

Sacred Spaces: Viewing Reporters within the Press Boxes at Sports Events

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A Thesis Submitted to

Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Journalism

October, 2009, Ottawa, Ontario

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-63827-9
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ISBN: 978-0-494-63827-9

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Abstract

Sports Journalism is often called the “toy department” of the news organization, an indication that it is not taken seriously as a field of study. In fact, sports journalism gets negligible attention from academics, and the press box, the “sacred space” where sports journalists gather to be professional observers, gets even less mention academically. Much of our general knowledge about the press boxes comes from interpretations from other media, especially movie makers. This thesis draws on ethnographic field work from press boxes at university sports events to show the culture and climate of sports journalists. Despite efforts to promote racial and gender equity, most press boxes are still dominated by a hegemonic culture of white males. This thesis finds that what some consider the “sacred space” might need to undergo an evolution in order to be considered valid and relevant into the future.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis adviser, Professor Christopher Waddell, for his support and encouragement, his insight and kindness in this work. My unconventional approach and divergent thinking was tempered by his breadth of knowledge and his willingness to allow me to break new ground in my exploration of this endeavour.

For their contributions and patient guidance, I must also thank Carleton University Journalism Professors Peter Johansen and Kirsten Kozolanka, both of whom helped shape my work from the beginning.

I want to thank my journalism classmates for their support and encouragement. I particularly valued the encouragement and insight provided by Alison Gzowski, Maureen Littlejohn, and Christian Molgat. Also my classmate Peter Martyn offered hospitality, kindness, leadership, and motivation.

I would likely not have made this journey without Doug Sutherland of News-Cast.com and Maureen Sparks at the University of New Brunswick, who opened doors for me everywhere and who let me put into practice my own theories.

Thank you also to my children, Elizabeth and Will, who tolerated my absences while I was pursuing this long-time dream. And I owe an infinite debt of gratitude to my wife, Janice Gange, for her unflagging support and optimism as I was working on this.

This has been a dream of mine since I was in Grade 4. It took all of you to help me reach this milestone. I thank you all.

— Mike Gange, August 2009

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Chapter 1: Exploring the Sacred Space

At the Aitken University Centre, on the campus of the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, a reporter covering a university hockey game made his way up the stairs of the 3,500 seat arena. He was heading to the press box. A university student, holding down a part-time job with campus security, examined the “press pass” hanging from a red cotton cord around the reporter’s neck. “I wish I could get up there,” said the student. “It is so sacred up there.”¹

It is interesting that the student recognized the area as “sacred space.” He implies that to work in the press box is something special, not available to the ordinary person, perhaps even a slice of heaven for those interested in sports and sports journalism. He recognizes that the working space is an important place at the university level, as it would be at a professional sports event.

While the student verbally validated the work done there, others, such as American academic Lawrence Wenner (1989), wrote that to a large segment of the population, the entire world of sports is sacred:

For theologian Michael Novak and millions of others like myself, the SportsWorld is on sacred ground and the chapel to which we come to worship is more and more a mediated one. While many fans attend sporting events each week, many millions more watch sports on television, listen on radio, and read about events in the sports pages. Those who do so are doing much more than merely finding out who won the big game or what the strategy is for the next one. We have

¹ Personal Observation: Dec 28, 2007.

chosen to celebrate sports culture, immerse ourselves in its values and share in its fruits with others.²

The average sports fan would likely never visit the press box but would have a general idea of how it looks and how it works. At most sporting venues, the press box is usually set off from the “house” or stadium. At football and hockey games, it is high above the playing surface and above the crowd, centred on the field or ice to allow the members of the media a fairly unobstructed view of the game below. At basketball games, the press box is often situated on the floor of the playing surface, just outside the sidelines and closer to the players than most of the fans could ever hope to be. In either case, a security person usually intercepts anyone who does not have permission to be there.

There is a perception that the press box has the best view of the sporting event, with perks such as free meals and drinks, and allows direct access to the athletes who are the stars of the games. This perception is not wrong, but what is not usually recognized is that the press box is also a working space, where reporters and athletes, coaches and managers are equals, and where reporters have work to do and a deadline to meet. The reporters and team representatives are considered equals there because the team officials realize the importance of the sports reporters in telling the story of the sports organization. The win or the loss of the game cannot be concealed, and the coverage of the event will lead to public interest in other such events. Frequently, athletes, coaches, and managers situated in the press box during a game are engaged in conversations by

² Wenner, *Media, Sports, and Society*, 7.

members of the media, in an effort by the media to confirm their observations of events or to explain a situation.

The press box is not open to any member of the media but only to those who are invited in, who receive accreditation and who have a purpose there. For example, although *The Daily Gleaner* newspaper of Fredericton, NB would have a staff of about twenty reporters, editors and photographers, only five of those would ever attend sports events at the Aitken University Centre on the campus of UNB. Only two reporters and occasionally an accompanying photographer from that newspaper are likely to be there at any one time. Even at that, the photographer would likely only be there for a short conference with the sports writer then would return to a position closer to the ice surface to get a better picture.³ At the Kingston *Whig-Standard*, only two of the five-person sport staff cover Queen's University football games.⁴

If sport is sacred to a large part of the population, then the press box at sporting events is indeed one of the most sacred of places for sports journalists and spectators alike. Lily Kong (1992) describes "sacred space" as a place that would be a religious enclave, such as a cathedral, a temple, or a mosque.⁵ She states that any "sacred space" would have a set of acceptable behaviours, sometimes even a codified standard of acceptable behaviours, with certain behaviours frowned upon, and indeed, considered "desecrating behaviour."⁶ Kong writes that sacred places do not exist naturally, but are assigned sanctity by people. The place of sanctity fulfils a specific function and it is a

³ Personal Observation.

⁴ Personal Observation: Oct 2007.

⁵ Kong, "The Sacred and the Secular: Exploring Contemporary Meanings and Values for Religious Buildings in Singapore," 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

place apart from the rest of the world, where those who are attending can have an idea of order and wholeness. It would radiate power, she writes, yet would also be protected. The sacred place should “draw one into a meditative mood” she states.⁷

Kong’s definition is applicable in this case, as the press box proves to be a type of “sacred space.” There are certain “acceptable behaviours” in the sports press box, most of which are implicit and understood. Only in a very few places are the rules posted in writing on the walls or directly on the work table in front of the members of the working media at the event.

The press box is designated as a place of sanctity—first by those who organize the sports events and give out accreditation to the working media. The presence of a security person who admits only those who are “allowed” emphasizes that the space is separate from the general public and protected from intruders. Second, the members of the media recognize the press box as a “sacred space,” and only go there to work. This thesis will show that this work space is treated as a special place, different from the newsrooms of any news gathering organization.

The term “working media” is often used by event organizers and journalistic practitioners alike to describe those working in the press box. The term encompasses those members of the news media who are assigned by their news organization to be covering an event. The term also includes reporters and other members of the electronic media who are not employed by “the press”—a term which applies only to the printed word.

⁷ Kong, “The Sacred and the Secular: Exploring Contemporary Meanings and Values for Religious Buildings in Singapore,” 24.

According to Kong, “sacred space” is set aside from the regular space. At sports events the press box is “set off” or apart from the fans attending the event. The work that comes out of the press box is also “set-off” from the ordinary. The task of the working media is to make an order or wholeness of the event they have seen. In fact, they “mediate” the event and interpret it for their audience. The press box is also “set off” from the ordinary newsroom work space, and has different practices. For example, in the press box, those who work for competitive organizations sit side-by-side. At times they trade gossip from their work places, while at other times they share observations and details from the game. At a sports event, it is not uncommon to hear reporters talk about who might be injured, who just scored, and how the play came about, without a fear that the observation or detail might have proprietary impact.

As Kong suggests, this “sacred space” does radiate power. The working media at a sports event have the power to “tell it like it is,” to say publicly—on the air or in print—who did their job and whose actions resulted in a loss for one of the teams. Those working in press boxes at sporting events have a power similar to those in the press boxes at political events, such as conventions, rallies, and legislatures or councils, or for that matter the press gallery that overlooks the House of Commons. Part of that power brings with it a sense of equality. Reporters are allowed, encouraged, and even expected to ask questions of athletes, coaches, and managers in order to help their audience understand the course of events. Many players or team officials have had media coaching or training and have learned to dodge these questions, but they have also learned not to adopt an adversarial position in their response. Sometimes these questions get posed in the press box—before, during, and immediately after the game—by reporters and game analysts,

and sometimes these interviews take place after the game, as the reporters pose questions in the dressing room areas.

While it is not unusual for members of the media to talk to each other as they try to make sense of an event—such as a fine play resulting in a goal, or the call of the game official or referee that changed the course of the game—it is also not unusual to see those in the press box pause pensively as they struggle to put into words their game reports after the event is over. Some reporters will sit quietly and review their game notes prior to writing, as the spectators leave the arena following the spectacle. It is a space, as Kong suggests, that promotes a meditative mood, particularly among the writers following a game. Some reporters have to file immediate post-game results to their web sites or write a blog on the events, and these urgent deadlines negate the meditative mood. However, when the time comes to write the longer piece, jocularity is set aside and the reporters carefully choose their words, even if they are under pressure to work to a deadline, which could be less than an hour after the end of the game, especially if there is any kind of a lengthy delay, perhaps from penalties or overtime.

The working media do get special treatment when they are covering a sports event, and have an unusual power: publicly commenting on the event or the game and its outcome. This creates an unusual dynamic, an interrelationship between the media, the sport, and the organizers, that Robert McChesney (1989), describes as a “symbiosis”:

Sport and the mass media enjoy a very symbiotic relationship in our society. On the one hand, the staggering popularity of sport is due, to no small extent, to the enormous amount of attention provided it by the mass media. On the other, the media are able to generate enormous

sales in both circulation and advertising based upon their extensive treatment of sport.⁸

(Although McChesney's statement was made in 1989, American writer James Michener is reported to have said in 1959 that "the symbiotic relationship between pro football and television is awesome; it really is made by the Gods."⁹)

In the recent past, the role sport plays in our society has come under increasingly intense scrutiny from academics from a variety of fields. Still, very little has been written about sports journalism, and even less has been written about the working relationship among reporters in the press box, or how reporters in the press box do their work. A large portion of a reporter's week could be spent in and around the press box, watching the game, interviewing players, coaches, and other team officials, writing the game report and filing it under the pressure of a deadline. A print reporter covering a hockey game scheduled to start at 7:00 p.m., for example, might arrive an hour or more before the game, interview several team members or the coach before the game, watch a two-hour game, and interview team members after the game, then write the game story so that it makes the 11:00 p.m. deadline for inclusion in the next day's paper. A radio reporter might arrive two hours before the game, record interviews with team members prior to the game so that these interviews might be introduced throughout the game, be actively involved in the play-by-play production for the two-hour duration of the game, and be on the air for a half-hour wrap up post-game show. Either way, this is a four to five hour block of time out of the forty-hour work week of the reporter. Football games typically

⁸ McChesney, "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," 49.

⁹ MacCambridge, *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine*, 98.

run longer than two hours, and basketball games can be shorter. A reporter covering a baseball double-header might be at the game site for eight hours or more.

Despite several studies of the newsroom as a workplace, there are very few details of how things work in the press box. While this lack of research is lamentable, the reasons for this gap are numerous. Perhaps sports journalism is truly considered the “toy department” and is not taken seriously. Perhaps sports journalists are more inclined to talk about the heroics of the game rather than about themselves. Perhaps this lack of detailed observations on the working space of the media covering sporting events is because academic researchers might feel out of place if they were to submerge themselves among sports reporters at a sporting event.

Lawrence Wenner (1989) recognized this gap in academic research about sports journalism. He suggested that academics need to pay more attention to sports. Although his writing was published nearly two decades ago, it still rings true:

Communication scholars have seemingly asked about every variant in the modern media. Studies of news and mediated politics and their influence tend to predominate. Fuelled by our concerns about children as a special audience, we have asked more than our share of questions about the relationship between media violence and aggression. We have asked many questions about soap operas, many related to gender portrayals or gratifications. We're worried about the effects of MTV, about cartoons, and certainly about commercials. Yet for the most part, sport eludes inquiry.¹⁰

¹⁰ Wenner, *Media, Sports, and Society*, 8.

In order to partly fill this gap, this thesis will focus on the workings of the sports press box, providing insight into numerous aspects that are largely unreported. An example of how this is under-reported can be found at Carleton University, which has a reputation for the strength of its journalism studies, but very few theses produced by its students deal with sports journalism. One, John J. Killingsworth's (1999) case study of *TSN*, emphasizes the political economy theory of the business behind the journalism, showing how *The Sports Network* was hugely successful beyond its initial financial projections. However, it makes no mention of how the reporters work in the studio or in the press box.¹¹

Wenner's (1989) argument that there is not enough academic literature about the world of sports journalism is valid. This is backed up by UK researcher Raymond Boyle (2006). Boyle notes, "Sports journalism is largely absent from histories of journalism in the U.K."¹² What is missing in academic literature about the journalism field is a portrayal of how reporters and other media personnel at various sporting events interact, dress, and carry themselves. The central question this thesis will address is "what is the culture of this sacred and unusual work place?" Also missing from academic literature is an analysis of racial and gender make-up among reporters in the press box. Findings from various sports press boxes will add to this body of literature.

Evidence for this thesis comes from observations made in several press boxes at football, hockey, and basketball games at Canadian universities. There are several reasons for choosing Canadian universities as the tableau for examination. First,

¹¹ Killingsworth, *The Sports Network: A Case Study in Specialty Channel Evolution 1984-1999*.

¹² Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Contexts and Issues*, 2.

universities with competitive sports teams at the varsity level are far more numerous than professional franchises. Only nine cities in Canada have professional sports franchises. Six have teams that play in the NHL (Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver). Eight have teams that play in the CFL (Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver), and only Toronto has a professional baseball team and a professional basketball team. In the Canadian Inter-University Sports league (CIS), however, every province has at least one team playing at the varsity level. Even the University of Prince Edward Island, with an enrollment of about 4,000 full- and part-time students,¹³ has a men's hockey team and a men's basketball team that are competitive nationally. St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, NS has a student population of about 4,800 full- and part-time students¹⁴ and has won national titles in men's hockey and men's basketball. The small universities compete and have done well against larger schools such as perennial hockey power University of Alberta, which has a student enrollment of 36,000¹⁵ or basketball powerhouse Carleton University, which won the national championship five times in a row (2003-2007). In Fredericton, NB, a small city of about 50,000, two university teams compete for the attention of the hockey fans. Both teams are covered by *The Daily Gleaner* staff. No city in Canada has two professional teams in the same league, let alone two that compete as ferociously as do the UNB "Varsity Reds" and the St. Thomas University "Tommies" hockey teams. With the exception of Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, every province has an intense rivalry between two universities that play

¹³ University of Prince Edward Island, "Frequently Asked Questions."

¹⁴ University information officer Laura Matthews, personal communication, May 12, 2008.

¹⁵ University of Alberta, "Facts."

in head-to-head action. And in cities such as Halifax, Fredericton, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, there are two universities that regularly meet in competition.

A second reason was pragmatic. The national championships for men's football, basketball, and hockey are held in three pre-determined sites. During the academic year 2007-08, the Canadian university's football championship (a single game) was held in Toronto, ON, the basketball championship tournament was held in Ottawa, ON, and the men's hockey finals tournament was held in Moncton, NB. This one-location game or tournament format meant the reporters would gather in the same location, focusing on the same event. It would be possible to gain admission, work in an ethnographic manner among the reporters, and observe their workplace performance without interfering with their duties.

Ethnographic research is difficult because it requires a significant investment of time. It is often undervalued because it does not produce quantitative results. American anthropologist Robert Sands, who has done first-hand ethnographic research into sporting teams and athletes, working with a university track club and a group of surf-riders in 2002, recognizes the commitment required for this kind of research. He describes ethnographic research in this way:

The main fieldwork method in ethnography is participant observation.

Ethnography is separated from other qualitative social science research methods by its emphasis on intensive, focused and time-consuming participation and observation of the life of the people being studied.¹⁶

¹⁶ Sands, *Sport Ethnography*, 21.

Sands traces the beginning of this kind of research work to that of Bronislaw Malinowski, who Sands says set the tone for ethnographic studies that followed. Sands says that Malinowski's pioneering study of the Trobriand Islanders of New Guinea in the South West Pacific, which took place from 1915 to 1918, provides a much better understanding of an exclusive society because of its detailed observations:

What Malinowski was after were the intangibles of human behaviour, such as friendships, adherence to routine and schedule, the tone of conversations that were lost through questioning or interviews that lay outside the arena of inquiry and the daily life of the cultural members.¹⁷

These are the very things this thesis will show: the friendships, the routines, the schedules, and the tone of the conversation among reporters in the press boxes at various Canadian university sporting events.

Sands recognizes that this kind of study is rare, and urges that much more of this kind of observation needs to be done to explain how groups work, and how this impacts our understanding of the job function. While he singles out anthropology, his words echo the sentiment expressed earlier by Wenner and Boyle:

Today, anthropology is one of the few social sciences that still find the study of sport beyond. Or perhaps beneath, the discipline. I can posit a few reasons. Perhaps anthropology continues to hold on to the idea that sport or physical activity, is peripheral to the real study of human behaviour which is routed through religion, economic or political systems or even language.... Even in this age of participant observation,

¹⁷ Ibid., 22.

anthropologists may shy away from studying sport, teams, and athletes because many were not themselves athletes or because they found sport to be anti-intellectual.¹⁸

Sands recognizes the difficulty of such a study, and has suggestions as to how the research must be best completed for it to be effective:

Participation is an engrossing and daunting task that involves a time-consuming effort to establish rapport with a new community and learn how to act in that community so that the ethnographer is eventually accepted as part of the social landscape. While learning how to fit in, the ethnographer must also travel in the opposite direction, achieving a removal from the everyday existence that he tries so hard to assimilate and become immersed in. The ethnographer must develop a perspective that mediates his or her cultural background and that of the new-found cultural mates.¹⁹

Field research for this thesis took place during the fall and winter of 2007-08. Because of my previous experience at Canadian university sporting events as a play-by-play reporter for University of New Brunswick hockey and basketball teams over the past four seasons, I found that being accepted by the reporters in the field was not difficult. This background knowledge and experience allowed me to get beyond the ordinary and mundane workings of the press box, and look for substantiation of issues and concerns, while still being “accepted as part of the social landscape” as Sands suggests. Especially of interest to me were such items as racial and gender diversity, boosterism, “freebies,”

¹⁸ Sands, *Sport Ethnography*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

and professional etiquette that are touched upon by researchers such as Marie Hardin (2006). I took detailed notes at CIS football games at Queen's University in Kingston, the University of Ottawa, and the championship game at the Rogers Centre in Toronto. As a comparison to what I saw at Canadian university football games, I also visited the press box in South Bend, Indiana, where the University of Notre Dame hosted the University of Southern California in one of the longest-lasting rivalries in American university football. I also took detailed notes at CIS basketball games hosted by Carleton University, the University of Ottawa, and the University of New Brunswick, as well as at the national championships in Ottawa. I went to university hockey games at Carleton University, the University of New Brunswick, and the Université de Moncton, as well as the championship tournament hosted by the Université de Moncton, and again I took detailed notes for this field study. As a comparison to Canadian hockey games, I went to view the press box in Schenectady NY, as Union College hosted Harvard University in NCAA hockey. Carleton University varsity sports events such as men's soccer and women's field hockey also allowed me to draw conclusions about how reporters work at those sports events.

Most of the public's perception of the workings of the press box comes from movies, and this thesis will compare the representation projected by Hollywood with reality. A small sample of movies has helped me examine how the movies portrayed press boxes within their story lines. The scenes of press boxes in these movies will be analyzed in Chapter 3 to see if the portrayal of the press box and its culture is accurate and fair, or laughable and exaggerated. I purposely sought out movies that included in their story lines the press boxes at football, basketball, and hockey games.

This thesis will examine the press boxes in the following format:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the topic. It will show why the press box research needs to be done, and outline why the decision was made to look at press boxes at Canadian Inter-university sports (CIS) events. It will start to fill in details of how the press boxes are both sacred and respected as working space.

Chapter 2: Research

This chapter will provide definitions of terms such as press box and culture, which are lacking in research into sports journalism. Surprisingly, at one time having a sports writer on a newspaper was seen as an innovation. The history of sports reporting will be presented, as well as observations as to why it is economically significant for the press to continue to provide press coverage of sporting events.

This chapter will also include a literature review, which includes articles that look at gender and race in the sports departments, a criticism of the way sports is presented, and a defense of the way sports journalism is handled.

Chapter 3: The Press Box as Seen by Movie Makers

This chapter will examine a small sample of movies identified as featuring “press boxes” as a part of the narrative. This chapter will see how the press box is either portrayed as a space of deference or derision. Movies often add the element of the press box to the story line as a signifier of the importance of the story, or to show how a “game” is being taken seriously by the adult world.

Chapter 4: Ethnographic Observations from Press Boxes

This chapter will describe various press boxes, and what they have in common. It will include anecdotal details describing the press boxes at the places visited for this study.

Chapter 5: Gender and Racial Diversity in Press Boxes

Articles by Marie Hardin and others suggest that gender and racial equality do not exist in most newspaper sports departments. Her general contention is that there are few females in the sports departments, and that most of the men are Caucasian. This chapter will look at the racial diversity of the sites visited to see if Hardin's research is accurate in this context.

Chapter 6: Observations and Conclusions

Following my observations at press boxes, I consider what this means to us in our research. Some conclusions and implications help us predict the directions the press needs to go in order to continue to be an effective source of sports news.

