

## ABSTRACT

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HIGHLIGHT FORM: FROM PEEP SHOW TO  
PATHÉ TO PASTICHE

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This dissertation traces the evolution of the sportscast highlight form. The highlight form emerged as the dominant technique of sportscasts as a result of the technological, economic and social changes that impacted media systems. Changes in technologies do not provide the entire account of the highlight form's development and deployment, so this study also explicates the importance of the protocols that express the intricate relationships between media producers, sports leagues and organizations, and audiences. It argues that the sportscast highlight form is not a recent development, given its prominent use within a news context in every medium from early news film and newsreels to television and new media.

As an example of media history, this project explicates each medium's contributions, not so much as discrete phenomenon, but as the relational totality which the term implies. Such macro-level histories necessarily take a more long-term view of the processes of historical change. Additionally, this methodology utilizes intertextuality as an analytical strategy to question whose interests were served from the evolution and deployment of this form, who benefited from the narratives represented through the form, and whose interests were consolidated from the commodification of the form. This study

analyzes primary and secondary sources related to sportscasts, including early sport films, newsreels, network and cable programming, and new media content.

The significance of this study stems from the prominent position sports media in general and sports journalism in particular occupy within the political and cultural economy of late capitalism. The significance of this project is also evidenced in the considerable impact the national and regional sports networks have had on the proliferation of sportscasts. Lastly, this study analyzes the impacts electronic sports journalists have had in influencing and reflecting trends in race, gender, and ethnic relations, as well as political, economic and international affairs.

**EVOLUTION OF THE SPORTSCAST HIGHLIGHT FORM: FROM PEEP  
SHOW TO PATHÉ TO PASTICHE**

By

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
List of Illustrations.....	iii
Chapter 1: The Highlight Form.....	1
Chapter 2: Knockout Rounds and Rounding Marks.....	35
Chapter 3: The Habit of Highlights.....	89
Chapter 4: A Dream of Carnage and the Electronic Monster.....	143
Chapter 5: The Agony of Defeat and the Ecstasy of Communication.....	191
Chapter 6: Sports Junkies, Junk Journalism and Cathode Ray Sterilization.....	244
Chapter 7: The Little Shop of Highlights.....	298
Chapter 8: The Real Virtuality for an Audience of One.....	336
Chapter 9: Significance of Findings.....	379
Appendix.....	399
Selected Bibliography.....	416

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- 2.1: Illustrations from the *Police Gazette*
- 2.2 Edison boxing films from 1891-1892
- 2.3 Photograph and drawing of the Black Maria studio
- 2.4 *New York Sun* illustration of film projection
- 2.5 Clipper advertisement
- 3.1 Zev-Papyrus display advertisement
- 3.2 Lewis Tewanima's "War Dance"
- 4.1 Photograph of images capture on television in the Zworykin laboratory
- 4.2 Display ad for Gillette Cavalcade of Sports World Series broadcast
- 4.3 NBC display ad for the Louis vs. Walcott championship fight
- 4.4 Photograph of the Stratovision, a B-29 Superfortress
- 4.5 A television map of the United States from 1949
- 4.6 NBC letterhead design of press releases for college football broadcasts
- 5.1 Ampex Corporation's Mark IV Prototype Video Tape Recorder
- 5.2 Scotch Magnetic VR Tape
- 5.3 Schematic drawing of Syncom III's synchronous orbit
- 6.1 The number of U. S. homes with cable television in 1980

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE HIGHLIGHT FORM**

### **Thematic Statement**

The purpose of this study is to trace the developments that contributed to the evolution of the sportscast highlight as an aesthetic form. In this regard the term aesthetics refers to those visual and audio techniques and conventions that contribute “to establishing the meaning and validity of critical judgments concerning works of art, and the principles underlying or justifying such judgments.”<sup>1</sup> As a form, the sportscast highlight has been used to communicate narratives about sporting events and the athletes who compete within them. In this sense, the highlight does not refer to specific content but to the form within which the visual images and audio commentary are presented.

Although sportscasters use the term highlights in referring to content, that undifferentiated usage raises the question of what constitutes a sportscast highlight: Is it footage that captures an historic achievement (e.g., world’s record), or is it footage that captures individual or team athleticism (e.g., slam dunk), or is it an oddity that defies categorization? The images that largely derive their meaning from the context are referred to in semiotics as syntagmatic. For example, the “highlight” selected as the greatest in a 2007 Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) contest of the “100 Greatest Highlights” was Mike Eruzione’s game-winning goal in the 1980 Lake Placid Olympic Games. Although the goal-scoring sequence offered neither outstanding athleticism, nor compelling visuals, it captured a significant sporting moment for an American audience, namely, victory over the highly favored hockey team from the Soviet Union. Not knowing the context of Eruzione’s goal dilutes its meaning. Conversely,

images whose meaning is less dependent on the context of surrounding images are paradigmatic.<sup>2</sup> For example, Lynn Swann's acrobatic catch in Super Bowl X was a great individual play regardless of the game's outcome. No context is necessary to appreciate the catch, and the images can be appreciated for the grace and beauty of the athleticism.

To trace the evolution of the highlight form as it was developed and deployed within sportscasts, it is necessary to differentiate between the two main types of sportscasts: 1) the live coverage (i.e., accounts and descriptions) of a sporting event and 2) news-oriented programming of sporting events. The former category includes all the national and international, professional and collegiate sporting events (e.g., Olympics, World Cup Football, Wimbledon, Kentucky Derby, NFL, etc.) that are disseminated live via an electronic delivery system.<sup>3</sup> The latter includes all emanations of sports news—film actualities, newsreel sports segments, televised sports news programming, Web site content, and content delivered via mobile devices.

The two main sportscast genres have been communicated by a variety of delivery systems. While the changes in delivery systems, or technologies, constitute an important aspect of this study, they represent only one part, for as Henry Jenkins posits, "Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are also cultural systems."<sup>4</sup> Jenkins also points out that while delivery systems come and go, "media persist as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment stratum."<sup>5</sup> Those layers include not only the delivery systems that disseminate content, but also what Lisa Gitelman refers to as set protocols or social and cultural practices. "Protocols express a huge variety of social, economic, and material relationships."<sup>6</sup> Thus, this study explicates how

sportscasts, as content for various media, have changed as media's protocols have changed. While the conventions and the deployment of the sportscast highlight form have changed, what has not undergone significant change is the highlight form itself.

Consideration of the sportscast highlight form is based on a principle that stems from what Raunbjerg and Sand call the "aesthetics of the instant."<sup>7</sup> Deployment of the most exciting "highlights" constitutes a visual representation of both the aesthetic form and the sporting event. This project proposes that the sportscast highlight form evolved from the technological changes that led to refinements in audio and video techniques, resulting in enhancements of production values. The sportscast highlight form has been adapted and appropriated by news organizations, as well as sports leagues and organizations to capture, preserve and embellish the decisive moments of sporting events and athletic achievement, often referred to as the "ritual object."<sup>8</sup> In so doing, these entities have utilized the form to carry what Susan Birrell calls "ideological messages that empower some views and values while dismissing or obscuring others."<sup>9</sup>

Explicating the changes in the technologies and the protocols that have shaped sporting discourse, transmitted cultural values, and promoted affective economics necessarily involves an analysis of the visual and audio techniques that constitute the form's foundation. Arguably, the most important technique is the creation of visual synecdoche through use of condensation and decontextualization.<sup>10</sup> As Kenneth Burke explains, "Artistic representation is synecdochic, in that certain relations within the medium 'stand for' corresponding relations outside it."<sup>11</sup> The sportscast highlight form condenses and decontextualizes images from a sportscast and recontextualizes those

images with auditory conventions (e.g., narrative commentary and canned music) to generate the meaning context. The recontextualized narrative guides the viewer to the “correct” interpretation and feeling state, despite the fact that viewers are disparately positioned and rarely interpret the highlight’s meaning in the same way.

This study argues that changes in the technologies were accompanied by changes in protocols for both sportscast producers and audiences. The highlight form changed the way sportscasters and electronic sports journalists performed their jobs. For example, with the introduction of in-game replays in the early 1960s, sportscasters’ accounts and descriptions of live sporting events became increasingly more technical and analytic, lending a greater scientificity to the commentary. Videotape allowed for instant replays, allowing montages to be used to amplify the spectacle and affect of sportscasts and in-game promotions. The role of the sportscaster changed from one who informed to one who entertained. In turn, the commercial imperative reshaped institutional values and professional practices of electronic sports journalists. The relationship between sports journalists and the leagues, teams and players was characterized by marketing co-promotion and a vested interest in protecting each other’s financial investments.

Technological changes also impacted the protocols of sportscast viewers. In the early 1890s viewers experienced the sportscast highlight form alone, looking through a viewer mounted on the top of kinoscope machines. Only a few years later, projectors allowed for viewing in cinemas (i.e., nickelodeons), opera houses, fairgrounds and anywhere a screen and projector could be set up and powered with electricity. Early television viewing was largely a communal affair as bars and taverns capitalized on the

new medium by offering sportscasts to patrons. The home became the primary place to watch when television sets became affordable for individuals and families. The viewing experience for audiences changed again with the proliferation of new delivery systems. No longer did viewers depend exclusively on the television schedule since sportscast pay packages allowed for access almost anywhere and anytime. Media and sports leagues discovered they could generate another revenue stream by delivering sportscast content to an audience of one.

To trace the development of this form necessitates a broad scope. As such, this project employs a historical framework whose concern “is not with particular individuals, moments, or events, but with the larger economic and social forces that structure their terrain, that shape the ground upon which events are enacted.”<sup>12</sup> While it is important to acknowledge that illustrations were used in early sporting magazines like the *Police Gazette*, this project considers the development of sportscasts in the context of visual electronic media. Specifically, the evolution of the sportscast highlight form can be traced from some of the earliest Edison films, which included staged boxing matches, as well as actualities of live sporting events. Newsreels helped to standardize the routines utilized by cameramen and the sports segments created in the production offices by editors. Early television developed the conventions and production practices used in the presentation of live sporting events and sports news programming. With the technological developments that produced videotape in 1956, televised sportscasts were enhanced with special effects techniques like slow motion, instant replay and stop action.<sup>13</sup> The emergence of cable networks like ESPN and the Cable News Network (CNN), which began airing nightly

half-hour sportscasts in 1979 and 1980 respectively, saturated the electronic sports media market and introduced the concept of the “sports junkie.”<sup>14</sup> Lastly, new media offered yet another set of delivery systems and protocols that changed the ways audiences accessed sportscasts.

As an example of media history, this project explicates each medium’s contributions, not so much as discrete phenomenon, but as the relational totality which the term implies.<sup>15</sup> Put another way, this project delineates how historically and as a matter of fact, film, newsreels, television and new media are very closely aligned in terms of the technologies and protocols that contributed to the development and deployment of the sportscast highlight form.

This study will answer the following research questions:

1. What technological developments in film, newsreels, television and new media contributed to the sportscast highlight form?
2. From what basic categories of generative mechanisms, which include style, mode of production, intertextualities, and authorship, did the sportscast highlight form evolve?
3. What protocols—economic, political and social relationships—contributed to shaping sportscasts within a commercial imperative?
4. How has the sportscast highlight form been deployed to shape sporting discourse, transmit cultural and sport values, and promote affective economics?
5. How has the sportscast highlight form shaped perceptions of race,

gender, national identity and ethnicity?<sup>16</sup>

## **Literature Review**

### A. Sport and Film History

If the sportscast highlight is considered an art form, then it is important to consider how that form evolved from basic categories of generative mechanisms. Allen and Gomery argue that these mechanisms “operate within larger contexts, however, and their individual histories involve both aesthetic and non-aesthetic factors, including the economic, technological, and social contexts in which films have been made and received.”<sup>17</sup> This research project argues that the development of the sportscast highlight form is an evolutionary process that involves aesthetic and non-aesthetic considerations. Like the history of film, the history of the sportscast highlight form is evolutionary: The film period is marked by formative concerns of production and distribution; the newsreel period by the refinement of visual, sound and editing techniques; the early network television period by imaginative story-telling and myth-making; cable television by the proliferation of mediated sport content; and new media by a technological synthesis of the other periods to produce more intense affect. As Allen and Gomery note, “One aesthetic development provides the impetus for the next as the aesthetic potential of the medium is realized by one filmmaker after another.”<sup>18</sup> Arguably, the same impetus holds true for a genre within any medium.

Several seminal works have documented the role of early filmmakers in capturing sporting events as content for entertainment films and actualities. Charles Musser’s *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography* provides a

comprehensive guide to early Edison films, as well as an insightful introduction that explains film production, representation and exploitation in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In the first volume of his *History of the American Cinema*, titled *The Emergence of Cinema*, Musser offers a compelling account of the social, technological and economic factors that contributed to the formation of early American cinema. His work chronicles the importance of sports as content for filmmakers. Gordon Hendricks' *Origins of the American Film*, a compilation of three works—*The Edison Motion Picture Myth* (1961), *Beginnings of the Biograph* (1964), and *The Kinetoscope* (1966)—is instrumental in detailing the contributions of W. K. L. Dickson and the Latham family to the development of early film.

While several histories of boxing refer to the relationship between boxing and film, Elliott J. Gorn's *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* provides a rich account of the sport in the decades leading up to the emergence of film. The most detailed study of boxing's relationship with film is Daniel J. Streible's unpublished dissertation, titled *A History of the Prizefight Film, 1894-1915*. This well-researched and exhaustive study is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the formation of sport media. Although Streibel presents a rich social history of the fight film, he offers little related to the formation of the sportscast highlight form.

## B. Sport Media History

Because the highlight form has been employed within different media, it is important to consider the works that provide an historical account of those various media. Raymond Fielding's *The American Newsreel: A Complete History, 1911-1967* offers a

comprehensive overview of the history of the American newsreel, although his analysis of sport focuses more on event coverage than on the routinization and standardization that characterized the newsreel sports segment. Fielding addresses the relationship between newsreels and prizefighting, as well as the Olympics, but searching for sports-related topics is difficult because sport is not an indexed topic. Peter Baechlin and Maurice Muller-Strauss present an objective, world-wide survey of newsreel in *Newsreels Across the World*. In addition to data-rich charts, the authors analyze the problems associated with the production of actual newsreels, their projection in cinemas, and international organization of newsreel ownership. The authors aptly analyze the production of sports segments. Because of its insightful analysis of how the newsreels created and utilized their operational aesthetic, Nicholas Pronay's chapter, "The Newsreels: the Illusion of Actuality," in *The Historian and Film*, should be considered essential reading. Of particular interest is Pronay's discussion of "the feel and character of events which was different in kind from what had lain within the powers of the news media before."<sup>19</sup>

Several works explain the importance of television in the development of sports. Benjamin Rader's *In Its Own Image* analyzes television's "impact on the ethos of sports; on the motives and behavior of athletes, owners, and spectators; and on the organization and management of sports."<sup>20</sup> Since the work, published in 1984, presents a critical analysis of the early years of sports telecasts, it provides almost nothing about cable television's impact or the importance of the highlight form to sportscasts. Similar in style and scope to Rader's book is Ron Powers' *Supertube: The Rise of Television Sports*.

Published in the same year as Rader's work, Powers' book explores the changes television forced upon sports, especially in terms of economics. Boone Arledge's *Memoir* provides anecdotal information about the development of ABC Sports by the person most responsible for its development. Bill Rasmussen's *Sports Junkies Rejoice! The Birth of ESPN* offers a detailed account of his role in creating the cable network. A more comprehensive and detailed study of ESPN is available from Michael Freeman, whose *ESPN: The Uncensored History* is based on "more than two hundred interviews over a four-year period with current and former ESPN employees...company documents, handwritten notes, diary entries and media accounts."<sup>21</sup>

Several trade books concentrate on the history of a single sport or the history of the sport's relationship with media. Even though Michael MacCambride's *America's Game* focuses on the history of the National Football League, his discussion of specific topics related to media—NFL Films, *Monday Night Football*, and blackout rules—is highly informative. In *Reading Football*, Michael Oriard shows how football became a series of cultural stories about power, luck, strategy, and deception. Oriard continues that investigation in *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press*. Oriard argues that newsreels were instrumental in popularizing football and that "newsreel football was the early ancestor of ESPN's *SportsCenter*."<sup>22</sup> Curt Smith's *Voices of the Game* provides a full-scale overview of baseball broadcasting from 1921 to the present. As Smith admits, judging play-by-play men must be, of necessity, arbitrary, but the work compensates with its breadth what it lacks in depth. *Selling the Five Rings*, co-authored by Robert Barney,

Stephen Wenn and Scott Martyn, tracks the history of the modern Olympic Games, providing considerable primary source documents related to the International Olympic Committee's use of media to popularize the games.

Several scholars have contributed chapter-length works on sport media history to compilations. Among these, Robert W. McChesney's "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," argues that surges in the popularity of sport have always been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the media's coverage of sport. In contrast with McChesney's perspective, Jennings Bryant and Andrea M. Holt's "A Historical Overview of Sports and Media in the United States" posits that many "cultural forces and social movements other than capitalism helped shape the complex, mutually interdependent relationship between sports and media"<sup>23</sup> and that essential elements of the relationship were derived long before the Industrial Age. These works illustrate the difficulties of providing an overview to such a broad topic in a single article.

### C. Television and Film Technical Production Techniques

Few studies have empirically engaged aesthetic processes of sports newscasts, although scholars have analyzed aesthetic features of news production. In "TV Sport and Rhetoric," Preben Raunbjerg and Henrik Sand utilize a genre approach to televised sport with a focus on form rather than content. They show how mediated sport transforms the sporting event into a media event on an aesthetic level, a characteristic feature of which is the tendency to preserve and embellish the event's decisive moments, meaning highlights. In *Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics*, Herbert Zettl, analyzed such factors as field of view, relative closeness of shots, selected graphic forces, the

articulation of two- and three-dimensional space, and motion within the frame.

Of particular relevance for this study, Martin J. Medhurst's "Propaganda Techniques in Documentary Film and Television: AIM vs. PBS" explicates the criteria of effective television and filmic propaganda techniques. Of particular significance, Medhurst argues that documentary film [and television], as a genre, "was anything but the objective, neutral, factual reporting of events as they transpired in real life."<sup>24</sup> Medhurst situates the documentary film as a genre dealing with the "creative treatment of actuality."<sup>25</sup> Medhurst presents nine techniques, some unique to film, some shared with other media, that characterize effective propaganda works, including the decontextualization of sound and image, the recontextualization of sound and image, the use of a narrator, and the pursuit of a journalistic angle, all of which contribute to "gaining control of the viewers' emotions...to lead the audience to specific ideational conclusions."<sup>26</sup> This project will argue that the propaganda techniques delineated by Medhurst constitute key elements of the sportscast highlight form.

Several studies within cultural studies have analyzed the impact that television's use of the highlight form has had on sport. In "Football Since the War," Chas Critcher notes that the editing of a ninety-minute game down to thirty "represents the game as a series of detailed moments rather than as a more general flow of action."<sup>27</sup> Critcher describes the effect of the press and television on the football sub-culture as debilitating. In "'Highlights and Action Replays'—Ideology, Sport and the Media," Alan Clarke and John Clarke examine key processes through which the media interpret sporting events and provide viewers with the frameworks of meaning with which to make sense of the

event. The two processes they explicate are the process of selection and the process of interpretation, through which the media are “involved in highlighting and reinforcing...ideological values.”<sup>28</sup> The authors identify four values that inform the concentration of the presentation of sport: spectacle, drama, personalization and immediacy, values which they note are also intrinsic to coverage of crime news. They note, “These elements of concentration operate within the broader frameworks of sports programmes and they can be illustrated by looking at the conventions, the formats of such presentation.”<sup>29</sup> While the article primarily analyzes these conventions based on textual evidence, the authors point to processes that have become accepted practices in sport-media production. In “Cool as the Other Side of the Pillow,” Farred argues that the commentary produced by ESPN’s *SportsCenter* anchors is a distinctive type of sports discourse permeated with a penchant for hipness. *SportsCenter’s* anchors use a discourse that “trades on two different, although by no means antithetical, kinds of ‘coolness’. In the first sense, it is...self-referential and literary; in the second, it is well versed in the latest in hip-hop speak.”<sup>30</sup> By repeating their own trademark phrases, these anchors are not only patenting and claiming their expressions, they also are adding them to the public domain.

#### D. Sport, Media and Society

The emergence of the sociology of sport as an academic discipline in the 1980s fostered a wealth of research on the relationship between sport, media and society. Gary Whannel’s *Fields of Vision* argues that television not only affects the ways in which we perceive and make meaning of sports, but also that the medium “makes implicit and

explicit statements, in words and pictures, about our sense of nation, of class, of the place of men and women, our relation to other nations and so on.”<sup>31</sup> David Rowe’s *Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity*, focuses on the organizational structures and professional ideologies that shape the production of media sports texts and the way audiences deconstruct sports images and information. Rowe is most effective in “assessing the relative power of major sports and sports organizations and of media corporations and proprietors.”<sup>32</sup> His critique is particularly relevant to a discussion of how the sportscast highlight form is deployed. *Sport and Postmodern Times* brings together a number of North American and European scholars whose work examines sport and its significance in the construction and diffusion of dominant cultural meanings and values. Several chapters confront the issues related to sport, representation and the postmodern mediascape, showing how sport appropriates “and reproduces postmodern aesthetic forms in order to better constitute itself as an object of hyperconsumption.”<sup>33</sup> The relationship between postmodernism and the highlight form is a key concept of this research. In the article “Sport on Television: Replay and Display,” Margaret Morse analyzes the impact of technical innovations like slow motion and instant replay in television broadcasts of American football, arguing that such innovations distort time and space to the detriment of the game’s overall geometry. This work offers an insightful analysis about one frequently used sportscast technique related to the highlight form.

Several works that do not deal with sport directly informed this study’s discussion of the changing protocols related to media. Timothy W. Luke’s *Screens of Power* investigates the politics behind how cultural, economic and social meanings are created.

His discussion informs the political and cultural economy of sport media forms. Although E. Ann Kaplan's *Rocking Round the Clock* focuses on rock videos, the larger arguments about postmodernism, spectatorship and advertising are certainly applicable to the aesthetic issues confronted in this study. In *Promotional Culture*, Andrew Wernick delineates the unfolding relationship between the intensive and extensive development of the market as an organizing principle of life, emphasizing the impact of promotion on the objective side of culture. Wernick's ideas on the spread of commodification were applicable to the deployment of sportscast highlights within the sport mediascape. Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* offers a cogent discussion on the collision of old and new media. Of particular interest to this study is his explication of convergence, participatory culture, and affective economics.

#### E. Sports Journalism

There is a dearth of scholarship specifically devoted to the issues and contexts in which sports journalism, media and popular culture intersect. Raymond Boyle's *Sports Journalism: Context and Issues* argues that sports journalism has been implicated in the construction of various sports discourses connected to wider issues of gender, race, ethnicity and national identity. Boyle's discussion on the issues of co-promotion, punditry and journalistic values is particularly relevant in light of the recent recognition that the sports audience is more media savvy than previous scholars believed. Although David A. Klatell and Norman Marcus's *Sports for Sale* is not wholly devoted to sports journalism, they explore several issues that stem from the entertainment ethos of sportscasting—biased reporting, conflict of interest, time-shifting, and the lack of

enterprise reporting—that characterize “the woeful state of television sport journalism.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Methodology and Sources**

This research project employs a historical-cultural methodology that seeks to explain the evolution and deployment of the sportscast highlight form by tracing the formation over a period of time. Such macro-level histories necessarily take a more long-term view of the processes of historical change. Additionally, this methodology utilizes intertextuality as an analytical strategy to explore the relationships and connections between media, sports leagues and consumers. It theorizes media as constituted by, as well as constituting, social and cultural formations. As Scannell notes, “The media clearly operate within a set of economic and political frameworks, representing the prevailing social order, but its [sic] diversity as well as its internal representational struggles, as articulated by the media, serve also to poise the media uneasily between convention and innovation, reproduction and change.”<sup>35</sup> Schrøder explains that in the case of news and other factual coverage, macro-level critical discourse analysis can be used to examine various media genres as they draw on other forms of discourse. He notes, “It is at this macro-social level that, ultimately, the meaning of discourses and practices may be evaluated.”<sup>36</sup>

In order to account for the various economic, technological and cultural frameworks that have contributed to the shaping of media genres and forms, it is necessary to examine the intertextual structures within media. The methodological question, as Jensen points out, of how to examine intertextual structures and the social and cultural processes shaping them over time has divided researchers. The majority of

intertextual studies has centered on texts as self-contained entities, and these studies have made “little or no reference to complementary sources of evidence about literary and media institutions....”<sup>37</sup> Jensen points to the work of Fiske as an alternative methodological approach that delineates different types of intertextuality according to their functions.

Fiske outlines two distinct types of intertextuality: Horizontal intertextuality concerns the transfer and accumulation of particular meanings over historical time, as preserved in metaphors, themes and, of particular relevance to this study, genres. Vertical intertextuality operates during a more delimited time period, but across several media and social contexts. To clarify this synchronic perspective, Fiske offers three types of texts: Primary texts refer to the center of attention (e.g., traditional artworks, a feature movie, etc.). Secondary texts consist of studio publicity, reviews and criticism, and tertiary texts consist of audience contributions in conversations and other interaction around media, which in today’s mediascape include blogs, internet forums and chat rooms. As Jensen points out, “Together the two axes of intertextuality may be understood as a model of how meaning is produced and circulated in society.”<sup>38</sup> This study employs a diachronic approach that investigates the contributions of the various media to the development of the sportscast highlight form and its deployment in the creation of sport narratives disseminated to audiences.

Seeking to unpack the intricate relationships between media, sports leagues and audiences, this study utilizes intertextuality as an analytical approach to question whose interests have been served from the evolution and deployment of this form, who has

benefited from the narratives represented through the form, and whose interests have been consolidated from the commodification of the form. By locating how the highlight form evolved and was deployed, this study can better theorize “about the cultural meanings and interests particular sites of power engender and mobilize.”<sup>39</sup> In the context of historical media research, intertextual analysis attempts to connect disparate historical events and entities to one another within a broader cultural framework. Because the highlight form has served as a means of encapsulating cultural values within a mediating object, intertextual analysis can be applied to access the process of meaning production, dissemination and consumption and offer a way to understand the past.

Ultimately, as Scannell asserts, “The precise method of any particular historical investigation will be shaped and informed by the nature of the topic and the available resources, but a willingness to read widely and to explore supplementary sources is vital.”<sup>40</sup> The nature of this research project being to trace the evolution of an aesthetic form, the sportscast highlight, it is incumbent that the researcher investigate the primary sources that contributed to that evolution.

This study is based upon primary and secondary sources related to sportscasts. Analysis revolves around a number of early films, located and available at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. These include: *Leonard-Cushing Fight*, June 14, 1894, Edison/the Kinetoscope Exhibition Company; *Corbett and Courtney Before the Kinetograph*, November 17, 1894 (filmed September 7), Wm. K. L. Dickson/Edison, Kinetoscope Exhibition Company; *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, March 17, 1897, Veriscope Company; *Jeffries-Sharkey Contest*, November 4, 1899, American Mutoscope

& Biograph; *World Championship, Jack Johnson vs. Stanley Ketchell* [sic], October 24, 1909, J.W. Coffroth/Kalem, Kleine Optical Company/MPPC and Gaumont, UK; *Jeffries-Johnson World's Championship Boxing Contest, Held at Reno, Nevada, July 4, 1910*, December 7, 1910, J. & J. Co., Photographed by Vitagraph; Supervised by J. Stuart Blackton; *Willard-Johnson Boxing Match*, May 4, 1915 (April 5 date of fight), Pantomimic Corp. (Fred Mace/L. Lawrence Weber; "*Columbia*" *Winning the Cup*, October 24, 1899, Thomas A. Edison, Inc.; producer J. Stuart Blackton, Albert E. Smith; and *Racing at Sheepshead Bay*, July 31, 1897, Thomas A. Edison, Inc.; producer, James White.

Newsreels have been analyzed, covering the years 1929-1952. A collection of *Universal* Newsreels are available at the National Archives at College Park. This study examines a purposive sampling to establish not only the range of sports covered, but also the contributions of newsreel sport segments in the creation of a national identity and cultural hegemony. The purposive sample compares newsreels produced in the years immediately after the introduction of sound—1929, 1931, 1932 and 1933—with those from the years following World War II—1947, 1948, 1949, 1951 and 1952. These years were selected to avoid the war years when newsreel coverage of sports was reduced, yet allow enough passage of time to note any changes in form or content. Additionally, the sample includes three Olympic years, 1932, 1948 and 1952, to compare how that event was used in constructing national identity and presenting women and minority athletes.

The Library of Congress has an extensive collection of NBC radio and television programming log books and public relations news releases. While there are almost no

extant copies of early sportscasts, the log book and news releases provide valuable information about their creation, production and dissemination. Another important source of information resides in national newspapers and trade journals related to television. As sports became an important source of television programming in the years following World War II, the *New York Times* provided extensive coverage of the telecasts, offering factual information and insightful commentary on the significance of what was being televised. A limited number of archived sports news programs are also available, including CBS's *Sports Spectacular* and ABC's *Wide World of Sports*. It has been especially helpful to compare these programs before and after the development of videotape to determine what, if any, that had on the aesthetics of both programs.

Cable programs such as ESPN's *SportsCenter* are still being broadcast, so a purposive sample of one week during each season (i.e., spring, summer, fall and winter) was analyzed to establish the audio and video conventions of the sportscast. Additionally, other news programming such as *Pardon the Interruption* and *Around the Horn*, both of which utilize the highlight form, was also analyzed. A collection of spots from the advertising campaign "This is *SportsCenter*" were accessed and used to explicate the intertextuality of ESPN's programming and branding strategies. Other programs such as ESPN's reality program, *Dream Job*, provided insights into how anchors provide lead-ins and commentary for highlights.

In addition, this study has accessed a number of Web sites utilizing the sportscast highlight form in order to analyze the deployment, packaging and functionality of the content. It has considered utilization of the highlight form by the professional sports

leagues, media organizations and providers of wireless mobile services. Issues related to commodification and marketing have been explicated.

Lastly, an extensive number of newspaper articles have been utilized to delineate the social, economic, legal and technological changes that impacted the development of the sportscast highlight form. Given the dearth of archival television programs available for research, newspaper articles were an invaluable source in establishing not only what sports programs were televised, but also how those programs were critiqued by *New York Times* reporters like Val Adams, Jack Gould, Orrin Dunlap Jr., Sidney Lohman and Richard Witkin. These reporters covered the emerging medium of television and its relationship with sports with considerable verve and polish, offering insightful criticism. Newspaper articles constitute an important primary source for this study.

While it is important for the researcher to become familiar with secondary sources, it is even more important to assess and analyze them “in regards to the types of evidence used, generalizations drawn and historical frameworks employed.”<sup>41</sup> A thorough understanding of the secondary literature assists researchers in formulating paradigms and asking appropriate research questions which are at the heart of the historical process. Further, these secondary sources can help to “establish appropriate themes and set parameters conducive to consistent and logical arguments.”<sup>42</sup> A list of the secondary sources that have been consulted in the grounding of this research proposal has been included in the bibliography.

### **Context, Conclusions and Significance**

The significance of this study stems from the prominent position sports media in

general and sports journalism in particular occupy within the political and cultural economy of late capitalism. Scholars have thoroughly explored the importance of sport within culture, leading Jennifer Hargreaves to posit, “The amount of time, energy and money devoted to sport in one form or another by all sections of society is undoubtedly greater than for any other aspect of culture.”<sup>43</sup> Significantly, it is within the sphere of culture where the key economic processes of production, dissemination and exchange occur, connecting cultural production to the late-capitalist world of making products, supplying services and generating profits. Since cultural factors are central to economic processes, then sport and sports media clearly occupy a central position in the larger process that is reshaping society and culture. As Rowe argues, media texts, including sportscasts, are positioned “at the leading edge of this culturization of economics: they cannot be eaten or worn yet billions of people desire them in a bewildering variety of types, and media corporations are willing to expend billions of units of currency to supply them.”<sup>44</sup>

As a cultural and political form, television has largely been shaped by and dependent on the norms of late-capitalism. Sportscasts, like other television genres, are imbued with political and cultural economy. Rowe notes:

Every fragment of sports reports, snatch of commentary, still shot and flickering image, and all other elements of sports discourse, are couched in visual and verbal languages whose grammar and syntax, vocabulary and framing, carry within them a kind of politics. These need not be overt, clear or consistent, but they represent a politics of the popular that is pumped out unreflectively every day in the name of

sport.... We underestimate the political economic weight of the media sports cultural complex at our peril.<sup>45</sup>

Understanding how the sportscast highlight form became the means through which producers couch the visual and verbal languages of sport affect is one of the purposes of this research project, one that necessitates an historical-cultural lens.

The significance of this project is also evidenced in the considerable impact the national and regional sports networks (e.g., CBS, NBC, ESPN, Fox Sports Net) have had on the proliferation of sportscasts. The sportscast landscape changed drastically with ESPN's presence on cable systems, as its daily newscasts grew from fifteen minutes (originally titled *SportsNight*) to sixty minutes (*SportsCenter*). Additionally, when ESPN began broadcasting twenty-four hours a day in 1980, sports programming became an all-the-time feature of American culture, Little wonder, then, ESPN research in 2003 showed an average of ninety-four million Americans spent fifty minutes a day or almost six hours per week with ESPN media.<sup>46</sup> ESPN filled a programming void that the networks could not. Charles Hirshberg posits:

And it did so by adopting, and perfecting, an underutilized, unappreciated method of communication: the sports highlight.... ESPN has made highlights the primary means by which the patterns and stories of sports are revealed. It's a perfect medium for modern America.<sup>47</sup>

As this project explains, Hirshberg's contention that sportscast highlights have been "underutilized and unappreciated" is patently overstated, given the very prominent use of highlights in both journalistic and non-journalistic sports programming since the very

beginning of film. To understand ESPN's success, this study explicates the changed context within which American electronic sports journalism has been organized and produced and the changed model of consumer behavior shaping programming and marketing strategies.

Audiences for sportscast news often know the outcome of local and national games before they watch, yet they watch them to see the "highlights" and must be maintained as an audience.<sup>48</sup> Electronic sports reporting has arguably changed from one that predominantly informs to one that primarily entertains by employing the highlight form to present increasingly dramatic and spectacular sports images. If Hirshberg's description, "A good highlight is at once a poetic distillation of athleticism and a carnival barker's holler for your attention, a shameless effort to keep you from pressing that damned remote" is even remotely accurate, then this "shameless effort" to maintain the audience not only dictates which highlights are presented, but also skews the aesthetic techniques toward more spectacular and viscerally-generating highlights.<sup>49</sup> Operating within a postmodern market culture, sportscasts create rather than satisfy needs. Rail refers to this as the sport of desire.

In postmodernity, there is less of a desire for sport than there is of a sport of desire: a constant and growing desire for new products, sensations and emotions—a desire fed but never fulfilled by the media, by the images.<sup>50</sup> The communication system captures, in this case, sport reality in its entirety so that the user becomes fully immersed in a virtual image setting in which "appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the

experience.”<sup>51</sup> Experiencing a presentation of sportscast highlights becomes more real than the actual event. Ultimately, however many highlights are shown, the viewer is never satisfied, instead being fixated on a perpetual present of constantly changing texts—game recaps subsumed within pastiches of spectacular plays removed from game context, random images untethered to any meta-narrative. By pandering to the “Incredible Shrinking Attention Span and its cut-to-the-chase-and-show-me-what-you-got values,” networks like ESPN may have found an easy way to rationalize its form of broadcast journalism, but calling it the “perfect medium for modern America” trivializes the product it purports to celebrate.<sup>52</sup>

Lastly, this study analyzes the impacts electronic sports journalists have had in influencing and reflecting trends in race, gender, and ethnic relations, as well as political, economic and international affairs. This stems from the idea that sport and mediated presentations of it operate within a discourse permeated with symbolism and metaphor. As such, issues of representation remain central to electronic sports journalism, which are “saturated with ideas, values, images and discourses which at times reflect, construct, naturalize, legitimize, challenge and even reconstitute attitudes which permeate wider society.”<sup>53</sup> In order to analyze the extent to which mediated presentations of sport impact the formations of race, ethnicity, gender and national identity, it is necessary to consider particular social, cultural and historical contexts. Rather than applying universal theories of sport, ethnicity and racism, particularly when examining the production and consumption of electronic news reportage of sport, it should be noted that a clear linkage of relationships connects the roles played by media, sports leagues and audiences.

Additionally, as Stuart Hall has noted, the positioning of the sports world in the social construction of news within both the layout of newspapers and the segmentation of local television news programs offers an important clue about our culture and a direct bearing on the coverage of sport, race and ethnicity. Hall points out that in major newspapers, sports are set off, “in a world distinct from other kinds of news, self-contained and self-sufficient. It has its own internal ranking of big and small stories, its own climaxes and fillers. It has its own news order of stories.”<sup>54</sup> A comparable positioning has occurred in local television news coverage wherein the sports segment was relegated to its own slot after news and weather.

This positioning within electronic news media reflects the general place of sport in our culture as a well-defined enclave, “one of whose major attractions is that it has little or no relation to the rest of the news.”<sup>55</sup> With the arrival of cable sports news programs, televised sports journalism truly set itself apart from the rest of the news. These programs had an immediate impact on local stations and the way they cover sports, since programs like *SportsCenter* “serve as models for local sportscasters in much the same way that network news programs serve as models for local newscasters.”<sup>56</sup> By tracing the evolution of the sportscast highlight form, this research adds to our understanding of an important method of communication. Understanding the way sportscasts have been, and continue to be, deployed to shape cultural values helps educators to prepare a curriculum for future sports broadcasters.

### **Precis of Chapters**

A summary of each chapter, delineating the major technological contributions,

political and cultural economies, and social frameworks related to sportscast highlights that have been identified thus far, follows.

Chapter One, “The Highlight Form,” provides a theoretical basis for explicating the highlight form as a rhetorical and aesthetic model; it also provides a review of the literature that informed this study, poses the research questions, reviews the methodology and sources, and explains the study’s significances.

Chapter Two, “Knockout Rounds and Rounding Marks,” explores how early sport film actualities contributed several key components to the evolution of the highlight form—an operational aesthetic that established production practices for the presentation of sport, the popularization of a performance culture that relied on spectacle and sports celebrities, and the marketing, packaging and diffusion of sport content in the form of highlights for cultural consumption. With its ability to capture movement, whether in the form of a horse race, racing yachts on the water, or boxers in a ring, film proved highly popular with the public before the turn of the twentieth century.

Another key aspect related to film’s operational aesthetic was its use of an on-stage narrator or commentator. Although this development stemmed from the tradition of illustrated lectures, it was used to legitimize sports. For example, it diffused boxing’s unsavory aspect by suggesting that the exhibition could be appreciated for its “genteel style of presentation.”<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, however, film actualities featuring boxing became a victim of their own success and of a racial ideology that would not allow the wide presentation of film showing a black champion. Racial ideology was fully realized with the filming and exhibition of the 1910 world heavyweight championship bout between

Jack Johnson and James Jeffries.

Chapter Three, “The Habit of Highlights,” explicates the importance of routinization and standardization in the ways newsreels were produced and viewed. Newsreels built on the advances of film actualities by nationalizing sports within an ideology of hegemonic masculinity, by refining audio commentary, and by increasing the sense of spectacle in capturing the activities of cheerleaders and fans. Sports became one of the three basic kinds of news for newsreels. Sporting events fell into the category of “scheduled events,” and could be readily counted upon for content, an important consideration when newsreels went to a twice-a-week schedule. With commentary provided by the era’s leading sports radio announcers, newsreels contributed to building a national identity in which sport had a central place. That central place was occupied almost exclusively by the dominant male white culture.

Blacks and women were marginalized in most newsreel coverage of sports. Black athletes were to a large extent rendered invisible. Portrayals of women athletes upheld an ideology of hegemonic masculinity in which contact sports were exclusively a male preserve. While this was not a direct product of the aesthetic form of highlights, it points to the impact producers had in shaping the ideology that form manifests. Ultimately, with the advent of television, newsreels lost their hold on viewers, who increasingly watched sporting events as they unfolded on their home sets.

Chapter Four, “A Dream of Carnage and the Electronic Monster,” analyzes early sportscasting as an exclusively live medium, transmitting images and sound from one space to another in real time. Viewers watched telecasts that originated from the studio or

remote locations, and broadcasters developed the conventions of live coverage of sporting events. Considerations related to the production of sporting events had implications in the development of sports journalism's institutional structures and professional values that shaped the representation of national identity, gender and race. Because coverage of live events was the preserve of the networks' news divisions, conflicts and institutional jealousies within broadcasting arose almost from the very beginning of television production of live sporting events. Television contributed to the development of the highlight form for newscasts by constructing programs that offered the viewers highlight packages, profiles of sport stars and in-studio interviews. This was largely accomplished by borrowing from formats that had proved successful in the past and by developing new formats.

In Chapter Five, "The Agony of Defeat and the Ecstasy of Communication," videotape's deployment as a means to create instant replays is explicated, illustrating its immediate and profound impact on sportscasts. It allowed network and local television stations to incorporate highlights more easily into sportscasts. Engineers from the Ampex Corporation first demonstrated the videotape recorder in 1956, a demonstration that revolutionized the industry and provided the technology that would make the highlight form a means of paramount importance for all sportscasts.

So pervasive did the use of videotape technology become that it changed not only what fans could see of a game, but it also altered the role of announcers from color commentators to analysts. Even more significantly, the technology changed television's role in relation to the sports it covered. That participation occurred in the way that the

technology literally became a part of many sports (e.g., football, hockey, soccer and tennis) in terms of on-field officiating decisions. Equally important from a journalistic perspective, videotape changed the way sports news was packaged and delivered. Until the arrival of videotape, scores and statistics were the primary discursive ingredients of the sport newscast; with videotape, highlights became the focal point.

