

**PLEASING A CROWD:**

**How social media and the sports entertainment industry has affected sports journalism**

---

**A Project Presented to**  
**the Faculty of the Graduate School**  
**at the University of Missouri-Columbia**

---

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Arts**

---

**By**

**Cameronallyn Denmark**

**May 2022**

**David Herzog, Chair**

**Kathy Kiely**

## Acknowledgements

I'd like to start by thanking Professor Herzog for his guidance throughout my time at the University of Missouri. He is the reason why I originally fell in love with data and how analytics can impact journalism. Through his mentorship, I now know what I would like to do after graduating from grad school. I appreciate the time he has given me with this project, and how he has pushed me to create a piece that I am proud of.

Thank you to Mr. Wheeler for giving me the opportunity to intern with your department this past semester. It was a joy to interact with you all on a daily basis and to have a safe, happy place where I could work. I appreciate his caring attitude, and drive to push the department closer together.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to every journalist that I spoke to who gave me their brilliant insights. I could not have done any of this with them and the help that they gave me. I sincerely appreciate it.

To Professor Kiely, I quite literally would not be here without you taking a chance on me. Thank you for taking a silly radio head from New York to come help at your classes. I miss all of the students and wish them the most success as they travel on their journeys. Professor Kiely, I am glad that you could be there from the very start of my journey at Missouri to the end.

To my mom, dad, and stepmom Karen, thank you for putting up with me the past few years. It was a huge gamble moving here, I couldn't have done it without your love and support. Thank you for being the best parents in the whole world.

Finally, to my friend Jon. I miss you every day. You taught me to be me. This is for you.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....                | 2   |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS .....               | 3   |
| CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION .....      | 4   |
| CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW ..... | 6   |
| CHAPTER THREE – ANALYSIS .....        | 16  |
| APPENDIX A – TRANSCRIPTS .....        | 31  |
| APPENDIX B – WEEKLY NOTES .....       | 99  |
| APPENDIX C – EVALUATION .....         | 108 |
| APPENDIX D – SELF-EVALUATION .....    | 109 |
| APPENDIX E – PROJECT PROPOSAL .....   | 111 |

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

When I started out my journalism career after I graduated from Ithaca College, I refused to use any sort of social media. I was a bit stubborn; I didn't feel like it was necessary since I thought that players and teams would just contact me directly. Looking back on it now, it was a plan that was doomed to fail right from the start. But it taught me a valuable lesson on how important of a tool social media can be.

Several years later, I have explored the power of sports journalism as a fan, a content creator, and now as a researcher. The rapid growth of social media as a tool to research stories and to explore new content has fascinated me. Now, teams and players do not need to schedule a press conference to announce breaking news to a room full of journalists. They can simply tweet out the news or release it in the form of a social media post. Athletes now have the power to disclose information about themselves or the teams that they play for through their own accounts.

But what does this all mean for the journalists that cover these teams? How do the teams cope with all the recent changes too? To find out, I asked seven journalists, out of a proposed 10, from six different publications how social media has affected what they report and how they report it. Some of these journalists were just starting their careers and were raised during the boom of social media. Others came into the sports media world when traditional forms of reporting and writing were still popular.

The evolution of it all has been rapid and will continue to change as we head into the future. While there is no real way to be able to predict the future, I asked the participants what

they thought the future could hold. Some pointed to some trends in the types of content that is being created by newer journalists. The push has been to shorten everything to fit the style of a social media post. Along with this, the drive to gain social media interaction has changed the speed at which news is reported. Sometimes, this can affect the accuracy of the content.

The journalists I interviewed came from a wide range of backgrounds and a variety of mediums. Some were beat reporters for certain teams, others wrote for national publications or provided local radio commentary. Most of the interviews were arranged by direct message on social media, mainly Twitter. The rest were contacted by email. The majority of the interviews were done via Zoom as it was the easiest to record transcripts for later usage. If the interview was not done by Zoom, it was done over the phone.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Often tied together for commercial purposes, sports and entertainment, termed sportainment, create thrilling moments that fans will remember for a lifetime (RADOŠINSKÁ, 2018). However, sportainment has been tarnished and the media industry is to blame. Taking advantage of suspenseful action and dramatic conclusions, we must look at how American cinema and advertising agencies exploit interpersonal fan connections for commercial gain. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a historical timeline describing how the sports entertainment industry arrived at the point it is at now, what the influence of the industry is on the world, and where it can go from here.

#### **Introduction**

Growing up as a Yankees and Giants fan in the heart of New York state, drama is always at a premium. This addiction to fiction-like storytelling did not come out of nowhere, it has been fueled by the no-nonsense, aggressive reporting style of the New York media. It is here that we see two elements that are currently threatening the sports journalism world: dramatization and tabloidization.

I think back to some moments that defined the '90s New York Yankees and the three championships that they won during the decade. Don Mattingly's first and only postseason home run during the 1995 ALDS, Tino Martinez's grand slam in the 1998 World Series, and perfect games thrown by David Wells and David Cone in '98 and '99 respectively. All legends that will live on in Yankee lore for the rest of time.

Another dynasty was etching its name into the history books during this time in the National Basketball Association. Led by Michael Jordan, the '90s Chicago Bulls, captured in ESPN's miniseries *The Last Dance*, are often described in sports media as the greatest dynasty in the history of the NBA. Much like the old saying, "a little of something goes a long way," talks of this dynasty and the legends it created are what keep sports alive in the journalism world. However, I would argue that we have gone past the point of feeling a slight buzz of intoxication from the tap of sensationalization. We are now in the territory of alcohol poisoning, losing interest and coordination with every editorial piece.

Self-described as the "Worldwide Leader in Sports," ESPN has suffered from declining subscriber ratings since 2011. According to data obtained by Business Insider, from 2011 to 2017, ESPN lost nearly 13 million subscribers (Gaines, Nudelman, 2017). It's not just ESPN either, networks across the sports landscape have taken hits on viewership ratings. The 2020 Stanley Cup, the National Hockey League's championship series, lost 61% of viewers compared to the year prior (Reimer, 2020). ESPN rivals Fox Sports have seen a decline in viewership for their NASCAR Cup Series coverage as well (Stern, 2021).

The purpose of this article is to explore how an addiction to drama, suspense, and overreliance on social media engagement have plagued the sports entertainment industry. Events like the Olympics and college rivalries create pride and emotional connections among a boisterous fanbase. It would be borderline idiotic for film companies, advertising agencies, and even journalists to ignore this interpersonal connection between team and fan. The events that take place during the length of a game, season, or even career can carry storylines that are best told through film and television. Even impartial sports broadcasters have changed methods for play-by-play style commentary.

Radio shows like the Paul Finebaum Show and the Dan LeBatard Show have built up a passionate group of listeners who call in regularly to provide their own insights. Television programs like First Take, Skip and Shannon: Undisputed, and Pardon the Interruption keep viewers entertained with fast-paced formats. Movies that are based on true stories like Glory Road and The Blind Side overdramatize and commercialize the tales of successful athletes. These formats promote drama and suspense for the viewer to create commercial success.

### **Sportainment**

To begin, we must break down how the current sports media world came to be and how the current format ties to audience engagement. Several studies have indicated that suspense in sports draws stronger interest and emotional connection to the viewer. I will discuss how these connections can vary from sport to sport and how college athletics differ from professional. As mentioned before, cinema has painted an unrealistic depiction on real life sports events. Most notably, creating the image of the “white savior” in films where the main protagonist(s) are young black athletes. Studies by both Hutchinson and Schultz look at how film has told the story of the 1966 Texas Western Basketball team and their run to the NCAA National Championship. Finally, we must look at the gaps in research and how the sports entertainment industry can save itself from certain destruction.

Luckily, we have a term to use when examining the sports entertainment industry as it stands right now. According to Radošinská’s look at the current landscape of American cinema and mainstream media, sports and entertainment can be combined into one word, “sportainment.” Sportainment, in Radošinská’s words, “is a portmanteau word which reacts to

the need to reflect on the commercial establishment of sports within the sphere of media entertainment (Radošinská, 2018).” The term emphasizes the importance of understanding how sports events and sports celebrities are covered and publicly presented to entertain media audiences.

I have seen and participated in sportainment firsthand. After working at an ESPN radio affiliate as an on-air personality for four years, the routine became very simple; while the talking heads changed depending on the time frame, the conversations did not. The conversations were usually centered around either the NBA or the NFL, often compared a current player to a player that may be considered the “greatest of all time,” and discussed what sort of championship implications this player may have on their franchise. It is boring, repetitive, and most of all uninspiring content. However, I was told by the president of the company I worked for on several occasions, “this is what the audience wants.” On a personal level, this form of conversation practically destroyed my confidence as a young sports journalist. Nearly every day I would ask myself, “why should I interview an athlete that is breaking school records in the pole vault when all the audience wants is Michael Jordan-LeBron James comparisons?”

With the ever-changing digital media landscape and the rising popularity of social media, sportainment has not just taken over the American entertainment industry, it can be traced all over the world. Take for example the Super Bowl, the championship game of the National Football League that takes place in the United States. Once thought of as a localized product for a national audience, the Super Bowl has grown in popularity in Europe and Latin America (Radošinská, 2018). So much so that regular season NFL games are now being played in England’s Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and Mexico’s Estadio Azteca.

The Super Bowl brings more than just American gridiron football, there is an entertainment factor attached to event. Super Bowl halftime shows are often a staple for musical performances by popular musicians, littered with advertisements for Pepsi, Coca-Cola, or Bridgestone. Advertising agencies understand that the Super Bowl is historically known for showing humorous commercials in between the action. In 2019, the cost of a 30 second spot during the Super Bowl was \$5.25 million, significantly more than the \$37,500-\$42,500 price tag back in 1967 (Su, McDowell, 2020). Take into consideration that the event drew in an estimated average of 98 million viewers in the United States plus an estimate 50 to 65 million viewers from around the globe, it's no wonder why companies will pay top dollar (Richter 2020). The Super Bowl is more than just a championship game, it is a sportainment spectacle.

Sportainment, at least in the football entertainment industry, is not a new theory by any means. In 1977, study was already taking place examining dramatic language used in football broadcasts (Bryant, Comisky, and Zillmann, 1977). The researchers noticed a strong trend between a commentator's use of dramatic language and the sense of enjoyment that a fan takes away. As the sports broadcasts change, so do the modes of performance that are being studied by researchers. Whereas older studies looked at how drama impacted sports commentary, recent studies examined how suspense can impact a fan's interpretation of a sports contest (Peterson, Raney, 2008). Peterson and Raney hypothesized a correlation between fan enjoyment and how close a matchup was. The researchers found that hypothesis to be supported.

It is important to note what role suspense in sports and how this can affect a fan's attachment to a team. In sports, the outcome is not preordained; it is in doubt unless the clock strikes zero, the final strike, or until the whistle blows. A viewer cannot say with absolute certainty that an outcome will unfold during the contest. As noted from Peterson and Raney, "in

sports, uncertainty reigns, such that the length of time the winning team is in question because the score is so close only increases the suspense of the game (Peterson, Raney, 2008).” This draws comparisons to fictional drama; suspense is theoretically associated with the perceived notion that the protagonist will be met with impending disaster. Sports, in this sense, provide the perfect formula for a nonfictional, theatrical performance.

### **The Olympic Spirit**

Targeting national pride is imperative when it comes to marketing the Olympics for a global audience. When picturing the average Olympic competitor’s journey to the world’s top sporting event, you imagine years of intense training leading up to one 100-meter sprint. The sprinters coil into their blocks waiting for the signal. The gun goes off. Camera flashes light up the multi-million-dollar stadium built specifically for this event. Runners hurl themselves towards the finish line. The event is over in just 10 seconds. The runner that has trained four years for a shot at the gold medal just missed the podium two-tenths of a second. Runners then may consider a number of excuses as to why they missed the podium. The next day, recovery begins, and training ensues for the next Olympic competition. These, as Ferrell argues, are the steps to marketing an Olympic event: anticipation, agony and regret, recover and compensation, and synchronic denouement (Ferrell, 2008).

Heading into the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo, the United States committee had much to be excited about. At the time, the talk of the town was the men’s hockey team, coming off one of the greatest upsets in Olympic history. Back in 1980, the United States men’s hockey team found themselves in the final round of the tournament along with Sweden, Finland, and the

heavily favored Soviet Union. Against all odds, the United States, in front of a Lake Placid crowd, defeated the Soviet Union in the semifinal round of the tournament in what would be known as the “Miracle on Ice.” This game would forever be etched into cinema history with the Disney film *Miracle* (2004). In the film, head coach Herb Brooks, played by Kurt Russell, delivers a passionate speech to his players pregame. Sports commentator Al Michaels, who delivered play-by-play of the teams run to the gold medal, recreated his commentary for the film. However, Michaels was unable to deliver the last ten seconds of the game with the same amount of passion that he had on the original commentary. Therefore, the real soundbite of the last ten seconds was used. The film serves as a great example of how dramatic sporting events can be retold in cinema. The United States would then defeat Sweden to take home the gold in the championship game.

As Ferrell mentions, Sarajevo went a bit differently than Lake Placid. The United States men’s hockey team had one win, two losses, and two ties in group play, and were bounced before tournament play even began. Prior to this, the American Broadcasting Company had acquired the rights to broadcast the 1984 Winter Olympics for between \$80 and \$90 million (ABC Awarded, 1980). ABC broadcast the Lake Placid Olympics before when Team USA made its “miracle” run. ABC heavily advertised the anticipation of Team USA’s 1980 run to the top heading into the games. Agony and regret soon took over after USA’s failure to reach tournament play. The Soviet Union would go on to win gold in the competition (Ferrell, 2008).

We see an example of nationalized advertising prior to the 1984 Winter Olympics through Bud Light. The 30-second advertisement begins by showing a typical flight crew loading up bags into an airline. An announcer then states: “every evening the ground crew loads Flight 207 for its trip across the Atlantic. But tonight, they know it carries something more. Tonight,

Flight 207 carries our nation's hope." A ground crew member then states, "Captain, the Olympic team's stuff is all on board." A wide shot reveals the snowy, freezing conditions in which, the ground crew is loading up the cargo. A member of the ground crew then holds up a sign to the visible athletes that reads: "good luck." A final shot shows the crew watching the plane take off with the message that reads: "official sponsor of the 1984 U.S. Olympic Team" (Beta MAX, 2014). The advertisement targets the American fan who is preparing for the Winter Olympics. It instills pride and hope that the United States will prove to be the best and take home the gold.

### **Painting a New Picture: Sport in Cinema**

As mentioned before, sport has its own space written in cinematography. The relationship is nearly perfect, sport provides the drama and cinematography can embellish a true story. Film has its own duty in the entertainment industry, to entertain the viewer in whatever format it sees fit. This is where we can draw the comparison between drama and suspense in sport.

In 1966 the Texas Western Miners men's basketball team went on a 28-1 run to win the NCAA National Championship. In the championship game, Texas Western (now the University of Texas at El Paso) started an all-black starting lineup against a widely favored all-white team from the University of Kentucky. The Miners went on to win, 72-65, etching their names in the NCAA history books. Their story was told on the silver screen with *Glory Road* (2006), a Disney film directed by James Gartner.

Nearly 55 years after the Miners won the championship, the portrayal of the title game and the team itself has evolved into what it is known for now. Back in 1966, journalists covering the game did not emphasize the racial aspects of the game and it was largely forgotten. As

Hutchinson (2016) indicates, the 1966 Miners basketball team was largely remembered as the answer to the sports trivia question: “What school interrupted UCLA’s (University of California at Los Angeles) string of NCAA basketball championships from 1964 until 1973?” Initially after the win, journalists were quick to change their plotlines. Instead of focusing on the racial aspects of the game, the narrative was the classic telling of an underdog story. “Speedy,” “poised,” and “flashy” were all traits used to describe the Miners (Hutchinson, 2016).

In 1966, journalists were not blind to issues related to race and sport. Boxing and even basketball stories often mentioned such. However, reporters failed to convey the racial aspects of the contest. One reason for this was the fact that the championship game had not been decided until about 24 hours prior. This gave reporters little time to build up the matchup and focus on historic implications. Head coach Don Haskins’ decision to start an all-black starting lineup was not made until the last-minute (Hutchinson, 2016). Haskins was later quoted saying, "I really didn't think about starting five black guys. I just wanted to put my five best guys on the court" (Glory Road, n.d.).

Glory Road tells a different story, however. Over the years, the narrative of the teams has changed and focuses more on the racial aspects of the game. During the course of the season, the team endures racial discrimination, building up to the moment when Haskins starts an all-black lineup against Kentucky’s all-white lineup. Glory Road illustrates Haskins as a “white savior” of sorts, making a statement in the midst of the civil rights movement (Schultz, 2014). As mentioned earlier, Haskins did not see the act of starting an all-black lineup as a noble one. Merely, he wanted to start his best five players. Glory Road leaves a long-lasting impression that Haskins is seen as a hero (Hutchinson, 2016).

## **Concluding Remarks and Questions**

The argument can be made the entertainment was meant for sports and that sport itself is made for entertainment purposes. It would stand to reason then that the two would fit together like Lego pieces. If this is the case, we must be ready for the influence that entertainment has on the sports industry. Even ESPN is now owned by entertainment giant Disney. There is nothing inherently wrong with storytelling or reliving a sports moment that changed an athlete or team forever. However, journalists, cinematographers, and storytellers in general are responsible for how we frame our perception of an event. As we see in *Miracle* and *Glory Road*, our interpretation of a game or a team is in the hands of the storyteller. It is important to remember these tales, they fill us with pride, make us feel emotions that would be difficult to recreate. However, sportainment is in control of its own destiny. How we remember sportainment, is up to sportainment itself.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: *How has social media changed the way that writers, beat reporters, and editors create sports journalism?*

RQ2: *How has sportainment changed the way that writers, beat reporters, and editors create sports journalism?*

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ANALYSIS**

It has been a growing trend in sports reporting for the better part of a decade now: The meteoric rise of social media has changed the way that we see, understand and even practice sports journalism. The digitization of the modern era has created a whole new wave of instant news and gratification among the ever-changing consumers. For the average sports journalist, it has been a world of bend or break. Either move with the times or the times will simply move you.

Sports journalism first began back in newspapers in the 1800s. Horse racing and boxing were commonly featured events in the beginning stages. Much of the interest drawn from these events came from the social elite, who were less interested in the coverage itself and more on the greater social context. According to Brian Moritz, “at the time, newspaper sports coverage was sporadic, and tended to focus on events with greater social context rather than just games themselves, like a race between horses from the North and the South, or a boxing match between American and British fighters.”

Now though, coverage is often localized with publications enlisting beat reporters to cover specific teams in the area. For example, the New York Post covers 11 teams located in the New York City area. These teams are part of the largest sports leagues in the United States: the National Football League, National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, the National Hockey League, and Major League Soccer. A beat reporter is selected by the New York Post to provide coverage for that team. By doing this, a publication can theoretically maximize its

outreach in the local sports market. Additionally, fans have someone to turn to that they can trust for news pieces on their favorite teams.

When long-form content still reigned supreme, publications like *Sports Illustrated* created in-depth pieces on players and their lives. That, coupled with the push for statistical analysis pushed sports journalism into the mainstream media. However, as social media started to rise, so did the popularization of short form content. The growth of Twitter, and its initial limit of 140 characters per tweet, helped standardize the way we think of explaining what is happening in the shortest way possible.

For journalists, many of whom were early adopters of Twitter, this meant an evolution in the style of their content. What originally started out as long-form coverage on a team or of a specific player, evolved to shorter tweets that explained what exactly was happening in the moment. Coincidentally, Twitter even mentions on its own page how [journalists can maximize Twitter](#) and “interact with their audience.”

The rapid migration to social media meant that it was tough to become the loudest voice in a room crowded with speakers. When several people cover the same exact thing and provide the same opinion on the same subject, pieces can become redundant. However, with programs like First Take, Undisputed, and Around the Horn rising to prominence on several different sports media outlets, the industry found itself a voice. This voice could come in the form of an unpopular opinion, or often described as a “hot take.” Personalities such as Stephen A. Smith, Skip Bayless, and Shannon Sharpe have all build careers on shows with argumentative formats. These shows have widespread appeal among sports fans. For example, some of the most viewed videos on ESPN’s YouTube page come from shows like these. The same can be said for Fox

Sports and its YouTube page. Hot takes and clashing opinions have changed the sports entertainment industry.

The same talking heads that now dominate the “hot takes” sector of the sports entertainment world were once in the print journalism field. Bayless, Tony Kornheiser and Smith all started their careers as sports writers. As their positions changed within the sports media field, the work they created became more and more polarizing by nature. When social media started to take over within the sports media world, the talking heads were some of the first to jump on the idea of “going viral” with their hot takes.

I believe that the growth in social media and the sudden evolution of the sports entertainment industry as a whole, has caused sports journalists to change the way they perform their jobs. With new social media outlets like Twitter, Instagram and TikTok pushing shortform content, I was curious to see how sports journalists not only maintain a voice on these platforms, but how they use it to their advantage as well. To explore this, I talked to seven writers, reporters, and broadcasters from six media outlets. I asked them questions that explored how they use social media for their line of work, what they think of the sports entertainment industry as a whole, and what they believed was the future of sports reporting given the status it is currently in.

Participants were contacted by either email or Twitter. Initially, I thought that email would be the best way to reach out to these journalists. I kept a list of all journalists from different publications that I wanted to reach out to.

Among the people that I interviewed, I sought to diversify the coverage. Some reporters that I talked to worked on the local level only. Some had prior experience on the national level

covering professional sports but currently cover college athletics for a larger university. Others have their work in the national spotlight, whether that may be covering an entire league for a team in the NFL. I felt as though this diversification would be positive and interesting to look at from a social media usage point of view.

## **I. Usage**

Every journalist I spoke to had a Twitter account that they used for professional work. This work could be in the form of retweeting information from the team that they cover, promoting stories by themselves or fellow co-workers in the same publication, or every for general social media interaction. For most of the journalists that I spoke to, social media has become a way to figure out what exactly is going on in their area of coverage.

“That's how I'm aware of things and it's how I find stuff to write about,” said Dan Doherty, sportswriter for Tompkins Weekly in Ithaca, NY, senior editor of Cageside Press a blog covering MMA fights and news, and play-by-play broadcaster at ESPN Ithaca in Ithaca. For small-market sportswriters, the opportunity to just find something to write about doesn't come around all that often. Many high school reporters have to rely heavily on local word of mouth or social media coverage from the schools they cover. “It's few and far between the stuff get that gets posted here in this area. So, when you do see something, you got jump on it, and see what you can get out of it.”

There are several positives that come from the social media game of small market media, however. It's fairly easy to be the big fish in a little pond when you have enough of a following. Communities will often spread your story to other people within the community if you talk about an athlete that has had success in their area. “People respond to that stuff,” said Doherty. “They

have more at stake, I guess, with what they see, because it's it tailors directly to them, instead of just seeing something that you know, you can find anywhere else.”

For many journalists, social media has become a venue for story discovery, especially when the athletes themselves are on it. A growing trend within the NCAA has been the rapid growth of the transfer portal. Student-athletes now have the option to take their talents to another school in the hopes of receiving more playing time or gaining more professional recruiting opportunities. The portal has almost become a gold mine for college sports reporters during the offseason. Since it is almost guaranteed that a team will have at least one player transferring from the program at the end of the season, journalists have something to keep an eye on.

Most athletes will announce on their personal social media platforms that they intend to transfer from their respective programs. According to Brett Dawson, writer for the Courier-Journal in Louisville, “literally every player is going to make some sort of announcement or decision about what they're going to do. If they're coming back, or if they're transferring, they're going to announce it on Twitter, or on Instagram.”

Dawson covers Louisville men’s basketball for the Courier-Journal; prior to his time with the Courier-Journal, he was a professor at the University of MissouriI and a sports editor at the Missourian. “I've got notifications on for every player until they make an announcement about where they're gonna go. So, there's that breaking news element of it that never existed before social media blew up.”

In addition to the rise of the transfer portal, Name, Image, Likeness compensation, or NIL, has given college athletes a whole new image on social media. “From an NIL perspective, so you kind of learn what companies are working with and what companies they like are drawn

to, but you also kind of learn about what they do,” said Dawson. “It's a place you go to really find out in an age where, where players and coaches probably control their images more than ever before. That's one of those places you go to find out what kind of messages they're putting out there about who they are.”

It's not just college athletes, professional athletes are using social media now more than ever before. Because of this, athletes can interact with fans and media directly. Sometimes, the interactions themselves on social media can become stories in and of themselves. “They're talking to fans directly on social media,” said Matt Derrick, reporter for Chiefs Digest, a blog covering the Kansas City Chiefs. “And we see frequently the things that players do on social media, work their way back into the news, and become topics themselves.” This can become a bit of a problem for both the athletes and the reporters whose job it is to report on them. “You end up writing a lot about what things happened off the field,” explained Derrick. “I mean, when players get into trouble off the field, that always becomes a story. But, you know, to me, I mean, you almost can't go a single day without multiple athletes, you know, there being stories about what they did on social media. And that has now become a story you have to cover.”

## **II. Evolution**

For several young journalists, the evolution in the sphere of journalism hasn't been as pronounced. Considering that the vast majority of social media users are millennials and Gen-Z, young journalists of this age were raised in the boom of social media. But for those that have been practicing journalism for a lot longer, the change is more pronounced. “In the past few years, you are seeing a little bit more, I would say a lot more, of that need to really follow what people are doing, you know, with their Instagrams and probably with their TikToks,” said

Dawson who has been a reporter since 1999. “I would say we're kind of in the second wave where in 2009, nobody really had it before.”

The evolution of social media has been quite rapid for some journalists. Nick Karski is a station manager at ESPN Ithaca and has been part of the Ithaca market as a radio personality and reporter for over 10 years. “It's really changed and evolved. Not just in 10 plus years, but also in the last like three years,” said Karski. “We would have coverage of Cornell lacrosse game, for instance, and kind of live tweet it, if you will. There was a time when that kind of was important, because that's how people got their information kind of in live time, if they couldn't make it to the stadium for the game.”

### **III. The Negatives**

With a space that has so many voices, everyone can have their own opinion. For Mike McAllister, sportswriter for Syracuse sports on Sports Illustrated, that isn't always a positive thing. “[Social media has] gone from a place where I think a lot of people went to, you know, just interact with other fans and read people's opinions on stuff and whatever else. And there's certainly a lot of that. But I've noticed that it has now become every single person with a Twitter account is an expert, at least in their own mind.” For McAllister, this can mean a lack of meaningful dialogue. “There's a lot of sort of wading through the vitriol to get to constructive conversations. We don't all have to agree. Everything doesn't always have to be rosy and positive. The problem, I think, and I think the biggest issue with social media is that there's no nuance with anything.”

A public space can also mean quite a bit of backlash and trolling. In some cases, the trolling can come from an individual pretending to be an established reporter in the sports media

field. This is a theme that is becoming all too common in every sports league and has especially become a problem on Twitter. For example, Adam Stern is an established NASCAR reporter for the Sports Business Journal. However, a few years ago a parody account that went by the name of Adam Slern would create fake posts to fool NASCAR viewers into spreading false information. As of the writing of this report, it seems as though the parody account has been taken down.