Significance of this Thesis

It is hoped that this thesis will add to the scant literature that shows how sports reporters work when they are covering events and writing from the "field," as opposed to working in the news room. It is further hoped that the press boxes at sporting events will continue to be recognized as "sacred space," but that they might also evolve in climate and culture. This thesis also points out some ways the press boxes are not entirely sacred in their operations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A comparison of the sports sections of several modern newspapers would show some universal features: that sports is set off from the other news and is often found at the back of the newspaper; big, bold headlines blaring the latest occurrences in the sports world, especially the news that relates to the team designated to be the most important locally; and all written by sports writers, whose names are often as recognizable in the community as the athletes they cover. Sports news is now so commonplace in newspapers, magazines, and websites that it seems it must have existed forever. However, there was a time when the sports pages were not designated as a separate section within newspapers. Early in the development of sports journalism, some of the writers who provided sports stories were not even journalists, let alone designated as sports journalists.

Sports journalism began in the 1860s, shortly after the American civil war, when newspaper publishers realized that their readers were interested in more than just news, and sports articles began to appear among the news items. Initially, these stories were hardly ever located in the back pages—the sports section as we know it today—but were intermingled with other news.

There are parallels between the developments of sports coverage in North America and England. According to UK researcher Raymond Boyle, the earliest significant change in sports journalism can be traced to New York City, the home of the first recognized “sportswriter”:

Henry Chadwick, hired by the *New York Herald* to cover baseball in 1862, is thought to be the first full-time newspaper sports reporter.

However, it would be another 20 years or so before Joseph Pulitzer set up the first dedicated sports department within a newspaper when he bought the New York Herald. Pulitzer viewed sports journalism as an exemplar of the “new journalism” of the time with its ready-made mass market appeal and human interest focus. Although the regular sports section as we would understand it today would not become standard in US newspapers until the 1920’s and 1930’s, the 1880’s does mark the emergence of the sports journalist as a distinct figure in the growing professional journalism field.²⁰

Robert McChesney’s essay, “Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States” (1989), gives a more complete picture of the emergence of sports journalism. McChesney notes that at one time, sports were apparently so distasteful to society that those who wrote sports stories did so under assumed names:

Sport was generally considered vulgar and disreputable among a large portion of the American reading public at the time. Hence these magazines tended toward the coverage of more respectable endeavours, like horse racing, and tread gently in their treatment of sports such as boxing, which tended to appeal to the lower classes. Magazines like *Spirit of the Times* published columns of schedules and results from race courses all over the country (Stevens, 1987). Many of those who

²⁰ Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Contexts and Issues*, 32.

wrote for the sporting press at this time did so under pseudonyms, to protect their real identities.²¹

Andrew Walker's (2006) case study of newspapers in the non-urban area of Lincolnshire, UK, from 1870 to pre-World War I, shows how the concept of sports journalism crept into newspapers outside of the major metropolitan areas. (Lincolnshire is a county in the east of England, extending along the coast of the North Sea, and contained within a region commonly known as East Midlands. It is about three hours' drive north of London, England. Lincolnshire is an agricultural area, growing wheat, barley, sugar beet and oilseed rape.)²² Walker's study is important to the understanding and appreciation of sports journalism because it illustrates the evolution of sports as a distinct area within the journalism field. It is quite likely that the developments in the provincial press in the UK occurred concurrently with those in North American rural papers:

In 1875, for instance, a typical edition of the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* (appearing twice weekly and selling for a penny) contained within its 48 columns on eight pages sections dedicated to: "Foreign intelligence"; "General intelligence"; and "London news". Lincolnshire news was scattered thinly over two pages (e.g. *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 1 January 1875).

It is then perhaps unsurprising to find that local sports news did not feature prominently in the *Lincolnshire Chronicle*. Sampling the

²¹ McChesney, "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," 51.

²² "Lincolnshire," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*.

title from the 1870s to the 1890s, rarely more than 4 per cent of the paper (two to three columns) comprised sports news.²³

Sports coverage, then, within such “country” papers, as opposed to those in the cities, was very limited. In 1893, the *Lincolnshire Echo* emerged as a rival to the *Lincolnshire Chronicle*. *The Echo* saw the significance of sport to its success, notes Walker:

Whereas the *Lincolnshire Chronicle*'s sports coverage regularly comprised about 4 per cent of its Friday editions by the 1890s (and an even smaller proportion was devoted to sport in its Saturday edition), the *Lincolnshire Echo*'s Monday edition included 20-25 per cent of sports news. From the outset, the *Lincolnshire Echo* was an evening newspaper which published four editions daily. It undercut its rival papers in price: *the Lincolnshire Echo* cost one halfpenny. Initially, its four pages contained 24 columns, though this extended to 28 columns by the first decade of the 20th century.²⁴

According to Walker, the *Echo* advertised itself as “the only daily newspaper for the county,” and it urged readers to buy it “for bright editorials; pithiness and point; and for earliest racing results.”²⁵ Just as McChesney (1989) noted of American sports writers, Walker shows that the UK sports writers often wrote under a pseudonym, particularly one

²³ Walker, “Reporting Play: The Local Newspaper and Sports Journalism c. 1870-1914,” 453.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 454.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

football (soccer) writer who wrote under the pen-name of “Free Kick.” Walker writes that sports coverage in *the Echo* came from a

variety of different types of sources from syndicated reports of league matches, the dispatches of “Free Kick”, local reporters covering matches, to voluntary contributions from those involved with the sport at grassroots level. Such voluntary reports were requested regularly at the start of each football season (*Lincolnshire Echo*, 1 September 1893). The dependence of the paper upon its readers for sporting information was, if anything, greater during the summer months. In 1893, in advance of the “cycling season”, the *Lincolnshire Echo* called for the co-operation of local cyclists and secretaries of local cycling clubs in order that the paper’s cycling columnist, “a well known amateur”, could make his “notes as interesting as possible to the wheelmen of Lincolnshire” (*Lincolnshire Echo*, 4 March 1893).

A similar plea was made by the paper 20 years later prior to the cricket season, though the tone of the request was rather different. Whereas the “Cycle jottings” columnist was grateful for contributions from local cyclists in 1893, the 1913 call for cricket information was more strident. Indeed, there was a clear expectation on the part of the *Lincolnshire Echo* that the paper would be supplied with the necessary information from local sporting officials. The *Lincolnshire Echo* demanded of all local cricket clubs that “The reports of Saturday matches should be delivered not later than first post on Monday

morning to secure insertion* a rule we shall be obliged to observe strictly” (*Lincolnshire Echo*, 3 May 1913).²⁶

Evidence of what McChesney calls the symbiosis of sports and media—the intertwining of the political-economy of sports franchises and news organizations for their mutual benefit—can also be found in Walker’s case study. He describes how a local hero became a spokesperson who endorsed a skin-care product. The player was paid for allowing his name to be used in the advertisement, the newspaper continued to cover sports for its audience, and the advertiser paid for its product to be placed in an advertisement. Walker writes,

S. Keetley, a former Lincoln City player, was used to advertise Zam-Buk, a skin cream for wounds and sores (*Lincolnshire Echo*, 7 March 1913). Underneath an illustration of Keetley and the headline “Ex-‘City’ Player and Zam-Buk”, the advertisement detailed how the product had aided Keetley’s recovery from a leg injury he suffered when playing for Lincoln City against Sheffield Wednesday in 1910. Interestingly, at the time the advertisement was displayed, Keetley was Nottingham based, both as a player and as a resident. This did not seem to diminish his attractiveness as a Lincoln City emblem, in the eyes of the advertisers at least.²⁷

Most of Walker’s examples relate to men in sports. He notes there were very few references to sporting events involving women within the pages of the papers he

²⁶ Walker, “Reporting Play: The Local Newspaper and Sports Journalism c. 1870-1914,” 457.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 458.

surveyed. This is an important observation because he illustrates a trend that continues in today's sports journalism. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, there were, no doubt, very few sporting opportunities for women compared to men. Walker shows that this was a business decision of the time. He writes, "The almost complete absence of sportswomen from the pages of the local press was also a result of the fact that the local papers' sports coverage was orientated to a male readership."²⁸

The placement of the sports news within the newspaper at this time is also significant. Walker writes that, initially, sports stories were placed in the regular news columns of the paper. However, as Lincolnshire newspapers evolved and were structured more rigidly, different sections of the paper were deliberately laid out to appeal to different readers. By the early twentieth century, the papers contained "ladies' columns," and sports news came to occupy a fixed position within the paper, a position, Walker writes, which was thereby easily ignored by women readers and conversely keenly sought out by many male readers. Invariably, sports news appeared on the penultimate page of the paper. Walker notes that even where both men and women participated in the same sport, the male competitions received more coverage:

In 1893, men's gymnastics received three times as much coverage as women's (*Lincolnshire Echo*, 3 March 1893). In the reports of local tennis tournaments, results of ladies' matches were given, but no account of these matches tended to be included whilst significant

²⁸ Walker, "Reporting Play: The Local Newspaper and Sports Journalism c. 1870-1914," 459.

attention was paid to the men's competitions (*Lincolnshire Echo*, 4 September 1908).²⁹

Walker found there were three separate phases in the evolution of sports reporting in the Lincolnshire newspapers, from the 1860s through to the beginning of the First World War. Sophisticated readership surveys would not have been available, so it was the newspaper owners or publishers who experimented with styles and lay-outs to find a more successful approach:

From the late 1880s until 1914, provincial sports reporting in Lincolnshire switched from the macro to the micro level: from attempts to offer readers extensive coverage of the newly developed national sports scene to in-depth coverage of sport in the locality. This was partly in order to ensure the local press's sports coverage complemented that provided by the national dailies and specialist sports press.³⁰

Walker's case study illuminates the evolution of sports journalism. Indeed, it points out that the writers covering sports were males, but also that there were very few, if any, writers who were designated specifically to cover sports events. The newspapers relied on community volunteers. One thing Walker does not say, but must be inferred from his case study: if there were no specific sports reporters, there were certainly no press boxes at sporting facilities.

²⁹ Walker, "Reporting Play: The Local Newspaper and Sports Journalism c. 1870-1914," 460.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 460-461.

During the same period, writes McChesney (1989), the United States went through a period of intense industrialization, immigration and urbanization. All of these contributed to a surge of interest in sports, helped greatly by the media coverage of sports. Newspaper owners knew the coverage of sport brought readers to the papers and attracted advertisers:

Newspaper circulations soared to previously unimagined heights in the 1880s and 1890s as technological innovations reduced the cost of printing while the swelling cities provided an enormous market. American capitalism was continuing to evolve and commercial advertising was becoming a primary competitive sales weapon for retail businesses. Newspaper publishing was becoming a big business and publishers were beginning to accrue nearly one-half of their revenues from advertising. Sport, with its proven capacity to attract readers, became a logical area of emphasis in this era of “yellow journalism,” a period in which the journalistic conventions of earlier times were shredded in the competitive fight for profit.³¹

Newspapers in major cities were the pioneers of sports journalism during this period, states McChesney. Other newspapers would gradually follow suit and provide extensive sports coverage. The development of the telegraph and telephone helped newspapers as these new technologies allowed coverage of events farther afield than the home newspapers could cover:

³¹ McChesney, “Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States,” 53

New York, Chicago and a handful of other major cities were the forerunners in sports journalism during this period; other cities would follow suit gradually over the following generation, depending upon their level of development of sport and sport journalism. . . . In 1883, Pulitzer established the first sports department, and prominent fights or races received front-page coverage. Most major newspapers had their own sports editors and staffs by the end of the century. In 1895, William Randolph Hearst, in the midst of his circulation war with Pulitzer, introduced the first distinct sports section in his *New York Journal*.³²

The newspapers' coverage of their hometown baseball teams fostered a civic pride. Just as Walker noted in his Lincolnshire case study, newspapers in America found it advantageous to support the local teams. Eventually, those writers covering baseball formed a national association to standardize scoring and to promote the game. Led partly by Henry Chadwick, who wrote for the *New York Herald*, and who is recognized as the first full-time sports reporter, the baseball writers said,

All sides now recognize that their interests are identical. The reporters have found in the game a thing of beauty and a source of actual employment. The game has found in the reporters its best ally and most powerful supporter. Hence the good feeling all along the line (Seymour 1960, p. 351).³³

³² McChesney, "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," 53.

³³ *Ibid.*, 54.

Legendary American sports reporter Leonard Koppett writes that the Base Ball Writers Association of America (BBWAA—a throwback to “baseball” still being recognized at that time as two words) met in December 1908 in some of its first “formalized” meetings and won assurances from the American and National League presidents that their leagues would co-operate with the new association’s goals of improving press box conditions and making scoring-rule reforms. Leonard writes,

In their constitution, they defined the objects of the BBWAA as:

1. To encourage the square deal in baseball.
2. To simplify the rules of scoring and promote uniformity in applying them.
3. To secure better facilities for reporting baseball games and better regulation of the scorer’s boxes during both the championship seasons and the World Series.
4. To bring together into a closer bond of friendship writers of baseball throughout the United States and Canada.³⁴

Newspaper owners agreed with the BBWAA, recognizing that local audiences wanted to read coverage of the local teams. By the 1920s, newspaper owners recognized also that sport had become a prime source of entertainment for Americans. At the same time, newspaper coverage of sports was further facilitated when the Associated Press wire service established a separate sports department, with a full time staff of twelve. Furthermore sports promoters and organizations were often willing to underwrite

³⁴ Koppett, *Sports Illusion, Sports Reality*, 11.

newspaper reporters' travel expenses to gain coverage; this was the standard practise in professional baseball, and newspaper owners could only see this as beneficial.³⁵

The coverage of sports in newspapers became universally recognized as important to revenue, and sports stories became an indispensable element of the daily newspaper, writes McChesney:

To understand why newspapers would turn over such a substantial portion of their pages to sport, it may be helpful to turn to a broader political economic view of American society. The 1920s was the decade that marked the complete establishment of oligopolistic, corporate capitalism as America's political economic system.³⁶

The owners' instincts about what sold papers proved correct a decade later. A 1930s survey revealed that fully 80% of all male newspaper readers read some portion of the sports page on a frequent basis (Slusser, 1952, p. 4).³⁷

According to McChesney, it was the advent of radio that helped solidify the emerging relationship between mass media and sports. Radio fuelled the imagination of the masses, and as an increasing number of listeners heard what radio could deliver, the popularity of the new medium soared. It was in the best interests of both radio manufacturers and radio station owners to promote sports coverage:

The 1920s was also a watershed decade for the sport-mass media relationship because of the emergence of radio broadcasting. In 1922,

³⁵ McChesney, "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," 56.

³⁶ Ibid., 55.

³⁷ Ibid., 56.

radio was found in only 1 of every 400 homes, but by 1929, fully one-third of American homes had radios (Spalding, 1963-64, p. 35). During the early and mid-1920s sport was capitalized upon by broadcasters to promote the acceptance of this new medium (Jhally, 1984, p.45) . . . when the Dempsey-Tunney championship (boxing) bout was to be broadcast in 1927, it was estimated that it generated sales of over \$90,000 worth of radio receivers in one New York department store alone (Betts, 1952, p. 471).³⁸

Sports broadcasting, in its early days, was as much “show business” as it was journalism, notes Ken Coleman (1973). Coleman writes that sometimes the announcer was not even at the game site.³⁹ Some radio announcers might broadcast from a radio studio, with the ongoing game details relayed to them from the field by telephone or telegraph. Other broadcasters might report on the game while seated in the stands among the crowd. Again, it is important to note that there was no mention of a press box:

Consider, for example, the announcer for WJZ who would break an ordinary kitchen match close to the mike in such a way that it sounded like a bat smacking a baseball. The same man, wearing a set of earphones, would get a description of the game over the telephone from the park. He would then describe the play over his microphone, which was conveniently placed near an open window. Just below the window, on an adjoining rooftop, was a group of hired extras who would cheer

³⁸ McChesney, “Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States,” 59.

³⁹ Coleman, *So You Want to Be a Sportscaster*.

and shout upon signal from WJZ. “The fans are going wild,” the announcer would say, hanging his mike out the window to catch the cries of the mercenaries . . .⁴⁰

Coleman notes that newspaper reporters were often called upon to report sports events on the early days of radio. For example, Grantland Rice—a *New York Herald Tribune* writer who is better known for his verse about not caring whether you won or lost but how you played the game, and for his lyrical interpretation of the 1924 football game between the University of Notre Dame and the Army Academy in which he dubbed the backfield of the Notre Dame team the “Four Horsemen” –broadcast the 1921 World Series for KDKA. Coleman notes when the early radio announcers were at a game, they would have been a curiosity:

The old radio microphones looked like a round oatmeal box. Often, the announcers broadcast directly from the grandstand, with paying customers looking on curiously at the freak talking to himself.⁴¹

The fairly new medium of radio was such a curiosity at that time that onlookers would be inquisitive, and it should again be noted, the radio broadcast originated from among the midst of the crowd because there were not separate press boxes.

Boyle (2006) supports McChesney’s argument that coverage of sports is important to the economic survival of news organizations, but he writes that while increased coverage of sports gets a larger audience, it offers fuel to the argument that such journalism is no longer about being the source of thought-provoking concerns:

⁴⁰ Coleman, *So You Want to Be a Sportscaster*, 6.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Commercially, sports journalism has always mattered to newspapers and the popular press specifically. What has changed in the last decade in the British newspaper market has been the explosion in the volume and range of sports journalism that one now finds across the media. For some, the fact that newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* now regularly can devote up to a third of editorial space to coverage of sports is another example of the dumbing down of society, with journalism heavily implicated in the process.⁴²

In Canada, there was nearly a three-fold increase in the number of newspapers published between 1874 and 1900. Canadian academic Mark Lowes writes that, as was the case in the United Kingdom and the United States, newspaper owners in Canada recognized that male readers were the audience advertisers were most interested in reaching:

Newspapers wanted to attract those readers with disposable incomes who could be swayed to purchase an advertiser's wares; consequently the core market for popular daily newspapers became male wage earners and businessmen. To help advertisers reach male readers, publishers catered to perceived males' tastes in their coverage of politics, business and labour issues and above all sports. At *La Presse* in Montreal for instance the proportion of total news space devoted to political opinions fell from about 14 percent to less than 4 percent between 1885 and 1914, while space devoted to sports and leisure rose

⁴² Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Contexts and Issues*, 2.

from 5 percent to over 15 percent. Likewise in the United States, the sports pages had grown into the sports section by the late 1920s containing much of the same information found in today's newspapers.⁴³

It is interesting to note that the amount of space devoted to sports coverage in newspapers grew throughout most of the twentieth century, while the amount of newspaper space dedicated to political coverage diminished. Lowes points out that this was a trend that continued throughout most of the mid-twentieth century:

Lever and Wheeler's study of the *Chicago Tribune* found that sports coverage became an increasingly significant part of that paper between 1900 and 1975. Sports coverage made up 9 percent of the total newsprint in 1900 and 17 percent in 1975, with steady increments for each quarter century in between.⁴⁴

Sports journalism today is frequently denigrated for its lack of substance, for the poor quality of its coverage and for its lack of analysis. However, Boyle notes that it can also be the very tool needed to promote discussion on issues important to society. Sports journalism should be taken more seriously, he writes, as it can be implicated in the construction of various sporting discourses that often connect with wider social issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and national identity formation:

If journalism is about disseminating information and facilitating discussion on a range of social, political economic and cultural issues

⁴³ Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages: Work Routines, Professional Ideologies, and the Manufacture of Sports News*, 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

pertinent to society, then sports, however some academics may dislike it, is part of that mix. At times sport can be trivial and unimportant, at times a symbolically significant cultural form that is an indicator of wider social and cultural forces in society.⁴⁵

Boyle points out that there is a lot to learn from sports journalism and about sports journalism. The field is a bit of a paradox, he admits. In the hierarchy of professional journalism, sports journalism has been traditionally viewed disparagingly as the “toy department,” an area of easy living, sloppy journalism, and soft news. Yet, he argues, because of its power to reach such a huge audience, sports journalism is an area that deserves even more attention:

Thus within journalism studies research, sports journalism has largely been under-researched. As Campbell (2004:213) argued “In Britain, sports journalism is both literally and figuratively on the back pages in discussion on journalism.”⁴⁶

Australian researcher David Rowe (2007) also supports the idea that sports journalism needs more research to gain credibility and to escape from the derisive label “the toy department of the news media,” that is, in a place dedicated to fun and frivolity, rather than to the serious functions of the fourth estate (Rowe, 2004).⁴⁷ Rowe points out that Howard Cosell, the late American sports journalist credited with inventing the expression, in fact said that “sports is the toy department of human life,” and so sports journalism became the toy department of the news media by association with the object

⁴⁵ Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Contexts and Issues*, 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Rowe, “Sports Journalism: Still the ‘Toy Department’ of the News Media?” 385.

of its coverage.⁴⁸ But in spite (and because) of the cuteness of the label, Rowe and others posit that sports journalism should not be exempt from scrutiny regarding conventional professional criteria within the news business.⁴⁹ Rowe also suggests that the criticisms of sports journalism can be equally applied to other journalistic endeavours—“such as travel, information technology, fashion, or television, for example—and more prestigious journalistic ‘beats’ like politics and business contain their fair share of self-serving, innocuous, even vacuous discourse (Franklin, 1997).”⁵⁰ Still, he writes, this does not diminish the importance of looking at sports journalism as a field of serious study:

Sports journalism, then, cannot be quarantined from the requirements of critical investigation because of its popular cultural object. The debate concerning journalism and popular culture is of long standing, and has tended to revolve, at least until comparatively recently, around a binary distinction between seriousness and quality on one side, and superficiality and trivia (sometimes typified as ‘tabloid’) on the other (Dahlgren and Sparks, 1992; Lumby, 1999; Sparks and Tulloch, 2000). These are not only concerns for the press, but also apply to broadcast journalism (Bromley, 2001; Born, 2005) and, increasingly, online journalism (Pavlik, 2001).⁵¹

As Rowe analyzes the current state of sports journalism, he recognizes that, on the one hand, sports coverage is being used to attract readers because of the profit motive of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 386.

