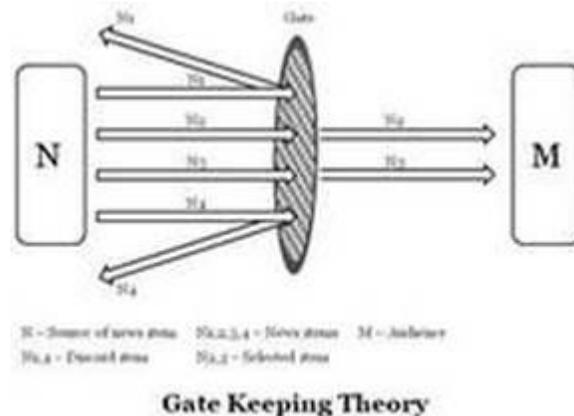
Literature Review

Gatekeeping Theory

How is it that news people decide what to report on a particular day? What is the process that goes into what stories are important and what information gets out to the public? One answer to that is gatekeeping. Communication Theory defines gatekeeping as “the process of selecting, and then filtering, items of media” that an audience consumes (2012). The difference between gatekeeping and what is called “agenda setting” is that decision makers in gatekeeping allow a certain information to be disseminated to the public whereas agenda setting influences what news entities want the audience to feel is important. I’d be wary of sweeping statements.

Lewin (1947) was the first to put a name on gatekeeping when he noticed how housewives determined what food comes into the house and eventually goes on the table for dinner. Lewin asserted that there are several “channels” that are walled into sections surrounded by gates. In this case, decisions are made as to whether to allow the food to enter the channel to start with or move onto the next section. Along the way, forces can exert pressure to accept or reject different types of food. Not long into his study, Lewin realized that he could also apply this theory to realms beyond food. The theory of gates, he wrote, “holds not only for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communications channels in a group...” (Lewin, 1947, pg. 145). Below is a modern illustration of Lewin’s theory provided by Shoemaker (2001) in her book *Gatekeeping theory*.

Figure 1: Shoemaker’s Gatekeeping Model



White (1950) took Lewin’s theory a step further by applying it to a news setting. He looked at the considerations and factors that go into deciding what news will go into the paper and what will not. As a student of Wilbur Schramm, who developed the “source–message–receiver” approach to mass communication theory that is still widely the norm today, White applied his theory to gatekeeping as the “channel” a message goes through before it is either discarded or allowed to pass on. He interviewed an editor, whom he called “Mr. Gates,” to find out what his process was for deciding what goes into the newspaper and what does not. During the week of February 6 to February 13, 1949, White analyzed every saved bit of copy that “Mr. Gates” from rejected stories for that week and kept track of why the copy was rejected (White, 1950). What White wanted to know most of all was if the editor’s biases — his “own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations” — influenced his decisions about what news to run and what to withhold. “Mr. Gates” kept all the copies he received during the day and made notes on why a certain story was allowed and why another was rejected. With these notes, White was able to conclude that an editor chooses to reject a story based on 1) it not being worthy of a story and 2) whether someone else had written about the same subject already for the

next issue. In addition to Mr. Gates' biases, White also found that some stories were rejected because there was "no space" left in the paper for them and also because "Mr. Gates" wanted to avoid being "sensational" in the paper's content and erred more on the "conservative" side of how a story is presented (White, 1950). One thing that "Mr. Gates" said when asked what influenced his decisions on stories was how much he respected his audience. He says that they are "human" with "average intelligence" and a "variety of interests and abilities," thus they deserve news that "pleases" and "informs" them about the world around them (White, 1950).

Shabir et al (2015) described the five main reasons for gatekeeping as "large amount(s)" of news going on at one particular time, a limited amount of time or space for that news to be put out, having a set of criteria by which the story will be judged — they used the example of being able to report a rape, but could not describe how it happened nor the identity of the victim — the tastes of the audience, and that every truth is not fit to be published or aired. Some of the examples of gatekeepers they name are journalists, based on what they choose to report; the culture within a newsroom; social institutions such as sponsors or advertisers; and society. All these factors play into what information is covered, whether journalists want to admit it or not. The public thinks for the most part that the news organization itself just decides what to report based on newsworthiness (Shabir et al, 2015). While that is true, there are several other stakeholders who come into play. Shabir et al's perspective is from Pakistan's media landscape, but say this can be applied to anywhere else in the world. They compare the theory to vanilla ice cream and say that while it's "not everyone's favorite," it can still be "tolerated" by everyone because it is a "vital" component in the delivery of content. However, it can also be used

in a way that, as many would argue in today's world, can lead to an "abuse of power" by deciding to only put out one kind of news and ignoring anything that runs contrary to that, thereby setting a "narrative" that they stick to.

Shoemaker et al (2001) further developed gatekeeping theory by describing it in relation to coverage of Congressional bills. Some of the additional "forces" they named as gatekeeping factors are newsworthiness, prominence, education, political ideology, work experience, ethnicity, gender or behavior based on whatever events happened during debates over bills in committee, the House floor, and the Senate floor up until a final vote is taken. Gatekeeping is never limited to a particular set of factors or people, so there are many more that can be identified. With the age of social media, the person with a Twitter or Facebook account can also be a gatekeeper as well. That is referred to as "citizen journalism" by academics where "ordinary users engage in journalistic practices" (Goode, 2009). As social media has developed since Goode's study, the "citizen journalism" concept has grown tremendously with breaking news being made by people with a social media account and a phone. Now, it is common for television news to use video taken from a social media account when breaking news happens, such as during the 2013 Arab Spring protests (Ali & Fahmy, 2013).

Whenever a school shooting happens, many news outlets are making the decision to not name the perpetrator in order to minimize the attention they receive for committing their crimes and thus, some say, prevent future shootings. Fox21 news in Denver is one example. After a shooting at an area high school in May 2019, news director Joe Cole tweeted out a message saying Fox 21 would "mention (the shooters') names in (their) broadcasts (on that day)...but going forward (they) will simply refer to (the shooters) as

the accused shooters.” Denver, of course, is just a few miles from where the Columbine shootings happened on April 20, 1999, where perpetrators Eric Harris and Dylan Kleibold killed twelve students and one teacher before taking their own lives. The news media at that time did not follow a policy of withholding the names of perpetrators of these crimes and thus turned Harris and Kleibold into celebrities in the way, as Frymer (2009) put it, that the 1994 Oliver Stone film *Natural Born Killers* portrayed with the media attention growing larger as the main characters, Mickey and Mallory — portrayed by Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis respectively (IMDb) — became more brazen in their crimes (Frymer, 2009). Frymer draws parallels between the shooting and the film by saying that, in a way, the film would “foreshadow” and “merge” into the shootings when they happened because the media would “feed the flames” of the event and show it to “captivated spectators” sitting at home (Frymer, 2009). News organizations have recognized this “causing mass murder to become famous” phenomenon and are doing what they can to put an end to it. This is just one example of the evolution that gatekeeping has undergone over the last twenty years.

Gatekeeping In College Sports

Sports is one area where gatekeeping on the surface might seem to have little impact. Most sports stories simply report what happens during a game or sporting event and highlight a certain athlete during that event if need be. However, there are areas in which gatekeeping hampers sports journalists’ ability to get good, interesting stories as social media has grown to become *the* source of communication in the world for many people. College sports is one such example.

Dittmore (2015) wrote that between 2008 and 2010, when social media was becoming more prominent in the sports world, college athletic organizations and professional leagues adopted “reactionary content restrictions” on outside media organizations that, as he said, demonstrated a “general misunderstanding” of how social media works, which led to a “fear” that it would change how the audience consumes and interacts with sports content. This led to a general consensus among college athletic departments that they could control their content themselves without needing the outside media sources to provide them with coverage. Through their own “websites and social media accounts,” the university could publish the content they want in a controlled manner that gives them the best look possible and streams content directly to their fans. That has led them to be more restrictive with how the outside media interacts with their student-athletes.

Grimmer (2017) argued that this “authorization of interviews” could be considered “modern censorship” due to the restrictions that organizations place on the media and the scope of their interviews. Subjecting reporters to certain parameters in an interview limits what they can talk about and makes them a “mouthpiece” for an organization (Grimmer, 2017).

In Europe, while there is freedom of the press in theory, press freedom has taken a hit over the last few years. The Atlas Institute for International Affairs notes that over the last seven years, freedom of the press has suffered “deterioration” across Europe (Poilova, 2020) as governments have taken steps to control what is reported to the public, such as in Hungary and Italy (Poilova, 2020). In the United States, there isn’t that same level of control, but censorship is still censorship (Grimmer, 2017). Grimmer studied

reporters covering German soccer clubs and suggested they are more “dependent” on the spokespeople for the team, on which both journalists and spokespeople agreed. Grimmer warned that 87 percent of journalists expect more pressure on their reporting of the soccer clubs in the future. He acknowledged, however, that journalistic roles have changed with the increasing advancements in technology and that these sports organizations are trying to stay ahead of these changes to avoid public relations damage.

Suggs (2015) added with a model he used during his study that suggested sports reporters had “mixed views” about whether they had the backing and “legitimacy” to do their jobs because they depend on access to events and sources “as much or more” than any other news professional. For the model, Suggs used survey responses from American college sports journalists describing the degree of “access and autonomy” they feel while writing about athletic events. Restricting access or making it depending on certain conditions being met puts the job of reporting on sports events and teams more in the hands of the institution than with journalists, allowing them to steer stories in the direction they want. It is a game that sports reporters have to put up with in order to get the information they need for their content.

Research Questions

The research questions I set out to answer for this project are:

1. In what ways do policies set by sports information directors regulate media access to student athletes?
2. How do sports writers get around those restrictions?
3. Does the difference in competition division affect the relationship reporters have with the sports information director at some schools compared to others?

Originally, I set out to answer whether there was a quality difference in university athletic websites versus outside news outlets, but as the project went along, there was not enough evidence to answer that question. Since both the reporters and sports information directors discussed their relationships with the other side at length, with two directors being at Division II schools while the others were Division I, that raised the question of whether the level of competition affects the relationship between reporters and sports information directors.

Methodology

To answer my research questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six experienced sports journalists in the Midwest to compare access to student-athletes 20 years ago to the present. Their insights illustrated what it was like for them to write sports before access became more controlled, how the situation changed over time, and how they respond to the restrictions university athletic departments have adopted. Semi-structured interviews worked best because they standardize interviews across all subjects but also allow room for conversation and spontaneity so the interview can be more tailored to the journalist being interviewed. The same process was used with the sports information directors. Five directors at Midwest universities were interviewed.

I conducted eleven interviews from January 2021 through April 2021. I emailed each reporter or SID and arranged a time and day that was best to speak over the phone, although in some cases the subjects asked if I could send them questions to answer, and I did so promptly. I found each of these reporters through a former colleague who is well connected in the sports journalism industry. These are the reporters I spoke to and their affiliations:

- Ivan Maisel, formerly with ESPN, Sports Illustrated, and others
- Bob Holt, Arkansas Razorbacks football reporter with the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette
- Pat Forde, Sports Illustrated
- Joan Niesen, host of Religion of Sports podcast, formerly at Sports Illustrated, the Denver Post, and Fox Sports
- Gene Wojciechowski, ESPN
- Brett Dawson, formerly of The Athletic and current sports editor at the Columbia Missourian newspaper at the Missouri School of Journalism

The sports information directors I spoke with were:

- Nick Joos, University of Missouri–Columbia
- Herman Hudson, Southern Methodist University
- Tom Gilbert, director for basketball communications at Kansas State University
- Blake Bunton, Lindenwood University
- Dusty Sloan, Ashland University

The University of Missouri-Columbia, Southern Methodist University and Kansas State University are Division I universities, meaning they are the major athletic powers in the college ranks. Lindenwood and Ashland are Division II universities, smaller than Division I programs and not getting as much media attention as the bigger programs. This diverse collection was intended to provide differing perspectives on the type of access they allow and how accommodating they are to outside media.