For Karski, this problem is one of the negatives to the rise of social media in sports reporting. “The people who essentially are trolls, that’s the best way to put them who, you know, think for some reason that they want to, like, I don’t know, prank the world I guess or whatever and joke around and like, literally steal Adam Scheftner’s (a popular NFL insider at ESPN) Twitter avatar, and you know, change his handle by one letter... And like, I don’t know, people fall for that stuff all the time.” These trolls usually impersonate a very notable figure in the sports journalism world and try to target people who may be quickly scrolling through and not paying attention.

Perhaps more notably though, social media can create a space where negativity and harassment become a problem. Sports journalists will often post the final score of a recent game whether or not the team they are covering is on the winning side. This can foster negative comments and negative attitudes towards journalists who are just simply doing their jobs. “Social media gives people the platform to just kind of like complain and vocalize their displeasure with their favorite sports team or vocalize their displeasure with the person who’s simply providing the news and the information itself,” said Karski. “I feel like sometimes when you scroll through a social media feed, you kind of have to, it’s almost like playing dodgeball, like you’re trying to

dodge and get out of the way of like, some things that like, just get in the way of what you're looking for.”

For some reporters, the negativity and backlash that they receive can be even darker than a simple disagreement or displeasure in a team’s roster moves. “Most of my friends that, you know, get the most back lashes and get some harassment and get these kinds of things, especially in sports are minorities and women, and it's just terrible,” said Derrick. “I mean, it's frustrating.”

Dawson shared the same experience, “I have friends in the business who are women and some of the stuff that men tweet at women, both like suggestive stuff, but also just really degrading insulting stuff about women in sports journalism.” Unfortunately, social media has allowed access to all fans and viewers, even the ones that are out to simply troll and harass an individual for simply doing their job. When I asked my participants what they did to stop the trolling and harassment, pretty much all of them said that the mute or the block button is their best friend. In the words of Donna Ditota, sportswriter for the Post-Standard in Syracuse, “I never blocked anybody, because they know that you block them. But if you mute them, they have no idea.”

#### **IV. The “industry”**

As mentioned earlier, the sports entertainment industry has undergone rapid evolution along with the rise in social media. This is no coincidence, clips of sports talk segments and quotes from interviews get passed around the sports media sphere on a daily basis. What shows have noticed is that the more clicks you get on a video or picture, the more traction you will get back to your site and to your show. Thus, your ratings will appear to increase as a result.

To some sports journalists, the expansion of “talking heads” or argumentative style shows has muddied the waters a little bit. According to McAllister, “I’ve had some interns, not in the last couple of years, but prior to that, that basically wanted to cover teams and write articles, as if they were doing a segment with Skip Bayless, Steven A Smith. And it was, you know, shock jock. ‘I’m gonna say something outrageous to get a reaction to get notoriety from it.’ And I don’t like that.” In a way, the idea of trying to get the most clicks from an opinion that you may not actually believe in can come across as disingenuous. “I’m not anti having an opinion. I’m anti trying to come up with an opinion that will get the most reaction and then trying to justify that just because of the reaction that it will get.”

In the world of everyone wanting to be the loudest voice in the room, people also want to be first to break the news now. Hypothetically, if you or your publication is the first to break a large story, you will get the most traction on that post. Sometimes though, the idea of being first may actually be the downfall to the truth of a story. While being first matters, being accurate may take a backseat to a large story that is being broken. “Being first matters a lot and the quality can suffer because of that,” said Doherty.

Recently, from series like *The Last Dance*, a miniseries created by ESPN that revolves around the career of Michael Jordan, fans have gotten an inside look at the life of professional athletes. This is always something that has been of interest for a lot of viewers, especially kids. People always wonder what it takes to perform at such a high level athletically. With shows that often depict the life of an athlete, we can now see this. This method of entertainment is most likely here to stay, at least for a little while. But it seems like more and more people are not wanting to see the glorified life of an athlete, they want to see the realistic point of view.

Alex Fast is the vice president and writer at Pitcher List, a nationally known fantasy baseball column that specializes in pitching analytics. “I was talking with one of the (Baltimore) Orioles broadcasters about this, about how it's very much both of our dreams to like, create a television show that is an accurate portrayal of not necessarily Major League life... but that for a triple A player,” said Fast. “I don't think there's any form of media out there that accurately depicts the guy who, you know, it's 4 p.m., and he's getting called up and he has to drive, you know, 12 hours to Seattle, wherever, because that's where the team is playing. And he has to pitch that night. I don't think there is any real accurate depiction of that, and I think the sport suffers as a result.”

YouTube has been a platform which has come into its own in the sports entertainment world for this exact reason. MLB players like Trevor May or Aiden McIntyre have expanded their social media reach by creating vlog-style videos showing what the day in the life of a professional player is like. The glorification of a professional baseball player is still made in movies like Bull Durham or The Natural, but it seems like fans are wanting to see accurate portrayals of the life of a professional athlete.

## **V. The future**

The push from more traditional forms of journalism to social media doesn't seem like it'll stop any time soon. In fact, it may continue to grow into a higher need for short form content as opposed to long form content. I asked all of my participants if they believe short form content, in the form of short stories, tweets, or just general social media posts, will continue to take over the medium. “Social media, in its essence is a style of short form reporting. I mean, it's always going to be quick videos, it's going to be short word counts, it's not going to be long form,” said Derrick. “Everything's going to have to be short, sweet and to the point.”

The big question heading into the future of sports reporting is, where are we going to get the news from? Most teams have cut out the middleman and no longer use any form of PR to relay their information to journalists. In the eyes of Karski, the players may just be the ones doing the talking. “I think the athletes are basically turning into the, quote, unquote, ‘news sources,’ if that makes sense.” A perfect example of this was when Von Miller, a veteran linebacker signed with the Buffalo Bills, he announced the signing via his own social media account. Normally, this announcement would be broken by the team or by a football reporter. However, Miller broke the news in a video that he made at his house with the details of the contract eventually being broken by various sports reporters.

The pessimistic view is that teams may realize that they don’t even need to give their information away to journalists. “Already teams have their own reporters, leagues have their own networks. That's probably just gonna continue to grow,” said Derrick. “And like I said, I've got colleagues of mine who think that 10 years from now, there won't be any reporters in locker rooms or in press conferences.”

We have already seen this with the rapid growth of Zoom to connect players and the media. During the beginning of the pandemic, one-on-one interviews pretty much stopped. The interaction between athletes and journalists was taken virtually. According to Derrick, “you can't have a conversation with a player on a Zoom with 30 people that you can have one on one.” There may be signs of this changing as restrictions have been lifted in clubhouses and locker rooms, but there are still some organizations that have not made any changes.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The more traditional journalist is in danger. The world of sports media and sports reporting is an ever-changing environment. Unfortunately, in a world of so much competition, it's either sink or swim. Now, with new methods of journalism being discovered and practiced almost every year, it's only a matter of time until what we know now becomes obsolete. I personally believe there will always be room for the journalist, but I'm not sure what is in store for the more traditional forms of journalism.

Before coming to Missouri, I worked in a radio station as an executive producer. Since it was a small radio station, I was also in charge of order insertion and traffic management for the station's commercial logs. In the four years I spent there, I noticed the rapid decline of radio as a selling point. Since it was sports radio, the bread and butter for clients buying ads through the station was the play-by-play broadcasts. While this still helped drive sales and listener traffic, what really got the station back off the ground was its social media presence.

Social media is an incredibly powerful tool that can help take a up-and-coming content creator's work and give it a new audience. It can quite literally make or break a content creator's career. Unfortunately, the rapid growth of social media has created an incredibly competitive world of trying to break news first. With the hustle and bustle of everyday life now, shortform content is becoming the new norm.

I worry about the small market, local journalists who don't have the resources to get their name out there. Matt Derrick shared the same thought. "The local reporter is endangered, because, you know, obviously, newspapers continue to struggle. I mean, there's no doubt about that," said Derrick. "What's the future of local television?" I think, is obviously probably the next question." There is a chance that social media may overtake newspapers, local television, and radio. After working in the field for a couple of years, even I can see that.

The connection between fan and athlete has been closer than it most likely every has been. Fans can tweet at their favorite athlete or directly message them. While they may not always get a response back, social media has given us that tool to be able to contact whoever we want at any given moment. This has led to trolling and even players getting into spats with the fans themselves. I think for me, the most interesting thing will be how athletes release news about themselves or the teams that they play for. They have every method to be able to break stories themselves. I could see a future where players release injury news or trades to the public on an almost regular basis as well.

The future journalist must be ready to embrace the world of sportainment, social media and all their flaws. In order for an article or another piece of journalism to be seen by the wider sports audience, it must be shared to social media. For many younger journalists with previous social media experience, that will not be difficult. However, for those that have been in the field longer, the transition may be a bit more difficult. Traditional forms of journalism are already on the decline and as previously mentioned, the world of sports media is cutthroat, you either sink or swim.

Additional study might investigate what the future holds for sports media. Is it talking heads and clickbait hot takes? Or is there room for something more thoughtful?

Another avenue for future exploration would involve adding geographical diversity to this inquiry. Four of the seven journalists interviewed were from the central New York area. I spent three years working at ESPN Ithaca prior to enrolling at the University of Missouri. For this project, I utilized my connections in that area to interview some of the journalists I knew. Getting perspective from journalists across the country could enhance this work.

**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**

**Nick Karski, station manager at ESPN Ithaca, host of Between the Lines**

**Cam Denmark**

So, Nick, first, thank you very much for joining me, I do appreciate it. I know that you are very busy at the station. I know that it's a very busy time right now, I do want to ask you, how long have you been working at the station for how many years?

**Nick Karski**

I'm approaching year 11. In July of this year.

**Cam Denmark**

July. That is a long time, and what is your official title at the station that you hold.

**Nick Karski**

I'm the operations manager at ESPN Ithaca. I'm also the program director, the host of Between the Lines which is our weekly show, weekdays at five.

**Cam Denmark**

And I'm trying to think so. When when I was at the station, we were doing between the lines you had been doing between the lines for how many years at that point?

**Nick Karski**

Um, it wasn't long, I don't think it was 2018, I believe, I think it was like, the early or the early parts of the Fall in 2018. And I think it's when it was.

**Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. And through the show, we obviously interview athletes, coaches, whatever, interact with social media as much as possible. And like I said to you, before we hit record on this interview,

the whole idea of this project is to just basically kind of look at, like, how social media has sort of affected the way that maybe you have reported a story or maybe how you have approached like a segment in the in between the lines or whatever. So to be kind of blunt and forward, how have you seen social media sort of, I guess, affect the stories that you pursue or affect, like the segments that you guys sort of talk about?

### **Nick Karski**

Um, it's really changed and evolved. Not just in 10 plus years, but also in the last like three years. You know, there was a time when it was, you know, we were trying to you know, just we simply could just, you know, put out, you know, stats of certain players like say, like, we would have coverage of Cornell lacrosse game, for instance, and kind of live tweet it, if you will. There was a time when that kind of was important, because that's how people got their information kind of in live time, if they couldn't make it to the stadium for the game. Whereas now it's become such a, it's really become such a visual medium, I feel like where a whole bunch of text that gives you, you know, an update of, hey, this kid scored this school at this point in the game, this is the score, you know, this is how much time's left or whatever, like that gets lost in, in the shuffle of Twitter. Now I feel like especially because now you're seeing videos and memes and you know, professional sports teams, content creators posting lineups of the start or starting lineups of games and stuff like that, like it's become such a, a visual sort of medium. So, you know, it's, it's, it's changing on the regular, for better or worse, you know, there's, there's obviously some positives to it, I sometimes see more negatives that kind of come with it, unfortunately. But, you know, it kind of is what it is, but it's something that's, that's obviously so important to do what we do, and it's so important to just the coverage of sports in general, I think, you know?

### **Cam Denmark**

You had talked about like, the the negatives what kind of negatives have you seen come out of social media, like the growth of social media recently?

### **Nick Karski**

You know, it's, I mean, the the first and most obvious thing is, you know, the people who essentially are trolls, the best way to put them who, you know, think for some reason that they want to, like, you know, put a like, not a joke, I don't know, prank the world I guess or whatever and joke around and like, literally steal Adam Scheftner's Twitter avatar, and you know, change his handle by one letter and, you know, use some sort of like, not logo, but like there's some sort of like, you know, emoji or something that kind of looks like a checkmark that people put next to it. And like, I don't know, people fall for that stuff all the time. You know, and that's a guy who's like trying to actually make an impact to be like, Hey, this is the news. or the thing that's happening. You know, sometimes people fall for that sort of stuff. The other thing I feel like is it

gives people the platform to just kind of like complain and in vocalize their displeasure with their favorite sports team vocalize their displeasure with the person who's simply providing the news and the information itself, providing their displeasure to sports talk radio show host to you know, is just basically there to spew out opinionated takes, and, you know, it sometimes can get messy, and it's not. It's not necessarily a hey, I disagree with you on what you're saying. It turns into a hey, I disagree with you. You're a bleeping bleep bleep bleep bleep, you know, things that you just can't say like things you just wouldn't say that, that aren't nice. So it's, it's, it's a changing world. And it's, you know, it's become so sometimes so negative, I feel like, you know, it kind of just makes the experience a little bit. It makes the experience really different. And I feel like sometimes when you scroll through a social media feed, you kind of have to, it's almost like playing dodgeball, like you're trying to dodge and get out of the way of like, some things that like, just just get in the way of what you're looking for, or even what you're just interested in, so.

### **Cam Denmark**

You had mentioned the trolls, the infamous trolls. I saw well you sent me it's not that I saw it's you sent me you got in a fight with BTS Twitter, which is always a losing battle. Other than that, have you sort of experienced any sort of trolling or backlash personally from like, the, you know, you as a reporter you as, like, a personality on, on Between the Lines or whatever?

### **Nick Karski**

A tiny bit, I mean, we're, you know, it is such a unique sports market that people necessarily don't have, like, super hot takes on what we have to talk about. But, you know, there there have been times where I've kind of like, laid into, like, you know, almost laid into that's maybe like a really harsh way of saying it, but one of the Bills played the Patriots during the regular season. And, you know, it was a cold winter night and, you know, just the bills didn't do much of anything, and the Patriots didn't do much of anything that game either, but you know, the Patriots fans are just like, you know, turning into like this, this fan base of, you know, celebrating their their victories and their championships and stuff like that. And it kind of got to the point where it's just like, Come on, guys. Like, like, you didn't play the best game either. And I kind of tweeted something out like that, you know, there was a Boston sports personality you saw it and was like, you know, we take this rivalry so serious now after, you know, Fox Sports, put a billboard in Foxborough saying that the bulls have the best fans in the world. And it's like, come on, like, you know, just little things like that. So, you know, I, I look, honestly, I feel like Twitter has gone from being like, almost like a reputable news source to almost a, hey, who can say the funniest thing out there? Or who can like make the funniest comment or whatever. Because there are times there are a lot of times where I'll say stuff on Twitter that I don't necessarily take seriously, if that makes sense. You know, me personally, like I'll jokingly say something about, you know, like that BTS, music group, you know, just be like, whatever, you know. And then there are fans of the group who literally, like start attacking me and start attacking my physical appearance. And, you know, who I am and what I do and everything like that. And it's just like,

come on, you know, like, kind of, like, grow up like, it's, it's your, you're, if you're acting as if some of this is life and death or whatever it may be like, Give me a break here. You know what I mean?

### **Cam Denmark**

Yeah. Have you do you typically focus on sort of, like, I guess fan engagement or your social media followers, like, for the station or for your personal Twitter page, or Instagram page, whatever? Do you typically kind of focus on those numbers?

### **Nick Karski**

When it comes to the station, yeah, you know, I hope that, you know, what we put out there kind of resonates with people to some extent, whether it's, you know, straightforward, hey, this team is meeting this team kind of live tweeting a sporting event, or if it's, you know, a post that we have on social where it's like, hey, this kid just threw a no hitter. Listen back to the broadcast from yesterday. You know, that sort of stuff. Yeah. I mean, it's nice to see growth. It's nice to see people interacting with it. It's nice to see people retweeting it and favoriting it and everything like that for my personal one. No, I don't Um, you know, like strategically say, like, oh, how can I, you know, try to get more engagement or stuff like that, you know, I think there was a time where I thought to myself, like, oh, I should really try to build my brand. But I feel like there's so many people out there who try to build brands and everything like that, whether they're in a professional setting, like, you know, an ESPN affiliate, or if they're literally trying to do a blog from their basement, you know, they, there are so many different people trying to build brands of themselves that it's become oversaturated. And it's become, it's kind of become difficult or difficult to weed through a lot of that stuff.

### **Cam Denmark**

This may be a silly question, but I remember when I was working at the station, personally, when I was when I would occasionally like help out with tweets, or Instagram posts, or whatever social media posts in general, it seemed like a lot of people, the posts that did the best were the ones that really affected people. So if parents of athletes, you know, their team went to the state championship, or their son or daughter had a great highlight. Obviously, that post is going to blow up a little bit more than a traditional, sort of, Between the Lines post kind of poll sort of thing. Have you, I guess I'm asking you this because I feel like I kind of was affected by this when I worked at the station. Have you sort of like, steered the content, I guess, that you produce on Between the Lines on social media, whatever, to kind of resonate more with people personally?

## **Nick Karski**

I think that that is a big part of that. You know, this, this, this area is so interesting, because again, there's not really that much of a big like cult following for a team besides Cornell, men's hockey, and Cornell wrestling, but even those sports are like really niche sports, you know what I mean? So, you know, a lot of a lot of our posts and stuff like that do involve high school athletics, which, again, like the parents, and the kids, they all love to see that, like, our Instagram numbers, especially are through the roof. But, you know, you look at it from one perspective of, hey, sports, radio, is, you know, a demographic that's, you know, predominantly male, you know, in the mid 20s, to mid 60s, whereas, our, our Instagram feed is essentially full of high schoolers, like, 1000s of high school kids, like, or maybe even younger, middle school kids, kids that just graduated college, and they all kind of are just like, looking, it's almost like they're looking out for themselves to see like, oh, did I, you know, get my picture from the, from ESPN Ithaca on, you know, from the photographer, or whatever it may be. So, you know, I, at least when it comes to a show standpoint, and like what we're doing, from an on air standpoint, I tried to differentiate, I guess that makes sense. You know, some of that stuff, like, you know, every every week we we have like, after the weeks, or athletes of the week, I should say, who, you know, we recognize and stuff like that. So, you know, there is obviously that high school element and everything like that, and that small town feel but, you know, there's also the element of like, hey, you know, we're talking to Aljemaine Sterling, who's the bantamweight champion of the UFC, you know, you should really tune in and, and everything like that. And, you know, sometimes for whatever reason, that doesn't resonate with with this audience as much even though you know, this big name guy, you know, even has ties to this area. Even though that's the case, you know, a lot of people seem to be a little bit more excited, if you will, and I don't blame him, you know, for for hearing the, you know, their, their nephew on the radio or their grandkid on the radio and stuff like that. So I, this long winded way of saying, you know, I don't really try to cater, per se, when it comes to like my own social media posts or something like that. I do encourage us to try and really balance things out if we can, the best we can between the high schools that we have around here and then the colleges that we have around here and that if we do get like a big interview with, you know, somebody really, really worthwhile who's worth talking to, you know, I think that's so important to get that stuff on the air to give a small market, a big market sort of feel.

## **Cam Denmark**

Being an ESPN affiliate, do you feel like in the past, maybe there's been a certain angle or light that you're expected to kind of show the organization when you create content? Sort of in favor for ESPN or whatever?

## **Nick Karski**

No, not really. Um, you know, I think a lot of ESPN affiliates kind of do their own thing kind of. I know, I feel like in the past, we've we've tried to have a not necessarily align ourselves with the mothership. But we try to, you know, make our website seem as is not as close as possible, but to give it that ESPN sort of feel like they have on their website. You know, one of the big things I thought that they did a few years ago was send us some of their social media templates that they use to, I'm assuming all of their affiliates to be like, Hey, if you guys want these, do what you want with them. And, you know, we've been able to localize that and essentially use a template that they would maybe use for Lakers vs Nets, like a comparison graphic to be like, hey, who you got tonight, to kind of do the same thing with, you know, one of our high school games, you know, a Newfield vs Moravia basketball, who you got to put like, the stats compare side by side and stuff like that. And, you know, just just to kind of have that sort of alignment in that same sort of not necessarily structure, I'm struggling for the word but like, you know, to kind of make it seem like there's a clear branding between the two of us, I think that's big, but I think a lot of honestly, a lot of affiliates kind of do their own thing. Some may, you know, air ESPN programming, but just completely like, you know, have like, I mean, they have the ESPN brand, they have an ESPN logo and stuff like that, but they may go in a different direction with what they do think so. I do like the fact that we kind of align ourselves with like, you know, trying to do what the national level does, but bring it bring that same sort of impact and, and everything like that to a smaller, localized scale, if that makes sense.

### **Cam Denmark**

I was going to ask, is it nice to kind of have that freedom to kind of do what you feel like you need to for the benefit of the station or for the benefit of your content?

### **Nick Karski**

Oh, yeah, I mean, anything to to help us grow and everything like that. I mean, you know, it's basically about growing the station making it you know, top notch and providing good entertaining content for the listeners in a variety of aspects whether it's we're talking you know, whether it's the national guys doing their show, whether it's, you know, BTL doing the local thing whether it's the play by play with the high school sports you know, we carry so much you know, play by play you know, through the Yankees through our Westwood one affiliation through like the motor racing network even Syracuse basketball, football so yeah, I mean, I think we all we always go above and beyond, you know, what we're supposed to do and, and stuff like that. And, and I think it provides a really unique experience for for this area, because you know, like I said, it's, it's, it's a very unique sports town, in that sense. So and the other thing too, like, you know, we've been around for a long time, like a little bit more than a decade here and there are still people that don't realize and recognize that that we exist and part of that is you know, it's trying to wedge our way into the the nature of the of the medium now, because a lot of people just don't listen to radio or a lot of people you know, listen to ESPN, but they do it on Sirius XM or the listen to podcasts of ESPN programming when they got the time so it's more or less still a

matter of trying to get the people to know what we do realize what we do realize what we have to offer and hopefully them really realizing that like, we have a really good listening experience for them

### **Cam Denmark**

On the local level, and on the national level, you kind of touched on this a little bit but what impact have you seen the sports entertainment industry have on just sports in

### **Nick Karski**

Good question I you know, a lot of and I mostly think of the national stuff to be honest, when you ask a question like that, you know, a lot of these athletes especially are larger than life now. For better or worse, they've got no privacy, a lot of them have their own specific brand on social media. Some of them have like YouTube channels where it just Chronicles their daily life. You know, it's, it's just a matter of, of, of getting the unique perspective of, of these players that you would not have been able to get even 10 years ago, you know, there was there was, there was something special about least when I was a kid, you know, watching like, I don't know, let's say like cartoons on a Saturday morning, like on Fox, and then it morphs into like, I don't remember the name of the show, but like, I don't think it was this week in baseball, but they they kind of had like a morning baseball show for kids. And they would show highlights, and they chose stuff in the clubhouse. And the players just, you know, having fun during batting practice, and you'd kind of get the inside scoop of what goes into making me a good hitter. Well, this is how I exercise. This is what I do with this, you know, that sort of stuff. And, like you, that was like the stuff you were glued to because you're like, Oh my God, how do I become a major leaguer, and I'm seeing all this stuff on TV like that, and wow, that's awesome. Now, literally, whip out your phone, go to the player's Instagram, and you're gonna see all that stuff. Like, they are literally showing you their everyday lives and their preparation and stuff like that. So you know, and in kind of with that too, like, I think a lot of people look at these athletes is just a sheer form of entertainment. You know, the, the element, and the aspect of them being a real life human is kind of thrown out the window. You know, because, you know, we've seen a lot of players kind of get vocal by it recently, and stuff like that. And in sometimes be like, hey, remember, we're athletes, and we're just here doing our jobs, you know, we're not like, here for your form of entertainment and stuff like that, like, I mean, then they're kind of right, like, you know, we, we, we again, look at these these athletes as larger than life, and because of, because they're providing the entertainment and sometimes they provide a quote on quote, "negative form of entertainment", ie a bad game on the court, whatever it may be. Fans have the ability to go on their social media and trash them, and say they're terrible, and call them this and say terrible things about their families and stuff like that. And it just completely like, like, I couldn't imagine being somebody of fame, not just in the world of athletics, but just in life in general now, based on, you know, all that they have to deal with, not just from a, you know, a work sort of standpoint, but from a, almost what they're dealing with, from the outside world sort of standpoint, you know, does that

make sense, like, like, we're just seeing a lot of, we're just seeing honestly, and like, not a lot of negativity with that stuff. But it's just, it's just interesting, because, again, these athletes have become so big, and have literally, they, they provide more and more and more for their brand. Which I think gives the illusion that like, hey, we can just treat them however, in some sense.

### **Cam Denmark**

So there's a certain invasion of privacy that kind of comes along with having all this access to each athlete and having...

### **Nick Karski**

It's an invasion of privacy to an extent, but the athletes welcome that, you know, the athletes are the ones who are like, you know, hey, I'm sitting at dinner right now look, who was who's with me, like, you'll see like Stefon Diggs example, like, put out a video with like him out to dinner with Isaiah McKenzie and Josh Allen and stuff like that, and people will freak out with excitement and stuff like that. So, you know, even even in their most private moments, these athletes are allowing people to, to be a part of that. So so in a way, it's you kind of wonder if maybe the athletes are doing some of the damage on, you know, to themselves in and I don't, I mean, it's obviously all about their brand and expanding on on fans and this and the other, but sometimes if you're letting people in so much into your lives, like that's that I'm like, come back to backfire on them.

### **Cam Denmark**

Let's go back to reporting for a little bit, just to kind of end this interview with. What do you think is the future of sports reporting? Do you kind of see this trend of reporters gravitating more towards social media as opposed to kind of like more traditional forms of journalism continuing?

### **Nick Karski**

Yeah, that's already happened. I mean, the first I mean, If you follow like your favorite sports team, a coach or a player has a press conference, follow some of the beat writers, they're all tweeting. They're not just jotting the notes down, they're not just like recording the audio, and then taking it back to transcribe it and put it on their, you know, on The Athletic are in the local paper, or whatever it may be. They're live tweeting everything. I don't know, if I necessarily see it changing. I don't know what could make it better. I don't know. Like, I feel like it's in a pretty good spot to like, get your information if that's what you're interested in, and stuff like that. But I mean, social media is king with this stuff. Like it just is bottom line, you know, for better or worse, like It rules the world. Especially in sports, because, you know, you you want to be first with the big story or you want to release the information about a blockbuster deal, or, Hey, this

player is injured. I heard it through a couple of sources sort of thing. And obviously, we've seen examples where it all kind of comes back to to backfire to bring up that word again, you know, a reporter who says something, my sources say this, the athlete may even tweet directly at them publicly and say, like, Nope, that's not happening, you know? So. Yeah, I mean, this this stuff, it's here to stay. And again, I don't know, as I think about this, I don't know how it necessarily grows, per se. I don't know how it goes from here. Because I think it's in a in a position where we're like this, is it like this is this is how it's going to be done. This is how it's going to continue to be done for at least the foreseeable future.

### **Cam Denmark**

Do you think that's a good thing?