⁴⁹ Andrews, *Sports Journalism: A Practical Introduction*; Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Contexts and Issues*.

⁵⁰ Rowe, “Sports Journalism: Still the ‘Toy Department’ of the News Media?” 386.

⁵¹ Ibid.

the owners, and, on the other hand, sports writing needs to look at deeper issues that affect society:

The sports beat occupies a difficult position in the news media. It is economically important in drawing readers (especially male) to general news publications, and so has the authority of its own popularity. Yet its practice is governed by ingrained occupational assumptions about what “works” for this readership, drawing it away from the problems, issues and topics that permeate the social world to which sport is intimately connected. In doing so, it seeks reinforcement and affirmation from the largely closed circle of sources that creates the insular world of sport in the first place.⁵²

In his examination of how sports journalism needs to evolve, Rowe looked at data from the International Sports Press Survey (2005), a huge international survey of sports journalism that covered ten countries, more than 10,000 sports articles, and 37 newspapers from Australia, Austria, Denmark, England, Germany, Norway, Romania, Scotland, Switzerland, and the USA. The survey examined both the influence and the quality of the daily sports press. Findings in this survey were largely unfavourable to sports editors and journalists, describing the sports press as the “world’s best advertising agency.”⁵³

As did McChesney (1989) and Boyle (2006), the International Sports Press Survey recognized the potential and power of the world of sports and sports journalism, calling it “a global business partnership between the sports industry and the sports press.”

⁵² Rowe, “Sports Journalism: Still the ‘Toy Department’ of the News Media?” 400.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 387.

The introduction to the survey reported on “an industry that excites and involves young and old all over the world and in Europe has an estimated turnover of 165 billion Euros (1.6 per cent of Europe’s total GNP) and a turnover of 213 billion dollars in the US—annually.” The survey findings also reported,

The sports business industry is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the United States. Our annual survey of the size of the industry estimated the sports business industry last year at 213 \$ billion [*sic*]. It is far more than twice the size of the U.S. auto industry and seven times the size of the movie industry. And, the findings report “Sport is one of the fastest growing branches of industry of all.”⁵⁴

However, overall, the survey condemns the present state of sports journalism everywhere. The report says the findings do not “matter whether the newspaper is based in Washington, Bergen, Vienna or Bukarest [*sic*].”⁵⁵ Sports journalism is almost always the same, according to the report, focused on too narrow a vision of journalism. Sports reporters, it seems, are unwilling to dig out new angles and are constantly looking for the glamorous aspects of sports and not the deeper issues that need to be examined. The report does not say what some of the deeper issues are, but clearly these might include racial or gender equality, drug use, and fair play, stories that would not be obvious just by covering the sports events:

The sports pages in daily newspapers are dominated by the particular types of sport, sports stars and international events which create the

⁵⁴ International Sports Press Survey, “The World’s Best Advertising Agency: The Sports Press.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

biggest turnovers on parameters such as advertising, sponsorship, numbers of television viewers and spectators in the stadium.

Conversely, the sports press has great difficulties reporting anything that takes place outside the angle of television cameras and after the stadium spotlights have been turned off.⁵⁶

The report quotes Dante Chinni, a senior researcher with the Center for Excellence in Journalism (which is affiliated with the PEW Research Center in Washington, DC) who says that sport journalism is largely reactive and allows others to set the agenda. Chinni further condemns sports journalists, saying “there is little doubt that sports journalists act as pr-agents.”⁵⁷

The International Sports Press Survey findings report that despite the aforementioned indicators of economic successes of the sports world, it is extremely rare to find articles that dig deeper into the financial realms of the world of sports. The survey found only six percent of the articles about sport in daily newspapers look at the economic and financial aspects of sport, and a mere 0.5 percent of the stories in the sports pages focus on the interests in gambling, bookmaking, and betting.⁵⁸

Other findings show that reporters most often focus on game results: 58 percent of the articles on the sports pages deal with current events—such as the match yesterday or the expected line-up this evening. There is a significant lack of investigation into how sport gets its funding: “Approximately one article in 30 includes political aspects of sport.

⁵⁶ International Sports Press Survey, “The World’s Best Advertising Agency: The Sports Press,” 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1.

Only one article in 100 deals with public funding of sport, and only one article in 20 deals with the commercial aspects of sport.”⁵⁹

Another criticism in the report is that too many of the stories are male centric: “Men are the focus of 86 per cent of all sports coverage.” The report explains that part of the problem might be that there are not enough females working in sports journalism: “Only one in 20 sports articles is written by a female journalist. Norway is also in this area the best in the world with women as subjects in one out of five articles and a female by-line over one out of eight articles.”⁶⁰

According to Lowes (1999), Canadian academic Joe Scanlon found very similar results in his study of the Canadian newspaper industry:

Joe Scanlon’s pioneering content analysis work on the sports pages of thirty Canadian daily newspapers revealed that sports copy consists of largely male-dominated professional sports. A staggering 86.9 percent of all news items studied could be classified as male; only 5.5 percent were clearly female (the rest were with both or not classifiable.)

Moreover, Scanlon reports that sports copy was heavily biased towards professional as opposed to amateur sport. During the three month study period, almost two-thirds of the copy (64.9 per cent) was about professional sports while only 26.8 percent focused on amateur sports.⁶¹

⁵⁹ International Sports Press Survey, “The World’s Best Advertising Agency: The Sports Press,” 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages: Work Routines, Professional Ideologies, and the Manufacture of Sports News*, 19.

American researcher Marie Hardin has written many articles about sports journalism. In a 2006 article, she and Erin Whiteside say that sports journalism has to change to better reflect society and social trends. Part of their complaint is that sports journalism as a field does not include enough racial diversity or gender equality. They point out,

In 1978 the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) outlined a mission to increase diversity in its newsrooms by the year 2000. The plan called for newspapers to match the percentage of minorities in their communities with the percentage of minorities working in their newsrooms. By the late 1990s it was clear that the goal was not going to be met, and the ASNE revised its target date to 2025.

Such a mission may be characterized as part of the newspaper industry's guiding ethic of social responsibility, which includes the charge to be pluralist and to reflect the diversity in the wider culture in order to more realistically and fairly report news.⁶²

Hardin and Whiteside write that “despite the dialogue in support of newsroom diversity, newspapers continue to employ a mostly white, mostly male workforce.”⁶³ And they say, the lack of racial diversity is most obvious in the op-ed and sports departments:

Anecdotal evidence has also suggested that racial minorities are underemployed in sports. As of March 2005, only five out of 1,456

⁶² Hardin and Whiteside, “Fewer Women, Minorities Work in Sports Departments,” 38-39.

⁶³ Ibid.

daily newspapers employed black sports editors, according to a column in *Editor & Publisher*.⁶⁴

Hardin and Whiteside also note that women are under-employed in newsrooms. They say that nearly 38 percent of newspaper staffers were women, except in the editorial and the sports departments.⁶⁵ More of this discussion will follow in Chapter 5.

The International Sports Press Survey (2005), Rowe (2007), and Hardin and Whiteside (2006) are among the voices critical of the gender imbalance in sports stories and among sports reporters. Closer to home, a Canadian study of the 1994 Olympic Winter Games coverage, done for Sport Canada, shows this gender imbalance continues in sports coverage, both among stories told and by the story tellers.⁶⁶ This research documents the portrayal of women and men in Canadian coverage of the 1994 Lillehammer Olympic Games. The major focus is on CTV's network coverage, but extends to coverage and to reports on the Olympics in regular news and sportscasts on CBLT, a CBC station in Toronto, and CFTO, a Toronto area CTV station.

Some of the findings show a clearly gender bias:

- If television coverage reflected the distribution of medal events, 41 percent of broadcast time would have gone to women's events, 56% to men's events and 3% to the two mixed skating events. In fact, men's events received considerably more coverage than this (64%), and women's events received less (26%).

⁶⁴ Hardin and Whiteside, "Fewer Women, Minorities Work in Sports Departments," 40.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Spears, George, and Kasia Seydegart. *Gender Portrayal in Television Coverage of the 1994 Olympic Games*.

- In all, 806 athletes, spectators and others were interviewed. Fewer women than men were interviewed. 32 percent of all interviews were with women and 68 percent were with men. In addition, interviews with women were shorter than those with men. As a result, 27 percent of all interview time went to women and 73 percent to men.
- Across the entire 148 hours of Olympic coverage analysed, CTV staff and commentators appeared in more than 1800 program segments. In 70 percent of these, only men were present. In 9 percent, only women were present, and in 21 percent, both men and women were present.
- “Voiceovers” are anonymous voices supplying narration over video of various sorts; 17 percent of these used female voices and 83 percent used male voices.

In a 2005 article, Hardin looks at the ethical issue of “boosterism” and “freebies” in sports journalism, which, she writes, compromise journalistic integrity:

“Boosterism” may occur when reporters are fervent sports fans or cultivate tight relationships with sources to secure stories. One sports reporting text states, “The question is logical: How can a reporter objectively and accurately report on a team when the reporter is practically part of it?” Sports editors and critics have expressed concern over such bias.⁶⁷

Not much seems to have changed since the early days of sports journalism, when the reporters’ expenses were covered by the baseball team. Hardin (2005) notes that

⁶⁷ Hardin, “Survey Finds Boosterisms, Freebies Remain Problem for Newspaper Sports Departments,” 67.

“freebies” include free meals, travel, and team memorabilia. She says, “Media ethicists agree that acceptance of freebies compromises objectivity, or, at the very least, presents the appearance of such. APSE guidelines advocate a ‘pay your own way’ standard for sports reporters.”⁶⁸

For her article, Hardin surveyed 285 newspapers, finding that most editors were male (97.5 percent) and white (96 percent). Slightly more than half of the editors (56 percent) said their staffs follow an ethical code. Ninety percent also believed that the sports department code should be the same as that used by the newsroom. Sports departments at small-circulation dailies (less than 50,000) were less likely to use a code than were larger papers, Hardin found.

On the question of “freebies,” Hardin’s survey asked sports editors whether they agreed with the statement, “Receiving free tickets, travel or tokens does not affect the objectivity of a sports reporter.” More than half (53 percent) disagreed with this statement, and 43 percent agreed. Four percent provided a “don’t know/not sure” response. On the subject of boosterism, editors were asked to indicate agreement with the idea that sports coverage “should boost home teams.” Fifty-nine percent disagreed and 39 percent agreed. Two percent provided a “don’t know/not sure” response. Thus, the results of this survey, where 43 percent of editors do not believe objectivity is compromised by perks and 39 percent believe sports pages should cheer home teams, indicate a disconnect between what many editors say they want and what they actually believe.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Hardin, “Survey Finds Boosterisms, Freebies Remain Problem for Newspaper Sports Departments,” 67.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 76.

It is clear that an examination of sports journalism is not going to be easy. McChesney's (1989) comments that sports writing was originally considered vulgar and disreputable and the comments attributed to Howard Cosell, that sports is the "toy department," both show that the general public and those practitioners in the field do not consider sports journalism to be a serious pursuit. But Rowe (2007) is correct in saying that sports journalism cannot be quarantined from investigations that illuminate journalism as a whole, investigations that will help to develop sports journalism into an area of serious study. The International Sports Press Survey (2005) calls sports journalism "the world's best advertising agency." Indeed, it can be.

Seated in the press box as either a broadcaster or merely an observer, I came to witness that a two-hour broadcast is certainly a two-hour endorsement of the ideal of university sports. Certainly a university education is a high ideal, a way of life, but it is not the only way to be successful. Some athletes achieve their goals without attending university, but sports broadcasts of university games make frequent mention of the degree a student is pursuing. I do not think this is a conscious decision by the broadcasters to promote an ideology, but rather to show the character and interests of the player.

Walker (2006) writes about the discrepancy between the coverage provided for male sporting events and female sporting events. This was the situation in the 1870's and is still the situation today. My observation is that the press box is full for football, basketball, and hockey games for male participants and fairly well empty for female participants. Coaches and team managers of female sports are still asked to call in their results to the local media, as was the situation in Walker's case study. In defence of this, I

turn again to my observations of the Fredericton *Daily Gleaner*, which employs four full-time sports reporters and one part-time reporter. On a daily basis, the *Daily Gleaner* has two people in the news room, covering the desk, working on page lay-outs, and trying to write their own pursuits. The reporters are assigned to cover the events of most interest to their readers, and this generally is male sports. Fredericton is home to two universities, two high schools, two midget hockey teams, and senior men's teams that compete at the interprovincial level in hockey, rugby, and baseball. At least one team from each of these organizations has won regional championships or national titles. The sports department has to decide which events will be covered with the limited staff available at any time. I believe the coverage is based more on logistical assignment of staff than on blatant sexism.

Sports writing holds an important place in our culture, and those working in the press boxes at sporting events are considered to be in the most sacred of places, as far as sports fans are concerned. This "sacred space" has evolved since sports writers began some 150 years ago, at one point even serving as the raw material for a mediated construction of reality, allowing "reporters" in a studio far from the original event to add sound effects and storylines that might have been more entertainment than reporting. Some of those who see the field of journalism as a reflection of society would like to see the culture of the press box continue to evolve. How the press box has come to be such an important part of our culture can be traced to the few times members of the general public are given a glimpse of the "sacred space." Movies, as we will see in the next chapter, often show us press boxes as the source of authority on sports, or use the press box to add authenticity and legitimacy to a sporting event.

Chapter 3: How Movies View the Press Box

Hollywood films can be either a reflection of our society or a fantasy of what we could be or seem to be. Successful Hollywood films do an excellent job of making heroes out of ordinary citizens, showing their efforts to be superhuman in the face of insurmountable odds. This can be especially so in films about sports. Since their inception, movies have served as a diversion, an escape from reality, and tales of sports heroes can be a wonderful change from the mundane. Hollywood's storytelling ability has constantly improved, aided by advances in technology and the emergence of talented directors who have learned to be better storytellers. American academics Demetrius Pearson et al. (2003) write that social and technological changes shaped American society during the twentieth century, and they note that this change has been especially reflected in films about sports:

First, the broad forces of industrialization and urbanization have shifted the attentions of Americans from those of an agricultural, rural, and individual orientation to those of an industrial, urban, and collective and/or bureaucratic perspective. Hence, popular 19th-century sports such as rowing and horse racing have given way to football and boxing, and these in turn have had to increasingly share their resources with basketball and many other rapidly growing sports. Second, social changes and shifts associated with "modernization" during this century, especially during and after the years of World War II and the 1960s, have produced greater equality for women and racial minorities and thus greater representation in sports. Finally, changes in the media

(print and visual) have been accompanied by shifts in media investigations and depictions. The era of the hero and the relentless pursuits of modern investigative journalism are associated with cynicism and a decline in idealization and production of icons and heroes in American culture.⁷⁰

Sports stories would seem to be a natural area that could be explored in Hollywood's "bigger-than-life" storytelling. In stories about sports, there is always conflict in one of the three classic literary interpretations: human vs. human, human vs. nature, human vs. him- or herself. Sports stories also typically have readily identifiable themes involving heroes and villains, underdogs, David vs. Goliath, or the "grit" of character that overcomes some seemingly impervious obstacle. Sometimes this "grit" is a heroic effort by an individual and sometimes it is the chemistry of a team that comes together to defeat the opposition. It would be an easy-to-use formula, and one might expect more feature films from Hollywood that offer sports themes. Pearson et al. (2003) found that Hollywood had produced 590 sport films since the advent of movies with sound from about 1930 through to 1995.⁷¹ In the sixty-five year history of sound films, then, fewer than ten films per year on average were made about the sports world by Hollywood. (As a comparison, Hollywood releases an average of about 500 motion pictures annually⁷²):

This consisted of 165 films during the period known as sport's "golden era". There was a radical decline from this point to numbers in the

⁷⁰ Pearson, Curtis, Haney, and Zhang, "Sport Films: Social Dimensions Over Time, 1930-1995," 145.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁷² Motion Picture Association of America, *Theatre Market Statistics*.

1980s and 1990s during the 1940s, 1950s, 1970s, and 1980s. The 1960s, the antiwar, antihero, pro-civil rights era, produced the fewest films, 43, of any of the decades in the 66-year time frame of our study.⁷³

Pearson et al. found that the most popular sport in film was boxing, which made up nearly one quarter of all sports films. The next three were football, auto racing, and baseball. They note that basketball is a latecomer to sport films but was the subject of twenty of the total twenty-seven sport films made between 1970 and 1995. Others included horse racing, wrestling, golf, hockey, the Olympics, skiing, polo, tennis, motorcycling, cycling, running, ice skating, roller skating, soccer, bodybuilding, and volleyball.⁷⁴

Pearson et al. echo the idea put forward by McChesney (1989) that sports and the media co-exist symbiotically; however, they apply these mutual benefits more specifically to the strong connection between sports and movies:

In American society organized sport has been a major social thread and, in some ways, an institution for more than a century. Yet, the marriage between film and sport has enabled these two entertainment options to capitalize on one another. Betts (1974) asserted that by the 1890s, motion picture companies had already begun to capitalize on professional sport. As this occurred, motion pictures began to rival conventional photography in spreading the gospel of sports (Betts,

⁷³ Pearson, Curtis, Haney, and Zhang, "Sport Films: Social Dimensions Over Time, 1930-1995," 150.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

1974). This relationship was acknowledged by Bergan (1982), who stated that both sports and movies prospered during the depression years. Sport films did well also.⁷⁵

Cinema can be a significant cultural influence, and as mentioned earlier, a reflection of what we are. Pearson et al. support the idea that films can be an important tool to inspect our society and way of life:

Although films have a penchant for stretching the truth through “poetic license” and are frequently tweaked for aesthetic and/or entertainment value, they offer an invaluable medium for examining American culture.⁷⁶

However, despite the roughly 500 Hollywood releases annually, and the 590 films made about sports from 1930 to 1995 identified by Pearson et al., only a small number stand out as examples of sports stories that use sports journalists as a way of advancing the narrative. Very few show the conditions of the working press box, or the reporters in their element as observers and commentators on society. Hollywood’s depiction of sports reporters ranges from characters to be respected to caricatures to be belittled, from someone worthy of deference to someone easily lampooned.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine a small sample of Hollywood movies about sports to determine how the press box is portrayed in some Hollywood films, and to see if this is a reflection of the reality found in my ethnographic field work, which follows in the next chapter. Specific attention is paid to those films that presented

⁷⁵ Pearson, Curtis, Haney, and Zhang, “Sport Films: Social Dimensions Over Time, 1930-1995,” 146.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

football, basketball, and hockey games, because those kinds of sporting events are the subject of the field work for this thesis. Two others were added that did not deal with any of those three sports to see if reporters were presented in a more or less realistic light in movies about different sports.

Movies that treat the sports reporter with deference often use the working media as a means of confirming the veracity of an event. For example, a character quotes a situation as was reported in the paper, and assumes, therefore, it must be accurate. Sometimes, the distance between the characters and the action is underlined by the delivery of the radio announcer as he relays the information from afar. These moments can add to the audience's knowledge of the events, or serve as a source of rising tension or dramatic irony. The use of the radio announcer in the *Cinderella Man* (2005), for example, shows the widespread appeal of the match, and underscores the seriousness of the contest between the boxers. The use of a radio announcer to broadcast a game played by children can add a sense of validity and seriousness to the event. A good example of this is *Hoosiers* (1986), the movie about an Indiana high school championship basketball team in the 1950's. A humorous treatment of a radio announcer in a movie can underline the comedic moment, and highlight for the audience that the team is definitely not the big-leagues and not to be taken seriously, as is the case in *Slap Shot* (1977).

It is rare for any aspect of the media to turn the lens on itself and show both the positive and negative aspects of the subject. It seems the mass media in general adopt the old maxim that "a reporter should break the news, not make the news." However, *Monday Night Mayhem* (2002), a Warner Brothers made-for-television movie of how the

television network ABC came to carry National Football League (NFL) games on Monday nights, broke from that pattern.

The movie opens with a football game broadcast in black and white on television and an unseen male provides the voice over describing the action. With no discernible accent, the announcer could be from anywhere in the United States, just as the audience watching the game is assumed to be from anywhere in the US. There is nothing particularly endearing about the announcer or the game; it is rather bland television. This underlines how ready the audience was for a change in the way football was broadcast.

If this is not enough of a metaphor, the broadcast switches to a television commercial for Alka Seltzer, the over-the-counter tablets for upset stomach, which used the animated character “Speedy” who urged the audience to experience “Plop, plop, fizz, fizz.” It can be interpreted that ABC is going to give the other US networks, NBC and CBS at that time, an upset stomach with its unveiling of Monday Night Football. According to this movie account, until this time the other networks had broadcast only those stereotypically unaccented white males, and because that is all the North American audience had experienced, even the irascible Howard Cosell is convinced that a Jewish reporter from Brooklyn would be never be accepted on prime-time television in the early 1970s.

ABC Sports Executive Roone Arledge does hire Howard Cosell. All of the commentators he puts in the press box, at the beginning, are white males. That continues to be the status quo as we see that white males control the broadcasting and business world. During a game scene, the movie does show a white woman—a production assistant—in the press box, but it is apparent she is a powerless go-between, delivering

messages from the directors and producers of the show, who are downstairs in the broadcast control truck, to the on-air talent located up in the press box.