Chapter Six, “Sports Junkies, Junk Journalism and Cathode Ray Sterilization,” explicates cable television’s role in saturating the television schedule with sports, fragmenting the audience, driving ratings down, and creating Friday afternoon “fire sales” for advertisers.<sup>58</sup> It points out the result was predictable: by the mid-1980s no station, cable or broadcast, was making money telecasting sports. Competitive bidding invariably drove up the broadcasting rights for major sporting events. This chapter also explores how cable television’s use of the highlight form changed not only the way events were telecast, but also how it changed the stadium and arena experience, long regarded as the last bastion against television’s encroachment on the sporting spectacle. Additionally, cable television changed the way sports journalists performed their jobs—both in terms of coverage of live events and in the reporting of sports news. Most notably, the presence of women journalists in the press boxes, announcing booths and locker rooms altered the dynamic of the sports-media relationship. By the time ESPN celebrated its fifteenth year of broadcasting in 1994, the boundaries demarcating sports journalism as information and as entertainment had been blurred beyond recognition. The sports junkie’s loyalty was largely predicated upon an operational aesthetic in which the highlight form had become the network’s *sui generis*.

Chapter Seven, “The Little Shop of Highlights,” explicates ESPN’s appropriation and commodification of the highlight form as *SportsCenter* became the network’s flagship program. While *SportsCenter* doubtlessly made the highlight form its primary means of communication, the contention by Charles Hirshberg that it is “a perfect medium for modern America” raises questions about what impact the spectacularization of sport has had on viewers, anchors and athletes within a late-capitalist economy, what values are being promoted through the highlight form, and whose stories are being told. *SportCenter’s* ubiquitous place in American sports journalism is considered in terms of its formation and development, its constitutive elements, and its offshoots, namely, the “This is *SportsCenter*” advertising campaign and a reality show, *Dream Job*.

Chapter Eight, “The Real Virtuality for an Audience of One” explores the developments in new media that reshaped the sports mediascape by providing new technological means of delivering and accessing sportscast highlights. Over the past two decades, sports broadcasters, fans, athletes and the leagues have all been impacted by the changes, especially those precipitated by the development of new delivery systems (e.g., World Wide Web and mobile devices). However, because the integration of new media with coverage of major sporting events involved not only changes in technology, but also social and cultural practices, it is important not to fall prey to what Henry Jenkins calls “the Black Box Fallacy,”<sup>59</sup> in which all changes are technological.

To comprehend the dynamics of the new sports media landscape, it is necessary to consider the changed context of sportscasting and the changed model of consumer behavior, what Jenkins calls affective economics, a model “which seeks to understand the

emotional underpinnings of consumer decision-making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decisions.”<sup>60</sup> In this model, cultural protocols and practices related to media can be seen as dynamic for both producers and consumers. Today, new alliances between broadcast and cable networks, technology companies, and wireless mobile phone providers have forestalled television audience fragmentation and helped to build a new fan base for sports by offering Internet pay packages, enhancing production values for live coverage of major events, and providing more infotainment, especially highlights.

Chapter Nine, “Significant Findings,” delineates the importance of the study’s major elements, including synecdoche, limitations of the various technologies, formation of a cultural hegemony, standardization of sportscasts, commodification of the form, codification and changing viewer protocols. Lastly, the study offers directions for future research.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> John E. O’Connor, “Historical Analysis, Stage One: Gathering Information on the Content, Production, and Reception of a Moving Image Document,” in *Image as Artifact*, ed. John E. O’Connor (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1990), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Gitelman, “Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects,” in *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (work in progress). Quoted in Jenkins, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Preben Raunsbjerg and Henrik Sand, “TV Sport and Rhetoric.” *Nordicom Review* 19 (1998): 160.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Birrell, “Approaching Mt. Everest: On Intertextuality and the Past as Narrative,” *Journal of Sport History* 34 (2008): 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Martin J. Medhurst, “Propaganda Techniques in Documentary Film and Television: AIM vs. PBS,” in *Television Studies: Textual Analysis*, ed. Gary Burns and Robert J. Thompson (New York: Praeger, 1989), 186.

- <sup>11</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 508.
- <sup>12</sup> Paddy Scannell, "History, Media and Communication," in *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*, ed. Klaus B. Jensen (London: Routledge, 2002), 193.
- <sup>13</sup> For a detailed explanation of the development and importance of these technical achievements, see Arledge, 2003; Schultz, 2004.
- <sup>14</sup> Bill Rasmussen, *Sports Junkies Rejoice! The Birth of ESPN* (Hartsdale, NY: QV Publishing, 1983).
- <sup>15</sup> Scannell, "History," 194.
- <sup>16</sup> Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 105.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.
- <sup>19</sup> Nicholas Pronay, "The Newsreels: The Illusion of Actuality," in *The Historian and Film*, ed. Paul Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 96.
- <sup>20</sup> Benjamin G. Rader, *In Its Own Image* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 3.
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Freeman, *ESPN: The Uncensored History* (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Company, 2000), 14.
- <sup>22</sup> Michael Oriard, *King Football* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 51.
- <sup>23</sup> Jennings Bryant and Andrea M. Holt, "A Historical Overview of Sports and Media in the United States," in *Handbook of Sports and Media*, ed. Arthur A. Raney and Jennings Bryant (Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 21.
- <sup>24</sup> Medhurst, "Propaganda," 184.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Chas Critcher, "Football since the War," in *Working-class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, ed. John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), 175.
- <sup>28</sup> Alan Clarke and John Clarke, "Highlights and Action Replays—Ideology, Sport and the Media," in *Sport, Culture and Ideology*, ed. Jennifer Hargreaves (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 69.
- <sup>29</sup> Clarke and Clarke, "Highlights," 73-74.
- <sup>30</sup> Grant Farred, "'Cool as the Other Side of the Pillow': How ESPN's *SportsCenter* Has Changed Television Sports Talk," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 24 (2000): 113.
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- <sup>33</sup> Geneviève Rail, Introduction to *Sport and Postmodern Times*, ed., Geneviève Rail (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), xvii.
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- <sup>35</sup> Scannell, "History," 204.
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<sup>37</sup> Klaus B. Jensen, "Contexts, Cultures and Computers," in *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*, ed. Klaus B. Jensen (London: Routledge, 2002), 186.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-187.

<sup>39</sup> Birrell, "Approaching," 10.

<sup>40</sup> Scannell, "History," 204.

<sup>41</sup> David K. Wiggins, Daniel S. Mason, "The Socio-Historical Process in Sports Studies," in *Qualitative Methods in Sports Studies*, ed. David L. Andrews and Michael L. Silk (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2005), 51.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Hargraeves, "Theorising Sport: An Introduction," in *Sport, Culture and Ideology*, ed. Jennifer Hargraeves (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 15.

<sup>44</sup> Rowe, *Sport*, 70.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>46</sup> Rudy Martzke and Reid Cherner, "Channeling How to View Sports," *USA Today*, August 17, 2004, D2.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Hirshberg, *ESPN25* (New York: ESPN Books, 2004), 12.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Stam, "Television News and Its Spectator," in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches—An Anthology*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: University Publications of America, 1983).

<sup>49</sup> Hirshberg, *ESPN25*, 12.

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<sup>51</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 373.

<sup>52</sup> Hirshberg, *ESPN25*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes, *Power Play: Sport, the Media & Popular Culture* (Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 111.

<sup>54</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Treatment of 'Football Hooliganism' in the Press," in *Football Hooliganism in the Wider Context*, ed. Roger Ingham (London: Inter-Action Imprint, 1978), 17.

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<sup>57</sup> Daniel G. Streible, *A History of the Prizefight Film, 1894-1915*, (PhD diss., University of Texas, 1994), 94-98.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Goodwin, "TV Sports Money Machine Falters," *New York Times*, January 26, 1986, SM26.

<sup>59</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

## **CHAPTER 2: KNOCKOUT ROUNDS AND ROUNDING MARKS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explicates the ways in which films featuring sports contributed to the evolution of the sportscast highlight form. Those contributions emerged in the two decades before the arrival of film technology as a result of sports like boxing, which borrowed promotional techniques and organizational structures from show business entities like vaudeville and the circus. These techniques included the use of road managers, booking agents, and advertising men.<sup>1</sup> Known as the “sporting and theatrical syndicate,”<sup>2</sup> this association of entrepreneurs was closely linked to the press, another institution that would have an important cross-promotional relationship with sports and films.

Additionally, this chapter explains how early Edison films that captured sporting activity utilized production techniques, as well as marketing and exhibition strategies, in ways that were distinct from other film subjects. Early sporting films not only provided the content required to display the technology’s capacity to capture motion, but they also demonstrated film technology’s operational aesthetic, what Musser defines as “its ability to capture an unfolding event and re-present that event with relative immediacy.... The operational aesthetic fosters a level of skepticism in the spectator who must assess how a technology...actually works.”<sup>3</sup> This fascination with film technology encouraged spectators to become consumers of the technology, and in turn the films became cultural capital, which, in Bourdieu’s terms, “acts as a social relation within a system of exchange

that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status.”<sup>4</sup>

Another consideration stems from the ways that films enhanced the status and earning capabilities of sport celebrities, whether represented as heroes (e.g., Corbett, Jeffries) or as villains (e.g., Jack Johnson). Not only did films facilitate the dissemination of information about sport stars, but they provided an important source of income to those stars. For example, boxers received royalties from their fight films and earned considerably more than they did from the fights themselves. Previously, fighters earned income by giving exhibitions and appearing in vaudeville shows. Even when states made boxing illegal, they did not prohibit the presentation of fight films in peep show parlors and nickelodeons.

Film technology lent an air of veracity to the representation of sporting events. Before film, sporting events were reported in newspapers and magazines or recreated on stage, but the representation involved the subjective interpretation of the reporter or performer. As Musser notes, “The filmmaker’s role was to record an event and then re-present it with as little intervention as possible, so that the audience was in a position to judge the outcome for themselves.”<sup>5</sup> This observational cinema or *cinéma vérité* was further enhanced by the use of an expert commentator, who was positioned to the side of the screen and offered running commentary, a precursor to the sports announcer.

Lastly, producers and exhibitors played important roles in the marketing of film content, and editorial control became a contested area between them. Hendricks notes, “Kinetoscope men did not buy a ‘pig in a poke,’ but viewed new subjects frequently, and decided very carefully on what they wanted.”<sup>6</sup> Some kinetoscope parlors employed

multiple machines to exhibit the different rounds of a staged fight, usually six. Although exhibitors could purchase entire films for a set price or single rounds, the knockout round was often the only one sold.<sup>7</sup> A viewer's having to pay ten cents at each machine to see each round of a fight ultimately inhibited the success of the kinoscope. Nonetheless, the packaging and exhibiting of knockout rounds is an important marker on the road to sportscast highlights.

Film's ability to capture movement, whether in the form of a horse race, yachts racing on the water, or boxers in a ring, proved to be highly popular with the public, creating opportunities for a shared culture.

### **Sport in the Pre-Film Era**

The relationship between sport and its dissemination through visual media emerged as a continuation and transformation of magic lantern traditions that had originated in the seventeenth century and gradually took shape along with the invention, development and deployment of nineteenth century communication technologies such as the telegraph, telephone and phonograph. Models for early moving pictures can be traced back to wall paintings and illustrated books, both of which employed series of images to tell a story. Arguably, the dissemination of sports via media was also an extension of a visual entertainment tradition (e.g., circus, burlesque, variety theatre, etc.) that "emphasized display and spectacle rather than story-telling."<sup>8</sup> Another part of the changing cultural system that fostered a fascination for sports and their visual representations was played by post-Civil War sporting magazines, which anticipated newspapers, radio and television in capitalizing on the public's growing interest in sport.

As early as 1872, Frederic Hudson, in his book *Journalism in the United States*, admitted that magazines “unquestionably give more information on the subjects they treat than the general newspaper can.”<sup>9</sup> Even before Richard Kyle Fox assumed editorial control of the *National Police Gazette* in 1877, lurid illustrations and photographs were being utilized to exploit the dominant themes of crime and sex (Illustration 2.1). To those themes, Fox integrated the world of sport, especially boxing, so that the *Gazette*’s coverage of the Ryan-Goss fight of 1880 resulted in a run of 400,000 copies and justified the journal’s subtitle as *The Leading Illustrated Sporting Journal in America*.<sup>10</sup> These and many other achievements within a long, dynamic process were necessary to help shift the cultural milieu from pragmatic, business-oriented technologies to consumer-oriented one.<sup>11</sup> It was the conjunction of these lines of development that would ultimately produce the first filmed sports highlights.

While sporting magazines and newspapers were cultivating a fascination for sporting events and athletes, attempts to capture and project motion were being conducted in the laboratories of Muybridge, Edison and Marey. In February 1888, Eadweard Muybridge met Thomas A. Edison in the latter’s West Orange, New Jersey, laboratory to discuss combining Edison’s phonograph with his zoopraxiscope to project a series of painted images onto a screen, a process that Edison ultimately deemed impractical and inconvenient. Eight months later Edison wrote the first of his caveats about projecting motion pictures. However, it was not until Edison met Étienne-Jules Marey at the 1889 Paris Exposition that he formulated the ideas for a machine that “passed a tape-like band of film past a camera lens, halting and then exposing a single

frame of film for a brief fraction of a second, after which the strip was again moved forward, until the next frame of film was halted in front of the lens and likewise halted.”<sup>12</sup>

After several experiments with cylinders, Edison and his camera specialist William Kennedy Laurie Dickson enlisted William Heise for the project, largely because Heise had expertise in moving tape-like strips of paper through a machine. In the spring of 1891, their experimentation produced a horizontal-feed kinetograph camera and kinetoscope viewer, which used three-quarter-inch wide film. Of the seven films known to have been made with this camera, the last captured two men boxing.

Edison, who had recently returned from Chicago where he was asked to provide some electric novelty for the World’s Fair exposition, was quoted in a *New York Sun* story of May 28, 1891, that he had a machine being perfected, which would allow viewers to sit in their own parlor and see and hear opera singers. Not content to satisfy the more refined tastes and knowing what had already been produced in his Photographic Building, Edison added:

That is only one part of what the machine will do. To the sporting fraternity I can say that before long it will be possible to apply this system to prize fights and boxing exhibitions. The whole scene with the comments of the spectators, the talk of the seconds, the noise of the blows, and so on will be faithfully transferred.<sup>13</sup>

Edison’s comments anticipated a level of sophistication that became characteristic of the “Up Close and Personal” production values of Roone Arledge at the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). Edison at this point clearly understood that boxing, wrestling and strong men were the sporting content that could most effectively be

captured by a motion picture camera. Part of this was grounded in Edison's fascination for boxing and the fact that newspaper and magazine coverage had already lent a degree of legitimacy to prize fighting, despite its illegal status in many parts of the country.

In fact, after the last bare-knuckle championship fight in which John L. Sullivan defeated Jake Kilrain (ring name of Joseph Killion) on July 8, 1889, in Richburg, Mississippi, Governor Lowry vowed to prosecute Sullivan and even offered a thousand-dollar bounty. The state of Mississippi indicted Sullivan for the offenses of prize fighting and assault and battery. Tried and convicted of the first charge, Sullivan and his lawyers appealed that decision on the grounds that the nature of the crimes had not been adequately specified in the indictment, that the fight had not been public and that the law required two defendants who must both be charged.<sup>14</sup> Although the court reversed the first decision and quashed the indictment, the entire ordeal cost Sullivan more money than he had won by defeating his opponent, and he vowed never again to fight under the old ring rules. The press played up both sides in the unseemly affair, exploiting the bout to sell newspapers and decrying the fighters' flaunting of the law. Typical was the coverage found in *Frank Leslie's*:

The spectacle of two bruised and battered ruffians dodging about the country, to escape the officers of the law, was in itself sufficiently demoralizing, without the addition, in print, of the story of their debaucheries and their low brutalities: and the two together, as illustrative of prevailing popular tendencies, certainly afford little ground for confidence as to the future dominance of the better forces in our life as a people.<sup>15</sup>

Once cleared Sullivan toured North America with a theatrical troupe performing the melodrama *Honest Hearts and Willing Hands*, written especially for him. After a lackluster tour of Australia in early 1892, Sullivan was goaded into issuing a challenge to face “any and all bluffers who have been trying to make capital at my expense,”<sup>16</sup> according to Marquis of Queensberry rules. Among the opponents to whom Sullivan was willing to give preference—all white fighters—was a young Californian named James J. Corbett, with whom he had previously sparred.

That the first heavyweight championship fight to be settled with gloves would be a legitimate media spectacle was testified by the fact that the articles for the \$25,000 purse and \$10,000 side bet were signed at the offices of the *New York World* and not the *Police Gazette*. The battle between Sullivan and Corbett was scheduled for September 7, 1892, at the Olympic Club in New Orleans, which was equipped with electric lights and a canvas mat. The New Orleans city council had authorized Queensberry rules fights in March 1890, with stipulations that no liquor be served, that no bouts be staged on Sundays, and that promoters contribute fifty dollars to charity.<sup>17</sup> Additional evidence of boxing’s transformation from a sport dominated by gamblers to one in which entrepreneurs seized control was seen in the person of Corbett’s manager, William A. Brady. Having a background in show business instead of the ring, Brady soon became a theatrical and motion-picture promoter, one who clearly recognized boxing and bicycle racing as extensions of the entertainment field.

In addition to the heavyweight championship fight, the Olympic Club organized and publicized a triple-main-event card over three nights, billed as “The Carnival of

Champions.” The card included a lightweight title fight between champion Jack McAuliffe and Billy Myer on September 5, and the next night a featherweight championship bout between Jack Skelly and George “Little Chocolate” Dixon.<sup>18</sup> The latter fight, in which the black champion defeated his white opponent in eight rounds, drew calls from both the *Daily Picayune* and the *Times Democrat* that the Olympic Club cease staging interracial matches. Although no hostile reaction was reported to have occurred at the Olympic Club, segregation became the law of the land within four years.

Press coverage of the heavyweight championship fight was extensive. Weeks before the fight, the *New York Herald* declared that “the events on hand are of national and international importance.”<sup>19</sup> The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that “now men travel to great boxing contests in vestibule limited trains; they sleep at the best hotels...and when the time for the contest arrives, they find themselves in a grand, brilliantly lighted arena.”<sup>20</sup> The *Times Democrat* noted that New Orleans was packed “with visitors of all classes, from the millionaire to the baker to the fakir. Politicians, lawyers, merchants and gamblers elbowed each other in all public places on comparatively equal terms.”<sup>21</sup> The ten thousand fans who filled the Olympic Club were not the only ones anxious to see the fight, hyperbolically called the “clash of the Titans.” In almost every major city in the country, thousands of interested fans jammed into theaters, hotels and newspaper offices to receive telegraphic reports of round-by-round descriptions “read aloud and shared for a moment in an instantaneous national culture.”<sup>22</sup> Gorn noted that on top of the Pulitzer Building in New York, a red beacon was poised to signal when the fight went Sullivan’s way or a white one for Corbett.<sup>23</sup>

The national information network of telegraph, telephone and newspaper communication provided instantaneous results of the fight. As the Sullivan-Corbett bout advanced to its conclusion, the *New Orleans Times-Democrat* provided headlines for individual rounds:

SULLIVAN WAS SO THOROUGHLY SURPRISED  
CORBETT NOW BEGAN TO FORCE THE PACE  
CORBETT WAS THE AGGRESSOR  
HE FOUGHT WILDLY  
SULLIVAN STAGGERED BACK  
SULLIVAN STAGGERED BACK  
STORM OF BLOWS.<sup>24</sup>

Newspapers and magazines provided front page coverage of the fight. The *New York Herald Tribune* devoted several pages that included graphic illustrations. Not only did Corbett's victory signal a change in the titleholder, it also ushered boxing out of a saloon-centered, gambler controlled subculture and into the "larger twentieth-century landscape of big business, mass media, and corporate-capitalist ideologies."<sup>25</sup>

### **The Kinetograph, the Kinetoscope and the Black Maria**

Less than a month passed after the Corbett-Sullivan fight before Dickson and Heise were testing the design of their motion picture camera. In October 1892 they shot four new films which used film whose width had been adjusted to one and nine-sixteenth of an inch (approximately 35mm). The subject matter for three of the four films was sports—boxing, fencing and wrestling—and selected frames (Illustration 2.2) were subsequently published in the October issue of *The Phonogram*. Musser asserts, "If format is considered, these films can be called the first modern motion pictures—though they were not shot with commercial use in mind."<sup>26</sup> *The Phonogram* article clearly

articulated the kinetograph's importance, noting that viewers need not resort to seats in the open air to see events:

Those who are interested in swift-running horses can see a race going on in Sheepshead Bay or Monmouth, without leaving New York and just here let it be remembered that this instrument may play a most useful part, for in a close race where a few inches of space turns the scales, it will take down just what happened faithfully; and the kinetograph will also record with fidelity all that takes place at prize fights, baseball contests and the noise, stir and progress of games.<sup>27</sup>

Significantly, this passage not only heralded the kinetograph's technological achievement in settling sporting disputes, anticipating the use of photo finishes and instant replay, but it also suggested the camera's ability to capture the ambience of sporting events, similar to Edison's comments for the *Sun* article in May 1891.

Having achieved a working camera, the Edison Company set about in late December 1892 to construct a studio specifically designed for motion picture production. The Black Maria, so named because it resembled the black paddy wagons that brought prisoners to jail, was constructed between December 1892 and January 1893. As Musser notes, the Black Maria "offered escape into nostalgia and play rather than the likelihood of imprisonment,"<sup>28</sup> evidenced by the subject matter of the films first taken in its space—*Blacksmithing Scene*, *Horse Shoeing* and *The Barber Shop*. In his *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope & Kinetophonograph*, Dickson related that the "exigencies of natural lighting" and "the lack of a suitable theatrical stage"<sup>29</sup> necessitated the construction of this revolving building that could follow the rays of the sun. Hendricks

estimated that the Black Maria measured 48' x 10'-14' x 18' overall (Illustration 2.3), and swung suspended on a central vertical axis over a graphite pivot to accommodate the need for sunshine, “although as a matter of practice nearly all Maria subjects seem to have been shot close to noon.”<sup>30</sup>

Although Edison had entered into an agreement to supply A. O. Tate with twenty-five Kinetoscope machines for use at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, production progressed slowly. By early May George Hopkins of *The Scientific American* examined the Kinetoscope in anticipation of demonstrating it at the annual meeting of the Department of Physics of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. This became its first official public demonstration, and although it did not include sound as promised, *The Brooklyn Standard Union* story offered an interesting account:

The Instrument which was exhibited, however, only presented the moving picture without the noises accompanying. But even in this form it was startling in its realism and beautiful in the perfection of its working.... The pictures taken by the camera can scarcely be distinguished from one another, so slight is the difference between successive views. This explains the continuity and unbroken character of the scene as presented in the kinetograph.<sup>31</sup>

According to Hendricks, one Kinetoscope was sent to Chicago and displayed in the Edison exhibit there, although the first parlor was not ready for the public until April 14, 1894.

In anticipation of the grand opening, the pace of film production in the early months of 1894 picked up considerably. One film, *Fred Ott's Sneeze*, was made

specifically for publicity purposes to illustrate an article that appeared in the March 24 issue of *Harper's Weekly*. The other films capturing athletic movement included *Athlete with Wand*; *Amateur Gymnast, no. 1*; *Amateur Gymnast, no. 2*; *Men on Parallel Bars*; and *Boxing Match*. The most significant films of this period, however, included three films of Eugen Sandow, body builder and strong man, shot on March 6, 1894. Sandow, one of the most popular theatrical stars, was at the time appearing at Koster & Bial's Music Hall, and his appearance at the Black Maria initiated the commercial phase of Edison's motion picture work. Dickson relates in his *History* that Sandow's chest expansion was fourteen inches. "The greatest expansion ever known at the Olympic games was six. This is demonstrated in the kinetograph series, together with the more remarkable feats relating to the action and uses of the various muscles, such as the lifting of three-hundred pound dumb-bells at arm's length over his head..."<sup>32</sup> Despite Dickson's seemingly overblown contention about expansion, the making of the *Sandow* film marked an important break from past efforts and introduces "a relationship between the world of performance culture and the motion picture world that has continued in some form to this day."<sup>33</sup>

The next major development occurred later that summer with the production of two fight films for the Kinetoscope Exhibiting Company,<sup>34</sup> controlled by Samuel Tilden Jr., Enoch Rector and the Latham family—Woodville and his sons Otway and Gray. The Lathams proposed the exhibition of prize fight films in enlarged Kinetoscopes that could accommodate approximately one hundred and fifty feet of film, almost three times as much film as the standard Kinetoscope. Hendricks noted that the enlargement "appears to

have involved little more than the addition of spools to the spool bank,”<sup>35</sup> a stronger motor and changes to the Black Maria’s interior, including the addition of padding on the walls and ropes on three sides of the twelve-foot square ring. The rounds would last a minute with seven or eight minutes in between rounds to load more film into the kinetograph. Newspaper accounts noted that several attempts to enlist fighters had been made before June 14, but those attempts proved unsuccessful.

Although titled *Leonard-Cushing Fight*, it is important to consider this production as distinctively different from a legitimate fight documented by a motion picture camera. Rather, this match was a boxing exhibition, limited by the constraints of the camera and the Black Maria space. Nonetheless, the *Leonard-Cushing Fight* was indeed marketed and advertised as a legitimate fight, evidenced by the descriptions in various catalogues. For example, the Maguire *Catalogue* (1898) noted, “This fight consists of six rounds between Mike Leonard, the very popular and well-known pugilist...and Jack Cushing. It was an actual contest, and is full of hard fighting. It has proved a popular and interesting subject.”<sup>36</sup> The Edison catalogue of July 1901 called it “an actual six-round contest between Mike Leonard...and Jack Cushing.”<sup>37</sup> The Maguire and Baucus catalogue of 1897 read: “Each of the above spirited boxing contests consists of SIX live rounds with ‘knock-out’ in the last.”<sup>38</sup> Several points merit consideration. By emphasizing that this was an “actual” fight with “spirited boxing” and “full of hard fighting,” the producers were obviously attempting to dispel the notion that this was a pseudo-fight, and to present it as a novelty worth the sixty cents a viewer paid to watch all six rounds. Although the fight garnered considerable newspaper coverage, it seems doubtful that viewers expected

a legitimate boxing contest. Streible posits that the *Leonard-Cushing Fight* raises a problem that surfaced with other boxing recreations and reenactments.

The problem of distinguishing genuine contests from ones set up for the motion picture camera, first suggested in this production, became an increasingly complex issue that plagued both the early film industry and the sport of boxing as they simultaneously sought social legitimation over the next two decades.<sup>39</sup>

While problems did surface when exhibitors attempted to pass off recreations as the real thing, no evidence suggested that customers entering a peep show parlor were duped into paying for anything other than a staged fight. More significantly, the Latham scheme of serializing the presentation in machines that offered viewers three times as much film for twice the cost of standard nickel-slot kinetoscopes created a viewing experience that emphasized the knockout as climax. The marketing ploy was readily picked up and disseminated by the press, evidenced in the *New York World's* report:

The theory is that when in the first round he [viewer] sees Mr. Leonard, to use his own language “pushing Mr. Cushing in the face,” he will want to see the next round and the next four. Thus he will pay sixty cents for the complete kinetograph [sic] of this strange and unheard of fight...<sup>40</sup>

Believing that viewers would pay to see “a fight to the finish,” the Kinetoscope Exhibition Company opened a parlor at 83 Nassau Street in Manhattan that was devoted exclusively to showing the *Leonard-Cushing Fight* on the new model (one hundred and fifty-foot capacity) kinetoscopes. However, the relative obscurity of the fighters, both of whom were from Brooklyn, and the fact that viewers could opt to pay for only the

knockout round contributed to the lack of success of the Lathams' parlor. Hendricks posits, "Fans were probably viewing only the knock-out round, and more and more often the other five machines remained idle.... This is supported by the fact that the knock-out round of a fight was often the only one sold."<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the marketing of fight films by selling rounds remained in vogue into the first decade of the twentieth century and marked an important step in the evolution of the highlight form.

Regardless of how viewers interpreted the film, the *Leonard-Cushing Fight* also drew the notice of authorities. An article in the June 16 edition of *The Sun* noted that the Grand Jury in Essex County was being convened to "investigate a reported prize fight, something which was certainly meant to appear to be a fight to a finish took place in the grounds of the Edison laboratory at Orange on Thursday morning."<sup>42</sup> Although no formal charges were brought against Edison, concerns about the presentation of fight films continued as the technology improved and ultimately was used to capture actual boxing contests.

With the help of Enoch Rector and Samuel Tilden Jr., the Lathams attempted to arrange a bout that featured heavyweight champion Jim Corbett. After winning the heavyweight championship from John L. Sullivan in 1892, Corbett had not defended his title and fought only one exhibition against British champion Charlie Mitchell in January 1894. Speculation swirled that Corbett would fight Peter Jackson of the British West Indies, but nothing came of that, in part because Corbett, like Sullivan, had promised not to break the color line and fight a black fighter for the championship. Newspaper accounts reported that Edison's company had offered \$15,000 for the Corbett-Jackson

fight, but the fight could not have happened “without throwing over ring rules bodily.”<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, Corbett was enlisted, for a fee of \$4,750 to fight “a clever Trenton heavyweight” Peter Courtney, who had supposedly “stood up against” Robert Fitzsimmons.<sup>44</sup> That Corbett’s appearance at the Edison complex was a carefully choreographed promotion was evidenced by the fact that the fight was staged on the seventh of September,<sup>45</sup> (the second anniversary of Corbett’s knockout of Sullivan), by Edison’s presence at the Black Maria to greet the champion, and by the numerous newspaper accounts documenting the entire affair from Corbett’s arrival at the ferry dock at 8:15 a.m. to the celebrations at Johnny Eckhardt’s. Clearly, journalists from the *Police Gazette* and the *World* were complicit in assisting the Edison Company’s marketing of what was supposedly a genuine fight, the latter providing a series of drawings that were recorded by the newspaper’s “artist at the scene.”<sup>46</sup> Although the *Sun*’s lead graph notes that “the fight was in the interests of science,” the outcome never was in doubt. In the *Sun*’s summary of the fourth round, the reporter notes, “It was now a certainty that Courtney would not last the six rounds...”<sup>47</sup> Even as Courtney toed the mark to begin the next round, “he knew very well that Corbett would sooner or later knock him out, but he didn’t flinch a particle, and faced the music like a man.”<sup>48</sup> In the climactic sixth round, “Jim had to finish him, however, as a matter of business...”<sup>49</sup> For the purposes of the film, the knockout occurred on cue.

Dickson served as the producer for the filming of *Corbett and Courtney before the Kinetograph*, and Heise worked the camera. The Black Maria’s improvised ring was enlarged to “14 feet square, roped on two sides, the other two being heavily padded walls

of the building. The floor was planed smooth and covered with rosin.”<sup>50</sup> Five ounce gloves were used, although Hendricks noted that the gloves were changed to smaller ones “because they were too big and covered the faces of the fighters from the camera.”<sup>51</sup> Footage of the fight shows Corbett laughing while deflecting Courtney’s wild swings, possibly in the fourth round, when the *Sun* reported that “Corbett clinched him and then laughingly threw him off.”<sup>52</sup> Kendrick noted that the six rounds of one minute and sixteen seconds, one minute and twenty-four seconds, one minute and twelve seconds, one minute and twenty-nine seconds, one minute and twenty-three seconds, and fifty seconds were appropriate lengths for the Latham-enlarged Kinetoscope.

As soon as newspaper accounts of the Corbett-Courtney fight were published, Judge Depue instructed the Grand Jury “to look into the Corbett fight in West Orange, before Edison’s kinetoscope, and find an indictment if the law has been violated.”<sup>53</sup> The following day, Edison spoke to a reporter for the *Newark Daily Advertiser*, dismissing the incident:

I don’t see how there could be any trouble about that fight. Those kinetograph people take pictures of anything that comes along. They have to do it, and we don’t interfere with them...

Certainly I did not understand that a prize-fight was to take place, and it was not a prize-fight in any sense of the word, as I understand it.... I have been told that the men wore five-ounce gloves...

I was not there. I have my business to attend to up here, but I have seen some of my men who were there and they say that the contest was similar to

others, except that Corbett being one of the principals there was more interest in it.

There was no knocking out done. It was simply a boxing match for a show for which these men were paid, and nothing more.... I should certainly not permit any fight to a finish in my place under any consideration.<sup>54</sup>

This constituted almost the entire printed article and illustrated Edison's careful manipulation of the situation, distancing himself from the immediate proceedings, claiming "I was not there" and "we don't interfere" with "those kinetograph people" though he was told specifics "the boxers wore five-ounce gloves" and "the contest was similar to others." Edison also clearly differentiated this "boxing match for a show" from a "fight to a finish," although that distinction was meaningless when it came to marketing the fight for public consumption, at which point it again became an actual fight with knockout. Edison doubtlessly knew that the controversy surrounding the making of this staged film enhanced the public's desire to see what all the fuss was about. Musser aptly notes that the reputations of Corbett and Edison were an important subtext of the event.

Anticipating a relationship that would become much more common in the twentieth century, reports of filming became a periodic source of news (which sold newspapers) and publicity for stars and producers (which sold films and built careers).<sup>55</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, *Corbett and Courtney Before the Kinetograph* became the most widely seen kinoscope attraction, even after projected film replaced peep shows in popularity. The exhibitions earned Corbett considerable royalties; the agreement

stipulated that he receive \$150 per week (later reduced to \$50) for each set of films on exhibition in the kinetoscopes, the sum of which reached \$13,307 by August 1896 and eventually exceeded \$20,000.<sup>56</sup>

### **Projection of Actualities**

The progression from peep show to projection owed as much to the conditions related to audience comfort as to technological innovation. Woodville Latham testified that almost as soon as the Edison Kinetoscope Company began showing fight films in the enlarged kinetoscopes at their parlor on Nassau Street in Manhattan, his sons, Otway and Gray, began hearing viewers express a desire to see the films projected upon a screen.<sup>57</sup> Such a projection enabled several possibilities. For one, the audience would see a larger, if not life-size, representation of the subject matter more clearly and more conveniently. Secondly, rather than experiencing the film individually, viewers seeing a film projected upon a screen shared the experience with others. Thirdly, projection offered the possibility of exhibiting an entire sporting event instead of an abridged version necessitated by the kinetoscope's limited capacity. Projection also benefited the exhibitor in that parlors needed only one projector, reducing the wear and tear on both film and projector. Showing a film to many viewers at one time reduced costs and increased revenues, expanding the exhibitor's range for distribution since more parlors across a wider territory could be opened with far fewer projectors.

By autumn of 1894, the Lathams were conducting experiments on a new projection system under the auspices of the Lambda Company, headed up by the Lathams, Éugene Lauste, and William K. L. Dickson, who had resigned from the Edison

laboratory in April of the following year. These experiments resulted in a new camera and the Eidoloscope projector, a demonstration of which was given at the Lambda Company offices (and workshop) on April 21, 1895. An illustration of the demonstration (Illustration 2.4) appeared in the *New York Sun* the very next day with a caption that reads: “Enlarged Kinetoscope Pictures Thrown on a Screen.”<sup>58</sup> According to the *Sun* article, the projected image was about the size of a window sash, although “the size is a matter of expense and adjustment.”<sup>59</sup>

It is ironic that the Lambda Company’s first production with the projection system that was so instrumental in capturing actualities involved the re-creation of a fight between Young Griffo (Albert Griffiths) and Charles Barnett on the rooftop of Madison Square Garden in early May. The film included no more than eight minutes of action—four rounds of a minute and a half with thirty seconds of rest between rounds—which was not significantly different than kinetoscope fights. What was different was that the action was shot without interruption. With an added loop to the camera—known as the Latham Loop—the capacity for continuous shooting was limited only by the amount of film housed in the film magazine.<sup>60</sup>

The Latham Eidoloscope made its debut on May 20, 1895, in a small storefront theatre at 156 Broadway. The first commercial audience for projected motion pictures saw a reproduction of the Griffo-Barnett fight. A broadside for the fight related several key components about the exhibition, as well as a summary of the fight. The broadside noted that the reproduction was “Life Size” and that “During the Exhibition the Audience will be Comfortably Seated” and “This is the first practical exhibition of subjects

showing Actual Life Movements on a screen ever made in the world.”<sup>61</sup>

A *World* article from late May lauded the advantages of the Eidoloscope, noting that viewers will no longer “have to squint into a little hole” to see the life size presentations. “It is all realistic, so realistic indeed that excitable spectators have forgot themselves and cried, ‘Mix up there!’ ‘Look out, Charlie, you’ll get a punch,’ ‘Oh! What do you think of that Mr. Barnett?’ and other expressions of like character.”<sup>62</sup> The article’s point about viewers responding to the realistic images, despite being a representation of a recreated fight, was significant because it showed that in the absence of a commentator, viewers supplied commentary themselves. In the next important fight film, the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, commentary was provided for them. The article also noted that the audience sat comfortably and saw “fighters hammering each other, circuses, suicides, hangings, electrocutions, shipwrecks, scenes on the exchanges, street scenes, horse-races, football games, almost anything, in fact, in which there is action, just as if you were on the spot during the actual events.”<sup>63</sup> In fact, those actual events included a horse race at the Sheepshead Bay track and several wrestling bouts on the roof of the *Police Gazette* building.

Latham’s Eidoloscope Company exploited territorial rights for the projector and exhibited projected films in Chicago’s Olympic Theater in late August before moving on to the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta where they encountered competition from C. Francis Jenkins and Thomas Armat, whose Phantoscope was technically superior in the use of an intermittent mechanism. By the end of 1895, Jenkins and Armat had a falling out, but not before the latter had enlisted the interest of Raff & Gammon, who worked to

secure the rights to the Phantoscope for Edison. The machine was given a new trade name, the Vitascope, formed from the Latin *vita*, “life,” and the Greek, *scope*, “to see,” somewhat ironic since this machine eventually sounded the death knell for the Kinetoscope, the first commercially successful motion picture machine. Kinetoscopes would disappear from the American scene by the turn of the century.

When the Vitascope debuted on April 23, 1896, showing six films at Koster & Bial’s Music Hall on Thirty-Fourth Street and Broadway, it initiated a new phase in entertainment culture. In addition to the continuous band of fifty-foot or one hundred and fifty-foot films spliced together and shown repeatedly, the Music Hall band provided accompaniment to the projected images. Musser notes that two of the films were in color, through a hand-tinting process similar to that used for stereopticon slides.<sup>64</sup> The representation of real scenes produced a heightened sense of realism. An article from the *New York Mail and Express* from April 24 captured this in detail:

One could look far out to sea and pick out a particular wave swelling and undulating and growing bigger and bigger until it struck the end of the pier. Its edge then would be fringed with foam, and finally, in a cloud of spray, the wave would dash upon the beach. One could imagine the people running away.<sup>65</sup>

This produced congruence between the projected image and the everyday world as the viewers knew and experienced it directly. Musser argues, “Projected images were conceived as a novelty in which lifelike movement in conjunction with a life-size photographic image provided a sense of heightened realism and intensified interest in the quotidian.”<sup>66</sup> The Vitascope remained a novelty in that most of the actualities captured

were devoid of a narrative. The exceptions were those sporting events like the 1896 Suburban Handicap that the Vitascope, more mobile and sensitive to light, captured on site rather than in the confines of the Black Maria studio.

Musser calls the Edison Manufacturing Company's footage of the 1896 Suburban Handicap "the first American film of a horse race."<sup>67</sup> That also made the Suburban Handicap the first remotely shot sporting actuality to be projected for commercial distribution in the United States. The film debuted at Keith's New Theatre in Boston in late June, less than a week after the running of the race. A *Boston Herald* article of June 30 explained that the "portion of the picture showing the field was somewhat obscured by the dust raised by the racers, but the *finish of the stretch*, showing the judges' box and grand stand crowded with spectators was extremely realistic"<sup>68</sup> (emphasis added). Arguably, the race's finish constituted the most important part of the race and the most natural to capture on the one hundred and fifty feet of film shot (approximately one minute), although it was not the only portion of the race captured. This testified to a deliberate, conscious decision on the part of the producers—James White and Raff & Gammon—to guarantee that cameraman Heise captured the highlights of the race. An editorial in the *New York Herald* from June 24 added more details, including the fact that the "day was perfect overhead" and that "the race itself was anybody's until the horses were nearly home."<sup>69</sup>

The team of White and Heise also shot the 1897 Suburban Handicap at the Sheepshead Bay track of the Coney Island Jockey Club. This race was also filmed on a one hundred and fifty-foot strip and included several views of the event—the parade past

the stand to the starting post, the horses running past the stand, the finish, and the weighing out. Musser notes that the four-shot structure marked this Suburban as particularly noteworthy, although not so significantly different from the previous year's film apart from the parade. Since the 1896 film is no longer available, a direct comparison is not possible, although only the pre-race parade seems to have been added, according to the information in the *Boston Herald* account. Both films were framed by editorial decisions about composition, and since a fifty-foot strip "showing the start and finish and weighing-out as above"<sup>70</sup> was also available, the process of selection and editing to create highlights of the event was certainly accomplished. The process is synecdochic<sup>71</sup> in that through the use of condensation and displacement, a part was used to represent the whole.

### **The Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight Film**

When Bob Fitzsimmons knocked out Jim Corbett in Carson City, Nevada, on March 17, 1897, to win the heavyweight championship of the world, three hand-cranked cameras loaded with thousands of feet of film were situated at ringside in a specially designed wooden house to capture the entire spectacle. The fight was financed and promoted by a Dallas entrepreneur and sporting man, Dan Stuart, and the filming of the event was produced by the Rector-Tilden partnership, which had successfully brought off the Corbett-Courtney exhibition for the Kinetoscope Exhibition Company but was now operating under the aegis of the newly formed Veriscope Company.

Organizers of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight had to overcome considerable difficulties before being able to stage the fight. Finding a venue for the fight proved to be

one of the most difficult hurdles. In October 1895, Stuart unsuccessfully attempted to stage the championship fight in Texas only to be thwarted when the governor and legislature quickly enacted a law making prizefighting a felony. A similar scenario unfolded in Arkansas, and soon thereafter Corbett announced his retirement. The title then passed to Peter Maher, who knocked out Corbett's sparring partner Steve O'Donnell on November 11, 1895, despite the fact that Fitzsimmons had easily outclassed Maher three years earlier. In turn, Fitzsimmons knocked out Maher on February 21, 1896, in ninety-five seconds in a ring constructed on a sandbar in the Rio Grande, although no film of the fight was taken due to a light rain and insufficient light. With Fitzsimmons touring the vaudeville circuit as champion, the debacle on the Rio Grande prompted Corbett to come out of retirement and proclaim himself champion despite a lackluster four-round draw against Tom Sharkey. Only after intense lobbying was Stuart able to convince Nevada lawmakers to once again legalize prizefighting.