### **Nick Karski**

From a person who has some perspective on life now, and everything is a bit older, I'm not necessarily a big fan of it, but as somebody who, who sees what the medium and what sports and what information and everything has become, yeah, I mean, it's, it's it's here to stay, you know, this way and everything like that. Like, again, the moment something newsworthy happens, open up the Twitter app, put the information in there hit send. And in whether it's I don't, you know, I don't I don't know how other reporters or journalists or anything like that, or even sports talk show hosts function. I think some of it do it for the sake of like, truly getting the information out there to prove like not to prove that they're like a worthy reporter or journalist, but to like, literally just do their job. And then I think obviously, there are some people who do it genuinely for clicks as they, as they kind of say, I really think that's a big element to it. I think that's a big part of it. So, you know, it's, it's, it's one of those things where, you know, it's, it's, it's just going to continue this way, I think, for the foreseeable future, I don't see anything changing with with a lot of this stuff.

### **Cam Denmark**

I know, you gotta get to your Wells interview here soon, or at least prep for here soon. So I'll leave you with one final question. Other than the growth of social media, what sort of trends do you see impacting the future sports reporting, whether it's for traditional reporters or ones who work for, like, the organizations that they cover?

### **Nick Karski**

There's always going to be a need for it, I think. I think there's always going to be a job for these these people who are in the industry. But I also think I also think sometimes I think we're kind of turning and maybe I'm completely wrong here. But again, I think the the athletes are basically

turning into the, quote, unquote, news sources, if that makes sense. Like Von Miller, when he announced that he was signing with the Bills, it was like, an Instagram post where it was like, a video and he's like, you know, what guys I thought about and everything like that, but I'm heading to Buffalo, and that was that there was there was the news. You know what I mean? This huge free agent was going to the Buffalo Bills. You know, I think it kind of goes back to the whole, like, invasive and privacy sort of stuff with these athletes. I think a lot of them are just going to start almost like sharing the news of where they're going or what's happening or something like that with themselves. But you know, if the thing is is that like with journalists and everything like that, like covering teams, especially you know, that that's never gonna go away. There's always gonna be people who are outside obviously the organization who are writing about the organization or covering the organization who are going to give you the insights and the inside scoops and the recaps and everything like that. Like none of that's, that's gonna change, but I do I do in a weird way. And again, I could be completely wrong. I could see, you know, want to say the athletes kind of taking things into their own hands a little bit more, but like, kind of going down that route a little bit more almost for, for their brand and their development and to, to kind of set the record straight because I do think there are probably a good chunk of athletes who have maybe been in these situations in their sports for some time where they're like, you know, like, I'm tired of the misinformation slash rumors and stuff like that, like I'll just come out and do it myself because I have the power to so.

**Dan Doherty – play-by-play broadcaster at ESPN Ithaca, sportswriter at Tompkins Weekly, senior editor of Cageside Press**

**Cam Denmark**

Thank you for joining me. It does mean a lot. Interviewing both you and Nick is also it's been very strange. It's going to be very strange interviewing you. But I think that with Nick, I sort of talked about, like, the local angle of social media and all that stuff. So just kind of get things going. What social media accounts do you hold? And sort of what is your position with the station?

**Dan Doherty**

In terms of my personal accounts, or?

**Cam Denmark**

Both, what social media accounts does the station hold and you personally?

**Dan Doherty**

Okay, I have Yeah, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn. And yeah, on ESPN Ithaca, we have Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

**Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. So you kind of like, head all the social media accounts and stuff like that you put the graphics out? And how long have you been working at the station for?

**Dan Doherty**

I am in my second year, I passed my two year anniversary in August. So I guess two and a half years technically.

**Cam Denmark**

I thought it was a lot longer than that. Okay. How long have you been writing for Cage Side Press?

**Dan Doherty**

Oh, I don't know. That was like, senior year, junior year of college. I was doing that. I think yeah, that Junior, your senior year of college? That sounds about right.

**Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. So, like I'd said, the whole idea of this project, what I'm looking at is to just kind of see how social media has affected your reporting, or the stories that you pursue or the station pursues? And so just kind of be very blunt. First question, like, how have you seen social media affect the stories that the station focuses on? Or in your reporting for MMA?

**Dan Doherty**

I would say that, you know, that's how I'm aware of things. And it's how I find stuff to write about. As far as you know, my two articles and Tompkins Weekly goes, it's it's few and far between the stuff get that gets posted here in this area. So when you do see something, you got jump on it, and see what you can get out of it. Because it's not going to be very detailed, there's just going to be a score or like, hey, good job to this person for doing this in college, whatever. So you just got to take what you can get, and then see if you can get further detail from it. That's I guess I use it specifically here.

**Cam Denmark**

Has it been interesting, like coming into ESPN Ithaca, writing the stories, sort of putting out the graphics and everything like that has been interesting to see like the sort of the local coverage aspect of it like to see the, I guess, population of listeners be so localized depending on like, what the what the story is?

**Dan Doherty**

Yeah, that's a new experience. For me, I would say, the stuff I've done in the past, it was like the entirety of the sport of MMA and professional baseball, like when I worked at as Long Island Ducks in the Atlantic league did their social media, too. So this is a new type of thing, where it's like, you have an audience that's, that has a cap, I guess, like there's a there's a maximum limit to the people that will see your stuff. So it's, it's it's new, you know, new grounds, tailoring stuff to a small population. That's, you know, if someone else outside of New York State sees that, they're going to be like, what does that even mean? But that's, that's totally fine for me. And so it's pretty cool. Sort of coverage, I would say.

**Cam Denmark**

I was gonna say, do you do like it? Like, as you've been kind of going about doing it? Do you like it?

**Dan Doherty**

Yeah because people respond to that stuff. They they have more at stake, I guess, with with what they see, because it's it tailors directly to them, instead of just seeing something that you know, you can find anywhere else. The stuff that we're posting, you're only seeing from us. So that that makes it unique and pretty cool.

**Cam Denmark**

Do you see sort of like the, I dont want to say the opposite of that with your UFC coverage, but do you see sort of that on like the national, the national level where you've got to pursue like the bigger stories or you've got to pursue the bigger fights kind of like that?

**Dan Doherty**

Yeah. Because, you know, when I was when I had a bigger role. In the beginning, I've decreased my role at cageside press as the years have gone on. Since I have full time work now. But when I had the big role, you just you're posting because you're supposed to, you have to post about this fight because everyone else is and if you don't have it on your site, it would look weird. So there's that aspect of it, where you're just doing what everyone else is doing and hopefully you get the SEO points and people click on your stuff instead of someone else's site. So there's there's that aspect to it, I guess, more meaningful. I see what I do now then what I do for Cage Side Press which is, again, a cool feeling,

**Cam Denmark**

In your time covering for doing social media for ESPN Ithaca. And just personally, have you sort of experienced like, trolling or backlash as a, as a writer, or reporter or anything like that?

**Dan Doherty**

No, the only the only trolling I see would be like, from kids of different towns going against each other. Underneath my posts, I guess. As far as you know, my MMA stuff goes, there was a think, one time where I was accused of being biased on a recap I did against the guy that ended up

losing. So I don't know, I was accused of being biased in that article. And that was the only time I was ever personally, you know, gone after because I like to keep my opinions off of the internet. I guess. So. Yeah, that that was the only time I ever was personally went after.

### **Cam Denmark**

How about with the Ducks?

### **Dan Doherty**

No, no, not at not at all people. People like the Duck stuff. You know, I did a lot of fun videos, I was on camera a lot more. And that that was well received.

### **Cam Denmark**

Yeah, I guess it was really interesting. Like, as when you joined the station, the social media growth for ESPN Ithaca grew so much where it was almost like a just just that like national level coverage, but on a local scale, to the point where like you said, having like, athletes from different towns like just trash talking each other like before a game or after a game or something like that. It was it was pretty fascinating to see that and like, from your point of view, just like making those posts and stuff like that. I don't want to say do you like that kind of stuff? Or do you like that, like people are engaging with it that much?

### **Dan Doherty**

I think I went in with the quantity over quality approach in the beginning, because what I learned from all my MMA coverage is people will see your stuff on social media if you just post a lot. And that's, that's, there's a lot of accounts on Twitter that just all they do is tweet, and people see those tweets, because all they're doing is tweeting. So I took that mindset into this and was just making sure I did something every day. So that people would see that, that ESPN Ithaca every day and you know, associate that with our local sports coverage. And then, as time went on, I added the quality part and made sure what we were posting was was better than, you know, me just putting together some iffy graphic on Photoshop where there wasn't really any bells and whistles. Then I got those bells and whistles and started adding that stuff. So then the quality followed and the audience stayed. So I think from my count, it's tripled the following since I've been here, which is pretty awesome.

### **Cam Denmark**

Speaking of count, do you typically focus on like the the follower count or like the fan engagement for for the station social media accounts?

**Dan Doherty**

I mean, I check it every week for our promotions, meaning seeing how we're growing and everything and I do it. You know, I guess the numbers is validation, I would say that's, that's the best way I would phrase it is that it's validation for what I've been doing.

**Cam Denmark**

Yeah, I gotcha. Has it been nice to see like the kind of growth of the station and just seeing like, the numbers go up? Because I know from from my point of view, like I've seen them personally, just seeing that gross has been has been pretty neat. At least I think.

**Dan Doherty**

Yeah. And then you have people coming up to you and saying like, I love what you guys do all that stuff. And it's just like, I guess more people are aware of what we're doing because we do good stuff here and making sure that people know about it is it's it's nice. It's it feels good. It's nice and heartwarming.

**Cam Denmark**

So I asked this, Nick, I asked Nick this to sorry. I'm being an ESPN affiliate, and being that you have been on between the lines as a regular contributor and co host, Have you felt that there is sort of like a certain angle or light that you're sort of expected to show the Oregon isation whether that be ESPN or the station itself, when you guys are like creating content for BTL?

**Dan Doherty**

Well at this level, you try to be nice to people because you want to interview these people. So that's what that's something that me and Nick have talked about, can't go out there and bash Cornell football because we want to interview guys that are doing good for Cornell football or Coach Archer or whatnot. So you can be critical, but not like Skip Bayless or Stephen A Smith critical, you got to like, tone it down a bit to make sure you maintain those relationships and whatnot. So there's that balance to it, but you can still be entertaining while doing that.

**Cam Denmark**

Have you ever felt that you've been like discouraged from pursuing any stories?

**Dan Doherty**

No, not at all. Whatever I want to do, I can do.

**Cam Denmark**

Yeah, nice. Part of this project has been sort of looking at not only just social media that like I said to you before, like the sports entertainment industry, like what is what affect the sports entertainment industry has on journalists or has on people that are sort of creating sports content in general. In the local level, and in the national level, like what impact have you seen that Sports Entertainment has had on sports in general?

**Dan Doherty**

Well, I guess being first matters a lot and the quality can suffer because of that. And then, you know, having hottakes is, is a is a big deal. You know, you know, just being all trying to rile up people and that drives engagement. You know, you see all these tweets, like we're, you know, like I already said, Skip Bayless chooses someone to vilify every day or Nick Wright chooses someone to vilify. They just go after one person that they know is going to cause a reaction every day. Because that no matter what cheers or boos, you're getting engagement. And that's, that's what matters. I guess that's a, that's an old like wrestling adage, you want people to make noise, when you're when you're in the building, you don't want them to be silent, that's the worst reaction you can get. So that part of it is, is affecting things because then the quality stuff doesn't get seen as much, you know, because it's not easily digestible or easily reacted to. So I guess that part has suffered. But there's an area for that there is an audience for it. It's just not going to be seen by as many people.

**Cam Denmark**

So in a way, it's kind of like social media coverage, in a way for the station where it's more or less, like when you first started, it was quantity over quality sort of thing.

**Dan Doherty**

Yeah just getting the right people's eyes. That's all. Yeah, exactly.

**Cam Denmark**

So just try to get the most clicks to most like, SEO traction. Yeah, try to be first. I gotcha. Do you see that trend sort of continuing for sports reporting?

**Dan Doherty**

Yeah, I don't see why it wouldn't. I don't see why it wouldn't. Twitter is a powerful tool. You know, the that, that whole attitude of being versus is going to stay, it's going to remain. So I think that it's not going to go away anytime soon, just because of how we want instant gratification in society. I guess that's deeper than what we're talking about. But that's just how things work. And Twitter is the perfect tool for that. So that's not gonna go anywhere.

**Cam Denmark**

You see the trend, like a lot more reporters, as you know, beat reporters, especially for baseball are really gravitating more towards social media as opposed to like, more traditional forms of journalism. Do you see that continuing to like do you see that change at all?

**Dan Doherty**

Yeah, I think that's been a cool change for things because you get to you can follow one person and get every relevant piece of news for that team from that one person because that's all they're focused on and then maybe sometimes they'll pump out a long term piece and or long form piece I should say. And you can read that and get more details so yeah, I think it's been a pretty awesome tool for beat reporters because I mean, you don't have to wake up the next day to see what they're doing you can get it right as they find out so that's that's been a great tool for them.

**Cam Denmark**

I know that you said that you've scaled down your your time with Cage Side Press a little bit more. From the UFC angle, have you seen Twitter kind of come into its own there to where just constant updates about flights and stuff like that?

**Dan Doherty**

Yeah, not even that just like with even like just the trash talk aspects like there there are articles based on what someone tweets at another fighter like that's that. It gives you content, I guess. And even that even then being first, it was always a big thing like I, when I was in college, I would like write during lecture halls to try to get a fight report out first. Once I saw that the news broke or something like that. I just tried to pump out like 300 words as quick as I could and get it

out there and see if the SEO would pick that up. So yeah, it's the same thing. Just getting out there first, and then even from content generation standpoint, it's been huge there too.

### **Cam Denmark**

When I talked to Nick, he had brought up something that I thought kind of stuck with me, I thought it was it was pretty interesting. He said that the athletes now are basically becoming the source of information. And you had mentioned like, there are articles about like two athletes just bickering with each other on Twitter and stuff like that. Have you seen that too? And like, have you seen sort of athlete just becoming more or less the source of content?

### **Dan Doherty**

Yeah. Or like, you know, disputing reports. Even like, yeah, they would like retweet something and say, I never said this. Yeah, stuff like that. That's always fun. Or I saw something today, like a tweet that said, LeBron tweeted two laughing emojis and Undisputed did two segments on it's, it's, yeah, it's nice that we get to the year that directly and I think athletes are getting more of a grasp of how to capitalize on their presence on social media. And that makes things more fun from our perspective as fans.

### **Cam Denmark**

So I'll leave you this. Because I know that Nick needs to get in the studio and record his interview soon. But what trends other than athletes becoming the source and just social media in general, do you see impacting the future of sports reporting, whether it's for traditional reporters or for ones that really just kind of gravitate more towards social media?

### **Dan Doherty**

I guess it would just be the digitalization of everything, like there being less of a space for long form pieces, or hard hitting analysis and stuff like that. People just want to know what's happening. Like, that's it. That's the I would say the big trend of what social media has done to journalism, I would say, there, there's a space for it, but that space is is getting dwarfed by just the instant gratification of of social media reporting.

### **Cam Denmark**

Do you like that? Or is that something that you're not really a fan of?

**Dan Doherty**

I like stories, but you know, scrolling through Twitter and seeing a bunch of things happen, it's also fun. It's a double-edged sword, I guess, I would say so. So, I mean, they're like, there. There are stories out there. It's just finding the right audience for it, I would say and that's, that's tougher and tougher to deal with these days.

**Matt Derrick – beat writer at Chiefsdigest.com**

**Cam Denmark**

This is just kind of looking at like social media and how you know, how it plays a role and your reporting and everything. And just to kind of start things off with. So, you personally, what social media accounts do you have?

**Matt Derrick**

Let's see, I've got Twitter that I'm most active on. I've got a, I've got Facebook for both personal and for Chiefs Digest. And I maintain a pretty good line between the two of those. I have an Instagram account that I've used very infrequently, and I'm more of a lurker on Instagram than anything else. That's probably it. I mean, I avoid Tik Tok I probably should get there. But I still have privacy and security concerns about Tik Tok.

**Cam Denmark**

I refuse to have it as well. I feel that. How long have you been writing for Chiefs Digest?

**Matt Derrick**

I been with Chiefs Digest for six years.

**Cam Denmark**

Six years. Okay. Cool. And have you been in the sort of journalism landscape for a little bit longer than that?

**Matt Derrick**

Yeah, I was I was a broadcast journalism major at Mizzou. And then I pretty quickly I mean, I guess a few years after graduation, I moved into public relations, I had kicked around a little bit in sales and work for a newspaper for a bit until I got into PR. And I spent about 15 years in public relations. Before I switched back over, Chiefs Digest was actually one of my clients, I helped get the site up online and launched and everything and did a little writing for them part time. And my predecessor was Herbie Teope who's now with the Kansas City Star. When Herbie left, I just took over running this running the site full time and had been doing that for last six years.

**Cam Denmark**

Nice. Is there a reason other than that, that you made like the switch from from PR, to to journalism?

**Matt Derrick**

You know, part of it was certainly going back to just what I wanted to do, I mean, I wanted to go into sports journalism when I was a kid, and but even when I was in college, realities kind of forced me to make a change, if I wanted to, and things are obviously always a little bit different. But I mean, still, it's probably the same. And if you want to go into broadcasting coming out of college, you got to go to one of my friends when Alexandria, Texas and Cape Girardeau, Missouri, you know, you get 175th market in the country, if you're lucky. And you know, and I, at that point, I had enough relationships, and I kind of went along to stay in Kansas City. So making the move made sense from a business standpoint, but sports was always a, you know, in the back of my mind, it was always the first love. And so when I got a chance to do this, it just seemed like the, the right idea at the right time.

**Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. Do you like the do you like the change? Like change of pace?

**Matt Derrick**

Oh, yeah, no, I mean, it's people who on the outside, obviously, you know, don't get the bad parts of the job. I mean, everybody's like, Oh, you must have the greatest job in the world, you get the cover sports for free and get paid for it. And well, that's great. But you know, you don't you don't know about the two o'clock text and, you know, breaking news or writing in the airport at five o'clock in the morning and the travel and somebody gets arrested, you know, yeah, I mean, it's, there's, there's plenty of good and bad, but now it's still something that has, if you got a passion for it, and it lights your fire, then I think that's something that's always there.

**Cam Denmark**

So I guess, in general, how have you seen sort of social media sort of affect the way that you report a story or a story that you focus on? I guess?

**Matt Derrick**

I think there's a few different ways. I mean, for me, personally, I mean, it's, it has certainly changed the way that, you know, I think even some news gets reported, there's things now that you just almost just report on social media, rather than what would have once had been been a story or, you know, part of a bigger piece and everything. Because, for better or for worse, you know, whether it's a site like mine, or even, you know, a newspaper, like the Kansas City Star, or even bigger sites, ESPN and the athletic. Everything pretty much gets dictated by, by by clicks. I mean, it's what draws eyeballs and everything. And I've only got I've got finite resources. So if I've got something that I need to work on and do, if it's not something that's going to draw a lot of clicks, that might be something that is worthy of a tweet, there's going to be plenty of things that and I think that the struggle that I mean, I always have in everything is that, you know, a lot of stories are too complex for the short burst of social media. And, I mean, I could probably there's a big issue, I think you could say about, you know, just as far as how, you know, journalists use Twitter as probably a separate question and topic and everything but I mean as far as how it's changed it. I mean, that's a big thing. I think from its the reporting standpoint is I do think it has changed, you know, what gets reported in a traditional way and be what gets it gets shared on social media. You know, the bigger part of it has just been the reaction to social media that that it has on reporting. To me, a lot of times, I don't want to get it for better or for worse, you know, we're writing about tweets, you know, players aren't just talking to reporters. Now, it's not just, you know, talking in a locker room, we're talking in a press conference. They're talking to fans directly on social media. And we see frequently that things that players do on social media, work their way back into the news, and become topics themselves. So, you know, once upon a time, you know, a lot of you will be writing about reporting about what they used to simply what happened on the field. And now, you know, you end up writing a lot about what things happened off the field. And to me, I mean, other than, you know, things that have always been there. I mean, when players get into trouble off the field, that always becomes a story. But, you know, to me, I mean, you almost can't go a single day without multiple athletes, you know, there being stories about what they did on social media. And that has now become a story you have to cover.

### **Cam Denmark**

One of the things that was brought up a couple of times, you obviously just touched on it, when I've been talking to other journalists is that the athletes themselves are becoming the sources. It's not like there's, you know, a middleman that you kind of work through or everything, it's just the athlete themselves are becoming the source themselves. Do you kind of prefer that? Or is it more or less, like, it's just kind of, you know, it is what it is almost?

### **Matt Derrick**

I mean, it doesn't bother me. I mean, if anything I and maybe this is the the former PR person in me, you know, kind of seeing both sides of it. I mean, I think that probably a lot of players should do more on social media and, and take control their own brands more, I think the players

that do that have obviously been proven to be pretty successful at it. And I think for the most part, it is a, it's been a profit center for them. And at least it's something that drives their brand and can drive their revenues. I see a lot of players that don't take advantage of it. And I get it. I mean, there's some players who aren't comfortable with social media. That's not their thing. I'm surprised, honestly, at how I mean, teams, for the most part, don't train their players on social media doesn't seem like and if they do the team messages, don't do anything on social media. But then again, I mean, that's, to me, it's a part of, you know, hey, teams don't necessarily want players to build their brands, they want to control all of that. And then they don't want players do anything stupid. So yeah, that's gonna be their message. But the other thing that surprises me is how few agents, you know, train their players and their clients on how to use social media, how to take advantage of it. Because once again, I mean, the players who use it and use it effectively. I think they do it very well. I mean, the players who don't, I think, are probably missing out on opportunities. But for me, I mean, it's not a, it's not a big thing. I don't think social media is the biggest, big challenge to reporting. I mean, I think players should take advantage of it. I think there's bigger obstacles for reporters in this day and age and just social media as far as when it comes to working with players and sources and getting information out of them.

### **Cam Denmark**

Another thing that a couple of people that I had talked to in the past had sort of touched on was the fact that you said it also is just that longer form stories longer, like deep dive stories are not being, you know, I guess published as much as because, you know, they want to get not necessarily the clicks, but like, the thing that is, you know, the gonna give you the most social media engagement or whatever is going to be like the the tweet or whatever. Have you seen that too?

### **Matt Derrick**

Oh, absolutely. I mean, it's and, and my experiences are probably different than a lot of other people's, maybe just a little bit about how I handle social media, and just, you know, my operation in general, because most people are probably telling you that I mean, they get most of their clicks from Facebook, I mean, and probably even Instagrams, I think becoming a better one. But journalists, all for the most part, tend to favor Twitter. And for me, I mean, my traffic from my side, actually, I mean, it's probably, it's overwhelmingly, you know, generated with either organic traffic or Twitter traffic. And once again, it probably stems back to the way that I use it. But it's I know, I'm giving a convoluted answer here. Kind of wandering around a little bit. But yeah, I mean, it's, I think, I think it comes you know, for to that. I think there's the bigger attention spans a big problem, too, in that, you know, we're encouraged whether, you know, and I even talked to my friends that work for newspapers, it's the same way. I mean, you're encouraged to write the quantity of 300 word posts, you know, designed for SEO that will get you clicks and everything, but that's generally not why any of us got into this business? We got into the business for the most part, the deal tell stories. And you know, for the most part, you

can't tell a good story in 300 words, you can at times, I mean, if it's a really isolated story, I mean, it's something's very specific or breaking news. Yeah, that can be done. But you know, most of us got in for the longer form and the feature reporting and the more in depth, and that's something that, you know, struggles now, I mean, people just don't have the time we're, you know, does it do anything more than skim through long form reporting? So, that's, you know, I want to get I mean, I still think there's a concern that, you know, traffic and SEO and just getting clicks is the bigger driving force behind most of the content that we create. And that's a bad thing to me. But I mean, I hope that long form recording and feature reporting never goes away, because I think that's why most of us got into the business for the first place.

### **Cam Denmark**

You typically focus on like, sort of social media follower count, or fan engagement?

### **Matt Derrick**

I mean, I, I don't follow, you know, my counts. I couldn't tell you how many Facebook followers I have right now. I mean, I can, I can tell you, I'm roughly on my Twitter followers, because I see it almost every day when I just log on to Twitter. It's right there in front of you. But I mean, no it's not it's not a driving force for me. I, you know, I mean, I generally, when I if I, when I'm looking at my Twitter analytics, for the most part, I'm just looking to see, you know, what are people looking at? What are they reading, you know, what is actually resonating, so at least going forward I have a better idea of, you know, hey, here's our stories, or people are interested, here's things that they're not interested in. And I mean, from an engagement standpoint, you know, I'm not worried about how many likes or retweets anything gets, I mean, I'm more just, you know, being, for better or for worse the man of the people. I mean, I want to make sure that I try to respond to people when they ask questions. Politely, of course, I have a one strike policy when it comes to rudeness. If you're a jerk to me, you're gonna get muted. Don't won't block you. I'm not that guy. But I'm going to mute you. So I never have to hear from you again. And you say something bad about my friends, then you get mute. Yeah, those of those people I get blocked. But most for the most part. I mean, that's, that's the probably the only thing that I do. I do look at my mute list, or once a while to see maybe who I should take off of it and give him a second chance to.

### **Cam Denmark**

Gotcha, gotcha. That's a good policy. Well, kind of piggybacking off of that, have you experienced sort of, like, trolling or backlash as a reporter?

### **Matt Derrick**

Um, I haven't had a ton. And I mean, I'll say part of it's probably cause, I mean, honestly, I'm a white male. Most of my friends that, you know, get the most back lashes and get some harassment and get these kinds of things, especially in sports are minorities and women, and it's just terrible. I mean, it's frustrating. I mean, even even the bad mail that I've gotten in emails that I've gotten even some feedback on social media, even then it's not hasn't usually been directed at me. It's been directed at stories that I've done or about people. And, you know, a few years ago, I did a story, when, you know, Colin Kaepernick and some of the other NFL players were kneeling during the national anthem, there was a player in Kansas City, Ukeme Eligwe, who, who was kneeling during National national anthem. And I asked him about it, you know, what was his reasoning behind it and everything. And he said, I don't want to talk about it publicly. But he said, anybody who writes me a letter, I'll write them a letter back and tell them why I'm doing it. And I put that in the story. And I got more emails off that story than any other story I've written. And I mean, most of the word from people misguided thinking that they were supposed to write me and I was supposed to tell him that. And he made it very clear, even in the stories, like, I'm not going to answer emails, you know, you're going to send me a letter, I'm gonna send you a letter back. But, you know, I once again, I mean, a handful of them were very racist. And, you know, and that's, that was, that was kind of eye opening to me. You know, as far as just, you know, how disconnected that people can be, whether it's email or social media, there's a fine line between that there. But once again, I mean, I think it was the social media, it was driving the messaging that people were sending. So to me, there's a connection there. But, I mean, I personally don't feel like that I have gotten a lot of the harassment and dislike. And part of that is I tried to be more maybe a to a more of a reporter. I mean, I don't try to do a lot of commentary that I know that drives a lot of dislike, I mean, certainly there's things I will report about players that fans don't like and then I'll get some feedback for that. But I try not to you know, say Well, hey, you know this, so and so I was terrible, you know, this guy's a jerk. Or, you know, I try to be, you know, I know that there's other friends of mine and reporters that, you know, they do go further. I mean, as far as their analysis goes, and they're trying to be like, maybe they're less objective as I tried to be. And I think that drives some feedback. But, I mean, I still think that the biggest, you know, biggest thing in social media and I see is just the the harassment and the disrespect that minorities and women in sports just continue to get, and it just absolutely drives me crazy.