Interview Guide

Questions for sports reporters:

- What college sports have you covered? Which universities have been part of your beat?
- When you first started, was there a policy for approaching athletes and interviewing them for sports stories?
- How did that influence your reporting?
- How did that impact the quantity and quality of your stories?
- Did the policies change? How did they change?
- How has that affected access to athletes, how you interview athletes, how often you are able to interview athletes?
- How would you characterize the relationship between outside media and the university athletic department today?
- Where do you see things going in the next five to ten years?
- What advice would you give young journalists starting out who are looking to get into covering college sports?
- Anything else you want to add?

Questions for sports information directors:

- What is your policy for outside journalists to be able to speak with student-athletes?
- Why do you believe policies restricting news media access to athletes is necessary?

- How would you characterize your relationship with the reporters that you interact with the most?
- Do you see any chance of evolution in policy over the next few years?
- Anything else you want to add?

This standardized set of questions created a basic structure for each interview but also allowed for any follow-up questions after a certain reporter or director's response or, in a reporter's case, questions about previous work they had done.

For example, during my conversation with Hudson at SMU, I asked whether the university became warier of the media after a scandal in the mid-1980s about Southern Methodist paying football players to play for the university, which resulted in the program being suspended, or what is informally referred to as being given the "death penalty" in 1987. To my surprise, he said that they had moved past that period and have a good relationship with the local media these days. "No one from that era is around anymore, which allows us to move forward," Hudson said. "When ESPN came around to do the "30 for 30" documentary, the university gave full access to people who were around at the time and fully participated."

I spoke to each subject over the phone, save for Wojciechowski and Bunton. They asked me to email my questions for them to submit their answers due to their busy schedules.

I took detailed notes on my conversations with the subjects. For Wojciechowski and Bunton, I took their direct responses and saved them in documents on my computer to be used for this report. Interviews spanned the range of 20 to 45 minutes.

Chapter Three

Findings and Discussion

I found common themes among the reporters and the sports information directors. While there were some variables, the reporters agreed that access has become more restricted over the past few years and that the relationship between reporters and university athletic departments has become “adversarial.” The sports information directors said the reasons for “limiting,” as they referred to it, were to “protect the student-athletes” because 18- to 22-year-olds are prone to slip-ups, especially after a bad loss or embarrassing moment, and they could say something inappropriate and cause a problem for the communications department.

Here are some of the conclusions that were drawn from the interviews and other research:

1. More news outlets means more selectivity

With online sports outlets such as *The Athletic* and *SB Nation* becoming more popular and vying for access alongside the established news outlets, sports information directors, either prompted by the head coach of a particular team or by their own decisions, are becoming more selective about which journalists are given access. This has led to a tug of war that the university athletic departments seem to be winning over the last few years in terms of how much access is granted.

All the reporters for this project laid out common issues that they say limit their ability to get material they need for their stories:

- 1) Having a representative from the athletic department sitting in on interviews with student-athletes, thereby restricting the direction of the interview.

- 2) Head coaches having more control over the scope of access today than they did before.
- 3) Athletic communications departments using their own websites to push the content they want published, thereby reducing the reliance on outside news media.
- 4) Being shut out of locker rooms, thereby not getting a chance to talk to players in a non-structured setting the way they can in professional sports leagues.

During the conversations with sports information directors, primary reasons they listed as for why to “limit” — the term they prefer — how much access outside reporters are given to student-athletes were:

- 1) Not wanting to overwhelm athletes with media requests due to their already busy schedules;
- 2) The fear that someone might say something that can be taken the wrong way;
- 3) The sheer number of news outlets that have popped up thanks to the internet;
- 4) Being cautious of the light in which a story casts the university.

While other reasons were listed, these were the common themes that surfaced during the course of each interview.

“It’s a lot tougher to identify who is a legitimate outlet these days compared to before,” said Joos, the sports information director at the University of Missouri-Columbia. “The media is a lot bigger now than it was 20 years ago, and because there’s not a lot of time, it’s tough to grant those one-on-ones.”

Joos said his communications department typically fields 10 to 15 requests for postgame comments after football games. He added that whoever the head coach of a particular program is also shapes the policies for teams.

Alabama head football coach Nick Saban has a reputation for being “standoffish” to the media and limiting access to players — freshman for example are off limits to the media except during bowl games (Sherman, 2015). Because he is a seven-time national championship head coach, with his most recent coming in 2020, many coaches are going to emulate that model (Sherman, 2015).

“The relationship between athletic departments and the media will always be determined by those making the decisions: the coaches, the athletic directors. If an AD decides his department should be transparent and cooperative, then it will be so. If a coach limits access, is suspicious of the media, prefers an adversarial relationship, then it will be so,” Wojciechowski said. “The other part of the equation is the conference commissioner. A strong commissioner can help create an open relationship between the media and the programs. My experience has been this: An SID can only be as good as a head coach lets him/her be.”

This was not always the case. Wojciechowski and Forde have been covering college sports for more than 30 years and say that when they were starting out, reporters were given privileges that have since disappeared.

“There was no specific policy. In college sports, you usually went through the sports information director or that office,” Wojciechowski said. “Colleges have slowly limited the access of reporters to players and coaches. The days of open practices and locker rooms is a distant memory in most cases. Such a shame.”

Dawson, a former reporter with *The Athletic* news website and current sports editor for the *Columbia Missourian* newspaper at the Missouri School of Journalism, experienced this change during his years reporting on college basketball. When Dawson covered the University of Kentucky basketball team for the *Courier-Journal* in Louisville, Kentucky for 10 years, the locker room was open for reporters to enter and freely talk to players early on. Things changed when head coach John Calipari came in before the 2009 season.

Dawson said Calipari would emerge, accompanied by only one player — usually one who had a tremendous game — for the media to speak to, but that was the end of it. Reporters were no longer allowed in locker rooms. Dawson came to realize it was not just Kentucky doing this, but many other schools within the so-called “Power 5” conferences had adopted similar strategies.

“The Power 5 is definitely more restrictive than before,” Dawson said. “Even so, the level of access you get largely depends on the school, who’s in charge, and how high the demand for coverage there is.”

Kentucky was a sharp contrast to Dawson’s first job. For five years, he was a beat reporter covering the University of Illinois basketball team for the *News-Gazette* in Champaign, Illinois. Bill Self, now head coach at the University of Kansas, was the coach during the last four years that Dawson covered Illinois. During his time in Champaign, he was able to attend practice every day. He wasn’t allowed to write about what he saw, but he could bring it up later during post-practice press conferences to see whether it was something worth reporting.

Forde recalled a time when he was covering the Southeast regional portion of the 1993 NCAA men's basketball tournament in Nashville. He and another reporter were assigned to cover the Utah-Kentucky game, and they were interviewing Rick Majerus, the coach for Utah. When they asked if they could speak to some players, Majerus said: "Have them as long as you want. Just make sure you give them a ride back to the hotel."

Those days are long gone, Forde said, adding that the relationship between reporters and figures like Majerus has become more tense in recent years. "I'd say that it's because the athletic department wants to put the best image of themselves out there, and they don't want to take the risk in something coming out that is not favorable to them. Of course, these are 18-to 22-year-old kids who are going to slip up at times, but they're going to find other ways to get their message out. That's just how it is these days with social media."

2. Athletics Websites Preferred Avenue for Universities

Limiting access to outside reporters has allowed universities to bolster the content of their own athletics websites. These sites have news and information on each varsity athletic team sanctioned by the university, providing fans a one-stop location for information about their favorite teams. For example, one can go on the University of Missouri-Columbia athletics page and find news about football, basketball, wrestling, swimming, and other sports that are not in the local paper as often. Compared to a local news publication such as the *Columbia Missourian*, the MU website provides more information for fans to consume about Missouri sports. Unfortunately for outside media reporters, this has led to more restrictions as the athletics communications department builds its own brand. Wojciechowski has seen this first-hand.

“They want to control their own narratives and access,” he said. “As schools further strengthen their own content departments, or feel an allegiance to their own conference networks (Big Ten Network, for example) or to their major network partners, it will become more difficult to do your job as a reporter. I hope I'm wrong.”

3. Print and Television Rivals for Access

In addition to the contract obligations with conferences that favor television stations, television reporters arguably get more in terms of access than their print counterparts, the two television reporters I spoke to said.

I interviewed two television reporters and four print or digital sports reporters. Ivan Maisel, formerly with ESPN, has been covering college football primarily for over 30 years. At ESPN, he primarily worked as a television reporter and produced video packages for “College Gameday.” As the national reporter for ESPN, he found it easier to get access to the people he wanted to interview than beat reporters working for print publications.

“College Gameday” has been a popular morning show during the college football season for 34 years. In 2019, ESPN reported that the show averaged its best ratings since 2015 with over 1.9 million viewers on average tuning in on Saturday mornings during the whole season (Schutte, 2019).

This proves it to be a popular outlet for fans to consume content outside of the games. In addition to building anticipation for a big game during a weekend, as well as commentator Lee Corso’s headgear selection when he predicts who will win that game, the show also airs features that reporters have worked on all week.

Forde surmised that television reporters get more access because not only is television a more popular means of consuming media today than newspapers or magazines but also because journalists are likely to be more willing to abide by restrictions placed on them by the sports communications staff due to television contracts.

The Power 5 conferences have their own television networks (SEC Network, Big 10 Network, ACC Network, and so on), and because of the popularity of television compared to print, universities can leverage these broadcasting contracts for control over a story or the image that is presented.

Print, on the other hand, is not under that obligation, thereby putting its reporters under tighter restrictions. This leads to the idea that university athletic departments are acting as gatekeepers to project the best image of their university and their teams.

Joan Niesen, another former Sports Illustrated writer who now hosts the “Religion of Sports” podcast, said it goes beyond just television versus print. National beat reporters tend to have more access than local beat reporters. “Sometimes the national reporters have it a bit easier than the ones who are there all the time and it can be frustrating,” Niesen said. “The more comfortable you are within a particular beat as a local guy, it doesn’t tend to equal more access unfortunately.”

4. Zoom A Possible Barrier That Remains

If access to college athletes was becoming more limited early in the 21st century, it took a much sharper turn with the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. With the new measures put in place, college sports and professional sports leagues have used the group meeting

application Zoom to conduct postgame press conferences and middle-of-the-week updates.

Reporters during the pandemic have not been allowed to appear at practice or outside the locker room to speak to the head coach or players. That leads some of the reporters interviewed for this project to wonder if Zoom might end up as another means to limit access to athletes by setting arbitrary time limits and preventing them from arranging individual interviews to get original angles for their stories, which the university athletics websites will be able to do much because of their higher level of access.

“Nuanced questions were easier to answer because you were not constrained by a time restriction, thus making it easier to follow up on some things,” Dawson said. “With that, you were able to get something you otherwise would not have. Now, with Zoom, you’re not able to do that.”

“It’s frustrating to get all the same stuff rather than to be able to find your own little angle to work with,” said Holt, of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in Fayetteville, Arkansas. He has been the beat reporter for the University of Arkansas football team for almost 40 years and has seen access change with each head coach that came along until Bobby Petrino, whom he said was the most restrictive. “It very well could be another way to limit access if it sticks around, but I can understand the convenience factor behind it.”

That convenience factor has not gone unnoticed by the sports information directors, either. Hudson, at Southern Methodist University, argued that Zoom has made the postgame routine more convenient for both sides. “It saves reporters from having to travel for road games. They can just hop on the Zoom call and get what they need,”

Hudson said. “Because they’re also constrained by their deadlines, they don’t have to go down to the tunnel and wait a while before things get started. They can just stay up in the press box and hop on the Zoom call to get what they need and then get their articles done. I wouldn’t be surprised if it is something that sticks around going forward, but it’s hard to say.”

5. Desire For Coverage Makes Division II More Accommodating

Sports information directors from Division II programs were consulted to see if there were any differences in policy between Division I and Division II programs and how they handle the media. Division I programs at the highest level of competition have chosen to be more restrictive because of the demand for content and the prominence of their program, which prompts the athletic departments to be more selective about who they permit to speak with student-athletes.