One scene in the movie shows Boone Arledge explaining his vision of how ABC Television can outperform CBS or NBC, using nine cameras on field instead of only four or five. From the football and basketball games I have seen this year, Arledge's innovation is certainly today's industry standard. Broadcasts of university football games definitely have that many cameras, and basketball games often use five cameras, even if it is a broadcast carried by the volunteer-run community cable TV channels.

The movie shows newspaper reporters to be all white males, and they are generally dressed in shirts, ties, and suit jackets. Those not wearing a neck tie have an open necked dress shirt under a suit jacket. This may have been an accurate portrayal of that time. Present day observations, however, would rarely find reporters in suit jackets. Current observations would also find that there are more women in sports journalism. Also, those reporters covering sports events—males and females—dress more casually today than they are portrayed in this movie.

The movie also shows the egotistical conflicts among the on-air talent. The former athletes-turned commentators are shown to be at odds with the intellectual Howard Cosell, sometimes with their egos clashing unprofessionally on the air during a broadcast. At times, Cosell ranted at the inclusion of former athletes in the press box, calling it "jockocracy," a term he invented.⁷⁷ There is definitely an ego-driven nature to those in the press box. Sometimes it appears as an inter-organizational rivalry that can be a point of friction, and at times it is a clash caused by ego-driven personalities. It is, after

⁷⁷ O'Neil, *The Game behind the Game: High Stakes, High Pressure in Television Sports*, 57.

all, a profession for people who choose to be in “show business.” And the conflicts as accurately portrayed by the movie can be a minefield that requires careful negotiation.

Broadcasting gaffes are also a frequent occurrence in real life and in this movie. At one point, Cosell describes one of the running backs, an African American, as a “monkey.” In real life, this remark caused a huge uproar, with civil rights groups going on the attack and the ABC Network was forced to defend Cosell. I have not seen this kind of insensitivity in the press box, intentionally or inadvertently. In fact, among reporters I observed, there is sensitivity to remarks that may be taken to be racially intolerant. For example, at one game I recall, UPEI’s Joel Ward, a black athlete, was playing hockey against UNB. One of the reporters asked, “Is he a black guy?” Someone else answered, “Yeah, so?”

One of the neglected aspects of *Monday Night Mayhem* is the absence of press passes. No one in the broadcast booth is wearing any form of media credentials. My experience is that, if they are worn around the neck on a lanyard, those press passes rarely come off, with the general exception of the on-camera talent. If the press passes are stuck on dress shirts with an adhesive or tucked in a shirt or coat pocket, that is where they are at the end of the game too. Without doubt, a fairly powerless production assistant would not be likely to get rid of her press pass, under any circumstances. This tiny detail illuminates how the idea of the press box as a sacred space has continued to evolve.

One aspect of *Monday Night Mayhem* certainly rings true from my observations. In the movie, network public relations personnel arrange for two newspaper reporters to sit with crew in the truck that serves as master control for the broadcast. My experience is

that this is a frequent occurrence, as public relations people jump on any opportunity to arrange observations by media people that will paint the organization in a better light.

I also found the evolution of the technology to be accurate. As a reporter in the 1970s, I too kept my usually hand-held microphone on a cord around my neck so my hands could be free. In the present day, nearly every broadcast organization can afford better technology that has microphones and earpieces in a combined headset.

In this movie, there are also traces of accuracy that are reflected in the academic research. McChesney's observations of the symbiosis between sports and media is underscored in a conversation between National Football League (NFL) president Pete Rozelle, who squeezes ABC for double the broadcast fee, pointing out that while the NFL has benefited from the broadcasts, ABC TV has profited from the content provided by the NFL.

In another instance in the movie, Howard Cosell says the sports department of ABC is like working in the "toy department." This is also found in Rowe (2007): "Sports journalists and others, both in agreement and protest, often refer to the jibe that sports journalism is the 'toy department of the news media . . .'"⁷⁸ Rowe again makes reference to this on the next page of his article, saying,

Howard Cosell, the late American sports journalist credited with inventing the expression, in fact said that "sports is the toy department of human life" (O'Brien, 2007) and so sports journalism became the

⁷⁸ Rowe, "Sports Journalism: Still the 'Toy Department' of the News Media?" 385.

toy department of the news media by association with the object of its coverage.⁷⁹

I have read this story in other sources and always interpreted this as Cosell's unfulfilled ambition to be taken seriously, to be a "news" reporter, not someone who worked only in sports. Rowe's quotation may be interpreted as suggesting that Cosell wanted to report on more than just games, perhaps moving into more journalistic pieces that showed some of the controversial side, the good things and the not so good things, of the sports world.

At the end of this movie, the producers show some respect for the reporters, as the actors who played those roles are listed in the closing credits. Clearly if one is going to tell a story about reporters, one should give them credits at the end of the story. From watching these movies, this is not always the case.

The Longest Yard (2005), released by Paramount Pictures and Columbia Pictures, is the unlikely story of a group of convicts playing football against their guards. It is an improbable event, and it is doubtful that such a game would get coverage on ESPN 2, even if the sports content-driven network was short of broadcast possibilities. Yet in this movie, ESPN is used to give the movie some credibility and to help the audience get beyond the implausibility of the event. This is a variation of McChesney's symbiotic relationship. In this case, ESPN benefits from having its name and brand used as an authoritative voice to comment on a sports event, but it is not the sports business, per se, that benefits but rather the two companies, Paramount and Columbia, which benefit from the partnership.

⁷⁹ Rowe, "Sports Journalism: Still the 'Toy Department' of the News Media?" 386.

Half way through the comedy, ESPN announcer Chris Berman appears as himself. He is a white male with no discernible accent and is dressed in a shirt and tie, despite the fact that the game is shot in the hot Texas sunshine. Berman becomes the voice of authority, telling the audience (in the movie house and supposedly at home watching on ESPN 2) of the inauspicious opening of the football game. "This one looks like it could be over early," he says. Later his comments take on both personal observation and professional curiosity. "That is the first sign of life from cons," he says. At a vicious tackle, he adds, "That is like being tackled by a Coke machine with legs." And following a rugby-style toss-around of the football, he says, "Shades of Cal-Stanford." While some might see the commentary by Berman as being less than objective, Koppett (1981) shows that this commentary is different in sports journalism than in news writing: "Being objective means not letting your preferences distort the accuracy of your account, to whatever extent you can be aware of distortion."⁸⁰

Then comes an inside joke, probably caught only by those with the knowledge of the Cosell comment, which is illustrated in the previously mentioned *Monday Night Mayhem*. "Look at that little Meggat run," says Berman. I think only hard-core sports fans would have knowledge of the Cosell monkey fiasco, and the purpose of this quip is not to be used as a throwaway idea, but to further connect with sports fans, as if to say, "look how we got around this one."

Shots of the press box show three white males, two of whom are in golf shirts, and one in a suit jacket and open necked shirt. As with other movies, the play-by-play is ahead of the action, serving to keep the audience focused on what is happening. In this

⁸⁰ Koppett, *Sports Illusion, Sports Reality*, 103.

way, the play-by-play becomes a narrative of its own, a subtext intended for the audience to absorb and accept as the voice of authority. And at the end of the game, as partly social commentary and partly professional observation, Berman says, “There you have it. A bunch of ruthless criminals have beaten the men who uphold our justice system.”

Paramount and Columbia Pictures list six sports writers in the credits at the end of movie, at least giving credit to those who are seen to be validating the game by commenting on it or writing about the outcome.

In the Walt Disney Pictures release of the basketball movie *Glory Road* (2006), the use of media coverage of the team and its winning season takes on a more significant role than shown in previously mentioned films. Very early in the movie, one of the players creates his own play-by-play of himself scoring in a winning game, underlining for the audience the importance media will play in this movie. The film is based on a true story and is inspired by the book of the same name by Don Haskins, who coached the Texas Western College Miners (later renamed the University of Texas at El Paso) to an NCAA Division I championship season in 1966. Although the film won the ESPN award for Best Sports Movie of 2006, it was released only on DVD and was not shown in cinemas. It has been played repeatedly on television, however.

There are elements in the film that duplicate my ethnographic observations and field work. Throughout the movie, the reporters covering basketball are seated right beside the court, along the floor lines near the centre of the court. This is one of the distinctions in how basketball is covered differently from other sports. The final game, broadcast by NBC TV, shows the broadcast crew to be all white males, aged in their forties or fifties. They are conservatively dressed, with one camera shot of a reporter in a

white shirt with a burgundy tie and a houndstooth jacket. At the media table, the reporters are all working on portable typewriters. This is worth mentioning because it is likely a historical interpretation of how society used to dress. Today's reporters would be much more casual, dressed in golf shirts or sportswear apparel. Almost every reporter today would also have a laptop computer.

Despite the realistic touches, some parts of the movie are a bit farfetched. For example, prior to the final game, the two coaches are seated side-by-side in a press conference. As the reporters ask questions, the testiness between the coaches grows into outright annoyance. It is unlikely that such a confrontation would be allowed by the league or tolerated by the coaches. This makes for great movie drama, but would be impossible to control for the organizers. Today's finals would have the coaches appear separately at the interview table, but that would also be a post-game situation. I have never seen opposing coaches meet the media before a big game; certainly they would not sit side by side.

In this movie, the voice over by the radio announcer serves to add to the narration through dramatic tension, but as can only happen in Hollywood movies, the play-by-play occurs just before the dramatic action. Of course this is to underscore the importance of the action and to interpret it for the audience, but in real life the play-by-play is always after the action.

Glory Road also has the play-by-play announcer scripted as discussing the importance of the racial equality issues faced by the team of five black and five white basketball players, but it is not an issue that is shown to be addressed in the newspaper stories that cover the team's progress throughout the year. My own observations of the

work of the sports reporters in the press box would have the newspaper reporters writing about the racial issues, because they would have more space and time than the radio reporter who might have a five-minute newscast every day. At the end of the movie, the actors playing the roles of reporters are listed in the credits. I see this as an acknowledgement that the reporters do have a role in shaping the story.

My second movie selection about basketball was *Hoosiers* (1986). Released by MGM/Orion Pictures, it is the story of a Hickory High School team that wins the Indiana State Championship title in 1951, despite being very much an underdog team. Unlike many other sports stories, this one does not use the media to carry a subtext. In fact, the members of the media generally do not appear until more than an hour into the movie, when the team starts to get noticed for their efforts. It would be fair to say that this is symbolic of how the team does not get much public attention until part way into the season.

The reporters in *Hoosiers* are white males, dressed in white shirts and ties. When the team gets into the finals, a dozen reporters are there, one of whom is a black photographer. At the Indiana State High School championship game, the members of the media are shown sitting along the sidelines, as is still the custom of basketball games. Press passes are visible in most of the shots of the media, and are either clipped to the vest pockets of the reporters' suits or to their suit jackets. The tiny detail about the press passes would be fairly close to the truth, even by today's standards. I see this also as an acknowledgement that the press box is a "sacred space" where one is invited rather than entitled to admission. Having the black male as the photographer might even be fairly close to accuracy, as the man might be recognized for his technical ability and not for his

words. As my field work observations will show, even by today's standards, press boxes are still typically made up of white males.

In *Hoosiers*, dramatic tension is created through the use of the radio announcer's scripted comments. The unaccented white male says, "We may see basketball history here tonight." Then, as the game progresses, the announcer says, "A sensational comeback by Hickory." At the very end of the game, the same announcer says, "The score is tied at 40, there are 19 fateful seconds left in the game." From listening to announcers at the various games this year, I feel this is a fairly accurate portrayal of what an announcer might say at such a point in the game. It is both accurate and analytical reporting on the part of the on-air announcer. The actors playing the reporters are credited at end of film, and again I view this as an acknowledgement of the role the media play in telling the story.

Miracle (2004) is a Walt Disney Pictures release of the story of how the US Olympic hockey team went on to win the gold medal at the Lake Placid Winter Olympics in 1980. The team was viewed as the underdog until it started to win in the early rounds. Although there are some elements of poetic licence in this movie's facts, the play-by-play is taken from ABC game tapes and is voiced by play-by-play broadcaster Al Michaels and colour commentator Ken Dryden, so is quite close to reality.

Because the hockey event in the Olympics is played in a tournament fashion, post-game press conferences are held in the same rink, immediately after each game, with the coach and several players coming out to meet the media, usually the losing coach first and the winning team's representatives second. In this movie, only the American coach is brought out to meet the media, and the reporters begin to question this procedure. The

type of press conference is fairly typical of my experiences at hockey finals held in a tournament fashion. In my experience, the reporters would stand up and question the coach as to why he would not allow his players to come to the microphone in the post-game conferences, just as they did here.

The movie shows the reporters dressed in turtleneck sweaters or in shirts and ties, waving note pads as they are trying to pose questions, and conferring among their colleagues as the coach dodges the sticky questions. This too is a fairly accurate portrayal of events I have witnessed with the reporters refusing to be ignored and grumbling among themselves if that happens. Shots of the press box at the dramatic moments of this movie are also quite accurate: the reporters are busy getting details such as who scored, who assisted, and how the goal happened, while team executives who are also in the press box would be jubilant and demonstrative.

Several small inconsistencies must be mentioned here. First, the play-by-play in this movie is exactly as the goal happens, and is not a moment behind, as would be the case in real broadcasts. Secondly, in the runway heading to the ice, there are many photographers who are busy shooting pictures of the team leaving the dressing room. My own experience shows there would be far fewer photographers on the scene and they would be further out of the runway, using the brighter lights of the arena to aid in the lighting of their pictures. The drama of the moment is not often caught in pictures before the game.

The movie credits list only seven reporters, but at times there were many more portrayed in this movie. The reporters portrayed here are almost universally white males.

Slap Shot (1977) by Universal Pictures is both a comedic treatment of a hockey team that “goons” it up to win and draw in audiences and a lampooning of the shallow hockey announcer who broadcasts the team. The opening shots of the film show white reporter Jim Craig, a man in his forties, interviewing one of the hockey players. Craig is dressed in a shirt, tie, and loud jacket, and an obvious toupee. Within minutes we realize he is a buffoon as he asks questions that are supposed to illustrate the differences between slashing and high sticking. Watching this humorous scene, I was also forced to wonder how the fans in this particular rink can be so rabid, so bloodthirsty, and so knowledgeable about hockey, and yet the media voice of the team does not know one of the key differences in penalties.

We hear from Craig again at 4:52 of a game, when he is play-by-play announcer. Beside him, the newspaper reporter—an overweight and fleshy older white man in a shirt, tie, and an old style fedora—is pecking away at his story on an old portable typewriter. There is no evidence of a press pass on either of the reporters. We realize what a terrible announcer Craig is when it is pointed out that he is not paying attention to the score. He says it is three to nothing, until the newspaper guy points out that it is still two to nothing. At times Craig asks questions and does not wait for an answer from his subject. Sometimes, during the action, he does not know the names of the players.

In the movie, Craig is, for comic relief, a sad testament to some radio announcers. He never takes off his suit jacket or loosens his tie, and he proves himself to be part PR guy, part team shill, in his radio broadcasts. For example, he says, “That took real old fashioned guts.” Later, he comes up with a shallow sports cliché, “A rags to riches, Cinderella story, these Charlestown Chiefs.” When the team is losing, he says, “The

Chiefs' performance here tonight has got to be a bitter disappointment to these 4,000 fans who have packed in here and are paying good money to witness this fiasco." Then, after a change of spirit, as the home team fights back, he says, "This is more like it. It just gives me real strength to see Chiefs back on the war path again." A bit later on he says, "Everybody is just on their feet screaming kill, kill, kill. This is hockey."

The character Jim Craig has many memorable lines in *Slap Shot*, but they are memorable mostly because they are so pathetic and so unprofessional. His inclusion in the movie is to advance the plot but also to add to the comedy of this hockey farce that is being played out. Craig only has a bit-part in the narrative but is the seventh credit on a list of many. Perhaps he is memorable because he is so unprofessional. It is possible the movie makers included Craig to underline that this sad-sack hockey team merits a third-rate announcer. From my observations, I find it unlikely that any reporter could be that underwhelming.

One of the significant lessons we should take from this movie is just how small the press box is. Two reporters can sit side by side, but when a hockey player who is not playing comes into the press box, he is forced to sit behind the other two. The working conditions of the press box, this "sacred space," are frequently not spacious or comfortable.

Blades of Glory (2007) from DreamWorks Pictures, is another comedic treatment of sports, this time a light-hearted look at figure skating. Almost from the opening scene there is a voice-over to explain to the audience what is happening and to advance the plot. Most of the voice-overs are done by middle-aged white males. One of the voices belongs to former figure skater Scott Hamilton, who adds an air of authenticity to the implausible

comedy. However, despite the unlikely plot, the announcers are treated almost respectfully and deferentially. What they provide is expertise in the sport. They are allowed to describe the crowd, the setting of the rink, and figure skating technical details such as a triple axel.

At one point, the comments made by the “on-air” announcers are filled with hyperbole that supposedly shows an understanding of other sports. “That is like Rice without Montana, Ali without Frazier,” one of them says. To add to the intensity, one of the commentators says, “That is a dramatic entrance for Chas Michael Michaels.” And then, to show the impact of the skater on the crowd, he says, “The lights are on and so is this crowd.” Part of this is to show that the sports reporters are well versed in some of the finest moments in sports, and this should give the announcers further credibility with the movie audience.

When they are shown on camera, we find out the announcers are two white males, dressed in network uniforms. Hamilton is dressed in an open-necked dress shirt over a turtleneck, while his on-air partner, identified later via an on-screen graphic as Jim Lampley, is dressed in a shirt and tie. The media are used in this story to add veracity to the plot. At a press conference, we see several reporters carrying still cameras (although we never see their camera flashes go off), microphones on boom poles, and shoulder-held TV cameras with large lights attached to their front. The press pass, hung from a purple lanyard, is visible around the neck of every reporter at the press conference, reinforcing the idea that these reporters are invited in to the press box and qualified to be there. In another scene, a female anchor on TV is conservatively dressed, in a blazer and camisole, with her hair down over her shoulder. She is shown reporting for CBS Denver, and the

CBS logo is seen over her shoulder. Most of the reporters are white males, although a few black males and a few white females are also included.

At the end of the movie, however, no mention is made in the credits as to the identity of the actors playing the reporters. In this movie, the reporters are used to advance the plot, to help audience understanding of the event and its intricacies, and to add to the veracity of the story, but they are ignored and not given credit for the roles they play. This can only be interpreted as a dismissal of their importance or a denigration of the function of reporters.

The boxing movie, *Cinderella Man* (2005), released by Universal Pictures, opens with this quote by sports journalist and author Daymon Runyon: "In all the history of the boxing game, you find no human interest story to compare with the life narrative of James J. Braddock." The use of that deferential quotation sets the tone for the serious and respectful way the media are shown in this movie, which begins in 1928. Newspapers lying on the ground are used to show the headlines and to underscore the seriousness of the unemployment problems gripping North America at that time.

In a scene set in 1933, we see that the NBC radio announcer broadcasting the boxing event is a white male, wearing a shirt and tie. Through a presentation that is part editorial and part sports authority, he fills in the narrative for the audience who might be listening to the radio (and for the spectators in the cinema). Braddock "can hardly lift his arm," he intones. As Leonard Koppett pointed out earlier, this is both enlightened sports authority and journalistic observation.

As the story advances to 1934, the NBC radio announcer, who is seated at ringside, continues in a voice over: "The skinny from the reporters at ringside is that

Braddock won't last 2 rounds." I had to wonder at this line. While in my observations it is not unusual for reporters from competing news organizations to collaborate, and perhaps even go so far as to share their notes, it would be unusual for a reporter to say, "According to the other reporters . . ."

As we have seen in other movies, most of the reporters are white males, dressed in shirts and ties, the dress "uniform" of the day. It is illuminating here that the term "ringside seat" literally means a seat right at the side of the boxing ring, inches away from the canvas flooring. Newspaper reporters are seated in the front rows at ringside, banging away on old fashioned typewriters. They are not wearing the press pass as we know it today, but have a press card in their hatband or in their suit jacket pocket.

The NBC radio reporter's comments prove to be a mix of personal opinion and colourful professional observation. He says, "Lewis is running out of real estate now." Later on, he says, "Lewis is just a piece of meat, and Braddock is carving him up." In another incident in the same fight, the NBC reporter says "Braddock just took Laskey's worst shot and it didn't faze him." I found the inter-mixing of first names and family names to be an unusual tactic in a broadcast. It may be used to show the lack of professional detachment on the part of the reporter.

In a later fight, the reporter underlines the seriousness and gravity for the viewers watching the film and for those supposedly listening on their radios at the time, saying, "Never in all my years have I seen this place so quiet." A bit later, he points out, "This fight is for real." And then one last time, he shows how important the fight is with his comment, "The table has been set. Let's get to the main course." To show how the tide is turning, the reporter says of Max Baer, "Maxi's glamour boy smile is now a bloody

grimace.” At the end, his comments underscore how Braddock’s victory was so unlikely: “Braddock came into this fight the biggest underdog in pugilistic history.” The roles of the reporters are listed in the credits at the end of the movie.