### **Cam Denmark**

Yeah, I've seen that too. I've personally seen that too. And I, I hope next week to be able to talk to somebody about that, and see how they sort of handle it and everything like that, but I'm glad that you personally have not been the target of any of that. And what, um, so as I mentioned, this study also looks at sort of the sports entertainment industry. What impact have you seen the sports entertainment industry have on sports in general?

### **Matt Derrick**

Specifically, what how are you thinking?

### **Cam Denmark**

I guess the commentary side of it, you know, could be like films or something like that, just like that, in general, just what have you seen? What kind of impact have you seen that have?

### **Matt Derrick**

I mean, if anything, social media and I think is driven further, the, the blogging atmosphere, I mean, you know, people have been writing about, you know, football, the NFL sports in general mean, and analytical pieces. I mean, people have been doing that for decades. You know, I think like Bill James, I mean, that he was, you know, Bill James, and baseball came along today, he probably would have had a blog before he did anything else. But, you know, 50 years ago, 40 years ago, 30 years ago, you know, a lot of these people were just kind of howling in the wind, maybe they were writing for themselves. Maybe they were writing for their friends. I mean, maybe they, you know, in the very early days of the 90s, maybe they got an email chain newsletter going. And then, you know, in the early 2000s, you know, people have started blogging about things, but now social media has, has been able to make these people almost, I mean, a cottage industry, I mean, people are making money online, doing things as a hobby now, that they didn't do. And, you know, to me, people, especially like, in football, I think this is a big one, you know, are people who take film, break it down, do analysis, you know, they'll do a play by play breakdown for a player in a game. You know, the draft right now is very big, you know, you've got people who be going to look at it college film and showing the players and what they do well, what they can't do. And, you know, certainly blogging is still a big part of me, that's how, you know, I mean, once again, as journalists, most of us aren't making any money on social media, I mean, the only way that we're making money is if we drive the traffic to our sites and our platforms. YouTube's is certainly an exception to that. But you know, I mean, it's being able to reach, you know, 1000s of people and then drive them to your content. Now. I mean, that's something that didn't exist. And without social media, me, I'm not sure that, you know, a lot of these armchair analysts for better lack of a better phrase. Would have any audience I mean, I think social media has banded that incredibly and, and some of that certainly has been, I mean, there's only so much volume, you know, certainly that has been taking away from how many people read newspapers or read, you know, sites like mine or anything. But then again, I mean, it's also just increased everybody's appetite. I mean, it's, especially the NFL. I mean, we haven't seen a point in which people's appetites can be exhausted. I mean, the more content we create, I mean, it seems like there's more and more of an audience for it.

### **Cam Denmark**

What do you believe is the future of sports reporting, and you see this sort of trend of journalists are gravitating more towards social media, as opposed to, I guess, more traditional forms of journalism?

## **Matt Derrick**

There's a lot of schools of thoughts out there. Because I have I have colleagues who think that five years from now, 10 years from now, you know, most of us probably won't exist in these current jobs. That if, you know that, that teams and leagues are taking greater control of the content as much as they can, and eventually that they're going, the pessimistic view is eventually the teams are going to realize there's no reason why they should be giving any of this away for free. Already teams have their own reporters, leagues have their own networks. That's probably just gonna continue to grow. And like I said, I've got colleagues of mine who think that 10 years from now, there won't be any reporters in locker rooms or in press conferences. If there are press conferences, I mean, maybe they'll just continue to be what we've seen right now or just zooms but very limited basis. I try to I like to be more optimistic that can continue to think that, you know, we'll continue to have, you know, kind of sports journalism as it is today. There will certainly be new platforms that come along to change things that you have to adapt to. There's certain new realities that, you know, you just have to adapt to. But to me, I think the, this is my more pessimistic view is that I think that the, the local reporter is endangered, because, you know, obviously, newspapers continue to struggle. I mean, there's no doubt about that. And, you know, and what's the future of local television, I think, is obviously probably the next question. You know, if, if, when we're covering the Chiefs, I mean, there's, I'm very rare. And that, you know, I'm a online exclusive reporter, it's credentialed to cover the team. I mean, there's not many of us, or even around the league. There's some but even places like, you know, SB Nation, for the most part aren't credentialed to cover teams, they're aggregators. And, hey, we all probably have to aggregate at times. I mean, I've certainly done in the past. I mean, you have you there's more of that, than there ever was before me once upon a time, you know, wasn't reporters didn't report on other reporters stories. But now you do that. And there's some sites that do nothing but aggregation. Well, what are those sites going to do when there's no local reporter to aggregate from anymore? And that's where I think, you know, the real danger is, and that's not just sports, I mean, that's going to be across the board, you know, is that the aggregation continues to take a bigger and bigger part of the audience. And as they do that, it's it's eventually going to drive out the original reporters. So I mean, yeah, what's, what's this business going to look like in five to 10 years, I mean, that's probably my fear is just that, whether it is the teams or whether it's the marketplace, there's going to be fewer local reporters, covering sports, it's gonna get harder and harder to continue to do that. So. And I think that the fans lose in that spot. I mean, I think that even the pandemic has been a really struggle for fans, because you know, without access to locker rooms, without access to one on one conversations with players, the relationships have changed, you know, players don't get to know us, so they don't get to trust us. You know, you can't have a conversation with a player on a zoom with 30 people that you can have one on one, you know, and hopefully, you know, the signs are that we're getting back the way things used to be, but I don't know if things will ever be the way that they used to truly be.

## **Cam Denmark**

You had mentioned that the local reporter is endangered that's something that sort of I know, it might not impact you as much necessarily, but does that sort of Does that scare you?

### **Matt Derrick**

It does. Because, you know, I mean, one thing is that there's always been this dynamic. And I think the pandemic is, you know, enhanced that, which is that there's always been a media versus everybody else mentality and sports, that it's the media versus the the organization's the media versus the front office, the media versus the coaching staff, media versus players. And don't get me wrong. I mean, if the the NFL Players Association could make sure that reporters never stepped foot in the locker room, again, they would love to do it. Because the players hate is being in there. And I actually get that, because it is a weird environment. I mean, you know, going into a locker room is probably one of the weirdest things you're ever going to do in a professional job. I mean, you know, you don't cover fortune 500 companies from the bathroom, you know, so I it's weird. But then again, I mean, it's how do you do it? I mean, you know, teams have kind of created that environment. I mean, I know, my colleagues have been coming to the Chiefs for years, you know, 20 years ago, they could go to a training camp in Wisconsin, and they were on the field. I mean, after practice, you just went over the players and talk to them one on one, those are gone, they're gone. You know, because the teams want to have more control of that. They don't want players to talk to people on their own as much. You know, you get this these locker room accesses but the locker room accesses are bizarre as they are. But if there's fewer and fewer people, you know, they're going to be able to ask the questions, then. Yeah, I mean, I do fear that because the teams aren't going to be letting more people in I mean, it's it's it's a matter of them trying to keep more and more people out. And if people are eliminated from the profession through attrition and through the marketplace, it's not like the the chiefs and the NFL are gonna say okay, you know what, we're gonna to credential all these bloggers to come in. And we're going to start credentialing podcast, you know, they don't want to do that. And I don't think they're going to so you know, I don't think that the pool of people reporting on teams directly and beat writers and beat reporters. I don't think it's ever gonna grow again. I think it's just going to continue to shrink. You had mentioned the, like, interviewing players in the locker room. So before I came to Mizzou, I was working at an ESPN affiliate back home. And one of the big teams that we cover is Cornell men's hockey. And it's so funny their, their, their area where they do the press conferences, is basically in their locker room. So you're standing there, you've got like, you know, your phone there so we can get the the audio and everything. You're asking these questions, and it smells awful. And like, it's, it's a really odd setup. And I get what you mean, where like, if you're in there in the locker room, like, it's a really weird feeling, because you're like invading in their personal space. So I totally get what you're saying. Yeah, I mean, I wish that I had a better answer for it. I mean, as far as you know, how you get, and part of it, I mean, certainly would be that, you know, just let reporters and players have normal relationships. I mean, as a credential, you know, reporter for the Chiefs. If if I reach out to a player, and then, you know, call him up and do an interview on the phone for a story, without the permission of the team? I mean, by the letter of their rules, they could pull my credential. I mean, that is the no,

no. So, you know, I mean, not that we don't talk to players, and you know, you don't reach out to them. And, you know, and certainly, but, you know, doing those kinds of things. And if the, if the teams just let us have normal relationships with the players and didn't create those barriers, and create these just bizarre contexts for you know, when you do get to talk, because you're absolutely right, I mean, you know, these locker rooms are their personal spaces, their offices, and, you know, for us, and for the Chiefs, you know, we in non pandemic times, you know, there were two at two locker room accesses and types that we would have one would be out of the game, which, like you're talking about are just bizarre, I mean, everyone wants to get out of there, they're taken showers, they're half naked, or completely naked. It's a cramped space, it's terrible. I mean, it's steamy, it's hot, it's smelly, it's just awful. And then during the week, we get to go into the locker room, and that's in a different facility. So it's a bigger space and everything. But once again, I mean, it's guys coming in and out of practice, and lifting weights and getting treatments. And, you know, they're sometimes you're coming in and out of the shower, sometimes their just trying to take a nap, you know, and get some rest because they're gonna break. And you know, for 45 minutes here, we come in and stand around and try to find somebody to talk to, it's weird.

### **Cam Denmark**

Have you felt that there's been like a time where you have to maybe paint the Chiefs in a certain light or something like that? So that way, maybe you don't lose your credentials, or just sort of have it, like, affects the content that you create.

### **Matt Derrick**

I don't think that that affects coverage that much from, you know, either a good or a bad point. I mean, if anything, I honestly, I think it probably has maybe a more negative effect on the team that did trying to control that type of kind of content and the kinds of restrictions they put on us. Because I know, you know, for the most part, I mean, there's not a single reporter on any given day, that doesn't have some frustration at the limitations being placed on us. And I think that's probably you know, for most people just bound to come out in a negative way. So if anything, I mean, you know, if you're a reporter, you might tweet something, post something on social media about a team that's maybe more negative than it would be normally, just because you're ticked off at him about something else. I think that's probably the you know, the bigger influence on it. But the bigger I guess, impact is that the restrictions that are placed on us just restrict what we can and can't say, you know, and what we can see and what we can observe. I mean, one great, one great way is that, you know, with the Chiefs, for example, if they've got a practice that their facility that were allowed to watch, you know, during, during the offseason, they'll have practices that just the media are invited to, they have a portion that's open the cameras, so it's like a 20 minute period at the beginning, where TV cameras can be in there, we can take still photos, photographers, or credentials can come in. And then after that 20 minute period of stretching in the cameras leave, then it goes completely off the record. Anything that happens in that practice

can't be reported on. So if somebody gets hurt, you can't report on it. You know, social media is prohibited. You can't tweet, you can't post anything on social media during that practice. So you know, even bringing out your phone is a violation. I mean, they've kicked people out of practice before for bringing out a phone during part of that part of practice. And if something happens, I mean, yeah, now you have to find some other way to get that into the to the story, I mean, something that happens on that field. Now, the only way that we can get that information out there without our credential being in danger, is to ask a coach about it or, you know, get the question out there. We can't report what we saw. And some of that makes since I mean, you know, there's a competitive balance standpoint, too. I mean, they originated the rule, the rule originated with the idea that they don't want reporters telling people about their offensive schemes and their game plans and sneak plays and everything like that. And there will be times, you know, when there'll be a PR person there, who knows what's getting ready to the habit of the practice, and we'll say just a reminder, you can't report on any of this. But then again, I mean, it's the bigger thing is when you know, their depth chart changes, you know, somebody gets hurt or anything like that, that becomes off the record. And that's, you know, that's the tough line, you know, when you know, that there's things that are happening that, you know, that fans want to know about. And now either you can't get it in to the public forum, or you have to kind of find a way to get it in there.

### **Cam Denmark**

One last question I'll leave you with, because I know that you have a lot of stuff to do. Other than social media and the dangers that that brings, what sort of trends do you see impacting the future of sports reporting?

### **Matt Derrick**

You know, there's, there's a few, I mean, I think that certainly one that continues to kind of have been going on is probably the impact of video. You know, I've, I've written for sites, you know, that an organization's and I know, some of my colleagues that, you know, it's become video first, in some, a lot of formats. They only, they only want you to write to the video, you know, they just want 250-300 words in a post just so they can post a video and suddenly ads behind that. They mean, that's going to continue to be a lot of a lot of companies are going to continue to do encourage their reporters to write to the revenue and report to the revenue. I mean, it's going to be it's not necessarily what we're trying to do. But you know, it's when you've got audience engagement, driving content, rather than editors. You know, I've got colleagues that, you know, they don't get story assignments from their editors anymore. They're starting to get more and more starting to get assignments, you know, from the the SEO people who are saying, oh, up this topics trending on on Twitter, this topics trending on Facebook, we need to story we need to post about it. That's gonna just continue to drive things. So that's, you know, concerning to me, because that's because it just becomes a little bit of an echo chamber, you know, that it's, it's just because something's trending on one site and one place, that everybody's gonna be talking about

it, because you're trying to get the clicks. So I think that those are, those are a couple of ways that I think that it's certainly changing. I mean, the access, I think, especially coming out of the pandemic is going to be a huge question. And that's the beauty less about social media, but just the less about everything in general. But I mean, I definitely think that, you know, part of it is that I don't think that, that social media is getting any longer form. I mean, social media, and its essence is a short form reporting. I mean, it's always going to be quick videos, it's going to be short word counts, it's not going to be long form. So I think that if anything, that the drive towards social media is continue to make all of us more piffy. Everything's going to have to be short, sweet and to the point.

## **Brett Dawson – reporter for Louisville Men’s Basketball at the Courier-Journal**

### **Cam Denmark**

So just to start, like just to start very, very bluntly, like, how have you seen, I guess social media affect the way that you're reporting or sort of like the stories that you have been focused on?

### **Brett Dawson**

Yeah, a lot. I mean, no, I started doing this in like 1999. So I've seen that change a whole lot, because it didn't exist when I started. And then I think I really started to see a change, personally. Around 2009 I would say that was the year I was that was my first stint at the Courier-Journal where I am now. And I was covering Kentucky. And Kentucky hired John Calipari and Calipari really used Twitter. At one point, I remember Calipari had more Twitter followers. They like I think it was at a time when they were ranked number one in the country. And I believe John Calipari had more Twitter followers than the coaches, the other 24 coaches in the top 25 combined. He hit a million pretty fast. And that was when people weren't getting to a million. Other than like you had like, I don't know who had this, I don't know, the singer in 2009. Who would have had that was but Rihanna or somebody would have had it. It was very unusual. And so he really believed in using Twitter as a tool, he was really into it at the very beginning. So he would announce things on Twitter, before the school would put it out or like press release or whatever, something hired an assistant coach or, you know, if there was a recruit coming, and they had the announcement ready, he put it out on his Twitter first. He had some business ventures, like Papa John's and frozen yogurt shop called Orange Leaf that he was an investor in, and he would put out deals and things like that for those companies. So that was the first time where I was really like, oh, this is like a new thing I have to pay attention to. And so that that, that has obviously never stopped. I mean, I think, you know, everybody uses it differently. He uses it differently than he did. But that was the first time where I started like, oh, I gotta turn on these notifications for John Calipari. And to be able to be ready to react to stories that come from social media. And I would say now, in 2022, we do so much reaction to social media. Because if you look at this day and age, you know we're in an age when you cover college sports, this is very different from the NBA, but in college sports anymore, with the transfer portal being what it is, you know, like right now I'm covering a team that had a coaching change in the era of the transfer portal. And so when I say literally, I know, it literally means not everybody does, literally every player is going to make some sort of announcement or decision about what they're going to do. And they're gonna put it out there. And most of them are going to announce that news. If they're coming back, or if they're transferring, they're going to announce it on Twitter, or on Instagram. Most of them I think for most of the players I cover, for example, Instagram was probably the favored social media outlet, but they'll still use Twitter for this. So like often, you'll see guys tweet their Instagram posts, for example, because they know that like to reach certain people, certain fans and definitely media people. Twitter's the way to do it. But yeah, that so that's the thing where you have to make sure that you're following everybody that you cover.

And this is so this is just one element of it. It's kind of the breaking news element. So I've got notifications on for every player until they make an announcement about where they're gonna go. And then I'll turn notifications off, because I don't want to notification about every single player that I follow. But so there's that breaking news element of it that never existed before social media blew up. But I think also, I was speaking to a group of journalism students at Kentucky, University of Kentucky last week on Thursday, and I had a girl come up to me after and she said, you know, like, there's a lot of people are interested a lot of different things in this, but what I want to do is really tell the stories of the players as people, which is what I like to do the most to. And she asked how do I, you know, how do I find out who these guys are? And that's one way is their social media accounts. And so what are they posting on Instagram, you know, some of them, you know, now, it's also a way this is kind of connected, but it's a way their Instagram is a great way to understand what they're doing and NIL because that's often where they're going to be doing stuff. I think, in my experience, they're using Instagram more than Twitter for that. So like, where they might use Twitter more for breaking news about themselves. They'll use Instagram more, they're gonna get paid more for their Instagram, those sponsored posts are really much more an Instagram thing than a Twitter thing. And so both from an NIL perspective, so you kind of learn what companies are working with and what companies they like are drawn to, but you also kind of learn about what they do. So you might find that your players are I don't know fishing or skydiving or working with kids in a basketball camp, whatever it might be. Instagram is really the best way to get to know that stuff. And so you're also whether you're following them or you're building a you know, I have an account that's just for that. That's like all I do is follow the athletes and coaches who I cover. So, you know, there's that. So I think we're it's changed so much. It's changed in a couple of ways. One, there was also a time when we had to pay attention to like people's Facebook pages that is gone. So we don't really it's like, not a thing most athletes are using. But I think it's where it really has changed for me is those those two major aspects. One is that it's a place where you have to track news about people breaking news. And two, it's a place you go to really find out in an age where, where players and coaches probably control their images more than ever before. That's one of those places you go to find out what kind of messages they're putting out there about who they are.

### **Cam Denmark**

You said that you've been at this since 1999. And you said the 2009 was really when it started to kind of take off. Has the evolution of it all been more rapid recently than it has been in the past?

### **Brett Dawson**

I would say this is maybe right now I would say we're kind of in the second wave where in 2009, nobody really had it before. People had Twitter. I don't remember what year people got on Twitter. I feel like it was before 2009-2010. But I feel like that's when it sort of started to take off as a medium. Because I feel like I have reporter friends and sports writers were really really early adopters. In some cases. I know that. I have a friend Ian Rapoport works for the the NFL

network now was covering like SEC sports covered Alabama or Mississippi State when he first started Twitter, I think Alabama. And he was like one of the first people I saw really use it to put his stories out there like link his stories. And so you had a lot of sportswriters using it. But I think you saw like the subjects that you cover, diving into it a lot, then when Twitter had that first kind of boom. And then I think Instagram, I think the Instagram thing really over the last three or four years has picked up a little bit more. Not that that's when Instagram started getting popular. But I think you saw athletes and less so coaches, but certainly athletes starting to use it a lot more. And so like I covered the Lakers for a period of time, it would be really hard to cover the Lakers, and have a feel for that beat if you weren't following LeBron James on Instagram, because he's putting a lot of stuff out there. He often posts opinions on Twitter, they'll often make a kind of a big deal. But like the Instagram is where he does more of the stuff that's like, so if you're interested in what LeBron is doing for his workouts, a lot of that stuff is on Instagram, it's out there, you know, if he's pitching a product that's more on Instagram, and so like all those little things that you need to know to cover a team. That stuff is much, much more on Instagram, and probably now I would think I'm not like Tik Tok is sort of where I've driven the drawn the line. I'm not on it very much. I'm too old. But I think even more so with college athletes that's moving to Tik Tok, increasingly away from Instagram. So I think what we're seeing now is like, there is that for a long time, I think the first way was like Twitter, Twitter really exploded. And now I think you're seeing some different things and people using social media differently. And so in the past few years, you are seeing a little bit more, I would say a lot more of that need to really follow what people are doing, you know, with their Instagrams and with probably what their TikToks. Again, I'm not really doing that. But in terms of giving you a little bit more of themselves as opposed to just, you know, here's an opinion or here's a, here's the school I'm signing with or, you know, whatever I'm, I'm turning pro, I think the sort of I think the growth area right now is like this is a little insight into these people as people a little bit.

### **Cam Denmark**

So a couple of journalists that I had been talking to, they mentioned a couple of times that social media now almost has become a tool of the stories actually pertain to the social media that they put out. Like somebody puts out a tweet or whatever. Have you seen that too?

### **Brett Dawson**

Yeah. So like an example of something where I'm not really crazy about this, this is this is me being a little bit more old school and my editors being you know, way younger than me and interested in some things that I'm less interested in. So like just a recent example I can give you is that during the Superbowl, Chris Mack who had was the Louisville basketball coach had parted ways with Louisville in January. I can't say fired because they reached a Separation Agreement. So he left and he's a huge Bengals fan. He's giant Bengals fan, went to Xavier and coach at Xavier. And he went to the Super Bowl and he made some comment on Twitter about people having to wear masks and not wearing masks at the Superbowl and he quote tweeted

somebody and a local radio host here basically said like you know, quote tweeted him with like, essentially just enjoy the frickin Super Bowl. You know, like, what do you do with in here with your your anti mask stance, which he had. And so like, our editors wanted a story about that. It's the former basketball coach and a radio host getting into a Twitter spat about the Super Bowl and our editors said we need to write about it. I did not think we should. I didn't think that rose to the level of newsworthiness. But I think what happens is I did that story. And it was, I think the first or second most popular story on the website that day. And what we're what we learned is that sometimes this is people do care about this, they find like a social media beef for something is sort of relatable or they're interested, and they want to read about it. And so it tends to do kind of traffic and you find that people care about it. And so, yeah, I think there's a lot more of like, the fact that someone posted something online is a story in and of itself. And I don't know that that's necessarily a great thing. But I do think it's definitely happening.

### **Cam Denmark**

Let's look at your personal social media usage. Do you typically focus on like sort of fan engagement or like your social media following or anything like that?

### **Brett Dawson**

I've done less of it, I think. So in 2020... the pandemic has thrown all my years off. When the pandemic started, whatever your the pandemic started, in 20, the spring of 20, the athletic laid off a bunch of people, and I was one of those people who got laid off. And so that's actually what resulted in me going to Missouri. But because it was like six months of, I was like unemployed for six months, there were no sports, writing jobs, essentially, because no one was hiring new in the midst of a pandemic. And during that time, I really got out of the habit of Twitter, I just wasn't using it much I didn't have a job, I didn't have much to say. And so I would, you know, maybe I'd watch a movie or something. And I'd jump on there and say, like this, whatever. But I found like, when I when I got laid off the day, I got laid off, I got this like outpouring of support from people, but also like, real nastiness from people about how great it was to see a journalist lose their job, or whatever. And I'm one of those people who like, if I get 30 positive responses to something and one negative one, I really dwell on the negative one, that sort of the person I am. And so I found that like, when I got away from the habit of engaging with people on social media, I liked my life better without doing a lot of it. So I've done way less of it. And so now if you look at my social media, one, you don't see a lot. And two, it's a lot of like retweeting of like work posted my story. And so like the work account, to my story out, and so I'll send out my story. And that's right now, that's the way I'm using it. Because nobody's pressured me to do any more than that. It's not great for building a following, you know, it's not the best way to kind of get your follower numbers up is to not be that way. But it's just kind of been my preference. Lately, I found it to be better for my mental health to just not engage with it as much. And so I don't, you know, often I'll sit there, and I'll kind of have an opinion about something and I'll type out the tweet, and I'll just get back, it's not worth it, I don't really want to put it out there. And so

I would say I was somebody who was like, heavily engaged with it. For a very long period of time where I use Twitter a lot, I tweeted a lot. And it's dramatically less since that, that in the past two years, and I don't miss it really. And so I haven't tried to do more of it. And it's probably not the best thing for me. But I'm also a little bit more established in my career right now. And so like, you know, I'm in a job right now, where they called me and said, you want this job. So like, it's easier for me to do that. If I were you, I would not recommend to a young journalist, for example, say like, oh, just you know, you can kind of disregard your social media, it doesn't really matter. And so yeah, it's not been something that that I engage with a lot, I have an Instagram that is private that I don't really use it, I use it, I follow some, some athletes and coaches and stuff like that with it, I will occasionally post pretty restrictive about who follows me on it. And that's sort of been my replacement for I don't use Facebook anymore, because like, I'm a person in the world. So I, you know, like, I don't feel a strong need for it. But yeah, I would say for me, the thing I use it the most for is just kind of putting out stories. And then I think, you know, the the nature of it anymore. And this obviously certainly changed to, you do some real time reporting with social media, which I was not, you know, obviously before like, 2009, we never did this. But like if a, you know, if you learned that a coach, and like I'm going through this right now assistant coaches are being hired. So if you learn that it's happening, you're gonna put out that first tweet, and you're gonna put out a little more detail. And then you're going to go to a press conference, and you're going to tweet some stuff from that press conference. And then you're going to tweet out links to your stories or whatever. As you work on stories. Sometimes stories are developing in particular, you know, bigger stories, the coaching search I was dealing with, or if you're at a big event, you know, I think you're sort of as you learn information, you're sharing it as opposed to waiting and putting everything into a story. And so there's some of that too. I think that's that's the way that almost everybody uses it now, if you use it in journalism.

### **Cam Denmark**

You kind of touched on a little bit. Have you experienced this sort of like trolling or backlash as a writer or a reporter from social media?

### **Brett Dawson**

Oh, sure. Yeah. I mean, I think almost everybody has, you know, for me, right now I got some when I got this job because I got hired to cover Louisville and I've covered Kentucky in the past. And I went to Kentucky and so like you get a lot of fans who are you know why you have this job and all that kind of stuff. So you get that stuff for sure. You know, I have opened DMs and you know, certainly when I got laid off, one thing you find is that people are much less comfortable tweeting at you really nasty stuff. Some people are some people were really comfortable with it. But like I'm somebody DMs were pretty, pretty nasty, you know, when that happened, offers to come cut people's grass and real demeaning stuff. And a lot like, over the course of time, a lot of like fat jokes that happens, you know, like, I've had those, that sort of stuff like, I don't love it. And it's probably part of the reason I've done less of it. I've heard stories

of reporters who just like, don't even have never looked at their mentions. I don't want to name any people. But a prominent ESPN personality, I know, it's just never like, looked at him initially. And they were so nasty. But he just stopped. And I've had much less I think then, like, I have friends in the business who are women and some of the stuff that men tweet at women, both like suggestive stuff, but also just really degrading insulting stuff about women in sports journalism. Like I haven't had that kind of stuff. But yeah, definitely, like just insults and stuff like that, for sure.

### **Cam Denmark**

How do you deal with it? How do you deal with those insults?