By the time an agreement for the fight, including film rights, was signed, the commercial potential for fight films had increased dramatically as a result of the development in projection by the Eidoloscope, Phantoscope and Vitascope. Boxing would be the first sport to realize considerable profits from motion-picture reproductions, complementing the profits reaped from paid admissions, betting, and theatrical exploitation of prizefighters' celebrity status. Streible argues that films were the key to larger profits:

Once secured, films could be indefinitely repeated and easily transported to multiple venues, making them less susceptible to the vagaries that often marred

live events.... After the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* scored an unprecedented success, film rights played a central role in major fight negotiations over the next two decades and beyond.<sup>72</sup>

Importance of the event's filming was evident in a *Boston Herald* headline that read, "The Kinetoscope Will Dominate Wholly the Arrangements for the Holding of the Battle."<sup>73</sup> Stuart even tried to alter the size of the ring to twenty-two feet square when he realized the Veriscope camera might not capture the action in one of the corners, where, as fate would have it, Corbett fell in the fourteenth round during the controversial knockout sequence.

While the eleven thousand feet of two and three-sixteenth-inch-gauge film stock with a wide-screen format shot by Enoch Rector's specially built cameras on March 17, 1897, was being developed for exhibition, a variety of religious and reform groups lobbied Congress to enact legislation that would ban not only prizefighting but also images and reports of fights. Fearing that such a broadly written bill would result in censorship of newspapers and magazines, Congress took no action on the proposed legislation. Even though a number of state legislatures also considered banning fight films, few enacted laws prohibiting the exhibition of fight films. Streible points to several factors that contributed to the defeat of such legislation, including boxing's popularity, the absence of any clear conception of what constituted cinema, and the Veriscope Company's effective publicity and promotional campaign.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to attempts to ban film of the fight, the Veriscope Company had to contend with newspaper accounts that offered ringside photographs and still photographs

of boxers imitating the fight's action, as well as on-stage reenactments performed by boxing experts based on telegraphic descriptions. Even more damaging were the fake fight films of Edward Hill Amet and Sigmund Lubin, despite legal threats from Rector and Stuart. Streible located a small portion of the Lubin counterfeit in the Library of Congress collection. His description is telling of the film's poor quality:

Shot from a very low camera angle, the film consists of two boxers standing in a tiny roped square (perhaps only six feet wide) against a white sheet. As they randomly spar, their ersatz identities become clear (despite noticeable underexposure): Corbett's counterpart wears a pompadour wig, while the other, in imitation of the balding Fitzsimmons, sports a hair net.... The only other details added to this minimal representation are a pair of seconds who mind the bucket and stool in Fitz's corner.<sup>75</sup>

Although clearly a sideshow that catered to remote venues not served by Veriscope, Lubin's fake film was more of an irritation than a direct threat.

Exhibition of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* was noteworthy on several counts. Even before the film was made available for the public, Stuart screened the film for the New York press, generating considerable publicity about the film's content rather than the technology. As such, each of the fighters made claims about what camera showed. In this regard, the company's name, Veriscope or truth-viewer, proved beneficial in playing on the controversies stemming from the fight's outcome. A *New York World* article noted that the camera proved to be "a triumph of science over the poor, imperfect instrument, the human eye, and proves the veriscope camera is far superior."<sup>76</sup> The possibility that the

camera could prove whether or not Fitzsimmons had been down for a ten-count in the sixth round and whether or not Corbett had been fouled in the decisive fourteenth round added to the film's attraction.

The exhibition of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, which debuted on May 22, 1897, at the Academy of Music in New York City, was also noteworthy. The film, with a running time of almost two hours, was soon offered as a stand-alone feature in many large theaters of major urban centers. As a representation of an actual event, the film was both legally and socially acceptable viewing material for an audience that cut across cultural and economic lines. In Chicago, where the film enjoyed an initial run of nine weeks, admission ranged from twenty-five cents for a gallery seat to one dollar for the orchestra. Musser notes, "Theater seats became seats at ringside as patrons saw this ritualized sport unfold from a single camera perspective in realistic time."<sup>77</sup> Over time, the film was exhibited in various other amusement places—fairgrounds, resorts, amusement parks, storefronts, and midways—almost anywhere a screen could be hung and electricity provided. Despite newspaper reports that detailed the flickering and vibrations that proved trying to the eyes, prompting efforts to improve both prints of the film and the projecting machines, the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* remained a premiere attraction thanks to effective publicity and distribution, topicality and mode of exhibition.

Arguably, the most noteworthy aspect of the film's exhibition was its use of an expert who stood on-stage and provided running commentary. These experts varied from location to location, and undoubtedly the nature of their commentary also varied in terms of content and quality. Nonetheless, their descriptions of the fight's key moments,

especially its controversies, fueled the audience's experience and drew considerable reactions, as evidenced in various newspaper reports. For example, the *New York Tribune's* article of May 23, 1897, noted:

In the sixth round, when Fitzsimmons was brought low for a few seconds, the crowd became so much excited that the lecturer who was explaining incidents had to give it up and let the spectators understand the rather complicated situation the best they could. He managed to get in just a word of explanation when it was nearly over.<sup>78</sup>

The same article related that when Corbett was knocked out in the final round, spectators cried out, "Where's the foul? Where's the foul?" The fight's ending, in which Corbett crawled out of the camera's view, no doubt left many viewers wondering exactly what had happened.

Streible explains that the live narrator's presence was important for at least two reasons. The narrator connected the fight film exhibition to the tradition of the illustrated lecture and thereby "helped diffuse the unsavory blood-and-guts aspect of the exhibition by suggesting the more genteel style of presentation used in illustrated lectures on the bourgeois lyceum circuit."<sup>79</sup> Also, the spoken commentary rendered musical accompaniment unnecessary and doubtlessly inspired spectator yelling, cheering and generally playing the counterpart to the actual ringside spectators. Perhaps even more telling was Musser's contention that in the use of an expert to provide commentary "the sports announcer had arrived."<sup>80</sup> Given the fact that within two years, several broadcasters, including Marconi and De Forest, would attempt to provide newspapers via

wireless technology with live reporting of an international yacht race off Sandy Hook,<sup>81</sup> Musser's bold assertion is not without merit. Musser's point that "the details and significant moments that would one day be brought out by close-ups were now emphasized by the narration"<sup>82</sup> accurately illustrated the importance of this exhibition innovation in the development of a sportscast convention.

The *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* grossed approximately \$750,000 with profits exceeding \$120,000 after the fighters received their percentages, marking it as the first motion picture blockbuster. More important, perhaps, the fight's film proved that a mass audience would pay to see a presentation of an actual event and that a privileged commentator could be used to guide viewers to the correct interpretation and feeling state. As Medhurst posits, "Though striving to appear fair, neutral, and objective, the privileged narrator 'knows' more than the audience and successfully communicates that superior knowledge through intonation, interpretation, and assertion."<sup>83</sup>

## **Issues**

Although motion picture companies continued to film sporting events, as well as their recreations and reenactments, these undertakings were not without problems along various technical, social and legal fronts. Seeking to follow up on the success of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, the American Vitagraph Company attempted to photograph the Jeffries-Fitzsimmons fight, scheduled at the Coney Island Sporting Club on the night of June 9. That the film industry was having a direct economic impact on the boxing world was evident in a July 29, 1899, article by Sam C. Austin for the *Police Gazette*, titled "Lively Bidding for the Jeffries-Sharkey Fight." Noting that any club wanting to

stage this championship fight needed both money and motion-picture facilities, Austin argued that the exhibition of fights “has moved beyond the experimental stages...[of the] indistinct and unsatisfactory”<sup>84</sup> Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight films and that the potential for the upcoming fight was enormous.

To such an extent has the photographing of movable objects been perfected since then that a wholly satisfactory result may be obtained, and considering the amount of interest that is now being taken in pugilistic affairs an exhibition of a genuine championship fight, such as the one forthcoming [Jeffries-Sharkey], ought to profit its promoters to the extent of several hundred thousand dollars.<sup>85</sup>

Although Austin’s claim that the photographing of movable objects, both staged and outdoor events, had been perfected was overstated, the same could certainly not be said of photographing live indoor events.

To capture this indoor event, twenty-four lamps were erected over the ring, but the engine that was supposed to provide the necessary watt output failed to generate enough horse-power.<sup>86</sup> *The Phonoscope* reported that only half of the lights powered up. “The light was perhaps equal to about four of the lamps burning as they should have burned, and the kinetoscope films developed out innocent of any marks that would suggest a negative.”<sup>87</sup> The magazine blamed the fiasco on inadequate planning and “demonstrates the advisability of preliminary trial before risking an installation on an important venture.”<sup>88</sup> The piece concluded by underscoring the fact that with more time to properly install and connect the equipment, the venture could be successfully accomplished. The Edison Manufacturing Company offered “the six important rounds,

including the knockout...faithfully reproduced”<sup>89</sup> with the actual fighters for \$150, but not before Lubin’s reproduction beat them to market, which Vitagraph also used for a time.

When Jeffries and Sharkey met in a heavyweight championship fight of twenty-five rounds on November 3, 1899, at the Coney Island Sporting Club, the lighting issue had been resolved from a technical standpoint. Despite shooting more than seven miles of footage on the largest film stock, two by two and three-quarter inches, Biograph’s production team encountered different problems. Some were self-inflicted and others “surreptitiously” imposed. The three hundred and fifty miniature arc lights needed to illuminate the ring for Biograph’s cameras almost roasted the fighters. After the fight, Jeffries decried the lights, telling the *New York Herald*, “No more picture machines for me. The intense heat from the electric lights bothered me considerably and made me very weak at times....”<sup>90</sup> Additionally, the cameras failed before the final round was completed, so that a reenacted ending had to be filmed some time in the seventeen days before the film was ready for exhibition. This diluted Biograph’s contention that they alone were offering the “only complete and accurate pictures” of the fight.<sup>91</sup>

Biograph waged an intense publicity battle in order to fend off Lubin’s faked fight reenactment and American Vitagraph’s fragments shot with cameras that had been smuggled into the arena by Edison and Vitagraph’s men, despite the presence of Pinkerton security hired to forestall such an infringement. Although the Vitagraph pirated version was copyrighted the next day by James H. White as *The Battle of Jeffries and Sharkey for Championship of the World*, the American Mutoscope and Biograph

Company launched vigorous legal and publicity campaigns to prevent exhibition of the pirated film. Biograph took out an advertisement (Illustration 2.5) in the *New York Clipper*, offering the Edison Manufacturing Company \$5,000 if it could dispute the fact that their pictures of the fight “are anything more than fragmentary snap shots of a few rounds, taken by cameras surreptitiously smuggled into the Coney Island Sporting Club and worked secretly.”<sup>92</sup> A similar amount was offered to Lubin, although he countered by offering \$10,000 to anybody who could prove his reproduction was not copyrighted. Lubin offered both a fifteen- to twenty-minute version of the entire fight, and a six-round highlight film. Interested exhibitors were even provided with free samples via mail. Unfortunately, fake fight films contributed to the dissolution of public interest in the real sport, which continued to struggle under the shadow of corruption and deception.

Although Biograph’s exhibition of the *Jeffries-Sharkey Fight* met with financial success, the tour was short-lived in comparison to the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*. One contributing factor was the changed reception that existed in 1899-1900. Unlike its predecessor, this release did not engender calls for legislation and censorship. Rather, by the dawn of the twentieth century, editorial control became an area of contention between manufacturers and exhibitors. Musser explains that the Edison Company had assumed greater editorial control in the production and marketing of its films. For example, the film of *President McKinley’s Funeral Cortege at Buffalo, New York* was a four hundred-foot “series” consisting of four separate films brought together through dissolves, introduced in the printing process.<sup>93</sup> The same process was employed for America’s Cup races, filmed in early October 1901, as they had been in 1899. Musser explains:

If the exhibitor did not like the sequence of subjects or only wanted some of the films and not the whole series, Edison was happy to sell them on an individual basis. Programs and reviews indicate that most prominent exhibitors were not yet willing to relinquish control over this area of expertise.<sup>94</sup>

The America's Cup yacht races between "Columbia" and "Shamrock I" in 1899 and between "Columbia" and "Shamrock II" in 1901, the latter owned by Sir Thomas Lipton, drew considerable newspaper coverage. The *New York Times* reported on October 21, 1899, that "large and demonstrative" crowds gathered in front of the newspaper offices along Park Row to read the bulletins of the race's progress, "impeding the progress of street cars and invaded City Hall Park for a considerable distance."<sup>95</sup> The crowds who gathered were both business men and "idlers who stood through the nearly four hours the race was in progress."<sup>96</sup> The races also provided an opportunity for Marconi to demonstrate his wireless technology. According to the *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* by the United States Naval Institute, the tests found that the "...coherer, principle of which was discovered some twenty years ago, [was] the only electrical instrument or device contained in the apparatus that is at all new."<sup>97</sup> A new technology was again tested through coverage of a live sporting event.

The films of the 1899 America's Cup, produced for Edison by J. Start Blackton and Albert E. Smith, captured select moments from each of the races. At least two were taken of the first race, contested on October 16, 1899. The first one hundred-foot film showed the "two yachts rounding the stakeboats and jockeying for a start."<sup>98</sup> The second film was given no description, although it had an alternate title, "*Columbia*" and

*“Shamrock” Tacking*, which Musser posits might be the name of another film that was not copyrighted.<sup>99</sup> For the third and final race, three films, each one hundred feet, were taken; the first two show the two yachts rounding one of the outer marks. The third, titled *“Columbia” Winning the Cup*, captured the decisive moment of the race. The Edison Film catalogue of July 1901 described the action. “As the ‘Columbia’ crosses the line, followed closely by the ‘Shamrock,’ we see the steam from the whistle of the Light Ship announcing the well earned victory of the American yacht.”<sup>100</sup>

These America’s Cup films warrant consideration on several points. First, that the Edison Manufacturing Company created a series with the 1899 and 1901 America’s Cup races illustrated a desire to create and market a composite story of an event comprised of multiple parts. This strategy has certainly been employed to market DVDs that tell the story of a team’s victory (e.g., Super Bowl, World Series) or the story of a specific event (e.g., 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics, 1981 Wimbledon). Additionally, the decision to capture the decisive moments of a race that featured ninety-foot yachts rather than attempting to capture the event in its entirety necessarily involved strategic planning, coordination, and timing. It also pointed to a completely different aesthetic than had been employed for filming fights. As Musser notes, in capturing actual performances that unfolded in time, films of sporting events like boxing “worked against crucial aspects of the presentational approach that dominated early cinema.”<sup>101</sup> However, these America’s Cup races, doubtlessly due to their length, their movement across a fixed course of open water, and their slow progress, lent themselves to an approach that could better highlight specific aspects of the race, namely the start, rounding marks, and the finish, signified by

a cannon shot once the winning boat crossed the committee boat's bow. This deliberate presentation of "key moments" was yet another important marker in the evolution of the sportscast highlight form. Lastly, these films served as standards against which to measure newsreel coverage of the America's Cup races featuring J-boats in 1930, 1934, and 1937, as well as television coverage of the 12-metre boats starting in 1958, particularly the 1983 and 1987 America's Cup competitions. The process of putting together excerpts of actualities that had taken place and editing in more recent film would also be used in the making of films about two fighters to promote and publicize what was billed as "The Fight of the Century," namely, the Jeffries-Johnson heavyweight championship fight in 1910. More and more, film was being used not merely to capture an actual event, but also to generate publicity for an event that had yet to occur.

### **Bifurcation**

By the time the Chicago Fight Picture Company put together excerpts and knockout rounds from the recent fights of both Jim Jeffries and newly crowned champion Jack Johnson and sold it as *The Making of Two Champions (1909-1910)*, both the film industry and the sport of boxing were in the midst of considerable change. During what was known as the Nickelodeon Era (1905-1915), the motion-picture industry changed from "a relatively small, wide-open part of commercial entertainment to a large, oligopolistic business based on mass production by studio."<sup>102</sup> These studios ultimately changed both their product, concentrating on feature-length fictional films rather than short subjects, and viewing spaces, replacing storefront nickelodeons and peep show parlors with ornate theatres that showed only films. Rapid growth in the film industry is

also evidenced in the proliferation of the first trade magazines—*Views and Film Index* (April 1906), *Moving Picture World* (March 1907), *Moving Picture News* (May 1908), and the *Nickelodeon* (January 1909). As Streible notes, “Amid this expansion, American Progressivism also simultaneously implemented its age of reform, critiquing and regulating the practice of cinema as it did most other social institutions.”<sup>103</sup> This concentration on social betterment forced the film industry to reassess its relationship with sporting entities, especially prizefighting.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, sports also experienced considerable growth as a source of popular entertainment. This growth was, in part, fueled by the continued proliferation of sporting magazines, the development and expansion of sports sections in newspapers, and the continued filming of sporting events for distribution within the growing motion-picture industry. The symbiotic relationship between these two industries generated tremendous enthusiasm by producing a constant flow of publicity through co-promotional activities. An article, titled “Pictures and Pugilism,” which appeared in the December 18, 1909, issue of *Moving Picture World*, captured the essence of this relationship:

The fortunes of the prize ring are apparently interwoven with those of the moving picture. Without the moving picture your modern prize fight would be shorn of most of its financial glamour and possibilities; without the prize fight the moving picture would not appeal to so many people as it apparently does.<sup>104</sup>

This joint venture to film and exhibit sporting actualities had to contend with reformists who continued to rail against the barbarity of prizefighting, still struggling to shed its

reputation as a brutal, savage blood sport with no socially redeeming value. Ultimately, the only spark needed to incite the move toward censorship and the banning of fight films was provided when Jack Johnson became the heavyweight champion by defeating Tommy Burns in 1908. As long as there had been a white heavyweight champion and the social hierarchy was maintained, the exhibition of fights was tolerated, even, at times, celebrated, especially when the feature showcased a popular champion like Gentleman Jim Corbett or Jim Jeffries.

For black boxers, especially those who won championships, defeating white fighters in the process, acceptance was “contingent upon their ability to appear non-threatening.”<sup>105</sup> As already noted, when Jack McAuliffe won the lightweight championship in New Orleans in 1882, newspapers demanded that boxing clubs no longer stage inter-racial bouts. Because John L. Sullivan and his successors maintained the color line, no black heavyweight had been afforded the opportunity to upset that hierarchy. Although the social hierarchy did not allow a black heavyweight champion, film played an important role in creating a space where black athletes demonstrated their talents. As Musser notes, the camera captured these performers without cultural preconceptions. “Here was an alternative rather than an obviously oppositional vision of a world. Racial and economic hierarchies may not have been upended but they were potentially effaced, flattened out or otherwise subverted.”<sup>106</sup> Johnson, however, not only upended the social hierarchy, but in his dominating ring presence and his flouting of social conventions by carrying on relationships with white women (e.g., Hattie McClay 1907; Belle Schreiber 1908) and marrying a white woman on two different occasions

(e.g., Etta Duryea 1909; Lucille Cameron 1912), Johnson was cast as a threatening menace to the ideology of race.

Even before Johnson won the heavyweight championship, the news of a black boxer defeating a white sparked considerable violence. As the telegraphed returns of the 1906 fight between Gans and Nelson were read at various sites, the furor of a black boxer beating a white fighter erupted in street violence. A *New York Times* article for September 5, 1906, with the headline “Almost a Lynching over Gans’s Victory,” reported on several incidents:

There were half a dozen fights in different parts of town, which were brought about by the success of the negro pugilist. In at least one instance the trouble almost grew into a lynching. In another case a stonecutter who had applauded the decision in the negro’s favor in a saloon in Williamsburg was followed from the place and assaulted by three men. He may die from his injuries.<sup>107</sup>

The films of Gans’s victory did not generate the same type of mob behavior, in part because venues for the exhibitions were segregated and alcohol was not served. Two years later, when Nelson knocked out Gans, the films grossed over \$100,000, a dramatic increase attributable to both an increase in the film market and to the idea that “the majority white audiences and promoters were more anxious to anoint a white fighter.”<sup>108</sup>

Consideration of Johnson’s fight films—Johnson-Burns 1908, Johnson-Ketchal 1909, and Johnson-Jeffries 1910—involved issues related to those racial policies that governed public life. One immediate result of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) was the racial bifurcation of public infrastructure and accommodations. As such, black and white public

spaces for seeing the Johnson films were “legally separate but hardly equal.”<sup>109</sup> Although Johnson defeated Burns for the heavyweight title on December 26, 1908, the film did not premiere until March 21, 1909, at the Chicago Auditorium where it played for two weeks for overwhelmingly white audiences. Promoter Hugh D. (Huge Deal) McIntosh provided the commentary, which often included calls, first uttered by Jack London, that the smile be removed from Johnson’s face and that Jeffries, who had retired undefeated and therefore still the rightful champion, come out of retirement to restore the championship to the white race. As Streible points out, white public outcry was accommodated by including footage of the *Jeffries-Sharkey Fight* of 1899, the moment of Jeffries’ greatest glory, to the Johnson-Burns film. This appendage served another purpose in addition to appeasing white panic; namely, it provided marketing impetus for a Johnson-Jeffries “Battle of the Century.”

Johnson’s ascendancy to the heavyweight championship came at a time of increased political activism within segments of the black community, especially related to the film industry. During Johnson’s reign atop the boxing world, 1908-1915, efforts included attempts by blacks to redefine stereotypical portrayals of black characters in theater and cinema, and debates about racial grounds for film censorship. Activists called for both access and autonomy, challenging segregation of exhibition venues and establishing independent black-run movie houses. Coincidental to Johnson’s capturing the heavyweight championship was the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) by W. E. B. DuBois and others in 1909. Along with the *Chicago Defender*, NAACP leaders spearheaded efforts to integrate

Chicago's movie theatres, a campaign which was also taken up in Harlem.

While there certainly was an expansion in the number of black-only movie venues during this time, the exhibition of Johnson's films often lagged behind exhibitions in white-run movie houses. Because McIntosh alone controlled the rights to the *Johnson-Burns Fight*, there were fewer advertisements for black theaters showing the film, indicating a lack of timely prints of the film.<sup>110</sup> A similar situation did not occur when the films of the Johnson-Ketchel fight were made in October 1909, in part because the prints were controlled by the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) and in part because Johnson himself demanded possession of the fight's prints.

*The Johnson-Ketchel Fight* generated both sensation and abhorrence. The extant prints of the film provided ample evidence that for most of the fight Johnson and Ketchel were engaging in a twenty-round exhibition more than a fight to the finish, cashing in on a money-making opportunity. As the fifth in a series of "Great White Hopes" that Johnson had fought and easily defeated since March 1909, Ketchel had earned a reputation as a fearless fighter. However, for most of his career Ketchel fought as a middleweight, and he was physically no match for Johnson. In fact, Ketchel was provided with lifts and padding to add girth to his stature for publicity photos. The film showed that for the first eleven rounds, Johnson toyed with the smaller man. Then in the twelfth round, Ketchel caught Johnson with a punch to the head, sending him to the canvas. As quickly as Johnson went down, he got up and quickly lunged at Ketchel, catching him with a vicious punch to the mouth that knocked him unconscious and left several of Ketchel's teeth embedded in Johnson's glove. The film showed Johnson pawing at the

glove, as if to remove the teeth.

Reception of the *Johnson-Ketchel Fight* ranged along the racial divide, accelerating white fears with images of black power and offering black audiences “a laudable antidote to the pervasive negative stereotypes of popular culture.”<sup>111</sup> Neither black nor white audiences reacted monolithically, however. Black critics questioned the fight’s highly suspicious ending, which appeared to one columnist as choreographed for the cameras:

If this Johnson-Ketchel fight wasn’t a pre-arranged affair, there was some awful clever catering to the moving picture machine.... After the supposed blow Johnson went down on his hands and toes, rolled over backward on one hand, and facing the moving picture machine all the time; then, seeing that Ketchel was waiting for his cue, he jumped up and rushed at Ketchel like a wild man.... The referee stood squarely over Ketchel, counting him out, and all three were in full view of the moving picture machine.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to concerns about playing to the camera, black critics were also beginning to question Johnson’s exorbitant lifestyle. Conversely, not all whites viewed the film within a racial discourse. Regardless of their attitudes about race, white fans of the sport doubtlessly appreciated Johnson’s boxing skills. As Streible notes, “When boxing insider Joe Humphreys narrated the pictures for fight fans at Hammerstein’s Victoria theater, for example, *Variety* reported that he held forth on pugilistic and financial details rather than race angles.”<sup>113</sup>

Those reports included details about the Jeffries-Johnson fight, the contract of

which was signed on November 30, 1909, a little more than six weeks after the Ketchel fight. Promoter George Lewis “Tex” Rickard lured Jeffries out of retirement, thanks in part to the largest purse for a championship fight, \$101,000, with the fighters splitting two-thirds of the movie rights and each receiving a signing bonus of \$10,000. The fight, originally scheduled for July 4, 1910, in San Francisco, was moved to Reno, Nevada, when in mid-June Governor James N. Gillett withdrew his support, bowing to pressure from civic and church leaders. According to a *New York Times* article from December 5, 1909, details of the “moving picture clause” occupied a considerable portion of the negotiations and was finally “stricken out of the articles and incorporated into a separate agreement.”<sup>114</sup> That separate agreement included the formation of a stock company, the J. & J. Co., to handle the fight’s pictures. The MPPC ultimately bought up both boxers’ shares of the net film profits, paying Johnson \$50,000 for his third and Jeffries \$66,000, as well as buying Rickard’s share for \$33,000. The *Times* article reported that profits would exceed \$300,000.

In addition to the MPPC coverage of the event, numerous independent film companies shot footage of the boxers preparing for the bout. Significantly, these films contributed to the pre-fight publicity so important in generating interest and building an audience not only for the event itself, but also for the films that followed. Comprised of excerpted segments, or highlights, from previous fight films and edited footage of training and sparring sessions, these publicity films constituted an important step in the sportscast highlight form’s evolutionary process, serving as precursors for not only newsreel segments, but also for the pre-game and post-game programs, as well as for

Video News Releases (VNR) that became staples of the sports broadcasting industry half a century later.

### **Backlash and Bans**

Production values of the *Johnson-Jeffries Fight* were not noteworthy, for despite a veritable cadre of cameras outfitted with special lenses being used by member companies Vitagraph, Essanay, and Selig, the film utilized most of the conventions of earlier fight films. Cameras were stationed on a platform thirty feet west of the ring and shot the action from that distance. One difference from earlier fight productions was the allocation of a panning camera to follow Jeffries, “framing the white boxer as protagonist and privileging white spectatorship.”<sup>115</sup> Jeffries, however, was unable to match the ring skills of the younger, more agile Johnson, who not only controlled the action, as he had in other fights, but was also seen talking to his opponent, as well as to Corbett and Sullivan, both of whom served as handlers in the Jeffries corner. Another significant aspect that the camera captures was that during the climactic sequence in the fifteenth round after Jeffries had been knocked down three times, Jeffries’ handlers entered the ring (Corbett included), preempting the final knockout ten-count. This caused referee Tex Rickard to declare Johnson the winner and new champion rather than allowing Jeffries to be knocked out as he surely would have been. A similar, more intrusive ending had occurred in Australia when Johnson defeated Tommy Burns to win the championship in 1908. In that bout, Australian constables forced cameramen to stop filming so that the knockout of Burns was not recorded. These incidents marked only the beginning of what became a vigorous campaign to censor the films of Johnson vanquishing the Great White Hope(s).

In the immediate aftermath of Johnson's victory, jubilant blacks celebrated and whites lashed back, and the ensuing race riots left a number of people dead. In a July 6 *New York Times* article, titled "Bar Fight Pictures to Avoid Race Riots," the *Times* listed seven cities where at least ten fatalities resulted from fights occasioned by the Johnson's victory. The article also noted that Washington [D.C.], Atlanta, Baltimore, St. Louis, and Cincinnati were among the cities that decided "not to permit the exhibition of the pictures."<sup>116</sup> Despite the numerous calls for bans on the film of the fight, few decried the overt racial furor being played out in cities and towns across the country. The actual number of blacks killed as a direct result of white vengeance over Johnson's victory has never been accurately documented. More telling perhaps, neither newspapers and magazines, nor church and civic leaders decried the behavior of white citizens for their actions. Rather, blame was placed on the sport of boxing or on black demonstrations of empowerment. The easiest target to censor was invariably the fight's film.

On July 6, the *New York Times* also reported that William Show, general secretary of the United Society of Christian Endeavor, had issued a formal statement in which he declared "that Independence Day had been dishonored and disgraced by a brutal prizefight: that the moral sense of the Nation had been outraged, but that this evil was as nothing compared to the harm which will be done by allowing children and women to view the production of the Jeffries-Johnson fight by moving pictures."<sup>117</sup> Significantly, this declaration against the fight film invoked a paternalistic tone of protecting women and children from viewing the film, despite the fact that women and children were certainly not the primary audience for fight films. In fact, the literature suggests that other

than the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, few women sought admittance to fight films.<sup>118</sup> Church leaders like James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore echoed a similar concern, namely, that the pictures would have a desultory effect on women and children. “If the pictures of this contest were permitted, I am sure hundreds of children would see them, and what would be the result? Their morals would not only be contaminated, but they would have the wrong ideal of a true hero.”<sup>119</sup> Although not explicitly stated, the message was clear: Johnson could never be considered a hero. Implicit was the idea that it was up to the white race to lead the way “to confer these gifts of civilization, through law, commerce, and education on the uncivilized.”<sup>120</sup> A legal tact was taken by Mayor Patrick Henry McCarthy of San Francisco, who claimed: “Inasmuch as the contest resolved itself into a prizefight pure and simple and was not a boxing match, the exhibition of the moving pictures would be as unlawful as the fight itself.”<sup>121</sup> Streible posits that these disparate attacks served both the progressive and racist agenda.

For some groups, then, the desire to control what they believed to be black peoples’ riotous nature by removing racially inflammatory images was consistent with their view of religion, reform, and progress. For others with more overtly white supremacist opinions, the rhetoric of moralism simply served as subterfuge for their calls to suppress anything which might suggest black power, achievement, or uplift.<sup>122</sup>

The entire episode marked a nadir in American sporting history.

Attacks on the *Johnson-Jeffries Fight* film did not go unchallenged. The *New York Times* reported on July 7 that the “moving-picture syndicate owning the rights to the

Johnson-Jeffries fight films will resort to the courts of the several States to determine their right to show the pictures...”<sup>123</sup> Black newspapers and clergy also added their voices to those advocating for the films to be shown, often pointing out the hypocrisy of the situation. The *St. Paul Appeal* asked, “Who believes for one minute, that had Jeffries been the victor at Reno, there would have been any objection to showing the pictures of him bringing back ‘the white man’s hope?’”<sup>124</sup> Similar stances were taken in black press editorials and cartoons, noting that the film of Johnson’s victory would have beneficial effects for the political and psychological well-being of black citizens.

When New York City’s mayor had made it clear that the film would not be banned, offers from theaters and houses of amusement poured into the MPPC offices on Fifth Avenue. With promises from the film’s producers and the MPPC that the films would be carefully handled, meaning “the shows will be stag,”<sup>125</sup> the *Johnson-Jeffries Fight* escaped total censorship for some time. Exhibitors, in practicing class, gender and race controls, were able to show the film and charge steeper prices for admission. This meant that not all of Johnson’s supporters, especially those in black communities, got a chance to see the *Johnson-Jeffries Fight*. For the next several years, Johnson held the heavyweight championship. Unable to find anyone who could defeat Johnson in the ring, those who sought to dethrone Johnson used the Mann Act, which forbade, under heavy penalties, the transportation of women from one state to another for immoral purposes, to prosecute and jail him, forcing him to leave the country.

The first attempt to ban fight films, as well as telegraphed descriptions of fights, was introduced in the U. S. Congress in May 1910 by Representative Walter I. Smith (R-

Iowa). Although that effort failed, two years later, another bill was introduced by Representative Thetus Sims (D-Tenn.) early in 1912. Southern Democrats pushed through the legislation, which was modeled after existing federal control on obscene publications (e.g., birth control, abortion literature). With the Sims Act of 1912, passed on July 31, 1912, Congress used its constitutional power to regulate commerce by forbidding interstate transport of fight films. As Lee Grievesen notes, “The Sims Act effectively defined moving pictures as commerce and thus brought them within the orbit of federal government intervention. This intervention was clearly linked to a moral concern over the effect both of prizefights in general and the effect of images of Johnson's victories in particular.”<sup>126</sup> That the Sims Act was motivated by racial ideology was evidenced by the demagoguery deployed in the debate. On July 19, two weeks after the fight, Representative Seaborn A. Roddenbery (D-Ga.) delivered a speech in which he called Johnson “an African biped beast”<sup>127</sup> and that failure to take action against “black-skinned, thick-lipped, bull-necked, brutal-hearted African”<sup>128</sup> would lead to another civil war. Ironically, those who had been longing for Johnson’s defeat were denied the opportunity to see the bout with Jess Willard in 1915 that ended Johnson’s tenure as heavyweight champion.

## **Conclusion**

The ban on boxing films did not mean filmmakers no longer sought to capture and disseminate sporting events. In the years that followed, leading film companies continued to capture actualities with their newsreel divisions, which began in 1911, one year before the Sims Act became law. By that time, other sporting events had captivated the public’s

imagination on both national and international stages. Major league baseball began playing its World Series in 1903 and baseball was captured on film as early as 1906.<sup>129</sup> Another sport that grew in popularity at the turn of the century was college football, which the Edison Company captured on film during 1903. Still another sporting spectacle that grew in popularity was the modern Olympic Games, which began in 1896. In short, sporting events served as important content for the newsreel divisions of the major film studios.

What is especially important about the formation and development of what today is called the sport-media-commercial complex<sup>130</sup> was not merely the technological improvements that allowed cameras to stage or capture live sporting events. Rather, all of the various constituencies played key roles in the evolution and development of the sportscast highlight form. Arguably, far more is known about the ways that inventors, promoters, exhibitors, journalists, athletes, civic and church leaders attended to the consumption of sport culture than about the audience. It is difficult to ascertain who watched sport films and what they thought of them. Economics, as Musser points out, limited the access to films by the poorer members of the working class and the poor. Drawing its audience from across the upper, middle and working classes, films sought to accommodate people of diverse financial status. He argues:

Spectatorship was undoubtedly distributed unevenly through these different economic groups, but economic difference was only one of the many factors that determined attendance. Geography, general accessibility to cultural events, age, sex and standing within one's family, ethnic and racial background, religion and

personal tastes all affected the likelihood of seeing films.<sup>131</sup>

It should not be assumed that the audience was comprised of males only. While the films showing the physique of Sandow, as well as the fight films featuring Corbett and Jeffries, were primarily intended for male patrons, these films almost certainly “held considerable erotic interest for women spectators.”<sup>132</sup> At least a few women asserted their independence by visiting theaters showing fight films and other sporting events, especially those that offered matinees.

While many factors determined the composition of the audience, it is also important to understand that control of the places of exhibition was as contentious as the controlling of the content. As the motion-picture industry became financially lucrative, not all entities shared equally in the profits. The system of selling the rights by states spawned highly competitive practices among exhibitors seeking to capitalize on topical films. States rights owners also faced considerable difficulties in recouping their investments in specific film properties. The sheer number of motion picture enterprises, especially in the early years of projection, exacerbated the difficulties of making profits from exhibitions. As the MPPC gradually gained more and more control over the distribution of feature-length fictional films, fewer independent companies were left to compete.

This concentration of control in the hands of the studios ultimately pushed sport films from the feature to the news actuality. With feature-length fight films no longer legal, sports became an important source and a regular part of the newsreel. As such, capturing highlights of a sporting event was established as the new operational aesthetic,

one that remained an integral part of the newsreel genre, even as radio broadcasting became the vehicle for capturing and disseminating a live sporting event.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 221.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel G. Streible, *A History of the Prizefight Film, 1894-1915* (PhD diss., University of Texas 1994), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ed. J. G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner's, 1990), 208.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 34 in Gordon Hendricks, *The Kinetoscope: America's First Commercially Successful Motion Picture Exhibitor* (New York: Theodore Gaus' Sons, Inc., 1966), 77.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant Gard," *Wide Angle*, 8.3-4 (1986): 64.

<sup>9</sup> Qtd. in John Rickards Betts, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1850-1950* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974), 62.

<sup>10</sup> Betts, *Heritage*, 61-62.

<sup>11</sup> Musser, *Edison's Motion Pictures*, 105.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>13</sup> "The Kinetograph," *New York Sun*, 28 May 1891, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Gorn, *Manly*, 237.

<sup>15</sup> Qtd. in Gorn, *Manly*, 236.

<sup>16</sup> Qtd. in Gorn, *Manly*, 238.

<sup>17</sup> Gorn, *Manly*, 241.

<sup>18</sup> See Gorn, *Manly*, 242. The New Orleans athletic clubs helped systematize boxing, and Richard Kyle Fox recognized six weight classifications, providing championship belts for each.

<sup>19</sup> Qtd. in Gorn, *Manly*, 243.

<sup>20</sup> Qtd. in Betts, *Heritage*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Qtd. in Gorn, *Manly*, 244.

<sup>22</sup> Gorn, *Manly*, 245.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Melissa Haley, "Storm of Blows," *Common Place: A Common Place, an Uncommon Voice*, 3.2 (2003). <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/cp/vol-03/no-02/>

<sup>25</sup> Gorn, *Manly*, 248.

<sup>26</sup> Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 80.

<sup>27</sup> "The Kinetograph—A New Industry Heralded," *The Phonogram*, (October 1892), 217-218.

- <sup>28</sup> Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 24.
- <sup>29</sup> W. K. L. Dickson and Antonia Dickson, *History of the Kinetograph Kinetoscope and Kinetograph-Phonograph* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1970), 19.
- <sup>30</sup> Hendricks, *Kinetoscope*, 27.
- <sup>31</sup> Qtd. in Hendricks, *Kinetoscope*, 37.
- <sup>32</sup> Dickson and Dickson, *History*, 34.
- <sup>33</sup> Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 28.
- <sup>34</sup> The Kinetoscope Exhibition Company, the Latham-Rector-Tilden venture, should not be confused with the Kinetoscope Company, belonging to Raff & Gammon.
- <sup>35</sup> Hendricks, 90.
- <sup>36</sup> Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 102.
- <sup>37</sup> See footnote 18 in Hendricks, *Kinetoscope*, 96.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.
- <sup>39</sup> Streible, *Prizefight*, 53.
- <sup>40</sup> Qtd. in Hendricks, *Kinetoscope*, 92-93.
- <sup>41</sup> See footnote 3 in Hendricks, *Kinetoscope*, 99.
- <sup>42</sup> Qtd. in Hendricks, *Kinetoscope*, 94.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.
- <sup>44</sup> “Knocked out by Corbett,” *New York Sun*, 8 September 1894, 1.
- <sup>45</sup> Because of the newspaper articles that appeared, September 7, 1894, has become the accepted date for the staged fight, despite some confusion in Hendricks’ using a different date in his first reference to the fight, although he later corrects himself. Brady’s autobiography also lent to the confusion in dating the event incorrectly.
- <sup>46</sup> See note 33 in Streible, 76.
- <sup>47</sup> “Knocked out,” 1.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> See footnote 10 in Hendricks, 106.
- <sup>52</sup> “Knocked out,” 1.
- <sup>53</sup> “Charged the Grand Jury. Judge Depue Wants the Corbett Fight Investigated,” *Newark Daily Advertiser*, 11 September 1894, 1.
- <sup>54</sup> “Not Regarded as a Fight. Edison’s Idea of the Corbett-Courtney Mill,” *Newark Daily Advertiser*, 12 September 1894, 1.
- <sup>55</sup> Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 31.
- <sup>56</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 84.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.
- <sup>59</sup> “Magic Lantern Kinetoscope,” *New York Sun*, 21 April 1895, 2.
- <sup>60</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 96.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.
- <sup>62</sup> Qtd. in Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 96.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.
- <sup>64</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 116-117.
- <sup>65</sup> Qtd. in Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 116.

- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., 118.
- <sup>67</sup> Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 213.
- <sup>68</sup> “Keith’s New Theatre,” *Boston Herald*, 22 September 1896, 4B.
- <sup>69</sup> “The Suburban,” *New York Herald*, 24 June 1896, 8.
- <sup>70</sup> See “Note” for *Suburban Handicap, 1897*, in Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 313.
- <sup>71</sup> Martin J. Medhurst, “Propaganda Techniques in Documentary Film and Television: AIM vs. PBS,” in *Television Studies*, ed. G. Burns and R. J. Thompson (New York: Praeger, 1989), 186.
- <sup>72</sup> Streible, *Prizefight*, 94.
- <sup>73</sup> Qtd. in Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 196.
- <sup>74</sup> See Streible’s discussion, *Prizefight*, 94-98.
- <sup>75</sup> Streible, 109.
- <sup>76</sup> Qtd. in Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 198.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., 198.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid., 198.
- <sup>79</sup> Streible, *Prizefight*, 122.
- <sup>80</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 198.
- <sup>81</sup> Eric Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States to 1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 23. Although he discusses the 1901 America’s Cup races and the attempt to use wireless to document the race’s progress, Barnouw makes no mention of Marconi’s demonstration at the 1899 America’s Cup races.
- <sup>82</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 198.
- <sup>83</sup> Medhurst, “Propaganda,” 187.
- <sup>84</sup> See note 12 in Streible, *Prizefight*, 196.
- <sup>85</sup> Sam C. Austin, “Lively Bidding for the Jeffries-Sharkey Fight,” *Police Gazette*, 29 July 1899, 11.
- <sup>86</sup> “The Films That Failed,” *The Phonoscope*, May 1899, 14.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 14.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., 14.
- <sup>89</sup> Qtd. in Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 508.
- <sup>90</sup> “Jeffries Cries ‘Foul.’” *New York Herald*, 4 November 1899, 4.
- <sup>91</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 206.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., 206.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid., 320.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid., 320.
- <sup>95</sup> “Around the Bulletin Boards,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1899, 1.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., 1.
- <sup>97</sup> United States Naval Institute, *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute*. The Institute, 1899, 857.
- <sup>98</sup> *Edison Films*, March 1900, 6.
- <sup>99</sup> Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 554.
- <sup>100</sup> *Edison Films*, July 1901, 32.
- <sup>101</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 208.
- <sup>102</sup> Streible, *Prizefight*, 257.