While the movies are a construction of reality and can take poetic licence with situations, they can be very worthwhile teaching tools too. From these eight movies, which range from slap stick to the more serious toned, we can learn that sports journalists are a respected authority commenting on our recreation and pastimes. The idea of the press box as a sacred space is also given further validation here, and while it might not always be a clean or comfortable place to work, it is still a place from which sports journalists are called upon to be the official observers at a sports event. These movies also show us that there are egotistical outbursts, as was demonstrated in the film *Monday Night Mayhem*, but a part of sports journalism is about show business. *The Longest Yard* shows us that, from time to time, one broadcast can pay homage to another, even if it is slightly cheeky, as is the comment by sports caster Chris Berman, “Look at that little Meggat run.” Both *Glory Road* and *Hoosiers* show us that the media is there to capture the veracity of the event, and even in a re-creation, can add power to the interpretation of the unfolding event. Interestingly, I think that the movie *Miracle*, while a supposedly correct re-creation of a true story, is the one of these examples that we need to watch with the most scepticism. It is guilty of over-exaggerating the power of the media. The movie shows too many photographers in the runway leading to the ice surface before game time. This implies that the media possesses crystal ball powers that can foresee the future. On the other hand, *Slap Shot*, the farcical interpretation of how an announcer should not be, may be the most accurate in understanding the working conditions in the press box. The

movie shows the press box to be cramped, cold, and uncomfortable. It is a working space where different types of media work side by side, sharing information and interpreting the events in front of them.

In the movies examined here, we can learn several lessons. One is how these movies put theory into practice. As Koppett said, commentary is different in sports journalism than in news writing: “Being objective means not letting your preferences distort the accuracy of your account, to whatever extent you can be aware of distortion.”⁸¹ With the exception of the buffoon play-by-play announcer Jim Craig in *Slap Shot*, that is a fairly accurate account of the proceedings of all these movies. Another lesson to be learned here is the interconnectedness, that symbiosis McChesney called it, between the sport and the media. This is particularly so in the football movie *The Longest Yard*, where the highly improbable event is broadcast on ESPN2. It is even more obvious in *Monday Night Mayhem*, when National Football League Commissioner Pete Rozelle tells ABC TV executives they could not be a success without the NFL, and the ABC TV executives counter that the NFL has benefited from ABC’s coverage.

A third lesson to be learned here is that those in the sacred space are given the power to speak on an event unfolding in front of them. Their credentials, education, and training are never in question, as long as these reporters are granted access to the press box and speak with the authority of a network or newspaper. In *Cinderella Man*, the credibility of the announcer is augmented by the fact that he works for NBC. Likewise, the use of the CBS Sports logo in *Blades of Glory* underscores to the audience that if the big networks are taking this silly story seriously, then so should we.

⁸¹ Koppett, *Sports Illusion, Sports Reality*, 103.

The final lesson we must learn from this chapter is how movies can be a cultural influence. Here movies show the audience how the press boxes work and function. They offer a rare glimpse of the adventures and power within the press box, and they allow those who dream of working there to see what some of the working conditions might be. These movies have served as a comparison to what the real press boxes look like.

Chapter 4: Ethnographic Observations from Press Boxes

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The average person has no idea what the inside of a press box at sporting events really looks like. In fact, I posit that the average news reporter has rarely been inside a press box, because his or her job does not entail this kind of work. For aspiring sports journalists, the press box is the embodiment of what it means to be a sportswriter but there is very little literature on what exactly the press box is, and how to gain admission. It may be a magical place, a sacred place, but to the average person, it is a mystery.

Sometimes movies give us a glimpse of the press boxes at sporting events and this can be a fairly realistic interpretation. Occasionally, sports networks will show us the game announcers inside the press box, but this happens only infrequently. These glimpses tell us very little about the culture there or the working conditions reporters have to face. This chapter presents my findings from my field work, which I spent visiting press boxes at various venues. The purpose of this chapter is to enlighten and to find common themes among the press boxes I visited for this thesis.

As an undergraduate student at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton during the mid-1970s, I was the regular play-by-play person on campus radio and local television for UNB football, hockey, and basketball games. In that capacity, I often travelled with the teams and broadcast from press boxes at every university in the Maritime provinces. There are remarkable similarities and subtle differences in the facilities. In preparation for this chapter, I strategically visited a number of sporting events at various universities in Canada and the US throughout 2007 and 2008. I was in the press box either as an ethnographic observer or as a broadcaster. My experience as a student broadcaster and more recently as a play-by-play announcer for UNB hockey games prepared me to look for the commonalities and distinctions in each locale. In order

to ensure that what I was seeing was not specifically a Canadian media experience, I chose to observe two events involving high profile American universities. I was cognizant of American anthropologist Robert Sands' work, and his suggestion that this kind of research had to look at "the intangibles of human behaviour . . . adherence to routine and schedule, the tone of conversations."⁸²

I visited Queen's University and the University of Ottawa for football games during the regular season in the fall of 2007. In October, I visited the University of Notre Dame in Indiana to see the highly publicized rivalry that dates back more than eighty years between Notre Dame and the University of Southern California. The Canadian national collegiate football championship, called The Vanier Cup, was held in Toronto in November 2007, and my seat in the press box provided further insight for this thesis.

For men's varsity basketball, I attended nearly every home game at Carleton University during the 2007-08 season, including the pre-season tournament, where several top-rated U.S. National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) teams played. Regularly I was part of the broadcast crew covering those basketball games, which gave me added insight. The national men's university basketball finals were held in Ottawa in March 2008. As a member of the media I again witnessed events and situations that added to my evidence.

The hockey games that I witnessed from the press box included matches at Carleton University, the University of New Brunswick, and the Université de Moncton. Then I attended the Men's national hockey finals at the end of March, hosted by the Université de Moncton, but held at the Moncton Coliseum, a much larger and more

⁸² Sands, *Sport Ethnography*, 22.

accommodating arena than U de M's home rink. My experience at an NCAA hockey game, as the Union College "Dutchmen" hosted the Harvard University "Crimson" in Schenectady, NY added further confirmation of the way members of the media in press boxes interact and allowed me to say that my interpretations are not uniquely Canadian. My observations, then, for this chapter are based on pre-season, regular season, and play-off games in three different sports.

1. Football

a) Laurier Golden Hawks vs. Queen's University Golden Gaels

Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Sept. 29, 2007

Two young women with big smiles welcome me to the "Will Call" location at Queen's University. They are dressed alike in golf shirts with "Queen's" printed on them, and I suspect they are both students. I had been told to pick up my press pass at the "Will Call" window on the far side of Richardson Stadium, the side of the football field furthest away from the parking lot. The window would be open ninety minutes before game time, and I arrived about noon for a 1:30 game. There really is no "window." It is a folding table with folding chairs behind it and the sign "Will Call" attached to the front. It is situated under a tent, just outside of the perimeter fence around the football field and will service the media, alumni, and distinguished guests. The two young women check my name on the master list for the media and then get me an envelope with my name on it and a press pass inside. The press pass is laminated plastic, just slightly larger than the pocket of a dress shirt. This one did not come with a lanyard, so I carry it with me in my hand. At the fenced-in football field gate, students in Queen's University campus security

jackets look at me and look at the press pass before allowing me to enter. The press box is situated at the top of a wooden grandstand that has seen better days. I make my way up the rickety steps to the press box. At the entryway, I meet the Queen's University Sports Information Director (SID). He greets me warmly, and notices that I do not have a lanyard with this press pass. He immediately takes his red cord from around his neck, detaches it from his own press credentials and gives it to me to attach to my media credentials.

He shows me where I am going to stand for the game and apologizes for not having an extra chair for me. Despite this, my spot is fortuitous, right next to the network television crew and behind the newspaper writers. All the seats in the press box are full. Still, my vantage spot allows me to see how the broadcasters operate and how the writers interact.

Like the stadium, the press box is old and rickety. This long, whitewashed wooden press box is a series of rooms or "booths" connected with a common hallway at the back. Each of the booths can be closed off from the others with a series of doors, and each booth has an unobstructed view of the playing field, with the players' benches at field level below facing away from the press box windows.

The SID and his staff have one booth, and two others are occupied by student broadcasters from each university. Game officials, who will keep track of game details such as penalties, yards attempted or gained, and scores are in another booth. Other booths accommodate the house announcer who operates the public address system, and a team of "spotters" from each university, in radio contact with their respective coaching staffs by headphones and attached microphones. The newspaper reporters sit together.

This includes writers from the student newspapers from both universities and a reporter from each of the local newspapers in Kingston and Waterloo. The way they are seated almost looks like the veteran writers are offering guidance to the student writers.

The last booth, the biggest, is occupied by the broadcast network *The Score*. That booth is a full of a jumble of electronic broadcast gear. Huge black boxes specially made for cables, lights, microphones, and cameras are pushed willy-nilly into the room. In addition to the two on-air announcers, there are cameramen and producers huddled in there, making it probably tighter quarters than any of the other booths. One of the field producers has turned some of the equipment boxes upside down and is using them as a makeshift desk. He is perched on top of some others that are lying on their side.

It is well before game time and two on-air reporters for *The Score* are doing a live “hit,” talking about the game and what the audience can expect to see. Although it is warm and sunny, they are wearing windbreakers with “*The Score*” logo on the chest. The cameraman is shooting them against the nearly empty field. A producer with the network is standing behind the cameraman with a clipboard in his hand. Although the cameraman and the producer have a media pass on lanyards around their necks, neither wears any clothing that identifies them as working for *The Score*.

Altogether, there are about thirty people in the press box. One of the student radio stations has a blonde female student broadcaster, but all the rest of the working media are males. There are two access points leading to the press box from the grandstand, and at either entrance, female university students wearing campus security windbreakers verify the press pass for everyone coming in and out of the press box.

About ten minutes into the game, the Queen's University Sports Information Director comes along the hallway behind each of the booths, delivering chilled bottles of water. Some of the broadcasters nod and wink, and the writers mumble a "thanks." At the end of each quarter, the SID goes through the hallway again, handing out statistics sheets with a summary of the quarter. The sheets are different colours for each quarter: white, blue, pink, and canary yellow. The broadcasters accept the handouts without looking at them, and without a break in their sentences. The SID is back at half time, this time delivering hot dogs wrapped in tin foil. Packages of ketchup, mustard, and relish are in the folded paper napkin. The SID generally stays out of the way of the reporters. At no time did he attempt to influence the media's portrayal or interpretation of the game.

One of the professional newspaper guys wears binoculars around his neck, which he uses to focus in closely on each play. He writes his notes in a stenographer's pad. The students from both student newspapers write on loose leaf sheets, on a clip board. The writers sit and stay seated all game. They get to their feet only during half time or when the play is in a corner of the field partly obstructed by the angle of vision. The broadcasters—both *The Score* and the student radio staff—alternatively sit, stand, and move around animatedly within their announcer booth.

Very few of the people in the press box wear a shirt and tie. The typical dress is a golf shirt and slacks. The television on-air people wear shirts and ties, as does the sports editor of the Kingston *Whig-Standard*. The students are in jeans and T-shirts emblazoned with the logo from their universities.

There is no cheering in the press box. That does not mean it is quiet or emotionless. The reporters do make "ooh" or "ahh" sounds when a player misses a catch,

or when a tackle is hard and effective. When Queen's quarterback is sacked, Laurier broadcasters let out a loud whoop. The reverse happens when the play goes the other way, too. The noisiest in the press box are the spotters from the two teams. They bellow when things go wrong for their team, and they whoop and high five each other when things go the way they think they should. As they get wound up, the SID makes sure the doors to their booths are closed, so as to not interfere with the others working in the press box.

At the end of the game, the print reporters gather their things and leave quickly, heading to the field for the post-game interviews. They search out the player they want to interview and question him, amid a gaggle of other reporters or admiring fans and parents. A couple of the reporters from the student radio stations do the same but leave their gear and their belongings in the press box, secure in the knowledge it is still a space that is off-limits to most people. The technicians from *The Score*, the first to arrive, are the last to leave, and take nearly an hour to pack all the gear into the various cases, and then lug them down the steps of the bleachers to the broadcast truck.

b) University of Western Ontario Mustangs vs. University of Ottawa Gee Gees

Frank Clair Stadium, Lansdowne Park, Ottawa, ON, Nov. 3, 2007

At a game hosted by the University of Ottawa, I get my first experience with a "gatekeeper." Although I write regularly for local papers in New Brunswick, and one of the key players of the Ottawa team is from Fredericton, I could not initially get press credentials to attend the game. I went in person several weeks before the game to explain my mission to the U of O SID, but he denied my application. I had to turn to Carleton

University athletics officials to plead my case to the cross-town university. Finally, I got permission to attend the game.

Inside the press box, my encounter with the SID is frosty. It is clear he is not happy that I went around him to get press credentials. This is the first time I have ever experienced this kind of press box control.

Because of the stadium design, those in the press box cannot see the fans below, unless they were to lean dangerously right out the windows. Sometimes the crowd noise comes up to the press box like a wave, especially at a big advance by the offence or some hard-hitting defensive play. Throughout the game, horns blow and blat, the crowd yells, some big male voices boom out, some shrill-voiced female screams something. Sometimes when the wind is just right, the unmistakable smell of popcorn comes wafting up here.

When a terrible call by the refs goes against the home team, the crowd suddenly chants "Bull-Shit!!" The sound comes up from the stands as if the crowd were standing right behind us. Most of those in the press box laugh right out loud at this editorial statement from the crowd. One of the men in the front row says, "They are right, too, I think." One of them wonders out loud how the broadcasters keep that from going out on the air.

In the room are mostly white males, in their thirties, forties, and fifties. One man tells me he just retired from the federal government and is committed to be a statistician because he went to the U of O. It is chilly in the room, so most of those there wear toques, gloves, hooded sweatshirts, or winter jackets. A few have on ball caps instead of toques.

One half hour before the game, almost all of the media assigned to this game seem to be on-site. In this main section, there are fifteen males. No one is wearing a shirt or tie here. Most are in jeans, some in dressier pants. A few have hooded sweatshirts bundled up to their ears. There is also a TV, tuned to a sports channel, with Canadian university football, but it is not this game. At game time, however, the TV would be tuned to this game. Reporters who are old friends shake hands and share some office gossip. Those who are just meeting go through a routine: “Who are you? Who do you write for? What do you think of the match-up today?”

c) *The Vanier Cup: University of Saskatchewan vs. St. Mary’s University*

Rogers Centre, Toronto, ON, Nov. 23, 2007

The Vanier Cup is emblematic of Canadian University football supremacy. It is awarded to the winning team after a series of regional play-offs involving universities in Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, and Western Canada. Sometimes it is moved from eastern cities to western cities. In November 2007, it was in Toronto on a Friday evening, with the game beginning at 7:30 p.m.

I picked up my press pass about noon, two blocks away at the Royal York Hotel, where the Canadian Universities Athletic Directors were having day-long meetings. The main press liaison was the Sports Information Director from the Ontario Universities Conference. She had a room full of press materials and two young male students from McMaster University in Hamilton as her “deck-hands.” The deck-hands checked their list to see if I was on it, but could not find me initially, however they said they were authorized to put me on the list, if need be. I found my own name on the list, and they quickly found the press pass. I got the impression I would be accommodated. Even if

they could not find me on the list, they were prepared to make a press pass for me at the last minute.

This time the lanyard was not red and made for a specific university; it was white, with the Canadian Inter-university Sport (CIS) logo and an advertising logo for “Fox 40,” a type of whistle made for outdoor or very humid conditions. It is popular with basketball, football, and sometimes hockey referees, because the “pea” is not inside, and the whistle comes from the angles made by the plastic. The press pass had my name printed on it and accreditation that would allow me access to the press box, the field, and the after-game press conference.

The atmosphere at the check-in desk in the hotel, and later at the game, is different from the other venues. There is a professional detachment among the staffers. They are accommodating and serious, as if they do not want to get in the way of a reporter who has a job to do.

I was told to go into the Rogers Centre from Gate 13, anytime after 5:30 for the 7:30 p.m. game start. I had previously been to baseball games at the Rogers Centre, and the entrance then was Gate 9. For baseball games, the press box is stretched the width of the field behind the home plate. The football press box is off to the left of the one used for baseball and runs the length of the football field, along what would be the third base side of the ball diamond. Although on the same lofty level as the baseball press box, it is not at all connected to it.

I was checked at the door to Gate 13 at about 6 o'clock by a uniformed security guard. I was moved over to a second desk, where my credentials were again examined, but much more closely. This was done by a young woman, who actually took the press

pass in her hands, and turned it over to make sure it was authentic. She was very pleasant and said I had to go over to one more desk. There another security guard, this time an older man, said, "Right this way" and pointed down the hallway to the location of the football press box. The admittance to this game was much more business-like than in previous games. At the press box was another level of security, this time a big, beefy male. He took a cursory look at the press pass, and said, "Right this way, sir."

This press box was divided into four sections, each with three rows of ten seats placed in a tiered formation. At the end of each section was a list of who was seated where, with their names and their organizations listed. *Canadian Press* had four seats, for example, and the *Winnipeg Sun* had seven. Halifax newspapers also had seven seats. Both Winnipeg and Halifax reporters were covering this game involving the University of Manitoba and St. Mary's University, respectively. In addition to those with a local angle, almost every city with a university team that played football was represented among the media. A number of the seats were assigned to student journalists from campus radio stations and newspapers where there are university football programs. All the *Canadian Press* reporters were seated together and the reporters from Winnipeg or Halifax were grouped together.

I found my seat on the second level, and from the third level, slightly above me, a reporter's voice called out, "Who are you and what are you writing?" This was the reporter for *Maclean's* magazine, and after our introductions he handed me the code for the wireless computer hook up. These sheets had to be handed around so that Internet access could be achieved. A few moments later, a reporter from the *Toronto Sun* moved into a seat in front of me. He passed in front of me, stopped, and shook my hand,

introducing himself. Other reporters slowly filled in the seats in these sections, and they too introduced themselves as they went by.

Although the football press box seats 120, there were only 100 listed on the assigned seating sheets. There were 95 males and 5 females. I was one of three who wore a shirt and tie. Many wore a golf shirt or a dress shirt and a suit jacket. There were a number who wore sportswear tops, such as a fleece, with their university's name on it. Many were hungover from a night of partying, the distinct smell of beer oozing out of their pores and their mouths.

I sat next to a reporter from the *Hamilton Spectator*. She mentioned to me that I was one of the few wearing a tie. She looked about the room and counted those in ties. At a lull in the action, our conversation turned to the state of professional journalists. She pointed out that many were hungover, and barely working through the game. She indicated her feelings that this was inappropriate and unprofessional. She said, "How can you interview an athlete who treats his body like a temple, when you are abusing your own?" She added, "How can you expect to be treated like a professional unless you dress like one, act like one, and take your job seriously?"

The rows of seats for the media overlook the field, and there is no such thing as a bad seat there. Behind this unobstructed view of the entire stadium was a half wall that separated working space from the main press room. It was part hospitality room, part dining hall, and part administration. Two huge flat screen televisions are set at either end of the room. They were tuned to Rogers Sportsnet, the channel that was broadcasting the game. Reporters on-screen were doing a series of hits. Some were obviously taped earlier, as the reporters were standing on the sidelines with no crowd behind them; in

actual fact, numerous fans clad in school colours from the two participating teams were moving into the seats.

At the end of the game, almost all the reporters packed up all their gear and headed to an elevator that whisked them to the dressing room areas and to an interview space set up to allow for team interviews. Typically the reporters do not head to the dressing rooms, although I overheard a few Winnipeg reporters saying they wanted to interview a couple of players other than those brought out by the coach. Reporters who were not under deadline took their time getting their gear together, said their good-byes to their colleagues and moved out onto street level.

There were several key differences in this game, things that stick with me even now. First was the scope of the advertising. It was obvious this event was reaching a national audience of massive numbers. Advertisements and sponsorship items were everywhere: on the printed press kits, on the lanyard, as well as on the field, and within the press box. The second thing that was different was the delivery method of the press material. It was all available in paper, but it was also available on a USB memory stick that easily plugged into my computer. The USB stick had a number of photos on it, some with key players from each of the two teams. It also had sponsor's logos available in case any of the media wanted to use those. Since all the press release material was available electronically, it was easy to import into a document for use in a sports story. It would have been an obvious time saver for reporters on the run.

d) University of Southern California vs. University of Notre Dame

South Bend, IN, Oct. 20, 2007

The press box at the University of Notre Dame is one of the most impressive I have seen. I was told it would be open four hours before the game, and I arrived about two hours before. At the media door, I was welcomed in by a retiree, who was beaming. “Welcome to Notre Dame, sir. May I help you?” he says. Here is a man I should be addressing as sir, and instead he is treating me like I am a dignitary. It makes me feel important.

I showed my press credentials and was shown to an elevator, where another friendly retiree operated the elevator to take me to the third floor. We had a nice conversation about how far I had driven to get here. He told me that I had the distinction of being the reporter from the farthest north.

The elevator opened onto a spacious reception area, with a full service bar at one end, and hot food on chafing dishes on tables over to the right. About forty people were there already, some seated at tables, eating and chatting, some standing around at the bar, some reviewing their notes. Along the half-wall to the immediate right of the elevator are a series of framed magazine covers from *Sports Illustrated*. Every time Notre Dame has had a cover story during the magazine’s 50-year history, it has been reproduced and framed for display here. Upon seeing this impressive exhibit, I am reminded of McChesney’s observation on the symbiotic relationship between sports and media, a relationship that the University of Notre Dame seems to promote.

A six-step staircase leads up to the working area of the press box. It is there that the immensity of this press box became obvious. There are six rows of thirty seats in this

level. They are placed in deep rows, theatre style, so the head of the person in the row in front of me was below my desk level, ensuring that no seat has an obstructed view of the field. Most of the eighty thousand spectators in the stands were also visible from here, except for those who were immediately under the press box. Floor to ceiling windows ensure maximum visibility. Down on the field, a couple of football players were tossing the ball around. They looked like they were about three inches high. While there were nearly two hundred members of the media in here during the game, I looked at the crowd packed in at half time, and quickly counted nearly five hundred people.