The difference between Division I and Division II programs in how they handle media requests is this: Division I has more funding and thus is able to add more staff to the athletic communications department to handle the number of requests that come in. For example, the University of Missouri-Columbia athletics department has a communications staff of 18 while Lindenwood has a staff of only four. Because Lindenwood is not dealing with requests as frequently, it can be more accommodating to reporters. In the crowded St. Louis sports market, Lindenwood needs to find ways to stand out.

“With us being at the mercy of the St. Louis media coverage, it is tough to get stories out there,” Blake Bunton, sports information director at Lindenwood, said. “The St. Louis media covers the Blues, Cardinals, Mizzou, and (St. Louis University) as their

priority. We will have a handful of stories each year with the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, but it is hard to compete with being in a market like St. Louis.”

In order to get noticed and have more coverage, Bunton does his best to be accommodating to reporters looking to do a story on an athlete from the school. During his four years there, he said he has never turned down a request.

This competition to stand out is an issue in other settings as well. Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio, is about halfway between the major cities of Columbus and Cleveland, being 80 miles and 60 miles respectively. Proximity to these markets does not translate into major coverage from the newspapers, so Ashland relies on local coverage and student news organizations.

“It helps that I know a lot of the reporters that I work with a lot,” Dusty Sloan, the sports information director, said. “I can go down to the *Ashland Post-Gazette*, and I’d know the guy there since I used to be there for a while. We have a very good relationship with the reporters, both professional and student reporters that we work with.”

Even so, Sloan said he is always looking to expand his network of reporters. “We’ve been working to get more coverage in Columbus, Cleveland, and even nationally. The work we do with these outlets puts the university in a brighter spotlight and gives us credibility. Because of that, we do our best to be very accommodating.”

Reporters still have to go through him to set up an interview with an athlete or coach, however. Sloan also makes sure he knows what the story is going to be about so there are no surprises. This is to “streamline the process” for both sides and avoid situations that might create a problem for the university, he said.

What sets Ashland apart from the other schools consulted for this project, Sloan said, is that they are always looking for new ways to evolve their policy, something none of the other sports information directors interviewed for this project said they did. During Ashland's summer meetings, staff members assess what worked and didn't work the previous year and decide whether to adjust their policy. "We're always looking for ways we can improve," Sloan said.

6. Social Media a Way Around, but Universities Restricting

Most college student-athletes have a presence on social media, which has created avenues for reporters to reach athletes. Because some athletes are more outspoken than others, sports information directors such as Sloan have implemented social media policies that outline what student-athletes can or can't post. Sloan framed this as a way to teach athletes how to be responsible with what they are posting.

"Kids are going to mess up sometimes, so that's why we have talks with them to let them know what to expect and what's acceptable," Sloan said. "Since we've done it, we've seen a lot more accountability from our student-athletes, and it's helped streamline the process for everyone."

Tom Gilbert, sports information director for basketball at Kansas State University, also believes educating athletes on what is acceptable when it comes to social media is key to preventing mishaps. While he said nothing like that has happened at Kansas State during his tenure, it does not mean it won't.

Even so, social media policies apply only to public posts, not to direct messages, which Forde and other reporters have used when news breaks. During the fall of 2020,

there was speculation that most conferences wouldn't have a football season. Anxious players reached out to reporters, including Forde, to express their thoughts.

“Some of them were asking me for info on whether or not there was going to be a football season, so that's how that worked out,” Forde said. “Social media is the new way to reach out to athletes because so many of them are on there in some form or another. You can easily direct-message them, and they'll more than likely respond, or you can speak off the record about things. Most places don't like that very much because of that.”

Bunton is hesitant about social media becoming a go-to avenue for journalists. He believes it can be difficult to know who is trustworthy when it comes to the media.

“Before social media really took over, I feel there were a lot of ‘true’ journalists. Now, anyone can post a quote on a student-athlete or a coach and have that shared with the world immediately,” Bunton said. This could lead to some quotes being taken out of context, which can lead to other problems. “I think we have all seen someone or something on social media just trying to get clicks and trying to create a narrative that isn't the truth. To me, that can cause a threat to any athletics department.”

Other routes that reporters have taken when they can't get to a subject is talking to people around an athlete, such as parents, friends or others who are not constrained by the athletic department. When New Orleans Saints quarterback Jameis Winston was in the middle of his alleged sexual assault case at Florida State, Forde spoke to other people involved to get his story after Winston declined to speak to him about it.

“I had to do something new in order to get that because I had a story to write, but (Winston) declined to speak,” Forde said. “I ended up talking to people who were either directly involved or witnessed something and got a pretty good story out of it.”

Wojciechowski and Dawson said limiting the amount of time spent with an athlete forces the reporter to be prepared with questions to ensure they get what they want from an interview. Dawson is passing this on to the student reporters he works with at the Columbia Missourian.

“Go where they ain’t,” he said. “By knowing where to go and what you want, you’ll get what you’re asking for.”

“The restrictive policies put a premium on preparation, artful interviewing, creative story ideas, additional interviews with family member, friends, etc.,” Wojcieshowski said. “It forces you to become more inventive, which is a good thing, I suppose.”

Conclusion

Sports and the media have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship for the last half a century when sports news became a key component of the daily news cycle. Whereas professional sports have enjoyed this status since roughly the 1960s, college sports has had this kind of attention for a shorter amount of time as major media draws. The changing media landscape has forced universities to adapt, and college sports are more popular than ever. However, with this rising popularity, university athletic departments have chosen to be more cautious by limiting outside media access. Coaches and sports information directors have exhibited more control of the situation by only making a small number of players available or having a member of the communications department sit in on interviews. Based on the findings in this project, this has made it harder for outside reporters to do their jobs in most respects and benefits the university athletics websites to generate their own unique content for fans.

Going into this project, there was little to no literature on the subject of the relationship between university athletic departments and the media, let alone the state of what access to college student-athletes looks like. Because of that, there was not a whole lot of reference to use while going through this project, something that was both thrilling and frustrating at times. With access continually being limited and unknowns that may happen when the world emerges from the pandemic, there is a multitude of possibilities for further research on this topic to see how it will look five years and even ten years down the road. One possibility I see being one of interest is why schools that are more restrictive have to allow for more open access, in the College Football Playoff for example where locker rooms are open to the media after games, and whether that can lead to one uniform policy through the whole season. If a team makes the CFP consistently, players should learn how to conduct themselves around the media in that kind of a setting so that they can navigate it with no problems rather than having to adjust since they don't do that otherwise. Other possibilities would be the true impact of Zoom on access if it becomes a permanent policy after the pandemic is over; an analysis between university athletics websites and outside media to see what fans are reading more of; a deeper dive into television reporters versus print reporters, as well as local beat reporters versus national reporters.

While athletic departments have adapted to this new age of mass media, reporters have been doing some adapting of their own. By using social media and expanding their source networks, they have found ways to get what they need to produce quality content so their work stands out. Building relationships with the communications department and athletes goes a long way toward ensuring reporters get what they need in a timely

manner, even as more changes have occurred during the pandemic. The situation will not return to where it was 20 years ago in terms of locker rooms being open or reporters having as much time as they want with student-athletes, but that doesn't have to be bad. As a reporter, that means using other tools at their disposal such as social media, source building, showing up every chance they get so that they build credibility with the coaches and sports information directors and interviewing sources around the athlete.

Fans' appetite for great content about their favorite teams is as voracious as ever, so it is up to the reporter to deliver that content any way that they can. Even with limited access, there are alternative ways for stories to come to the surface. For many student-athletes, this is the only chance that they will get to have their stories told because many will not go professional, where the media presence is constant. The symbiotic relationship between college athletics and outside media has been on a bit of a slide. With this project, I hope to begin the process of fostering understanding between the two sides so that they can benefit each other once again.

Appendices

Appendix I

Interview Notes – Reporters

Gene Wojciechowski

I've covered football, baseball, basketball, track, women's basketball. I was a beat reporter covering the University of Miami, but most of my work was as a national college football and basketball writer.

--There was no specific policy. In college sports, you usually went through the sports information director or that office. In pro sports, you approached the player or coach directly. It depended on the situation itself: pregame...postgame...at practice, etc... In college sports, you still go through the SID in most cases. Sadly, very few locker rooms are now open after football games (USC might be one of the few?). Everything has become much more structured and press conference-like. I've always thought that impeded the ability to tell a fuller story. In some cases, the schools have used female reporters as the reason for the closing of those locker rooms. It's a bogus excuse. In pro sports, (non-covid era) the access is dictated by the leagues. But again, so much depends on the willingness of the players and coaches to make themselves available.

--Impact? The more access, the better and more complete your story can be.

--Colleges have slowly limited the access of reporters to players and coaches. The days of open practices and locker rooms is a distant memory in most cases. Such a shame.

--Access and insight is king. The restrictive policies put a premium on preparation, artful interviewing, creative story ideas, additional interviews with family member, friends, etc. It forces you to become more inventive, which is a good thing, I suppose.

--More and more college programs have their own internal websites and content creators. They want to control their own narratives and access. The relationship between athletic departments and the media will always be determined by those making the decisions: the coaches, the athletic directors. If an AD decides his department should be transparent and cooperative, then it will be so. If a coach limits access, is suspicious of the media, prefers an adversarial relationship, then it will be so. The other part of the equation is the conference commissioner. A strong commissioner can help create an open relationship between the media and the programs. My experience has been this: an SID can only be as good as a head coach lets him/her be.

--I don't see a reversal in any of the trends related to access, etc. As schools further strengthen their own content departments, or feel an allegiance to their own conference networks (Big Ten Network, for example) or to their major network partners, it will become more difficult to do your job as a reporter. I hope I'm wrong.

--Advice? Follow your heart. Sports journalism is a hellacious profession. Read Sally Jenkins, Bill Plaschke, Ian O'Connor...watch Tom Rinaldi, Kirk Herbstreit, Rece Davis, Jay Bilas, etc., and tell me otherwise. I laugh when others call it the Toy Department. There is nothing toy-ish about covering billion-dollar industries, writing on deadline, learning the art of investigative journalism, feature writing, game writing, moving from football to basketball to whatever other sport you might be assigned. You have to be nimble, creative, dogged, and develop several layers of skin. You cover the arc of the human condition: wins, losses, personal tragedy, triumph, coaches in their 70s, players in their teens, parents, agents, cheaters, heroes. Sports is a reflection of who we are and who we can be. You don't get that as a CPA.

A great story will always be a great story. What we need are those willing to find those stories and tell them in compelling ways. Do you want to do that? If you do, then sports journalism is a noble pursuit. If you want to sit on a couch and opine in 300 characters or less, then move along, please. Sports journalism takes commitment. College sports is evolving in ways we never thought possible 20 years ago. The mediums used to cover those sports is also evolving. But in the end, you still have to be able to report, to write, to research, to knock on a door or make an extra phone call. You have to see it for yourself. You have to ask difficult questions. You have to work at it. I love that challenge. No two days are the same in this business. I can't imagine doing anything else.

Pat Forde

-SI, Louisville Courier-Journal, Yahoo! Sports; ESPN.

-College sports: Football and Basketball. Olympics.

-Louisville; Eastern & Western Kentucky; Murry State; Morehead State; UK; Indiana; national beat writer. Alabama

-The same. Going through media relations and setting through them. Hasn't primarily changed. New ways to go through it—social media. Most places don't like that much.

-Story had to do new stuff: Jameis Winston incident. Reaching out to people involved or witnessed the incident via Twitter. Tried to reach Winston, but he declined. Talking via direct message or off the record. Athletes reached out to him for info on whether season or no.

-Intimate line of communication. More sensitive questions to a degree; more often SIDs want to sit down on interviews today. Both sides feel a license to speak more frankly.

-More university control. More desire to project a certain image. Uptight. 1993 NCAA tournament—Utah and Kentucky game. Utah coach spoke freely. Allowed to talk to players so long as they give a ride back.