- <sup>103</sup> Ibid., 258.
- <sup>104</sup> “Pictures and Pugilism,” *Motion Picture World*, 18 December 1909, 871.
- <sup>105</sup> Streible, *Prizefight*, 317.
- <sup>106</sup> Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 44.
- <sup>107</sup> “Almost a Lynching Over Gans’s Victory,” *New York Times*, 5 September 1906, 16.
- <sup>108</sup> Streible, *Prizefight*, 322.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid., 332.
- <sup>110</sup> Ibid., 329.
- <sup>111</sup> Ibid., 341.
- <sup>112</sup> Uncle Rod Kees, “Johnson Shows Physical Powers of the Negro,” *Freeman*, 6 November 1909, 7.
- <sup>113</sup> Streible, 341.
- <sup>114</sup> “Rickard Explains ‘Secret’ Session,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1909, S1.
- <sup>115</sup> Streible, *Prizefight*, 351.
- <sup>116</sup> “Bar Fight Pictures to Avoid Race Riots,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1910, 3.
- <sup>117</sup> Article 1, No Title, *New York Times*, 6 July 1910, 3.
- <sup>118</sup> See Streible’s and Musser’s discussions of the audience and women’s access to prize fights.
- <sup>119</sup> Allen Sinclair Will, *Life of Cardinal Gibbons* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Sons, 1922), 802.
- <sup>120</sup> Robert J. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 126.
- <sup>121</sup> “Barred in San Francisco,” *New York Times*, 7 July 1910, 3.
- <sup>122</sup> Streible, *Prizefight*, 356.
- <sup>123</sup> “Picture Men to Fight,” *New York Times*, 7 July 1910, 3.
- <sup>124</sup> “The Johnson-Jeffries Fight,” *St. Paul Appeal*, 16 July 1910, 2.
- <sup>125</sup> “At Stag Houses Only,” *New York Tribune*, 11 July 1910, 3.
- <sup>126</sup> Lee Grieveson, “Fighting Films: Race, Morality, and the Governing of Cinema, 1912-1915,” *Cinema Journal*, 38 (Fall 1998): 44.
- <sup>127</sup> *Congressional Record*, July 19, 1912, 9305.
- <sup>128</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>129</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 484.
- <sup>130</sup> Michael Messner, *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 76.
- <sup>131</sup> Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 184.
- <sup>132</sup> Ibid., 184.

## CHAPTER 3: THE HABIT OF HIGHLIGHTS

### Introduction

By the time the Sims Act was enacted in 1912, barring the interstate transportation of fight films for commercial exhibition, the cinema industry had already entered into the second phase of newsreel development with the release on August 8, 1911, of the first American-produced newsreel by the French-owned *Pathé Weekly*. An announcement in the July 29, 1911, issue of *Moving Picture World*, signaled the beginning in America of a weekly newsreel, "...issued every Tuesday, made up of short scenes of great international events of universal interest from all over the world."<sup>1</sup> Regularity certainly became a hallmark of the newsreels, allowing them to become something with which the audience could be comfortable. Luke McKernan posits, "The news itself is always subject to form and habit."<sup>2</sup>

Several factors related to production and distribution facilitated the establishment of the weekly exhibition of filmed news. The ready availability of serviceable cameras, projectors and film stock allowed a sufficient number of producers "experienced in the rudiments of cinematography to take the chance offered by spectacular events far away in which there was intense public interest everywhere."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the public's interest in film entertainment had been established, evidenced by the fact that in the United States the number of cinemas grew from nine thousand in 1908 to almost fourteen thousand in 1914. This growth would not have been possible without a very large number of people having acquired the habit of attending the cinema.

The ability to exhibit reproductions of actual events anywhere a darkened space and a projector could be brought together transformed the economic basis of entertainment from a local commodity of theatrical performance to a national and international industry. Clearly, it was the large production companies with world-wide connections that had the resources to produce news films to satisfy the public's insatiable appetite for this new medium of communication in which the wonder of the moving image supplanted the magic of acting.<sup>4</sup>

That sports played an instrumental role in the development of the newsreel form was first realized in Great Britain when Birt Acres and Robert Paul filmed the Epsom Derby on June 3, 1896, and projected it the following evening at the Alhambra. This "element of rushing an event of entirely ephemeral but great topical interest to the public" had been missing from other cinematic presentations of actualities.<sup>5</sup> Equally importantly, the coverage of sporting events proved that film communicated aspects of an event which could not be captured by print news media at the time or by radio when it eventually emerged. The news films of boxing, horse and yacht races, and athletic (i.e., track and field) competitions evoked a greater degree of emotional involvement from the audience than printed words or illustrations by supplying moving images of the scene, despite the fact the results often were already known. As such, evocations of crowd responses demonstrated the power of newsreels to "reduce the individuality of the people in the audience and substitute a mass response for a critical and individual assessment."<sup>6</sup>

Film's ability to affect an audience *en masse* had both positive and negative implications for the development of the newsreels as journalism—on the one hand

allowing it to act like a demagogue capable of tremendous influence through the power of intimacy, while on the other confining it to the workings of a motion picture camera within the context of a news organization trying to catch its news on the fly, often rendering its coverage superficial and entertaining. Nonetheless, watching newsreel coverage of sports joined attending those events, as well as reading about athletic contests in the print press and listening to games on the radio, in creating a common popular culture centered around sports.<sup>7</sup> One component of that popular culture was being in the public eye, which now meant being seen.

This chapter explicates the development of the sportscast highlight form within newsreels. It argues that sports, as scheduled events, became one of the mainstays of newsreel subject matter. According to a 1949 survey, sport was the most popular newsreel segment, not only because it captured the spectacle and pageantry of the events, but also because it “helped nationalize sports by visualizing major sports heroes who had never before been seen by sports fans outside of the cities where they played.”<sup>8</sup> Although newsreels were not wholly responsible for creating this national sporting identity, the newsreel sports segment perpetuated the dominant masculine sporting identity extolled in early twentieth century sports discourse.<sup>9</sup> To a large extent this discourse developed at a time when the modern Olympic movement was initiated by Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1896. The Olympics were appropriated by those advocates of nationalistic athletic prowess as a means of celebrating the melting pot character of the United States.

Additionally, sports lent themselves to a formulaic approach employed by newsreel cameramen. The major producers obtained the greatest access to events

throughout the world thanks to their network of cameramen, as well as to their operational bases throughout the globe and to the private exchange agreements among them, which guaranteed both financial and technical advantages and curtailed challenges from local producers. This system of gentlemanly competition resulted in a general increase of productivity through routinization and standardization.<sup>10</sup> As explicated in the previous chapter, the earliest news films before the newsreel era were shot in fifty-foot and one hundred and fifty-foot segments, and these were followed in the first decade of the twentieth century by three hundred-foot topicals, also known as actualities. When newsreels supplanted topicals in the market, they retained their length and stayed that way for almost their entire history. Because a cameraman had a limited amount of footage to shoot, every shot had to be a highlight. Michael Oriard has argued that sports newsreels were the predecessors of today's sports news programs like ESPN's *SportsCenter*: "Whatever the photographer shot became the big plays for the audience in the theater, and in a cruder way and a simpler time the producers of newsreels achieved the same effect as today's more extravagantly financed and technically advanced highlight films."<sup>11</sup> Analysis of most newsreel sports segments reveals specific characteristics. For example, in the case of a college football game, there was a general view of the stadium to establish the venue, followed by a shot closer to the field, then by a shot of the crowd (e.g. cheering), a shot of a crucial play (e.g. touchdown), close-up of the hero, and at the end a shot of celebration by the team and fans. Cameramen were not expected to capture footage in sequence, and close-ups were often edited into the final edited newsreel.

When the first all-sound newsreel was premiered by *Fox Movietone News* on October 28, 1927, at the Roxy Theater in New York City, it contained highlights of the Army-Yale football game at the Yale Bowl and the rodeo in New York. Sound newsreels necessitated a more complex approach to editing to insure synchronization and sound levels.<sup>12</sup> In early sound newsreels, microphones were strategically positioned to capture the sounds of the bands and cheerleaders, and canned footage “of cheering throngs and football pageantry were edited into the game action.”<sup>13</sup> As newsreel editors became more comfortable and ambitious with the sound-on-film process, commentary was used to enhance the excitement of sport segments. Commentary was often provided by the some of the period’s leading sports radio announcers, who became among the most widely known personalities in the nation. As Luke McKernan notes, “The word, and its emphatic delivery, makes the sound newsreels a rich source of material for anyone seeking to interpret the values and attitude of the period.”<sup>14</sup>

One of the most significant developments regarding the relationship between newsreels and sports revolved around securing the exclusive rights to film a sporting event. As noted in the previous chapter, piracy and re-enactments (i.e., fake fight films) plagued early film actualities. Perhaps the most glaring illustration of this continuing problem occurred in October 1923 with the filming of the match race between Kentucky Derby winner Zev and Epsom Derby winner Papyrus at Belmont Park. *Pathé* spent \$50,000 for the exclusive rights to the race, but the event was pirated by cameramen from *Fox Movietone* and *Hearst’s Metrotone*. They exhibited their film of the entire race—five thousand feet of it—a full week before *Pathé’s* legitimate newsreel reached the screen.

The issue of securing the rights to important sporting events did not end with the Zev-Papyrus; in fact, the practice of charging film companies for access to footage of the Olympics took root in that same year, 1923, and greatly contributed to casting the Olympic Games as a commercial commodity.

Just as the sports newsreel segment became the prototype for today's highlight form, the newsreel companies also served as the prototype for today's multinational corporations. It was this economic aspect of the cinema industry which, more than any other factor, characterized the history of newsreels, inextricably linking the development of film as journalism to the development of film as entertainment.<sup>15</sup>

### **Routinization and Standardization**

The coverage of sports by newsreels was predicated on routinization—both by producers and by viewers, who flocked to the cinema on a weekly and then bi-weekly basis expecting to be entertained. At the height of newsreel popularity in the 1930s, sports accounted for twenty to twenty-five percent of the footage, and weekly attendance of over one hundred million meant an estimated audience of twenty million for each of the five major newsreel distributors.<sup>16</sup> Producers crafted the sports segment of highlights in terms that combined newspaper headlines with a synecdochic approach to the visuals and commentary that played up themes related to celebrity, nation (melting pot), gender and race to maintain the dominant cultural hegemony. Another aspect of the routinization revolved around the standardization of the visuals, which used a sequence of shots taken before and after the action, juxtaposing shots of the event's location with close-ups of participants as well as intermixing real shots of the crowd and the event with re-

enactments. Lastly, the sports segments followed the progression of the sports seasons, heeding the calendar in a very predictable fashion—ski jumping in the winter, horse racing in the spring, baseball in the summer, and football in the fall.

The newsreel sports segment relied on a combination of scheduled events, breaking news, and human interest stories that often featured oddities (e.g., child prodigies, daredevils and crashes). Comparing a purposive sample of *Universal International Newsreels* from the beginning of the sound period—1929, 1931, 1932 and 1933—with those from the years following World War II—1947, 1948, 1949 and 1951—not only provides an overview of what sporting events comprised the newsreel sports calendar but also reveals a constricting of the range of sports covered as certain sports like college and professional football and events like horse racing’s Triple Crown, Wimbledon, and the World Series came to dominate coverage. Being able to count on scheduled events afforded newsreel editors opportunities to dispatch cameramen to cover breaking news as it arose as well as to find those human interest stories that highlighted the bizarre, the unusual and the spectacular. Significantly, coverage was characterized by “picture material, not analysis.”<sup>17</sup>

The newsreel sports calendar in the early 1930s was far different than it would be in the early 1950s, especially during the winter months. In the earlier period, viewers were more likely to see newsreels of speed skating, ice boat racing, ski jumping and dog sled racing during January, February and March than viewers in the later period. Although viewers in the later period were treated to some traditional winter sports like ski jumping and speed skating, their coverage began with highlights of college football’s

bowl games, and featured sports that were growing in popularity, including figure skating, college basketball, indoor track and field, speed boat racing and professional golf tournaments. Horse racing was one sport that retained a favored position in both time periods, as thoroughbred racing from Florida (Hialeah) and California (Santa Anita) was covered, as well as the Grand National steeplechase from England. It is worth noting that steeplechase racing, which often featured spectacular falls as horses and riders attempted to jump barriers, offered the visual material that newsreels sought. Although not in season, baseball, usually in the persons of stars like Babe Ruth and later Joe DiMaggio, received some coverage in March as teams began spring training. Several factors contributed to the wide assortment of winter sports covered in the early newsreels, including the absence of two key professional leagues—the National Hockey League and the National Basketball League—as well as limited coverage of college basketball’s NIT and NCAA tournaments.

Adding spice to the mix of winter sporting highlights was 1930s coverage of oddities like water-ski polo, aquatic ballet, tub races down mountains as well as 1950s coverage of roller-skate hockey, ice skaters jumping barrels, cliff diving, and motorcycle racing on ice. Neither time period refrained from odd and exotic events, including women wrestling men, pee-wee golfers performing trick shots, kick boxing, and mass gymnastics. Any event that featured spectacular crashes in the snow or daredevil stunts on the water or ice was certain to be included.

While the winter season offered sporting events that depended on the elements, the spring months featured events involving speed, daring and teamwork. The schedule

revolved around horse racing's Triple Crown—including the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes and the Belmont Stakes—as well as English races like the Epsom Derby, the Grand National steeplechase and the Ascot Gold Cup. Other sports' top races such as the Boston Marathon, the Indianapolis 500, America's Cup racing, and speed boat racing's Gold Cup were also covered. In fact, races of all kinds—from crew and air racing to bike and race walking—were captured. Part of racing's lure for the newsreels stemmed from the fact that its organic unity lent itself to the process of highlighting.

What constituted a sports highlight in either period was dictated by “the complexities of telescoping the time element into the scale of a newsfilm.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, until 1945 cameras were capable of filming continuously for no more than ten minutes, so capturing a race's finish was easier to time than attempting to capture the scoring of a goal, touchdown or home run. Even after the introduction of sixteen millimeter (16mm) safety film, newsreel companies could not afford to film most events in their entirety or for long stretches to secure the decisive moment-of-truth plays. For that reason, racing of almost any kind was captured, especially because it offered at least one decisive moment, the finish, which was combined with the start and almost any other part of the race to suggest a complete story. Add to that establishing shots of the crowd and a shot of the winner celebrating, and the reel was complete, economically and efficiently captured. Except for the shortest races, usually track and field's sprints and hurdling events, editors preferred transforming what had been captured into a highlight by allowing the headlining and commentary to maximize the affect and importance of what the viewer was seeing. As Oriard notes, “With limited footage to shoot, newsreel

photographers had to be lucky to capture the game's crucial plays.”<sup>19</sup> With racing, cameramen did not rely on luck; rather, they relied on the knowledge that if they captured the finish, they had the highlight.

Just as the coverage of most any race was routinized, so too was the coverage of those summer sports in which individual athletes were the focus. Newsreels presented highlights of the major tennis and golf championship events, focusing on the stars of those sports. Arguably, neither of those sports lent themselves to the spectacular footage that characterized coverage of auto, bobsled, or speed boat racing. Lacking visually exciting crashes and pile-ups, these sports rarely offered the kind of footage so characteristic of newsreels featuring races. Given the aforementioned limitations, capturing the moment-of-truth shot or decisive point proved exceedingly difficult for any cameraman shooting a Wimbledon final or the final round of the U.S. Open Golf Championship. Not surprisingly then, coverage focused on the star personalities of those sports, including Bobby Jones, Walter Hagen and Babe Didrickson in golf and Bill Tilden, Suzanne Lenglen and Helen Wills Moody in tennis.

The formula for those individual sports used at least one familiar technique of juxtaposing long shots and close-ups, although the key was capturing the final point or putt, the handshake between competitors, and holding or hoisting the trophy, culminating with a close-up of the victor. For example, *Universal's* highlights of the 1930 women's final at Wimbledon featuring two Americans, Helen Wills Moody and Helen Hull Jacobs, set the stage by showing the two women before the final, then presented a rally of several shots, culminating with the final handshake at the net. Moody was then shown holding

the trophy, and lastly viewers were provided a close-up of her on board ship as she was returning home.

Moody was certainly a favorite of the newsreels, evidenced by the coverage of her marriage in December 1929—titled “Life’s Doubles”—her 1924 Olympic gold medal in tennis, her many Grand Slam victories, and her exhibition match against the eighth-ranked American male player, Phil Neer, whom she defeated on January 28, 1933, in San Francisco. In 1933, the newsreels also covered the last match she played at the U.S. Open in which she retired during the final against Helen Hull Jacobs due to a back injury. At the time, Jacobs was leading in the third set. Because she felt the press and fans treated her harshly at the U.S. Championship, Wills decided never to play there again.

That the focus of the coverage was squarely on the star athlete is further evidenced by another piece taken at the 1930 Davis Cup Challenge Round contested at *Stade Roland Garros* in Paris, France, between the United States and France, the three-time defending champion. Using the formula described above, the piece focused on Tilden’s victory in the first singles match, a four-set victory over Jean Borotra, one of the legendary Four Musketeers who helped France hold the Davis Cup from 1927-1930. Significantly, Tilden’s victory was headlined, no doubt because it was the only one of the five matches won by the United States that year, but also because it was Tilden’s final match as a member of the U.S. Davis Cup team. Even after Tilden turned professional, he remained a favorite of the newsreels.

Golf posed comparable problems for cameramen attempting to capture highlights. Like tennis, golf features a large number of shots over the eighteen holes, and it is

difficult to know exactly when a competitor will make a winning or spectacular shot (e.g., hole-in-one, long putt). For this reason, golf coverage most often showed the eventual winner teeing off on the first hole of the final round, followed by shots of the crowd swarming toward a green, and the competitors taking turns putting on the final hole. The final sequence typically included the final putt, the handshake and the trophy presentation with a close-up of the winner.

This formula is much in evidence in the newsreels that captured Robert Trent Jones's historic Grand Slam in 1930, with victories in The (British) Open Championship, the U.S. Open Championship, the U.S. Amateur Championship and the British Amateur Championship. The coverage of Jones winning the British Amateur followed this formula, providing shots of Jones teeing off for the final round, as well as the final putts and the hoisting of the trophy. *Universal's* headline provided the drama: "Bobby Jones Victor in British Amateur After Close Finish." A month later, the *Universal* cameraman was able to capture the ultimate shot in the 72-hole event held at the Interlachen Country Club. Positioned as the first segment of the newsreel for July 14, 1930, the segment showed Jones teeing off for the final round with a comfortable five-shot lead. By the final hole that lead had almost completely disappeared, thanks in part to a double-bogey on the penultimate hole when Jones uncharacteristically hit a wayward drive into a water hazard.<sup>20</sup> After his second shot to the final green, Jones, clinging to a one-shot lead over MacDonald Smith, was left with a long, 40-foot putt that had to travel over a mound. The camera was rolling as Jones lined up the shot, got into position and struck the ball with his putter. The film showed the ball rolling over the mound toward the hole and then

disappearing.

Although no audio is available with the archival newsreel footage, the *New York Times* story provided a comparable dramatization.

...Now was this the time for Calamity Jane, his renowned putter, to deliver a telling blow and deliver it he did. His ball went up the hill, over the top and into the hole for a birdie 3 which left Mac Smith with the impossible to do.

As Bobby's ball made its way toward the hole there was utter silence, but when it disappeared into the tin a shout that could be heard to the utmost limits of the course went up.

Jones had won again—the only man in the history of the game to gain the two British championships and one of the two American championships in the same year. All that now remains for him to do in order to accomplish a feat that probably will never be equaled in golf is to win the American amateur at Merion next September.<sup>21</sup>

Given the fact that Jones went on to complete the Grand Slam, a feat which has never been duplicated as the *New York Times* reporter aptly predicted, the Interlachen putt is arguably one of the most significant sports highlights ever captured on film. When Jones completed the Grand Slam by decisively defeating Eugene V. Homans in the finals of the U. S. Amateur Championship by a score of eight and seven at the Merion Golf Club, *Universal* featured it as the lead story on September 29, 1930.

Jones, Tilden and Moody were not the only stars to shine in the newsreel sports galaxy, for despite the ban on boxing films, the newsreels continued to provide coverage

of champion boxers. For example, in February 1930 the cameras were rolling as soon as Sharkey knocked out Phil Scott, actually capturing Sharkey raising his arms in victory. Not being allowed to film the fight did not discourage the newsreels from capturing pre- and post-fight footage. Being limited to previewing fights and showing the aftermath served as important precursors for the wrap-around programs that were later adopted by television producers for coverage of many sports, especially college football. That boxers had remained as sport celebrities is not surprising given the stature they had achieved prior to the Sims Act; in fact, boxing was arguably the most important sport in terms of generating what famed sportswriter W. O. McGeehan called “ballyhoo” in referring to the excessive attention given to sport. As Mark Dyreson notes, “McGeehan insisted that publicity agents and the press had manufactured a star system in athletics which rivaled that of Hollywood.”<sup>22</sup>

McGeehan was not alone in spotlighting the attention that athletes garnered. In *Only Yesterday*, Frederick Lewis Allen decried the heights to which ballyhoo elevated the sports stars of the 1920s. Noting that the decade was a great sporting era, he added:

But it was an even greater era for watching sports than for taking part in them. Promoters, chambers of commerce, newspaper-owners, sports writers, press agents, radio broadcasters, all found profit in exploiting the public’s mania for sporting shows and its willingness to be persuaded that the great athletes of the day were supermen.<sup>23</sup>

Allen illustrated this public fascination by noting the meteoric rise of Red Grange, who on November 21, 1925, played his final game for the University of Illinois. On the very

next day, Grange signed a contract to play with the Chicago Bears, collecting \$12,000 for his first professional game on November 26, another \$30,000 on December 6 for his first New York game, and the very next day signing a \$300,000 movie contract with Arrow Picture Corporation.<sup>24</sup>

Allen also noted how fickle the public's attention was since shortly thereafter, Gertrude Ederle swam the English Channel and was welcomed in New York "to thunderous applause."<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the attention generated by the Dempsey-Tunney fights in 1926 and 1927 was so pervasive that even the *New York Times* "a paper so traditionally conservative in its treatment of sports...announced the result of a major bout with three streamer headlines running all the way across its front page."<sup>26</sup> Perhaps, too, Allen was bemused by the "incredible sum" of \$2.6 million that was taken in by the second of their two title fights, an amount six times as great as the \$452,000 that the Dempsey-Willard fight had been worth in 1919. Little wonder that following those fights, the *Literary Digest* questioned the value of these sport celebrities, positing, "How much of their fame is pure metal and how much of it is mere ballyhoo does not matter as long as they add to the gaiety and credulity of nations."<sup>27</sup>

The most significant change to the routinization of the sports calendar from the 1930s to the 1950s can be seen in the increased coverage of team sports during the autumn months. Although baseball's fall classic, the World Series, had been and would remain a showcase event in the 1930s during early October, in terms of the number of segments, college football dominated newsreel sports coverage. In October 1931, for example, *Universal* devoted two segments to the World Series and two segments to

college football. Two years later, those numbers had not changed significantly, three World Series segments to two college football segments. Although a World Series might last a minimum of four games, coverage usually spanned at least two newsreel dates—a Wednesday and Saturday—and if the series lasted through the seven-game maximum, it spanned three dates, as it did in October 1951.

However many segments were devoted to the national pastime, baseball posed at least one problem that cameramen had difficulty overcoming, namely, following the ball. For example, *Universal's* segment on the 1930 World Series, titled “Record Crowds See Cards and Mackmen Battle for Title,” illustrated that problem. The segment attempted to capture action, but the shots of hits and base runners at times resembled a Buster Keaton comedy. Not being able to follow the ball also characterized early television coverage of baseball, and it was not until cameras were improved and better positioned that baseball coverage caught up to the other sports in terms of aesthetic quality. In 1934, the newsreels began covering baseball's other glamour event, its mid-summer All-Star game, which lent itself to cut-ins of star players and shots of celebrities in the crowd.

Several factors contributed to the significant rise in the number of newsreel segments devoted to college football. For one thing, the schedule of college games, beginning in September and ending on January 1<sup>st</sup> with the bowl games, was made far in advance, publicized in every section of the country, and intended to provide stimulating rivalries. Additionally, the fact that the games were played on Saturday afternoons meant that the newsreels could process and edit footage of several top games from across the country for Wednesday newsreel release and even provide same-day coverage of one

Saturday game for newsreel cinemas in New York City. Lastly, the pageantry and spectacle of college football provided newsreels with the kinds of action shots, cheering crowds, and band and card section choreography upon which they relied. Oriard explains:

Newsreel football was the early ancestor of ESPN's *SportsCenter*: highlights in which every game is a big game, every play a great play, every crowd wildly cheering.... The calculated heightening of dramatic spectacle—to the extent of filming “berserk” fans cheering touchdowns before the game even began—was as important as the action on the field.<sup>28</sup>

Little wonder, then, that the newsreel coverage of the Army-Navy game became one of the favorites, thanks in large part to “the goat and the mule, the dignitaries in attendance, the rows upon rows of uniformed cadets and midshipmen marching before the game and cheering in unison throughout the contest.”<sup>29</sup> The newsreels also employed the leading sports radio broadcasters such as Ed Thorgeron (*Fox Movietone News*), Clem McCarthy (*Pathé*), Graham McNamee (*Universal*), Bill Stern (*News of the Day*), and Ted Husing (*Paramount*) to heighten the excitement of college football coverage.<sup>30</sup>

The numbers provide ample evidence of the newsreels' increased coverage of college football. For example, *Universal* increased the number of college football segments during November from six and four in 1931 and 1933 respectively to thirteen and sixteen in 1947 and 1949. As Oriard aptly explains, “Football fan or not, anyone who went to the movies the week after the Army-Navy game, the Thanksgiving Day contests, or the bowls on New Year's Day came to understand football's role in the calendar of national ritual.”<sup>31</sup> So entrenched were the newsreels' routines in terms of both calendar

and technique that in 1952 a UNESCO study reported that no major changes in methods of selecting and presenting sport segments occurred during a quarter-century (1927-1952), which included almost the entire period of sound newsreels.<sup>32</sup>

### **Access and Rights**

While the routinization and standardization of newsreel sport segments was largely a product of the lack of competitiveness that characterized the later years, the same can not be said for the formative years of the silent newsreel era. Competition between news film producers was intense even before the introduction of *Pathé Weekly* in 1911, evidenced by the attempts at pirating such events as the Jeffries-Sharkey championship fight in 1899. In his history of American newsreels, Raymond Fielding posited that in those early years securing exclusive news material in advance of competitors sprang from motives that ranged from prestige to economic survival. Noting that the acquisition of exclusive rights by one company “automatically provoked attempts at illegal coverage by the competition,” Fielding explained that piracy of sporting events was “more the rule than the exception.”<sup>33</sup> At the crux of the issue was the idea of whether or not sporting events were news, the rights to which *Pathé*, in particular, argued, “could no more be properly sold to a newsreel company than they could be sold to a newspaper association.”<sup>34</sup> Perhaps no single sporting event illustrates the lengths to which competing companies went to pirate an event, as well as the attempts to counter pirating, as the match race that took place at Belmont Park on October 20, 1923, between Kentucky Derby winner Zev and Epsom Derby winner Papyrus.

To state that this match race, which was given the name the International,

received more ballyhoo than any other previous horse race, would not be an overstatement. The Jockey Club was offering one of the two gold cups that would be awarded to the winner, the main trophy being worth \$5,000. As the *New York Times* reported, “This will be a permanent trophy and it is hoped will continue for all time as a challenge cup to serve for the turf as the America’s Cup does for yacht racing and the Davis Cup for lawn tennis.”<sup>35</sup> The Jockey Club also assumed responsibility for selecting the thoroughbred that was to represent the United States in this race by sponsoring what it called the American Trial Sweepstakes, scheduled for late September at Belmont Park. When Zev injured himself in winning the Lawrence Realization Stakes at Belmont Park on September 10, 1923, and could not participate in the American Trial Sweepstakes, the matter was thrown into considerable dispute.

The dispute over which American horse the Jockey Club would select drew the attention of many people, including Brigadier General William Mitchell, assistant chief of the U. S. Air Service, who wrote a letter to August Belmont, Chairman of the Jockey Club. Published in the *New York Times* on October 1, 1923, Mitchell’s letter explained that the entire country was thrilled by the announcement that the race had been arranged and even those who cared nothing for racing “looked upon the announcement as an excellent method of cementing relations between the two great English speaking peoples...worth more than years of activities in diplomacy, propaganda and other things which are now taking so much money and efforts...”<sup>36</sup> Conceding that Papyrus had been the unquestioned choice to represent Great Britain, Mitchell expressed the view that he and many people who cheered the original announcement “are dumbfounded by the

manner in which your club has chosen or rather has neglected to choose the American standard bearer.”<sup>37</sup> Mitchell outlined the merits of the leading contenders, especially Zev—winner of that year’s Kentucky Derby, the Withers, the Belmont Stakes, the Paumonok, and the Rainbow Handicap, as well as the aforementioned Realization Stakes—and My Own—winner of “every race in which he was entered, including the Fort Edward Handicap, and galloping away from Harry Payne Whitney’s Bunting in the Saratoga Cup.”<sup>38</sup> My Own’s owner, Admiral Cary Grayson, had offered to race Zev “at any place, any time, with or without a purse, the whole matter to be left to the decision of the Jockey Club.”<sup>39</sup> Mitchell argued that if Zev were not fit to race in the American Trial Sweepstakes on October 6, then “the committee cannot justify the selection of him for the big race on Oct. 20.... The condition of a horse last Spring or Summer cannot be controlling for a race in October. It seems to me that the question should be settled without delay...or the public should be given very good reasons in support of your decision.”<sup>40</sup>

Mitchell was doubtlessly disappointed when the Jockey Club issued a statement on October 5 in which it named its top three horses: Zev, My Own and Untidy. As the *New York Times* reported, “This means that Zev, if he remains fit and well, will be the horse.... The definite choice of Zev sets at rest any speculation as to the chances of My Own outranking him for the honor and puts an end to the controversy which has been raging for the past two weeks.”<sup>41</sup> The Selection Committee’s decision may have put an end to the controversy for the present, but only two days before the race, Admiral Grayson was contacted by the committee and “directed by Major Belmont to ship My

Own immediately to Belmont Park and [told] that the shipment of his colt is being provided by the Jockey Club.”<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the Committee had been unimpressed by Zev’s workout the previous Sunday, even though it was reported that the horse had come through that work in good shape. More likely, the Committee became alarmed and “was put in an embarrassing position by a malady of uncertain diagnosis that affected Zev.”<sup>43</sup> That malady proved to be a skin irritation that did not impact Zev’s overall conditioning.

In addition to the reporting on each horse’s condition, the *New York Times* devoted an article to the betting odds in Paris—Zev being a five to eight favorite among the French—as well as one to those notables who would be in attendance, including “three Governors, at least one member of the President’s Cabinet, officers high in the army and navy, United States Senators, foreign diplomats, bankers, merchants, famous turfmen, notables from other branches of sport, society leaders and thousands of others.”<sup>44</sup> In an editorial titled “The International Race,” the *New York Times* lauded the amenities offered by Belmont Park, hailing it as

one of the finest [race] courses in the world. Compared with Epsom, the scene of so many historic contests, Belmont Park, with its spacious track, its great infield, its stately trees and its towering grandstand, is noble in all appointments.... An American may be pardoned for thinking that a grandstand at Belmont Park with its parterres of fashionably dressed women, who take as much interest in the sport as the men, is an attraction in itself that will bear comparison with any similar gathering in the world.<sup>45</sup>

A display ad (Illustration 3.1) not only announced where tickets could be purchased, but

also that special trains would run from 11 a.m. until 1:45 p.m., with “special cars for ladies.”<sup>46</sup> A Macy’s display ad noted that the store had “Glasses for the Races,” declaring, “You will see Zev and Papyrus much more clearly Saturday, if you are equipped with a good, strong glass.”<sup>47</sup> In the days after the race, several other ads—taken out by the Socony Gasoline & Motor Oil Company and John Wanamaker—made use of the match race to sell their products.

Given the race’s importance, it certainly made good business sense that *Pathé News*, despite having fought so hard against paying for exclusive rights to sporting events, spent \$50,000 for the rights to film the race. They doubtlessly knew their competitors would attempt to film the event. In fact, as the *New York Times* made clear in an article published the day following the race, *Pathé* went to considerable lengths to keep its rivals from acquiring footage of the race:

A smoke screen thrown up on the far side of the course, opposite the grand stand, and the dancing motion of two enormous reflectors over there were observed with much curiosity, it is true, by the spectators on the lawn and in the crowded grand stand.... The spectators also had evinced interest in five airplanes which, from some time before the first race at 2 P.M., had been twisting and cavorting over them.<sup>48</sup>

The reporter explained that these were not part of the overall scenery, but “were barriers arranged by the racing officials and employes [sic] of a motion picture company which had bought the privilege of taking pictures of the race to prevent other film companies from doing likewise.”<sup>49</sup> Despite these efforts, described hyperbolically as “world war

tactics,”<sup>50</sup> the other companies got pictures of the great event “right under the noses of the men who had been delegated to prevent their doing so.”<sup>51</sup>

*Fox Movietone* and *Hearst Metrotone* accomplished their goal of surreptitiously shooting film of the race by stationing cameras both inside and outside of the track. For one company, “every available house in the vicinity of the race course from which motion pictures could be taken with long distance lenses was hired...and then arrangements were made to get camera men inside the track to take pictures as the two horses were battling for victory.”<sup>52</sup> The article added that one of the companies paid \$600 to a house owner “on a line with the second turn of the course and with a clear view of the start and finish of the race.”<sup>53</sup> Not to be outdone, the other company “paid for the privilege of erecting a ‘crow’s nest’ in a clump of trees directly overlooking the grand stand.”<sup>54</sup> Not satisfied with this, the company also “arranged to have an automobile and a delivery truck drive right into the race course at points between the third and fourth turns on the left of the grand stand and near the first turn on the right.”<sup>55</sup> Lastly, they enlisted “two motion picture actresses who were seated at vantage points in the grandstand with small cameras concealed in ornamental handbags, resting on the rail in front of them.”<sup>56</sup> The article explained that these “actresses” merely had to press a button in each camera until the horses had passed beyond them.

As has been pointed out, to combat these efforts, *Pathé* utilized various means to keep its rivals from acquiring film of the race. These included setting off “‘smoke pots’ to spoil the plates of those interloping camera men and [using] reflecting mirrors to prevent any rival camera man in the interior of the race course from snapping phases of the

race.”<sup>57</sup> The smoke pots, set off as soon as the horses entered the track from the paddock area and paraded past the grand stand, were followed by cars pulling “two large mirror reflectors, glaring in the sunlight, bouncing up and down as they made their way along the outer rail on the opposite side of the track...in an effort to blind the lenses of the rival cameras.”<sup>58</sup> Detectives were stationed at the entrances in an attempt to keep rival cameramen out. While one rival “effected a perfect disguise and took one of the large motion picture cameras into the inner field merely through the medium of wearing a black derby hat,”<sup>59</sup> another, disguised merely with a false moustache, was nabbed when “this added adornment came loose just as he was undergoing the scrutiny of a scout for the concessionaire.”<sup>60</sup>

The episode, as reported by the *New York Times*, raises several points worth considering. For one, the article was based almost entirely on unnamed sources, no doubt to protect the identity of these “interlopers,” as they were referred to in the article, raising questions as to the validity of what these sources told the reporter. It seems likely that while some of these tactics were employed, the subterfuge was invariably exaggerated, especially considering the fact that by 1923 newsreel cameramen had acquired a reputation for daring and bravado in their quest to capture footage of important events. The article reported that it was “considered unprofessional” for a cameraman to wear anything but a cap on his head, yet no mention was made of the dubious ethics of pirating what another company has paid the rights to film exclusively. Lastly, Emanuel Cohen, editor of the *Pathé News*, was identified by name in the article’s final paragraph, only because he issued a statement explaining that *Pathé* had secured the exclusive right to

take film of the race “from Benjamin Irish, owner of the English contender, who was granted the motion picture privilege in his agreement with the racing association.”<sup>61</sup> Perhaps the Jockey Club granted Irish the exclusive film privilege to this event as an inducement to get him to ship his horse across the Atlantic Ocean. Perhaps, too, because *Pathé’s* international home was based in London, that company invariably had the inside track to secure exclusive film rights to the event. In England, companies routinely paid for the rights to film important sporting events; however, securing the rights to an event “which was being sustained by the public”<sup>62</sup> was not common practice in America. That *Pathé*, which had so vigorously fought against paying for rights, changed course for this particular event becomes understandable given the Jockey Club’s decision to cede rights to Irish.

On October 21, 1923, the *New York Times* ran a listing of “This Week’s Photoplays,” including the Zev-Papyrus race at the Rialto, and a day later, the Strand’s presentation of the race was reported in an article under the heading “The Screen.” This film showed Zev “gradually plowing his way ahead of the British winner, and at the end slow-motion pictures of the race, which give a wonderful idea of the speed of the two horses.”<sup>63</sup> Also noted were the shots of the crowd, hurling their hats high in the air. This certainly followed the standard newsreel formula of editing in crowd shots reacting to an event’s outcome. That either *Movietone* or *Metrotone* had such a well-edited version available only two days after the race seems remarkable, although Fielding asserts that these companies were showing the race a week before *Pathé*.<sup>64</sup>

Fascination with the incident continued for more than a week, evidenced by

several articles the *New York Times* ran that reported reaction in England, thanks to wireless and special cable. The day following the race, the *New York Times* reported that when the race result was announced on the screen in the cinemas “there were groans of disappointment, and then the program went on.”<sup>65</sup> The next day another article noted that a (*London*) *Times* correspondent wrote that Papyrus’s defeat surprised no regular followers of racing there, noting no other result “was ever possible, and the whole episode, with its alarms and excursions in the American press and the cinema rights, savored more of a prize fight between two heavyweights than a horse race of any sort.”<sup>66</sup> Finally, on October 28, 1923, the *New York Times* ran a lengthy article, titled “Resourceful Camera Men,” which noted that in England, events similar to what had happened during the Zev-Papyrus race occurred regularly. Ultimately, as a result of this episode, the practice of purchasing exclusive newsreel rights to sports events in the United States came to an abrupt end.

Although it is difficult to estimate what, if any, impact the piracy that marred the filming of the Zev-Papyrus match race had on securing the rights to filming other sporting events, later that year the *New York Times* reported that “the French Olympic Committee has just signed a contract with a private French firm granting it the exclusive moving picture and still picture rights for both the Winter sports at Chamonix and the Summer games at Colombes.”<sup>67</sup> The article reported that the decision was reached after “a long investigation and study into the situation” led to the conclusion that the “great number of cinema men and photographers likely to be attracted to the games would interfere with the effective carrying out of the program.”<sup>68</sup> An article that appeared in

early January 1924 noted that it would be impossible for judges, timekeepers and umpires to perform their duties “if persons not competing were allowed to come and go at will.”<sup>69</sup> This decision, issued shortly before the initial Olympic Games in Chamonix, France, set off a vigorous protest by American and international newsreel companies. A similar scenario had unfolded before the 1920 Antwerp Games, but because of the clamor, organizers allowed the newsreel cameramen and photographers access. The Organizing Committees for the 1924 Olympic Games in Chamonix (winter) and Paris (summer) held fast, however, and their November decision may, in part, have been influenced by what had happened at Belmont Park in late October.

As preparations for the 1924 Paris Olympic Games began, difficulties arose, especially relating to the rugby tournament, scheduled for May, prior to the other athletic contests. On May 8, the *New York Times* reported that Franco-American relations had been strained “over the determination of the American players to take their own photographs of the match with Romania Sunday for documentary and training purposes, despite the insistence of the French Olympic Committee that exclusive contracts already had been let to French firms for all photographic work in connection with the Olympic Games.”<sup>70</sup> The issue quickly reached an impasse, prompting team manager Samuel Goodman to threaten “to abandon the game if the permission were not granted.”<sup>70</sup> After a meeting between Goodman and Alan Muhr, the assistant general commissioner of sports, Muhr issued a note explaining that the private company who owned the right to make pictures of all Olympic contests would allow “your official photographers to make pictures of both Rugby matches in which the Americans are engaged, under the condition

that these pictures are purely for record and educational purposes.”<sup>72</sup> Goodman’s threat to “prevent the French company’s men from filming the rugby matches participated in by the Americans unless American photographers were allowed the same privilege” apparently convinced the French Olympic Committee, “which promised to break its contract with the moving picture concern having the concession, or to pay it 100,000 francs] forfeit money in order to allow American photographers to work.”<sup>73</sup>

When a similar ban was announced before the 1928 Olympic Games to be held in St. Moritz (winter) and Amsterdam (summer), American newsreel companies appealed to the U. S. Department of Commerce “to make an unofficial protest against the action of the Amsterdam Olympic Games committee.”<sup>74</sup> What especially vexed the American newsreel companies was the fact that the film rights had been sold to the Ufa Company, a German company, and this marked the first time since World War I that the Germans were participating in the Olympic Games. In their appeal, the newsreel companies complained of having to pay “large sums for the privilege of photographing the Winter sports.”<sup>75</sup> By May, the newsreel companies were “formally protesting...against the attempt to sell the exclusive American news-reel rights for \$60,000.”<sup>76</sup> The companies contended that charging for film footage was “contrary to journalistic precedent and practice and that they are entitled to the same privileges and consideration as the press.”<sup>77</sup> In addition to this contention was the threat that the American public would not have an opportunity of seeing its Olympic athletes in competition, a scenario similar to what had happened in England when British companies refused to make any pictures of the 1924 Olympic Games. Such threats were repeatedly met with a statement that the rights for

America could be purchased for the aforementioned price. When the newsreel companies took their protests directly to Amsterdam, they were “served notice that no photographer from any foreign newspaper or newsreel would be permitted to enter the Stadium.”<sup>78</sup>

Except for those Olympic Games hosted in the United States—1932 Summer Games in Los Angeles, 1932 Winter Games in Lake Placid, and the 1960 Winter Games in Squaw Valley—American newsreel companies were required to pay for access to film showing the Olympic Games. The argument asserting their right to cover the Olympic Games free of charge was based on the premise that they were covering a news event. Conversely, Olympic organizers recognized that the distinction between news coverage and entertainment was a difficult one to distinguish. Furthermore, there was no way to prevent news organizations from editing their coverage into commercially viable packages that would detract from sales of the official Olympic film, long a staple of each Olympiad. This impasse culminated in a major showdown before the Melbourne Games of 1956, which ultimately led to a major revision in the *Olympic Charter*, known as Rule 49 regarding the selling of publicity rights and distinguishing between news coverage and live television rights, which by that time had become the primary source of income for the International Olympic Committee. Rule 49 stipulated that television networks seeking exclusive rights to more than the nine minutes of royalty-free daily coverage granted to all television and cinema news agencies would have to pay for the enhanced level of programming.