Everyone was assigned a seat. In front of mine was a white card taped to the counter/table top. It said my name and my news organization or affiliation. It also said, "No cheering in the Press Box." Every seat had a similar place card. Early in the game, a young man below me let out a whoop at a key Notre Dame play. A reporter beside him nudged him and, shaking his head, urged him to be more appropriate. It is the only place I have seen in my travels where this kind of reinforcement of the rules was done by the peers in the working media.

This is only the third floor. A retired sports announcer, who was sitting beside me, took me on a tour of the rest of the media centre. We walked up some metal stairs to the fourth floor, where the broadcast booths were located. In one booth, where the NBC crew was working, there were nine people jammed in and around the booth. The three on-air announcers were dressed in shirts and ties but everyone else was in jeans, sneakers, golf shirts, or T-shirts. Beside the announcers was a camera on a tripod, and a headset-clad operator who can alternate between shots of the field and shots of the on-air talent. There was a spotter, scribbling notes on a clipboard, and connected to the show's director

outside in the broadcast truck by a set of headphones. The booth was crowded, and there was hardly an extra inch of space. Outside the door, a female production assistant, aged about mid-twenties, listened on headphones and watched on a TV monitor. She also has a clipboard on her knee. There were twenty of these broadcast booths on this floor, some for radio, some for Internet broadcasters, and some for various television stations. Most were not as crowded as the NBC booth.

The fifth floor was all university dignitaries. They, too, had an unobstructed view of the game and were located in booths like private boxes at a hockey game. I learned that this is where the university president makes a pitch to some of the alumni for donations.

We climbed more metal stairs up to the sixth floor, which was an open air photo platform. One of the university security staff met us at the door, and after checking our press passes, told us this was reserved for accredited photographers only. We begged our way in, to just get a glimpse. When he found out I was from Canada, he relented and said we could be there for five minutes only. There were nearly fifty photographers there, all with super long lenses. Most were dressed in jeans and multi-pocketed, tan-coloured vests the photographers often seem to favour. Although it was hot and humid, most also had a windbreaker ready to pull on if it got too windy or chilly.

Almost all of the people in the press box were older than thirty years of age. There were only a few children, obviously family members of the SID. About thirty minutes before the game, the seats were about half-full, but the reception area was full. I estimated that about 90 percent of the room was males. The master seating plan listed three women as writers for the *Associated Press*. It also listed scouts from seven NFL

teams that were seated among the media covering the game. About 30 percent of the reporters here were wearing a blue golf shirt with the UND logo. Some of the older reporters were in shirts and ties, but hardly any wore a suit jacket or sports coat. Most of the men wore dressy pants and only a few were in jeans.

In the row below me were three high school aged students, two girls and a boy. Their affiliation said “Scholastic Magazine.” The boy was the only one of the three taking notes. The girls had a laugh-filled conversation about boyfriends and school chums. They hardly looked at the spectacle before them. Their conversation was loud and a bit distracting. Reporters on both sides of me mentioned how irreverent the two were and how they were wasting the event as a wonderful learning opportunity. Indeed, their conversation seemed as out of place here as an obscenity uttered in church.

There were a dozen televisions suspended from the ceiling. An hour before the game, they were all tuned to ESPN. During this game, they would be tuned to NBC, the network that was broadcasting the game. The writers in the room often turned to the NBC broadcast to catch the replays during the time between plays.

2. Basketball

a) University of Ottawa vs. Carleton University

Carleton University Field House, Ottawa, ON, Mar. 1, 2008

On Labour Day weekend I met with the Carleton University Athletic Director, who was thrilled with my plan to observe all of the sporting events this year. She immediately made arrangements for me to get a season press pass, valid at any sports event on the campus, for the whole year. It came in the mail about three days later—a red

lanyard with Carleton University written on it, and a plastic card attached that read “2007-08 Carleton University Athletics Media Pass.” I wore it to most games, and within a very short time, the students working as campus security at sports events recognized me and never asked to see the press credentials.

The press box at basketball games is usually situated on the gym floor, very close to the players and officials. Part of the reason for this is that the basketball court is about half the size of a hockey rink. If the press box is as high as it is in a hockey rink, the subtle aspects of the basketball game are not visible to the commentators: the feint, the block, and the final flourishes of a player on a scoring play that can be as seemingly insignificant as getting a hand slightly higher than the opponent’s.

At Carleton University’s home games, some of the reporters sit at tables along the floor, alongside the score keepers and timers. Others are relegated to an upper press box, two flights of stairs above the playing surface. This spot is perfect for the television cameras as it provides an unimpeded view of the floor and the camera operators can use the zoom function to get close up shots. For the radio or Internet broadcasters, this height is less than ideal. The advantage is that it does provide adequate space for the broadcasters, half-time commentators, and statisticians, who can function as a team throughout the game. There are three separate rooms and, at this game, room one is full of Carleton broadcasters, room two is full of local cable TV cameras and staff, and room three is full of University of Ottawa people including that university’s SID, several students writing for the student papers and others who are affiliated with the team. Doors close between the three rooms so the noise of one broadcast team does not interfere with any other room.

At this game, in the room where the Carleton University broadcasters are working for radio and the Internet, there is a sense of a broadcast “team.” We have worked together for most of the year. Working with the team are two male undergraduate university students, both of whom are interested in sports broadcasting and wish to pursue it as a career. Although I have the most broadcasting experience of the team, I usually keep statistics and work as a spotter for the broadcast team.⁸³

During time-outs, when the teams were huddling together, I used the binoculars to “read” the clipboard the coaches use to diagram for their players how they need to handle a situation. I passed this information to the other broadcasters. I could sometimes “shape” the broadcast by posing a series of questions that I write on paper and leave in front of the colour commentator. He provided the answers to them in his responses during the breaks in the action.

Occasionally one of the broadcast teams would turn to me as the stats person, either silently mouthing a question or writing the query on a scrap paper or on the edge of the stats clipboard and looking for a silent answer –usually an affirmation or short answer. A typical question would be “How many fouls is that for this player?” About ten minutes into the game, the Carleton University SID comes through the press box, handing out cold water bottles to everyone. He appears at the end of every quarter, with the official stats for the end of the period and distributes copies to everyone in the booth. At no time does he ever try to “shape” or control the broadcast. Occasionally he will

⁸³ This was decided by a volunteer, who wanted to do play-by-play himself. It was clearly hubris, because he was brutal in that he did not follow the play well and rarely told a story. He was often unprofessional in his comments about the athletes or the referees.

appear with a newsy tid-bit from the training room: this player has a sprained knee or a twisted ankle and will or will not return today.

The regular play-by-play guy dresses in a golf shirt or a sweater and dress pants or jeans. One of the students is constantly dressed in a shirt and tie, as am I. The others in the “team” are more casual, dressed in golf shirts. Almost none of this team will eat immediately before the game or at half time. Earlier in the year, one of the students had a bag of popcorn. He offered some to me. I declined and explained that I did not want to eat anything that might risk my choking or scratching my throat so close to game time. The student finished the bag of popcorn but he never brought popcorn to the game again.

Most of the broadcast team arrives an hour before the game, although there have been some scary moments at times, such as when the driving conditions were treacherous and one of the team was late. At one game, the equipment did not get there until five minutes before game time.

I almost always went downstairs after the game and talked to one of the players, a rookie from my hometown. I asked him about the game, his impressions of the opposition, what he thought were the turning points of the game, and how he did personally out there. I did not use this information as a journalist at the time, but it adds to my knowledge of the game and I might make reference to it in a future game, without divulging the name of my source. This informal grouping of players, members of the media and fans, is very much like the post-game sessions at Queen’s University football games.

b) The National Men's Basketball Finals

Scotiabank Place, Ottawa, ON, Mar. 15, 2008

The national men's basketball finals were held at the home of the Ottawa Senators, a hockey rink converted to host a basketball tournament. I entered through the media door, made my way downstairs, and checked in at the media accreditation table. There was a problem with my press pass, so a young woman at the desk called on the cell phone to the Carleton SID who bustles out to the desk. He quickly authorizes my accreditation and the young woman apologizes profusely. "I am terribly sorry, sir," she says. She quickly gets me a press kit with all the team names, a history of the tournament, and some other details.

At these basketball games, the members of the working media are situated on the floor level, just behind the chairs in place for the basketball teams. There are three long rows of tables and chairs for the members of the media. Between games and when there is no action on the floor, the reporters talk among themselves. Except for the front row, which is designated for the game staff such as house announcers and statisticians, most of the spaces are not labelled as a specific reporter's space. However, in between games, the reporters feel confident enough to get up and leave their work space, to get a drink or something to eat, knowing that their things will still be there when they return. Uniformed event staffs keeps watch over the whole area.

The hospitality room is in the far end of the rink, under the bleachers. In this case, it has two photocopy machines and tables where nearly one hundred reporters could sit and work, eat or talk. The tournament was sponsored by a milk organization and the glass-fronted bar fridge was full of white and chocolate milk. Complimentary water

bottles all had their labels removed—a request from the milk organization. The reason given for this was that the milk organization did not want to promote another product and the television shots frequently showed the media tables with the water bottles visible in front of the reporters. At least a dozen pizza boxes were stacked up along the tables at the back of the room, and reporters helped themselves.

At one game, I found the seat next to me to be occupied by a reporter from CBC, but at the game that followed immediately afterwards, I was seated next to a reporter from Global TV. On the other side of me, at one game was the University of Alberta Athletic Director, but the seat was filled by a roving photographer at the next game.

At the final football game there was a sense of all of the reporters together, as if we were witnesses to a spectacle, while at the basketball tournament, there was a sense that the drama was still to come but the reporters had a different attitude. Although friendly, the reporters at this tournament did not have that same sense of camaraderie, even in the hospitality room. This might be because the finals for basketball are in a tournament format as opposed to a single game. With two games being played every day of the tournament—one at 6 p.m. and one at 8 p.m.—the reporters might have more work to do, and so are less social at the event. The nature of the sport is different too, with football being a start-stop game and basketball being more fluid. It would not be unusual to have a football game where several minutes might pass between plays. In basketball, one team scores and the ball is immediately brought back so the other team can attack the basket to try to score. Both of these reasons could account for the different approaches among reporters covering the game.

Some of the photographers use the desk space as their “home base” going off to find just the right shot, but returning to their coats and camera bags afterwards.

Sometimes during the action, they sit cross-legged under the basket and just behind the baseline of the court. This is both a precarious perch and a perfect spot. On the one hand, they risk getting trampled when the action gets heavy under the basket and yet it affords them a perfect angle and unobstructed view of the final flourish in a scoring play.

3. Hockey

a) University of New Brunswick vs. Union College

Fredericton, NB, Dec. 31, 2007

The main press box at the Aitken Centre on the University of New Brunswick campus has not changed since the building was opened in the mid-1970s. The UNB hockey program has changed, however, going from a mediocre program to one where UNB is a contender for the national championship. The recent track record of the team means the press box is often full when the UNB team is playing

Like most press boxes in hockey rinks, it is at the top of the building, overlooking the stands, and centered on the penalty boxes and the off-ice officials. It is a metal frame structure, built into the building’s girders. It is enclosed but has a large window opening, looking out onto the playing surface of the rink. There is a door with a lock on it. The large window has no glass in it and often the crowd noise can permeate right through to the microphones of the broadcasters.

The desks used by the media are actually long wooden tables built into the wall facing the rink. There is an electrical outlet and an Internet connection for every four seats. The desks are deep enough to hold a laptop computer or a small television monitor.

If it is a particularly cold night, as it often is in January, the press box can be freezing cold. The back wall of the press box is the outside wall of the Aitken Centre. Although the floor of the press box is some fifteen rows above the ice level, it can be uncomfortably cold on the feet. Broadcasters typically stand for most or part of the game while print reporters tend to stay seated. It is not unusual to see the broadcasters stamping their feet in an effort to keep them warm.

When UNB plays an arch-rival, there is a sense of anticipation among the reporters who might be jammed into the press box. The reporters greet each other cordially, but quickly turn to their task at hand by examining the line-ups for both teams, looking at the record of the starting goal tenders and each team's strengths and weaknesses. There is an almost palpable tension in the booth, a feeling that the reporters are going to witness something awesome. Watching this UNB hockey team, there is an expectation of something heroic from one of the players that will turn the game in UNB's favour, but the unasked question is, "which one?"

Although there are seats for eight reporters, it is not uncommon to have ten or twelve reporters there. Sometimes, at important games especially, there are so many reporters that the press box is overflowing with people and broadcast gear. Although it can sit empty for most of the week, when all of the media are there, it is a magical place. There is often a sense that this is where the action is. If the local cable company decides to broadcast a game, one camera person is positioned on the lower level of the press box,

and the Internet broadcaster gets squeezed to work outside the press box, but within signaling distance of the on-air commentators. The cable company uses two commentators too, and they would be upstairs in the second deck of the press box. It is so close to the rafters, you can literally set your drink on one of the beams, if you wanted to use it as a shelf. The cable company would also have four other camera operators around the rink, two with cameras fixed on tripods and two shoulder mounted cams at each end near the goal. They would also use one other camera intermittently, for the game hosts or the between period interviews.

Just before game time, someone from UNB—usually a student working in the athletics office—delivers a plastic tub filled with ice and lots of bottled water and juices. Rarely is there ever food provided by UNB in the press box.

At the end of the game, the print reporters beat it out of the press box, and head down to the coaches' rooms, where they try to get a quote from either team. If the game is not in doubt, the reporters might leave with a minute or two remaining on the score clock, in order to beat the crowd. It usually takes twenty minutes after the game to get the coach because he spends time with his fellow coaches and the players in the dressing room and then the reporters get about five minutes to ask him some questions. Reporters would meet the UNB coach in his office, and would interview the visiting coach in the hallway outside the dressing room. If they want to interview a player, the coach will generally provide the player after he has showered, bringing him out into the hallway and out of the dressing room. Almost never do reporters go into the dressing rooms now,

although at one time they did.⁸⁴ Upstairs in the press box, the broadcasters usually just wrap up their show and head home. They do not need the comments from the coach at the end of the game. They will use the newspaper stories as the background for the next game.

Almost all of the reporters or media personnel at UNB games are white males in their forties or fifties. It is not an old boys club, but the reporters have the familiarity of long-lasting friendships and mutual respect. While these are professionals, it is rare to see the reporters mentoring an intern. There is no cheering in the press box, but this is an unwritten rule. However, if someone scores, reporters might emit an audible sigh or show a smile. If there is a major body check, they will often cringe. It would be rare to hear someone use foul language because of the professional acknowledgement that all microphones are treated as if they were live.

Absolutely everyone in the press box knows hockey. Some of the reporters are more conversant with the latest rules or strategies; some are more widely read and can cite sources such as *The Hockey News*. But the knowledge of hockey is deeply ingrained

⁸⁴ When I was a student reporter in the 1970s, reporters regularly went into the dressing room, as the players were showering and changing. This is just not done now at any university or professional sports events. I think there are two reasons why: first, the dressing room is where the players can decompress and feel comfortable talking among themselves, and secondly, coaches work hard to conceal injuries or ailments and do not want their players' weaknesses to be seen and publicized. The issue of privacy is sometimes used as the explanation, but I am not so sure it is the real reason.

When I covered the Toronto Maple Leafs in the 1980-81 season, reporters regularly went into the team dressing room. I recall interviewing Phil Esposito while he was draped in a towel after his shower and a woman reporter from a New York publication interviewed Barry Beck, who was similarly undressed and dripping wet. That year, that female reporter from New York had a very public blow up with team owner Harold Ballard, demanding equal access to the players in the dressing room. She had to threaten to lay a complaint with Human Rights in order to win her argument.

in every one of those working there. At the end of a period or when the action has died down, it is not unusual to have newspaper reporters come over to the television crew and ask to look at a replay. Likewise, it is a common occurrence to hear the camera crew remark on a specific play, describing it in terms that the writers would be apt to use. During a UNB hockey game, it is an invigorating atmosphere, shared by knowledgeable people who report on and interpret the game in a creative manner. It is interesting to note that all those in the press box are fans of the game, no matter which team they may be covering. It is hard to imagine that reporters in the political press boxes would say they were fans of the game or the political parliamentary system.

b) Union College vs. Harvard University

Schenectady, NY, Feb. 8, 2008

Schenectady, NY is about a five-hour drive from Ottawa. I went there to see NCAA hockey, with host Union College “Dutchmen” playing against Harvard University “Crimson.” I arranged to do this with the SID of Union College and, despite the fact that I am from out of town, had no trouble getting press credentials.

I pick up my press credentials at the front lobby offices, about an hour before the game. This time it was not a lanyard but a chain with a plastic press attached. On the back of the blue laminated pass, it reads,

This working credential is issued for the sole purpose of providing facility access to an accredited agency’s employee who has a legitimate working function (media or game service) in connection with the event. It is not transferable. Any unauthorized use of this credential subjects

the bearer to ejection from the facility and prosecution for criminal trespass.⁸⁵

I make my way over to the main press box, which is the least ideal press box location imaginable. It is situated right behind the home team goaltender. I climb up a steep set of stairs at the end of the rink and get a warm welcome from the reporters already in the box. My name is on a card taped to the desk space where I can connect my computer. A few minutes later, I am welcomed by the SID who helped to arrange my visit there. She makes sure I have met everybody in the press box.⁸⁶

The radio and television crews are not in this press box. They are situated as high as possible in the stands to our left, centred on the red line on the ice. Those members of the media working in this press box can see the backs of the home team players' bench. The TV feed loops over to the main press box and is used by the print reporters as a way of checking the replay. A small TV monitor is placed between every four reporter stations. When an official's call is questionable or a replay is needed, as many as eight reporters cluster in to see the TV replay. The broadcast is state-wide on a cable network.

The television on-air people are dressed in shirts and ties, and so am I. Most of the others are dressed in sweaters. The reporter next to me is a retired newspaper reporter, but when the local paper needed someone to cover the hockey games, he offered. He lives in the area of the university and writes only hockey stories. He is very friendly, and asks me about the area I am from. A tray of sandwiches is on the counter behind us, and the reporters help themselves, without prompting.

⁸⁵ Personal Observation: February, 8, 2008.

⁸⁶ This woman was not the only female SID I met, but one of the few. She informed me she has been fascinated with sports public relations since her undergraduate days, and she is especially fond of hockey. She has ambitions to work at a larger university.

At the end of the game, the print reporters head over to the Harvard dressing room door, to interview the Harvard coach about the game. I decide to go along with them. We wait outside the dressing room for a few minutes, and one of the boisterous Harvard fans begins to heckle the reporters. Along with the retired reporter and myself is a younger, more strapping young man, and he tells the fan to get away. The fan continues his heckling rant, until this reporter holds up his fist and says “Buddy, you get out of my face or you get this.” The fan keeps yapping but backs away. It is the only time I have ever seen such a confrontation in an otherwise professional occupation. After the coach leaves, the reporters and I discuss the obnoxious fan. They agree that he is an anomaly.

The hockey game was over by ten o’clock, and the reporters took another twenty-five minutes to interview their subjects. We return to the press box, where the newspaper reporters sit down and begin to write their stories for tomorrow. They tell me they have to file before midnight if they are to make their deadline.

The next morning, I read both of their stories in the local papers. Their quotes are identical but their stories concentrate on different aspects of the game.

c) National University Men’s Hockey Finals

Moncton Coliseum, Moncton, NB, Mar. 23, 2008

On the day I arrived at the national university men’s hockey finals in Moncton, NB, I had my 13-year old son with me. I had bought him a ticket at the box office for the house seats, and then headed over to the press credentials “office” in another part of the building. Three women were working there, and one scrutinized me thoroughly. “Did I have ID?” she asked. I produced a driver’s licence and a student card, and she examined those, and then searched for my press pass. She informed me that my son would not be

allowed in the press box. I showed her that he already had a ticket from the box office, and she seemed satisfied. She gave me my credentials, another red lanyard and a press pass, and I hung it around my neck.

Although hosted by Université de Moncton, the games were held in a much bigger facility, called The Coliseum, which is owned by the city of Moncton. At the entryway to the game, the ticket taker took my son's ticket and directed me to go through another door, so that the official attendance, as counted by the turnstiles the paying customers passed through, would not reflect members of the media. This is the first time I had seen this but in fairness, at both the football championships and the basketball championships, media entered through a completely separate gate, not near the crowd.

The press box for this event is located, as it is at most other hockey rinks, high above the stands. To get to the press box, reporters make their way through the crowd, walking up two flights of stairs. Security personnel at the doorways that lead to the house glanced at my press pass, and smiled.

This press box is another one built into the superstructure of the building. Huge metal girders support the box, and at various spots in the press box, the view of the ice is actually obstructed by these steel girders. Reporters sitting behind the girders have to stand up frequently, dodging around to get a better view, if there is a close play at the goal. The press box in this case is actually three long rooms. Sportsnet, the network covering this championship tournament, is given the preferred location, so those broadcasters overlook centre ice and have an unobstructed view of both ends of the ice. Radio broadcasters from Alberta were relegated to be behind one of the girders, and the play-by-play guy was often up and out of his chair to get a better view of the ice. The

“live” TV signal from Sportsnet is actually about four seconds behind the live event. Reporters frequently used the television signal as a replay to check the action, although the network also provided a replay of penalties and goals.

At this tournament, broadcasters with radio stations were not set beside each other. Either by design or accident, the radio broadcasters could talk as loudly as they needed to without interfering with another station. Several of the print reporters sat together, and several of the SID’s often sat together.

Long tables attached to the front half-wall of the press box make it easy to work with a laptop computer or steno pad. Most of the print reporters are writing on laptops, although a couple of university students are working with clipboards and loose-leaf.