-Weary to describe the relationship between outside media and university athletic departments. Using their athletic department writers to put out the best image for the university. TV people more willing to play ball than the writers due to TV contracts. Gets access, but handcuffs to a degree. Less honest broadcasts.

-Yahoo! no contracts of interest.

-Expects it to be the same. University-driven media controlling everything. Access continuing to be difficult going forward. Basketball thawing a little more on access than football.

-Advice: Be patient. Get to know people and build relationships so that if something pops up, you can reach out. People will call before things happen after a while to let you know about something beforehand. Takes time to build relationships.

Ivan Maisel

Worked as a television reporter for the most part.

Graduated from Stanford, Class of '81. Worked for the Mercury News in San Jose; Sports Illustrated as a fact checker; the Atlanta Journal-Constitution covering University of South Carolina and Clemson football (Clemson won the national championship in 1981); the Orlando Sentinel; Dallas Morning News for seven years as the national college football beat reporter; News Day for 3 years; went back to SI for five years; then to ESPN as the national college football reporter for 18 years before getting recently laid off.

Policy when you started? There'd always be a luncheon on Monday at Clemson for a chance to talk to players. Same at Stanford. Could get them until Wednesday when players were no longer available after that. Fly Friday, cover the game on Saturday, fly off on Sunday. If you need a player, just get them. First Iron Bowl between Auburn and Alabama, went and wrote every day. Georgia Tech vs. Virginia; Florida State vs. Notre Dame. As a national writer, it was easier to get players than beat reporters. More difficult, but some exceptions. TV guys get more leeway. At Alabama, no freshmen except bowl game and no assistant coaches. College Football Playoff says locker rooms must be open though. Bobby Bowden had an open locker room for much of his tenure. Jimmy Johnson and Dennis Erickson at Miami were also open. Peter Carroll at USC too.

Relationship between university and media? Always been some tension. Bridge between media and the program. Previous generation of sports information directors understood how to facilitate things because they understood our jobs better. Now it's oppositional. Head coaches have more control today. Not enough understanding today. USC, Georgia, Auburn, Virginia, Notre Dame, and Colorado only schools can think of that are easily accessible.

Future? Depend on how current events go forward to say what could happen. Technology making it less expensive, but lost feeling of being at events. Go back to normal soon hopefully. Less intrusive.

Advice? Show up, go to practice, and keep your ears open. You catch more flies with honey. Build relationships with players and coaches. It helps with more informed writing. Have to use vinegar sometimes to get a good mix. Talk to assistant coaches. Bill Walsh was the head coach at Stanford for my first two years before he went to the 49ers.

Brett Dawson

Sports covered? Illinois basketball for the *News-Gazette* in Champaign, Illinois for five years; Kentucky basketball and football for 10 years with the *Courier-Journal* in Louisville. Also NBA basketball for *The Athletic*. Now the sports editor for the *Columbia Missourian* in Columbia, Missouri.

Policy? Baseline policy has not changed much. Must go through athletics to get what you need. More openness during the early days as a reporter though. Open locker room at Kentucky for the first half of his tenure covering them, allowing more freedom to roam around and speak to players.

Quality impact? Developed a comfort level with players. Get something that no one else gets. Ease to answer questions “How do...” rather than “How you feel”. Nuanced questions easier to answer and to follow up. With how things are now, Zoom becomes the new barrier possibly or being filed into media rooms.

Changes that you’ve seen? Bill Self was the head coach at Illinois for the last four years was there. Was the only basketball writer covering Illinois. Went to practice every day. Not allowed to write what seen, but could ask after and see if it could be put on the record. Informs the coverage. Prior practice conversations and after availability also part of it at first. At Kentucky, when John Calipari came in, it was just him and one player after games but were surrounded by others that you could not get much. Power 5 conferences are more restrictive than before, but it all comes down to who the coach is at a school in how they handle that.

Relationship? Adversarial and it’s made the job harder. Some animosity as the SIDs keeping things from reporters. Build relationships as year round. Bigger wall now than before. Finding sources outside the locker room. Build a variety of sources. Build credibility. “Go where they ain’t.” Depends on the place though.

Future? Circumnavigating with social media. Go to events to introduce yourself to the team. Younger reporters getting big beats because they can pay them less compared to seasoned reporters. Social media is becoming more prevalent and will be the way to go in the future.

Advice? Be present. When there's an opportunity to be near the team, take it. Go outside the athletics. Let people know you're there. Seize any opportunity you can to be around the team to show your face. Build relationships.

Anything else? No.

Bob Holt

Arkansas Razorbacks football beat reporter at the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in Fayetteville, Arkansas since 1981.

Policy? High school and smaller colleges a bit easier to cover in terms of access. The bigger the school, a bit harder to get good access. Wide open policy at first. Lou Holtz was head coach when started on the beat in the early 80's. The Tulsa World had great content compared to the *Democrat-Gazette*. Three to five reporters at practice in those days. Could watch the whole time, Holtz gave report and then could talk to players. Assistant coaches widely available. Trainers were available to talk in detail, but that is off limits now.

Changes? No locker room open now. Late 2000s is when things started to change. Houston Nutt was the head coach at Arkansas at the time. Practices became more closed. Nutt was very paranoid and secretive; only some assistants were available. Bobby Petrino was when things changed fully. Recently, they've gotten better at making guys available until of course COVID hit. With Zoom now being the way to conduct postgame stuff, you're not able to develop relationships now.

Characterize relationship? Quality work, but hard work. Think outside the box. Talk to other people around the subject. You might get something even better.

Evolution? Zoom could be the way of the future. Unknown when pandemic ends. All getting same stuff is frustrating. Could be another way to limit access in the future. Can see the convenience factor. Universities now producing their own content.

Anything else? No.

Joan Niesen

Sports Illustrated, The Denver Post, and Fox Sports. Current host of The Religion of Sports podcast.

Primarily covered professional sports such as the NFL and Major League Baseball. Last four years at Sports Illustrated were covering college football from 2015-2019. Was the national reporter, but focused primarily on University of Wisconsin football.

Policy? Varies from school to school. The NFL is set in how they conduct media access with negotiated times for the media to speak to players and what they can do. In college,

it depends on the coach. Did features primarily, so relied on access to players. Was lied to at times and did not get what was promised. Had a wide variety of perspectives.

Best experience? Wisconsin was very accommodating. Did a story on the No Name Defense. Talk to as many guys for 20 minutes and got plenty of good things. Non-Power 5 schools are generally more accommodating because they want the coverage. Jeff Driskell story. Social media as the end-around.

Impact for story? Takes a story from terrible to great when you have access to athletes. With COVID, we're using phone calls and Zoom calls. While all that's okay, actually getting one-on-ones adds another dimension to the story that takes it to another level.

Relationship? Adversarial. Less access now and the media wants more. It's also a battle of national reporters versus local beat reporters. Also, TV and print. More comfort with a beat is bad because it breeds complacency.

Future? As economic power in sports shifts, it will allow more power for the media. More media benefits the players.

Advice: Getting to know people and build relationships with athletes. Reporters are there to tell their story. Fight for what you want. FOIA everything when you can because that's how some stories can be found.

Anything else? No.

Appendix II

Interview Notes – Sports Information Directors

Nick Joos

Fourth year as sports information director at University of Missouri. Been doing this job for 35 years. Was notably at Nebraska previously when Tom Osborne was head coach of the football team and they won three national championships in four years in the 1990's.

Policy: Reporters must arrange with communications office, but for the most part, it is mostly postgame interviews done in a group setting. Get 10-15 requests per game. Pull players out when can. Learned a lot from Osborne while at Nebraska that he took with him. Media is bigger thanks to the internet, making it tougher to identify trustworthy outlets than it was before the internet. Have to be more selective to make sure outlets are worth talking to. Access dictated by the head coach to keep it from getting too intrusive.

Why necessary? Trying to keep student-athletes from getting overwhelmed with their schedules and having to add media obligations to it. Requests have exploded that can't accommodate them all. Efficient for both parties. Recognizes the struggle for the media.

There was greater trust back in the day than there is now with the pressure to be first on a story.

Evolution? Don't see much change in the future. Mizzou is more open compared to other SEC schools. In fact, it is the top of the SEC in terms of making access easy for reporters.

Anything else? Worry that there could be payment involved for interviews in the future.

Herman Hudson

Been the sports information director at Southern Methodist since 2004.

Policy? Request through office. Vet outlets and work time to accommodate around athlete's schedule and the reporter's deadline. No media on an off day. In a major sports market like Dallas, it's more competitive, thus having to be more flexible.

Pay-for-play scandal a factor at all in shaping policy? Not really a big factor today because no one involved with the scandal is still around the university today. The university was involved extensively with the '30 for 30' about the scandal; the one who made it was an alumnus of the university.

Why necessary? Knowing good outlets and building relationships with them. Teaching athletes to give and taken as it comes to their time commitments. Niche publications are more prevalent now, so we do our research and make sure. Media is more splintered these days due to the internet, so doing due diligence is important.

Relationship? It's a respectful relationship with the news outlets they work closely with. Backgrounding and also good conversation with them. Professional. Trying moments at times, but it's above all respectful and professional. Keeping an open mind.

Evolution? Hard to say. Zoom postgame press conferences. Better access to road games and good for reporters on deadline. Don't have to stand in the tunnel or wait a while for coach to come out. They could just hop on the Zoom call, get what they need, and then get in on time. It could stay. More efficient.

Anything else? No.

Tom Gilbert

Director of basketball communications at Kansas State University.

Policy: Depends on situation. No real formal policy, though different if legal issues arise. This last season during a game against Baylor, it was the worst loss in school history so no players were made available after the game. Two players are available after every game otherwise. They have to sometimes learn the hard way to approach the media. I would rather have open locker room all year, but that is dictated by the top and I go on

their word. Luckily, I only have 13 to 14 athletes in basketball to deal with compared to football.

Why necessary? To prevent something dumb from happening. These are 18-22 year old kids at the end of the day and they tend to say things that they regret sometimes. It hasn't hurt K-State as long as I have been around, but I can see where it could be an issue. Recognize that social media is a big way around me so educating student-athletes on how to use social media wisely, as well as planning on our part, are big keys to preventing an incident from happening.

Relationship with the media? Generally good. Kansas gets more coverage so have to get as much as we can. Haven't had a problem for as long as I have been around. It's antiquated to restrain access due to platforms.

Evolution? See beat reporters being more cautious.

Anything else? No.

Blake Bunton

Sports information director at Lindenwood University.

1. Our policy is any outside media requesting an interview with a student-athlete must go through our Athletics Communications Department. We are lenient if media decides to go through our coaching staff, but for the most part our coaches prefer media request run through our department. In the past, we have had instances with students going directly to our student-athletes and conducting an interview without our knowledge. My personal opinion, I don't mind it if the student-athletes are okay with it. However, we want to make sure the interviewer has the best interest of our student-athletes before any quotes are taken, which is why we have our policy in place. As for postgame interviews, we are always welcome to have any reporter interview our student-athletes. But, because of the emotions that players and coaches have during a game, we request a short cool down period to give them time to answer any questions with a clear mind.
2. I am not all that familiar with the Division I policy on media requests. I do know that some of the bigger schools will host a media day each week where a coach will deliver a press conference. At that time, media members will be able to ask questions directly to the coaches and/or players. For the most part, when we hold a press conference (which doesn't happen often), we will make our best efforts to have a communications person present to make sure there are no questions that could create a negative response or create a bad look on our athletics programs. Overall, I feel there are more similarities than differences from Division I to Division II.
3. I don't like to turn away any journalist wanting to interview our student-athletes, and as I am in the middle of my sixth year with Lindenwood (full-time), I do not remember turning anyone away. It is my job to promote positive information about Lindenwood. If I am not being diligent in protecting our student-athletes and coaches, then I am not doing my job. And by protecting them, I need to make sure the interview questions do not put them in a bad spot. I believe there was one time where I had to ask the interviewer what their intentions were because of the way a question was worded. We also do not want to be caught off guard about a story being released. These student-athletes go through a lot

- with school, sports, and their personal lives. We want to make sure that they understand the reason for the article, and avoid putting them in a negative light. So it is not so much restricting access to interviews, as it is more of checks and balances to assure the validity of the interview.
4. I feel our relationship with the local media is good. Our student news coverage is great, as they are always respectful and timely with their requests. With us being at the mercy of the St. Louis media coverage, it is tough to get stories out there. The St. Louis media covers the Blues, Cardinals, Mizzou, and SLU as their priority. We will have a handful of stories each year with the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, but it is hard to compete with being in a market like St. Louis. In all, our relationship is good with all media members who want to cover Lindenwood.
 5. I think it is getting harder for communication departments to get interview requests filtered through us first. With social media it might be easier for a journalist to contact the student-athlete directly. Before social media really took over, I feel there were a lot of “true” journalist. Now, anyone can post a quote on a student-athlete or a coach and have that shared with the world immediately. It is good to have as much positive coverage as we can, but I would feel terrible if a student-athlete had his/her words twisted when they didn’t mean it the way it was published. I think we have all seen someone or something on social media just trying to get clicks and trying to create a narrative that isn’t the truth. To me, that can cause a threat to any athletics department. I don’t know if the policy needs to change. There are times where I am extremely busy and I feel like we could bypass our department because it is an extra step. However, because we are trying to do what we think is best for our student-athletes, I feel it is a necessary step. I have been brought up in a way that if someone has a rule or policy, then I need to respect that. So even though social media provides easier access, to me a policy is still a policy and that should be respected.