### **Nationalism and a National Culture**

Part of the reason why securing film rights to the Olympic Games was such an

important issue for American newsreel companies revolved around the ways with which both the newsreels and print media used the Olympic Games to foster a national culture. After only the second day of the 1896 Olympic Games, the *New York Times* reported, “One thing is believed to have been established, and that is that the future of the Olympian Games has been decided, and that they will henceforth take their place among the noted events of the athletic world.”<sup>79</sup> The American press quickly seized upon these noted events and crafted stories that proved to themselves and the rest of the world that American athletes possessed the character and make-up of an exceptional people, “a people who illuminated for the world the path towards progress, political perfection and social justice.”<sup>80</sup> The symbolic relationship between athletic success and national vitality became a cornerstone in the drive for a national culture. According to press accounts, American victories at the Olympic Games “stemmed from America’s democratic institutions, the predominance of the work ethic, and the essential fairness of American society.”<sup>81</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, sport discourse had become one of the key sources in shaping national identity. The American press even devised a means of keeping score of the Olympic Games—only the track and field events were counted—so that in 1908, for example, even though Great Britain won far more medals during the entire competition, the American press proclaimed the United States team victorious based on their achievements in track and field.

Formulating a national identity did not happen at once; rather, the process evolved over the course of several Olympiads. The earliest teams were principally composed of eastern collegiate athletes and members of clubs like the New York Athletic Club. During

the very first modern Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896, notions of American athletic success cast in national terms were attributable in part to foreign commentators. For example, one Greek newspaper described American athletic prowess as attributable to their mixed blood “join[ing] to the inherited athletic training of the Anglo-Saxon the wild impetuosity of the red-skin.”<sup>82</sup> These representatives of America were also lauded for their enterprise and their skill. G. S. Robertson, a British participant in the 1896 Athens Games, commented on the effort of the American team, attributing the team’s participation to “the natural enterprise of the American people and to the peculiarly perfect method in which athletics are organized in the United States.”<sup>83</sup>

In 1900, the *New York Times* simply referred in headlines to the participants as “Our Athletes in Paris” and “American Athletes Win.” Held in conjunction with the Paris Exposition, the 1900 Olympic Games ran into several problems. One stemmed from the scheduling of several sporting events on a Sunday, which the *New York Times* reported “is the day of all big sporting events in France,” but which aroused “a strong feeling of the American colleges from [against] participating in Sunday games.”<sup>84</sup> The other was the scheduling of several track and field events on the same day as the annual review of the troops of Paris by the President at Longchamps, resulting in a sparse crowd of not more than a thousand spectators, most of whom, the *New York Times* reported, were American:

Two small stands only were provided for the spectators, and only one of these was fairly filled, chiefly with bright, young American girls, who wore the colors of the various American colleges competing and gave unstinted applause as their countrymen secured victories. A portion of the leading stand was reserved for

Americans, and it was gaily bedecked with the Stars and Stripes.<sup>85</sup>

As evidenced here, sport served as an institution to socialize both American men and women in gender-specific roles—men to compete and women to support them by cheering them to victories. The *New York Times* concluded that the primary “feature of the meeting was not only the number of events the Americans won, but the ease with which they outstripped their competitors, often finishing first and second, laughing side by side, and in a canter.”<sup>86</sup> That the participants would be laughing and not running at full speed draws attention to the lack of competitiveness in certain events.

Americans exhibiting an air of superiority became a staple of Olympic myth-making, culminating in the most mythologized story of American Olympic bravado, which purportedly occurred at the opening ceremony of the 1908 London Games. During the parade of nations, American flag-bearer Ralph Rose refused to lower the American flag before English royalty, reputedly growling that “this flag dips for no earthly king.”<sup>87</sup> Perhaps this was done in retaliation when the American flag was not displayed in the stadium for the opening ceremony.<sup>88</sup> Other commentators have suggested that Rose, of Irish descent, was irked that the English had refused to allow the Irish to participate as a separate team. From this event the mythology of never dipping the American flag before a foreign leader at an opening ceremony took root, despite evidence that the flag was dipped at both the 1912 Stockholm Games and again at the 1924 Paris Games.

The theme that dominated media portrayals of American athletes competing in Olympic competitions to forge a national sporting identity was the image of the melting pot, a term that served as the title of Israel Zangwell’s popular 1908 play.<sup>89</sup> The idea that

America effectively assimilated the various ethnic groups into a unified athletic team was used by Progressives as an explanation of American athletic prowess, as well as in a more general sense to explain away the debilitating effects of industrialization, urbanization and immigration.

The melting-pot image was certainly fostered by the American media and officials of the American Olympic Committee. For example, in 1912, Edward Bayard Moss, a leading sports journalist, anointed the U. S. Olympians as “America’s Athletic Missionaries,” who represented a “heterogeneous gathering [of] lawyers, physicians, policemen, Indians, negroes, [sic] Hawaiians, college men, school boys, clerks, mechanics, and, in fact, entrants from every walk of life.”<sup>90</sup> A *New York Times* photograph (Illustration 3.2) from July 26, 1908, titled “Tewanima the Indian competitor in the Marathon Leads the Fourth of July War Dance,” illustrated the conflicting ideology that characterized the melting-pot imagery. On the one hand, Tewanima, a Hopi who was enrolled at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, is shown performing a war dance for his laughing teammates. Upon returning to the United States, Tewanima and another Carlisle Olympian, Frank Mt. Pleasant, were greeted by President Theodore Roosevelt, who told the two athletes that he was “glad to have this country represented abroad by a genuine native American.”<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, the use of the stereotypical “War Dance” by a stoic, noble savage possessing natural athletic ability to illustrate the democratic ideals which recognized no class or racial distinctions was typical of mainstream press representations of American Indian athletes, especially the Carlisle school football team.

That the democratic ideals personified in America’s melting-pot Olympic team

were not completely realized became painfully evident after the 1912 Stockholm Olympics when double gold medal winner Jim Thorpe, a teammate and classmate of Tewanima at Carlisle, was stripped of his medals by the American Olympic Committee and the Amateur Athletic Union when it was discovered he had played professional baseball several years earlier. As Pope has noted, “athletic organizations and their publicists scrambled to explain Thorpe’s ‘mistake’ in terms of his race, which they had characterized as ‘American’ just months prior.”<sup>92</sup> In an editorial, the *New York Times* lamented not Thorpe’s disgrace but the disgrace “which he has brought upon his country—with the derision and denunciation which all Americans will long have to hear from the foreign critics.”<sup>93</sup> Neither the AAU nor the AOC expressed much sympathy for Thorpe when they informed him that ignorance was no excuse. The final irony of the situation played itself out in 1982 when Florence Ridlon, the wife of Thorpe biographer Raymond Wheeler, discovered that Olympic rules stipulated that any contestation of a medal won must be filed no later than thirty days after an event has been completed. Petitioning the IOC for the return of Thorpe’s medals, Wheeler and Ridlon told the IOC: “Gentlemen, with all due respect, ignorance of the general regulations for the 1912 Olympics was no excuse for illegally divesting Jim Thorpe of his awards.”<sup>94</sup>

The American newsreels made nationalism an integral part of their Olympic presentations, especially in the 1932 Olympic Games, hosted by Lake Placid (winter) and Los Angeles (summer). These constituted the first Olympic Games the United States had hosted since 1904 when the Games were included as part of the St. Louis World’s Fair. The Olympics first attracted British newsreel or topical companies in 1908, but it

was not until the 1920 Antwerp Games that American newsreel companies decided to film the competitions. Faced with the prospect of paying for rights to show the Olympics in 1924 and again in 1928, newsreel companies limited coverage, especially when the American team fared poorly in Amsterdam. Nonetheless, *Fox Movietone News* “touted its Olympic coverage as one of the highlights of its fall offerings.”<sup>95</sup> For the 1932 Games, four American newsreel companies were granted rights to shoot footage, including *Pathé*, *Paramount*, *Fox-Hearst* and *Universal*. In addition to sponsoring special showings of feature films and social gatherings that included motion picture stars “of both native and foreign persuasion,” the studios “planned to release previews of the days [sic] events which would include slow-motion footage.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the 1932 Games were touted by the media as “Depression-busters,” infusing money and creating jobs during a time of considerable economic distress, leading AOC President Avery Brundage to proclaim, “It is a remarkable fact that in this unprecedented period of financial and industrial distress there has been practically no disturbance, disorder or social unrest.”<sup>97</sup> Although glossing over the depression’s impact, Brundage enlisted the support of many companies that used the Olympics to market their products, including Standard Oil, Union 76 Petroleum Company, Nisley Shoes, Kelloggs, Weiss Binoculars, Safeway and Piggly Wiggly.

*Universal’s* coverage of the 1932 Winter Games in Lake Placid presented the Olympics as a competition between nations. This idea of winning the Olympics, originally based on a method of scoring devised by the media, continued to be employed. In its first Olympic Games segment on February 4, 1932, *Universal* used a formulaic headline: “Shea’s Sensational Skate Victory Gives Olympic Lead to US.”<sup>98</sup> A week later,

the newsreel presented two key victories by American athletes—one in speed skating and the other in the two-man bobsled event. As the headline makes clear, these “Thrilling Victories clinch U. S. Triumph in Winter Olympics.”<sup>99</sup> In its last segment on the Winter Games, *Universal* showed ski jumping, not because Americans won medals—the Norwegians swept the top three places—but because the event featured several spectacular crashes. The final contest shown was the four-man bobsled event in which the American quartet raced to victory, purportedly sealing a victory for the U. S. team. Sixteen years later during its coverage of the 1948 Winter Games in St. Moritz, commentator Ed Herlihy contradicted the claim of victory in the 1932 Olympics. In describing Dick Button’s victory in men’s figure skating, Herlihy announced that Button’s victory provided precious points for the American team, helping it secure third place, “the strongest showing of any American team” at the Winter Games.<sup>100</sup>

The idea of winning the Olympic Games as a nation also dominated coverage of every summer Olympiad. For example, at the 1932 Los Angeles Games, *Universal* focused on that aspect in almost every one of its headlines: “U.S. Maintains Lead in 10<sup>th</sup> Olympiad as World Marks Fall,”<sup>101</sup> “U.S. Increases Lead in Olympics as More World Records Fall,”<sup>102</sup> and “U.S. Athletes Add to Overwhelming Lead in X<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games of 1932.”<sup>103</sup> This aspect of winning the Olympics has remained an important theme in the American media’s coverage, although the idea of winning has changed slightly from a scoring system in which points were tabulated to a system of counting medals. As John Slater has noted, “In the pre-television era, the media chose, by and large, to ignore Olympism and instead to create heroic myths. They had a different agenda.”<sup>104</sup>

Slater's point merits consideration in that the media certainly created heroic myths in their coverage; however, the media in general, including the newsreels, did not completely ignore Olympism and Olympic ideals. Newsreel coverage highlighted the pageantry of the Games, giving considerable attention to the opening and closing ceremonies. The opening ceremonies of the 1932 Los Angeles Games, for example, merited "Special" coverage in which every aspect was presented—the parade of nations, greeting from American dignitaries, release of the pigeons as a symbol of peace, the athletes' reciting the Olympic oath, and the lighting of the Olympic flame. In fact, *Universal* repeated several of the same segments, a technique that had been employed in early film actualities of fights to lengthen the reel. In its coverage of the St. Moritz Winter Games of 1948, *Universal's* commentator noted the "Tempestuous start" to the Games, in which "fist fights and sabotage imperil the Cold War developments over eligibility."<sup>105</sup> As a result of this dispute over the use of professionals, ice hockey was not officially recognized that year, although *Universal* ended that week's segment with a shot reminding viewers that the Olympic "torch burns brightly with hope that nations will foster friendship through continued sportsmanship."<sup>106</sup> Another example of sportsmanship was prominently used in one segment from the 1948 London Games featuring the men's 4 x 100-meter relay race in which the winning American team was disqualified for an illegal baton pass, giving the host nation its only gold medal. After the Americans protested the decision, race officials, using slow-motion filmed footage, reviewed the disputed exchange and reversed their decision. Herlihy noted, "The gallant British team relinquished the crown to the Yanks with true Olympic sportsmanship."<sup>107</sup>

While Olympism and sportsmanship received attention, it often was overshadowed by intense national pride. For example, at the 1952 Helsinki Games, with the arrival of a team from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, political ideology was added to the formula. In describing the parade of sixty-seven nations, Herlihy explained that this was “the first Russian team since the days of the czar, forty years ago, and the political implications of their presence overshadow the sporting side.”<sup>108</sup> In the same reel, the commentary noted that Finland, “the little nation that pays its debts,” is “still struggling under the yoke of Russian reparations.... Finland is proud host of the athletic pride of the world.”<sup>109</sup> Not surprisingly, the Soviet team was identified as the “Russian” team, and the hammer and sickle icon was not prominently displayed, although several Soviet athletes were shown on the medal stand with the CCCP emblazoned on their uniforms. In its final segment featuring the Helsinki Games, *Universal* noted the contributions of American swimmers to the team’s point total. This allowed the American team, the commentator explained,

to win the unofficial team title, overtaking the Russian team in the closing days of the Games. The Soviet news agency, TASS, is telling its readers the Russians won the Olympics. Those at Helsinki, and especially the American swimmers, whose victories contributed greatly to our Olympic triumph, know better.<sup>110</sup>

For the next four decades, the ideological battle between communism and capitalism characterized an Olympic rivalry that resulted in boycotts, allegations of professionalism, and charges of cheating, all of which undermined Olympic ideals. In fostering a national sporting identity through the Olympics, the newsreels commodified its coverage in ways

that reinforced a cultural hegemony. Steven Pope explains:

The capacity to structure sport in preferred ways, to establish sporting traditions, and to define the range of “legitimate” practices and meanings associated with sport practices enabled Olympic advocates to extend their hegemony over an ever-growing sporting public.<sup>111</sup>

### **Cultural Hegemony**

The newsreel coverage of sports was dominated by a cultural hegemony that marginalized women and minority athletes. The newsreels, to a large extent, followed the print media in reflecting and reinforcing traditional roles for women in American culture. Women’s sports newsreel features were created within a context of gendered power relationships in that they were almost entirely filmed by men, edited by men and had commentary written and provided by men.<sup>112</sup> That images of women were almost entirely produced through the male gaze to accommodate male interests and desires is testified by the fact that *Pathé’s* in-house *Hints to News Film Cameramen* noted that “only the most strikingly beautiful specimens should appear.”<sup>113</sup> For example, in *Universal’s* coverage of the 1948 St. Moritz Games, Barbara Ann Scott is identified as “Canada’s Pretty Ambassadors” and “Queen of the Flashing Blades.”<sup>114</sup> That she was not an American was less important than the fact she was blond and attractive. Jean Shiley, a participant in the 1932 Los Angeles Games, received praise for being “the prettiest girl of the American track team.”<sup>115</sup> Having a strict company policy meant that newsreel coverage of women’s sport was framed by a hegemonic, patriarchal male discourse which helped to define the ways that audiences thought about women’s sport. While approximately half of the

general newsreel stories featuring women were related to sport, the percentage of women's sport newsreel segments ranged from five to seven per cent of all sporting newsreels.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, women's achievements in sport were projected as part of a marginalized, separate sphere. For example, women's sports were often introduced with headlines and phrases such as "Gals Get into the Act"<sup>117</sup> and "And Now Something for the Ladies."<sup>118</sup> In a similar way, the commentary almost always referred to women athletes as girls, and members of the U. S. Olympic team were called "Uncle Sam's nieces."<sup>119</sup>

Newsreel sport segments featuring women athletes focused on the socially elite, white, heterosexually feminine women. Not surprisingly, the more genteel sports such as tennis, golf and figure skating figured most prominently with commentary delineating the grace, style and elegance of athletes such as Suzanne Lenglen, Helen Wills Moody, Althea Gibson, Carole Heiss and Peggy Fleming. When Helen Wills married in 1929, *Universal* used that event to "emphasize her heterosexuality and marriage as an adequate source of fulfillment"<sup>120</sup> beyond winning Grand Slam titles. A woman's role as wife or mother often overshadowed her athletic accomplishment. When *Universal* showed Andrea Meade Lawrence winning two alpine skiing gold medals in the 1952 Oslo Games, Herlihy emphasized her marital status rather than her technical expertise, telling viewers, "The pretty Vermont housewife swept down the steep slope with flawless perfection."<sup>121</sup> As Gina Daddaria explains, "If an accomplished athlete is also portrayed in roles that are valued in a patriarchal society, such as wife and mother, then she cannot threaten masculine sports hegemony."<sup>122</sup> Even for a publication like the *Woman Citizen*,

which had long been the voice of the women's suffrage movement, sport provided an opportunity for a woman to enhance her sexual appeal as much as her political right. As Mark Dyreson explains, "The *Woman Citizen* thus married the old and deeply-entrenched stereotype of women as sexual objects to a new image of politically and socially emancipated women."<sup>123</sup> Public discourse about women athletes fostered this duality—emancipated and sexually appealing—as a way of reassuring men that these new women were still alluring.

The sports that the newsreels and the print media used to focus attention on the physical attractiveness of women athletes were swimming and diving. These were the two sports that were first introduced into the Olympic Games of 1912, although the American Olympic Committee (AOC) resisted the inclusion of women until 1920. In 1914, in a meeting at the New York Athletic Club, the AOC went on record as being opposed "to women taking part in any event in which they could not wear long skirts."<sup>124</sup> Ironically, when the AOC finally allowed women on the 1920 Olympic team, the committee failed to field a U. S. tennis team to compete in the much anticipated tennis tournament that featured France's Suzanne Lenglen. Instead, the U. S. team included one female figure skater and fifteen women swimmers and divers. American women dominated the 1920 Antwerp Games, winning all three medals in four of the five women's events. Ethelda Bleibtrey won three swimming gold medals and Aileen Riggan and Helen Wainwright each won two gold medals.

In both the 1920 Antwerp Games and the 1924 Paris Games, photographs and newsreels of American women swimmers and divers dominated coverage. Not only did

these two sports showcase the athletes' grace and rhythm exhibited in their performances, but they also allowed photographers to show them in their bathing suits and commentators to use the terms "mermaids," "naiads," and "water sprites" as discursive motifs to accentuate their other-worldliness. Bleibtrey, Riggin and other women swimmers were featured in a special Sunday picture section of a Pittsburgh newspaper that was removed from textual articles about American Olympians, appearing in their swim-suits under a headline that accentuated their physical appeal, "A Bevy of Fair American Mermaids."<sup>125</sup> Riggin "shares the beauty honors of the American Olympic team with Miss Helen Wills,"<sup>126</sup> and Sybil Bauer, despite holding the world's record in the 440-yard backstroke for both men and women, became Johnny Weissmuller's "pretty teammate."<sup>127</sup> Caroline Smith, winner of the gold medal in diving, was described in terms suggesting it was her beauty rather than her athletic accomplishments that won over the highly partisan French crowd: "With her beautiful figure standing out impressively against a blue sky and a smile of unassuming confidence on her face, she sailed so gracefully in the high dive that she inspired the first real tribute that a French crowd gave to an American during the entire games."<sup>128</sup> Little wonder, then, that one of the leading American sportswriters of the era, Grantland Rice, dubbed these Olympians the "Form Champions" of the Paris Olympics—possessing the swimming form to dominate their rivals and the feminine form to charm onlookers.<sup>129</sup>

Newsreels also expressed reservation and anxiety when women athletes ventured into iconic masculine sports. Women were not allowed to compete in Olympic track and field events until 1928 when a five-event programme was begrudgingly introduced. This

inclusion was doubtlessly the belated reaction to the first Women's Olympics held in Paris in 1922 and sponsored by the *Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale* (FISI), which proved so successful that the International Olympic Committee was forced to drop its resistance to women's participation. Of the events that were introduced in 1928, the women's 800-meter run drew the most criticism. Despite the fact Germany's Lina Radtke broke the world record by seven seconds, sports journalists drew attention not to that achievement but to the exhaustion of the runners as they crossed the finish line, decrying the race as a "spectacle [that] proved...such events are not right for the Olympics."<sup>130</sup> Paul Gallico also lamented seeing women exerting themselves, "If there is anything more dreadful aesthetically or more depressing than the fatigue-distorted face of a girl runner at the finish line, I have never seen it."<sup>131</sup> Not surprisingly, the 800-meter run for women was dropped from the next Olympics, and women did not compete in all the distance running events until 1984 when the women's marathon was introduced.

As women's sports became more prominent, the newsreels struggled to reconcile the incursion by women athletes into male preserves, reflected in newsreel titles such as "What's next girls? Cross-country running, the latest sport to be taken up by women" and "Should women box?"<sup>132</sup> While newsreels did document certain women's achievements, like Gertrude Ederle's record-setting swim across the English Channel, other presentations made light of gender-bending activity. *Universal* segments like "Girl Mat Gladiator Wins Smashing Bout with Man Rival" and "Woman Champ Defeat Man Rival in Bowling Clash" showed women were capable of defeating men at their own games; however, such a characterization assumed that a woman's athletic capabilities peaked at a

certain level. When an athlete exceeded that level, as Daddario notes, “an athlete then begins performing on a male’s playing field, which, in turn, prompts the media to identify this as a gender anomaly or a female impossibility.”<sup>133</sup>

The case of Mildred “Babe” Didrikson offered insight into the masculine ideology that governed sport. Didrikson’s performance at the 1932 Los Angeles Games, in which she won two gold medals and a silver medal in the three events in which she competed, challenged the idea that women should not participate in rigorous athletic competition. The media responded in typical fashion, referring to her as a “slender, brown-haired Texas girl.”<sup>134</sup> The media diminished Didrikson’s accomplishments by noting that while her victories were impressive, they did not “contribute to the United States point score in the men’s track and field competition.”<sup>135</sup> Didrikson was also characterized as a “Viking girl” and “Amazon,” capable of “Viking capacity for berserk rage.”<sup>136</sup> Didrikson, the media asserted, proved that women’s participation in rigorous athletics would lead to “a new super-physique in womanhood.”<sup>137</sup> As David B. Welky explains, an athlete like Didrikson had the capacity to “overturn traditional gender roles and was, therefore, carefully excised from the ranks of women and placed in a new, derogatory category by itself.”<sup>138</sup> This category implicitly questioned the femininity of Didrikson and other female athletes. Significantly, when Didrikson expressed her desire to join the women’s golf tour, the media immediately printed pictures of Didrikson in a dress. By taking up golf, considered a more appropriate game for women, Didrikson was cast “into the ideal of what a woman should be.”<sup>139</sup>

Newsreel presentations of women athletes, like those of the print press, was

characterized by a conflicting discourse that framed these athletes as “icons of liberty and objects of desire,”<sup>140</sup> capable of contributing to the national sporting identity by not only vanquishing the opposition, but also by looking sexually appealing. In the process, women athletes became the heroines of a burgeoning consumer culture, second only to movie stars in public esteem. Little wonder that in the 1920s far more Americans would rattle off the names of Olympic champions like Ethelda Bleibtrey and Aileen Riggin, as well as tennis stars Helen Wills and Suzanne Lenglen, and English Channel swimmer Gertrude Ederle than could name the women who served in the U. S. Congress in 1924—Jeanette Rankin of Montana, Edith Nourse Rodgers of Massachusetts and Mary Theresa Norton of New Jersey.<sup>141</sup>

Just as the newsreel presentations of women athletes was characterized by a conflicting discourse of sexual appeal and icons of liberty, the presentation of America’s black athletes was characterized by a discourse that sought to avoid controversy by presenting their contributions in a factual manner. With their formulaic approach, newsreels encapsulated events by capturing their superficiality, “interpreting intellectual issues along lines of strong pictorial action to reduce intellectual participation of the audience.”<sup>142</sup> Scholars have identified five historical stages of news about minorities: exclusion, threat, confrontation, stereotypical selection, and integrated multiracial coverage.<sup>143</sup> Except for rare occasions when an individual athlete was identified as “Buckeye Bullet” (Jesse Owens in 1936), “the flashy Negro Back” (Bernie Jefferson in 1938,) or “sensational Negro back” (UCLA’s Kenny Washington in 1939), race was largely ignored, rendering black athletes largely invisible, especially within professional

sports that openly barred them.<sup>144</sup> However, in amateur sports like track and field, particularly in the Olympics, black athletes who won medals could not be totally excluded from coverage in newsreels or the mainstream press, although that coverage largely reinforced traditional patterns of racism.

As early as 1904 when George Poage won a bronze medal in the 400-meter hurdles, becoming the first black to win an Olympic medal, black athletes contributed to America's national sporting identity. As noted above, the contributions of blacks and American Indians in early Olympiads were explained under the "melting pot" paradigm that celebrated these victories as evidence of the democratic ideal of inclusiveness. When black athletes like Eddie Tolan, winner of two gold medals in the 1932 Los Angeles Games, and Jesse Owens, winner of four gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Games, emerged as star performers, a new paradigm emerged, one that began to proclaim the physical superiority of the black athlete.<sup>145</sup> This dialectic, in which white athletic prowess was aligned from superior intellect, will power, and scientific training and black athletic prowess was aligned with natural ability, closeness to nature, and "physical attributes peculiar to their race,"<sup>146</sup> was incorporated into a double-edged discourse that promoted national identity while marking racial differences.

*Universal's* coverage of the 1932 Los Angeles Games, for example, showed Tolan's victories in both the 100- and 200-meter sprints, Ralph Metcalfe's silver and bronze medals in the same races, as well as Edward Gordon's gold in the long jump. Unlike the print media, which gave these athletes nicknames like "Negro flash," "dusky little thunderbolts," and "two streaks of black lightning," the newsreels tended toward

understatement, focusing more on the point totals contributed toward the U. S. team score. As Mark Dyreson notes, “Unlike Jesse Owens’ later accomplishments, Tolan’s and Metcalfe’s feats did not spark widespread discussion in white mainstream America about racial equality or any ideologies of white supremacy—not Aryanism, nor Nordicism, nor Jim Crow.”<sup>147</sup> By using commentary to frame these victories within the overall team victory, the newsreels avoided having to explain the total absence of blacks from the American Olympic Association or the American Olympic Committee, and the absence of any black coaches or managers.

Other coverage was blatantly racist in nature. For example, in November 1931, *Hearst Metrotone News* featured a game between two Norfolk, Virginia, high schools. In this piece titled “Colored Gals Get Football Fever,” the newsreel’s commentator refers to the “dark shadows” playing on the field and to the “red hot mama that keeps the crowd a-sizzling, and every time her man makes a couple of downs, she starts a ragtime chorus.”<sup>148</sup> A football is carried “in a watermelon clinch,” one team’s shift is “better than pork chops,” and one of the captains calls “the magic signal, ‘Come seven, eleven.’”<sup>149</sup> As Oriard explains, “This was football in minstrel blackface, football as buffoonery, football played by Amos ‘n’ Andy, yet nothing in the images on the screen suggests anything but a conventional game.”<sup>150</sup> Shown in movie theaters across the country, this newsreel, like others produced by Hearst’s company in the early 1930s, played on demeaning stereotypes of the dice-throwing, watermelon-eating, sexually promiscuous and superstitious darkies. Not all portrayals of African Americans were equally distasteful, thanks to the work of black journalists. The most positive newsreel portrayals

of them can be found in *All-American News*, a newsreel founded by Claude Barnett in 1919. Barnett also founded the Associated Negro Press in 1919, and sports also played an important part of the black press's appeal to its readers, providing a "continuing drama of triumph and injustice," enacted by its athletes.<sup>151</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the importance of newsreels to the development of the sport highlight form is rooted in the increased standardization and routinization that produced information packaged as entertainment. By comparing a purposive sample of newsreel sports segments, this chapter has delineated the sporting calendar that the newsreels companies established in their coverage, as well as a hierarchy of team and individual sports that were preferred. The more important the event, the more coverage the newsreel companies provided. The sample clearly illustrated not only a predilection for name events (e.g., Wimbledon, the Olympics, the World Series), but also for star athletes (e.g., Bobby Jones, Helen Wills Moody, Babe Ruth, Babe Didrickson).

Comparing newsreels from the early 1930s and 1950s also established the reluctance of the newsreel companies to depart from a clearly established formula. Newsreel sports segments from the 1950s were not significantly different than those from the 1930s in terms of how the major sporting events were covered. Shot composition, editing and commentary of sporting events and sport celebrities established the highlight form's reliance on synecdoche, in which the part represents the whole. With this technique, newsreel cameramen created a condensed sporting discourse that reached a wider audience than any other sport media.

In the decades between the world wars, newsreels helped to establish athletes as the heroes and heroines of a burgeoning consumer culture, comparable in stature to the Hollywood movie actors that followed the athletes onto the screen. Athletes became recognizable commodities within a national sporting identity. That national sporting identity was largely based on a strict separation between whites and nonwhites and reinforced the unequal distribution of power based on class, race and gender. While the newsreels reinforced existing attitudes about culture, class, gender and race, they rarely in themselves changed those attitudes.

Newsreel companies sought the same rights and access to sporting events that print journalists and photographers enjoyed, yet these companies handicapped themselves with a superficial formula that relied on the entertainment rather than the journalistic value. Despite the limitations imposed by the workings of a motion picture camera and of a news organization attempting to use it to capture its news on the go, newsreels provided viewers with a very broad range of sporting events and athletes. Even though viewers might have known the results of the events they were watching, the highlights presented in the newsreels evoked a greater degree of emotional involvement than print media offered. In eliciting crowd responses, the newsreels had a power “which it did not bequeath to its successor, television.”<sup>152</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Fielding, *The American Newsreel: A Complete History, 1911-1967* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Luke McKernan, “Witnessing the Past,” in *Researcher’s Guide to British Newsreels*, Volume III, ed. J. Ballentyne (London: BUFVC, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Pronay, “The Newsreel: the Illusion of Actuality,” in *The Historian and Film* ed. P. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 98.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Dyreson, "Aggressive America: Media Nationalism and the 'War' over Olympic Pictures in Sports 'Golden Age,'" *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22.6 (November 2005): 974.

<sup>8</sup> Jennings Bryant and Andrea M. Holt, "A Historical Overview of Sports and Media in the United States," in *Handbook of Sports and Media*, ed. A. Raney and J. Bryant (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 29-30.

<sup>9</sup> Steven W. Pope, "American Muscles and Minds: Public Discourse and the Shaping of National Identity During Early Olympiads, 1896-1920," *The Journal of American Culture*, 15.4 (1992): 109.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Baechlin and Maurice Muller-Strauss, *Newsreels across the World* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952), 18.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Oriard, *King Football* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 51.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Cohn, *Movietone Presents the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Oriard, *King*, 166.

<sup>14</sup> McKernan, "Witnessing," 4.

<sup>15</sup> Pronay, "Illusion," 104.

<sup>16</sup> Oriard, *King*, 50-51.

<sup>17</sup> McKernan, "Witnessing," 3.

<sup>18</sup> Pronay, "Illusion," 101.

<sup>19</sup> Oriard, *King*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> "Jones Wins U.S. Open For the Fourth Time as 10,000 Look On," *New York Times*, July 13, 1930, 127.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Dyreson, "The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s," *Journal of Sport History*, 6.3 (Winter, 1989): 270.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1931), 207.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 208-209.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Dyreson, "Emergence," 270.

<sup>28</sup> Oriard, *King*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>32</sup> Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, 29. The study on newsreels was published by UNESCO in fulfillment of its constitutional obligation to promote "the free flow of ideas by word and image" in order to further "mutual understanding among peoples."

<sup>33</sup> Fielding, *Newsreels*, 89.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>35</sup> “Zev, Champion Colt, Injures His Hoof,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1923, 11, 23.
- <sup>36</sup> “Mitchell Demands Zev Race My Own,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1923, 1.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> “Zev Is Selected to Meet Papyrus in Match Race,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1923, 1.
- <sup>42</sup> “My Own Is Coming By Special Train,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1923, 23.
- <sup>43</sup> “May The Better Horse Win,” *New York Times*, October 20, 1923, 14.
- <sup>44</sup> “Notables Will See Match Race Today,” *New York Times*, October 20, 1923, 11.
- <sup>45</sup> “The International Race,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1923, 18.
- <sup>46</sup> “Display Ad No. 17,” *New York Times*, October 18, 1923, 17.
- <sup>47</sup> “Display Ad No. 19,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1923, 16.
- <sup>48</sup> “Fights Race Film With Smoke And Sun,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1923, 1.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>63</sup> “The Screen,” *New York Times*, October 22, 1923, 17.
- <sup>64</sup> Fielding, *Newsreels*, 89.
- <sup>65</sup> “London Is Shocked By Decisive Defeat,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1923, 1.
- <sup>66</sup> “Race No Fair Test, Say London Critics,” *New York Times*, October 22, 1923, 22.
- <sup>67</sup> “Picture Rights Let For Olympic Games,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1923, 11.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>69</sup> “Olympic Body Will Supply Photographs of the Games,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1924, 24.
- <sup>70</sup> “Pro Charge Annoys U. S. Rugby Players,” *New York Times*, May 8, 1924, 15.
- <sup>71</sup> “U. S. Rugby Players Threaten To Quit,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1924, 24.
- <sup>72</sup> “French To Admit U. S. Camera Men,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1924, 11.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>74</sup> “Protest UFA Monopoly,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1928, 5.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>76</sup> “Plan To Charge \$60,000 For Olympic Rights Draws U. S. Protest And May Bar Films Here,” *New York Times*, May 16, 1928, 30.

- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> “Detectives To Aid Olympic Photo Ban,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1928, 14.
- <sup>79</sup> “The Americans Ahead,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1896, 3.
- <sup>80</sup> Mark Dyreson, “Melting-pot Victories: Racial Ideas and the Olympic Games in American Culture During the Progressive Era,” *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6.1 (1989): 49.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid., 53.
- <sup>82</sup> Pope, “American,” 112.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 109.
- <sup>84</sup> “Our Athletes in Paris,” *New York Times*, July 12, 1900, 9.
- <sup>85</sup> “American Athletes Win,” *New York Times*, July 15, 1900, 4.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>87</sup> Qtd. in Pope, “American,” 117.
- <sup>88</sup> Pope, “American,” 116.
- <sup>89</sup> Dyreson, “Melting-pot,” 52.
- <sup>90</sup> Pope, “American,” 112.
- <sup>91</sup> “About Carlisle Athletics,” *Carlisle Arrow*, September 8, 1908, 3.
- <sup>92</sup> Pope, “American,” 122.
- <sup>93</sup> “Olympic Prizes Lost; Thorpe No Amateur,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1913, 9.
- <sup>94</sup> Raymond W. Wheeler, *Jim Thorpe: The World’s Greatest Athlete* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), vii-viii.
- <sup>95</sup> Mark Dyreson, “Aggressive America: Media Nationalism and the ‘War’ over Olympic Pictures in Sport’s ‘Golden Age,’” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22.6 (November 2005): 983.
- <sup>96</sup> Mark Dyreson, “Marketing National Identity: The Olympic Games of 1932 and American Culture,” *OLYMPIKA: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, IV (1995): 24.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., 26.
- <sup>98</sup> *Universal News*, February 4, 1932.
- <sup>99</sup> *Universal News*, February 11, 1932.
- <sup>100</sup> *Universal News*, February 9, 1932.
- <sup>101</sup> *Universal News*, August 4, 1932.
- <sup>102</sup> *Universal News*, August 8, 1932.
- <sup>103</sup> *Universal News*, August 11, 1932.
- <sup>104</sup> John Slater, “Changing Partners: The Relationship Between the Mass Media and the Olympic Games,” *Fourth International Symposium for Olympic Research*, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada (October 1998): 51.
- <sup>105</sup> *Universal News*, February 2, 1948.
- <sup>106</sup> *Universal News*, February 2, 1948.
- <sup>107</sup> *Universal News*, August 12, 1948.
- <sup>108</sup> *Universal News*, July 21, 1952.
- <sup>109</sup> *Universal News*, July 21, 1952.
- <sup>110</sup> *Universal News*, July 31, 1952.
- <sup>111</sup> Pope, “American,” 124.
- <sup>112</sup> Mike Huggins, ‘And Now, Something for the Ladies’: Representations of Women’s

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> *Universal News*, February 9, 1948.

<sup>115</sup> David B. Welky, "Viking Girls, Mermaids and Little Brown Men: U. S. Journalism and the 1932 Olympics," *Journal of Sport History*, 24.1 (Spring 1997): 31.

<sup>116</sup> Huggins, "Something," 685.

<sup>117</sup> *Universal News*, August 9, 1948.

<sup>118</sup> *Universal News*, April 25, 1935.

<sup>119</sup> *Universal News*, August 9, 1948.

<sup>120</sup> Huggins, "Something," 690.

<sup>121</sup> *Universal News*, February 25, 1952.

<sup>122</sup> Gina Daddario, *Women's Sport and Spectacle: Gendered Television Coverage and the Olympic Games* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 24.

<sup>123</sup> Mark Dyreson, "Icons of Liberty or Objects of Desire? American Women Olympians and the Politics of Consumption," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38.3 (Autumn 2003): 438.

<sup>124</sup> "No Women Olympians For American Team," *New York Times*, March 31, 1914, 9.

<sup>125</sup> Dyreson, "Icons," 442.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 450.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> J. P. Abramson, "U. S. Athletes Fail 4 Times at Olympics," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 3, 1928, 1, 18.

<sup>131</sup> Paul Gallico, *Farewell to Sport* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970 [1938], 233-244.

<sup>132</sup> Huggins, "Something," 691.

<sup>133</sup> Daddario, *Women's*, 26.

<sup>134</sup> Welky, "Viking," 32.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Dyreson, "Icons," 435.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>142</sup> Melissa A. Johnson, "Pre-Television Stereotypes: Mexicans in U. S. Newsreels, 1919, 1932," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 16 (1999): 421.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>144</sup> Oriard, 296.

<sup>145</sup> Mark Dyreson, "American Ideas about Race and Olympic Races from the 1890s to the 1950s: Shattering Myths or Reinforcing Scientific Racism?" *Journal of Sport History*, 28.2 (Summer 2001): 186.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>148</sup> Oriard, *King*, 296.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>151</sup> Huggins, "Something," 695.

<sup>152</sup> Pronay, "Illusion," 99.

## **CHAPTER 4: A DREAM OF CARNAGE AND THE ELECTRONIC MONSTER**

### **Introduction**

Any indication that television was to become the medium within which the sportscast highlight developed into the most important form for the dissemination of sport news was certainly not evident when the first steps in bringing sport to the public through the camera eye or magic window were taken.<sup>1</sup> That some of the initial steps were taken by Vladimir Zworykin, a Russian scientist who had fled post-Bolshevik Russia and who eventually came to work for the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) and its president, David Sarnoff, another Russian immigrant, helps to explain the lore of television's mythological beginnings. Beginning in 1933, Zworykin and his assistants took photographs of daily activities and special events conducted in and around his Camden, New Jersey, lab. Among the earliest photographs of images captured on the television screen are a pair related to sports—one taken of a football game that shows one team about to score a touchdown and the other a long shot of a baseball game (Illustration 4.1).

These images do not represent an actual broadcast of sport; rather, these images are “photographs of a television camera's image of another photograph” to illustrate the effect that different scanning rates had on picture clarity.<sup>2</sup> Additional steps were taken in August 1934 by another important figure in television's development, Philo T. Farnsworth, a part of whose demonstration of the world's first electronic television system showed a scrimmage between members of the Philadelphia Eagles outside the Franklin Institute.<sup>3</sup> Coming more than five years before RCA unveiled its television

system at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City, these tenuous steps provided little evidence that television would become the primary purveyor of sport across the world, let alone that it would displace existing media—newspaper, film and radio—as the medium people chose to enjoy consuming sport.

This chapter traces the formation of the television-sport-commercial complex in the first of its two distinct stages.<sup>4</sup> The first stage spans the period from 1934 through 1956, covering experiments and the resulting telecasts of sporting events before World War II through the introduction of videotape into television broadcasts of sports. In its early years, television was almost exclusively a live medium, transmitting images and sound from one space to another in real time. Viewers watched as events unfolded in the studio or from remote locations. In terms of viewing sport, this marked a considerable difference from the technology of film, which was unable to transmit a live event to viewers in real time. Until 1939, sport fans could either watch an event at the site or listen to a radio broadcast, which might originate from the event's location or might be the skillful recreation of an announcer working from Western Union reports rather than live coverage.<sup>5</sup> Walker and Bellamy posit:

Listening to the radio broadcast was not the same as watching the game. Although some have argued that in the voice of radio's most skilled announcers baseball was better, no matter how much people may long for radio's theater of the mind and its ability to stimulate our imagination, sight is still our first sense. Only being at the game or watching it on television could deliver that visual experience.<sup>6</sup>

Sport became a favorite of early television producers for many of the same

reasons that sporting events had become a staple of the newsreel and radio industries. Sporting events, scheduled well in advance throughout the year, offered dramatic spectacle that appealed to ready-made fans. Having learned the operational aesthetic of both film and radio, these fans quickly adapted to a new technology that was accessed in the public sphere of the neighborhood tavern or in the private sphere of the home. Producing a sporting event for telecast was accomplished as efficiently and economically as a studio program, especially in the case of sports like boxing, which became the medium's most popular televised sport. The popularity of boxing on television stemmed, in part, from the controlled indoor environment in which the bouts took place, as well as the fact that boxers occupied a prominent position among sport celebrities. Thanks to the prizefight's inherent drama, neither scripts nor rehearsals were needed.<sup>7</sup> Similar production considerations contributed to the popularity of televising sports like professional wrestling and roller derby.