### **Brett Dawson**

For the most part I don't like so I, you know, I might share it with a friend and talk about it or whatever. But I usually don't engage with it in any way. For the most part, if it's a little bit light, or whatever, I might make a joke back in response that happens sometimes sometimes I've been known to just say, you know, thanks for reading, glad glad you're reading, that's always been a thing that I've done a lot. When I used to get nasty emails, I would send back that way. Just say hey, like, I'm glad you read the story, appreciate. So that kind of thing. But I've never really like I've not really confronted anybody who was really nasty. And, you know, or occasionally I will report but I typically will only report if somebody says something threatening, which has very rarely happened on Twitter has happened a couple times via email, but I can't remember a time on Twitter, when anybody actually sent me a threat. I'm much more likely to report tweets at other people than I am at myself, I just kind of, you know, mute or block and move on.

### **Cam Denmark**

Looking at your time with Louisville, and obviously, just like any any sort of organization that you've been with, or any sort of team that you've covered in the past, has there been like a certain time maybe where like, you've, you felt that you've kind of had to show the organization or the team in a certain light so that way, maybe you're you know, you don't lose credential? Or you don't, you know, you show them in sort of a positive light?

### **Brett Dawson**

I don't think so I've never felt like, you know, I've had I've had trying to remember a time when my when my actual social media was like, I'm sure I've had like, PR people say like, "why did you have to say that" or whatever. But never anything where it felt like it was, you know, be nicer, or we're going to revoke your credential, or whatever. I know, like, one of my friends had a GM tell him, you know, he made a little joke on Twitter. And this GM said, "I'm sure that's the

way Bob Ryan would have done it," you know, like, just kind of it to take a shot at their reporter. But no, I don't, I've never really felt that one thing I do remember, when I got since when I first start covering the NBA, one of the things that people told me was, like the NBA is a little bit of a different animal in the sense that like players have such big support systems, agents, family members, stuff like that, just remember that anything you tweet, there's a very good chance they'll see it. So just be aware of it. Like it always sort of felt like, like, if you're covering colleges, I was ever somebody who's gonna take a lot of shots at a college kid anyway. But the coach, you might take some digs. And it's just kind of the nature of things, you know, like their big time, celebrities, they don't really look at their Twitter accounts. Sometimes somebody might point it out. Sometimes they might not or whatever, but with NBA players was always going to kind of be like, you know, they're going to be aware of it. So just be aware that they'll be aware. And that doesn't mean you don't criticize or say something on Twitter, that you would put in a story that would be critical. But like one of the things that was told really early on covering the league is, you know, anytime you want to make a little joke, just think about the value of that joke versus the possible fallout if they see it. And so I was always pretty cautious about that didn't mean that I didn't make jokes. But I've always everything I do. That's an extension really of how I write too. I always try to think about, you know, when I taught sports journalism, I told students that Missouri you know, we don't cover sports, we cover people and they play sports. And so there's always like, I always want a human element to everything that I do. I always want to remember that they're people and so that always curtailed a little bit of my you know, (?) on Twitter. But I think I definitely thought about it more once somebody once people were telling me like, hey, just be aware. Like, you know, Russell Westbrook will see this tweet. One way or another or somebody will tell him the content and even worse, somebody will relate to him secondhand and get it out of context. And so just you know, like, proceed with caution.

### **Cam Denmark**

I'm, I'm actually a bit of an ACC boy myself, too. I come from, I'm from New York, the Fingerlakes area. And I'm a huge, Cuse basketball fan. And I've got my own Cuse basketball podcast. And I don't know if you've seen this too, or not. But like, what's really shocked me as I've started this podcast with my friend, is that a lot of like, people, a lot of fans, man, they take a lot of digs at these at these college players. And then you just kind of like realize that they're are kids, you know, they're very young adults. And it's, it's really, really weird to see. And it's very, like, just, I don't know, like, how can you be a fan of the team that you're really like taking shots out when these guys are just, you know, they're just kids?

### **Brett Dawson**

Yeah, yeah. It's always that I've always tried to be aware of that. And like, I've covered really high level college programs. And so the players are really good. And, you know, there's a standard at those places. And so like, you know, if a guy is just completely lost on defense, I'll say, he doesn't know where he's supposed to be right now. And that's, it's not insulting, it's, you

know, this is what's happening. I've never had a player say like, you know, that was harsh, or whatever. So it doesn't mean that you don't use it, you know, it doesn't mean you don't use it to point out something or to critique something or say, you know, this guy's taking terrible shots, or whatever. But I always tried to be careful because not only do I not want to be insulting them, I don't want to incite other people to do it. So I'm always trying to keep it as you know, as even keeled as I can and not be too hypercritical. I'm the same way, mostly with coaches, I'll criticize coaches, because I think college coaches in particular are fair, I mean, pro coaches to but college coaches are in a whole different stratosphere than their players in terms of what they make financially. And the length of time they stay there, how associated they're with program, all that kind of stuff. And if they're, you know, if they're screwing some stuff up, I think it's very fair to point out, but I also just never ever want to get personal with anything. I never want, you know, personal attacks of any kind. Not only because I don't want to do it, but also because I think, you know, if you if you do it at one level, it encourages other people to kind of, you know, jump off what you're saying and really insult the guy.

### **Cam Denmark**

Yeah, I think with with Cuse fans, especially with Jim Boeheim, they love to, they love to take shots at Jim Boeheim. And, you know, over the years, you just kind of get I can, I've heard him talk about it before, just like how he doesn't even he didn't pay attention to it at all. It doesn't even like cross his mind. And I think that's a pretty healthy mentality of, you know, how do you like a lot of these athletes are on social media so heavily as you pointed out, I just can't imagine like how they feel just seeing this stuff. You know, once you have a bad game, you got a fan kind of rip into you, it's like, Come on, man. Like how about you try it out there.

### **Brett Dawson**

Yeah, I often wonder about that. And like, sometimes you'll see really nasty stuff. It's not that often. And I do think most of the time when somebody says something really horrible. They'll get piled on by other people. But it doesn't help. I mean, it's still you still heard the one thing you know, when I was when I covered the Thunder Royce Young who now works for the Thunder was covering them for ESPN. And he wrote something or tweeted something probably both like wrote it and tweeted it. You know, where like Russell Westbrook was had had a bad game basically was in a bad stretch and played poorly. And, you know, Royce just said, you know, basically, critique his game. Wasn't wasn't personal, just sort of, you know, said he's not playing well. And I don't remember exactly the thing that set the guy off. But this guy tweeted at Royce. This fan tweeted, Royce, "you're just mad at Russ, because unlike you, he has a living daughter." And Royce and his wife had lost a daughter and their pregnancy. And Royce had written about it very openly and talked about it and shared, they actually, they they knew their daughter was not going to survive. And so they went through this whole process of like, taking her to term so they could donate her eyes to someone who needed eyes. And because of this, like Royce wrote about it, and he did a big public thing on medium. They had a photographer in the delivery room, and

the whole thing was they wanted to document it for themselves. And so it was very well known that this happened. But that guy, you know, he tweets that at him, and was quote tweeted and said, and this is I think this is just an example of who Royce's this probably doesn't help you with your project at all. But like, Royce quote tweeted him and said, "hey, if the goal here was to make me feel bad, congratulations, like that worked. This made me really sad." And like all these people really piled on that guy and what was funny about Royces, Royce, I call Royce, I knew he would be driving. He lived a little outside of the city. So I was leaving the game and I saw those tweets and I called Royce in his car, just to see if he was okay. And he said, You know, I feel a little bad for putting that guy out there like that, because now everybody's going to kind of pile on him, and I was like, you know, probably says a little something about you this guy just said this about you and you're worried that you're being too mean to him.

### **Cam Denmark**

Yeah, no, that's that's just disgusting. I can't imagine that happening. Let's kind of wrap this up. I don't know you have a lot of stuff to do. What do you believe is sort of like the the future of sports according and do you see this sort of trend of reporters more or less gravitating more towards social media as opposed to like, more traditional forms of journalism continuing?

### **Brett Dawson**

Yeah, I'm curious about it. You know, it's funny, because for me to say, like, here's what I think is gonna happen, I think about, you know, like, if you'd asked me in 2009, when this was all starting and said, like, how do you think it's gonna go? I don't think I could have predicted it with any kind of accuracy. I don't, I certainly don't think I would have thought in 2009, that this would still be kind of the thing is because, and, you know, I guess, with with the younger athletes in particular, it has changed, right? Because at that time, you know, 2009, every college kid was on Facebook, they were using Twitter, but Facebook was probably the place where they were still connecting with their friends more. And now no young people use it, most of them don't have accounts. And so what's changed is like, obviously, the medium has changed and went from Twitter to Instagram, Tik Tok, there'll be something else, like something else will take off at some point. I don't know where it'll be, because like, you know, if I knew what it would be, I could get out of this business and make a lot of money. You know, like if I, if I knew what the next phase was. But I don't think it'll go anytime soon, where, where we like, this idea where the social media post itself becomes news, I don't think that's going away anytime soon. You know, maybe we go to a place where people get more private, and there's less stuff out there, or athletes become more savvy, and they think I'm going to put less, sort of, I'm not going to put out any inflammatory stuff, but probably not. Because athletes tend to be pretty emotional about their games and things like that. And so like, you know, it's pretty easy for them to get mad at something somebody says, or whatever, I don't think that'll change. We're all emotional people, everybody, you know, this is like, it's natural, if somebody insults you to lash out at them, or whatever. And so I don't think the idea of those stories of like, this guy created a controversy by

saying this thing or doing this thing, or this guy became a sensation, because like, you know, the, the quarterback at Kentucky Will Levis he's like kind of a, he's become a big, you know, he's got some really big time in NIL stuff. And like, he did a thing on Instagram, where he ate a banana with the peel on, because his mom is, I don't know, somebody, he knows a nutritionist or something. And the peel is supposed to be good for you. But really what that did was like, it became a thing, every game they played, it was like during the broadcast, they would show this video from his Instagram of him eating this peeled banana or unpeeled banana. And like that kind of stuff. Now, people are just sort of people have always been interested in who the players are, you know, like they're always that's, that's been universal, that hasn't changed with social media, social media has given the players much more control over that message of who they are. And so people find it fascinating. And because I think they're a little less reluctant to share details of their lives with us than they are to just put it out there on their social media, I don't think that's going to change at all, that I think will probably grow even more. And you're going to see more and more. I think for us, one thing I've talked to young journalists about one thing I think will happen, if NIL progresses the way it's progressing, if they don't pull it back, or whatever. One thing I think will be beneficial to journalists is that social media, I think will create some opportunities, because you'll have situations where athletes will now want to talk about the things that they're doing for NIL, these companies that they work with these pieces of themselves. And I think ultimately, you'll see, you know, they'll they are already having NIL agents, I think you'll see much like in the pros, agents will be reaching out about stories, it'll probably create some opportunities for reporters to get one on one interviews with athletes that they didn't use to get because the athletes will want to talk about these brands, and the way they're promoting them on their social media. And so I think that creates a potential opportunity. I was like to look at it this way, like, what could what could come out of this, like, I don't like to think about the idea that we're gonna be writing stories forever about what somebody posts on their social media, but could it give us a little more insight into them gonna give us a little more access into, you know, get a little more access to them, and a little more insight into them. I think that can be really beneficial if we all learn to use it. And I think we're all still kind of trying to figure that out. But I ultimately think that could be helpful. So I think you'll see more, I think, if I had to make a prediction, I think we're gonna see more of players putting out parts of themselves on social media. And so I think, you know, we have to figure out the best way to make use of that for ourselves.

### **Cam Denmark**

Other than social media, do you see any other sort of trends continuing for for sports reporting?

### **Brett Dawson**

I think it seems to me based on especially the job that I had in Missouri and people would reach out to me about jobs, you know, we need a recent graduate for this job. I think that the versatility piece is is like more important than ever, I think that'll continue to be important. And so I used to

tell students all the time, you know, be great at something like, be a great writer, be great on camera, but learn all the other stuff to like, be good at the other stuff. So, you know, I talk all the time about when I was in Oklahoma, we do a little less than this here. But when I was at the Oklahoman, the newspaper there, you know, if a big story happened a trade, you know, a free agent signing, whatever it might be, we often would tell that story, we tell it in a quick web update, we would update that over the course of the day, for a more full web story, that also becomes a print story. We also shoot maybe a short video, just kind of detailing what's happening. And then at the end of the day, we might do a longer video, we had a TV studio in that newsroom. And so like, we might go, and we did a thing called Thunder Thursday, that was like a 20 minute show, every Thursday, we might go into that Thunder Thursday studio at the end of the day, and just shoot a longer video or two or three of us talk about it. And then at the end of the day, there were two of us recover the thunder, we'd probably go do a podcast. And so you know, just being able to do all those things. And I think if you can learn a little bit to, you know, engage in the production side of some of that stuff as well. So not only could you shoot a video, but you could get it ready to go online, or not only could you record a podcast, but you could put the bumper music in it, all that kind of stuff. I think that stuff is increasingly important, because, you know, so few newspapers want to tell a story one way anymore. Everybody wants to have multiple ways of telling stories. And you know, as we move more digitally, as we we take less interest in the print product, because of various challenges that the print product creates. I think being able to tell stories, in more ways online is is valuable. And that's still true for TV too. I mean, like TV, a lot of TV stations want written updates on their websites, because they want website content. And so learning how to be a better writer, if you're on TV, all those kinds of things. I just think that that that versatility piece of it is important. It's been important for a while, but I don't think that's going to change. I think that's a trend we'll see continued further and further. As we see more digital outlets turn to you know, like more traditionally, sort of print outlets. We want more video. We want more audio and that kind of stuff.

**Alex Fast – Vice President of PitcherList, sportswriter at PitcherList**

**Cam Denmark**

So just to kind of get things going, personally, what social media accounts do you have?

**Alex Fast**

I have a Twitter, Instagram, both personal and for baseball and a TikTok, the Instagram and the TikTok, I have not really developed as much, but Twitter is definitely my main source of social media for baseball.

**Cam Denmark**

I'm gonna be honest with you, I've spoken to a lot of journalists and you are the first one that has actually said that they that they use TikTok. Everybody else has been like, "no, I don't want to use TikTok."

**Alex Fast**

You have to man. Listen, if Adley Rutschman (prospect for the Orioles) is going to use TikTok, then you got to use TikTok.

**Cam Denmark**

That's right. That's right. So it's nice to have like, sort of that little diversification I guess, in this this project, but um, how long have you been remind me once again, how long have you been with with PL for?

**Alex Fast**

Man, probably like, six or seven years? Maybe more? So let me think of any here that was in there for like three years? Yeah, probably like, six years. Yeah.

**Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. So as you've gone on in your journalistic career, how have you seen sort of social media affect the way that you report the stories that that you focus on?

### **Alex Fast**

Oh, that's a great question. I think, you know, it's funny, I don't, um, in terms of the things that I'm interested in, it seems kind of disassociated, from what, from what's happening in social media, like the impetus for a lot of the things that I would focus on, come from personal research. The only impact that social media would have on it is if I saw another post that put something into my mind, right, so like, that was a good example, a couple days ago, someone posted about Andrew Heaney. And he had like, I think, 11 strikeouts or something a couple of days ago, and it was 3am. And I had just gotten Zelda down to sleep. And I was like, oh, yeah, I remember that. I saw that about Andrew Heaney. And I went to Baseball Savant and started to do some research about that new pitch that he was throwing. So I guess if social media does have an impact, it'll just be kind of providing, you know, acting kind of as a muse. I guess every once in a while too, I will use it to see what the pulse is of a particular player. Right? Like, if I had more time, it'd be great to write a more in depth thing about Matt Brash, right, because Matt Brash is kind of like the the darling child of social media right now, when it comes to pitchers, or like, Seiya Suzuki or, you know, I know that Twitter was all the rage with Steven Kwan and his beginning to the season, and as a result, we saw 15, Steven Kwan articles. So if I have a little bit more time, that'd be another thing. Like, who are the hot topic guys right now? And how quick can I get an article out about it?

### **Cam Denmark**

So for you, kind of different than the other journalists that have that have interviewed? You more or less use that as like an outlet to sort of, you know, where is the you know, who is everybody sort of talking about it? Kind of?

### **Alex Fast**

Yeah, I mean, it to be like 100% honest, for me, I don't... I am in a fortunate spot that because journalism isn't my primary method of income. I do not need to cater to what like a kind of public whim is, and I'm very fortunate that I can just be like, what do I want to talk about? Like, maybe I don't want to talk about Matt Brash, maybe I want to talk about this Heaney pitcher. Maybe I want to talk about someone else who isn't like the sexiest name out there. So I think because of my, because journalism is my secondary focus or tertiary focus. I can just say, what am I interested in, and if it gets 15 views, or if it gets 500, it's all the same to me.

### **Cam Denmark**

Do you typically focus on sort of, like your social media follower count, or like sort of fan engagement on your on your platforms?

## **Alex Fast**

I definitely look at analytics a lot. Yeah, I look at the analytics. It's fun. But the other reason I look at my followers is because it blows my mind that I even have 100 like that, that that that to me just like that number that I have doesn't click, but analytics, I like to see I like to see what things people tend to engage with more. I can get a little stubborn about particular things like there are there are like kind of like, I call them like first bust tweets, which are like the easiest thing that you can do, which are like, "what's everyone's fantasy baseball team name?" You know what I mean? Like, there's those are like easy knockout wins if I'm like really hungry for engagement. But mostly it's like, I'm also trying to, like in a perpetual battle to figure out what format stats are best presented in right? Like, does if I have the yesterday I tweeted like the top differentiators between wOBA and XwOBA? Like, do people enjoy seeing a wall of text like that? Will they stop and read it? Are they more prone to stop? If there's an overlay, how much engagement does the overlay get? Is it does it mean something in the first three seconds? I've also been thinking I was thinking about this yesterday, you know, Yordan, Alvarez hit like a 5000 foot homerun yesterday off Michael Lorenz and, and I put like an all caps tweet. And I was like, is that annoying? Like, does that make people stop? Like, if you're doom scrolling, I try to think about like, what, what actually makes you stop and be like, oh, I want to look at this. You know what I mean?

## **Cam Denmark**

What have you seen work so far? When you're when you're presenting stats, like what has work so far?

## **Alex Fast**

I think, clean bulleted lists that are very simple. If it's a complicated subject, put an asterisk. And then I have a sub tweet that explains what the what the subject is, right? Like, a lot of people aren't familiar with wOBAcon. So put what wOBAcon is like, I guess it's kind of like maybe this is something I learned in my acting days. Never assume you're always assume your audience is smart. Like people do not like to be treated like they're dumb. Always assume your audience is smart. So the first tweet is always going to assume that everyone knows what wOBAcon is, right? And then the second tweet is always going to be an astricks explaining "this is what wOBAcon is.". So I think but keeping things succinct, to the point, and as as little room for interpretation, or margin of error as possible. Like the reason I personally, I am proud of the fact that I don't really get into a lot of Twitter arguments. I just don't like I just don't have time for it. And I think the reason I do that is because no one can argue with what a top 10 CSW leaderboard is. Like, they can't be like, what do you mean, Zack Greinke was number one? Well, I don't know what to tell you. Sometimes I don't follow that. Yesterday, I tweeted about how I think Byron Buxton should only be a DH. And I found myself getting into like, okay, this is a little

more opinion base. But like, I just try and this is an interesting fact that I've learned, and then it saves me a billion headaches.

### **Cam Denmark**

I gotcha. Speaking of that, have you sort of experienced a sort of trolling or backlash in any of your posts or as a as a writer or anything like that?

### **Alex Fast**

Only when we when we posted about inequality in the space, or like a lack of representation of the space. That was when like, yeah, I got a lot of hate, for posting about how there weren't enough, you know, black people or women inside of the space. That was definitely when people like.. But you know, sometimes, it proved to be an interesting conversation, like people were like, I don't understand, like, what if, if women aren't interested in being in fantasy baseball, why do they why do we have to force them? You know, and it was like, well, it's not about forcing them. It's about making a space in which they feel comfortable joining it, if they don't want to join it, that's fine. But a lot of women just say that they don't want to join because it's the boys club, and what can we do to change that? And there are some people who heard that and were receptive that and there are some people who were like, you're social justice warrior, you're a snowflake, you're all that shit. But aside from that phase, no. And I think it really is just because you can't troll someone who tweets about swinging strikes. It's just this is the way to do it. And if it happens, I just don't engage. I just don't really care. Like, it's like, I'll just put the phone down and walk away.

### **Cam Denmark**

So some of this project has also been sort of looking at the sports entertainment industry. So that could be maybe talking heads or that could be maybe like sports movies that are put out reality. They're not reality shows, but like, just you know, TV shows that sort of depict sports life whatever. What impact have you seen sort of the sports entertainment industry have on sports?

### **Alex Fast**

It's funny, I actually tweeted about this yesterday i in terms of sports, entertainment, I think this year, we are seeing more close ups and slow motion, captures of pitch movement from like behind the back, like kind of zoomed in when there's a strikeout, and I really firmly believe that that's Pitching Ninja like coming out a little bit. I think broadcasts might maybe this is too optimistic. And maybe this is just wishful thinking. But in my line of thought is broadcasts know that if they deliver a high quality camera angle a strikeout Pitching Ninja will be more likely to tweet it. And as a result, it will drive views to their broadcast, right? It only makes sense. Even if

they're not doing it intentionally, maybe they at least know that this is the content that people want to see. Yeah, that so I think I think he's just had a really, really big impact on the space. In terms of media, though. That's a good question. I don't think there's been a you know, there was a that show Brockmeier for a little while, with Hank Azaria that seemed to have a positive impact a little bit. But I, this might be way too much of a digression. But I was talking with one of the Orioles broadcasters about this, about how it's like very much both of our dreams to like, create a television show that is an accurate portrayal of not necessarily Major League life because that isn't as of interest to me, but like that, for a triple A player. Like what that that experience is like there's there are no in my opinion, there are no true accurate representations of it. There are bastardization of accurate representations of in Bull Durham is a good example. It's like a silly, fun movie. You know what I mean? Moneyball was like a fun example. But like, I don't think there's any form of media out there that accurately depicts the guy who, you know, it's 4pm, and he's getting called up and he has to drive, you know, 12 hours to Seattle, wherever, because that's where the team is playing. And he has to pitch that night. And if he doesn't pitch well, then he's gonna get sent back down. And this is just on his, you know, first kid and his wife doesn't have a job and their move. It's like, I don't think there is any real accurate depiction of that and I think the sport suffers as a result. Because we don't see it aids the the owner push the narrative of like, these are just a bunch of wealthy crybabies. You know what I mean? Whereas, like, we don't really get a really good look into like, what life is actually like for a bulk of major and minor league baseball players. So no, I don't. Yeah, so in summation, Pitching Ninja, I think is really helping push narratives forward. But there is no form of large entertainment that I think there is no Hard Knocks, even though there is there is no like kind of Hard Knocks for baseball.

### **Cam Denmark**

Could you see maybe a platform like sort of YouTube kind of taking that over with a whole like vlog sort of narrative, not narrative, but like the vlog approach that a lot of players are sort of adopting?

### **Alex Fast**

Yeah, definitely. I think. I think there's, you remind me to like Foolish Baseball also does like a fantastic job of bringing in younger audiences, his videos are absolutely top notch. I think it sucks because I think the two people who are doing the best in the in the vlog space turned out to be garbage people, right? Like, as much as I absolutely hate him. Trevor Bauer was great at giving us insight into his life. And that's why like, I found myself actually getting like, I'm a pretty cold dead hearted person inside. I found myself actually getting very upset that we finally got a person who was going to be social media responsible. And it turned out to be Trevor Bauer, because it seemed like the biggest swing and miss that we possibly could have had, and was the same thing for Bregman. Right? Bregman was huge with his online platforms, right? He still puts out a lot of content. He's just not gonna get as much success because of the Astros scandal, right? Jomboy has been good, but that's a little bit different. Right? Like, it's not really like insights. I

mean, he has some shows, Chris Rose stuff is great. I think we're getting there. But like, it just needs to be a little bit more, which needs to be a little bit more. And I think, you know, YouTube is obviously still just successful, it sucks to hear that those journalists so like, TikTok? No, no, no, because like, that's where every young person is, for every young person is. But looking at sort of the sports media landscape, in general, what do you believe is sort of the future of the sports media landscape? What what trends or do you believe that you see? Um, I think the, the in depth player interviews that we're seeing, like from Rob Manfred, or excuse me from from Rob Freedman from Pitching Ninja, I think those are, I think there's kind of like a waking consciousness that like, there is a there was almost like there was a distrust between the players and the fans. And now that the fans are getting much more interested in the nitty gritty and the analytics, and so are the players. There's almost this bridge gap that's happening. And it's also like, I don't know, in my experience, every time I've been able to reach out to a player in DMs, they've responded, like, they'd been like, Oh, you want to talk about pitching? Sure. Let's talk about pitching. Let's do it. There's, there's kind of a waking consciousness in my mind of like, oh, we can have this connection with our fans, that isn't the typical, like, oh, you suck, because you struck out three times in the game, or, Oh, you're bad, because you gave up two earned runs or three earned runs? You know, I mean, that's like the old prototypical fan relationship. I think we're, you know, we're moving to what, theoretically that that Instagram model can be for NBA, right? Where it's like, for better or worse, there is a chance that you can get on Instagram and interact with Kevin Durant might not go as well as you think it will. But like, you probably have that chance. And we're starting to learn a little bit more about personalities, right? Christian Pache? Right. The outfielder for okay. I don't know I can't remember. It's his last name.

### **Cam Denmark**

I have no idea.

### **Alex Fast**

He's a younger player who got dealt from the Braves and plays for Oakland now whose online presence is amazing. He's just his his account is fantastic. Joey Votto, like is starting to come alive a little bit more on social media, these guys are coming around to it. And the younger generation is definitely going to be a bit more into it. There is one thing though, that, that we're never going to be able to divorce, which is that I don't want to say firmly believe, but I have a pretty good assumption that baseball players writ large. Amongst all other sports are the most politically conservative, and right leaning players of any sports franchise, right? This is not a lot of Democrats playing for the for the Atlanta Braves. And there's where things get a little bit tricky, right? Like everyone was like, let's get to know these players a little bit. And then, like trying and tweet out a bunch of antivax stuff, and we're like, oh, you know what I mean? And it's not to say like, Kyrie Irving's the same way, but like, I, they're obviously this nation is incredibly polarized politically at the moment. And I think that is another reason why a lot of players don't make a lot of their personal lives known. So, again, I apologize for rambling a little bit, but like, I

think what the steps forward could be, could be what we see from Pitching Ninja, but there could be a hard lie and based off of a lot of political beliefs.

### **Cam Denmark**

A lot of journalists that I've talked to have said that the trend that they see has been a lot more short form content, as opposed to and it's more gravitating towards, like just a simple Twitter post or yeah, I guess just Twitter post, or something that's like under 300 words that keeps a short attention span. And it's starting to kind of go away from more or less the long form content. Have you seen that too?

### **Alex Fast**

Um, I think there's, I truly believe there's room for both. I think you can do a, make, make a tweet that is short form, get a point across and 250 characters and say, for people who want to learn a little bit more, here's an article that I wrote about it. Like, I think it has to be both. But it doesn't have to be either, like, the one doesn't have to come at the expense of the other. If anything, like use the short form as a breeding ground for the long form, like we talked about, if I'm seeing that a wOBA minus xwOBA, tweet is getting a lot of attention, guess I'm writing an article about it. If I have the time, you know what I mean? Like, that's, that's what what the foundation is, but like, you like, maybe it's just my sometimes just don't want to write, you know what I mean? Sometimes you're burnt out, and you don't want to write, but there's a good little tidbit. That's where TikTok comes in, like, set up a little green screen, learn how to use Premiere, or if that's too much for you use a blank wall behind you, and say, a great fact that you just learned, like, that's gonna keep your engagement up, and it's gonna make people want to pay attention to what you're doing more, and then they're gonna be more interested in your long form stuff. But like, yeah, one is, I don't think they're mutually exclusive.