Dusty Sloan

Sports information director at Ashland University

Policy: All media must go to me and get something setup with athlete, even if in class with them for student reporters. Want to be aware of the content of the story. Acts as an extra layer of protection for both sides. With pandemic, enforcing guidelines with face-to-face interviews. Incorporating Zoom as well after basketball games. Questions are chosen ahead of time before postgame press conferences.

Division I vs. Division II? Division I going to Zoom more than where AU is but that’s because Division I has a bigger media presence.

Why necessary? To avoid PR nightmares. Has a social media policy where have talks with athletes to let them know what to expect on what is acceptable or not to post on their social media pages. Helps streamline the process for everyone.

Relationship with media? Relationship is generally good with both student and local media. Formerly at the *Ashland Post-Gazette* so knows a lot of the people there. Looking to expand reach with big cities like Columbus and Cleveland as well as nationally. Try to be as accommodating as possible.

Evolution? Chance of evolution. Always looking to see how can improve from one year to the next. Make adjustments in the summer if needed, so policy is always being looked at for improvement.

Anything else? By doing this, advocating for student-athletes. Make it a more mutual process.

Appendix III

Field Notes/Activity Log

Week One

Hi Scott,

I have finished my first week at my internship with the UMKC sports communications department, and I am even more excited for what is to come through these next couple of months. It was a tremendous first week, and I feel as though I can really contribute something positive to them during this period. Though there were no soccer matches this week, I still had plenty to do.

From the start, I was already put to work with some good old-fashioned manual labor. On Monday, I went into the office and was first introduced to everybody there. Since it was a holiday, there were not many people around, as well as for the other obvious reason. Kylee, the head of the department, took me on a tour through the facilities and laid down what was going to happen. I then helped her with putting up signs that had been blown on the soccer field, and helped with stocking the fridges at the concession stands in the rec center full of soda. After that, I was responsible for putting together the rosters for men and women's soccer, as well as volleyball, for the game programs. The only problem I had doing that was keeping everything lined up XD.

Tuesday, I stepped up the ladder just a little bit. I got to write the previews for both the men and women's basketball games this weekend against Oral Roberts University. I had to go back into the record books to get information regarding the games, but it was fun doing that. I finished the women's basketball preview first and sent it off to my supervisor, Jerod, who gave me some things to be mindful of when I wrote the men's game preview. I took his advice, and then did that one. Both turned out well. I was starting to find my footing a bit now that I had two days under my belt.

Wednesday was a bit more laid back. We had an 11 o'clock meeting with all the other interns to lay out what was going to happen for the next week. The next Thursday was the first soccer match, so Kylee wanted to make sure I was going to be available for that. I said I would. After that, I did some small things around, but nothing like what I had done the previous two days.

Thursday saw me going through the record books for volleyball to check if any players were close to anything significant on the all-time lists. I found a couple players that were climbing up the all-time lists in some categories and sent them over to the person that would be updating the bios on the roster page of the volleyball team's website.

That was my week. I am excited for how this is going to go moving forward. Next week is the first soccer game on Thursday, so that is one thing I know I will be doing. For my

interview subjects, I will start reaching out next week possibly to get things set up down the road so that I can get those interviews.

That's all for this week. Look forward to updating you next week.

Week Two

Hi Scott,

Hope you had a good week.

During this second week, I got much more settled into the routine of what was expected of me. It's starting to get easier for me where I can do things without really thinking about it. I'm getting comfortable with getting to know the teams and being on call for anything. Soccer season is getting close, which means I will be a lot busier over these next couple of weeks. I am looking forward to that.

Monday was an easy day. I had to do write-ups for players that were named by The Summit League conference as players to watch for the upcoming soccer season, as well as the general soccer season preview. Two from the men's team and two from the women's team were selected. I will provide those links at the end of this report.

Tuesday was a bit more exciting as I did basketball previews for the games against North Dakota State this weekend. Again, links will be provided at the end of the report here. I am getting more comfortable with the structure of how they do the game previews for the athletics website.

Wednesday, we had our weekly meeting a little bit later this time – 1 o'clock instead of 11 a.m. – to get things sorted out for the games this weekend and into the beginning of next week. Not long after we finished, we heard that William Jewell College had a few COVID cases pop up, so the men's soccer team's scrimmage against them was canceled. Since it was just an exhibition game, it wasn't that big a deal but was still significant. Looks like this could be a theme this season much like it was for me when I covered Russellville football last fall.

Thursday, instead of doing the game as scheduled, I did a preview for the volleyball games on Sunday and Monday, which was interesting to me. I had never done much volleyball coverage other than a color commentating job for the radio station during my undergrad at Ashland University, so it was a good challenge. That one is not up yet, but I will send it to you when it does. To fill the void of the canceled soccer game, I am going to be helping with some other sports recaps this weekend. The tennis matches going on this weekend and the women's soccer exhibition against Western Missouri State University.

On the project front, I reached out to several seasoned sports journalists for interviews. Pat Forde and Ivan Maisel both have agreed to talk to me, and I have sent an email to Jeff

Metcalf but have not heard back yet. My interview with Maisel is Wednesday, Feb. 3 at 1 o'clock. Looking forward to speaking to him there. I will soon be reaching out to the sports communications people to start getting those interviews set up as well. In short, things are moving along nicely.

Week Three

Hi Scott,

Hope you had a good week. I spent this week getting the ball rolling on interviews and doing more of the stuff I have done the last two weeks.

UMKC had their first men's soccer game on Wednesday, so I got to cover that. Sunday, I did a recap for the women's tennis matches against Illinois State. They had three singles winners but got swept in doubles and had two other individuals lose their matches. Due to this, I didn't have much on Monday. Tuesday, I worked on the softball rosters as I did for the soccer and volleyball teams my first day in the office. Because of that experience in week 1, it helped me get it done much quicker. Also, on Tuesday, I did an article about one of the volleyball players being named defensive player of the week for their performance in the two matches against North Dakota State last weekend. Wednesday was the first UMKC soccer game against SLU. They lost 3-0. I wrote the whole article. Thursday, there wasn't much due to no real action going on. I'll be helping with other sports next week since there's a lot more games going on.

On the project front, I have made a lot of progress. I am currently working on setting an interview up with Brett Dawson for next week. On Wednesday, I spoke to Ivan Maisel and came away with some interesting insights. During our 45-minute conversation, he mentioned how some of the television guys get a bit more leeway and favors compared to the beat guys, which when I thought about it made sense. The main thing he emphasized during our conversation was on building relationships and trust among the coaches. The more you build a relationship with them, the more likely they will accommodate you. My interview with Pat Forde will be next Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. I also sent an email to Billy Watkins at the Clarion-Ledger this morning.

I just got off the phone with Nick Joos at Mizzou and spoke with him for about 15 minutes to get the SID's side of things. He says that the reason most athletic departments have been a bit more restrictive is because the requests for one-on-ones have exploded with the rise of the Internet, which increases the reporter pool. Due to the limited amount of time for student-athletes and coaches, they have had to be more selective about giving interviews that way. He also mentioned how Mizzou was at the top of the SEC in terms of accessibility for the media, which I checked out and he was right, and how proud they were of that. For the other sports information directors, I sent out emails but have not heard back yet from any others besides Nick.

Overall, I would say it was a successful week and I am looking forward to what happens next week.

Week Four

Scott,

Hope you are well and had a great week despite this deep freeze we are experiencing. Had something going on yesterday that I decided to send my memo a day later than normal. Due to said deep freeze, there was not much going on around this week other than towards the end. To make up for the lack of much to do earlier in the week, I did more regarding my project. Two interviews were done this week, and both went well.

Monday was a regular day at the office—nothing to really report on that day. That was mostly, I think, due to the cold and everything being rearranged as a result. It was not due to the result of the Super Bowl the previous night; I can assure you that. Tuesday yielded something—I wrote previews for the basketball games this weekend against Omaha and scheduled an interview with Brett Dawson for 2 on Thursday.

Wednesday, we had our group meeting at 10 am but there was nothing much else otherwise on the agenda. Thursday, more of the same. Friday, the women's soccer game got moved to NDSU due to the cold and snow here in Missouri because they had a bubble over their soccer field to play in. UMKC won 3-2 on a goal scored in the last ten minutes. I will link the summary of the game to you.

As hinted at earlier, the project front was very successful this week. I spoke to Pat Forde on Wednesday and we talked for about 20 minutes. Some of the key things that I took away from our conversation was being able to use other methods to reach student-athletes such as social media. He mentioned that when football season was up in the air for most conferences, he had players reaching out to him via social media saying that they wanted to talk to him. Also, he said that he sees college basketball thawing more on giving reporters more access than football in the future due to basketball needing more media attention in the period where it's not on. Pat also gave an anecdote about when he was at the 1993 NCAA men's basketball tournament and got access to the Utah players before their game against Kentucky. All that was asked from the coach was "give them a ride back" when the reporters were done.

Thursday, I spoke to Brett Dawson and we talked for 30 minutes. Though it had been a few years since he wrote for college sports, he still had good insights into what it looks like now and how things have changed. When he was the beat reporter for the University of Illinois, Bill Self was the head coach. During that time, Self was open with the media, allowing them to speak to players before practice and after practice. Even though Illinois was a Big 10 school, they weren't covered as much as some of the bigger programs, so they needed the attention. When Self went to Kansas, Dawson said he did a 180 because everyone wants to cover Kansas, so he needed to be more restrictive. With the pandemic, Dawson worried that due to most leagues using Zoom for postgame or post-practice interviews, it could potentially become the norm and serve as another barrier between teams and the outside media.

Overall, I would say this was a successful week, even with things being frozen. Making good progress in my project. Still waiting to hear back from some SID's. I'll send follow-up emails today.

Week Five

Hi Scott,

Sorry for the later memo out, but most of my work was this weekend. I figured it would be better that I sent this out after I did everything this weekend. I hope you are doing well. There was lots of action this weekend, so I was kept plenty busy.

The early part of the week was dormant because of the preparations for the weekend things going on. I found out on Thursday that due to the weather not cooperating, the men's soccer game was merged into one game on Monday, leaving me only the women's soccer games to cover, which I did on Friday and Sunday. Saturday, I helped gather notes for the men's basketball game against Denver for the main writer.

On the project front, this was a bit slower. I reached out to some of the SIDs that I had contacted previously to follow up. I managed to get a date set for a conversation with Tom Gilbert at K-State: Sometime between March 15-19 after basketball has ended for the Wildcats. Brad Sutton at SMU also passed along my message to the main SID at SMU, but due to the power outages going on across Texas, it has been tough reaching out to him. I'll also be following up to other reporters I have reached out to.