Additionally, considerations related to the production of sporting events had implications in the development of sport journalism's institutional structures and professional values that shaped the representation of national identity, gender and race. Because coverage of live events was the preserve of the networks' news divisions, conflicts and institutional jealousies arose almost from the very beginning of television production of live sporting events. Not only were there questions about the allocation of resources and personnel, but questions also surfaced about television's role in reporting on the sports events being covered and in promoting those events to guarantee that sponsors and advertisers realized a return on their investments. Analyzing how sports

broadcasting came to utilize what Klatell and Marcus call “a carefully orchestrated blend of entertainment, promotion, journalism and controversy”<sup>8</sup> to build an audience that attracted sponsors and advertisers constitutes one of the overarching themes of this chapter. As sports promoters and the professional sports leagues entered into partnerships with television broadcasters, conflicts of interest were but one of a formidable set of obstacles that encumbered sports journalists. Early on-air announcers not only had to sell the game, but also the sponsor’s products. If a station bought the rights to a team’s games, the announcers often avoided criticizing “their contractual partners.”<sup>9</sup> Control over the descriptions and accounts of a sporting event may have belonged to the broadcaster in theory, but in practice that control was shared between the broadcaster, the team and league, and the sponsors and advertisers. As Klatell and Marcus note, “So long as sports events are considered private performances, to be sold by their rights-holders at their discretion, the broadcasts of those events will in no way intentionally resemble unfettered journalism.”<sup>10</sup> As rights became more expensive, a “cooperativeness factor”<sup>11</sup> was as important as the amount of money that blind bidders put forth.

Not only were sports broadcasters faced with questions about how to satisfy the responsibilities of the journalism profession while producing coverage that was mutually beneficial for their contractual partners, but they also had to produce television that attracted and maintained an audience via a medium whose technology paled in comparison to film in terms of picture size and quality. While the public had certainly acquired a taste for watching newsreel coverage of sports, no one knew for certain whether or not the public would be satisfied watching any sporting event on a screen that

ranged in size from 2 x 3 inches to 9 by 6.75 inches.<sup>12</sup> Not only was it difficult to follow a baseball or hockey puck, but the signal, especially in outlying areas, was not always clear.

The primary thing that television capitalized on was its liveness, for while newsreel viewers often knew the outcome of the sporting event's highlights they were watching, television offered the opportunity to see the event as it unfolded. In the early days of sports telecasting when the question of television's impact on attendance at sporting events was still being debated, *New York Times* columnist Arthur Daley explained that television catered "to sheer animal comfort":

It eliminates long trips to stadia or arenas; you just walk across the room and twist a dial. It eliminates crowding, pushing and those hard wooden seats; you sprawl out in an easy chair with all the elbow room you need. It eliminates the uncertainties of the weather; as far as is known, blizzards, rainstorms and the broiling rays of summer sun don't invade the living rooms.<sup>13</sup>

Daley noted that while some believed that television was not a threat because it could not convincingly capture "the feeling of excitement, the restless hum of the crowd, the sense of ever-sharpening anticipation," others understood that television's potential in "satisfying too many potential spectators and stifling lesser sports and lesser attractions in favor of the big ones."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most prophetic pronouncement Daley included came from one promoter who said: "Radio has made sports fans, but television will only make television fans."<sup>15</sup> The implication was that viewers would be satisfied as long as they were entertained, regardless of whether the entertainment program included a sporting

event. In 1939, only one broadcast was needed for producers to realize that a single camera was not enough to cover a baseball game. That broadcast began a never-ending process of presentational refinements that led to multiple camera positions, new camera technologies (e.g., mobile, tracking, miniature and blimp), on-screen graphics, and faster editing. As Margaret Morse posits, “The television event may indeed be a better vehicle to give form to the fantasies which animate the cultural model of sport.”<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, television contributed to the development of the highlight form for newscasts by developing programs that offered the viewers filmed highlight packages, profiles of sport stars and in-studio interviews. This was largely accomplished by borrowing from formats that had proved successful in the past and by developing new formats. On the one hand, the networks borrowed and converted successful radio programs into content for television. For example, NBC developed a television program that utilized a similar format and the name of its radio counterpart—radio’s *Colgate Sports Newsreel* was recast as the *Gillette Summer Sports Newsreel*, a summer replacement for the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* program. Offering “round-the-world coverage of the biggest sports stories,”<sup>17</sup> the reel included headline sports events, sound-on-film interviews with leading sports personalities, and unusual features.

On the other hand, the networks also attempted to complement their live broadcasts with studio programs. For example, all four television networks—NBC, CBS, ABC and DuMont—televised sport news round-up shows and pre- and post-game shows to accompany their live sports broadcasts between 1947 and 1959, many during prime time. Although none of the shows lasted for more than a season, dismissing these

programs as totally inconsequential because none lasted very long would be short-sighted. These programs served as important forerunners for not only the omnibus-format shows that replaced them, but also for the sport news programs that are so ubiquitous in today's sport programming schedule. Additionally, it is important to consider several issues related to the broadcasting of these early sports news programs, including scheduling, format and competition from newsreels.

### **Prime Time Coverage**

Television's broadcasting of sports followed a similar trajectory to the media that preceded it, especially radio. This trajectory included the broadcasting of live sporting events, and both NBC and CBS radio networks assigned the "description and accounts" of sporting events to their news departments.<sup>18</sup> That the distinction between news and sports became blurred beyond recognition was attributable, in part, to the use of the most prominent on-air commentators like Graham McNamee for both types of events.<sup>19</sup> In this way, Walter Cronkite served as host for CBS's coverage of the 1960 Squaw Valley Olympic Games, and Roone Arledge, who headed ABC Sports through numerous successes including *Wide World of Sports* and *Monday Night Football*, was selected president of ABC News. Not surprisingly, the public's perception of broadcast sport as entertainment contributed to the blurring of journalism with entertainment.

In 1939, the first American sporting event to be telecast was a collegiate baseball game in which Princeton University defeated Columbia University at Baker Field by a score of 2 to 1 in ten innings, which, the *New York Times* reported, "consumed 2 hours and 15 minutes of television's time."<sup>20</sup> A mobile television van at the field "relayed the

pictures and associated sounds on ultra-short waves to the main transmitter atop the Empire State Building, from where they were picked up at Radio City, at the World's Fair and other receiving outposts in the metropolitan area."<sup>21</sup> This telecast followed efforts by Universum Film AG (UFA) at the 1936 Berlin Olympics and by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) the following year when its first broadcast was transmitted from Wimbledon. Although the baseball game's picture quality ranged from blurry—players described as appearing like “little white fliers”—to clear—the skyline of apartment buildings “sharply defined” in the background—telecasting quickly improved with the addition of a second and third camera.<sup>22</sup> As the *New York Times* noted in September 1939, “Four or five cameras will be used before long and then baseball as a motion picture will be in the air to stay, providing, of course, that some scheme is evolved to protect the gate.”<sup>23</sup> Protecting the gate to live sporting events, which served as the main source of revenue for most sports, proved to be one the main impediments to the acceptance of televising those events. One sport, professional football, protected teams' gate receipts through the use of blackouts; others, like boxing and minor league baseball, were impacted by the proliferation of coverage until fans almost completely stopped attending, nearly ruining each sport.

That boxing was destined to become television's favorite sport to broadcast was evident from the very first televised fight at Yankee Stadium on June 1, 1939. Because this bout was covered during television's experimental period, “no contract was involved and no fee was charged by the promoter for the rights to telecast,”<sup>24</sup> Orrin E. Dunlap Jr. reported in the *New York Times* several days later in his review of the televised fight. To

say that Dunlap was enthralled by the telecast would not be an overstatement. Dunlap watched the telecast “in a darkened room at Great Neck on Long Island, about twelve miles beeline from Yankee Stadium,” which was “like sitting in a front row seat.”<sup>25</sup> Within the first few paragraphs of his review, Dunlap favorably compared the experience to listening on the radio or seeing highlights of the fight in newsreels. “To see a prize fight telecast is 10,000 times more interesting than listening sightless to a broadcast announcer. The telecast batters broadcasting into the category of the silent film.”<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Dunlap relegated radio to the status of silent film, another visual medium, rather than to another auditory medium like the phonograph, which could not capture live what radio was capable of capturing. In fact, in the next paragraph, he noted that “this seeing by radio is far more exciting than watching a belated and cut newsreel of such warfare, because here the result is in suspense, it may be revealed at any moment.”<sup>27</sup>

Dunlap pointed to the size of the boxing ring, the two contestants being within an arm’s length of each other, and the well lighted ring as reasons for the telecast’s success. Later, he admitted that “television is not quite clear enough yet to show swollen eyes and lacerations, but the different colored trunks are a great aid to the spectator in following and identifying the fighters at all times.”<sup>28</sup> Dunlap recommended against sending two fighters into the televised ring in the same colored shorts, which suggested that the black and white picture alone was not enough to distinguish between the fighters, who were of similar builds. That Dunlap did not describe the bruises each fighter suffered—Baer’s badly cut lower lip required four stitches and Nova’s right eye was swollen shut and had a cut that required three stitches<sup>29</sup>—also strongly intimated that the picture quality was

not rich in graphic details. Not surprisingly, then, Dunlap admitted that while the sights and sounds of the event came alive, “it is still considered necessary that a sports commentator sit alongside the camera to thread the illustrated story together.”<sup>30</sup> Noting that the commentator had to be attentive to every blow because the public was seeing exactly what he saw, Dunlap praised announcer Sam Taub for his “colorful reporting job. His words fitted every whack.”<sup>31</sup>

Dunlap aptly summarized the televised bout’s importance, not only identifying that “television uncannily projects intimacy into the performance” so that the fighters seemed “to be slamming in the family circle, not for the 16,738 huddled around the ring under June’s starlit canopy.”<sup>32</sup> Dunlap also correctly surmised that televised boxing would do for sales of television sets what radio broadcasting had done for radio sales, noting that once television sets were mass produced, the price would inevitably come down. He also predicted that “eighteen years from now, in 1957, fistic classics will be projected on wall screens, and no doubt a coast-to-coast audience will surround the arena.”<sup>33</sup> Pronouncing boldly that the first American televised bout had provided evidence galore that boxing was a natural for television, Dunlap did not mince his words. “Carnage has been a dream of television.... There is no dodging of reality, for television is already recognized as an instrument of truth. Seeing is believing.”<sup>34</sup> Coincidentally, the same thing was proclaimed about film, and like the older technology, television’s truthfulness was also manipulated and compromised.

Only after World War II did television build a programming schedule. In 1946, for example, NBC and DuMont broadcast for only an hour or two per night and not at all

on Saturdays.<sup>35</sup> Two years later, sports, most notably boxing, figured prominently in the early prime-time schedules. This was attributable to the fact that the networks had very little idea what programs the public wanted to watch, “which made the early years of network programming a time of great trial-and-error.”<sup>36</sup> Additionally, with few stations operating and the cost of building studios in which to create original programming costly, television turned to boxing, which afforded an economical alternative to the studio program, with production costs running approximately \$2,500 per program.<sup>37</sup>

The first regularly scheduled television sports program, known as the *Cavalcade of Sports* and owned by the Gillette Safety Razor Blade Company, featured boxing from St. Nicholas Arena in New York City on Monday evenings from 9-11 p.m. and from Madison Square Garden on Thursday evenings from 9:15-11 p.m. The show had made its debut on Mutual Radio in 1941 with the broadcast of the Joe Louis-Billy Conn heavyweight championship fight, thanks to the enterprising work of A. Craig Smith, who paid only \$14,820 for the rights to the fight.<sup>38</sup> Smith also secured the rights to the World Series and baseball’s All Star Game for Gillette (Illustration 4.2), which it retained into the mid-1960s. Bob Stanton served as the announcer for the *Cavalcade of Sports* program until 1948 when he was replaced by Ray Forrest, who remained with the program for only a year. Jimmy Powers took over the role in 1949, and remained while NBC aired the program until 1960 when it was dropped. ABC then picked it up, moved it to Saturday nights, and continued airing it until 1964. In total, the program broadcast over six hundred nights of boxing. The *Cavalcade* enjoyed one of the longest runs in television history, and in March 1955, the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* was awarded an Emmy for

Best Sports Program at the seventh annual awards ceremony of the Television Academy.<sup>39</sup> That marked the last time the academy included Best Sports Program as a category until 1979 when a number of sports categories were awarded in a separate ceremony.

Despite its success on television, the *Cavalcade of Sports* was also broadcast on radio. Ads, which read like press releases and included photographs, regularly appeared in New York newspapers the day of the broadcast. The writing for these ads emphasized the local draw, “Jawbone” Jake LaMotta or “Rock-a-bye” Rock Graziano. The ads also promised plenty of action, “a slam-bang affair” or “a blistering battle.”<sup>40</sup> The ads always ended with the same two paragraphs, the first identifying the radio station (WJZ, WHN) and the second providing the Gillette logo and jingle. It read: “And remember, men...LOOK sharp! FEEL sharp! BE sharp! Use Gillette Blue Blades with the sharpest edges ever honed.”<sup>41</sup>

By the time Gillette attached its company name to the program’s title in 1948, the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* had become one of the most popular programs with the neighborhood tavern audiences throughout New York City.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, the fees to broadcast the program rose dramatically when Madison Square Garden demanded \$200,000 for the weekly rights during that television season.<sup>43</sup> A year before, the DuMont network experienced “a considerable increase in fee” to broadcast fights from the Jamaica Arena in New York City, despite the fact that “Apparently not all boxing promoters are worried over the possible inroads of television on the box-office receipts of pugilistic events.”<sup>44</sup>

In addition to its weekly coverage of boxing, Gillette also secured the rights to the world heavyweight championship bout between Joe Louis and Jersey Joe Walcott for \$100,000. The *New York Times* reported that the deal between Gillette and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Sporting Club “occasioned some surprise along Radio Row, since previously a television contract for a major bout had been made directly with a broadcaster rather than with a sponsor.”<sup>45</sup> No doubt this surprise stemmed, in part, from the fact that NBC had enjoyed considerable success with the broadcasts of other championship fights, particularly the Louis-Conn fight in 1946, which Gillette had also sponsored. The broadcast’s success caught the attention of advertising agencies, which noted the achievement by the industry “to bring forcibly to the attention of the public the practical value of television.”<sup>46</sup> This practical value largely revolved around the introduction of new consumer products.

NBC did, in fact, broadcast the Louis-Walcott rematch, scheduled for June 23, 1948, in Yankee Stadium. A display ad (Illustration 4.3) that appeared in the *New York Times* on the scheduled day of the fight conveyed the importance of not only the fight, but also of the telecast as a means of promoting the NBC television network, its news and entertainment programs and its sponsor. In the advertisement’s copy, NBC noted that “Tonight’s fight—like the last three World’s Heavyweight Championship Bouts—will be seen on the NBC Television Network...WNBT in New York.”<sup>47</sup> Coverage of the fight was yet “another in the parade of exciting events which make NBC television’s No. 1 Network.”<sup>48</sup> Since the fight was scheduled to coincide with the Republican National Convention, NBC made sure to note that, in addition to the fight, viewers could “see

*complete* television coverage of the convention.<sup>49</sup> Nineteen-forty-eight marked the first television coverage of the national political conventions, which eventually led to the development of nightly network news. The ad did not mention that the fight was being televised over NBC (coaxial) lines through its outlets in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Baltimore, Schenectady, Boston, and Richmond. Additionally, coverage of the fight and convention was to have been broadcast to home receivers in the Midwest, thanks to “the first public demonstration of stratovision.”<sup>50</sup>

Stratovision was a technology, developed by Westinghouse with the backing of the Glenn L. Martin Company, which utilized a B-29 Superfortress, orbiting 25,000 feet above Pittsburgh, to receive the television signal directly from WMAR-TV in Baltimore and send the signal to an area over five hundred miles in diameter.<sup>51</sup> The bomber (Illustration 4.4) was outfitted with an eight-foot mast on its vertical stabilizer to receive programs; the signal was then sent from the antenna to the cabin and on to the broadcast antenna, projected twenty-eight feet down when in operating mode. Stratovision was successfully used to broadcast coverage of the Republican convention on June 23, the night of the scheduled Louis-Walcott fight, although the fight was twice rescheduled due to rain. While the rain played havoc on the fight’s schedule, television did not deter people from attending. The *New York Times* reported that 42,667 people paid \$841,739 at the gate to see the bout on June 25, noting that receipts would have surpassed the one million dollar mark had the inclement weather not forced two postponements and the refunding of over \$100,000. The newspaper also reported that eighteen members of the Walcott family, including the fighter’s six children, gathered in the Walcott home to

watch the fight via television, although his wife “saw the fight from a home of a friend but nobody would say where.”<sup>52</sup> That the broadcast garnered considerable coverage in the press suggests the gathering importance of the medium in American culture.

Boxing was not the only sport to appear in prime-time in the late 1940s. In terms of quantity, 1948 marked a high point in the number of programming hours devoted to sports, accounting for twenty-seven of the eighty-three hours broadcast. The second most popular sport was basketball, which was offered on Saturday nights during prime time by three of the four networks. In addition to its Saturday night broadcast, CBS offered a game on Monday nights. One can only wonder what prompted the networks to commit over nine hours of their schedule to a professional sport that had certainly not taken root with the sporting public, evidenced by the fact that, by all accounts, college basketball was more popular with double-headers often offered at Madison Square Garden. That three networks scheduled games at the same time on the same night proved to be not only overly ambitious but “not a wise choice for prime-time programming, as it proved to be much less popular than boxing.”<sup>53</sup>

Professional wrestling was also shown by three of the networks—ABC, DuMont and NBC—on four nights a week; however, each network scheduled its boxing program on a different night, thereby avoiding direct competition. In many ways, professional wrestling attracted a more diverse audience than other professional sports. As Neal-Lunsford notes, “What really made wrestling popular with advertisers, however, was that most estimates, however reliable, found women to be the most avid home wrestling viewers...not so much interested in wrestling technique as it was in watching their heroes

pose and preen under the television lights.”<sup>54</sup> Wrestling drew the attention of state legislators in New York, who enacted a law requiring that every match be listed as an exhibition, not as a contest. Regardless of what prompted lawmakers to pass such feeble legislation, wrestling’s status as a legitimate sport clearly concerned the networks and advertisers. In fact, wrestling’s choreographed moves, exaggerated drama, florid costumes, identifiable heroes and villains proved well suited to television. Further cementing their relationship with television networks, wrestling promoters “took special care to ensure that the matches did not exceed the time slots between commercial interruptions.”<sup>55</sup>

The same features that made professional wrestling popular also characterized another pseudo-sport, roller derby, thirty separate contests of which ABC broadcast on Monday, Thursday and Friday evenings in 1949, making it the network’s most popular show for a short while.<sup>56</sup> Roller Derby, “the patented concoction of Leo Seltzer,”<sup>57</sup> was popularized up and down the East Coast. For example, beginning in March of 1949, it enjoyed a five-month run in New York City, which included an eighteen-night run at the Fourteenth Regiment Armory in Brooklyn, a sixteen-night run at the Sixty-ninth Regiment Armory, and a run at the Twenty-second Engineers Armory in May. After covering the National Roller Derby championship match on September 22, 1949, which drew 13,000 fans to Madison Square Garden to see the New York team defeat Brooklyn, ABC dropped roller derby from its Monday night programming schedule, but retained it on Thursday and Friday evenings through most of 1950. When Pulse, Inc., issued a report on the most popular television programs among New York metropolitan area viewers,

roller derby was listed as the sixth most popular among video shows,<sup>58</sup> less popular than other shows like *Howdy Doody* and *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, but more popular than the *News Caravan* and *Six-Gun Playhouse*.<sup>59</sup>

Roller derby's popularity elicited a *New York Times* article in which Jack Gould argued that roller derby "represents television at its most narcotic."<sup>60</sup> Gould explained that despite its narcotizing effect, as television, "the derby has it all over a couple of the more accepted diversions, such as hockey and basketball."<sup>61</sup> Like boxing, roller derby featured "a new jam [a type of scrum in which one team's skaters attempt to pass the other team's skaters, thereby scoring points] coming every couple of minutes."<sup>62</sup> Because jams did not take particularly long and commercials were aired between them, roller derby's flow was well suited to television. Each team featured both men and women, and because the carefully choreographed hair-pulling, fist fights and anguished shouting were part of the performers' repertoires, "it's still a lot more vivid TV than wrestling."<sup>63</sup> Lest readers take away the wrong impression, Gould qualified his assertion by noting that the coverage's most glaring weakness was "the worst play-by-play commentary to be heard anywhere on radio or television."<sup>64</sup> Not only did Ken Nydall never forget that he was the press agent for roller derby, but he also chose the moment when the action was at its height "to beg the viewers to buy tickets to the derby."<sup>65</sup> Gould concluded by noting that roller derby would remain popular "until the novelty of television wears off a little more."<sup>66</sup>

ABC planned another season of roller derby in 1950 before the networks began their exodus from broadcasting sports during prime time, although roller derby and

professional wrestling successfully migrated to local television stations. The popularity of wrestling and roller derby is understandable when considering its suitability for television in terms of form and content. Most noticeably, these sports featured both male and female performers. This fact did not escape the notice of advertisers. An article published in *Business Week* noted, “In the past decade, two impacts have hit the American public—the atom bomb and the Roller Derby—and it appears the latter will have the most permanent effect.”<sup>67</sup> Perhaps such optimism was delusional, perhaps it was ballyhoo, but in any event, roller derby, unlike much of the other sports coverage, appealed to women viewers, who largely “controlled viewing choices as well as consumer spending.”<sup>68</sup>

By 1949, the television audience had grown considerably. In that year, the *New York Times* published another article by Jack Gould that included a television map of the United States (Illustration 4.5), which showed that television was available in areas “inhabited by 60,000,000 people.”<sup>69</sup> The report also noted that there were one and one-half million sets, with a regular audience of six million. Although coast-to-coast broadcasts were still more than two years away, Gould predicted that by 1953, “television looks forward to serving 19,000,000 families and a total audience of 50,000,000.”<sup>70</sup> Gould noted the continued improvement in television set manufacturing and the increased variety of programs, of which sports, “as a ready-made attraction, retain their hold on a large part of the audience.”<sup>71</sup> The most pressing problems were economic, Gould explained, commenting that “no single television network is yet making money...production overhead runs high...the actors have not yet organized television and instituted a minimum union contract.”<sup>72</sup> Despite those imponderables, Gould explained

that the main concern of the industry was directed toward satisfying “public demand.”<sup>73</sup>

In 1950 television viewing choices greatly expanded, as network prime time offerings increased from ninety to one hundred and nine hours. Sports accounted for only eleven per cent of that total, or twelve hours and thirty minutes, down from nearly twenty-seven hours in 1948 and fifteen hours the previous year.<sup>74</sup> While many decried the impact television was having on attendance at sports events, others realized that sports were becoming a far less important source of network programming but more important for local television stations. In this regard, television was merely following the precedent of radio. In a *New York Times* article, Sidney Lohman presented two reasons for the decline in the number of hours devoted to the network televising of sports events: “(1) a growing reluctance on the part of promoters to permit the televising of their shows, and (2) the elimination of choice nighttime viewing periods as more time segments are sold for sponsored shows with long term contracts as opposed to the seasonal fluctuations in sports events.”<sup>75</sup> Lohman and others aptly recognized that while sports had played an important role in helping television gain a foothold into American popular culture, that role changed significantly after 1950. Two decades passed before sports re-appeared in prime time with ABC’s *Monday Night Football*.

The impact of television on sports journalism was immediate and long lasting. With their “descriptions and accounts” of sports events, the networks were largely responsible for reinvigorating sports journalism. Klatell and Marcus explain:

In many respects, the growth of the modern newspaper sports page...can be credited to the broadcasters’ pushing breaking sports news into the farthest

reaches of the nation, greatly popularizing the topic, and spreading interest wherever their signals reached.<sup>76</sup>

Klatell and Marcus also note that while broadcasting helped to sell newspapers and magazines, “broadcasters frequently use the existence of newspapers and magazines as justification for their own abdication of much journalistic responsibility.”<sup>77</sup> As more local television and radio stations broadcast the games of local teams, the audience expected a certain familiarity with the announcers, many of whom remained with the same team for years. Klatell and Marcus suggest that familiarity breeds anything but contempt. In fact, “television viewers are much less comfortable with their reporters and announcers acting in an aggressive or confrontational manner.... As a result, the landscape is littered with ‘homers’—utterly biased observers in the employ of the event they are supposed to be covering.”<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately, on the local level, the audience has come to expect biased reporting as “a harmless part of the sports entertainment package.”<sup>79</sup>

### **The Eternal Time-Present**

Except for the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* and special events like the World Series, sports programming was moved from prime time to the weekends, by default as much as by design. For example, in 1953 ABC introduced its Major League Baseball *Game of the Week*, despite the fact advertising account executive Edgar J. Scherick had managed to secure the television broadcast rights for only three teams: the Philadelphia Athletics, the Chicago White Sox, and the Cleveland Indians.<sup>80</sup> Further, the owners of the other teams imposed a blackout on ABC stations to protect their own game attendance, meaning the network was barred from broadcasting on any station located in any major

league city. In spite of these conditions, the Falstaff Brewing Company went ahead with its sponsorship, and *Game of the Week* made its debut on June 6, 1953, with former St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Dizzy Dean providing the play-by-play. The program struggled to attract much of an audience for the first half of the summer, but by the end of the year, *Game of the Week* had achieved an 11.4 national rating and a fifty-one percent share of sets in use on Saturday afternoons. Part of the attraction was certainly related to Dean's homespun style. Ron Powers explains:

Television had not witnessed Dean's like before. Nearly all the new TV personalities up until his time, not only in sports but in prime time and news, had been either Eastern-urban, or, like Mel Allen, scrubbed and urbanized. Dean was an absolutely unexpected blast from the heartland, the real goods. The Stetson, the string tie, the impulsive warbled snatches from "Wabash Cannonball," the artfully composed usage—"Fawstaff—hit's Amurica's P'emium Quality Beer!"—struck the Republic as authentic, even somehow deliciously truant, a thumbed nose to straitlaced authority.<sup>81</sup>

ABC's success with *Game of the Week* in 1953 and 1954 arguably defied explanation. With far fewer affiliate stations than the other networks, ABC experienced television losses of almost \$2 million in 1950 alone. Only a merger with United Paramount Theaters in 1953 and an accompanying infusion of \$30 million in capital saved the struggling network from going out of business. Clearly, what made *Game of the Week* a ratings success was Dean's easy-going style, which appealed to viewers in rural areas.

CBS took over the *Game of the Week* in 1955 and kept it through the 1964 season,

although not exclusively since NBC began its Saturday and Sunday coverage in 1957 and in 1959 respectively. In 1960, ABC resumed Saturday telecasts, and the three networks combined to telecast over one hundred games. Only in 1965 did MLB end its blackout in the cities that were home to MLB teams when it signed a \$6.5 million deal with ABC, a sum which it shared equally among the teams. Thanks to this contract, ABC provided the first-ever nationwide baseball coverage with twenty-eight weekly Saturday and holiday broadcasts of *Game of the Week*. ABC's deal covered all of the teams except the New York Yankees and Philadelphia Phillies, both of which had existing television deals. ABC blacked out the games in the home cities of the clubs playing in the televised games. Chris Schenkel, Keith Jackson, and Merle Harmon were the principal play-by-play announcers for ABC's coverage. In October 1966, NBC signed a three-year deal with MLB, which cost roughly \$6 million per year for the twenty-five *Games of the Week*, \$6.1 million for the 1967 World Series and 1967 All-Star Game, and \$6.5 million for the 1968 World Series and 1968 All-Star Game. This brought the total value of the contract up to \$30.6 million.

NBC's coverage marked a considerable change in the number of games, although viewers did not necessarily embrace that change. The idea that whatever game was attractive for one market would be attractive for all markets proved to be a mistake that neither the network nor MLB had anticipated. Instead of watching over one hundred games on three networks, a majority of American viewers were limited to twenty-eight telecasts on one network. Another change that arguably impacted viewer reception was the fact that fans got a new announcer. "Curt Gowdy emerged for an entire generation of

listeners as the national signature of baseball broadcasting,” asserts Curt Smith. “From 1966 through 1975, he called play-by-play for every All-Star Game, every World Series game, and virtually every regular season network game.”<sup>82</sup> That list excluded Gowdy's work on seven Super Bowls, seven Olympic Games, twelve NCAA basketball championships, thirteen Rose Bowls, the Pan Am Games, and twenty years of *The American Sportsman*. Employing a very different style than Dean's, Gowdy was unable to achieve comparable ratings, even before becoming burdened with the weight of overexposure. His highest regular season rating was still two full points below Dean's first year, despite the ban that MLB markets had imposed on ABC's initial telecasts. The ratings for NBC's telecasts dropped fifteen percent by 1970, and NBC's World Series ratings fell by nearly twenty percent, although it was not Gowdy's fault alone.

To his credit, Scherick recognized that baseball, although better suited as a local-station commodity, would attract an audience if the game was properly packaged. Rather than banking on the teams to serve as the attraction, Scherick counted on Dean's colorful use of the language and insider baseball knowledge to involve the audience in the moment. Scherick believed that television, unlike newspapers and magazines, left no record; rather, it inhabited an eternal time-present and “could revise itself at will.”<sup>83</sup> More than anything else, this focus on the eternal time-present, keeping viewers in the moment, became one of the most important aspects of television's operational aesthetic. Scherick used that same enterprising attitude to bring the Falstaff Brewing Company to another backwater sport with seemingly untapped potential, professional football.

### **The Electronic Monster**

Regular season broadcasts of National Football League games on CBS did not begin on a league-wide basis until 1956. Until this time, individual teams negotiated contracts for the rights to their games, but realized next to nothing in profits. In fact, in 1948 the Chicago Bears televised six home games and because the team had to pay two of the stations to transmit the broadcasts, the Bears lost \$1,750 in the venture.<sup>84</sup> Having reached the championship game in 1949, the Los Angeles Rams sold the rights to their 1950 home games to the Admiral Television Company with one important stipulation: Admiral would compensate the Rams if attendance did not increase by ten percent. Despite having one of the most potent offenses in league history, attendance fell from an average of 49,854 to 26,804, costing Admiral \$307,000.<sup>85</sup> With the Western Conference title game against the Chicago Bears blacked out in Los Angeles, the Rams drew 83,501 fans to the Coliseum, ending the television experiment on the local level.

In 1951, NFL Commissioner Bert Bell decreed that league teams could not sell broadcast rights to home games, which the U. S. Department of Justice challenged as an unlawful restraint of trade. Assistant Attorney General H. Graham Morison articulated the Justice Department's position, noting that the NFL's policy was "a denial to the people of their right to see football games."<sup>86</sup> As expressed by Morison, the Justice Department's premise that the public should not be denied "their right to see football games" ran counter to the entire commercially-based American broadcasting system and was positioned closer to the British and European system.

On November 12, 1953, U. S. District Court Judge Allan K. Grim issued a ruling that limited the constraint in certain peripheral areas—within a seventy-five mile

radius—but it specified no interference with telecasts outside that area.<sup>87</sup> The ruling also prohibited the blacking out of radio, and it disallowed Bell’s powers “to approve or disapprove all contracts made by the league teams for the telecasts or broadcasts of their games.”<sup>88</sup> The NFL had unsuccessfully argued that “it was not subject to the anti-trust laws because it was not a business engaged in interstate commerce.”<sup>89</sup> Grim rejected that argument, holding that radio and television is an interstate industry, and “the league’s policies interfered with the conduct of its business.”<sup>90</sup> Significantly, Grim’s ruling did not address the status of the league. Only a few days earlier, the U. S. Supreme Court had ruled that MLB could continue to enforce its reserve clause in players’ contracts because it was not an interstate business.<sup>91</sup> The NFL, Bell noted, had “won the most important part of its case because the league’s most vital need is the protection of the home gate if we are to continue our existence.”<sup>92</sup>

In reviewing the decision, *New York Times* columnist Arthur Daley offered commentary that was clearly laced with sarcasm, especially in regards to the government’s position that the public had a “right” to the games. “The Government had claimed that the play-for-pay boys violated the anti-trust laws by not giving away their products on video for free-to-all comers.”<sup>93</sup> Although noting that “it all sounds ridiculous to a non-legal mind,”<sup>94</sup> Daley took another shot at the government by pointing out the hypocrisy of that position. “The Government didn’t demand that Westinghouse and other pro football sponsors give away their products for free. The gridiron folks were the only patsies.”<sup>95</sup> Daley aptly surmised that the decision was “tremendously important”<sup>96</sup> and that it opened up possibilities for other sports, particularly baseball. “The diamond game

slowly is being strangled to death by the electronic monster and yet the baseball folks were too scared to make a move until the suit against the gridiron game was settled.”<sup>97</sup>

Daley concluded by bringing the Grim decision into perspective with the Supreme Court’s decision to uphold MLB’s anti-trust status. “The world of sports has got so many green lights in the last few days that it’s beginning to resemble a St. Patrick’s Day parade.”<sup>97</sup>

Daley’s assessment of the baseball situation was confirmed over the next decade. Even though MLB attendance was not adversely impacted by televised games, attendance at minor league games was, in fact, devastated. According to statistics compiled by William O. Johnson, over forty million Americans attended minor league contests in 1949. A decade later, that number plunged to thirteen million and then to ten million by the end of the 1960s. The number of minor league teams dropped from almost five hundred in 1949 to approximately one hundred and fifty in 1969.<sup>98</sup>

The Grim decision was the first of several important legal cases that shaped the broadcast landscape of televised sports over the next several years. Emboldened by the decision, Bell then imposed stipulations within the contract the NFL had signed with CBS that “CBS News shall instruct its cameramen and camera crews to make every reasonable effort to avoid training any television camera on any fights among or injuries to the players.”<sup>99</sup> Significantly, Bell did not restrict print journalists from reporting on any such events. However, Bell insisted that radio and television had to be held to a higher standard because broadcasting was a matter of public interest. “We don’t want kids sitting in the living room to see their heroes trading punches. That doesn’t teach good

sportsmanship.”<sup>100</sup> Bell’s invocation of protecting children echoed the very same concerns that had been used to bar fight films.

From 1951-1955, the Du Mont network televised the NFL championship game at a cost of \$95,000 per year. The first nationally televised championship game was broadcast in 1951, featuring a rematch between the Los Angeles Rams and the defending NFL champion Cleveland Browns. The 1950 title game that the Rams lost by a score of 30-28—called the “greatest football game I’ve ever seen” by Commissioner Bert Bell—was not carried nationally, and the surviving film of this momentous game has no sound.<sup>101</sup> The 1950 championship game would be replaced atop the hierarchy of greatest games only a few years later by the 1958 NFL championship game when the Baltimore Colts defeated the New York Giants 23-17 in sudden death overtime. The game-tying touchdown was almost not televised to the forty-five million viewers watching when a cable that connected NBC’s cameras to its remote truck outside of Yankee Stadium was jarred loose from its power supply. Cables were not the only things exposed to the elements. Announcers Chris Schenkel and Chuck Thompson were perched into one of the NBC camera cages that had been suspended from the right-field upper deck, exposed to the elements. The near accident “illustrated television’s second-class status in that era.”<sup>102</sup>

### **A Byers Market**

By the time Walter Byers assumed the position of executive director of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1951, college football attendance had experienced television’s impact in much the same way as the major professional sports leagues. Attendance had surged briefly after World War II, but then declined in

each season from 1950 through the 1953 season. Another seven seasons passed before attendance reached the same levels as in the 1949 season. Television was blamed for falling attendance, especially after the University of Pennsylvania and Notre Dame University signed contracts with ABC and DuMont respectively to allow telecasts of all their home games in the 1950 season. In September of that year, the *New York Times* reported that New York City viewers would have “a choice of five different games each Saturday during most of the season and three night-time Friday games in addition.”<sup>103</sup> CBS was telecasting the home games of Army, Navy and Harvard; WABD carried Notre Dame’s home games; ABC televised the home schedule of Pennsylvania; WOR-TV was televising a slate of games but had not decided on which teams at the time the article was published; and WPIX was to televise Yale’s five home games at Yale Bowl and Fordham’s two home games at the Polo Games. The night games were also carried by WPIX and featured Boston College’s home games, to be played at Braves Field in Boston.

Only the Big Ten Conference banned televised games entirely, and attendance at those games dropped less than the national average. Other colleges across the country were at liberty to negotiate deals with local television stations, and with no restrictions and not much money offered, it was definitely a buyers’ market. Those conditions precipitated considerable angst within the NCAA, especially after two studies—one conducted for the NCAA by the Crossley Corporation in 1948 and another, requested by the NCAA’s newly formed television committee, by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago in 1950. The former concluded that viewers

rated watching games on television to be equal or superior to watching them from the stands, and the latter concluded that attendance would have been at least forty percent higher had no games been televised.<sup>104</sup> Swift action was taken.

At the national convention in January 1951, the NCAA decided to “establish an experimental program of total and partial blackouts so that the NORC could make a comparative study of the impact of television on the gate.”<sup>105</sup> With television coverage limited to seven regular season games in each region and three nationally televised games, NBC announced in August that fifty stations on its network would carry its slate of games, including “the majority of Big Ten universities, most of the Ivy League and some colleges in the Southern and Southeast conferences, as well as numerous large independent institutions.”<sup>106</sup> If NBC was not terribly specific in terms of which schools would be participating in the broadcasts, it was attributable to the furor that the NCAA plan engendered, including bills introduced in a number of state legislatures that required the “games of their respective state universities be televised”<sup>107</sup> and a charge from one governor that the NCAA was engaging in an “illegal conspiracy.”<sup>108</sup> Having paid \$700,000 for the rights, Westinghouse Electric Corporation used its national advertising agency to arrange the slate of games. To complement its telecasts, NBC also introduced pre- and post-game shows for the 1951 season as a means to keep viewers informed about traditional rivalry games they chose not to broadcast.

To its credit, NBC dealt with the televising issue head on. In October and December of 1951, NBC offered two simulcast programs about college football on Theodore Granik’s *American Forum of the Air*, a public affairs program that aired on

Sundays at 2:30 p.m. The first program was billed as a debate, titled “What’s Wrong with College Football?” and offered the opinions “of four experts”<sup>109</sup>: K. L. Wilson, Commissioner of Athletics in the Big Ten Conference; Avery Brundage, president of the American Olympic Committee; Arch Ward, sports editor of the *Chicago Tribune*; and Marshall Smith, sports editor of *Life* magazine. In December, another group, also composed of collegiate athletics administrators and sportscasters, discussed the question of whether there was too much football on television.

Things hardly improved the next year when the NCAA Television Committee sold the rights to NBC for \$1 million with the stipulation that no college would appear on the air more than once. A week before announcing the deal, NBC named Lindsey Nelson as assistant director of sports and David M. Camerer as coordinator for the NCAA football television coverage.<sup>110</sup> When it announced the deal on July 29, NBC noted that “under controls as outlined by the National Collegiate Athletic Association,”<sup>111</sup> it would telecast a single game coast-to-coast on eleven of the twelve Saturdays from September 20 through November 29. Tom Gallery, NBC’s sports director, explained that the schedule of games would be announced after extensive field tests were conducted to guarantee remote pickups. Gallery noted, “We hope to bring games of national and intersectional significance from stadiums that, heretofore, have been ‘out-of-bounds’ for full network transmission.”<sup>112</sup> The other Saturday would be devoted to televising regional and local games. In August, however, NBC announced that General Motors would sponsor the television broadcasts of the college football “television game of the week”<sup>113</sup> on eleven consecutive Saturdays, noting as it had in the previous release that “there will

be no ‘blackouts’ this year.”<sup>114</sup> This marked the first venture of General Motors into television broadcasts of sporting events. NBC designed special letterhead (Illustration 4.6) for the “College Football News” press releases that went out for each of the eleven telecasts. It dropped its pre-game film show in 1952, but retained its post-game show.

Having achieved a measure of control over the telecasts, the NCAA’s Television Committee added to the price for the television rights. To the list of conditions, it included the right to approve all network play-by-play announcers. Ron Powers posits, “Byers’ influence was clear in this matter. He felt that any reference, no matter how indirect, to professional football was tantamount to free advertising for a competitor’s product. The networks indulged this blatant editorial interference until the mid-1960s...”<sup>115</sup> Through the remainder of the 1950s, the NCAA’s Television Committee exerted more control on telecasts and undermined the popularity of its signature sport on television in an attempt to save attendance figures.

The NCAA’s policy of restricted telecasts was not well received. In November 1952, *New York Times* reporter Jack Gould called the telecasts “dull viewing.... It is almost a sure bet that if there is a dull game around it will turn up on TV.”<sup>116</sup> Gould explained that the decline in quality of college football on television stemmed from the NCAA’s attempt to curb the impact television was having on attendance at the games. What was troubling was the manner with which the NCAA had elected to cope with the problem. Part of the problem related to picking the games in June, “which is palpable nonsense... The individual team’s quality can only be judged after the season’s start. What may be the interesting games on a succeeding Saturday may be known only a week

ahead.”<sup>117</sup> Getting the maximum of colleges on the air was “as silly as its schedule-making” because “the teams commanding national interest always have been relatively low.”<sup>118</sup>

Rather than adhering to a rigidly fixed schedule put together in the spring, the NCAA should focus on telecasting the best game available, Gould argued. He maintained that presenting “one decent game a week cannot possibly destroy the football industry from coast-to-coast.”<sup>119</sup> Not announcing which teams would be shown until the Wednesday or Thursday before the game was important, he argued. “With uncertainty until almost the last moment over what game would be on the air, the sale of tickets could be protected.”<sup>120</sup> Admitting that a nationally televised game might adversely impact attendance of a local game, Gould reasoned that a solution was available by moving the telecast of the “game of the week” to a Saturday night. “This would satisfy the TV fan, protect all the country’s other games from the financial standpoint, and remove a constant source of argument.”<sup>121</sup> Gould concluded that whatever solution the NCAA decided upon, “for a change it might abandon its essentially negative approach to the medium and see if a little sensible imagination cannot accommodate it.”<sup>122</sup> Gould’s warning proved prophetic. Not only did Byers’ iron grip on controlling the schedule and other aspects of the telecasts not solve attendance issues for almost another decade, but college football also lost the popularity contest as professional football gradually became more popular with football’s television viewers, who “tired of being treated as a scrub viewer.”<sup>123</sup>

### **News and Information Programs**

Even before the development of videotape, television did not rely on the

broadcasting of live events alone. Beginning in the late 1940s, the networks developed a number of programs that featured sports news, information, interviews and highlights from game action. The process of gleaning highlights from film was time-consuming and required several steps before copies could be dispatched to subscribing stations that carried the program. These programs, referred to as kinescopes, were syndicated to the network's affiliate stations. Walter Byers, who became executive director of the NCAA, began his career by working for the Big Ten Conference. In 1949 he prepared highlight kinescopes of Big Ten Conference football games for distribution in the Midwest. He described the process required to produce a highlight reel.