### **Cam Denmark**

Use a blank wall like the one behind me. I've been told by a couple of my friends that whenever I'm on Zoom, I look like I'm in like a hostage situation.

### **Alex Fast**

(laughter) Yeah. I'd still watch your videos.

### **Cam Denmark**

Just to kind of wrap things up, like what sort of, I guess advice would you have for maybe like a young writer who's going into the landscape or young content creator who's who's going into the sports media landscape?

### **Alex Fast**

Stick to don't get too bogged down with what you think the public wants to see at the moment. I think I firmly believe that the public wants whatever your perspective is. And your perspective is different than my perspective, because you and I are two totally different people. We are in a for baseball, we're in a great space. Because there are hard factual things that you can point to. The reason I very much believe that the fantasy football community sucks much more than the fantasy baseball community is because there is not as much fact that you can point to, I mean, there's so much more interpretation as to what is good and what is bad. And there's such a smaller sample size, and there are far fewer games. And as a result, is much more vitriol on Twitter, I can't believe you think this running back is better than this running back this running back to this, this running back to this. It's so much easier for me to say I can't believe you think this outfielder is better than this outfielder, here's all this person's stats, here's all this person stats, this is where we can go from there. So with that said, like, find what your opinions are, make a solid, cohesive argument, and then just let go, like, send it out into the world and do what you got to do. But like, the reason that Foolish Baseball has success is because there's nothing like Foolish Baseball. The reason that Rob has success is because there's nothing like Pitching Ninja, you know what I mean? Find what your niche is find the thing that makes you excited? Is it pitching? Is it batting? Is it both? Is it stealing bases? Is it homeruns? Is it whatever? But don't don't look to Twitter to find the answer to that question. Look within yourself to find the answer to that question. If you are coming towards social media, as and using it for its intended purpose, which is as an outlet to express how you feel about particular things, and the people will come. If you start to get bogged down in this isn't getting a lot of engagement or no one really read this. You're doomed because you just don't know they can't control it. Like you just got to put your nose to the grindstone, make the focus on what you're passionate about, and then see what happens.

## **Mike McAllister – Syracuse sports publisher at Sports Illustrated**

### **Cam Denmark**

So just to kind of jump right in, I guess, like, very, very basic, how have you seen sort of social media, I guess, affect the way that you report stories and sort of what stories I guess that you focus on?

### **Mike McAllister**

For me, personally, I focus a lot on recruiting, obviously, I cover Syracuse, and I live tweet during games and give reactions and things like that. So there's, there's a lot of engagement during games. But that's not necessarily reporting that's opinion based. But obviously, you can get a lot of engagement and interaction with fans of the team that you cover, through live game opinions and observations, because no two people see the same exact play the same way. Right. So there's always discussions on that. But I think that also can grow your following on social media, because the more people see you tweeting about that, then you get some of their fans, maybe they weren't aware of you, and they'll follow you and start looking at your stuff. But as far as reporting goes, my bread and butter is recruiting. And I think that's where I've been able to carve out a niche in Syracuse market, is because, yes, other outlets cover recruiting, but no one really covers it as in depth. And so, you know, I was able to find, I think, an area that was lacking, and put my own stamp on it and kind of make it my own and differentiate myself that way. And I think that helps me. And then the other part of it is, when you're dealing with recruits, recruits all have social media accounts. So when you write an article about a recruit, you interview them talk about their visits, and everything else. You tag them in it, then they're retweeting it, and then their schools are retweeting it, and their coaches are retweeting it, and their teammates are retweeting it. And so it gets a lot of interaction that way. So I think that is certainly helpful recruiting when when you're covering recruiting. But I also think it's social media has allowed people that perhaps are not part of traditional media, and allows them to make a name carve out a niche, carve out a spot in a market that perhaps otherwise they wouldn't if random person starts a blog. It's a lot harder to get that in front of people. Just by leaving it out on the internet, not promoting it anywhere. Right? You go on social media, and you put certain hashtags in there or you're talking about Syracuse basketball, Syracuse basketball search, randomly trending, Jim Boeheim seems to trend on a regular basis, Jay Wright retires and Jim Boeheim trends. And you can get people that maybe have no idea who you are. And all of a sudden they discover you and your content and what you do. If you're part of a newspaper, you know, random people are going to read your stuff on a regular basis, because they're used to reading the newspaper or going to the newspapers, website, etc. Social media, I think allows for some of that non traditional someone that's doing a blog, someone that's just there to comment on things, someone that's just doing a podcast, doing some combination of any of those things from getting some exposure, that prior to social media was very difficult to get. It's funny that you mentioned

### **Cam Denmark**

It's funny that you mentioned that. I guess it was this past season, my friend and I did just we started a little bit of a Cuse basketball podcast, because we've always been fans of the team and everything. He's a huge fan of Jim Boeheim. I don't know who wouldn't be. And yeah, it's funny that you mentioned that whenever we sort of tagged the athletes or we follow the athletes get them involved in some way, like, engagement obviously goes through the roof. But it's funny that you mentioned that it's something that I've definitely seen firsthand. Can you remind me just one more time how long you've been covering Syracuse for?

### **Mike McAllister**

About a decade, I believe I started my own blog. I started just doing like, I can't remember if it was Blogspot or one of those things like I just decided to create my own blog. Mainly, you know, I was born and raised in the area. I grew up going to games that was kind of how I discovered sports fell in love with sports. It was Michael Jordan and Syracuse that's that was my sports world. And that's how I learned about the game etc. So when I graduated college, I was... my degree is not in journalism. It's actually in accounting. So I had season tickets with a buddy of mine. And he encouraged me to start a blog. And at first I resisted, I didn't want to spend time with it, figured no one's going to read it, etc. And then I decided to mainly just to use it as therapy for myself after games. It was the Greg Robinson era of Syracuse football, there was a lot to vent about. So I used it for therapy, as much as anything. And then, you know, started to gain a little bit of traction. And but that's, so that's kind of where I got started overall, but that was back in, I believe, 2012. It was, it was lightly, but it was some somewhere around there. I started, I think with my blog a little bit before that. But it didn't really start gaining notoriety, where I considered myself covering Syracuse until it was like 2011-2012. So about a decade.

### **Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. It's funny that you mentioned that too, because like, we literally started the podcast just as like therapy, because we would be coming back from the car ride, you know, it's an hour and a half back to Trumansburg from Syracuse. So we would be, you know, in the car, and we'd be like, I can't believe that Rob isn't getting more playing time or like, you know, just whatever. And we're just like, maybe we should, you know, get some fans and talk about this a little bit. So it's just funny that you mentioned that. Yeah. So you've been going at it for, like you said, basically a decade plus, how have you seen it, how have you seen social media, I guess, evolve in that span of time?

### **Mike McAllister**

There, it's gone from a place where I think a lot of people went to, you know, just interact with other fans and read people's opinions on stuff and whatever else. And there's certainly a lot of that. But I've noticed that it has now become every single person with a Twitter account is an expert, at least in their own mind. And so there's a lot of sort of wading through the vitriol to get to constructive conversations. We don't all have to agree. Everything doesn't always have to be rosy and positive. Obviously, Syracuse basketball this past season had a losing record. That's not good. There's plenty to complain about. The problem, I think, and I think the biggest issue with social media is that there's no nuance with anything. You can't just say, the season wasn't good. It has to be this season wasn't good, because Jim Boeheim doesn't know how to coach he should be immediately forced out in the program should go DII, right. Like that's, that's what, what it goes to. So it's, it's become a place where I think people just feel comfortable spouting off whatever pops into their head. And sometimes I think the reactions in the comments are overly emotional and reason gets lost. And so what I've tried to do with my coverage is, yes, I covered the team report news, give opinions and all of that, I also try to bring the reason back. And I understand fan is short for fanatic. And I understand people are still going to be overly emotional, and, and all of those things and I get it. I'm also Philadelphia Eagles fan. I cut the whole team in my mind every year, at least multiple times, right, I get it. I get saying I want the third string quarterback, he's got to be better than this guy when reality you know he's not. So I get those types of reactions. But I try to bring the reason back, which is, you know, the comment of Boeheim can't coach, he needs to be forced out immediately. And I try to bring some common sense. Rationalization, not overly emotional, fact based responses. One of the comments that I often make is, if you have a coach that's built your program, over 45-46 years, and it's been a winning program every year, and they've had Final Fours, a national championship, one of the best coaches of all time by essentially every metric and has one bad year. Do you not think that that guy of all people deserves a chance to turn it around? And see what happens the next year then react from there. That's sort of in my reason try to be rational response to it. So that's, that's what I've noticed social media a lot of times is it's trying to rein in the overly emotional responses and bring some rational, fact based commentary back to quell that a little bit.

### **Cam Denmark**

You gotta love New York sports fans.

### **Mike McAllister**

It's unbelievable. Sometimes it really is.

### **Cam Denmark**

Have you? Have you ever sort of experienced, I guess, sort of trolling or backlash as a reporter on social media?

## **Mike McAllister**

Oh, yeah, I've by doing the rational responses to the over emotional comments. I've been called a homer. I can't tell you how many times. One of the things I also do is, I comment on bad officiating, not just with games I'm covering. But in general, if I'm watching sporting event, I see bad calls at comments on it. My main reason for it isn't to chastise the individual official. It's because I don't think that bad officiating is held accountable. And I think there's a lot of protection of it. So I have a stance that I think there could be more done to improve the officiating. And so until I see some of those measures, put forth, I comment on them. So I often get the "you're making excuses for X team playing that." No, they're they're separate issues. You can talk about both, but I've, I've been called the homer quite a bit. That and I've been told I have orange shaded glasses. I'm a skill for the program. The coaches have me in their back pocket, I'm just saying whatever they want me to you know, I've, I've had people say that a lot. And my response, usually when that happens is if I'm that terrible, you are more than welcome to unfollow me. I have no problem with it. The vast majority. You know, you hear a lot of comments. Oftentimes it's it's more political. I think that sports but with vocal minority, right here that that phrase a lot. And I think that's true on social media, you know, I've I have over 11,000 followers, and the negative comments that I get, it's usually from the same 10 people. I've had disagreements with people on social media, and we've left the back and forth, still disagreeing. But there's never been anything disrespectful. We just don't agree on a certain topic. And I enjoy those interactions. Even if neither of us budge on our stance, that's fine. That's what I think social media is good for us to have those discussions. But, you know, if it gets personal. I've had people make comments about my appearance. I've had people say things. I got a comment one time because I I've, as I mentioned earlier, I have a son, he's, he's going to be seven in about a week. And pre pandemic, I don't know if he was three or four. And I took him to a football game. It's just exposing him to sports, right? And I took a picture of myself, my wife and him sitting in the stands of an SU football game. It's the only place that I can take it really locally without driving out to Buffalo. And someone made a comment about me being a fan and I shouldn't be allowed to be media, etc. And I was like, "Listen, I'm a dad right now. Like that this isn't about me being a fan. This is about me exposing my son to sports the same way that my dad did to me." So you know, you get some of that stuff. I've never had anyone to my knowledge that I can recall, create like a fake account pretending to be me. I've never had that. But I've I've dealt with trolls negative people going beyond just disagreeing with my opinion. Even you know, someone calls me dumb idiot because of my opinion. That stuff doesn't bother me. But when it goes beyond that it goes to being personal or attacking my family. That's when the block button becomes a good friend.

## **Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. Gotcha. Yeah, I was gonna ask you like, how do you deal with the personal stuff but yeah, the block button is always the best answer.

**Mike McAllister**

I try. I try not to just instantly block. If you attack me personally say something about my appearance. Boman Jones has actually said stuff about my appearance before we had a back and forth and And he said somebody called me a meathead and said, I have a terrible hairstyle or something, which I'm like, okay. But oh, it was b-. I remember what it was several years ago, he created he doesn't like zone defense and basketball. He created a shirt called zone is for cowards. And I think this was in 2016, when Syracuse made a Final Four run, think when they beat Virginia.

**Cam Denmark**

I feel like I remember this a little bit.

**Mike McAllister**

Yeah, so he was then promoting the zone is for cowards thing. And I, I said something about, you know, if you have a Hall of Fame coach, who is using it, and then you have Coach K, who is at least in the discussion for being the best coach of all time, who is using it more and more, and specifically brought Jim Boeheim on his staff for USA basketball to teach zone. I'm like, is it really for cowards, then, if the some of the best coaches Hall of Fame coaches, the best coaches a sport has ever seen are using it more? Does that make them cowards? I'm like, I don't understand how using a defensive scheme that works, makes you a coward. And that's when he said something about me being a meathead and about my hair and my hairline or something. And I said, "well, if you can't argue the point, you must not be very confident in your point." So there was a little back and forth on that. But yeah, if it's over the line, and it's about me, personally, I'll at least try to engage back and say something like, you know, listen, you can disagree with me and think I'm an idiot, whatever. But you don't need to do that. If they go to my wife or my son that's instant block, that's that's not something I'm going to try to reason with you on. I'm just not.

**Cam Denmark**

You had mentioned your follower count. Do you typically kind of focus on your social media count, or I'm sorry, like the the number of followers or just sort of like the analytics in general?

**Mike McAllister**

Not a ton. Once in a while I focus on the engagement. When the news broke from when Sportico reported that the Carrier Dome was getting a name change. And I reported, I didn't really report, I just wrote a story that said Sportico reporting this and for some reason, my tweet blew up more

than theirs did. So I, it was actually, it was kind of cool. When you go into Twitter's trending thing, and the Carrier Dome was trending. And my tweet was the picture on the trend. I thought that was pretty cool. I'm like, I never I didn't even do anything. This isn't my scoop. So I did track the engagement on that. Just because you just typically don't see that kind of interaction. I think the last I checked to had 750 something 1000 impressions. And that's obviously not typical. For follower count. I've monitored it a little bit. It's not something that I brag about or anything like that. But I do pay attention to it a little bit. Because I do you know if all of a sudden my follower count is dropping like crazy, say wait a minute, I'm I'm doing something that's not right. So what's what's going on? That's making Syracuse fans all of a sudden unfollowing me like crazy. And that is one of the main ways that I promote the stuff that I write. So, you know, it's important to have people following you, but I don't check engagement on on posts, all that often. You know, with impressions and Twitter analytics and things like that. Only when I see something going crazy like that, too. I check it just because I find that kind of interesting. But I do look at Google Analytics for my website traffic that I monitor on a daily basis. But, you know, normal interactions and follower counts and whatever I try to respond to almost everyone that replies to me. Or at least interact back with them, even if it's a like, at least to acknowledge that they responded to me, just out of respect for anyone that takes the time to respond to me, I want to at least try to acknowledge it as much as I can. Obviously, I'm posts that blow up, it's a lot more difficult to do that. I had to mute that thread at one point, because it was I've got alert set on my phone, when every time someone interacts with me, I get a buzz on my phone, and I it was too much. I don't know how, you know, celebrities, they must turn the notifications off social media because of it. You know, I'm obviously not anywhere close to it or anything like that. And some people tweet stuff, and within five minutes, it's got 25,000 retweets. You know, I got a very, very, very small taste of what that can be like. And it was overwhelming, but largely a monitor a little bit. Nothing that I go crazy.

### **Cam Denmark**

So I've asked a couple of other reporters this that cover specific teams just sometimes do you feel as they're sort of like a certain light or angle that you're sort of expected to kind of show the organization that you cover for like for you have, you know, Syracuse sports or whatever?

### **Mike McAllister**

Yeah, I do. I think there is a perception that if you're covering, we'll take Syracuse since that's the team I cover. That if the fans view things a certain way, that you're expected to almost ask the type of questions even if it's in a combative way that they would ask. So for example, Dino Babers, coming back, as the head coach from Syracuse football, there were, I'd say the fan bases, but was pretty split on that on whether or not he should be back for another season, there was definitely a vocal contingent. I don't know how large it was as a percentage of the fan base. But there was a vocal contingent that wanted him gone and wanted to go in another direction. And it feels sometimes like those that feel that way or feel like they should force Jim Boeheim to retire

things like that, that they're expecting you to either ask that person directly, why do you think you should still be here? Shouldn't you be fired or things like that. But also with the athletic director, when they have me the opportunities is to ask them, not just ask them "why?" Because sometimes I think that's, I think that's a valid question. If you wanted to ask John Wildhack, why does Dino Babers deserve another year? That's a valid question. Whether you think he should or not, I still think it's interesting to get his perspective on that and to why he made that decision. But it's the expecting there to be. You know, when he gives a response and saying, Well, that's a stupid answer. Why are you this dumb? You know, that's, that's the type of thing I feel like sometimes there's an expectation that you're almost going to approach things that way. And I just, I just don't think that's very productive. So I do think there's a perception of that. I think there's a perception that sometimes the local media is, quote, unquote, too afraid of the coaches to ask them what is what are deemed tough questions. And I don't necessarily think that's the case. But there is a perception of some of that. So yeah, I think all of that all of those biases play into how people perceive how you cover the program. And then of course, just in general, I'd say over the last five, six years, trust in media in general, sports, politics, local journalism, etc, has waned significantly. And I think all of that factors into how people view the way that you cover a team.

### **Cam Denmark**

So I guess, in your experiences, it's not so much that the pressure, the pressure is coming from Syracuse themselves to cover them in a positive way. It's more or less like the the fan base is kind of like trying to push you to sort of pursue different stories in a way.

### **Mike McAllister**

Yeah, in some respects. Yes. Now, because I'm also most of the people that follow me and those that subscribe to my site they're expecting me to cover the team, but they're primarily following me for recruiting information. They are, there's an expectation that I'm going to be covering, I'm going to be covering recruiting in an in depth detailed way. And they expect that. And if I were to not, they would call me out on it. And they have, honestly, there's been times where there hasn't been much recruiting information. And I haven't put out a lot of recruiting stories, but I put out stories of other kinds. And you'll get the "hey Mike, we haven't heard anything about recruiting in the last three days. What's going on?" And that's mainly because there's an expectation. I'm going to be putting out recruiting content, some capacity, basically, on a daily basis. As far as the university goes, I've never had anyone at the university request that I cover the team in a certain way, meaning favorable or unfavorable. If my opinion of a team a coach, a player is unfavorable to not voice that I've never had anyone say that. And they have media guidelines, and they expect you to follow those. But those are mostly, you know, certain rules when you're in the press box and how you can act and the professional decorum and things of that nature, and certain protocols with injuries to go to report them by going through certain channels, certain steps, making sure you wait for a media opportunity to ask a coach about an

injury before just report, something you heard from a source to make sure that the information is accurate, and that the family of the player involved they're notified prior to your reporting and those those types of things. But I've never been told not to report something. I've never been told that I'm not allowed to have an opinion on something or that my certain opinion has to be slanted a certain way. I've never had the university dictate anything like that to me.

### **Cam Denmark**

So like I had mentioned to the beginning of this. This project also kind of looks at the sports entertainment industry. So I guess you could consider that sort of talking heads or just like the like, not reality TV, but there's like sort of that that industry a little bit. How have you seen sort of that environment, that sort of industry, like what impact have you seen that have on sports in general?

### **Mike McAllister**

So I've seen, you know, I have interns that write for me every single year. I've got relationships with professors up at SU in Newhouse, and I send them an email every summer or they send one to me. And I basically make a presentation to their classes. And then anyone that wants to write for me can send me an email, and we discuss from there. So I've had writers, I've had some interns, not in the last couple of years, but prior to that, that basically wanted to cover teams and write articles, as if they were doing a segment with Skip Bayless, Steven A Smith. And it was, you know, shock jock. I'm gonna say something outrageous to get a reaction to get notoriety from it. And I don't like that. I'm not anti having an opinion. I'm anti trying to come up with an opinion that will get the most reaction and then trying to justify that just because of the reaction that it will get. If you don't actually legitimately believe it, then I don't think it's something you should be arguing. That's, that's my perspective on it. And I think, especially with someone like Skip Bayless, I think a lot of the things that he says that are outrageous, he doesn't actually believe. And it does bother me that he's essentially making a living off of doing that.

### **Cam Denmark**

In a way you're almost like sort of lying your own fan base.

### **Mike McAllister**

Yeah. And it's just it's disingenuous. And it's just, it's just not something that I enjoy, I find entertaining. I know that Stephen A Smith has a reputation of doing that. I'm not sure how much of that is he has a certain opinion and he just voices it in such an outlandish way. But the opinion itself is something that he actually believes. But I don't for whatever reason, and maybe this is an issue. On my end, I don't have as much of an issue with him as I do with Skip Bayless, for

whatever reason. But yeah, I've certainly seen that permeate into some people trying to emulate it. I think for the most part, a vast majority of the people trying to get into sports media now aren't that way. But there are certainly some who believe that that is a path to a career, and try to do that. And I think it's unfortunate, because most of the time, if people just stick with whatever their opinion is, and discuss it respectfully, you don't need to do that in order to get attention. But some people feel like they do, I guess.

### **Cam Denmark**

I'll end with this, because I know that it's getting quite late there. But you sort of mentioned the future of sports reporting, and people sort of having that mindset going into, you know, their career, that they think that that's a path that that path that they can take, what do you believe in general is just the future of sports reporting?

### **Mike McAllister**

I think there's a race to be first in a lot of stories. And I think that seems to be the number one thing. And people are willing to be wrong and jump the gun, when just to be first on something. I think everyone who's been in sports journalism has made a mistake, sort of rushing to get a story out in some capacity. I've done that myself. And I've been wrong and had to backtrack and retract and make a comment that said, I made a mistake. And I've done that. It's embarrassing, but you know, you have to do it. But I do think that there tends to be the future of sports reporting, I think is going to be finding a balance between trying to always be first so that you get the credit, versus making sure that you're right. And the good ones, make sure that they're right, a vast majority of the time, no one's going to be perfect, everyone's going to make a mistake, everyone's going to report something, something's going to be incorrect. Even if you get it from trusted sources, that's that's going to happen. Every single reporter in every every single aspect of being a reporter. That's the nature of it when you're a human being, but largely, you know, I, I think trying to calm the rush of wanting to be first so that you get the credit, that's going to be the biggest hurdle. I think, with social media. Social media is going to be front and center with sports reporting, it's not going anywhere. It is the number one place where people get information with with covering sports. And, you know, I think a lot of things that you see now with pregame shows, postgame shows, highlights and all that a lot of that stuff is going to be housed on social media, I feel like it's going to become bigger and more robust. And you're going to see streaming attached to it. It's, you know, you see that now with Twitter spaces and things like that, I think all of that stuff is going to get expanded. And it's going to be almost a one stop shop where, you know, social media is your webpage. And it's where you write stuff. And it's your reporting. And it's where you stream and all of that. So I think all of that is just going to continue to expand and come up with things that we're not even thinking about right now.

### **Cam Denmark**

Well, Mike, I really appreciate your answers your you had a lot of really, really helpful insight on a lot of stuff. And it really, really means a lot to for you to be meeting with me, especially so late back home. I really do appreciate all this.

**Mike McAllister**

Of course, I'm glad I could help. And yeah, if there's anything else I can do feel free to reach out.

## **Donna Ditota – basketball writer for The Post-Standard**

### **Cam Denmark**

So just I guess to, you know, very, very broadly, just how have you seen sort of social media affect the way that you report stories that that you focus on?

### **Donna Ditota**

Well, I think it helps to make people aware of stories that I've written. And it also makes me aware, I'm also aware of, you know, what's taking somebody commits to the program that I cover, you know, that's usually, it's usually put out on social media for sure. When somebody leaves or when somebody's, if somebody's interested in school, all that kinds of stuff is usually I usually just discover it, or I see it, or somebody will point me to it and social media. So that's, I would say, that's the way it's mostly used for me.

### **Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. And do you typically sort of focus on sort of like your social media follower count? Or like, sort of fan engagement?

### **Donna Ditota**

No. Not really.

### **Cam Denmark**

Okay. All right. No problem. Um, in your experience of using sort of social media as a writer, have you ever sort of experienced any sort of like trolling or backlash as as a as a reporter?

### **Donna Ditota**

Well, I mean, I suppose on occasion, that happens, but you know, there's a thing called a mute button, if the person gets too obnoxious. And I just mute them.

### **Cam Denmark**

Yeah, yeah, I was gonna ask like, how do you usually, like deal with that, but usually, like, everybody I've talked to has just said, like, the block button has been their their best friend.

**Donna Ditota**

I never blocked anybody, because they know that you block them. But if you mute them, they have no idea.

**Cam Denmark**

There you go. Perfect. Perfect. Also, and again, one of the things that just kind of looking at for this project is just sort of like, what impact the sports entertainment industry has had on sports as well, that could take the form of like, you know, talking heads, or just like the film industry, whatever. And I guess, how have you seen sort of the sports entertainment industry? Like what effect has it had on sports in general?

**Donna Ditota**

Well, I mean, I don't, I don't really pay attention to that kind of stuff. I'm maybe the wrong person to talk to you about this, because I don't pay any attention to it. Really, I don't pay any attention to like, you know, talk radio, or I don't watch any of the ESPN talk shows. I don't do any of that. I don't, I don't honestly don't care what anybody's saying about it. Like, my goal is to find out what to report on, what people are talking about, and the extraneous stuff that happens around it is an extraneous stuff happens around the program. And I don't pay that much attention to it.

**Cam Denmark**

Gotcha, gotcha. Yeah, no problem. Just, again, picking, picking these journalists brains just kind of seeing what what they think about everything. And for the future of sports reporting, I guess, what do you believe is the future of sports reporting? Do you sort of see the trend of reporters sort of more gravitating more towards social media happening in the future?

**Donna Ditota**

Well, I hope so. I hope that journalism continues to be journalism and does not become becomes every person's opinion about some sort of topic. I hope there are actual people out there who are still taking time to research stories, to talk to people in person, to talk to people on the phone, to show up for games to show up for various things, and do some actual reporting about it. I hope it doesn't become a free for all and social media about what everybody's opinion is about is about something or other. I hope people are actually trying to do some reporting. That's the basis of journalism is doing the reporting. And I hope that that does not get lost in the future.

**Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. And then other than social media, I guess, what sort of trends do you see impacting sort of the future of sports reporting?

**Donna Ditota**

Access to athletes is the big one access, you know, I think with with COVID, I think a lot of schools kind of shut down your access to players and to to some degree coaches, I mean, you can call, I can call, call the coach or text a coach that I cover, but I know a lot of people did not have that kind of access that they had pre-COVID. And I worry that now that it ran somewhat smoothly, I mean, it went terribly for everybody, every journalist involved in every reporter hated zoom. Like, we're done with Zoom, right? And we would like to get back to talking to these these players in person and being able to interact with them after games in the locker rooms, etc. And I fear that that access is going to be severely restricted and or eliminated at some point.

**Cam Denmark**

Has the university sort of made any announcement, like do they know what they're going to be doing for that next season? I guess, when it comes to that kind of stuff?