The working media included twenty-two males and six females.⁸⁷ On-air personnel on the television, radio or Internet were mostly males, although two national network reporters were females. Several of the women were SID’s from various universities. Most of the reporters were casually dressed in T-shirts, golf shirts, or jeans, but about eight of the men had on dress shirts and ties. For the first time in any of the events I have attended this year, I see reporters in hats. Several of the student reporters are wearing ball caps, and one of the SID’s has on a cowboy hat. They all seem out of place, somehow.

There is no cheering in this press box. At a national championship of this nature, reporters are there to cover the team in their own locality, but the members of the media

⁸⁷ This gender split is about as high as I had seen anywhere. I think it was partly because national broadcasters CTV and Global TV each had two women reporters at the tournament.

are not openly “rooting” for their team. It is a working area, and broadcasters’ voices go up and down in excitement, but it could not be considered cheering.

At the end of every period, one of the organizers arrives with a scoring summary, and it includes shots by players, penalties, and pluses and minuses.⁸⁸ It is delivered within minutes of the buzzer ending the period. If the reporters have left their seats to go to the washroom or for a drink, the hand-out is placed on top of their personal effects. Those reporters writing on computers leave their computers closed during the time they are not there. Several of the students take the time to turn over their clipboards, so their notes are face down on the table. With about ten minutes to go in the game, one of the Université de Moncton SID’s comes around, verbally telling everyone the attendance. He repeats it over and over at each group of reporters.

In addition to the hand-outs from each university in the tournament, Sportsnet has provided a press kit too. It tells who is on the air doing play-by-play and colour commentary and includes a brief biography of each. It is the first time I have seen such self-promotion on the part of the media at an event like this. The purpose of this press kit was different from the others provided by each university in the tournament. This was not about introducing the players and coaches to the media but about self-promoting, for the consumption of the other working media. I cannot imagine a broadcaster mentioning that his competition included Sportsnet. However, one of the print media outlets might write a story about the coverage provided by the network.

⁸⁸ If a player is on the ice when his team scores, he is given a plus. If a player is on the ice when his team is scored against, he is given a minus. This does not include goaltenders. It can be a quick way to see who is having a stellar or lacklustre game.

At the end of every game, the media have a chance to ask questions to both the winning and the losing teams in a press conference format. The members of the media leave the press box, and make their way down through the arena seats and the crowd, to a media room. Another security guard is there, and again the media passes are glanced at. This is a large reception room, with a podium at front, then twenty-four folding chairs on which the media sit. Behind the chairs are risers for the television cameras, so they can get an unobstructed shot of those players designated to speak for the team and the head coach. Each of the two or three players and the coach has a microphone in front of them, and their answers are piped through big speakers so no member of the media can miss the answers. Anyone who is there and wishes to ask a question is allowed to do so. Some of the reporters speak loudly from the floor; some use a hand-held microphone to pose their questions. This ensures that the questions are all heard and not repeated.

No matter what press box at what venue, there is a sense of excitement and anticipation before the game starts. Looking at all of these observations, it becomes apparent to me that universally, there are four common findings that relate to press boxes. First, not all press boxes are created equal. Second, there is some sort of security in place at the gate of press boxes; sometimes in the form of a security person denying access at the point of entry and sometimes in the form of a gatekeeper who denies permission to enter when one applies to be allowed into the venue. Third, there is a respect for the rules in press boxes, whether they are written down, posted on the walls, or left to be understood among the participants. And finally, it is a working space, but both the organizers hosting the event and the reporters see the benefits of the collaboration.

Press boxes have come to be so universally accepted that one might tend to think of all press boxes as the same. However, some are just not big enough to accommodate a huge throng of reporters and then the reporters fill the space and spill out into the stands. Some, as was the case in Schenectady, NY, are split into two locations, with the TV and radio in one location, and the writers in the end zone press box. Some are incredibly cold, and reporters who have worked there a long time have come to know that they need a hat and mitts or gloves to be there. Other times you will see the reporters stamping their feet to keep the blood moving inside their chilled feet.

Some of the press boxes are built into the steel girders, as if they were an after-thought on the part of the building's designers. In these press boxes, tall people are at a real disadvantage as the floor to ceiling distance tends to not be exactly eight feet in height. Sometimes the space is just not designed for the modern needs of a large crew. This was the case at Queen's University press box, where *The Score* had its producers using the travel cases as makeshift desks. It is, however, a working space and reporters tend to adapt to their working environment. Press boxes in the same venue can be different for football and baseball games. If hockey and basketball are held in the same venue, basketball reporters are placed beside the basketball floor, a better vantage point than that of the hockey press box, which is high above the stands.

The on-site security at these university games was generally provided by a student, working in a part-time capacity. They are the people who actually check the press credentials to see that they are valid. In some cases, as in the admission to the University of Notre Dame press box, the security was provided by an older volunteer who acted on behalf of the university. There is another kind of screening, and I saw it in

two circumstances. At one game, the SID did not want me to be granted press credentials, because he thought I was just a spy looking in on his people. At another game, the woman who was going to give me my press credentials made sure that I knew my son was not allowed in the press box. She was only satisfied when I told her I had purchased a ticket for him to sit in the stands. The message here is clear: only those who belong there should be there.

Respect for authority was constantly in evidence at these games. On one working space was the sign "No cheering in the press box." In another, a similar sign was posted on the back wall of the press box. This of course is both a real warning and a metaphorical one, urging the members of the media to be fair and unbiased in their work. In some cases, the reporters take it upon themselves to enforce the rule. I observed this situation in the University of Notre Dame's press box. Also at Notre Dame the members of the media who were seated near the talkative high school girls were disgusted that the girls were not more respectful of the opportunities the "sacred space" was providing. Further respect for the decorum was shown by the deferential language, as reporters constantly monitored their own language to avoid any swearing. Almost no one wore a hat in the press box, unless it was very cold. When university students were on site wearing the now ubiquitous baseball cap of their generation, they looked out of place. On the back of the press pass for the Union College in Schenectady NY was the message that only those with legitimate reason to be there are allowed, and anyone else will be considered to be trespassing. The rules could not be any clearer.

McChesney called the relationship between the sporting event and the media a symbiosis. This term is usually used by biologists to show the mutual benefits derived

from a collaboration of two organisms. In this case it is very apt, as the sporting event needs the publicity generated by the media, and the media need the content for its newspapers or broadcasts. At university sporting events, SIDs repeatedly go out of their way to make things easier and better for reporters, and reporters know they can count on cooperation of SID's to get the story. This is obvious from the respectful tone of the conversations between the two. In the field work for this thesis, I saw SIDs provide little things such as a hot dog or a whole meal, a bottle of water, a pen and notepad, and a commemorative tote bag, in their efforts to make the job easier for the reporters. While some would argue that these are unethical gifts to the reporters, I do not agree. When the reporters spend eight hours at a stretch in the same venue—as can be the case during tournament play when there might be two games per day—a courtesy such as a free lunch can be the difference between inadequate and effective coverage on the part of the reporters, especially if they have to leave the building to get a meal. The outcome of the game is what is being reported and the coverage would not be determined based on these tiny gestures.

Two other observations are worth mentioning. The majority of reporters at football and basketball games tended to wear golf shirts while the small majority of those at hockey games tended to wear shirts and ties. I think this might be because hockey rinks—and the press boxes therein—are colder than venues where the other two sports are played. I do not think it has anything to do with the professionalism of the reporters in those sports. Of course, no matter what the sport, television reporters tend to be a bit dressier in their appearance than do radio or print reporters. Secondly, sports reporters can be fans of the game, and not necessarily be cheering for a specific team. The people

at press boxes, both reporters and technicians, really know their sports and talk knowledgeably about the games they have seen.

Throughout these observations, I kept in mind American anthropologist Robert Sands' suggestion that this kind of research had to look at "the intangibles of human behaviour . . . adherence to routine and schedule, the tone of conversations."⁸⁹ What I present here is a glimpse into the working conditions of all sports reporters. I do not think this is a specifically Canadian media experience, but rather one that can be applied universally, across international boundaries.

⁸⁹ Sands, *Sport Ethnography*, 22.

Chapter 5: Gender and Racial Diversity in the Press Boxes

Evidence from my field research frequently confirmed the press box space as a “sacred space,” as detailed by Kong (1992). It was set off from the general public, and often protected by a security person. Those within were empowered to have something important to say; at the end of the game the print reporters have their say in 700 words, while broadcast reporters have their say for a two hour time period. Collegiality and professionalism were generally in evidence. Even reporters who were competitors were usually cordial to each other and those from out of town were greeted with a handshake and an inquiry about their families or travels. Inside the press box, the reporters tended to use more professional speech, and foul language was frowned upon. Inappropriate behavior was censured too, as was the case where one reporter encouraged another to be less demonstrative in his support for one of the teams at the University of Notre Dame football game. True to Kong’s description, I found that sometimes the acceptable behavior is codified—posted on walls or taped to the desks of every participant.

Yet, in my observations, I found there was something missing. There were hardly any women of any age in most press boxes, and very few were reporters. There were very few people of colour. Despite these events being university sports, there were very few university-age reporters in the press boxes. These university sports events may have featured athletes who were roughly eighteen to twenty-four years old, but the reporters who tended to cover university sports were middle-aged white males.

American academic Marie Hardin has written numerous articles on the lack of gender and racial diversity within newspaper newsrooms. As noted earlier, there is very little in the way of research into the culture and workings of the sports press box, yet

what Hardin has written—either singularly or collaboratively—can frequently be applied to the press boxes. Hardin and Whiteside (2006) note that women and racial minorities are underrepresented in newspaper sports departments, in general. They write that this is not just an oversight. They see this situation as an example of an unmet ethical responsibility on the part of news organizations:

In 1978 the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) outlined a mission to increase diversity in its newsrooms by the year 2000. The plan called for newspapers to match the percentage of minorities in their communities with the percentage of minorities working in their newsrooms. By the late 1990s it was clear that the goal was not going to be met, and the ASNE revised its target date to 2025. The ASNE continues to emphasize the need for newsrooms to diversify, stressing in its most recently updated Statement of Newsroom Diversity that

....to cover communities fully, to carry out their role in democracy, and to succeed in the marketplace, the nation's newsrooms must reflect the racial diversity of American society by 2025 or sooner.

Such a mission may be characterized as part of the newspaper industry's guiding ethic of social responsibility, which includes the charge to be pluralist and to reflect the diversity in the wider culture in order to more realistically and fairly report news. Securing a diverse newsroom staff, including among management ranks, is considered a basic step in reflecting the ethic of social responsibility; recognition of such a requirement for the complete, fair and bias- free production of

news stretches back to the Kerner Commission.⁹⁰ The goal of increasing female and minority employment at newsrooms is a regular topic in industry newsletters and trade publications. Leaders speculate on strategies for improvement, including more emphasis from top management, establishing mentoring programs and the creation of internships that target women and minorities.⁹¹

On July 28, 2009, American academic Bob Papper and the (American) Radio-Television News Directors Association released their annual “Women and Minorities Survey,” which found that women currently account for 41 percent of the news force—a record high for the survey.⁹² While these numbers do not address sports journalists specifically, they do show that gender and racial diversity is improving in the US media in general and in television specifically. Papper reports that the minority population in the U.S. has risen 8.5 percent in the past 19 years, but the minority workforce in TV news is up by only 4.0 percent. The following table, using statistics provided by the 2009 survey

⁹⁰ “‘Our Nation is Moving Toward Two Societies, One Black, One White—Separate and Unequal’: Excerpts from the Kerner Report.” U.S. President Lyndon Johnson formed an eleven-member National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in July 1967 to explain the riots that plagued cities each summer since 1964 and to provide recommendations for the future. The Commission’s 1968 report, informally known as the Kerner Report, concluded that the nation was “moving toward two societies, one black, and one white— separate and unequal.” Unless conditions were remedied, the Commission warned, the country faced a “system of ‘apartheid’” in its major cities. The Kerner report delivered an indictment of “white society” for isolating and neglecting African Americans and urged legislation to promote racial integration and to enrich slums—primarily through the creation of jobs, job training programs, and decent housing. President Johnson, however, rejected the recommendations. In April 1968, one month after the release of the Kerner report, rioting broke out in more than 100 cities following the assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.

⁹¹ Hardin and Whiteside, “Fewer Women, Minorities Work in Sports Departments,” 38.

⁹² Papper, “Women in TV News at a Record High but Minorities Drop.”

by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, shows the proportion of ethnic diversity in American newspapers and TV news departments.⁹³

	Daily Newspapers	TV News
Minority population	13.4%	21.8%
African American	5.2	9.6
Hispanic/Latino	4.5	8.8
Asian American	3.1	3.0
Native American	0.6	0.5
Women	37.0	41.4

In Canada, the Canadian Association of Newspaper Editors does not have a similar mission to promote gender and racial diversity, but they do point out the study done by Ryerson University researcher John Miller, which will be addressed later in this chapter.⁹⁴ Similarly, the Canadian Newspaper Association web pages do not deal with the issue of gender or racial equality.⁹⁵

At the three CIS (Canadian Inter-University Sport) national championships that I attended in 2007-08, there were more women sports reporters in the press box than there were at sports events throughout the regular season. This might be because the radio and television networks, which are more likely to be interested in a national story, are making an effort to diversify the backgrounds of their staff reporters. If this is the case, then sports departments that cover more local stories lag behind in their diversification efforts.

⁹³ Papper, "Women in TV News at a Record High but Minorities Drop."

⁹⁴ Canadian Association of Newspaper Editors.

⁹⁵ Canadian Newspaper Association.

I do not think there is an effort by local media to restrict women from reporting on sports, but rather I see that there are not a significant number of women who are employed as sports reporters in the local sports departments of the various media.

If there were women at regular season sports events, they were likely employed by a university as Sports Information Officers, helping to promote the team or the university, but not writing about the sport as a reporter. In other words, the women who were in the press boxes were in a helping role, perhaps a subservient role, rather than an empowering role. As UK academic Raymond Boyle (2006) said, “At times sport can be trivial and unimportant, at times a symbolically significant cultural form that is an indicator of wider social and cultural forces in society.”⁹⁶ I have come to see the lack of women in a press box, especially a university sponsored sporting event, as a significant cultural observation.

Sporting events at the university level are perfect places to encourage both male and female students to gain experience that might lead to career options. The students need to be encouraged and given opportunities to see sports journalism as a life-long pursuit. If the new generation of writers and thinkers do not find racial and gender equality in the university setting, then they are not likely to see equality as a practical aspect of their working lives.

My observations in the press boxes parallel what Hardin and Whiteside (2006) write about newsrooms in general: “Despite the dialogue in support of newsroom diversity, newspapers continue to employ a mostly white, mostly male workforce.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Contexts and Issues*, 13.

⁹⁷ Hardin and Whiteside, “Fewer Women, Minorities Work in Sports Departments,” 39.

Hardin and Whiteside make a series of important points in the article. These include:

- In 2005, about 38 percent of newspaper staffers were women, a significant gain from previous years.⁹⁸
- Limited research has shown two areas of the newsroom as particularly exclusionary for women: the editorial and sports departments. In 1989, about 15 percent of op-ed columnists were women; that percentage has grown to 24 percent in 1999.⁹⁹
- Female representation in editorial comment sections, however, may not be as low as female representation in sports departments. An informal survey by Associated Press sports Editors in 1999 found that only 10 percent of sports reporters were women.¹⁰⁰
- Further a survey of sports editors published in 2005 showed that almost 41 percent believe they do not have an ethical obligation to increase the number of women working in sports departments.¹⁰¹

It is a troublesome image of sports journalism in both the present and the future. In my observations, women regularly made up much less than 10 percent of the people in the press box. This does not seem to have changed much since I was a university student in mid 1970s. This is not a small thing, and it shows that women are not breaking the cycle of male domination in this field and have not made great gains in an entire generation.

The implications are that men and men's voices will continue to dominate the sports

⁹⁸ Hardin and Whiteside, "Fewer Women, Minorities Work in Sports Departments," 40.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

journalism field, dictating the coverage and concerns. The cycle continues. Women are not habitually hired to be sports writers, so they do not get a chance to be in the sports press boxes. Since they do not get hired in the sports department, they rarely get to become sports department editors, so they cannot influence the hiring processes or the nature of the journalism coverage provided. Until this cycle is broken, women will never have the ability to influence and shape the sports coverage in journalism, and are going to have legitimate complaints of inequality. Still, even just changing the “professional pecking order”¹⁰² may not be enough to ensure that more women have a voice in shaping sports coverage. Hardin and Shain (2006) point out that initiating change is not going to be easy. They write,

the notion that “employment = representation = empowerment” is a feminist fallacy. . . . Another incorrect assumption is that women who are promoted will incorporate a feminist agenda as part of their professional goals.¹⁰³

Achieving gender equality in the sports press boxes may continue to be an up-hill battle. For women, this means entering into a “sacred space”—a place viewed as filled with perks and privileges that some men may not give up willingly. The perks do exist and range from free food and drinks to free parking, often located close to the doors of the arena. Rubbing shoulders with the star-athletes might also be seen to be a perk.

Hardin and Shain (2006) see this invisible barrier as a form of cultural hegemony:

¹⁰² Hardin and Shain, “‘Feeling Much Smaller than You Know You Are’: The Fragmented Identity of Female Sports Journalists,” 322.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Cultural hegemony has been used to explain power relations and dominant ideology in cultural institutions, including media and sports. Hegemony—a form of control based on persuasion not coercion—is the result of the responses of people to values that support social relationships and power structures (Hargreaves, 1994). Individuals in key social institutions (such as education and media) thus participate in preserving social norms (such as masculinity and femininity) that ultimately oppress them (Hargreaves, 1994). In sports male hegemony has been more complete and more resistant to change than in other areas of culture.¹⁰⁴

A factor that contributes to women not being hired in sports departments is that they are not seen as being committed to the long-term goals of the department. Hardin and Shain (2005) write that when women do get to be employed in the sports journalism field, they do not stay there their whole careers:

The average career-span for women in sports is ten years, and most never reach management ranks. Some women in the business have contended that the biggest problems facing them are not direct discrimination (such as locker room access) but instead challenges in balancing family lives with demanding careers.¹⁰⁵

While being a sports writer may have its elements of job satisfaction, one of the elements of job dissatisfaction has to be the working hours. It is not unusual for sports

¹⁰⁴ Hardin and Shain, “‘Feeling Much Smaller than You Know You Are’: The Fragmented Identity of Female Sports Journalists,” 323.

¹⁰⁵ Hardin and Shain, “Female Sports Journalists: Are We There Yet? ‘No,’” 804.

writers to work a split shift, which means going to work in the morning, going home for the afternoon, then covering a sports event in the evening and filing before the typical 11 p.m. deadline. I am sure that working these “entertainment hours” would prove to be a discouraging factor for both males and females who might apply.

Perhaps another reason that women do not make a career of sports journalism is that they get discouraged at the fairness in the coverage of men’s and women’s sports.

Marie Hardin, Julie Dodd, and Kimberley Lauffer (2006) write that sports media generally exclude women from coverage. They found that newspapers dedicated

only 5-8% of total coverage to women’s sports, even though 40% of sports participation is by women (King, 2002). By neglecting and marginalizing female sports, the media reinforces a value system that discriminates against women both as athletes and as sports journalists.¹⁰⁶

Women in sports and sports media have made great strides since the 1970s. American sports journalist Michelle Kaufman writes that sports events for women have gained acceptance among fans just as women reporters have fought for and gained acceptance as sports writers:

Women’s sports have come a long way since 1972 Title IX legislation, which required schools to offer boys and girls equal sports opportunities. Then only 1 in every 27 high school girls played varsity sports. Today the number is 1 in 2.5. Nearly 40 percent of high school and college athletes were female in 2001. The women’s Final Four

¹⁰⁶ Hardin, Dodd, and Lauffer, “Passing It On: The Reinforcement of Male Hegemony in Sports Journalism Textbooks,” 430.

basketball tournament drew 20,000-plus fans in 2000, 2001 and 2002.

...There were more than 400 female sportswriters at the nation's 1,600 newspapers in 2002, compared to a few dozen in the 1970s when *Sports Illustrated* reporter Melissa Ludtke went to the Supreme Court to battle for equal locker-room access.¹⁰⁷

It is fair to say that participation in athletics and consumption of sports media have increased in the last decade. There has also been an increase in post-secondary education programmes where future sports journalists might receive their training. Hardin, Dodd, and Lauffer (2006) found that almost one-quarter of US journalism schools now offer sports journalism courses. However, they did not find a wide selection of textbooks geared to sports journalism. They write, "Relatively few sports journalism textbooks have been published; we found only eight."¹⁰⁸ (I found there are now about a dozen, but there are very few, if any, references to the inner workings of the sports press boxes.) The examination of this area by Hardin et al. (2006) confirms the conclusion of both Boyle (2006) and Rowe (2007): the world of sports journalism needs to be examined more closely.

In examining the content of those eight textbooks, Hardin, Dodd and Lauffer (2006) found that men outnumbered women almost five to one in the overall number of references in the text. They also found that women were often associated with individual sports, while men were involved with team sports, and that women were frequently mentioned as participants in non-contact sports, such as golf or tennis, or aesthetic sports,

¹⁰⁷ Kaufman, "Covering Women's Sports: Fair Play?" 235.