During Sunday evening, I ran through countless yards of 16-mm black-and-white film from Saturday's games to select the best plays. Then the lab editor made a work copy of the edited version, which I viewed for purposes of writing the script. The announcer would then put a voice on the master print, the lab would hurriedly print the 26-1/2-minute Big Ten highlight film, and copies would be dispatched to subscribing stations in the seven-state Big Ten territory.<sup>124</sup>

The process was certainly paved by years of newsreel production, and viewers had come to expect news in the manner the newsreels presented it. This had a considerable impact on both the production and reception of sports news on television.

In 1949, ABC, CBS and NBC introduced sports news programs. CBS offered the *Sportsman's Quiz*, hosted by Don Baker and Bernard Dudley. Sponsored by the magazine *Sports Afield*, this five-minute filler first seen on Mondays from 8-8:05 p.m. posed and answered questions about hunting, fishing, conservation and wildlife. Dudley served as

the program's host and posed the questions. Baker provided the answers, using drawings, pictures, diagrams and other visual aides to illustrate his responses. Viewers were encouraged to send in questions of their own.<sup>125</sup> The program moved to Friday nights in August 1948 where it remained until January 1949 before moving to Mondays at 7:10 p.m. The DuMont network introduced a similar, but more ambitious half-hour program, the *Fishing and Hunting Club*, in September 1949, which aired on Friday evenings from 9-9:30 p.m. Hosted by Bill Slater, this program offered demonstrations and interviews with various outdoor experts and enthusiasts. In January 1950, the program was re-titled *Sports for All*, but it was discontinued in March of that year. This type of hunting and fishing program was fully realized in 1965 when ABC introduced *The American Sportsman* with Curt Gowdy as host and enjoyed an eighteen-year run.

ABC was next to introduce a sports news program in August 1948. *Sports News with Joe Hasel* was a fifteen-minute summary of the sports news of the world. Hasel provided scores and commentary for the edited film highlights, and he conducted interviews with notables from various sports. ABC tried the program on Saturday evenings at 7:30 p.m. from August through January before moving it to Friday evenings at 9:30 for two months and then to Tuesday evenings at 7:15 for another two months. ABC also introduced a half-hour collection of filmed short subjects on various sports and sports personalities, titled *Sports Camera*, in September 1950. The following year it was reduced to a fifteen-minute program, and in December was renamed *Sports on Parade*. Similar in format to these programs, CBS's *Your Sports Special*, with reporter Carswell Adams and former major league umpire Dolly Stark, first aired in October 1948 on

Friday evenings and then varied from two to five nights per week in January 1949. The program's ambitious schedule, offering viewers daily news and interviews, provides evidence that the networks were searching for a format that would complement their live telecasts of sports. The use of a studio host also characterized NBC's five-minute program, *Sportswoman of the Week*, which aired in 1948 from September 9 until December 2. Conceived as a documentary about a different notable woman each week, the program changed to a straight interview show, hosted by tennis champion Sarah Cooke. The program was first called *Girl of the Week*, echoing the newsreels in referring to women athletes as girls.

Later, in September 1949, CBS tried a fifteen-minute weekly sports news program on Tuesday evenings, *This Week in Sports*, which offered "newsreel highlights from various events, films of outstanding individual plays and short profiles of well-known sports personalities."<sup>126</sup> This program, which aired from September through mid-December, covered the end of the baseball season, the World Series, most of the football season, and the beginning of the basketball season. Arguably, based on this description, highlights of individual plays constituted the main focus rather than a recitation of scores and statistics. That the visual element served as the primary focus provides an indication of how television developed its news-oriented programs around highlights.

In October 1950 ABC began offering a half-hour highlight show of a major college football game, titled *Game of the Week*, and hosted by Bill Fisher. After a two-year hiatus, ABC brought the program back in 1953, and although it retained the title, the program featured highlights of Notre Dame's football games. This had been precipitated

in part by the NCAA's decision to restrict universities from negotiating their own deals. Because no college could appear on NBC's telecasts more than once and given Notre Dame's national popularity, it is not surprising that ABC created a vehicle to show all of that university's games. The program replayed almost the entire game, excluding only inconsequential plays, with Harry Wismer and Ford Bond serving as announcers. The program lasted only one season. Several years later, in 1957 ABC offered the *All-American Football Game of the Week*, a highlight program of one major college game played the previous Saturday. It is unclear whether this program was televised using kinescopes or videotape, which had been introduced for commercial use earlier in 1957.

On Friday nights, Joe Hasel hosted *New York Giants Quarterback Huddle*, a program that was syndicated as *Pro Football Highlights*, which offered extensive highlights of the previous week's New York Giants game, as well as interviews with players and discussions of news and issues about the NFL. Although it aired neither program in 1951, DuMont brought back the Giants highlight program in 1952 and used Coach Steve Owen as host. Although the program only lasted for two seasons, the format served as the prototype for the half-hour programs that local television stations eventually offered in every NFL city and their surrounding markets. In 1957 ABC offered a half-hour highlights program of the New York Giants games, and two years later began to offer "a full-length videotape replay of the game that had been played earlier that day."<sup>127</sup> If Brooks and Marsh are accurate in their description, this marked an important development in the use of videotape technology as a means of time-shifting, which had first been used with radio broadcasts a decade earlier. In the mid-1950s the Ampex

Corporation of Redwoods City, California, had developed a visual version of its system, and its new four-head Quadruplex system was first used in American television on November 30, 1956, in Los Angeles.<sup>128</sup> The Ampex videotape recording (VTR) system being used at this time did not allow for cutting and editing, so the program would have to be aired in its entirety if, indeed, videotape was being used. Chuck Thompson and Howard Cosell provided the commentary for this 1959 videotaped program.

Cosell hosted another sports news program in the late 1950s, titled *Sports Focus*. This fifteen-minute program aired on weekdays from 7-7:15 p.m. on ABC. Cosell summarized the day's news in the sports world, also providing personal commentary on controversial issues, which became his signature contribution to sports journalism. At a time when the relationship between sports journalists and athletes was nothing if not cozy, Cosell was different, as Klatell and Marcus explain, "for reasons of style, impact and precedence. Throughout his career, he tussled with his subjects, his employers, his on-air image, and his own true self.... He was controversial, but perhaps part of this was only in contrast to the pallid docility of so many others in the business."<sup>129</sup> Although not as well known as his later work on ABC Sports, especially his *Monday Night Football* announcing, *Sports Focus* was one of the first programs in which Cosell honed the journalistic techniques with which he widened the public agenda on sports.

With both live telecasts and highlight shows using a *Game of the Week* concept, the format proved to be a viable means of attracting an audience without negatively impacting gate attendance. Another important consideration related to the highlight show format was how the professional leagues attended to their games' highlights. The NFL

once again showed that it intended to pursue its own course. In 1965 the NFL took an important step to securing control over the highlights of all its games when it began negotiations with Blair Motion Pictures, owned by Ed Sabol, who suggested to Commissioner Pete Rozelle that the league bring his company in-house as a promotional vehicle. At the NFL meetings in the spring of 1965, the owners agreed to buy Blair Motion Pictures, which had shot the previous two championship games, and renamed it NFL Films. That fall, NFL Films dispatched two cameramen to every NFL game. One camera captured the game from a press-box-wide perspective and the other from the field was used for close-ups. As Michael MacCambridge notes, “The endeavor took flight immediately, and in 1965 many CBS affiliates, along with American Express, had bought into a syndicated weekly feature, the *NFL Game of the Week*... And so began the profligate documentation that would bring about the self-mythologizing of pro football.”<sup>130</sup> That sense of mythologizing was achieved with production values that mirrored “the way Hollywood produces movies—lots of closeups, pictures of faces and hands, great music.”<sup>131</sup> John Facenda lent his distinctive baritone voice to do the voice-overs, and a media spectacle was born around professional football. In addition to syndicated features like *NFL Yearbook*, *Inside the NFL*, *NFL Week in Review*, *NFL Action* and *Great Teams/Great Men*, NFL Films created a half-hour highlight movie for each team each year. In comparison, MLB introduced its first syndicated series, *This Week in Baseball*, in 1977.<sup>132</sup>

All of these programs were ambitious television sports news programs at a time when sports fans got most of their daily sports news from the newspapers or listened to

sports news programs like the *Colgate Sports Newsreel* on the radio. In terms of delivering visual highlights of sports, these programs directly competed with the firmly established newsreels and their sports segments, ultimately hastening their demise. Once the local and network stations began offering nightly news programs, which invariably included a sports segment, most of these television programs no longer were needed, although some of the formats were brought back by local stations and later by cable stations.

### **Things Old, New and Borrowed**

The marriage between sports and television prospered thanks to formats that had been successfully employed by film and radio. On August 17-18, 1951, NBC offered television viewers re-broadcasts of major sporting events from the past. As part of its *Greatest Fights of the Century* series, it showed a 1909 fight between heavyweight champ Jack Johnson and middleweight champ Stanley Ketchel. According to a press release, “the 42-year-old film of this spectacular bout had to be carefully reprocessed to make a television showing possible.”<sup>133</sup> The next night NBC presented a re-creation of Roy Reigels’ historic wrong-way run in the 1929 Rose Bowl as part of its *Silver Jubilee on NBC* program. Sportscasters Bill Munday and Graham McNamee, who had provided the original call, re-created “complete with sound effects...his [Munday’s] exciting commentary of Reigels’ dash toward the wrong goal posts and the frenzied reaction of the Rose Bowl crowd to the classic boner.”<sup>134</sup> It is not surprising that television, a medium attempting to build an audience, utilized re-broadcasts and re-creations to fill its programming schedule. News films often re-created boxing matches, and newsreels took

even greater liberties in re-creating news events beyond the world of sports. Even today ESPN has a channel, ESPN Classic, specifically devoted to providing re-broadcasts of past sporting events and, on occasion, recent events under the title “Instant Classic.” With these, producers are able to keep sporting mythologies alive. Roland Barthes explains that mythologies are created when sporting images emerge, freeze and circulate in a very particular type of signification, a process of hide-and-seek that characterizes myth.

Barthes explains:

The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation: the form must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for its nutriment; above all, it must be able to hide there.<sup>135</sup>

As a summer replacement for the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports*, *Sports Newsreel* aired on WNBT on Friday evenings at 10 p.m. from 1950 until 1955. This half-hour program showed the week’s sport highlights, and unquestionably was the television counterpart to its *Colgate Sports Newsreel* radio program. The *Sports Newsreel* featured sporting events like the Withers Handicap at Belmont Park, the Wimbledon tennis championships, and the IC4A track meet at Franklin Field in Philadelphia. It also included “sports sidelights” or sports oddities in newsreel terms, featuring the annual medieval football game in Florence, Italy, the Morris and Essex [dog show] at Madison, New Jersey, and training camp shots of heavyweight boxers Joe Louis and Lee Savold, as well as profiles of athletes like Maureen Connolly and Florence Chadwick. Various announcers provided the call of the different events and narration where necessary.

In 1952 the program became known as the *Gillette Summer Sports Reel*. At first the program used newsreel highlights and later added its own commentary. Eventually, the show used a host and studio guests to analyze the features and filmed events. *Sports Newsreel* served as a forerunner for omnibus programs like the *CBS Sports Spectacular* (1960) and *ABC's Wide World of Sports* (1961). All of these programs featured highlights of games and events played during the week. As Boyles and Haynes note, they were “designed to combine filmed material with studio comment and interviews, with much emphasis placed on sporting personalities.”<sup>136</sup> These programs were considered important in helping the networks develop an audience of both sports lovers and the uninitiated, who, producers hoped, eventually would appreciate more specialized live sports programming.

Perhaps the key development that contributed to the way sportscasts are presented today was the decision by NBC to add pre-game and a post-game shows to its broadcasts of the 1951 college football season. Additionally, on September 22, a week before it began coverage of its slate of regional football games, NBC aired a half-hour special, *Football Kickoff, 1951*, which featured several Ivy League coaches “to tell what can be expected during the coming season.”<sup>137</sup> NBC's fifteen minute pre-game show, sponsored by General Tire & Rubber Co., was hosted by well-known broadcaster Ted Husing, who commented “on the players and strategy of the competing teams.”<sup>138</sup> In addition to previewing each Saturday's top match-ups, Husing interviewed “a leading coach or football expert.”<sup>139</sup> This use of expert opinion became a lasting characteristic of sportscasts, especially after baseball pitcher Dizzy Dean began announcing games in his

own highly personal and vernacular style. As Raymond Boyle notes, “While not strictly journalism, the rise of ‘punditry’ and ‘expert opinion’ has become an important part of the wider journalistic discourse that surrounds sports.”<sup>140</sup> More importantly, NBC’s pre-game show made use of “film clips of notable contests of last season.”<sup>141</sup> The week between games afforded enough time to select and edit film to use for these highlights. However, because television had not yet developed the technology to create action (instant) replays and slow motion, the post-game show was restricted to “an up-to-the-minute roundup of the latest scores of the day of games played across the country.”<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, in developing these programs in which the editing of highlights played such a prominent role, the networks established the key institutional practices that made the highlight form so important.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that in sports, television networks and local television stations found programming to fill broadcast schedules. Both live telecasts of sporting events and sports news and information programs figured prominently in the early weeknight prime time schedule (1946-1952) and the daytime weekend schedule from 1947 to the present. In its formative years, television had a deleterious effect on attendance at sporting events, and both the professional leagues and the NCAA struggled to find a way to use live telecasts and highlight shows to build and maintain its audience for events. It has been clearly established that the more important the sporting event, the less impact television has on attendance. However, for sports like boxing, the sheer number of telecasts impacted gate attendance. For sports like football, television helped

to change the way the sport was played, prompting rule changes that protected the quarterback and promoted more scoring.

In presenting live the accounts and descriptions of sporting events, the television networks continued using many formats and announcers from film, radio and newsreels. More significantly, television maintained the widely held belief that broadcast sports were entertainment programs, staged to attract an audience to whom sponsors and advertisers offered their products and services. This belief had lasting implications in terms of how sports journalism's institutional values and practices were formed. As the costs to broadcast rights for sporting events escalated, the teams and leagues "were immune from the usual intrusions of journalists into topics other than what took place on the playing field."<sup>143</sup> Despite this commercial imperative, television attempted to develop news and information programs that moved discussions beyond what was merely good for the game. Relatively little success was achieved with these programs. Part of the reason for the programs' relatively quick cancellations can be attributed to an audience that had come to expect all sports news to look like newsreel sports segments. Perhaps, too, television executives and sponsors feared how the audience might react to hard-hitting sports news.

In the post-war period, sports provided television with programming that was relatively inexpensive to produce. As the television industry relied more and more on variety programs to fill its prime-time schedule, live sports telecasts were relegated to the weekends. This shift from prime time to the weekends for sports programming marked the beginning of the networks' strategy to secure the largest audience for its telecasts of

sporting events. The strategy of attracting an audience primarily comprised of males for weekend telecasts of both live and news-related sports programming was greatly aided by the development of videotape. Videotape was first used to re-broadcast professional football in 1959. Two years later, ABC introduced the first slow-motion highlight during halftime of a college football game. In December 1963, CBS used instant replay during game action, and in the following year slow motion and instant replay became regular features of most major sporting broadcasts, thanks to the Ampex Corporation's videotape-recording machine, the Mark IV. Its impact on sportscasts was immediate and profound. Network and local television stations more easily incorporated highlights into their sportscasts. The highlight revolution was born.

## Notes

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<sup>4</sup> Michael A. Messner, *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 76.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Rader, *In Its Own Image: How Television Has Transformed Sports* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Walker and Bellamy, "Baseball," 10-11.

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<sup>8</sup> David A. Klatell and Norman Marcus, *Sports for Sale: Television, Money and the Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 220.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Jack Gould, "Television, in Big Strides, Advances across the Nation," *New York Times*, April 24, 1949, XX1.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Daley, "When the Ringside Becomes the Fireside," *New York Times*, March 27, 1949, SM17.

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- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>17</sup> "NBC-TV Provides Weekly Sports Reel for Stations," NBC-New York, Press Release, September 25, 1951, 1.
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- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> "First Television of Baseball Seen," *New York Times*, May 18, 1939, 29.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>24</sup> Orrin E. Dunlap Jr., "Watching a Battle," *New York Times*, June 4, 1939, X10.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Neal-Lunsford, "In the Land of Television," 60.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 59.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 61.
- <sup>38</sup> Ron Powers, *Supertube: The Rise of Television Sports* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1984), 56.
- <sup>39</sup> "TV Names Gobel Best Newcomer," *New York Times*, March 8, 1955, 33.
- <sup>40</sup> "Graziano Slugfest on WJZ Tonight," Display Ad 100, *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1946, 27.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>44</sup> Jack Gould, "The News of Radio," *New York Times*, August 25, 1947, 34.
- <sup>45</sup> Jack Gould, "Radio News," *New York Times*, March 11, 1948, 54.
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- <sup>47</sup> "Louis vs. Walcott," Display Ad 39, *New York Times*, June 23, 1948, 35.
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- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> "News of Radio," *New York Times*, June 23, 1948, 54.
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- <sup>52</sup> "No Moaning for Loser," *New York Times*, June 26, 1948, 11.
- <sup>53</sup> Neal-Lunsford, "In the Land of Television," 66.

- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 67.
- <sup>55</sup> Gerald W. Morton and George M. O'Brien, *Wrestling to Rasslin: Ancient Sport to American Spectacle* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1985), 47-49.
- <sup>56</sup> Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time TV Shows, 1946-Present* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 254.
- <sup>57</sup> Jack Gould, "The Roller Derby: Is It Television, Sport or Narcotic?" *New York Times*, June 5, 1949, X9.
- <sup>58</sup> Video show means the program was shot on film and distributed in syndication. These programs were often referred to as kinescopes.
- <sup>59</sup> "Radio and Television," *New York Times*, May 31, 1949, 40.
- <sup>60</sup> Jack Gould, "The Roller Derby: Is It Television, Sport or Narcotic?" *New York Times*, June 5, 1949, X9.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> "Roller Derby: An Industry Made by Television," *Business Week*, June 4, 1949, 22-23.
- <sup>68</sup> "Women Buy 55% of U.S. Good, Study Indicates," *Advertising Age*, January 26, 1950, 36.
- <sup>69</sup> Jack Gould, "Television, in Big Strides," XX1.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Neal-Lunsford, "In the Land of Television," 72.
- <sup>75</sup> Sidney Lohman, "Coverage of Sports," *New York Times*, April 24, 1949, XX10.
- <sup>76</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sports*, 214.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid., 214, 219.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid., 216.
- <sup>80</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 80.
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- <sup>82</sup> Curt Smith, *Voices of the Game: The First Full-Scale Overview of Baseball Broadcasting, 1921 to the Present* (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1987), 296-297.
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- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., 79.
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- <sup>86</sup> "Pro Football Seeks Dismissal of TV Suit," *New York Times*, October 30, 1951, 25.
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- <sup>89</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup> The reserve clause reserved the right of Major League Baseball team owner to do with a player's contract as he so desired. It limited the player from negotiating with other teams or selling his services to the highest bidder.
- <sup>92</sup> "Court Limits Pro Football's Control of Television to the Area of Home Games," *New York Times*, November 13, 1953, 30.
- <sup>93</sup> Arthur Daley, "Sports of the *Times*," *New York Times*, November 13, 1953, 31.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>96</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>98</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 59.
- <sup>99</sup> MacCambridge, *America's Game*, 105.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>101</sup> A film of the 1950 NFL Championship game is available from NFL Films, which notes on its web site that the film has no sound.
- <sup>102</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 83.
- <sup>103</sup> Sidney Lohman, "News of TV and Radio," *New York Times*, September 17, 1950, 119.
- <sup>104</sup> Rader, *Image*, 70.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>106</sup> "Top Football Games Will Be Telecast by NBC in Fall; More Than 50 Stations to Carry NCAA Events," NBC Television News, August 10, 1951.
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- <sup>108</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>109</sup> "'American Forum' to Debate What's Wrong with College Football, on Oct. 7," NBC News, October 2, 1951.
- <sup>110</sup> "Lindsey Nelson Appointed Assistant Sports Director For NBC," NBC-TV News, July 23, 1952.
- <sup>111</sup> "NBC's Football Staff Plans for Complete Schedule of College Games to Be Televised by Network," NBC-TV News, July 29, 1952.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>113</sup> "General Motors to Sponsor Coast-to-Coast Telecasts of College Football Games on NBC," NBC-TV News, August 25, 1952.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>115</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 224.
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- <sup>117</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>122</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>123</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>124</sup> Walter Byers, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct: Exploiting College Athletes* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 79-80.
- <sup>125</sup> Brooks and Marsh, *Directory*, 965.
- <sup>126</sup> Ibid., 1036.
- <sup>127</sup> Ibid, 365.
- <sup>128</sup> Rob Turnock, "The Arrival of Videotape."  
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- <sup>129</sup> Klatell and Marsh, *Sports*, 217.
- <sup>130</sup> MacCambridge, *America's Game*, 183.
- <sup>131</sup> Smith, *Voices*, 303.
- <sup>132</sup> Ibid., 304.
- <sup>133</sup> "Johnson-vs.-Ketchell Bout of 1909 to Be Telecast," NBC-New York, Press Release, August 10, 1951, 1.
- <sup>134</sup> "Colorful Early-Day Sportscaster, Bill Munday, Will Recall Famous Wrong-Way Rose Bowl Touchdown on 'Silver Jubilee,'" NBC-New York, News Release, August 8, 1951, 1.
- <sup>135</sup> Qtd. in Timothy W. Luke, *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 25.
- <sup>136</sup> Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes, *Power Play: Sport, the Media & Popular Culture* (Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000,) 42.
- <sup>137</sup> "'Football Kickoff, 1951,': Lou Little, Charles Caldwell, Jack Lavelle and Others to Preview Season on Special NBC-TV Program," NBC Television, WNBT New York, News Release, September 11, 1951, 1.
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- <sup>139</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>140</sup> Raymond Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Context and Issues* (London: Sage, 2006), 74.
- <sup>141</sup> "Special Pre-Game and Post-Game Football Programs To Complement NBC-TV's Gridiron Coverage," NBC-New York, NBC-TV News Release, September 10, 1951, 1.
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## **CHAPTER 5: THE AGONY OF DEFEAT AND THE ECSTASY OF COMMUNICATION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter traces the growing importance of the sportscast highlight form in television's second stage of development from 1956 through 1979, covering those years when videotape was first used in broadcasting up through the beginning of cable television. The videotaping of television shows for rebroadcast had a profound impact on how those programs were produced and viewed, which triggered a revolution that allowed for time shifting, which means "the recording of programs so that they could be broadcast live in the Eastern Time Zone and three hours later, from the kinescope, in the Pacific Time Zone."<sup>1</sup> Equipment (e.g., optical film recorder, embossing on uncoated aluminum) to record radio broadcasts had been available from almost the very beginning of broadcasting; however, it was not until the Ampex company started work on an American version of the Magnetophone tape recorder, developed in Germany in the mid-1930s, that recording technology moved toward magnetic tape. Examples of the technology were sent back to the United States during World War II, and "because the Germans had not taken out U.S. patents, the technology was up for grabs in the U.S. and other countries."<sup>2</sup> Bing Crosby's *Philco Radio Time*, which aired on ABC, is often credited as the first radio show to be played back from an edited recording in 1947, although scholars point out that there were prerecorded shows on Mutual as far back as the mid-1930s. Many other shows followed the Crosby example as the networks dropped

their restrictions on transcribed shows, and by the early 1950s, canned shows were the norm.<sup>3</sup>

Arguably, videotape had an even greater impact on television. Until its initial demonstration at the 1956 convention of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters in Chicago, a film recording, or television transcription, was made of every “live” commercial television program on a network.<sup>4</sup> All of those films, known as kinescopes, were “filmed by a specially built movie camera off the face of a picture tube while a ‘live’ program is in progress.”<sup>5</sup> The program was then shipped to stations not linked by the coaxial cable. The prevalence of kinescopes was due, in part, to the number of non-interconnected television stations in many cities, “making it impossible for the four major networks to feed programs into those cities simultaneously.”<sup>6</sup> For example, a program like *One Man’s Family* was presented live on twenty-eight stations, and then presented as a kinescope on thirty-four additional stations.<sup>7</sup> Kinescopes served other purposes—“as promotional advertising, as aids to criticism of program techniques and content, and as legal records including documentation of station operation for the records of the FCC.”<sup>8</sup>

According to an RCA Victor engineer, in May 1949 the networks were using 250,000 feet of film every week in New York City alone, and a 1951 *New York Times* article estimated that the television industry would require 550 million feet of film, “about one-fourth of Hollywood’s consumption,”<sup>9</sup> to meet its weekly demands. By 1954, the television networks were using more film on a weekly basis than all the Hollywood studios put together.<sup>10</sup> NBC and CBS were the largest distributors of film transcriptions—

the former shipping forty-four hours of programs weekly and the latter forty-two hours. Each of the networks distributed approximately one thousand film prints to stations every week, and after the films completed their rounds, the Eastman Kodak Company bought back the film “at a salvage rate of 7 cents a pound.”<sup>11</sup> The *New York Times* also noted some of the “gremlins” that plagued the distribution system of kinescope film prints. “Once a station affiliated with the A.B.C. network ran off an entire kinescope film before it discovered the show belonged to N.B.C. One network sent a station Part 1 of a certain program and Part 2 of a separate program, the station telecasting both parts as the same show.”<sup>12</sup> Given these costs and various gremlins, it was not surprising that after seeing the Ampex demonstration, CBS almost immediately ordered three videotape recorders and announced it would “eliminate its kinescope film recording process in Hollywood when the tape recorders are delivered.”<sup>13</sup>

The use of videotape also had an impact on sports coverage. As noted in the previous chapter, in 1959 a New York City television station began broadcasting full-length videotape replays of a college football game that had been played earlier in the day. However, with videotape technology, broadcasts of live sporting events could be recorded on videotape and played back during the event, for later news segments, for sports round-up programs, and for on-air program promotions.<sup>14</sup> Although slow-motion was a technique that had been introduced in sport films like the 1897 Corbett-Fitzsimmons heavyweight championship fight (e.g., the solar plexus punch), it was not until April 1962 that slow motion instant replay was used during the BBC’s coverage of the Grand National steeplechase.<sup>15</sup> Instant replay was first used in the United States

during CBS's broadcast of the Army-Navy game on December 7, 1963.

So pervasive did the use of videotape technology become that it changed not only what fans could see of a game, but it also altered the role of announcers from color commentators to analysts. Even more significantly, the technology changed television's role in relation to the sports it covered. As Neal-Lunsford explains, "Television is not just a purveyor of sport to the viewing audience, it is an active participant in the conduct of sporting events."<sup>16</sup> That participation occurs in the way that instant replay is used to confirm or overturn on-field officiating decisions for many sports (e.g., football, hockey, soccer and tennis). Equally important from a journalistic perspective, videotape changed the way sports news was packaged and delivered. Until the arrival of videotape, scores and statistics were the primary discursive elements of the sport newscast; with videotape, highlights became the focal point.

This chapter also explicates the commercial imperative that characterized television's broadcasting of sports. As already demonstrated with the newsreel industry, buying the rights to sporting events, as well as securing access to cover events, was often a contentious and expensive undertaking. However, there is no question that sports helped draw an audience to television and spur the sale of television sets, in the very same way that sports helped radio to grow. With television, the pendulum swung quickly, in part thanks to a pair of rulings. The first was a 1936 FCC ruling that stipulated that the baseball teams and not the broadcasters owned the rights to disseminate the product.<sup>17</sup> The second came to be known as the *Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961* (15 USC 1291), which allowed professional sports leagues to negotiate broadcasting rights collectively,

without fear of anti-trust legislation.<sup>18</sup> As Brad Schultz posits, this ruling “shifted power away from the sports provider toward the broadcaster, especially the networks.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, because the networks utilized sports to fill their programming schedule, stations negotiated deals with individual teams. In the early years, the stations secured the broadcast rights for many sporting events inexpensively. Once television helped popularize sport, however, the professional leagues, as well as organizations like the International Olympic Committee, came to depend on the revenues from selling network television broadcast rights to offset escalating staging costs and players’ salaries. To justify their investment, the networks translated the higher rights fees into more sophisticated production values to attract larger audiences, which, in turn, allowed them to charge sponsors more expensive advertising rates. The networks enjoyed considerable control through the 1970s until the arrival of cable and the fragmentation of the television audience.

In addition to technological, legal and economic factors that impacted sports broadcasting, a philosophical change about production was articulated by ABC’s Roone Arledge in a memo prepared during the summer of 1960. Shortly before ABC began telecasting college football on Saturday afternoons, Arledge composed a memo that Ron Powers characterized as “a feverish yet tightly reasoned burst of youthful idealism and exuberance ... [that] foretold with almost unnerving accuracy the technological and philosophical future of television sports.”<sup>20</sup> Arledge provided a summary of the memo’s major themes in bold letters mid-way through the document: “WE ARE GOING TO ADD SHOW BUSINESS TO SPORTS!”<sup>21</sup> Invoking the entertainment ethos of show

business was Arledge's way of reconfiguring the relationship between televised sports and the audience. Arledge felt that the best way to "take the viewer to the game" was to "utilize every production technique that has been learned in producing variety shows, in covering political conventions, in shooting travel and adventure series to heighten the viewer's feeling of actually sitting in the stands and participating personally"<sup>22</sup> in the experience. The memo outlined the concepts that came to characterize ABC's "up close and personal" coverage of sports. What Arledge articulated in this memo not only served as the template for ABC's live coverage of college football, the Olympics and *Monday Night Football*, but also for the omnibus program that would be "Spanning the globe to bring you the constant variety of sport: The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, the human drama of athletic competition."<sup>23</sup> That program was *ABC's Wide World of Sports*.

Lastly, this chapter explains the relationship between televised sport and viewers by considering how the audience's migration from public to private space impacted the development of production values. In the early days of television before many individual homes were equipped with sets, programs were shown in restaurants, bars and neighborhood taverns. The installation of television sets in taverns changed the dynamic of that social space. Inhabiting a space of amusement that already had regimented practices and behaviors, television changed how taverns were aligned with other working-class diversions, provoking protests from motion picture exhibitors and sport team owners.<sup>24</sup> Taverns also created a distinct market for large screen television, spurring the development of "direct view" systems for public viewing.<sup>25</sup> As a means of viewing live sporting events within a public space, the television in taverns engaged the viewer

with both the spectacle and the context of that viewing.

When the number of home television sets increased rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, the production values of sports broadcasting became more sophisticated and for the home viewer more entertaining. The entertainment ethos compromised sports journalism's presentation of live events and its coverage of those events during the sports segments of newscasts. The television networks' view of sports did not change with the growing commercialization of sports, and the complex ties between sport, media and business were largely unreported by broadcasters "who clearly viewed sport as a form of entertainment and had a vested interest in portraying sport in a particular light and context for a range of ideological and commercial reasons."<sup>26</sup>

### **A Bombshell Starts It All**

The project to develop the first videotape recorder began in 1951 at the Ampex Corporation laboratories in Redwoods City, California. In its early days, the project was a rather low priority and was suspended twice—the first time in May of 1952 and again in June of 1953—in favor of other high priority company programs. In fact, as Charles Ginsburg, one of its engineers noted, the project enjoyed no continuous status until August 1954, although "a certain amount of progress had been made on specific problems by means of some very minuscule man hour and money allotments, some authorized and some bootlegged."<sup>27</sup> Eventually, a report was drafted that included a request for time to make modifications on the machine that became the Mark I. By the end of August Ginsburg and Charles Anderson demonstrated the Mark I for an Ampex management committee, which approved authorization for the allotment of more time on

the project. The project team was expanded to include Fred Pfof, Shelby Henderson, Ray Dolby and Alex Maxey, in addition to Ginsburg and Anderson.

Although Ginsburg related that the work did not “flow from divine inspiration or a miraculous break through,”<sup>28</sup> several major innovations—including varying tape tension and redesigning the individual magnetic heads—keyed the recorder’s development. By the end of 1955, the team demonstrated their improved model, which Ginsburg described as “a rather crude looking wooden cabinet containing a metal top plate and a few electronic units, which operated in conjunction with two partially filled 19-inch standard equipment racks.”<sup>29</sup> Having achieved considerable improvements in resolution and in signal-to-noise ratio thanks to the shift from fast-moving tape to fast-moving heads, the team was instructed to package its machine more attractively and to prepare a “surprise demonstration” at the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters (NARTB) Convention in Chicago, scheduled for April 1956. That improved packaging resulted in the Mark IV (Illustration 5.1), which was successfully demonstrated to a group of thirty Ampex people in February 1956, whose response “shook the rafters of the building with shouting and hand clapping.”<sup>30</sup>

Before demonstrating the Mark IV at the NARTB Convention, Ampex invited representatives from CBS, ABC, CBC and BBC to see separately the new invention. NBC’s parent company, RCA, was in the process of developing its own videotape recorder. Bill Lodge of CBS was impressed enough to invite Ampex to give a showing at the annual CBS Affiliate’s Meeting, scheduled for the day before the opening of the NARTB Convention. In addition to the demonstrations in Chicago, Ampex decided to

stage a simultaneous demonstration of the videotape recorder for the press at its Redwood City headquarters using the Mark III model. Despite almost constant refining, on the night before the affiliates meeting when Lodge saw the pictures the engineers were getting, he declared they were not good enough—the signal-to-noise ratio was too low and the noise banding was unacceptable.<sup>31</sup> This time the team decided better tape was needed, and an emergency call was made to the chief physicist at Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing, better known as 3M. A total of ten minutes of new tape (Illustration 5.2) was produced overnight, rushed to the Minneapolis airport and surreptitiously passed to an Ampex employee on board a Chicago-bound airliner.<sup>32</sup>

With two hundred CBS network affiliate representatives gathered, Lodge delivered a speech that was taped using the Mark IV. One attendee described what happened:

... after a brief introduction from Bill, we were looking at pictures of ourselves on the monitors not only taken just seconds before, but of a quality that was hard to realize was actually electronically duplicated and not “live.” It took a few seconds before we realized the significance of what we had seen, and then, for all the world like a football crowd cheering Doak Walker or Bobby Lane trotting off the field after the winning touchdown, the entire audience rose to its feet and applauded spontaneously.<sup>33</sup>

That the audience’s reaction was compared to a cheering football crowd points to the importance sports had assumed among television broadcasters and industry representatives.

In his front-page story for the next day's *New York Times*, Val Adams reported that the introduction of the device, the only one ready for commercial use, was "bound to set off long and arduous jurisdictional battles between various motion picture and television unions."<sup>34</sup> Adams detailed the differences between the Ampex recorder and RCA's model, which had been first demonstrated in 1953, although that device used far more half-inch wide tape. Whereas the RCA recorder's nineteen-inch reel could only record a quarter-hour program, the Ampex device could record sixty-five minutes of program on its fourteen-inch reel. Despite the recorded picture's clarity, one minor distraction was noted. "Tiny white streaks shot across the screen here and there, indicating flaws in the recording."<sup>35</sup> In spite of this flaw, in a follow-up story the next day Adams reported that broadcasters and reporters who saw the demonstration "were amazed at the clarity of the tape-recorded picture."<sup>36</sup> CBS, which placed an order for three of the recorders, said that the first application "will be in the area of delayed broadcasts."<sup>37</sup> By the end of the convention, Adams reported that seventy-three recorders had been ordered, which represented gross sales of \$3,800,000.<sup>38</sup>

Although RCA presented "the first public demonstration of moving color pictures recorded on magnetic tape"<sup>39</sup> in October, the entire tape-recorded portion lasted only two minutes. By the end of November, CBS used the Ampex Mark IV Video Tape Recorder to present a delayed broadcast of *Douglas Edwards and the News* on the West Coast, marking the first time that any video tape had been broadcast.<sup>40</sup> In December, the *New York Times* reported that CBS had conducted a closed-circuit test in which *Art Linkletter's House Party* program, recorded the day before as the live show went on the

air, was fed from Hollywood to CBS headquarters in New York City. CBS also disclosed that it was planning to record the *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* program on tape and release the taped version to West Coast viewers "at the usual hour."<sup>41</sup> In the same story, Adams reported, "By coincidence, engineers and executive of the National Broadcasting Company also witnessed a private demonstration here yesterday of Ampex tape."<sup>42</sup> In January, NBC began daily telecasting of a live show, *Truth or Consequences*, from a pre-recorded magnetic tape, and in April, ABC began using the Mark IV for delayed broadcasting at the beginning of daylight savings time.<sup>43</sup>

Within a month, NBC and CBS combined to present almost twenty hours of tape recorded programming weekly, and on April 1, it was reported CBS "quietly transmitted a magnetically recorded version of 'Cinderella' to the West Coast last night, marking the first time ninety consecutive minutes of tape-recorded images have been telecast."<sup>44</sup> The *New York Times* article does not explain what was meant by "quietly transmitted," although the playing of tape-recorded feature length films more than likely brought to the fore jurisdictional issues between the motion picture and television unions. The *Times* story also noted that the technical flaw of the white flash across the screen, or drop-out, was at a minimum. Engineers had determined that the flaw causing the drop-outs was in the tape and not the recorder.

The impact of the Mark IV was felt by television network producers, who no longer had to create and distribute thousands of kinescopes, and by millions of viewers, who no longer had to watch an inferior picture of programs shown live elsewhere. As a book published by 3M explained in capital letters: "TAPED TV LOOKS LIVE,

WHEREAS FILMED TV LOOKS FILMED,” and “TAPE CAN BE PLAYED BACK IMMEDIATELY, ERASED, RE-USED, EDITED.”<sup>45</sup> The technical benefits to broadcasters were almost immediately incorporated into programming, including creating time lapses, dissolves, and special effects, as well as allowing for immediate review of performances and for flexibility in covering events and scheduling production. It was 3M’s latter point, however, which proved to have long-term implications, especially for archivists. Because video tape cost \$306 for a reel, almost three times as much as film, the only way to make it cost effective was by reusing it over and over again. What broadcasters in the 1950s considered important was not longevity and stability but durability. As Jeff Martin explained, the question was not “whether a tape could survive decades on the shelf but whether it could survive multiple passes through the recorder without an unacceptable loss of quality, a loss perceived by deterioration visible to the home viewer.”<sup>46</sup> Additionally, tape stock was often defective, so once a good tape was identified, having successfully recorded a program already, that tape would necessarily be reused, regardless of what had been previously recorded on it. Lastly, since most of the early videotape recorders were actually prototypes, “their hand-built record and playback heads were unique, and not compatible with one another—a tape recorded on one machine could only be played back on that machine.”<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, these factors contributed to the loss of a tremendous amount of early television programming.

### **The Coup d’NBC**

Even before the arrival of videotape, CBS used kinescopes to get around the NCAA-imposed restrictions of televised games during the 1951 football season. On

August 19, 1951, Val Adams reported that CBS “will film a selected college football game in its entirety on Saturday afternoons this fall and televise a one-hour condensation of the contest twenty-four hours later” and that some Sundays would offer “highlights of two games rather than one.”<sup>48</sup> Since NBC owned the rights to televise one NCAA football game per week that season, CBS was using a highlights program to get around the newly-imposed restrictions and NBC’s contractual exclusivity to televise college football live. Adams noted that CBS planned to use Red Barber and Dr. Mal Stevens to “offer ‘live’ commentary with the specially edited films.”<sup>49</sup> This technique of offering “live” commentary over an edited film had its antecedent in “live” radio broadcasts of baseball games done from Western Union transcripts. It also became commonly used for sporting events that were videotaped and then edited for television omnibus programs.

ABC used videotape to present a full-length replay of a college football game played earlier that day in 1959. The more important use of videotape for sports broadcasting, however, was its utilization for telecasting omnibus-format programs like the *CBS Sports Spectacular* and *ABC’s Wide World of Sports*. This latter program had, in part, been made possible as a result of ABC’s securing the rights to NCAA football on March 14, 1960, at New York City’s Royal Manhattan Hotel. On that day, NBC’s Tom Gallery, not recognizing any competitors, submitted his bid to the NCAA believing that no one was bidding against him. Ron Powers described what happened next.

Now came the moment of Stanton Frankle. With the dramatic flourish of a stovepipe-hat villain emerging from the draperies in a riverboat melodrama, the ABC secret agent strode toward Bushnell [television director for the NCAA]. As

heads swung toward him, Frankle—following Scherick’s orders to the finest detail—announced himself, thrust forward the ABC envelope and slapped it down. Gallery was trumped.<sup>50</sup>

That coup, master-minded by Tom Moore and Ed Scherick, whose Sports Programs, Inc. company served as the foundation upon which ABC Sports was built, was not the last time ABC pilfered from the older network. The ascendancy of ABC Sports was largely attributable to Scherick’s bringing together a team that included Chet Simmons, Roone Arledge, Chuck Howard and Jim Spence.