Memo is a bit shorter this week, but it has still been a great week in terms of doing things. I'm looking forward to how things will go this coming week.

Week Six

Hi Scott,

Hope you had a good week. Thank goodness the weather is starting to turn nice. I'm ready to shed winter forever at this juncture. With the nicer temperatures and lack of snow came some great action this week.

On Monday, I went back to Kansas City to cover the men's soccer game and wrote the recap for that. Wednesday, I did previews for the basketball games against South Dakota State this weekend. Because both soccer teams were having road games, I did not have to go to Kansas City for this weekend. The women's soccer team won on Friday; the men's soccer team lost on Saturday; and the women's soccer team won on Sunday in double overtime. Overall, it was an exciting week after being busy all last weekend.

On the project front, I also had a successful week. I spoke to Herman Hudson, the SID from Southern Methodist University in Dallas and talked to him for a half-hour. It turned

out he had spoken to another Masters student in Houston about a topic like mine, but it was for a thesis a bit before speaking to me. He thought it was a fascinating topic and was more than happy to talk to me.

During our conversation, he talked about how using Zoom for postgame press conferences may be something that sticks around once the world goes back to normal. This is based on the potential convenience for reporters that need to write their stories on tight deadline. They can just hop online and get what they need so they can write their stories and not have to stand around the tunnel for a while. That was the main thing I took away from our conversation, which was a good one. He had a lot of good insights on some of the questions I asked, which made for a fun interview.

I reached out to some more reporters for interviews and got responses from Gene Wojchenchowski from ESPN and Bob Holt from the Arkansas-Democrat-Gazette in Arkansas. Gene was busy with projects, but he said I could send him some questions to ask, which I did. With Holt, I scheduled an interview for Tuesday at 11 am. Once those are put in, I will be done with reporter interviews. I'm so excited. All the interviews I have done have been great and I've learned so much from these experienced reporters.

I'll report back next week with even more great things to share.

Week Seven

Hi Scott,

Hope you are well and had a good week. For the most part, my week was okay until the end when I found out someone I was close to died on Thursday. It really sent the rest of my week into a tailspin, but I managed to still get plenty of work done. Hard to believe we are at the halfway point already through this internship.

Early in the week, we were given the task of naming photos tied to certain sports as part of another project to do. I was given the basketball photos from the February 19 game and got those done that very same day. Wednesday, I did more of the same for another set of pictures. Thursday was when the action began. The men's soccer team played on Thursday and won against Eastern Illinois. The women's soccer team lost to South Dakota State 4-0 on Friday. I wrote the recap for those two. Saturday, the men tied against Eastern Illinois and the women lost 2-0 to South Dakota State today.

On the project front, I spoke to Bob Holt from the Arkansas-Democrat-Gazette in Fayetteville for 45 minutes on Tuesday and had a terrific conversation with him. Through the course of our conversation, he talked about his experiences covering Arkansas football for the last forty years. When he started out, Arkansas had an open locker room policy under head coach Lou Holtz and stayed basically that way until Houston Nutt took over as head coach in the late 90's. Like Brett and Herman Hudson, he mentioned how Zoom has become a double-edged sword these days and whether it will prove to have lasting power moving forward when things get back to normal. I reached out to Tom

Gilbert at K-State to set something up during the week he suggested. We have a date set for St. Patrick's Day afternoon to speak. I am also still waiting to hear back from some other SIDs I have reached out to. I will try to have all the interviews done by the end of March.

That has been my week and I am looking forward to what the next one brings. Talk to you next week.

Week Eight

Hi Scott,

Hope you had a good week this week. Not happy with how the weather has done a 180 but having lived in Missouri basically my whole life I can't say I'm not used to it. Since there was not a lot of action going on with the sports teams this week, I spent most of it working on that photo project that we have been doing over the past week.

On Monday, there was not much going on, so they gave me the rest of the day off, which I took advantage of. The next three days, I worked on the photo project and got two more of my assignments done. The latest one they gave me I have been working on and making good progress on it. Friday was the only game of the week against Central Methodist—they lost 1-0. On the plus side, I got a compliment from my supervisor, who told me that it was the best recap I have done so far.

For the project, I have my interview with Tom Gilbert next week and I am still waiting to hear back from Gene Wojchenchowski with his responses. I've got other SIDs lined up to satisfy the interview requirements and just fielding through which ones to accept.

Eight weeks in, I can say that this type of work is something I want to do in the future. I've gotten compliments on my writing and it's been fun covering a sport that I don't initially gravitate towards. I have already started applying for jobs, and some are being a beat writer covering college athletics so this internship would be a good steppingstone to hit the ground running in those positions if I do get one. One thing I have been struggling to remember is that changing my writing to reflect more positively on a game or team's performance, even during a loss, but I feel I am slowly getting it. This has been an amazing experience and I am sad to see it is over halfway over.

I will have a much fuller next week with four soccer games and the interview with Tom Gilbert. I will let you know how that goes when I report next week. Have a nice day.

Week Nine

Hi Scott,

I hope you had a good week and are doing well as March starts its wind down. I made a lot of progress on the project and did some good work with the soccer games.

Monday, I finished the photo project assignments that I was tasked with doing. The last one was a long one with over 25 pages worth of photos, but I finished it on schedule. There were soccer games all weekend, but I only managed to make the Friday and Saturday ones due to some other commitments Thursday and Sunday. It was a mixed bag of results with the women going to a draw on Friday and the men losing on Saturday. There are only five games left for me to cover over the next month. Hard to believe I am almost done with this internship, but it has been a lot of fun for me.

On the project front, I sent some questions to Blake Bunton, the SID at Lindenwood University, and he responded back quickly on Tuesday. Since Lindenwood is a Division II school rather than a D-I, I thought it would be interesting to see what perspective the SIDs there have compared to the others I have interviewed for this project. Surprisingly, he said that he didn't see many differences between Division I policies and Division II policies. When at Lindenwood, since they are in the St. Louis market, they're in need of more coverage compared to SLU so they are lenient in most instances where reporters need an interview with an athlete.

Wednesday, I had a long conversation with Tom Gilbert at Kansas State, and he took a radically different approach to the topic compared to the others I have spoken to. He wishes that there was open locker room access and allowing reporters to do their jobs, but he is constrained by what the athletic director dictates and other university officials. After hearing about why there is a need to be restrictive in most circumstances, it was a breath of fresh air to hear someone take a different perspective on the issue of access from the SID side. Tom was great to talk to and I enjoyed our talk.

With all these interviews and soccer games I have done, I think I am getting a clearer understanding on where the state of access to student-athletes is, especially considering the NCAA basketball tournaments going on now. In those kinds of events, the reporters are given a bit more in terms of having players out for interviews. Of course, this year is a bit different compared to past years, but it applies the same concepts with Zoom postgame press conferences. Based on my talks with reporters and sports information directors so far, I believe it just boils down to the school and director in terms of which schools are more accommodating than others. I still have one more interview to do for both reporters and SIDs so that could change where my findings are as of now. We will see. It's been quite an education.

Hope this finds you well and I will report back next week with more.

Week 10

Hi Scott,

There are several good things to report from this week. For one, I have finished conducting my interviews with sports information directors and I am one interview with a

reporter away from being finished with those. It's all starting to come together, and I could not be more excited about that.

There were soccer games Thursday and Friday, so I covered those for UMKC. The men won on Thursday in the last minute to defeat Omaha while the women let a 2-0 lead slip away against North Dakota to fall in extra time on Friday. Attached are the links to both of those stories.

On the project front, I spoke to the SID at Ashland University, Dusty Sloan, on Tuesday. Ashland is a Division-II program, so I thought it would make it a good mix of divisions in my project. During our conversation, he talked about how the ways AU permits interviews from both inside the university and outside as well. Since Ashland is a smaller town, they are accommodating towards whatever media comes around to help them get the interviews they need when they need them. Every year, they discuss what went well during the school year and are always seeking new things to implement into their policies so there is always a chance for an evolution. I found that to be a unique way of doing that, which I did not get from any of the other SID's that I have spoken to.

I have an interview with Joan Niesen, an experienced reporter formerly with Sports Illustrated and a Mizzou alumnus, on Monday at 10 AM. Even so, I received answers back from Gene Wojciechowski and boy did he have a lot to say. He believed more access is better for reporters to do their jobs and doesn't like how restrictive things have become. Gene also talked about how it's more than just the whims of an SID or coach that help shape policy, but also those of the conference commissioners themselves so it's coming at all sides. Despite all of this, he could not imagine doing anything else besides covering college sports. Now that I have finished all these interviews, I feel like I have plenty of insights to work with in conducting a good final research paper. After all these interviews from both sides, I believe it comes down to how the athletic departments conduct their business. Division I teams must deal with more media because they are the bigger division that gets on television all the time, so they tend to be more restrictive while Division II wants the coverage, so they are more accommodating and flexible with media. I find this to be a sensible dichotomy, but I will dive more into that for the final paper. Preparation and knowing what I want to talk about are going to be key to getting what I want for a story if I become a college sports reporter, based on what Gene talked about in his answers.

I'll see you and Jeanne on Wednesday at our meeting. Looking forward to writing this paper.

Week 11

Hi Scott,

It was wonderful speaking to you and Jeanne on Wednesday and I am excited to be starting on the first draft of my report. I have already outlined how I want it to go so I will be starting on it very soon. With regards to my internship, it was a bit slow early in

the week but then picked up at the end with soccer games on Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Monday, the men's soccer team lost to Creighton 3-1 and I wrote the recap on that. Thursday, the men went to Western Illinois for their weekend series and won that game 2-0, their first shutout of the year. Friday, the women played Oral Roberts; they lost 4-2. Saturday, the men won 2-1 to complete the series sweep. Next Friday is their last home game against Oral Roberts.

I also have another photo project to do, so I will be working on that this week in addition to writing the first draft of my project report. My final interview for the project was completed on Tuesday in a conversation with former Sports Illustrated writer Joan Niesen, a Mizzou grad in her own right. We had a tremendous conversation, despite a plumber interrupting it at one point.

I'm excited to sit down and put everything I have learned down onto paper. The information I gathered for this project has surpassed my expectations. I have a feeling it's going to be a great final report, and I have every intention of making it that way. Everything I have learned through this project will be beneficial as I go forward in my career as a sports writer and college sports is something I have an interest in covering.

I'll report back next week with how this week went as well as sharing the rough draft of my final report on Friday. Have a good week.

Week 12

Hi Scott,

Hope you had a good week this week. I spent all of it working on the rough draft of the project report and then did my final soccer game on Saturday. I am surprised at how quickly it has gone by and am excited to see where the future goes from here.

With regards to my internship, I spent the time I was not working on the rough draft to the new photo project that I was assigned to do. I almost finished it but will finish the rest before my April 14 deadline next week. Saturday was the final men's soccer game, and I wrote the recap for that. With that, there are no more soccer games to cover this season. However, there is still other work to do before I am finished.

Reflecting on this experience with UMKC, I can say without a doubt that I have enjoyed every bit of it. Covering college sports is something I want to do in the future and this internship has only fanned the flames of that desire. Learning how to frame questions differently after a bad loss, as well as how to get the best in victory, and gauging the situation is something I will take with me going forward into whatever job I get into.

Looking forward to seeing what feedback you and Jeanne have for the rough draft as well as finishing it. I'll report back next week with more.

Week 13

Hi Scott,

Hope you are well this week. I have only one week left of this internship. I cannot believe how fast all of this has gone by. It seemed like just yesterday that I was starting it but now I'm reaching the end. Even so, it has been a tremendous experience and I have enjoyed every second of it.

With soccer season now over, I worked on the photo project and completed it before my Wednesday deadline. As I worked, it hit me that this was one of the last things I would have to do. I've enjoyed the work that I've done for my internship and knowing that this was one of the last things I had to do was both a sense of relief and bittersweet.