**Donna Ditota**

Well, I think that they're going to go back. So in the beginning of the season the basketball locker room was open. And then once you know COVID, reestablished itself I think it was the first bit first Delta wave and then certainly through the latest Omicron wave I think that they then shut it down again. And so then we had to do stuff on Zoom. Once the situation got bad in New York State and then it was toward the end. I don't think the locker room was open. I don't remember if it was or not, I think the locker room was open back again at the end of the season. But we were remote most of the season this year and were doing stuff on Zoom, which like I said, every reporter hates it and just everything about it sucks.

**Cam Denmark**

Yeah, no, I get you. I know you gotta get going. So just one final question. Do you have any sort of advice for any sort of like young writer that's about to go into, you know, the content creation, like sports content creation, or just like the sports journalism industry in general?

**Donna Ditota**

Well, I mean, you have to do the work. Like I said, I don't know I've become sort of a, like a sort of an echo. But that's, that's the thing. I mean, you know, you you have to go out and do the work, you have to show up for stuff. You have to ask people questions, you have to do your do your research, do the reading, watch the film, whatever it is, you have to do the work. And that's the advice I would give you. I mean, in terms of finding a job, that's a completely different set of advice, but in terms of doing your job. Showing up for stuff is the most important thing, showing up and asking questions is the most important thing that you can do.

**Cam Denmark**

Gotcha. Well, thank you very much, Donna, again, I know you're busy. So, this really really means a lot.

**Donna Ditota**

So, you will learn this when you get into sports journalism is that every day is not what you think. The day will start out you think like, here's what I'm doing tomorrow and then five things will happen in the morning or something, then your day is completely different. It is just part of the job.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **WEEKLY NOTES**

#### **Week one (1/18 – 1/22)**

This week is the star of my last semester here at the university and unfortunately, I am starting the semester back home in New York. While it is a bummer, hopefully I will be back in Columbia next Monday or Tuesday. That said, I have taken a position with the business office of the university's athletic department as an analytics intern.

On Monday, I met with my boss on Zoom, William Wheeler. He is the Senior Associate Athletic Director for analytics and finance and comes to Missouri with a long resume. Before coming to Missouri, Mr. Wheeler was a Senior Associate Athletic Director at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He attended the College of Saint Elizabeth and is a fellow east coast man much like myself. I enjoyed our conversation, we mostly talked about projects that I could be overseeing during the semester, and I am quite excited to get started. Unfortunately, the position will be unpaid which I very much don't like. But the experience should outweigh the lack of funding.

Not too much progress has been made on the project at this time. During the winter break, I made an Excel file that I will use throughout the process of contacting journalists. The file contains columns labeled: "name of journalist," "publication," "method of contact," "answer," "date of interview," and so on. This will help me stay organized when trying to reach out to journalists. I plan on updating the list with the 10 journalists from the original project proposal next week. I think it'll be fairly easy to interview these journalists considering I have a list of questions that are all ready to go. Also, in my experience of interviewing journalists, they always love to talk. So I'm thinking I will get some excellent quotes and sound bites.

## **Week two (1/23 – 1/29)**

During this week, my boss tasked me with learning the software we will be using for the duration of the internship. We are using a mixture of Microsoft Excel and a visualization program that I am not familiar with called Power BI. From what I can gather, it is very similar to Tableau and works well with Excel databases. Unfortunately, due to transportation issues, I could not get back to Missouri during this week to work in the office. However, I was able to get back to Columbia during the weekend.

There were two big challenges I faced this week. The first was mostly trying to figure out Power BI and how useful it will be during my internship. I downloaded mock Excel spreadsheets that are created by Microsoft and imported them to BI. From there, I made a few mock visuals just to get an idea on how to work with BI and what it can and cannot do.

However, the most challenging obstacle I faced was working from NY during this week. I felt terrible not being able to help out in the office. I know Mr. Wheeler said he wanted to get started on a couple of projects but couldn't since I was not there. To overcome this, I tried my best to reach out and ask if there was anything that I could do while working remotely. Unfortunately, there was not much so I could only work on practicing BI.

I feel like the trickiest part of my research is going to be reaching out to all the reporters I need to. To tackle this problem, I have started to fill out the spreadsheet with all the journalists I mentioned in the proposal. Oddly, the majority of the journalists that I am looking into do not mention their emails anywhere. The only way I am really able to reach out to some of them is through social media. Also, through my digging, I have found that Corey Roepken, an MLS reporter that I talked about in my proposal, is not in journalism anymore.

### **Week three (1/30 – 2/5)**

This has been my first week of actually working in the office and I don't think I have met a single person that I don't like. I work in a small office in the Missouri Athletic Training Complex (MATC), which is where all the athletes do their lifts and get food. I feel a bit out of place working there, not being an athlete, but the people I work with are all very supportive and interested in what I'm studying in.

Mr. Wheeler and I have been talking about a large project that will encompass my time here in the business office. As mentioned before, the project will primarily use Power BI, a visualization tool that works well with Excel. We are going to create a dashboard that looks at the sales of tickets for each individual sport on a day-by-day basis. This will give the department a better understanding of how the marketing team is doing and who exactly is buying tickets. The dashboard will graph the previous year's growth compared to the present one. We will also be working with Archtics to gain a better understanding of our season ticket holders.

I haven't looked at the data nor do I really know how messy it may be. The data that deals with day-by-day ticket sales is coming from Ticketmaster directly. So, I can't imagine it is going to be the cleanest in the world. From what I've gathered, the data will be coming from another individual that works outside of the office. I'm hoping that at some point soon I can get a meeting to meet this person.

I've added some more questions to the running list that I already have. I think these questions will come in handy to find a better identity for the paper. More or less, I want to freeform each interview I have. This will be beneficial when I want to ask follow-up questions or when I think the interview is taking a different tone than I think it will. From my experience,

journalists usually do a great job of keeping the conversation flowing and don't just answer questions with two or three words.

#### **Week four (2/6 – 2/12)**

I'm in my fourth week of my internship now and I think the development of the project is going a little slow. I have spent basically the entire week cleansing a spreadsheet along with another intern in the department. Since we were remote for some of the week last week due to the snowstorm, I didn't get in the office all that much. I don't have remote access to the computers back at the office, so I am unable to do much work when we do go remote.

The spreadsheet deals with the expenses that each team has when they travel for a tournament or a game. Teams will make a purchase in the form of food, lodging, gas, whatever. The coach of that team must then keep track of every purchase made so they can include it in their report. Each coach has a card that is connected to the university's bank account. The business office will then approve the expense report given by the coach.

At some point, the office uploaded every transaction to this spreadsheet but there are several errors in it. So, another intern and I are going in and cleaning the data. We are double checking the total expenses in each expense report with what is in the spreadsheet. We are going to be looking at what has been accounted for from 2017-2021. To be completely honest, it's a little boring and tedious, but I know that the office needs it done so I am trying my best to get it finished as soon as possible.

I have set up two interviews for next week with two different journalists. To my surprise, the best method of contacting journalists so far has not been with email or by the phone, but actually through their Twitter accounts. People can choose to have their DMs open or closed,

most people with large followings usually have theirs closed. This has been an interesting way to filter out people I want to contact. Everyone wants to be able to pick the brain of the larger reporter, but most of the time that just simply isn't possible. I'm very interested to see how journalists pay attention to their social media analytics, if at all.

### **Week five (2/13-2/19)**

On Monday I had my first Zoom meeting with a couple of coworkers regarding the dashboard. Through Power BI, I have created a very rough rendering of what it could look like. The idea of this dashboard is to have something that the department can access on their phones, preferably through an app. Thankfully, I have found the Power BI app and have figured out how we can get department wide access to this dashboard. Once the dashboard goes live, we can send the link to it out to everyone that requests it. We would tell them to download the Power BI app, sign in with their pawprint, and then they should have access to the dashboard. There is a way too that we can have the dashboard update every day. I haven't really figured this out just yet.

I have finished scrubbing the spreadsheet that I had talked about last week. Since we had another snowstorm where we had to go remote, it was a bit of a pain to not be able to work on it. But thankfully, my coworker and I finished it and submitted the final cleaned spreadsheet to our bosses. Being that I want to go into data analytics as a career, I understand that data cleansing is a very necessary step to any data exploration. That said though, my goodness is it boring. It's definitely a process where you need to put some music on and just get into a groove. But staring at a whole bunch of numbers for several hours a day can get to be a lot. I need some of those blue light glasses.

The two interviews I had lined up for this week cancelled. It's a shame, because they were both scheduled during the snow day we had. It has been extremely difficult getting any sort of response back from reporters. Sports reporters are very busy, I totally understand, but that doesn't make this process any less frustrating. I'm very thankful that my Twitter page is very professional and only contains likes and retweets from my favorite teams in addition to some of my articles from the *Missourian*. Shoutout to Professor Kiely for always driving that point home during our J4180 classes.

### **Week six (2/20 – 2/26)**

I've been tasked with another assignment; this one isn't data-based unfortunately. As part of a scholarship that was given to the university, several student athletes are eligible for additional funding. This money can be used for anything, but I've been told that it's intended purpose is for food and housing. The amount of money that each athlete will receive is entirely dependent on their current GPA.

I have a list of all the student athletes that are eligible for this additional funding. It honestly seems like just about every Missouri student athlete is on this list. It's nice to see our athletes doing so well in the classroom. Anyway, on this sheet is the amount that each athlete will receive. I need to go into the system and transfer the money from the university's bank account to the individual athletes' accounts. Like the cleaning of the spreadsheet, this is a long and tedious process that requires background music. Thankfully, NASCAR season is underway, and I have a few podcasts that I listen to when doing this kind of work.

I had been stressed out because I wasn't receiving any word from any of the journalists that I was reaching out to. I had the two cancellations last week and that sort of deflated my

confidence. Then I realized, why don't I just ask two journalists that I know personally. So, I got my first two interviews completed, one is with ESPN Ithaca Station Manager Nick Karski. The other interview is with Tompkins Weekly sportswriter, senior editor of Cageside Press, and play-by-play broadcaster at ESPN Ithaca Dan Doherty. It was very strange interviewing both of them, but they both had great points during their conversations. I finally got the ball rolling with my project, hopefully it's a sign of good things to come.

### **Week seven (2/27-3/5)**

Not too much went on during my internship this week. I was out for two days from eating undercooked chicken (bad move on my part). The funding assignment that I was assigned last week is finally finished, lots of money was transferred over to the student athletes. I've done quite a bit of scanning this week along with other general office tasks. It's quite uneventful and I hope that things start to pick up here soon.

The head of Human Resources for our department is retiring at the end of this week. We had a big lunch from Panera on Friday, it was very nice to socialize with all my coworkers. Mr. Wheeler, and pretty much the whole office for that matter, are often not in the office since budget meetings have been going on. Every year, each team must meet with our department to finalize its budget for the next season. These meetings usually take all day and must be done for each team. Everyone is very stressed, and I've gathered that it's just getting started. I do not sit in on these meetings, but I have been told that they are quite boring.

Since I don't have much to do during my internship, I decided to start reading some final research projects for inspiration. I have a rough idea in my head what this final project is going to look like. I have also started editing the Otter transcripts which are a bit more of a pain than I

thought. Otter is great at giving a rough idea of what the transcript should be. But it still leaves a lot to be desired when it comes to the nitty gritty. A lot of editing still has to be done with the two transcripts I have.

### **Week eight (3/6 – 3/12)**

Virtually no one has been in the office this week because they have all been in budget meetings. It's a little awkward, I come in around noon, most of the time everyone is at a meeting. My office is in the center of the department, so someone will walk in, looking for someone within the department. Since I'm the only one in the office most of the time, I have to just guess when everyone will be back. At least I finally got a full tour of the building and all of the resources that we offer student athletes. As cool as MATC is, it smells like sewage, everywhere, all the time.

It has been a while since I have done any sort of work on the Power BI project. Mr. Wheeler is almost never in and when he is in, he seems pretty tired from the long day of meetings. To be honest, I don't blame him. I was told that I was going to get data from someone in another department that works directly with Ticketmaster. There has been no mention of what the status is with that from anyone. For now, I would assume that it is last on just about everyone's mind.

I had another interview that went very well. I'm happy that at least some progress is starting to come along with this research project. When I started this process with the proposal, I honestly had no idea what direction the project was going to take or even how my interviewees were going to respond to the questions. Overall, I think the strategy of going with a loose script

has gone quite well. It leaves me the ability to control the interview depending on how the flow is moving while also having a rough idea of the picture I would like to paint.

### **Week nine (3/13 – 3/19)**

For the past two weeks I have pretty much let everyone in the office do what they need to do. Everyone has meetings for the majority of the day and with spring sports starting up, most people leave early to support our teams. I just kind of hang out at the office and use it as a study hall to get my work done. When people are in the office, I try and ask them if they have anything for me to do. The answer is almost always “no.” At least it has been nice to talk to some of the coaches who come in for help.

I’m not even mad at anyone in the department for not having anything for me to do. I know everyone is busy with meetings so there is naturally not going to be much work that needs to get done. I get it, but at the same time I feel like I am wasting my time being here. The other intern is a grad student like myself, she is even more frustrated than I am. During the day she will just leave since there is never any work to be done. She told me that she is often just online shopping instead of doing anything productive.

Just like last week, I had another great conversation with another journalist. It’s been nice to get some solid traction on that front and every conversation has been very enjoyable. I like to think that the project is coming along at a solid pace. I hope to be able to match some of the lengths of projects that I’ve seen uploaded in the past. Some of the projects reach 250-300 pages. I’m hoping that I can hit at least 100 pages.

### **Week 10 (3/20 – 3/26)**

I've been told that I do not need to come into the office at all next week for spring break and I could not be happier. Due to unrelated family issues and my own mental health, I have hit a pretty big roadblock with the project and internship. This week, I didn't do much for the internship aside from clean another spreadsheet. This one only took about a day to sort through since my coworker already got a decent start on it. This sheet sorts out how much athletes spent on meals for each road trip taken by each team. I guess the department wants to look at the option of using an umbrella token system for each athlete on these road trips as opposed to giving them a different amount of money for each trip.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, I understand data cleansing is a large part of data analytics. But I feel like this internship is not providing me with any sort of analysis practice with any of this data. Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for the opportunity to work for the university. But at the same time, I feel like I'm not getting too much out of my time here. The practice with Excel is always good and valuable, the title of the internship will look good on a resume too. But other than that, I don't think I'm getting too much out of this experience. It's a shame too because I had high hopes when I got here.

I was not able to solidify any interviews during this week. I actually had two cancellations which is quite the bummer. To get some progress done though, I have finished transcribing all of my interviews so far. I have worked with Otter in the past and I forgot how much editing you still need to do once everything is finished. After the AI is done going through the audio, there are still many slip ups that it doesn't catch. Still, it is better than transcribing all of the interviews by hand. I have had to do that several times in the past at my old job and it was absolutely awful.

**Week 11 (3/27 – 4/2)**

I have taken a brief hiatus from the project and internship to work on my mental health and deal with family issues. No additional research was completed this week nor was any work done at or for my internship.

### **Week 12 (4/3 – 4/9)**

The meetings have finally finished, and everyone is back on their normal schedules in the office. It's nice to see everyone again. While it may have been healthy to take a break from the work, there is something to be said for keeping yourself busy when you are going through a rough patch. While I may not be doing too much at work, it is nice to get back into the swing of things.

The department is looking to make a new hire at the end of the month that will help oversee the analytics field. I talked to Mr. Wheeler about the hire today, he wants me to hop on a Zoom call with the new hire within the next week or two. Unfortunately, I'm not going to be here for too much longer after they make the hire considering I'm graduating next month. I guess the new hire is going to take over the tickets project that I roughly started back in February. That will be the main project that he is tasked with during his first year. It's looking like I won't have anything to show future employers when they are about my time at the internship.

The other intern is still on vacation, so I assumed that I was going to get some more work upon my return. Especially considering the fact that I had been gone for a full week as well. This was not the case however, just a few papers to scan and get in the system is all. I still ask everyone in the office if they have anything to for me to do. They all still say that they do not, but at least I am asking.

I've worked very hard with the analysis portion of my paper. Quite honestly, I feel like I have enough material to start writing this paper right now. At the time of this update, I have six interviews, all of which have given me a very solid idea of what I want to write about. The journalists I have spoken to really like to discuss how social media has affected the style and content that they report. A lot of these reporters have been at it for several years, decades in some cases. Social media has evolved before them into what we see now. It's incredibly interesting to hear them talk about their own personal discoveries with each platform.

### **Week 13 (4/10 – 4/16)**

Most of my time this week has been spent getting things sorted for my research project. Like usual, not much of anything has gone on with the internship. I have noticed that it does look good on a resume though, as I have gotten three job interviews so far.

The other intern who was working here quit to take an assistant coaching position in Washington DC. Unfortunately, it hasn't given me more of a workload here. As time goes on though, maybe I will get one more project before I graduate. If not, I'm still happy that I had good coworkers here. It's tough to realize that this is the only internship I could land for the semester. I applied to so many during the fall semester and winter break, I'm just shocked that this is the only one that I was able to get. Without it though, I would have been in deep trouble, so I am grateful for that.

I had another interview this week, that makes a total of seven which I am very comfortable with. It is not the 10 that I had put in the original proposal, but I still believe it is enough to write a very solid analysis. The last interview was tricky because the woman I interviewed refused to use Zoom. Unfortunately, everything needed to be recorded by phone. I

held my phone up to my microphone while having the call play on speaker. It was quite strange to do it this way but I'm glad I was able to nail down the interview. I am appreciative of her time that she gave me.

#### **Week 14 (4/17 – 4/23)**

I am extremely nervous, but I am finally submitting my project for review. I had to take some days off from my internship to finish up the analysis and a couple other sections of the paper. This is, by far, the longest project that I have ever had to work on. For my undergrad, I had to work on a capstone, but it was not nearly as long as this one was. I plan to defend some time next week, which I am excited to do.

It seems like just yesterday I stepped onto Missouri's campus thinking that I was going to take over the world. I learned very quickly that you can easily be a little fish in a very big pond. Being from a small town, going to college only 20 minutes from where I grew up, I hadn't really lived outside of the area before. But when I moved 16 hours away to attend grad school here, I didn't know it would be this hard. There have been many ups and downs throughout my journey here. I feel like this project is a perfect example of that. There were many highs, many lows. But in the end, I am proud of myself and what I have accomplished here. I hope that my committee feels the same way that I do.

## APPENDIX C

### EVALUATION



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
DEPARTMENT OF ATHLETICS

Mizzou Arena  
1 Champions Drive  
Suite 200  
Columbia, MO 65211  
PHONE: (573) 882-6501

May 4, 2022

Evaluation Letter: Cameronallyn Denmark

It is my sincere pleasure to write a letter for Cam Denmark. Cam has been an intern in our Athletics Business/Analytics Office for the entire Spring semester.

Cam was extremely eager to intern in our office and help in any way possible. Cam has excellent interpersonal skills, is extremely motivated, and reliable. Even when he could not make it into the office, he would text to ask if he could work on assignments from home.

Although Cam wanted to do more analytical work, he began learning Athletics business operations. Some of the work he assisted with in the office are filing, scanning, athletics team travel projects, and creating a visual for the ticket sales dashboard. He was a tremendous help with creating the visual for our new ticket sales dashboard to display metrics for season tickets sold, total revenue, and comparing to previous year data. His assistance with the ticket sales dashboard was invaluable. This is something new for the Athletic Department that we will be utilizing for years to come.

Cam is an outstanding young man and professional. He brings a great attitude to the office every day, and everyone around the office enjoys speaking with him. I would be happy to discuss his internship in greater detail, if needed. I can be reached at [wheeler@missouri.edu](mailto:wheeler@missouri.edu) or during business hours at (573) 810-4599.

Sincerely,

*William Wheeler*

William E. Wheeler III  
Senior Associate Athletics Director, Finance & Analytics

## **APPENDIX D**

### **SELF-EVALUATION**

When I went into this project, I honestly had no idea what the project was going to look like. I had a rough idea of what it might be because of the questions that I had, but no real clue how the journalists were going to answer those questions. Now that I am finished with the study and have interviewed a number of reporters, I can honestly say that I love the way it turned out. The idea of asking the research questions first and being up front with that I would like to talk about is not a strategy that I have tried in the past. Usually during interviews, I try and warm up whoever I am talking to with general questions to get the ball rolling. I was told to not include those in my original list of proposed questions. This made the interview so much better to go through.

The participants were upfront with their answers and almost knew exactly what they wanted to say right off the bat. It was kind of like they had been wanting to talk about this subject for a long time, but they didn't know how to. Perhaps interacting with social media for a long time with no real outlet can frustrate you. I'm sure the pandemic didn't help things much either, given that their jobs essentially went fully remote. Lots of journalists that I talked to were excited about the possibility of restrictions being lifted. I honestly can't say that I blame them.

What I discovered about social media in the sports journalism landscape and how it's used didn't really surprise me too much. You can see how journalists are using it all the time by just looking at their individual profiles. If a new recruit signs a letter of intent to play with a college basketball team, a journalist may quote tweet it with a link to a story or maybe some simple commentary. The athletes themselves are becoming the sources of news instead of the

schools that they play for. This is certainly a change that I think we will see a lot more of in the near future.

Even though I didn't gain too much experience from my internship with the university, I still enjoyed the people that I worked with. I have worked in many toxic work environments in the past, and it was nice to finally have a positive space where I could come in and work. I can't thank Mr. Wheeler enough for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the community. It's a shame that I came in when I did, I'm sure that if things were less busy then I probably would've gained more experience than I did. Unfortunately, the spring is usually the time when budget meetings happen. That, along with some road bumps in the initial hiring process meant that I couldn't do much. I am still thankful to everyone in the office for being so supportive.

I feel like this project as a whole can be compared to my time at Missouri. When I started out, I was a little nervous and confused. I had no idea what my plan was or what exactly I was thinking about studying. Again, I had a rough idea but not enough to do a full project. As the months went on, I started to become a bit more confident, exploring the possibilities that I could study. Finally, with the help of Professor Herzog and Professor Kiely, I created a project that I can be very proud of.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **PROJECT PROPOSAL**

#### **Introduction**

Social media has changed the way that we look at beat reporting and sports journalism. A profession that used to require timely writing for next day publication now requires engagement with an audience of followers on Twitter and other social media platforms on an almost regular basis. Twitter, especially, has evolved journalism into a constant thread of updates and up-to-the-minute information that we have never seen before. Beat reporters in particular are often looked to as constant sources of information. On the sports side, beat reporters are tasked with keeping fans up to date on everything happening with the team. This includes preseason acquisitions, game updates, attending press conferences, interviewing players and coaches and so on. The reporters themselves post a majority of these updates to their own social media, to further engage an interested audience.

On November 2, 2021, the Houston Astros played the Atlanta Braves in Game 6 of the World Series. According to Sportsnaut, a site dedicated to bringing fantasy sports news and updates, the World Series averaged 11.75 million viewers with a rating of 6.5 heading into game 6. This was roughly a 20% viewership increase compared to the COVID-19 shortened season a year prior (Johnson, 2021). Brian McTaggart, Houston Astros beat reporter for MLB.com, provided a constant stream of information for an eager audience on his Twitter profile. When it was all said and done, McTaggart would end up tweeting 66 times throughout the day. These tweets ranged from pregame press conferences and interviews to inning-by-inning updates on game 6. By the end of the night, the series had wrapped up and the Atlanta Braves took home their first World Series title since 1995 when they bested the Cleveland Indians (Anderson,

2021). Even when the night was finished, McTaggart was still providing information about the Houston Astros heading into next season. Several messages from players expressed the desire for Dusty Baker to return as the team's manager. McTaggart even posted an interview with Astros pitching coach Brent Strom at the end of the night, who said he would not return to the same position next year. According to CNBC, game 6 drew in 14.3 million total viewers with a rating of 7.9 (Young, 2021).

This style of reporting and the constant influx of updates can help drive the natural drama and suspense in sport. According to a Pew Research Center survey using data collected in 2019, around one in five U.S. adults currently uses Twitter in some capacity (Hughes & Wojcik, 2020). With all this interaction and engagement, all eyes are on journalists to provide pertinent information when it counts. Engagement, while not essential to the content that is being reported, is critical for a journalist and publisher's social credit. The more engaged and higher following that a reporter or publication has, the more traffic they will receive on their social media pages (Khan, 2016).

For my research, interviewing sports beat reporters and editors will give me a better understanding of how social media can affect the style of reporting. Additionally, I will explore if the format of social media can affect the content that is being reported. For example, on Twitter a user must only limit their posts to 280 characters, unless they create a thread. This could create challenges when a reporter is attempting to break a lengthy story posting a long quote from an interview.

Journalists create storylines that can end up trending on social media, further creating suspense for an upcoming matchup. Recently, Cam Newton was released by the New England Patriots. Two months later, Newton was signed to his old team, the Carolina Panthers. The

signing was generally seen as a positive return to where he once had success. Adam Schefter, an ESPN Senior NFL Insider, was one of the first to break the story that Newton signed a one-year contract with the Panthers. The tweet ended up getting nearly 31 thousand likes and 4.3 thousand retweets. Heading into their Sunday matchup against the Arizona Cardinals, it was reported that Newton would most likely see playing time. As a result, Newton became a trending topic leading up to the game, creating drama and suspense behind his upcoming performance. The Panthers ended up winning the game 34-10. Newton was in the game for several snaps and scored two touchdowns, one rushing and one via the pass.

My research will also explore what affect a reporter has on the drama that sports provide. Highly anticipated matchups are a staple of any sports fans love of the game. It's only natural that a reporter hops on a trend or topic of conversation that is popular in the sports world. Reporters, as we know, can further drive discussion among fans and even coaches and players, whether it be positive or negative. Spreading rumors of trades, and possible retirements, and sharing engaging quotes can create trends for fans to jump on. Social media has changed the way that we look at sports reporting and how sports reporting is created.

## **Professional Component**

Analytics has played a huge role in my life, stemming from my love of sports. From my time working at ESPN Ithaca, an ESPN Radio affiliate located near my hometown, I have taken an interest in pursuing a career in sports statistics. I see myself more interested in the internal side of athletic departments. This means, I would rather work in analytics that help a team

become better rather than marketing the team and helping them grow from an advertising standpoint. I believe my background in journalism is perfect for a role in sports analytics. So many newer statistics that are becoming popular are very difficult to explain because they are so complicated. If I want to explain to an athlete that they are performing poorly in a certain metric, it is up to me to explain that in a way that they can understand. For example, if I see that a pitcher is performing poorly in FIP, a statistic that measures a pitcher's performance based on conditions that they can control, I recommend a way for them to avoid any forms of contact against hitters.

For the professional component of my research project, I am currently applying for sports analytics roles and data journalism internships. I have applied to a number of sports teams including the Indiana Pacers, Cincinnati Reds, Milwaukee Brewers, and the Texas Rangers. In addition, I am currently in talks with the University of Missouri Athletic Department to become a data analyst intern who would work closely with the newly hired athletic director. Most sports positions that I have applied to are for baseball teams because that is the sport that I feel I know the most about. I have also applied to data journalism roles for publications. I have applied to roles with FiveThirtyEight, The New York Times, and USA Today that range from data journalism internships to graphics fellowships.

My internship will be conducted over 14 weeks during the Spring 2022 semester, my last at the University of Missouri. Because of the turbulent nature of COVID-19 and lack of funds, I plan to work remotely from Columbia, Missouri for the duration of the internship while I am still in school. If the internship does go past the date of graduation, I am willing to move for an in-person experience. The professional component of my research will take up around 30 hours per week. The remaining 10 hours that I have in my 40-hour work week will be comprised of the

research element of this project. I will also be emailing my committee weekly memos to update the progress of my research and professional work. These will help me stay on pace and keep my committee updated with the status of my research.