¹⁰⁸ Hardin, Dodd, and Lauffer, "Passing It On: The Reinforcement of Male Hegemony in Sports Journalism Textbooks," 435.

such as gymnastics or synchronized swimming, while men were mentioned in relation to power or contact sports. They see this as further hegemony that keeps women from realizing their potential as equals in the sports departments within the various media:

College courses can be a catalyst for helping female students develop the competency and confidence to enter sports journalism careers. But, with one possible exception (Craig, 2002) the eight textbooks reviewed for this study do not help foster a sense of “that’s the job for me” in women who would be reading these books.

These texts, to varying degrees, reinforce the idea that sports and sports journalism are masculine; they are enterprises for men. Thus these texts do not meet the call by Pederson et al (2003) to train journalists to treat sports as a domain for equitable coverage of men and women. These texts promote the gender stereotypes of sports, sports writing and sports writers and, therefore, provide a model for students to maintain those patterns rather than promoting the realities of women’s sports, the reporting and storytelling possible for men and women in covering women’s sports, and the opportunities for women sports writers.¹⁰⁹

It was UK academic Raymond Boyle (2006) who said that sports can be “at times a symbolically significant cultural form that is an indicator of wider social and cultural forces in society.”¹¹⁰ This is an area where further academic studies must be done.

¹⁰⁹ Hardin, Dodd, and Lauffer, “Passing It On: The Reinforcement of Male Hegemony in Sports Journalism Textbooks,” 441.

¹¹⁰ Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Contexts and Issues*, 13.

In a Canadian context, there is a similar lack of women in the sports departments. Statistics Canada 2001 census data show that the general population of males and females is almost equal. According to the 2001 Census, males comprise 49.6 percent of the general population of Canada, while females make up 50.4 percent of the general population.¹¹¹ University age students—those in the age range of twenty to twenty-four years old—make up nearly 14 percent of the general population, with 7.1 percent being males and 6.8 percent being females. In the general population survey of 2001, Statistics Canada also reports the number of journalists in Canada as 11,400. Of these, 6,350 are males, which is 55.7 percent of those listed. Females in this occupation total 5,055, about 44.3 percent of the total. One more set of statistics from Statistics Canada shows that there ought to be gender equality among journalists. Canadians 15 years of age and older, who list themselves as sports fans, and who watch or attend sports events, total nearly 7,651,000, of whom 4,040,000, or 52 percent are males, and 3,611,000 or 47 percent are females.¹¹² Perhaps, as Hardin and Whiteside propose, there is some sort of cultural hegemony at work, which keeps females from finding employment in sports departments and finding their place, and their voice, within the press boxes.

Much of the work by Hardin and her various collaborators examines the issue of gender equality in newspapers, although she does touch on racial equality too. Canadian academic John Miller (2004) addresses the lack of racial diversity among reporters in Canadian newspapers. While Hardin and her various collaborators and Miller all look at the make-up of those working in the news media, their findings can apply to the sports departments because sports has to be seen as an integral part of the whole news

¹¹¹ Statistics Canada, "Population by Sex and Age Group."

¹¹² Statistics Canada, "Sports Involvement by Sex."

organization. Presumably, the general manager of the whole organization, along with the head of the sports department, would sit in on hiring decisions, and would be able to shape the whole organization. Miller sees the progress being made in implementing racial diversity as a good news / bad news story:

Racial minorities have slightly increased their presence in the newsrooms of Canada's daily newspapers in the last decade, according to a survey done by researchers at Ryerson University's School of Journalism. Non-whites now constitute 3.4 per cent of the newsgathering staffs of 37 papers that returned questionnaires, compared to 2.6 per cent of staff at papers which responded to a similar survey in 1994.

Now the bad news: The gains do not keep pace with the huge increase of non-whites in the Canadian population. People of colour, including Aboriginals and those who self-identify as visible minorities, made up 16.7 percent of the population in the 2001 Canada Census, up from 11.7 percent in 1991. So the gap between minorities in the newsroom and in the communities they serve has widened during the last 10 years.¹¹³

Miller's (2004) study does end on a positive note, however:

¹¹³ Ryerson University School of Journalism, "Who's Telling the News? Race and Gender Representation in Canada's Daily Newsrooms."

The good news is that a majority of Canadian editors now believe that journalism schools are producing qualified visible minority candidates.

Fifty-seven percent (21 of 37) agreed with that statement.¹¹⁴

A report in the *Globe and Mail* predicted that one in five faces will be non-white when Canada celebrates the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017.¹¹⁵ The newspaper article reports that the number of visible minorities in Canada is expected to double by 2017 and form more than half the population in greater Toronto and Vancouver. Miller's detail, that 16.7 percent of the population of Canada self-identify as visible minorities, and the projection that Canada is a nation experiencing significant change in its racial makeup are important indicators that the world of sports journalists—those middle-aged white males—must change. Clearly we should expect to see more women and people of colour on our sports pages and on television. (Miller's 16.7 percent of the population includes all Canada's aboriginal peoples.)

In Chapter 2, I quoted Boyle's (2006) thought that "journalism is both literally and figuratively on the back pages in discussion on journalism." Unfortunately, this reality means that issues such as racial and gender diversity among sports reporters rarely get examined. Without an open and honest discussion, it is unlikely that any progress can be made on diversity issues.

Doris Maynard (2003), president of the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, makes a similar point in her editorial in the *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2003):

¹¹⁴ Ryerson University School of Journalism, "Who's Telling the News? Race and Gender Representation in Canada's Daily Newsrooms."

¹¹⁵ Ryerson University School of Journalism, "Media Watch Cache."

What makes this conversation more difficult is that we have yet to acknowledge and understand the role that race and gender play at shaping our perception of news and events around us. Just as journalists of colour and their white peers experience career opportunities differently, they also often view news events through very different lenses. . . .

To fulfill the industry's promise to diversify its newsrooms so journalists can accurately and fairly cover our increasingly complex communities, we need to find ways to talk about our nation's racial fault lines. To do so might require retraining ourselves in how to listen and how to speak honestly and respectfully to our colleagues. If we fail to learn how to do this we stand a good chance of having these same stilted and unproductive conversations about how we once again missed the mark in the year 2025.¹¹⁶

Sports journalism, of course, is not the only area of the journalism field that lags behind societal changes. Canadian researchers Marsha Barber and Ann Rauhala (2005) found the demographics of Canadian news directors at media organizations to be similarly skewed:

While women do constitute a significant percentage of the broadcast-journalism workforce, increasing from 20% in 1974 to 37% in 1994 (Robinson & Saint-Jean, 1998), they are vastly underrepresented

¹¹⁶ Maynard, "Why Journalists Can't Talk Across Race," 34-35.

among newsroom decision-makers. We found that 79.1% of Canadian news directors are male; only 20.9% are female.¹¹⁷

More than 90% of news directors are White. This compares with 4.5% who are Aboriginal and a further 4.5% who are East Asian. Statistics indicate that 13.4% of the Canadian population is made up of visible minorities, a threefold increase in the last 20 years (Statistics Canada, 2001e). Compared with the population as a whole, non-Whites are underrepresented in the ranks of the news directors. Certain groups, such as Blacks, were not represented at all among those who responded to our survey.¹¹⁸

Clearly, the media have a long way to go before achieving anything close to equality in these areas. One further document provides evidence that change is needed in the world of sports journalism. A 2006 report by George Spears and Kasia Seydegart examines the portrayal of women and men in Canadian coverage of the 1994 Lillehammer Olympic Games.¹¹⁹ The report, prepared for Sport Canada, showed a significant imbalance in the voices and sports presentations in these four areas:

1. The proportion of time given to women's and men's events:

Women's	26%
Mixed	10 %
Men's Hockey	32%

¹¹⁷ Barber and Rauhala, "The Canadian News Directors Study: Demographics and Political Leanings of Television Decision-Makers," 287.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 288.

¹¹⁹ Spears, George, and Kasia Seydegart. *Gender Portrayal in Television Coverage of the 1994 Olympic Games*, 1-4.

Men's other sports	32%
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2. Interviews:

Women:	27%
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Men	73%
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3. Commercials:

Total plays	3,255
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Actual ads:	235
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Male voice-overs:	90%.
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4. Announcers:

Male only	70%
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Both men and women	21 %
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Female only	9%
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It is interesting to note that not just the sports coverage of male and female athletic events receives a slant favourable to the male participants, but male voices dominate the ranks of announcers. The data provided by this report parallels my own observations: the male-dominated sports press boxes do not foster or encourage women to comment on the sports world. This, of course, is denying a voice to more than half of the population. American academics Thomas Oates and John Pauly (2007) describe sports as a male bastion that helps deliver a male audience:

Marketers seek the male audience that sports gathers. Most viewers, readers, and listeners are men. Thus sports media's ability to "deliver the male" to advertisers is well-known; and recently, vendors have

shown an increasing receptiveness to marketers wishing to reach consumers in creative ways.¹²⁰

If the world of sports is just about delivering a large audience to advertisers, then ignoring women as reporters or audience members is ignoring the possibilities of a large segment of the population. Sports writers, therefore, are short-changing the advertisers by not including sports events interpreted from a female perspective. Maybe it is time for another renaissance in sports journalism, as happened during the 1960s and 70s, when proponents and practitioners of the “New Journalism” turned to sports writing. Oates and Pauly (2007) pinpoint this time as a time of significant change in the world of sports journalism:

In short, writers and readers discovered in the New Journalism deeper lessons about sports, exploring the moral implications of sports as a cultural activity. It was not so much that the New Journalism “discovered” sports as a topic; to the contrary, newspaper, magazine, radio, and television had covered events and athletes for decades. What the New Journalists did was to undermine older narratives of sports as heroic or epic.¹²¹

The New Journalists found those themes as easily in sports as they did in other domains of society. New Journalism offered an uninvited critique of normal journalistic conventions and assumptions. Taking up sports as a serious topic was part of this critique, but shifting the focus from the structure and apparatus of games and events to

¹²⁰ Oates and Pauly, “Sports Journalism as Moral and Ethical Discourse,” 339.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 343.

sports participation, spectatorship, production, and display as culturally complex activity was the other part. Despite the challenging and innovative approach these writers brought to their work, sports remains one of the more mystified social practices in contemporary life, a tangle of amateur and professional experiences, contested meanings, and organizational and commercial relations waiting to be interpreted.¹²²

Nearly fifty years after the New Journalism used sports as a way to look at our society, it is time for another revolution. The new revolution will involve more women and people of colour. There are several things that need to be changed. One is the lack of diversity in the sports departments. Another area that needs to be addressed is the lack of equality in the sports press boxes. Another paradigm shift that needs to happen is to get younger writers, university age students, into the press boxes. Not only is this an opportunity for them to find their voices as young writers, but it will give them experiences that go beyond the lessons they learn in the classroom.

Just as the New Journalists of the 1960s found a way to look at sports in a whole new way, the next wave of revolutionary sports writers will find a way to look at sports from the press box in a whole new way. This can only happen if those providing the training ground for beginning journalists invite them into the press boxes so they can begin to understand the power that really emanates from the sacred space.

¹²² Oates and Pauly, "Sports Journalism as Moral and Ethical Discourse," 344.

Chapter 6: Observations and Conclusions

This thesis ends where it began—in the press box. On a Saturday in mid-October 2008, I was watching a football game in Antigonish, NS, between St. Francis Xavier University and St. Mary's University. About a half hour before game time, I made my way up the three flights of stairs that led to the press box. This was the very first press box I had ever been in, back when I was a student broadcaster at UNB. It looked the same as I remembered from thirty years ago.

In the press box, I was joined by about a dozen others, all of whom were friendly, cordial and welcoming. Most of us were white males over forty years of age. There were only two women in the press box; the SIO and another woman who was helping her husband as an official scorer. There were no university-age students in the press box, from either team.

Part way through the game, a wind came up and the sliding glass windows of the press box had to be closed to keep the papers from blowing away and to reduce the chill. In the stands outside, many university boys were shirtless, with their skin painted blue in favour of the home side. They found no protection from the wind.

For the second half of the game, I took a seat in the grandstand. I had forgotten how disconnected the press box is from the real game and the real fans, and this experience certainly brought that home to me. There, in the stands, I found what I would never find in a press box: noisy fans overflowing with opinions about the game, making editorial comments about the players and refs. The smell of beer-soaked fans permeated the air, and the chatter in between plays was mostly about the post-game social lives of the campus residents. The chilling wind cut through layers of windbreakers, sweaters and

blankets of the more sober fans. The stadium seemed to be in constant flux, with fans heading to the washrooms or the concession stands for hot-dogs and drinks. The conversation among many of the well-heeled alumni seated around me was whether they got the right size and colour of sweatshirt for their daughters. Clearly, they did not take the outcome of the game as seriously as those in the press box, and were more concerned about the social experience. For most of the fans this was an event celebrating a communal connection. Upstairs in the press box, the combined energy of the members of the media and others was about interpreting and filtering the event. Those in the sacred spaces were working, while those in the stands were relaxing and enjoying their connection to the sporting event and the campus.

None of this sideline connectedness was discernable from the press box, where the windows were closed against the breeze and tumult below. It may seem I have come full circle. However, the readings I have done and my press box observations have changed my view of sports and sports journalism. My love for these things is not diminished, just changed, and if anything, I have become more passionate that more fans and potential sports writers need to know more about the press boxes.

Press boxes at sporting events may be sacred places, but they can be as detached from reality as if the window was closed against the changing winds of society. I realized that one of my nagging questions was not whether those in the press boxes were doing a good job, but whether they could do a better job, and whether they were missing anything. Among the things missing in the press boxes are the voices of young people, the very students who attend the universities where these athletic events take place. I think that universities have an obligation to develop these young journalists. Any

university that has a competitive varsity sport—not just those universities that teach journalism—should have a student writing from the press box about that sport.

Universities have an obligation to their fans, their student body, and their alumni to somehow hire, promote, or sanction a university student to write the post-game reports, whether for the student newspaper or an Internet web site. These post-game reports are tasks that usually fall to the media director, public relations, or sports information officer on the campus, but it should be assigned to a student, under the supervision of the SID if necessary. This is a way to connect the university with its constituents and a way to develop young talent. It is also a voice of a student who is a peer to the athletes themselves. The athletes also deserve to have someone their own age reporting on their successes.

Another thing I question now is why all universities do not provide a web-cast of their games, whether by audio-video or only an audio signal. Such a web-cast of the game would be a powerful marketing tool that would allow fans in faraway locations to stay connected with their favourite university. Relatively inexpensive, this makes use of digital technologies that are already commonplace but are under-utilized.

I also question the lack of female reporters in the press box. With the general population fairly evenly divided between males and females, why are there not more females reporting from the press box? This is crucial, I think, to empower a diversity of voices on the sports scene. I agree with Hardin and Shain that this really is an issue of ethics, but I extend it to universities as well as to heads of sports departments. Similarly, as our society is heading to a racial diversity that will see one in five being people of colour, establishments such as news organizations and universities have an obligation to

open their doors to this changing demographic. Universities have an obligation to reach for higher ideals; actively promoting gender and racial equality while embracing more fully the new technologies are easily obtainable ideals.

The digital technology brings with it opportunities and challenges. Journalists especially have an obligation to embrace the technological changes and social developments as they come along. In his 2008 thesis, Carleton journalism student Peter Martyn wrote about the “mojos,” the mobile journalists who are expected to ably work across various media platforms, quickly and efficiently providing information from anyplace on their beat, to audiences who may be around the corner or across the world. The “mojo” concept came about in part as a return to shoe-leather journalism, Martyn says, just as sports journalism needs to reconnect with the fans in the stands. “The idea of being on the scene as ordinary life unfolds is not a brand-new idea,” Fort Myers News-Press Managing Editor Mackenzie Warren told Martyn, “but it’s something that most journalists have stopped doing.”¹²³ This shift in the work-world of news journalists is also having an impact on sports journalism. Andrew Wallace, writing in the Ryerson Review of Journalism (Summer 2009), underscores that journalists, and in this case sports journalists, are going to need better training in both job skills and thinking skills in order to navigate the changes that are coming:

The emergence of the web presents more than a technological blip on the continuum. For the first time, newspapers and pro teams are on the same platform, competing to tell the same stories and attract the same audience. But the two camps, struggling to stake claims in a

¹²³ Martyn, *Get Your 'Mojos' Working: How the Techniques and Technologies of Mobile Multimedia Reporting Affect the Practice of Journalism*, 84.

marketplace rich with potential, are wildly mis-matched. In one corner, the cash-cow MLSE [Maple Leaf Sports Entertainment] fighting for more dollars, more control. In the other, every shrinking Toronto sports section, fighting for their very survival.¹²⁴

It is in the best interests, then, of sports journalists to provide the universities with website links that the university community can access as they search for sports content on their favourite activities. Helping sports journalists to build connections with their readers through such links may at least forestall further declines in the newspaper readership that have news organizations concerned about their very survival.

Sports journalism is going to have to change. It is going to have to accommodate the growing number of women who are seeking positions in the sports departments. It is going to have to involve more young people, especially those from within a university community. It is going to have to allow for a more diverse population that better reflects the national demographic, and it is going to have to account for the changes in technology that are closer than just on the horizon.

What sports journalists have done well in the past is to tell stories. Regardless of the medium, good sports journalism involves telling good stories. Wallace (2009) writes that it is through excellent story telling that sports journalism has kept a faithful following:

Gary Andrew Poole argued that if sports sections are going to remain relevant they need to revisit their past. Poole, who freelances for *Time*, *GQ*, *Wired*, *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail*, believes that

¹²⁴ Wallace, "Cold War," 45.

sports journalists spend too much time fixated on the almighty scoop instead of doing what they actually do best—tell stories. He says good sports reporting provides context, nuance, narrative and insight—the stuff of legendary sports writers like Red Smith, W.C Heinz and Grantland Rice. By focusing on constantly breaking news at the expense of deep analysis and investigation, journalists today are missing their *raison d'être*. Evidence? A sports article hasn't won a Pulitzer Prize in nearly 20 years.¹²⁵

Sports journalism also needs an education system. Hardin, Dodd, and Lauffer (2006) found that about one-quarter of US post-secondary journalism programmes also offer sports journalism courses. They do not say, however, whether these programmes teach only sports writing concepts or provide a wide-spread understanding of the social trends, including those of racial and gender diversity in the sports departments. It is fair to say that the ideals of a more inclusive profession would not be absorbed by osmosis, so these issues must be taught and discussed in journalism schools.

However, it is not only values and ideals that need to be taught in journalism schools. Sports reporters have to learn to get beyond the summaries and scores of the game, and to tell the story in some interpretive manner. Reporters need to be taught that the press box, the sacred space, allows and at times encourages the kinds of storytelling that author Jack Lule (2001) calls eternal stories. Lule writes that these stories often involve “The Seven Master Myths in the News.” These especially seem to apply to sports journalism, and are “The Victim,” “The Scapegoat,” “The Hero,” “The Good

¹²⁵ Wallace, “Cold War,” 45.

Mother,” “The Trickster,” “The Other World” and “The Flood.”¹²⁶ The first three are fairly self evident. “The Good Mother” may take some explanation. “Myths of the mother can vary from those about the Terrible Mother, a figure of fear and hate, to those about Madonna, an icon of virginal innocence,” writes Lule.¹²⁷ In sports stories, the “Good Mother” may be the coach who cares about the team so much that he or she gets invited over to a player’s family home for food and home comforts. The team leader who makes sure the team mates are looked after could be another “Good Mother” figure, regardless of his or her gender.

As for the “Trickster,” Lule says “the title can lead people to think that the Trickster is simply a sly and cunning figure. . . . The myth of the Trickster often portrays a crude and stupid figure, half animal and half human.”¹²⁸ Sports stories of this kind might involve those using steroids or causing such a public distraction that their team gets off focus. Athletes involved in sexual assault or gambling and betting on their games or others may fall into this category. These are common enough sports stories, seeming to appear somewhere internationally, on a fairly frequent basis.

The “Other World” may be both magical and threatening, writes Lule: “Sometimes the Other World is a garden of delight, an exotic land of foreign charm. Sometimes the Other World is portrayed as a threat, as a dark and disagreeable land that harbours an enemy.”¹²⁹ The university hockey player, for example, who leaves the protective garden of the university community for a professional league might be seen to have been lured by the Other World. Use of drugs, steroids, and gambling may also fit

¹²⁶ Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories*, 21-25.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

into this category. Of course, this does not need to be perceived as a negative. Some athletes move from amateur to professional ranks, continuing their career in the most glorious fashion.

And “The Flood” represents calamities and disasters. “These stories depict the destruction of a group of people by powerful forces, such as the gods or nature.”¹³⁰

Examples of this abound in sports: the rain that washes out the ski hill before the downhill race and negates the hero’s chance of a winning performance; the snow that nullifies a football team’s running game; or even the leaky roof of an arena that causes the ice in the corner to give off a bad bounce that results in a winning goal.

One theme that Lule is missing, however, is the power that emanates from the “sacred space.” Those who work in the press boxes need to be educated so they can act on issues that help change society—issues such as racial and gender diversity or equality within their own midst. Sports reporters also need to be educated so they can tell better stories about what they observe. History tells us the first sports journalist was hired about 150 years ago, long before the concept of a press box was developed. By the 1920’s, writers such as Grantland Rice and Damon Runyon were delivering widely read, carefully crafted, imaginative interpretations from the press boxes at sporting events.

Universities need to do more to teach their students about the protocols of the press box at sporting events. They can do this by involving them in the working of the press box at university affairs. Without this change, the press boxes of the future might still be stuck in the past. Instead of being a sacred space, they might more properly reflect an “old-boys space.” It would be a shame if, nearly 100 years after writers such as Rice

¹³⁰ Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories*, 25.

and Runyon, by the year 2020, press boxes have lost their sacredness because they do not represent enough diverse voices. Then, for sure, they will be denigrated as merely part of the “toy box.”

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