As for the project report, I received yours and Jeanne's feedback and am working diligently on it. I'm looking to add in some more statistics for some things like you asked as well as working out how to go more in-depth in the parts you both marked. I will do my best to have it done by the middle of the week next week. I am aware of the time crunch with the 30th being the last day to defend so I am doing the best I can.

This internship was more than I could have expected. Though soccer is not my primary sport of interest, I am a sports fan first and was going to do the best job I could to do it well. This adaptability to covering any sport will serve me well going forward in terms of getting job opportunities and more assignments. One thing that I have learned through the internship is that college sports is one thing I want to do at some point, even with the access issues that I have examined through this project. It's a good environment and it's for the love of the game; something I can connect with on a personal level.

I'll report back next week with my final memo. Have a good week.

Week 14

Hi Scott,

I have finally reached the end of my internship. We had our end of season celebration on Thursday at Chicken 'N Pickle in Kansas City and enjoyed drinks and pickleball to celebrate the end of the sports season. It hit me just how much fun I had being with this group of people and the work we have done this whole spring.

This internship was the best experience I could have had. The work was what I expected, and it was fun going to the soccer field every time for home games as well as covering the team on the road. Covering a sports team beat is something I know I want to do in the real world so the chance to do it for a Division I college team was an opportunity I could not pass up. Sure, it was not a sport I am primarily interested in but it was a writing job

and that's what mattered to me. This has been a rewarding experience and I would do it all again in a heartbeat.

I finished my report and am getting ready for my defense. This project was straightforward, but there were some parts that I had to adjust because there was not enough evidence for a couple things. Overall, I feel good about where the report is and I'm ready to defend it.

Looking forward to the defense.

Articles Written for UMKC

<https://kcroos.com/news/2021/1/21/mbb-back-in-action-at-oru.aspx>

<https://kcroos.com/news/2021/1/20/womens-basketball-wbb-wraps-up-road-trip-at-oru.aspx>

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<https://kcroos.com/news/2021/3/4/mens-soccer-guti-rrez-mart-nezs-brace-leads-roos-over-eiu.aspx>

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<https://kcroos.com/news/2021/3/20/mens-soccer-comes-up-just-short-against-denver.aspx>

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<https://kcroos.com/news/2021/3/26/womens-soccer-roos-drop-overtime-match-to-north-dakota.aspx>

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<https://kcroos.com/news/2021/4/1/mens-soccer-roos-score-in-first-final-minute-in-win.aspx>

<https://kcroos.com/news/2021/4/3/mens-soccer-early-goals-propel-roos-over-leathernecks.aspx>

<https://kcroos.com/news/2021/4/10/mens-soccer-roos-drop-heartbreaker-to-oru.aspx>

Appendix IV

Self-Reflection on Internship

This spring, I worked as a communications intern for the University of Missouri-Kansas City focusing on the men's and women's soccer teams. In addition, I also did work for the basketball teams such as writing up previews of a weekend series and, on one occasion, doing some work for the games as well. I reached out to other universities in mid-Missouri such as the University of Missouri-Columbia and Lindenwood University. UMKC was the other school I reached out to, and they got me on just in the nick of time. Writing for a college program is something I potentially wanted to do in the future, so that is where I focused my efforts on finding an internship, and to get this opportunity was a thrill for me. Soccer is not a sport that I consider myself fanatical about compared to sports such as football and hockey, but any chance to cover sports is an opportunity to write, which is what I like most. As things went along, my love of the sport grew to where I became invested in what was happening and made it more fun to write.

The internship only required that I be in Kansas City when I had games to show up and cover. I would otherwise be free to work from home due to the pandemic. Despite that, there were occasions early on where I was in Kansas City from Monday through Thursday in case there was anything needing to be done. When there was a stretch of weekend soccer games, I would also be available for other things going on. I helped with a men's basketball game against Denver at the end of February. When teams were on the road, I could just write articles from home. The internship went fourteen weeks from mid-January to late April, but there were times that it seemed to breeze by.

For all of the experience I gained through this internship, I learned what it was like to work in an athletic communications office. While the experience was great, I found it difficult to adjust my writing so that even in a bad loss, I had to write something that put the athletic teams in a good light. I had never had to do this type of writing before. It went against everything I had been taught and trained to do as a sports journalist having to be constrained in the way I wrote. I adjusted to it after a while, but it showed me just what type of control university athletic communications departments have over what is written. Since I covered soccer, there weren't many outside reporters to interact with. There was one occasion when an outside reporter came around; I believe it was the home opener for women's soccer, and he went down and spoke to the coach before he was given approval. That wasn't a big deal in the grand scheme of things because it was just jumping the gun rather than actually being denied access to the coach, but it was still worth being talked about. As a member of the university media, I was allowed to speak to whom I wanted as long as I named who I wanted to talk to. There was a total of two times that I spoke to an athlete after a game, particularly after a big moment they had during the game.

Despite the fact it somewhat played into what my perceived notions around the project were, the experience I had during this internship was rewarding in the end. The opportunity to cover Division I college sports full-time is where I would like to end up one day so the chance to get a taste of it was more than I could want. The place I hope to do it from is an outside media source, where I have more freedom to frame how an event or game went, instead of from an in-house university media platform where I have to write with the university's interest in mind.

Internship Evaluation

Mr. Scott Swafford,

I write this letter in reference to Chris Martucci's internship with Kansas City Athletics throughout the Spring semester of 2021. We were extremely grateful to have Chris's help throughout the year, one which would have been nearly unmanageable without his assistance.

One of the best qualities that Chris consistently displayed through the semester was his reliability. When we spoke prior to starting his internship, I told him that he would be our post-game recap specialist for men's and women's soccer, a task which he gladly undertook. He was consistently present at our home games, and when the teams were on the road, he would send me his draft within an hour of the games' end. I am the only one working in our communications department this year, so his help in getting recaps to me in a quick and timely manner saved me a lot of time (and sanity).

There were also areas in which Chris could use improvement. There were times throughout the year that he would send a recap with misspellings or incorrect stats, but after a talk about attention to detail he was much better in that area. He was always happy to accept feedback on his work, and worked to improve as the semester went on.

As they often say in the sports world, "The best ability is availability." Chris did a great job of making himself available whenever needed, and we were happy to have him

around to help.

Jerod Fox

Appendix V

Original Proposal

MA Project Proposal

The Challenges of Access to College Athletes

Chris Martucci

Missouri School of Journalism

University of Missouri–Columbia

November 6, 2020

Presented to:

Professor Scott Swafford, committee chair

Professor Jeanne Abbott, committee member

Abstract

News media access to college student-athletes has been a source of contention over the past twenty years. While the media had unlimited access to athletes in the past, reporters now must jump through metaphorical hoops in order to speak with them. University athletic departments across the country have formed their own media relations departments, giving them the power to control what is said about their athletic teams and what information gets out. This has created a wedge between them and the outside news media. This project will examine how this has changed over the last twenty years and how college athletics reporters have worked around the challenges in front of them to get their stories.

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Introduction

Athletic departments acting as gatekeepers

Sports writer Ed Sherman described an interview he had with NFL Hall of Famer “Prime Time” Deion Sanders in the late 1980’s when Sanders was a senior at Florida State University in an article he wrote in 2015. During their conversation, Sanders couldn’t keep a straight face when he said “Oh, school’s great, just great.”— it wasn’t because he hadn’t completed the previous semester as he should have (Sherman, 2015). This led the state of Florida to pass a law unofficially in his name, the “Deion Sanders Rule”, that “prohibit(ed) football players from state universities from playing in postseason games if they did not complete the previous semester” (Sherman, 2015). The key thing about that interview was it was just he and Deion, with “nobody from the sports information department sitting in” on the interview (Sherman, 2015). The freedom he was allowed to have with such a big star back in those days was more common, he said, than it is now with “highly rare exceptions”.

Over the past 20 years, sports writers across the United States have noticed a profound increase in restrictions when it comes to interacting with college student-athletes in an informal interview setting. This has led to a landscape in which university athletic departments are becoming central gatekeepers that determine what information gets out. Athletic departments have established their own media centers that deliver content in a way that draws more positive attention to the university. In the Midwest, examples include the University of Missouri’s Tiger Network and the University of Oklahoma’s Sooner Network. This creates a divide in the content of the university’s

athletics website versus the local newspaper. An example is the difference in coverage from the Oklahoman newspaper in Oklahoma City and the University of Oklahoma athletic department. In an article recapping the Sooners' 41-13 win over in-state rival Oklahoma State in late November, the Oklahoman article by Aber (2020) had only quotes from head coach Lincoln Riley, defensive coordinator Alex Grinch, and linebacker David Ugwoegbu, whereas the Oklahoma athletics website, Sooner Sports, had comments from quarterback Spencer Rattler, Ugwoegbu and linebacker Ronnie Perkins in addition to Riley (Rohde, 2020). Given their in-house media machines, schools now can put out only the messages they want their audiences to hear, which makes them more hesitant to allow outsiders to interact with their student-athletes in unstructured settings where they can't control what is talked about.

Impact of Gatekeeping on Sports Writers

The primary objective for this project is to examine how university athletic departments have imposed restrictions on access to student-athletes over the past 20 years and what sports writers have done to navigate around them in order to get what they need for their stories. It will also explore what this means for the future of reporters wanting to write about college sports. With the creation of their own media outlets, athletic departments have realized they don't need the outside news media (Dittmore, 2015) to earn an audience or deliver messages. Reporters, in turn, have seen restrictions on access to athletes grow and have to become more creative in their strategies for pursuing stories.

Research Questions

To provide a comprehensive look at access in major Division I universities, this project will focus primarily on schools in the Midwest. Three of the Power Five

conferences have teams in the Midwest, which will allow the researcher to compare how select schools differ in their approaches to allowing outside media access to their athletes.

Within this framework, these are the questions that this project will look to answer:

- RQ1: In what ways do those policies regulate media access to student athletes?
- RQ2: How do Midwestern sportswriters respond to those restrictions?
- RQ3: How do these restrictions affect the quality of content in university media versus outside media?

Of course, the future is hard to predict because trends may occur later that were unaccounted for, but the sooner an understanding can be reached, the more this knowledge will benefit the profession of sports writing. The world of media is changing almost by the day, and everyone alike is running to catch up with the ever-changing trends. The knowledge I will gain from this project will allow me to have a good understanding of what the job will look like for the foreseeable future. The skills learned through this project will give me awareness of the limits on access in college athletics and learn successful ways to respond to it in order to get what I need for stories. My time at the University of Missouri has been unique to say the least dealing with remote learning and adapting to a constantly evolving situation over these past seven months, and I hope to use what I have learned to become a complete sports journalist who can adapt to any situation once I have successfully attained my master's degree in May 2021.

Professional Component

For the professional component of this project, I have been applying for internships in cities and towns that have major universities in order to get a clear understanding of what it's like these days for writers covering college sports. Media

companies in these college towns rely so much on their coverage of the local university to sell papers because, as former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Earl Warren once said, “I always turn to the sports section first” (Sports Illustrated, 1968). Since so much revolves around the university in a college town such as Columbia, people want to know what’s going on with the athletics because of how important the university is in that town or city. If I am lucky, I may even get to help out with coverage of the NCAA basketball tournament for whatever news organization I end up with. I do not have anything concrete yet; I’m applying to places such as the News Tribune in Jefferson City and other surrounding news organizations and waiting to hear back. Once I do have something, that’s what I am hoping it will look like.