As a sports journalist, you must hold some form of knowledge in new and upcoming metrics. I feel as though my time at the University of Missouri has been very beneficial in prepping me for that. From learning SQL in Computer-Assisted-Reporting to calculating advanced statistics with R in Methods in Sports Analytics through the University of Missouri statistics department, I feel like I am very well prepared for the crazy, turbulent world of sports statistics.

## **Literature Review**

Often tied together for commercial purposes, sports and entertainment, termed sportainment, create thrilling moments that fans will remember for a lifetime (RADOŠINSKÁ, 2018). However, sportainment has been tarnished and the media industry is to blame. Taking advantage of suspenseful action and dramatic conclusions, we must look at how American cinema and advertising agencies exploit interpersonal fan connections for commercial gain. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a historical timeline describing how the sports entertainment industry arrived at the point it is at now, what the influence of the industry is on the world, and where it can go from here.

## **Introduction**

Growing up as a Yankees and Giants fan in the heart of New York state, drama is always at a premium. This addiction to fiction-like storytelling did not come out of nowhere, it has been fueled by the no nonsense, aggressive reporting style of the New York media. It is here that we see two elements that are currently killing off the sports journalism world: dramatization and tabloidization.

I think back to some moments that defined the '90s New York Yankees and their three championships that they won during the decade. Don Mattingly's first and only postseason home run during the 1995 ALDS, Tino Martinez's grand slam in the 1998 World Series, and perfect games thrown by David Wells and David Cone in '98 and '99 respectively. All legends that will live on in Yankee lore for the rest of time.

Another dynasty was etching its name into the history books during this time in the National Basketball Association. Led by Michael Jordan, the '90s Chicago Bulls, captured in ESPN's miniseries *The Last Dance*, are often described in sports media as the greatest dynasty in the history of the NBA. Much like the old saying, "a little of something goes a long way," talks of this dynasty and the legends it created are what keep sports alive in the journalism world. However, I would argue that we have gone past the point of feeling a slight buzz of intoxication from the tap of sensationalization. We are now in the territory of alcohol poisoning, losing interest and coordination with every editorial piece.

Self described as the Worldwide Leader in Sports, ESPN has suffered from declining subscriber ratings since 2011. According to data obtained by Business Insider, from 2011 to 2017, ESPN lost nearly 13 million subscribers (Gaines, Nudelman, 2017). It's not just ESPN either, networks across the sports landscape have taken hits on viewership ratings. The 2020 Stanley Cup, the National Hockey League's championship series, lost 61% of viewers compared

to the year prior (Reimer, 2020). ESPN rivals Fox Sports have seen a decline in viewership for their NASCAR Cup Series coverage as well (Stern, 2021).

The purpose of this article is to explore how an addiction to drama, suspense, and commercial exploitation have plagued the sports entertainment industry. Events like the Olympics and college rivalries create pride and emotional connections among a boisterous fanbase. It would be borderline idiotic for film companies, advertising agencies, and even journalists to ignore this interpersonal connection between team and fan. The events that take place during the length of a game, season, or even career can carry storylines that are best told through film and television. Even impartial sports broadcasters have changed methods for play-by-play style commentary.

Radio shows like the Paul Finebaum Show and the Dan LeBatard Show have built up a passionate group of listeners who call in regularly to provide their own insights. Television programs like First Take, Skip and Shannon: Undisputed, and Pardon the Interruption keep viewers entertained with fast-paced formats. Movies that are based on true stories like Glory Road and The Blind Side overdramatize and commercialize the tales of successful athletes. These formats promote drama and suspense for the viewer to create commercial success.

## **Sportainment**

To begin, we must break down how the current sports media world came to be and how the current format ties to audience engagement. Several studies have indicated that suspense in sports draws stronger interest and emotional connection to the viewer. I will discuss how these connections can vary from sport to sport and how college athletics differ from professional. As

mentioned before, cinema has painted an unrealistic depiction on real life sports events. Most notably, creating the image of the “white savior” in films where the main protagonist(s) are young black athletes. Studies by both Hutchinson and Schultz look at how film has told the story of the 1966 Texas Western Basketball team and their run to the NCAA National Championship. Finally, we must look at the gaps in research and how the sports entertainment industry can save itself from certain destruction.

Luckily, we have a term to use when examining the sports entertainment industry as it stands right now. According to Radošinská’s look at the current landscape of American cinema and mainstream media, sports and entertainment can be combined into one word, “sportainment.” Sportainment, in Radošinská’s words, “is a portmanteau word which reacts to the need to reflect on the commercial establishment of sports within the sphere of media entertainment (Radošinská, 2018).” The term emphasizes the importance of understanding how sports events and sports celebrities are covered and publicly presented to entertain media audiences.

I have seen and participated in sportainment firsthand. After working at an ESPN radio affiliate as an on-air personality for four years, the routine was very simple, while the talking heads changed depending on the time frame, the conversations did not. The conversations were usually centered around either the NBA or the NFL, often compared a current player to a player that may be considered the “greatest of all time,” and discussed what sort of championship implications this player may have on their franchise. It is boring, repetitive, and most of all uninspiring content. However, I was told by the president of the company I worked for on several occasions, “this is what the audience wants.” On a personal level, this form of conversation practically destroyed my confidence as a young sports journalist. Nearly every day

I would ask myself, “why should I interview an athlete that is breaking school records in the pole vault when all the audience wants is Michael Jordan-LeBron James comparisons?”

With the ever-changing digital media landscape and the rising popularity of social media, sportainment has not just taken over the American entertainment industry, it can be traced all over the world. Take for example the Super Bowl, the championship game of the National Football League that takes place in the United States. Once thought of as a localized product for a national audience, the Super Bowl has grown in popularity in Europe and Latin America (Radošinská, 2018). So much so that regular season NFL games are now being played in England’s Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and Mexico’s Estadio Azteca.

The Super Bowl brings more than just American gridiron football, there is an entertainment factor attached to event. Super Bowl halftime shows are often a staple for musical performances by popular musicians, littered with advertisements for Pepsi, Coca-Cola, or Bridgestone. Advertising agencies understand that the Super Bowl is historically known for showing humorous commercials in between the action. In 2019, the cost of a 30 second spot during the Super Bowl was \$5.25 million, significantly more than the \$37,500-\$42,500 price tag back in 1967 (Su, McDowell, 2020). Take into consideration that the event drew in an estimated average of 98 million viewers in the United States plus an estimate 50 to 65 million viewers from around the globe, it’s no wonder why companies will pay top dollar (Richter 2020). The Super Bowl is more than just a championship game, it is a sportainment spectacle.

Sportainment, at least in the football entertainment industry, is not a new theory by any means. In 1977, study was already taking place examining dramatic language used in football broadcasts (Bryant, Comisky, and Zillmann, 1977). The researchers noticed a strong trend between a commentator’s use of dramatic language and the sense of enjoyment that a fan takes

away. As the sports broadcasts change, so do the modes of performance that are being studied by researchers. Whereas older studies looked at how drama impacted sports commentary, recent studies examined how suspense can impact a fan's interpretation of a sports contest (Peterson, Raney, 2008). Peterson and Raney hypothesized a correlation between fan enjoyment and how close a matchup was. The researchers found that hypothesis to be supported.

It is important to note what role suspense in sports and how this can impact a fan's attachment to a team. In sports, the outcome is not preordained; it is in doubt unless the clock strikes zero, the final strike, or until the whistle blows. A viewer cannot say with absolute certainty that an outcome will unfold during the contest. As noted from Peterson and Raney, "in sports, uncertainty reigns, such that the length of time the winning team is in question because the score is so close only increases the suspense of the game (Peterson, Raney, 2008)." This draws comparisons to fictional drama; suspense is theoretically associated with the perceived notion that the protagonist will be met with impending disaster. Sports, in this sense, provide the perfect formula for a nonfictional, theatrical performance.

### **The Olympic Spirit**

Targeting national pride is imperative when it comes to marketing the Olympics for a global audience. When picturing the average Olympic competitor's journey to the world's top sporting event, you imagine years of intense training leading up to one 100-meter sprint. The sprinters coil into their blocks waiting for the signal. The gun goes off. Camera flashes light up the multi-million-dollar stadium built specifically for this event. Runners hurl themselves towards the finish line. The event is over in just 10 seconds. The runner that has trained four

years for a shot at the gold medal just missed the podium two-tenths of a second. The runner then may consider a number of excuses as to why they missed the podium. The next day, recovery begins, and training ensues for the next Olympic competition. These, as Ferrell argues, are the steps to marketing an Olympic event: anticipation, agony and regret, recover and compensation, and synchronic denouement (Ferrell, 2008).

Heading into the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo, the United States committee had much to be excited about. At the time, the talk of the town was the men's hockey team, coming off one of the greatest upsets in Olympic history. Back in 1980, the United States men's hockey team found themselves in the final round of the tournament along with Sweden, Finland, and the heavily favored Soviet Union. Against all odds, the United States, in front of a Lake Placid crowd, defeated the Soviet Union in the semifinal round of the tournament in what would be known as the "Miracle on Ice." This game would forever be etched into cinema history with the Disney film *Miracle* (2004). In the film, head coach Herb Brooks, played by Kurt Russell, delivers a passionate speech to his players pregame. Sports commentator Al Michaels, who delivered play-by-play of the teams run to the gold medal, recreated his commentary for the film. However, Michaels was unable to deliver the last ten seconds of the game with the same amount of passion that he had on the original commentary. Therefore, the real soundbite of the last ten seconds was used. The film serves as a great example of how dramatic sporting events can be retold in cinema. The United States would then defeat Sweden to take home the gold in the championship game.

As Ferrell mentions, Sarajevo went a bit differently than Lake Placid. The United States men's hockey team had one win, two losses, and two ties in group play, and were bounced before tournament play even began. Prior to this, the American Broadcasting Company had

acquired the rights to broadcast the 1984 Winter Olympics for between \$80 and \$90 million (ABC Awarded, 1980). ABC broadcasted the Lake Placid Olympics before when Team USA made their “miracle” run. ABC heavily advertised the anticipation of Team USA’s 1980 run to the top heading into the games. Agony and regret soon took over after USA’s failure to reach tournament play. The Soviet Union would go on to win gold in the competition (Ferrell, 2008).

We see an example of nationalized advertising prior to the 1984 Winter Olympics through Bud Light. The 30 second advertisement begins by showing a typical flight crew loading up bags into an airline. An announcer then states: “every evening the ground crew loads Flight 207 for its trip across the Atlantic. But tonight, they know it carries something more. Tonight, Flight 207 carries our nation’s hope.” A ground crew member then states, “Captain, the Olympic team’s stuff is all on board.” A wide shot reveals the snowy, freezing conditions in which, the ground crew is loading up the cargo. A member of the ground crew then holds up a sign to the visible athletes that reads: “good luck.” A final shot shows the crew watching the plane take off with the message that reads: “official sponsor of the 1984 U.S. Olympic Team” (Beta MAX, 2014). The advertisement relates to the American fan who is preparing for the Winter Olympics. It instills pride and hope in the American heart that the United States will prove to be the best and take home the gold.

### **Painting a New Picture: Sport in Cinema**

As mentioned before, sport has its own space written in cinematography. The relationship is nearly perfect, sport has a flair for the dramatic and cinematography can embellish a true story.

Film has its own duty in the entertainment industry, to entertain the viewer in whatever format it sees fit. This is where we can draw the comparison between drama and suspense in sport.

In 1966 the Texas Western Miners men's basketball team went on a 28-1 run to win the NCAA National Championship. In the championship game, Texas Western (now the University of Texas at El Paso) started an all-black starting lineup against a widely favored all-white team from the University of Kentucky. The Miners went on to win, 72-65, etching their names in the NCAA history books. Their story was told on the silver screen with *Glory Road* (2006), a Disney film directed by James Gartner.

Nearly 55 years after the Miners won the championship, the portrayal of the title game and the team itself has evolved into what it is known for now. Back in 1966, journalists covering the game did not emphasize the racial aspects of the game and it was largely forgotten. As Hutchinson (2016) indicates, the 1966 Miners basketball team was largely remembered as the answer to the sports trivia question: "What school interrupted UCLA's (University of California at Los Angeles) string of NCAA basketball championships from 1964 until 1973?" Initially after the win, journalists were quick to change their plotlines. Instead of focusing on the racial aspects of the game, the narrative was the classic telling of an underdog story. "speedy," "poised," and "flashy" were all traits used to describe the Miners (Hutchinson, 2016).

In 1966, journalists were not blind to issues related to race and sport. Boxing and even basketball stories often mentioned such. However, reporters failed to convey the racial aspects of the contest. One reason for this was the fact that the championship game had not been decided until about 24 hours prior. This game reporters little time to build up the matchup and focus on historic implications. Head coach Don Haskins' decision to start an all-black starting lineup was not made until the last-minute (Hutchinson, 2016). Haskins was later quoted saying, "I really

didn't think about starting five black guys. I just wanted to put my five best guys on the court”  
(Glory Road, n.d.).

Glory Road tells a different story, however. Over the years, the narrative of the teams has changed and focuses more on the racial aspects of the game. During the course of the season, the team endures racial discrimination, building up to the moment when Haskins starts an all-black lineup against Kentucky’s all-white lineup. Glory Road illustrates Haskins as a “white savior” of sorts, making a statement in the midst of the civil rights movement (Schultz, 2014). As mentioned earlier, Haskins did not see the act of starting an all-black lineup as a noble one. Merely, he wanted to start his best five players. Glory Road leaves a long-lasting impression that Haskins is seen as a hero (Hutchinson, 2016).

### **Concluding Remarks and Questions**

The argument can be made the entertainment was meant for sports and that sport itself is made for entertainment purposes. It would stand to reason then that the two would fit together like Lego pieces. If this is the case, we must be ready for the influence that entertainment has on the sports industry. Even ESPN is now owned by entertainment giant Disney. There is nothing inherently wrong with storytelling or reliving a sports moment that changed an athlete or team forever. However, journalists, cinematographers, and storytellers in general are responsible for how we frame our perception of an event. As we see in *Miracle* and *Glory Road*, our interpretation of a game or a team is in the hands of the storyteller. It is important to remember these tales, they fill us with pride, make us feel emotions that would be difficult to recreate.

However, sportainment is in control of its own destiny. How we remember sportainment, is up to sportainment itself.

## **Research Questions**

*RQ1: How has social media changed the way that writers, beat reporters, and editors create sports journalism?*

*RQ2: How has sportainment changed the way that writers, beat reporters, and editors create sports journalism?*

## **Methods**

I will use semi-structured interviews with a minimum of 10 writers, beat reporters and editors in sports journalism. During these interviews, each participant will be asked a series of pre-determined questions centered around what role social media and the sportainment industry have had on sports journalism.

According to Nohl, “semi-structured interviews allow not only for assessing the participants' opinions, statements and convictions, they also allow to elicit narratives about their personal experiences” (Nohl 2009). I would like participants to reflect on their own reporting and how social media has affected their style and their brand. I feel as though semi-structured interviews will provide the opportunity for further dialogue outside of the pre-determined set questions. I want the questions provided to be very open ended so each participant will provide a

different answer compared to other participants. Each journalist is where they are because of a different story, I want to explore that story and utilize what they have been through to answer my research questions.

Interviewing professional sports reporters, though, carries certain challenges. First and foremost, sports reporters are hardly ever available unless it is the offseason. “Sports reporters work long hours, face hectic schedules, and draw constant criticism from the public” (Wanta, 2013). This will require a large pool of possible reporters that I can interview. Luckily, each professional sports team has their own beat reporter that will write for a publication.

At the time that I perform this research, the NFL will be in their postseason and the NBA and NHL will be in the middle of their regular season. MLB should just be starting Spring Training workouts and the MLS in the middle of their offseason. This means, I may need to stay away from reporters that cover teams in the NBA and NHL as they will be right in the middle of the busiest time of the year. However, it would be interesting to talk to NFL reporters when the postseason is starting to ramp up. Most likely though, I will be talking to MLB and MLS reporters as they may have the most free time.

I don't think taking a team's success into account when choosing reporters is necessary. Social media can have a huge impact on the way a reporter covers their team regardless of the success of that franchise. It would be interesting to see how a reporter chooses to cover their team when the team is performing well compared to when they are not performing well.

The level of reporters that I am choosing to talk to have made it to the top of their profession. As a result, “intensive and detailed preparation” is needed so the reporters understand that I am serious about their work (Zuckerman, 1972). This will lead to quality responses from

the participants and will further encourage quality discussion. Thorough preparation will result in a lengthier interview and discussion as well. However, I hope to keep these interviews around 30-45 minutes in length. I do not want to waste the participants time, nor do I wish to waste mine.

Unfortunately, with COVID, these interviews will most likely not be done in person. In-person interviews would be ideal because they would allow a chance to read the interviewee's body language and have a more personal discussion. A substitute that I will use is Zoom, so I can at least see the participants face and read their expressions. Phone interviews are the least ideal but may need to be done if the participant is too busy to schedule a Zoom interview.

After the interview is done, I will transcribe it using Otter, a service that automatically transcribes an audio file and does a great job of discerning who the speaker is. My transcription of Otter will assist me in creating quotes for my analysis and possibly structure the research portion of my analysis. There are sometimes bugs with the service and I will go back and edit the transcription after every interview. However, I have been using Otter for years and I trust that it will get the job done.

## **The Reporters**

### **BRETT DAWSON**

Dawson is currently a basketball reporter for the Louisville Courier and former sports editor for the Columbia Missourian. Before taking over at the Missourian, Dawson spent time covering college basketball and football at Illinois and Kentucky for the Star-Gazette and The Courier-Journal, respectively. He has also spent time covering the NBA for the Advocate and the

Oklahoman for the Los Angeles Clippers and the Oklahoma City Thunder. Additionally, Dawson worked for The Athletic covering the Oklahoma City Thunder, the Los Angeles Clippers, and the Los Angeles Lakers.

#### DERRICK GOOLD

Goold is the current St. Louis Post-Dispatch beat writer for the St. Louis Cardinals. A graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism, Goold started out his career as a reporter covering Louisiana State University football, baseball, and women's basketball for The Times-Picayune in New Orleans, Louisiana. Goold served as president of the Baseball Writers' Association of America in 2016 after serving as vice president in 2015. He has won numerous awards including Associated Press Sports Editors Beat Writing Award in 2016.

#### MATT DERRICK

Before becoming the current publisher and lead beat writer for chiefsdigest.com, Derrick started out his career as a University of Missouri graduate. Following graduation, Derrick was a special sections coordinator for Sun Publications in Overland Park, Kansas. He joined chiefsdigest.com in 2013 as an associate editor and took over as publisher and lead beat writer in 2016.

#### LINDSEY ADLER

Adler is currently a staff writer covering the New York Yankees for The Athletic. Previously, Adler worked at Deadspin and BuzzFeed. She has a very large social media following, mainly on Twitter at 81 thousand followers. There, she posts mainly about Yankees content but also utilizes her social media for personal news.

## MEG ROWLEY

Prior to taking over as managing editor for FanGraphs, a website dedicated to stories revolving advanced baseball metrics, Rowley worked as a contributing writer for Baseball Prospectus. She graduated from Bryn Mawr University with a bachelor's degree in political science and from the University of Wisconsin with a master's degree in political science. Additionally, Rowley has served as an analytics conference speaker at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She has a large following on Twitter as well with over 24 thousand followers.

## ALEX FAST

Fast serves as the vice president of PitcherList, a website dedicated to advanced pitching analytics with a focus on fantasy production. Prior to becoming vice president, Fast was a contributing writer for PitcherList and also appeared on ESPN. I have spoken to Fast on multiple occasions and actually interviewed him about a metric he and a fellow co-worker created a few years ago. He was a fantastic interview and would provide great insight for this project. He has also been awarded Best Research Article of the Year by the Fantasy Sports Writers Association.

## JULIA POE

Poe recently transitioned into a beat writing role covering the Chicago Bulls for The Chicago Tribune. Before the transition, Poe previously covered Orlando City SC and the Orlando Pride for the Orlando Sentinel. She is a native of Kansas City and graduated from the University of Southern California. After college, Poe became an intern at Sports Illustrated and with the Philadelphia Inquirer.

## COREY ROEPKEN

Roepken has been a staple in the Houston market for several years now. A University of Eastern Michigan grad, he currently serves as the managing editor at Catena Media. More importantly though, Roepken is a freelance sports journalist for the Houston Chronicle. Mainly, Roepken covers Houston Dynamo and Houston Dash soccer.

## SAM MELLINGER

Mellinger, a native of Lawrence, Kansas, started his career at the Journal-World at a very young age, covering summer baseball and high school football for the University of Kansas. After graduating from the University of Kansas, Mellinger took a position at the Kansas City Star covering high school sports. He eventually made his way up the ladder to cover Kansas City Royals baseball. Since 2010, he has served as a general sports columnist for the Star, mainly covering the Royals. His work has been honored nationally by the National Headliner Awards and Associated Press Sports Editors for columns, features, and projects.

## PAUL TENORIO

Tenorio has an extensive resume covering soccer at all levels for several publications. Currently, he is a staff writer for The Athletic covering the United States Men's Soccer Team. A University of Northwestern alum, he previously wrote for the Washington Post, Orlando Sentinel, FourFourTwo, ESPN and MLSsoccer.com.

## **Questions**

I'll ask the participants the following questions, though additional or follow-up questions might depend on the answers given:

1. How have you seen social media affect the way you report or the stories that you focus on?
2. Is there a certain angle or light you are expected to show the organization in when you create content? Are you discouraged from pursuing any stories?
3. Have you experienced trolling or backlash as a writer/reporter/editor from social media? If so, how did you deal with it?
4. What impact have you seen that sportainment has had on sports?
5. How have you seen drama and suspense in sport further engage fan interest?
6. Do you typically focus on social media follower/fan engagement? If so, which platform and why?
7. What do you believe is the future for sports reporting? Do you see this trend of reporters gravitating towards social media as opposed to more traditional forms of journalism continuing?
8. What trends do you see impacting the future of sports reporting, whether for traditional reporters or ones who work for the organizations they cover?

## References

- ABC-TV Awarded Rights To 1984 Winter Olympics. (1980).  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/sports/1980/01/25/abc-tv-awarded-rights-to-1984-winter-olympics/6536c4d5-c029-46eb-aa1c-18f9a2d3a4f7/>
- Anderson, R. J. (2021). World Series Score: Atlanta Braves win first title in 26 years after slugging past Houston Astros in Game 6. CBSSports.com. Retrieved from  
<https://www.cbssports.com/mlb/news/world-series-score-atlanta-braves-win-first-title-in-26-years-after-slugging-past-houston-astros-in-game-6/live/>

- Beta MAX. (2014, November 17). 1984 Olympic Themed Bud Light Commercial [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgX\\_VvpBOSE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgX_VvpBOSE)
- Bryant, J., Comisky, P. W., & Zillmann, D. (1977). Drama in Sports Commentary. *Journal of Communication*, 27, 140–149.
- Farrell, T. B. (1989). Media Rhetoric as Social Drama: The Winter Olympics of 1984. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6(2), 158. <https://doi-org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/10.1080/15295038909366742>
- Gaines, C., & Nudelman, M. (2017, September 15). ESPN has lost nearly 13 million subscribers in 6 years, but it is not as bad as it sounds. <https://www.businessinsider.com/espn-losing-subscribers-not-ratings-viewers-2017-9>
- Glory Road. (n.d.). <https://www.utep.edu/glory-road/the-year/index.html>
- Greenfield, C., & Williams, P. (2000). Sporting Gamble: Media Sport, Drama and Politics. *Media International Australia*, 97, 47–58.
- Hughes, A., & Wojcik, S. (2020). 10 facts about Americans and Twitter. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/02/10-facts-about-americans-and-twitter/>
- Hutchison, P. (2016). The legend of Texas Western: journalism and the epic sports spectacle that wasn't. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 33(2), 154–167. <https://doi-org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/10.1080/15295036.2016.1170173>
- James, J. D., & Ross, S. D. (2004). Comparing Sport Consumer Motivations Across Multiple Sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 13(1), 17–25.

- Johnson, M. (2021). MLB Ratings: 2021 World Series television ratings improve, still long-term concerns for baseball. Sportsnaut. Retrieved from <https://sportsnaut.com/mlb-ratings-tv-viewership-numbers/>
- Khan, M. L. (2016). Social Media engagement: What motivates user participation and consumption on YouTube? *Computers in Human Behavior*.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0747563216306513?via%3Dihub>.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S., David, P., Eastin, M. S., Tamborini, R., & Greenwood, D. (2009). Sports Spectators' Suspense: Affect and Uncertainty in Sports Entertainment. *Journal of Communication*, 59(4), 750–767. <https://doi-org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01456.x>
- Møller, V., & Genz, J. (2014). Commercial sport - Debordian spectacle or Barthesian mythology? *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*, 6(2), 257–271.  
[https://doi-org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/10.1386/cjcs.6.2.257\\_1](https://doi-org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/10.1386/cjcs.6.2.257_1)
- Nohl, A.-M. (2009). *Interview and Documentary Method: Instructions for the Research Practice* (3 ed.). Publishing house for social sciences, Wiesbaden, Germany.
- Peterson, E., & Raney, A. (2008). Reconceptualizing and Reexamining Suspense as a Predictor of Mediated Sports Enjoyment. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(4), 544–562. <https://doi-org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/10.1080/08838150802437263>
- RADOŠINSKÁ, J. (2018). On Cinderella Men and Peaceful Warriors: “Sportainment” in American Mainstream Cinema. *Communication Today*, 9(2), 20–36.
- Reimer, A. (2020). Why sports TV ratings will likely still suffer in 2021. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexreimer/2020/12/16/why-sports-tv-ratings-will-likely-still-suffer-in-2021/?sh=4101e77f2acf>.

- Richter, F. (2020, January 31). Infographic: Super Bowl Can't Hold the Candle to the Biggest Game in Soccer. <https://www.statista.com/chart/16875/super-bowl-viewership-vs-world-cup-final/>
- Schultz, J. (2014). *Glory Road (2006) and the White Savior Historical Sport Film*. *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, 42(4), 205–213. <https://doi-org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/10.1080/01956051.2014.913001>
- Stern, A. (2021). NASCAR viewership on Fox Sports not far off pre-pandemic numbers. *Sports Business Journal*.  
<https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Daily/Issues/2021/06/10/Media/Nascar-Fox.aspx>.
- Su, R., & McDowell, E. (2020, February 02). How Super Bowl ad costs have skyrocketed over the years. <https://www.businessinsider.com/super-bowl-ad-price-cost-2017-2>
- Tillery, B. and Agne, R. R., *A New Look at Sports Talk Radio and Fan Identity: The Discourse of Glory and Failure in the Paul Finebaum Radio Network*. (2011). *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association*, 1–31.
- Wanta, W. (2013). *Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Reporting and Journalists*. *Communication & Sport*.
- Young, J. (2021). 14.3 million people watched the Atlanta braves win the 2021 World Series. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/03/2021-world-series-ratings-braves-astros-game-6-draws-14point3-million.html>
- Zuckerman, H. (1972). Interviewing an Ultra-Elite. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, no. 2: 159-175.