Literature Review

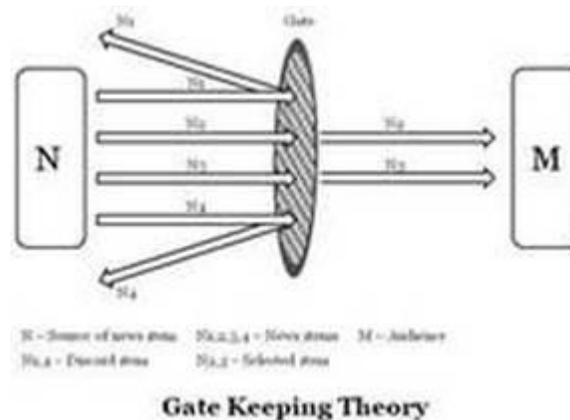
Gatekeeping Theory

How is it that news people decide what to report on a particular day? What is the process that goes into what stories are important and what information gets out to the public? One answer to that is gatekeeping. Communication Theory defines gatekeeping as “the process of selecting, and then filtering, items of media” that an audience consumes (2012). The difference between gatekeeping and what is called “agenda setting” is that decision makers in gatekeeping allow a certain information to be disseminated to the public whereas agenda setting influences what news entities want the audience to feel is important. I’d be wary of sweeping statements.

Lewin (1947) was the first to put a name on gatekeeping when he noticed how housewives determined what food comes into the house and eventually goes on the table for dinner. Lewin asserted that there are several “channels” that are walled into sections

surrounded by gates. In this case, decisions are made as to whether to allow the food to enter the channel to start with or move onto the next section. Along the way, forces can exert pressure to accept or reject different types of food. Not long into his study, Lewin realized that he could also apply this theory to realms beyond food. The theory of gates, he wrote, “holds not only for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communications channels in a group...” (Lewin, 1947, pg. 145). Below is a modern illustration of Lewin’s theory provided by Shoemaker (2001) in her book *Gatekeeping theory*.

Figure 1: Shoemaker’s Gatekeeping Model



White (1950) took Lewin’s theory a step further by applying it to a news setting. He looked at the considerations and factors that go into deciding what news will go into the paper and what will not. As a student of Wilbur Schramm, who developed the “source–message–receiver” approach to mass communication theory that is still widely the norm today, White applied his theory to gatekeeping as the “channel” a message goes through before it is either discarded or allowed to pass on. He interviewed an editor, whom he called “Mr. Gates,” to find out what his process was for deciding what goes into

the newspaper and what does not. During the week of February 6 to February 13, 1949, White analyzed every saved bit of copy that “Mr. Gates” from rejected stories for that week and kept track of why the copy was rejected (White, 1950). What White wanted to know most of all was if the editor’s biases — his “own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations” — influenced his decisions about what news to run and what to withhold. “Mr. Gates” kept all the copies he received during the day and made notes on why a certain story was allowed and why another was rejected. With these notes, White was able to conclude that an editor chooses to reject a story based on 1) it not being worthy of a story and 2) whether someone else had written about the same subject already for the next issue. In addition to Mr. Gates’ biases, White also found that some stories were rejected because there was “no space” left in the paper for them and also because “Mr. Gates” wanted to avoid being “sensational” in the paper’s content and erred more on the “conservative” side of how a story is presented (White, 1950). One thing that “Mr. Gates” said when asked what influenced his decisions on stories was how much he respected his audience. He says that they are “human” with “average intelligence” and a “variety of interests and abilities,” thus they deserve news that “pleases” and “informs” them about the world around them (White, 1950).

Shabir et al (2015) described the five main reasons for gatekeeping as “large amount(s)” of news going on at one particular time, a limited amount of time or space for that news to be put out, having a set of criteria by which the story will be judged — they used the example of being able to report a rape, but could not describe how it happened nor the identity of the victim — the tastes of the audience, and that every truth is not fit to be published or aired. Some of the examples of gatekeepers they name are journalists,

based on what they choose to report; the culture within a newsroom; social institutions such as sponsors or advertisers; and society. All these factors play into what information is covered, whether journalists want to admit it or not. The public thinks for the most part that the news organization itself just decides what to report based on newsworthiness (Shabir et al, 2015). While that is true, there are several other stakeholders who come into play. Shabir et al's perspective is from Pakistan's media landscape, but say this can be applied to anywhere else in the world. They compare the theory to vanilla ice cream and say that while it's "not everyone's favorite," it can still be "tolerated" by everyone because it is a "vital" component in the delivery of content. However, it can also be used in a way that, as many would argue in today's world, can lead to an "abuse of power" by deciding to only put out one kind of news and ignoring anything that runs contrary to that, thereby setting a "narrative" that they stick to.

Shoemaker et al (2001) further developed gatekeeping theory by describing it in relation to coverage of Congressional bills. Some of the additional "forces" they named as gatekeeping factors are newsworthiness, prominence, education, political ideology, work experience, ethnicity, gender or behavior based on whatever events happened during debates over bills in committee, the House floor, and the Senate floor up until a final vote is taken. Gatekeeping is never limited to a particular set of factors or people, so there are many more that can be identified. With the age of social media, the person with a Twitter or Facebook account can also be a gatekeeper as well. That is referred to as "citizen journalism" by academics where "ordinary users engage in journalistic practices" (Goode, 2009). As social media has developed since Goode's study, the "citizen journalism" concept has grown tremendously with breaking news being made by people

with a social media account and a phone. Now, it is common for television news to use video taken from a social media account when breaking news happens, such as during the 2013 Arab Spring protests (Ali & Fahmy, 2013).

Whenever a school shooting happens, many news outlets are making the decision to not name the perpetrator in order to minimize the attention they receive for committing their crimes and thus, some say, prevent future shootings. Fox21 news in Denver is one example. After a shooting at an area high school in May 2019, news director Joe Cole tweeted out a message saying Fox 21 would “mention (the shooters’) names in (their) broadcasts (on that day)...but going forward (they) will simply refer to (the shooters) as the accused shooters.” Denver, of course, is just a few miles from where the Columbine shootings happened on April 20, 1999, where perpetrators Eric Harris and Dylan Kleibold killed twelve students and one teacher before taking their own lives. The news media at that time did not follow a policy of withholding the names of perpetrators of these crimes and thus turned Harris and Kleibold into celebrities in the way, as Frymer (2009) put it, that the 1994 Oliver Stone film *Natural Born Killers* portrayed with the media attention growing larger as the main characters, Mickey and Mallory — portrayed by Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis respectively (IMDb) — became more brazen in their crimes (Frymer, 2009). Frymer draws parallels between the shooting and the film by saying that, in a way, the film would “foreshadow” and “merge” into the shootings when they happened because the media would “feed the flames” of the event and show it to “captivated spectators” sitting at home (Frymer, 2009). News organizations have recognized this “causing mass murder to become famous” phenomenon and are doing

what they can to put an end to it. This is just one example of the evolution that gatekeeping has undergone over the last twenty years.

Gatekeeping In College Sports

Sports is one area where gatekeeping on the surface might seem to have little impact. Most sports stories simply report what happens during a game or sporting event and highlight a certain athlete during that event if need be. However, there are areas in which gatekeeping hampers sports journalists' ability to get good, interesting stories as social media has grown to become *the* source of communication in the world for many people. College sports is one such example.

Dittmore (2015) wrote that between 2008 and 2010, when social media was becoming more prominent in the sports world, college athletic organizations and professional leagues adopted "reactionary content restrictions" on outside media organizations that, as he said, demonstrated a "general misunderstanding" of how social media works, which led to a "fear" that it would change how the audience consumes and interacts with sports content. This led to a general consensus among college athletic departments that they could control their content themselves without needing the outside media sources to provide them with coverage. Through their own "websites and social media accounts," the university could publish the content they want in a controlled manner that gives them the best look possible and streams content directly to their fans. That has led them to be more restrictive with how the outside media interacts with their student-athletes.

Grimmer (2017) argued that this "authorization of interviews" could be considered "modern censorship" due to the restrictions that organizations place on the

media and the scope of their interviews. Subjecting reporters to certain parameters in an interview limits what they can talk about and makes them a “mouthpiece” for an organization (Grimmer, 2017).

In Europe, while there is freedom of the press in theory, press freedom has taken a hit over the last few years. The Atlas Institute for International Affairs notes that over the last seven years, freedom of the press has suffered “deterioration” across Europe (Poilova, 2020) as governments have taken steps to control what is reported to the public, such as in Hungary and Italy (Poilova, 2020). In the United States, there isn’t that same level of control, but censorship is still censorship (Grimmer, 2017). Grimmer studied reporters covering German soccer clubs and suggested they are more “dependent” on the spokespeople for the team, on which both journalists and spokespeople agreed. Grimmer warned that 87 percent of journalists expect more pressure on their reporting of the soccer clubs in the future. He acknowledged, however, that journalistic roles have changed with the increasing advancements in technology and that these sports organizations are trying to stay ahead of these changes to avoid public relations damage.

Suggs (2015) added with a model he used during his study that suggested sports reporters had “mixed views” about whether they had the backing and “legitimacy” to do their jobs because they depend on access to events and sources “as much or more” than any other news professional. For the model, Suggs used survey responses from American college sports journalists describing the degree of “access and autonomy” they feel while writing about athletic events. Restricting access or making it depending on certain conditions being met puts the job of reporting on sports events and teams more in the hands of the institution than with journalists, allowing them to steer stories in the

direction they want. It is a game that sports reporters have to put up with in order to get the information they need for their content.

Methodology

To answer my research questions, I will conduct semi-structured interviews with five experienced sports journalists in the Midwest who can compare what access to student-athletes was like 20 years ago compared to now. Their insights will illustrate what it was like for them to write sports before, how things changed over time, and how they respond to the restrictions university athletic departments have adopted during this period. Semi-structured interviews will work best because they standardize interviews across subjects but also allow room for conversation and spontaneity so the interview can be more tailored to the journalist being interviewed.

Also, five university public relations directors in the Midwest will be consulted. The public relations directors can provide insights into an institution's policies and how they serve the athletic department's interests. While it will not be representative of the entire industry, it will serve as the start for more research down the road as media policies evolve going forward.

Potential Interviewees

The potential interviewees for this project are a mix of experienced sports journalists and university public relations directors to analyze both sides of how access works now versus how it used to be for these journalists. This will provide a good mix of voices to gain an understanding of what the policy is for journalists not associated with a university to get what they need compared to where it was in the past. The list is as follows:

Journalists

Ivan Maisel, college football reporter for ESPN and other outlets. He has been covering college football for more than thirty years and has seen rapid change in the policies that university athletic departments have adopted during his time as the national beat reporter.

- Jeff Metcalfe, beat writer for Arizona State University athletics at the Arizona Republic. He has been covering sports in the Phoenix area since 1985.
- Pat Forde, sports writer for multiple news outlets, including Sports Illustrated, ESPN, and Yahoo! Sports. He is a graduate of the University of Missouri and has more than thirty years of experience covering mainly college sports.

Billy Watkins, beat reporter for University of Mississippi for over thirty years at the Clarion-Ledger in Jackson, Mississippi.

Brett Dawson, formerly of the Athletic, Kentucky basketball.

Public relations officials

- Nick Joos, senior associate athletic director and media department spokesperson for the University of Missouri.
- Tom Gilbert, director of communications for Kansas State basketball.
- Brad Sutton, senior associate athletic director in charge of external affairs at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.
- Brandon Meier, senior associate athletic director in charge of marketing and multimedia at University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

- Mike Houck, assistant athletic director in charge of strategic communications for football at the University of Oklahoma.

List of Potential Questions for Reporters

- What college sports have you covered? Which universities have been part of your beat?
- When you first started, was there a policy for approaching athletes and interviewing them for sports stories? Identify universities? Or be more general?
- How did that influence your reporting?
How did that impact the quantity and quality of your stories?
- Did the policies change? How did the policies change?
- How has that affected access to athletes, how you interview athletes, how often you are able to interview athletes ?
- How would you characterize the relationship between outside media and the university athletic department today?
- Where do you see things going in the next five to ten years?
- What advice would you give young journalists starting out who are looking to get into covering college sports?
- Is there anything else you want to add?

Potential Questions for Public Relations people

- What is your policy for outside journalists to be able to speak with student-athletes?
- What is the process they have to go through in order to get that access?

- What would happen if they did not go through the proper channels ahead of time and tried to talk?
- Why do you believe policies restricting news media access to athletes is necessary?
- How would you characterize your relationship with the reporters that you interact with the most?
- Do you see any chance of evolution in policy over the next few years?
- Anything else you want to add?

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