Having secured the rights to NCAA football, Scherick and Moore attempted to develop a low-budget, regularly scheduled weekly program for the second quarter of the broadcast schedule, from April through July, featuring videotaped sports events that people would not mind watching on a delayed basis. They believed such an omnibus program would not only satisfy the needs of their affiliates, who were exasperated by the lack of ABC sports programming, but would also attract sponsors. Faced with the daunting prospect of having almost no money to secure the rights to established events and no idea how to sell the idea for a sports program without a name, Scherick approached Arledge and instructed him to find events they could tape between April and September. In turn, Arledge told Chuck Howard, his production assistant, to develop a list of events during that time period. When Howard questioned how he was going to do that, Arledge instructed him to venture to the NBC library and look through microfilm of *New York Times* sports sections by posing as Pat Herson, who, while working at an NBC affiliate, had introduced Arledge to Scherick. Arledge knew Herson never used the

library, and Howard found everything he needed to compile his list in the NBC library.<sup>51</sup>

Scherick then sent Arledge to the annual board meeting of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) in January 1961 where he secured the rights to all AAU events for \$50,000, including track and field, gymnastics, swimming and diving, and the Soviet Union-American track meet. Getting advertisers to commit to a program still without a name proved difficult even when Scherick and Arledge promised agencies opportunities to advertise on NCAA football in the fall. Unable to secure sufficient sponsorship and facing an absolute deadline of March 31, Scherick was rescued by a not-so-unlikely hero, A. Craig Smith and the Gillette Safety Razor Company. When \$30,000 of Gillette's advertising budget that had been earmarked for the *CBS Sports Spectacular* suddenly became available after a rival shaving cream company bought an extra minute of advertising time, Gillette's agency went to Scherick with the money. On the same day, R. J. Reynolds also decided "to take a chance on the unnamed, unstaffed, unwritten program,"<sup>52</sup> and Scherick and Arledge suddenly had enough sponsorship. Finally, Chet Simmons suggested the name *Wide World of Sports*, adapted from NBC's popular program, *Wide, Wide World of Entertainment*. Once again NBC provided an integral ingredient for ABC's fledgling sports programming.

### **Parades and Charades**

Although scholars point to the *CBS Sports Spectacular* as the format that ABC adapted to suit its new program, it should be noted that the omnibus-format had been conceived by the BBC. For example, the mid-week program *Sportsview*, introduced by Peter Dimmock in 1954, was "designed to combine filmed material with studio comment

and interviews, with much emphasis placed on sporting personalities.”<sup>53</sup> In 1956 Saturday evening’s *Sports Special*, the forerunner of *Match of the Day* later launched on BBC 2 in 1964 after the introduction of videotape, was “built on the back of the BBC’s exclusive deal with the Football League for edited filmed highlights.”<sup>54</sup> Finally, *Grandstand*, introduced by David Coleman in 1958, brought together “previously disparate live outside broadcasts from sport under one umbrella programme, and was invariably structured around horseracing.”<sup>55</sup> All of these programs predate the American programs, so it is reasonable to assume American producers were at least aware of the programs. Even if American producers were not aware of them, the omnibus format resembled the newsreels in terms of the variety of sports presented.

In March 1961, Scherick sold Sports Programs, Inc., and all its properties to ABC, including *Wide World of Sports*, for \$500,000 in stock. After becoming the second largest individual stockholder at ABC and its vice-president in charge of sales, Scherick never again produced a sports program for the network he rescued from the television doldrums. In drawing up the guidelines for *Wide World of Sports*, Scherick wanted no demonstrations or exhibitions, demanding that the events be legitimately contested and resolved in the show. Although those guiding principles were followed, production values that emphasized place and personality characterized the presentation of *Wide World of Sports*.

Shot live on videotape for airing on a later Saturday, *Wide World of Sports* made its debut on April 29, 1961, with Jim McKay (McManus) serving as host and reporter. Over its twenty-week run that spring and summer, *Wide World of Sports* truly did span

the globe by going from Acapulco, Mexico; to Le Mans, France; to Nagoya, Japan; to Moscow, Russia; to cover twenty-five different events in fifteen different sports.<sup>56</sup> Also important were the technical innovations—capturing divers from the bottom of the pool as they entered the water, using the creepy-peepy hand-held camera to show Soviet and American track and field athletes joining hands as they paraded across the infield and in 1965 transmitting the Grand Prix from Le Mans via the Early Bird communications satellite.<sup>57</sup> Arguably, the element that made *Wide World of Sports* successful “sprang from the authenticity of the human characters.”<sup>58</sup> That included not only a veritable parade of athletes who became well known—Olga Korbut, Evel Knievel, Dorothy Hamill, and A. J. Foyt—but also those cliff divers, barrel jumpers, demolition car drivers and others in “unheard-of events performed by people whose names were frequently unpronounceable, let alone familiar or beloved.”<sup>59</sup> One such athlete, Yugoslavian ski jumper Vinko Bogataj, became an iconic figure who personified “the agony of defeat” in the show’s opening sequence, aired each and every week. At the show’s twentieth anniversary celebration, Bogataj was the only individual performer to receive a standing ovation, although in his own country, he was neither a hero nor well known.

Although the program was almost canceled after its first run in 1961 because of low ratings, *Wide World of Sports* telecasted over eight hundred shows and over twelve hundred hours of sports in its first twenty-five years.<sup>60</sup> The program also spawned several spin-offs, the most notable being *The American Sportsman with Curt Gowdy*. The pilot aired in May 1963 on *Wide World of Sports* with a segment that featured Gowdy and angler Joe Brooks fishing for trout on the shores of Lago General Paz near the Argentine-

Chile border. Gowdy and Brooks were paired against two Argentine fishing guides in a pseudo-competition in which “points were awarded for the most fish caught, the biggest fish, etc.”<sup>61</sup> Not only can the legitimacy of the competition be questioned, but before long all three networks were producing other spin-offs that focused more on celebrity than competition. Shows such as *Superstars*, *The Women Superstars*, *The World Superstars*, *The Superteams*, *Challenge of the Sexes*, *Celebrity Challenge of the Sexes*, *Dynamic Duos*, *US Against the World*, *The Battle of the Network Stars*, and *The First Annual [sic] Rock ‘n’ Roll Sports Classic* became the vogue of the self-absorbed 1970s. Ron Powers explains that the corruption implicit in these made-for-television sports programs lay neither in the phoniness of the competition, nor in the presence of celebrities. “It lay in the premeditated, coolly disinterested attempt to package an audience attitude along with the packaged event. This phony packaging of attitude would prove to be among the most corrosive elements in American televised sports’ progressive decline from excellence.”<sup>62</sup> That phony packaging soon extended beyond televised sports as reality programming firmly took root in prime time television in the 1990s.

Videotape and communications satellites certainly changed the way the American networks approached telecasting sporting events that originated in Europe and the Far East. The most common solution was to offer the event on tape-delay, as *Wide World of Sports* often did, or to offer same-day tape-delayed coverage, especially for World Championship and Olympic events. Time-shifting effectively solved the problem of not having to telecast an event (e.g., Australian Open tennis championships) at 3 a.m. when most Americans would not be watching. When time-shifting was used, one journalistic

issue surfaced, namely, the restriction of news of the event's outcome before the videotape was scheduled to air. While the producers of *Wide World of Sports* often counted on their audience not knowing the results of many events, the problem of other news organizations reporting the results has become more pronounced in today's nonstop news cycle.

Moreover, the practice of recording events on videotape was also used when time was not the issue, but the event's length did not fit into the program schedule. Videotape allowed producers and editors a way to edit down long events to fit into a specified time frame. The event was videotaped in its entirety with announcers providing commentary as the event unfolded. That tape then was edited to eliminate long, boring or inconsequential stretches. To create a seamless, tightly edited product, the announcers re-narrated the edited version on videotape, which Klatell and Marcus explain, greatly enhanced "their ability to anticipate events in the race, or comment on something which might happen (and usually did)."<sup>63</sup> In this way, television created the appearance of providing live and objective "descriptions and accounts," when in fact the product was stripped of its "liveness" in favor of an artificial, scripted package in which suspense, sequence and narrative were manufactured. Klatell and Marcus posit that the practice raised a question about whether this constituted "merely an intelligent utilization of television technology to enhance its audiences' enjoyment, or was it a charade which undercut the pretense of journalism and objectivity?"<sup>64</sup>

### **A-synchronicity**

The question was in part answered in the early 1960s after communication

satellites—Telstar in 1962, Syncom III in 1964 and Early Bird in 1965—were used to broadcast television across the oceans. In the *New York Times*, Jack Gould reported that the successful transmission of French and British television signals on July 11, 1962, would spur governmental agencies and the networks “to prepare for the new era in global communications” in which television would become “the dominant medium for speaking directly to the peoples of the world.”<sup>65</sup> Gould explained that the Kennedy Administration “hoped to keep the problems of international television separate from those of domestic video.”<sup>66</sup> Those domestic problems had lingered ever since FCC Chairman Newton N. Minow characterized “much of television programming as a ‘wasteland.’”<sup>67</sup> Another question that needed to be addressed, Gould noted, revolved around “the extent that commercial broadcasters can be asked to make the sacrifice of donating evening time at home in order to assure the presentation of the American position abroad.”<sup>68</sup> Broadcast executives were reportedly concerned about the costs of trans-Atlantic transmissions and “that as a practical matter Telstar programs will be limited to major news events with Television stations on both sides of the Atlantic deciding what they would carry.”<sup>69</sup>

In a separate story published on the same day, the *New York Times* reported that Japanese officials and scientists were impressed by Telstar’s success. Ichiro Matsui, an Olympic official in charge of television planning, said that the Telstar project “is a very hopeful sign for live televising of Olympic events, but there are still a number of problems to be solved.”<sup>70</sup> In August, the *Times* reported that the United States and Japan had agreed “to hold technical talks...to determine whether live telecasting of the Olympics will be possible.”<sup>71</sup> Conspicuously absent from these preliminary discussions

was any mention of network executives and to what extent they would be involved in the endeavor of international cooperation.

In January 1964, the *Times* reported that “urgent studies” were being conducted by the newly formed Communications Satellite Corporation (CSC) to see whether the next Syncom satellite, Syncom III, scheduled for a July launch, “might be able to transmit pictures sufficiently improved so that commercial broadcasts would be possible.”<sup>72</sup> Manufactured by the Hughes Aircraft Company, Syncom III was to be orbited at the synchronous altitude of 22,300 miles above the Equator, which would allow for continuous live broadcasts because the satellite would keep pace with the Earth’s west-to-east rotation (Illustration 5.3). Previously, satellites could only transmit signals while in line of sight with both coasts, usually for less than an hour. Because of the synchronous orbit, Syncom III would remain at a fixed point in range of both the Japanese and California coasts. Despite these promising developments, Richard Witkin reported NBC was planning “to fly films by jet across the Pacific. Events would go on the air here anywhere from 10 to 14 hours after they took place.”<sup>73</sup> Although plans for at least some live coverage had been “bandied about for many months,” there was still only “an outside chance that television audiences here will have extended live coverage of the Olympic Games in Tokyo this fall.”<sup>74</sup>

Prospects for live coverage of the 1964 Tokyo Games remained dim after a test was conducted in late April by representatives from NASA and NBC. The test used Syncom II, hovering near the West Coast, to relay pictures from an antenna at Fort Dix, New Jersey, to the satellite and from the satellite to a powerful receiver at Andover,

Maine, before being relayed to NBC studios by coaxial cable. The *New York Times* reported, “Officials of both organizations adjudged the pictures not of standard commercial quality but adequate for brief broadcasts of important events.”<sup>75</sup> Not surprisingly, the Japanese representative, Dr. H. Uyeda, was more enthusiastic about the quality of the reception than the U. S. representatives. Underscoring the sensitivity of the negotiations, the State Department was reported to have written to the CSC, which served as the carrier responsible for setting up a receiving station on the West Coast, “asking it, in the national interest, to look into the possibility of live TV coverage of the Olympics.”<sup>76</sup> Providing live coverage of the Olympic Games may have been deemed “in the national interest” by the State Department, but it was not of considerable interest to NBC’s executives.

When the 1964 Tokyo Games opened on October 10, 1964, NBC provided live coverage of the opening ceremony on the East Coast of the United States from 1-3 a.m. The broadcast was relayed by the Syncom III satellite, which had been launched into a synchronous orbit in July and provided pictures that Jack Gould described as extraordinary. “They were so rich in detail that they often seemed superior to pickups made under ideal lighting conditions in studios.”<sup>77</sup> Although President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk hailed the plan for live Olympic telecasts as “a stimulus to friendship between peoples,” NBC balked at the plan, explaining that long before anyone knew Syncom III would be aloft and working, “it had been necessary for NBC to arrange a schedule of Olympic broadcasts.”<sup>78</sup> That schedule included an arrangement providing exclusive coverage for four sponsors. NBC also blacked out live coverage on the West

Coast “to avoid interfering with commercial programming, including the *Tonight* show with Johnny Carson.”<sup>79</sup> NBC offered no further live telecasts of the Tokyo Games.

The incident provides ample evidence that the commercial interests of NBC were asynchronous with the desires of the State Department, the Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C., and the CSC. In a scathing review titled “When TV Lost the Olympics,” *New York Times* reporter Jack Gould lamented the recurring problem between “the exciting wonders of science and the harsh practicalities of commerce.”<sup>80</sup> Gould noted the significance of the experience—the remarkable progress of electronic transmission of signals, as well as overcoming the element of time—in terms that he admitted were idealistic. “The potential of Syncom 3 and its successors as instruments for advancing world unity and understanding was so vividly apparent that one’s imagination inevitably ran off in all directions.”<sup>81</sup> While all the organizations that had worked so tirelessly “to achieve the scientific collaboration between countries expressed disappointment,” David Sarnoff, chairman of NBC who was in Japan for the Olympics, “could not understand the adverse reaction from Washington.”<sup>82</sup> Gould scoffed at the notion that the incident could be rationalized by contractual provisions, however valid they might be. “Such is the importance of TV and the international interest in the medium that it becomes a commentary on American values when the rest of the world hears that this country makes a moment of history subordinate to the fate of a cluster of advertising spot announcements in California.”<sup>83</sup> Gould berated NBC for neglecting its trusteeship of the public airwaves and its failure to recognize that at times national interest will inconvenience commercial schedules. Calling for new and broader perspectives, Gould

concluded succinctly, "Isolationist TV is a contradiction in terms."<sup>84</sup> Despite Gould's condemnation, NBC's coverage of the 1964 Tokyo Games, comprised of tape-delayed, highly edited filmed highlights, was a harbinger of the way NBC presented the Olympics.

### **Scoring Again and Again**

In addition to tape delaying telecasts, videotape was a technology that allowed for other noteworthy uses in telecasting sports. Arguably, the most significant use of videotape in sports telecasting was the development of instant replay. As early as 1955 George Retzlaff, head of sports for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and producer of *Hockey Night in Canada*, experimentally used a "hot processor" to develop a kinescope (film) recording of a goal within thirty seconds for "almost instant" replay.<sup>85</sup> Although he used the process in a live telecast, he had not forewarned MacLaren Advertising, which expressed displeasure at not being able to promote the new feature. Additionally, the Montreal studio, one of two Canadian studios that produced *Hockey Night in Canada* each Saturday, was not equipped to produce such a replay, and the CBC had a rule that hockey productions from both centers had to look alike. Retzlaff did not use the technology again.

A year later, ABC announced that it had installed a speeded-up process for recording a live television program on film and playing it back within an hour.<sup>86</sup> Several years later, Boone Arledge related that while in Japan to secure the rights for the Japanese All-Star baseball game, he watched a samurai epic and became intrigued by a scene filmed in slow motion. After returning to the United States, he explained what he had seen to one of his engineers, Bob Trachinger, who sketched out how to produce slow-

motion effect with television. Arledge explained: “We’d tape the action, and as it replayed on an orthicon camera tube, tape it again with another camera running at half speed. Voila, we’d have slow motion.”<sup>87</sup> After considerable experimentation and refinement to eliminate the picture flickering and drop-outs (i.e., lines running through it), Arledge debuted the special effect during halftime of a college football broadcast on Thanksgiving Day 1961. The replay of a made field goal originated from a videotape machine in New York City rather than the ABC remote truck. The following weekend, Arledge’s production team again utilized the effect, showing a seventy-yard scoring run in which the player appeared to move “with dreamlike grace.... Watching, I saw the future open up before me.”<sup>88</sup> However, Arledge’s memory of instant success was only partially reliable in that ABC refused at that time to allocate a budget to develop the technique any further.

Instant replay was first used during CBS’s telecast of the Army-Navy football game on December 7, 1963, after Tony Verna, a director, solved the problem of how to rewind and replay videotape immediately after a play. Verna explained:

In those days there were no such things as footage counters or electronic readouts. It wasn’t like film. When we rewound the tape we didn’t know where we were. I finally ordered one of my technicians to coordinate a “beep” tone to the point at which the quarterback took the snap.<sup>89</sup>

Attempts to employ the technique during the early parts of the game failed until Verna and his technicians finally cued up usable footage of Army quarterback Rollie Stichweh scoring a touchdown. Verna reminded announcer Lindsey Nelson that he would have to

explain the replay. Taking his cue literally, Nelson repeated to the audience: “This is a videotape! They did not score again! They did not score again!”<sup>90</sup> During the following season, instant replay became a regular part of sports telecasts.

Instant replay’s impact on sport telecasts was significant, resulting in what Margaret Morse refers to as a representation of considerable deformation through “spatial compression and temporal elongation and repetition.”<sup>91</sup> When instant replays are shown, time is manipulated in order to dramatize and analyze action that has just occurred. Morse posits that instead of bringing perspective to the game’s overall geometry, instant replay tends to emphasize “only points of action and body contact.”<sup>92</sup> Not only is the overall geometry of the game lost in the camera’s myopic gaze, but the television screen itself becomes a canvas on which multiple, fragmented images are displayed. As Geneviève Rail explains, “Split screens and screen windows concentrate events that are diffuse in space, while highlights concentrate events that are diffuse in time. In several ways, mediated sport defies localization and adds to the effacing of history.”<sup>93</sup> This transformation of televised sport means in one sense that the images were no longer subject to the laws of linear space and uni-directional time. With slow-motion instant replay, the world of speed and violent collisions was transformed into a dance-like beauty. Morse argues that in telecasting sports, the operational aesthetic is to “bare the device, allowing the enormous capital investment in sport itself and in broadcasting technology to gleam through the ‘live’ event, exhibiting the highest production values in regularly scheduled television.”<sup>94</sup>

Those production values included a complex combination of title montages,

music, amplification of field noises, collages, superimposed graphics, rapid cuts, computer simulations, color arrangements, and shocking images. Gary Whannel suggests that in order to dissect this complex combination of visual and auditory techniques, “it is more useful to think in terms of conflicting tensions between attempts to achieve transparency and desire to build in entertainment values.”<sup>95</sup>

On the other hand, slow-motion instant replays can be treated as part of hermeneutic process of scientific discovery. They allowed for the analysis and appreciation of complicated choreography, the nuances of which were normally inaccessible to view. Instant replays also presented the commentator(s) with the opportunity to judge individual performance, evaluating it as well as setting it in statistical and biographical perspective.<sup>96</sup> Morse notes that “as his name implies, the color-man is also responsible for the spectacle aspect of the game, for conveying the enthusiasms of the crowd vocally, inviting discharge.”<sup>97</sup> This dual capacity has justifiably lent special effects innovations and the accompanying discourse an aura of scientificity.

In terms of scientificity, the camera’s ability to capture mistakes was not always welcomed at sporting events. Raymond Fielding noted that toward the end of the 1920s, sports promoters barred slow-motion cameras from sports events when “footage revealed gross errors in the judgments of umpires and referees, resulting in complaints from sports enthusiasts and gamblers.”<sup>98</sup> In 1961, at almost the same time that Arledge introduced slow-motion replays during halftime, the *New York Times* reported that a local television station would show “TV highlights of the disputed Notre-Dame-Syracuse football game last Saturday.... The sponsored half-hour will include shots of the field goal by Notre

Dame that became the point of contention for Syracuse.”<sup>99</sup> Invariably, with more and more slow-motion instant replays came more disputes related to officiating. Morse notes that the technology “allows the viewer to outguess the referee and see what ‘really’ happened.”<sup>100</sup> Morse’s analysis proved prophetic, for as camera and replay technology improved, the use of instant replay not only served to entertain the viewer, it became an active participant in the conduct of sporting events. In the case of professional and collegiate football, hockey, tennis and basketball, instant replay is now “an integral part of how the game is conducted as field officials consult with replay officials to determine whether or not certain calls should stand.”<sup>101</sup>

### **Segmentation and Routine**

Videotape and special effects techniques allowed for other uses besides in-game replays. Other notable uses of videotape occurred in the preparation of highlights for inclusion in the sports segment of newscasts and on-air promotions for both network sports events and entertainment programming. As David Rowe posits, “A single sports ‘live’ TV broadcast can be shown in ‘real time’ and endlessly afterwards, and can be cut up and packaged in myriad ways, with its soundtrack separated from its visual images so that both can be continually manipulated and reproduced.”<sup>102</sup> With the advent of videotape, the use of the sportscast highlight form was greatly facilitated.

In explicating the importance of the sportscast highlight form to convey narratives through moving images and audio commentary, it is worth considering the special placement of sports within the newscast. The positioning of sports in the social construction of news within local television news programs offered important clues about

culture and has a direct bearing on the coverage of sport, identity, race, gender and ethnicity. Stuart Hall pointed out that sports are set off, “in a world distinct from other kinds of news, self-contained and self-sufficient. It has its own internal ranking of big and small stories, its own climaxes and fillers. It has its own news order of stories.”<sup>103</sup> A comparable positioning occurs in local television news coverage wherein the sports segment is relegated to its own three- to five-minute slot after news and weather. Television news’ positioning of sports followed the pattern that was established in the newsreels. Within that positioning, sports stories were, and continue to be, reported based on traditional values related to timeliness, proximity, significance and oddity. To those traditional news values must be added the availability of videotaped material in highlight form, shot either by the television station itself, provided by the local sports teams, or acquired directly from the networks.

This positioning of sports within the televised newscast also reflected the general place of sports in our culture. Hall and other scholars described this as a well-defined enclave, “one of whose major attractions is that it has little or no relation to the rest of the news.”<sup>104</sup> Even before the advent of cable stations devoted strictly to live sports broadcasting and news programming, local television stations were able to include scores and highlights, breaking news, and previews of upcoming events. As Klatell and Marcus note, “The sheer tonnage of material available through broadcasting, combined with its immediacy and ability to beat most newspaper deadlines by hours, eventually forced a change on newspaper sports sections.”<sup>105</sup> Despite this distinct advantage over newspapers, the sports segment within television newscasts was often cut to

accommodate breaking news. As noted in the previous chapter, sports news ended up in local newscasts because sports news programs in the late 1940s and early 1950s failed to attract enough of an audience to hold a prime time slot. The sports segment remained a viable part of the newscast primarily because it provided coverage of local sports teams. Perhaps because of the narrow range of news historically covered by television stations, sports ranked at or near the bottom in most late twentieth century research polls as to why people watch local television news.<sup>106</sup> For example, in a 1998 poll conducted by the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation, the percentage of people (two percent) who watched local news because of sports matched those that said they watched because there were no other choices on television.<sup>107</sup>

### **An End Run into Congress**

Although commercial television did not begin until 1941 and was quickly curtailed by World War II, early telecasts provided ample opportunities for advertisers to hawk their wares. During early broadcasts, announcers got around the FCC restrictions against commercial sponsorship by “holding up examples of each sponsor’s product as he [Red Barber] read their advertising copy.”<sup>108</sup> Another way advertisers circumvented the restrictions stemmed from the exposure television cameras inadvertently provided when billboards along a field’s perimeter were included within the frame of action. The trade journal *Broadcasting* noted, “Sponsors of ball games will have to take over the billboards at the parks...or see other advertisers get as much benefit from telecasts as they do.”<sup>109</sup> Despite the rather limited number of television sets in use when the first FCC-approved commercial television programming began on July 1, 1941, at Ebbets Field, advertisers

like Bulova Watch Company quickly recognized the potential of sports productions as a vehicle for advertisements.

Sponsors like Gillette became identified with specific programs, which proved to be mutually beneficial. Thanks largely to its sponsorship of NBC's *Cavalcade of Sports*, which began in 1946 under that name and then became the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* in 1948, Gillette's share of the shaving products market rose from sixteen percent in the 1930s to more than sixty percent in the late 1950s.<sup>110</sup> As previously noted, rights fees and production costs in the formative years of sports broadcasting were relatively inexpensive. Sports like boxing, wrestling and roller derby, all of which became staples for early sports broadcasts, cost little to produce because they took place in a small indoor arena which provided ample lighting for the bulky and difficult to maneuver cameras that could capture the action and close-ups of the participants. Additionally, rights fees for regular season baseball and college football games were reasonably priced, ranging from \$1,000 per baseball game to \$3,000 for college football. For example, the DuMont network paid the New York Yankees \$75,000 for the rights to regular season games in 1947.<sup>111</sup> Almost a decade later, CBS purchased the rights to NFL regular season games for \$750,000, and earned more than one million dollars in advertising sales.<sup>112</sup> It did not take long for professional teams and leagues to realize that rights fees for broadcasting their games was a virtual gold mine that could be exploited. The key development occurred a decade later when league teams pooled their rights.

In 1961, the federal government challenged the new two-year \$9.3 million contract CBS had recently signed with the NFL that gave the network "the sole and

exclusive right to televise all League games.”<sup>113</sup> Under the terms of the contract, the NFL was to distribute that money equally among the fourteen teams. The government sought restoration of the situation as it existed prior to the execution of the contract, arguing that the NFL and its member clubs “combined and conspired to violate the Sherman Anti-Trust Act.”<sup>114</sup> This complaint was, in fact, the very same one the Justice Department had made when it originally filed a complaint on October 9, 1951. In that case, *United States v. National Football League, 1953*, Judge Allan K. Grim ruled that the agreement to prevent the broadcast of home games was a restraint of trade, but “such restraint was not always illegal,” holding that “the restraint in this case was reasonable in order that the league be able to ensure attendance at home games...”<sup>115</sup>

In his written opinion for *United States v. National Football League, 1961*, Judge Grim noted that the 1961 contract between CBS and the NFL marked a basic change in television policy whereby implicitly the member clubs agreed to pool their rights and sell the package of pooled television rights. Grim ruled that “by agreement, the member clubs of the League have eliminated competition among themselves in the sale of television rights to their games.”<sup>116</sup> Teams were enjoined from making any agreement separately, “having the purpose or effect of restricting the areas within which broadcasts or telecasts of games may be made.”<sup>117</sup>

Over the next several weeks, the NFL launched its appeal both in the courts and in the court of public opinion. Pete Rozelle, NFL commissioner who had negotiated the contract with CBS, predicted the decision would have a “far-reaching effect on televised sports events.”<sup>118</sup> Of particular concern for NFL owners was the issue of competitive

balance, which, they argued, was directly tied to the equal distribution of television revenues, an impossibility if each team were to negotiate its own deal. Bert Rose, owner of the NFL's newest team, the Minnesota Vikings, noted that Judge Grim's decision "would make it impossible for the team so affected to compete on equal terms with selected franchises able to sell their television rights for substantial fees. The final end would be the destruction of the balance which has made competition in the NFL so interesting for hundreds of thousands of football fans across the nation."<sup>119</sup>

On July 26, the *New York Times* reported that the NFL had submitted two petitions to Judge Grim "in an effort to proceed with TV schedule of ninety-eight games, starting Sept. 17."<sup>120</sup> The first petition asked Judge Grim for a modification of the 1953 decree to permit arrangements with a single network for the televising of its games. The second petition requested permission to go ahead with its schedule of telecasts, due to the time necessary for a modification to the 1953 decree. At the hearing, Rozelle told Judge Grim that if the NFL's contract with CBS were disallowed, "only half of the fourteen-team league will wind up with TV coverage in 1962."<sup>121</sup> Judge Grim asked Justice Department lawyers whether they believed "television contracts involving such groups as the National Collegiate Athletic Association, National Basketball Association and the American Football League (AFL) were legal."<sup>122</sup> Lawyers for the government told the judge that several of the contracts were being investigated by the anti-trust division and that they doubted their legality. Of particular interest to the NFL, of course, was the television contract signed by the AFL with ABC, granting the network "a package deal" of rights. When Judge Grim denied both of the NFL's petitions, NFL executives said that

“without package television professional football would cease to exist” and that the NFL would be unable to compete with the AFL, which had a package deal.<sup>123</sup>

Having floated such dire consequences, the NFL proceeded with its plan to provide for the same coverage as it had the preceding season whereby fans would get the road games of their home team televised. Behind the scenes, NFL executives lobbied members of Congress to have packaged contracts exempted from antitrust laws. In early fall, a bill legalizing single-network television contracts by professional sports leagues was introduced in Congress by Representative Emanuel Celler (D-N.Y.). It passed the House and Senate and was signed into law by President John F. Kennedy, September 30. By passing *The Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961* (Public Law 87-331; 75 Stat. 732), which granted antitrust immunity to any agreement among the clubs in the professional leagues—baseball, basketball, football, and hockey—the U. S. Congress countered Judge Grim’s ruling and allowed each league to pool and sell their broadcast rights to sponsored telecasts of league games. The *New York Times* noted, “Instead of taking on the court, the league made an ‘end run’ into Congress and had packaged contracts exempted from the antitrust laws.”<sup>124</sup> The bill also offered a provision protecting college football by “preventing the telecasting of professional football games on Friday night or Saturday within a seventy-five-mile radius of a college game.”<sup>125</sup>

Although many local, independent television stations opposed the law, *The Sports Broadcasting Act* was passed mainly on the merits of providing equal shares of broadcasting revenues equally among league teams, as well as protecting gate attendance, which had been the most contentious issue in the late 1940s and 1950s. In the wake of the

*Sports Broadcasting Act*, the NFL and CBS signed a four-year deal worth \$4.65 million annually. Additionally, the fees the networks paid for the national regular-season rights began a steady climb that today continues unabated. For example, the rights to telecast MLB climbed from \$2.0 million in 1962 to \$5.7 million in 1967 to \$12 million in 1977. The rights to NFL games climbed from \$6.5 million in 1965, followed by contracts that climbed to \$27.7 million and \$50.1 million annually.<sup>126</sup> Without question, pooling proved to be one of the most financially rewarding strategies the professional sports leagues have employed, and as Ira Horowitz noted, “the TV exposure has provided free advertising that has undoubtedly helped at the gate.”<sup>127</sup>

Another impact of the *Sports Broadcasting Act* was the leverage that it gave to the major sponsors. Sponsorship of network sports programming has distinct advantages despite the increased costs that accompany each new rights deal signed by the professional leagues and the networks. The networks justified the increased rights fees by selling advertising time at commensurately higher prices. National advertisers were willing to pay these prices, Horowitz noted, “when the sponsor is guaranteed a large viewing audience that will not be offered a comparable, simultaneously telecast alternative.”<sup>128</sup> Horowitz also explained that due to the absence of any competitive alternatives, producers of like products were denied the opportunities to air their promotional messages to sports audiences. Thus, for the national advertisers that tended to dominate sports sponsorships, rights pooling allowed under the *Sports Broadcasting Act* has “afforded certain sponsors unique TV advertising opportunities that, if truly exploited, could have an anticompetitive impact on the industries housing these firms.”<sup>129</sup>

Because sports programming attracts the most desirable demographic, comprised of the 18-49-year-old age group, sponsors of network sports are assumed to be reaching a captive audience that is “especially ready, willing, and able to purchase the sponsors’ products.”<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, those national advertisers that can afford sponsorship of network sports acquire an extremely cost-efficient national advertising medium. Horowitz argued, “Sports programs represent unique sponsorship opportunities for a relatively small set of firms in a relatively small set of industries.”<sup>131</sup> Those industries include firms that sell automobiles, automobile-related products, and petroleum products, firms that sell tobacco products, clothing, and toiletry articles, as well as brewers and firms that provide travel-related and financial services.<sup>132</sup> For example, in 1966, four companies—Gillette, Chrysler, R. J. Reynolds, and Falstaff Brewing—each paid \$5 million for one-quarter of NBC’s *Game of the Week* baseball coverage. This represented expenditures ranging from twelve to fifty percent of their total advertising budgets.<sup>133</sup> Of the top one hundred television sponsors, only twenty-three were among the major sponsors of network sports; conversely, the principal network television sponsors such as Proctor & Gamble and Bristol-Meyers are not heavily involved in sports sponsorships.<sup>134</sup>

### **Interdependence and Co-promotion**

The business of televised sports is to deliver a large audience to the advertisers. As such, the leagues and teams, advertisers and broadcasters share an interdependence in developing and maintaining an audience interested in watching sports. Accomplishing this requires “a carefully orchestrated blend of entertainment, promotion, journalism and

controversy”<sup>135</sup> to generate interest in the product. Controlling this blend has largely become the preserve of sports management and sports public relations specialists, who interpose themselves between journalists and team players and coaches in order to maximize return on sponsors’ investments. These tightly controlled conditions impact sports journalists in several ways, including selection of on-air announcers, the tendency to avoid criticism of contractual partners, and the practice of giving prominence to those events being broadcast by particular stations.

Until Roone Arledge stood up to NCAA executive director Walter Byers, the NCAA attempted to exert pressure on the networks in terms of which announcers did the telecasts. The NCAA was not alone in this regard. Klatell and Marcus posit that “in the majority of broadcast contracts, the selection of announcers is either shared with, or granted outright to, the rights holder.”<sup>136</sup> Not only have teams and television stations cooperated to make sure announcers refrain from undue criticism of the league, team, owner and players, but announcers have been enlisted to serve as the spokesperson in advertising campaigns featuring local companies. Some even have their own endorsement contracts with advertisers. Because advertising and sponsorship commitments are negotiated long before a sporting event is telecast, “advertisers are rightfully nervous about the future performance of a team in which they have invested their clients’ budgets.”<sup>137</sup> Not surprisingly, the interdependence has reinforced the tendency to downplay negative news and cast everything that happens during a game or season in the best possible light.

Television stations that have paid for the right to broadcast sporting events have a

vested interest in presenting the event in the best possible light. This includes the telecast of the event itself, the pre- and post-game shows that wrap around the game, and the halftime show. All of these elements became integral parts of the broadcast, not only to serve a journalistic function of bringing the accounts and descriptions to the viewer, but also to inspire the interest and adulation of the viewing public. The codification of production values for coverage of sporting events evolved over the first three decades of television; however, the main tenets were articulated by ABC's Roone Arledge shortly before ABC began its coverage of NCAA college football in 1960. Arledge wanted to bring the viewing audience to the game by making viewers familiar with the host campus, by providing impact shots of the coaches, players, cheerleaders and people in the stands, and by supplying human drama—bringing the players to the audience in up close and personal ways—i.e., “by means of pictures of them in their normal street attire.”<sup>138</sup> These “delightful adornments,” as Arledge referred to them, were complemented by using “video tape recorders to enable us to replay the decisive plays of the first half during the half-time break.”<sup>139</sup>

Thanks to videotaped highlights, halftime for the television viewers included much more than the pageantry of marching bands. In fact, halftime highlights became significantly more important in 1970 when ABC re-introduced a sports program into the prime-time flow with *Monday Night Football* (MNF). The six- to seven-minute package of the NFL's best games combined highlights into a montage that utilized both the technology of videotape and filmed footage shot by NFL Films crews the previous day. The edited film was shipped directly to the host city for MNF, and Howard Cosell

narrated the package, working from only a “bare-bones play sheet.”<sup>140</sup> Cosell unquestionably elevated what MacCambridge posits had been “the sweet and empty cadences of a generation of highlights readers.”<sup>141</sup> MacCambridge doubtlessly was referring to the commentary provided by newsreel sports announcers and the early television announcers who reported sports in local newscasts. MacCambridge explains the significance of Cosell’s work:

At a time when an easy relay of highlights was sharply limited, and when NFL Films’ highlight package *This Week in Pro Football* didn’t air until the following Saturday in most markets, the halftime highlights package became a powerful vehicle. Even in blowouts, the audience numbers stayed strong through the halftime package.<sup>142</sup>

*Monday Night Football*’s halftime show of highlights marks another important step in the evolution of the highlight form, one that placed a premium on affect in the attempt to keep the audience entertained when no on-field action was available.

With increased use of highlights to entertain the audience tuned into live telecasts, to report on completed games and events, and to promote upcoming games, a gradual re-orientation occurred in the level of sports news self-promotion among competing networks. Increasingly, both networks and local stations presented news reports of, and promotions for, those events to which they held the rights and access. The larger the event and the costlier the rights to telecast the event, the more pronounced co-promotion was utilized to maximize viewership. Klatell and Marcus argue, “The urge to build and retain audiences has strained the ethical fabric of network sports and cast grave doubts on

their integrity.”<sup>143</sup> Klatell and Marcus cite several examples to illustrate how the networks signed exclusive contracts with several boxers who had won gold medals at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. Owning the rights to telecast the fights of these boxers, the network never bothered to inform audiences that “these boxers were, in effect, employees of the telecasting network.”<sup>144</sup> Networks not only routinely used name athletes to promote events they would be telecasting, but they often employed expert commentators (e.g., Dick Button, Donald Dell) who also owned production companies for the sports which they promoted and then commented on. What strains the ethical fabric was not the use of these promoters as commentators per se, but, as Klatell and Marcus explain, “the network’s unwillingness to disclose these conflicts [of interest] during the telecasts, so that viewers could, indeed, decide whether their existence was bothersome.”<sup>145</sup>

In the two decades following the introduction of videotape and the proliferation of highlights, television sports journalism rarely investigated, critiqued or reported on the increasingly important role that sponsors and other commercial interests exerted on mediated sport presentations. Both televised event coverage and sports reporting struggled to attract and maintain an audience to deliver to advertisers. Raymond Boyle explains that under these conditions, the networks often deferred to sports stars and the organizations to which they were commercially beholden. As the commercial dimensions of the industry grew substantially in the next two decades, Boyle argues that television’s view of sports remained unchanged. “Indeed, the increasingly complex ties between sport, media and business were going largely unreported by broadcasters who clearly viewed sport as a form of entertainment and had a vested interest in portraying sport in a

particular light and context for a range of ideological and commercial reason.”<sup>146</sup>

Television’s approach was to become even more commercial in its presentation of sports.

### **The Ecstasy of Communication**

Cultivating an audience for television sports was predicated on the same rationale that had spurred the growth of radio—generating enough interest in programming so that listeners/viewers would purchase sets. On July 2, 1921, WJY broadcast the heavyweight championship fight between Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier, the French champion. More important than Dempsey’s fourth round knockout of his opponent were the behind-the-scenes ramifications in which RCA chief David Sarnoff and promoter Tex Rickard cooperated to arrange for radio sets and loudspeakers to be set up at locations throughout the eastern United States at which admission was charged to collect funds for “aid to devastated France.”<sup>147</sup> The broadcast audience was estimated at 300,000. Erik Barnouw argues, “Thus sports excitement, interest in radio, patriotism, and humanitarianism were all skillfully channeled into a formidable promotion for the age of broadcasting.”<sup>148</sup> Not only was the demand for radio sets now assured, but sports was also implicated in the seduction of consumers whereby broadcasts delivered “the commodity of audiences to advertising producers and the advertised commodities of producers to the consumer audiences.”<sup>149</sup>

Television cultivated its audience in the years following World War II within the neighborhood tavern. In 1946 only eight thousand television sets had been sold to people in the New York City area. The following year, sales of television sets increased to fourteen thousand unites, and then jumped to one hundred and seventy-two thousand sets

in 1948 as more and more stations cropped up west of the Mississippi River. By the mid-1950s over seven and one-half million television sets were in use, and some television shows were receiving higher ratings than radio's top-rated program, *Lux Radio Theatre*.<sup>150</sup> The path to home viewing of television traveled through the neighborhood tavern, evidenced by a 1947 survey that showed most viewers watched from the tavern rather than from home.<sup>151</sup> According to *Business Week*, tavern patrons preferred sports and news to other types of programs. When bar owners began to advertise that sports were available for viewing, baseball owners threatened to prohibit baseball telecasting in the future. First motion picture exhibitors and later local liquor boards considered initiatives to curtail the use of televisions in taverns. Anna McCarthy notes, "The barroom was no longer simply a place for community leisure, it had become a place of public, mass amusement and a competitor to the stadium in the market of sports spectatorship."<sup>152</sup> Bar owners quickly realized the opportunities that mediated sports programming afforded them, including raising prices, imposing drink minimums, and suspending draft beer sales in favor of more expensive bottled beer during important sports telecasts.

Televised sports also changed the social dynamic within the bar, since more often than not people came to the bar to watch television and not for the social drinking experience; these viewers also drank more slowly, tended to leave as soon as the game was over, and made regulars feel unwelcome. In 1948, the *New York Times* reported, "Thanks to the intrusion of a garrulous pictorial contraption called television, the thirsty talker has had his forum shot out from under him. As a business bait, television may offer

momentary rewards; as a curb on freedom and continuity of speech, it can only breed resentment.”<sup>153</sup> From its very beginning then, televised sports programming clearly impacted the social sphere of the bar, providing a venue for spectatorship instead of a space of interpersonal communication.

As viewing habits shifted from the social sphere to the home, audiences readily came to expect sports programming to be entertaining. Invoking participation from the viewer was largely achieved through familiarity with production values related to visual and auditory techniques and effects that elicited emotional identification with specific players and teams. However, scholars have come to view that participation as largely anti-mediatory, which, Geneviève Rail explains, “does not allow for communication. The viewer is always positioned as a passive observer or listener and has no freedom but to consume or reject the sport spectacle.”<sup>154</sup> As television production values became more sophisticated, rendering the viewer passive was largely accomplished by overwhelming the viewer with sensations that were both related and unrelated to the game or event. Camera angles, close-ups, slow motion, instant replays, game summaries, and highlights all became pieces of a production model that emphasized immediacy, pace and action.

While attempting to recoup the soaring costs of rights fees and production, the television networks emphasized entertainment values and attenuated the traditional sporting experience. Benjamin Rader has argued that television sacrificed sport’s inherent drama to the requirements of entertainment governed by a technologically driven power to magnify and distort images. By interrupting its telecast with advertisements, special reports, replays, pre-recorded interviews, statistical graphics, and the ubiquitous “stay

tuned” teasers for upcoming segments (e.g., halftime show, post-game show, other events), the narrative was undercut by fragmentation. Morse argues that the contiguity between the various and alternating images reinforced a flow of values.

While the viewer is consciously aware of the difference between sport material and ad material, at another level the contiguity between these continuous and alternating images is an index of the flow between them.... Ads do not endanger the “live” framework of sport by offering a realistic contrast, but rather reinforce an atmosphere of otherworldliness.<sup>155</sup>

Despite producing programs within a realist frame that purported to present accounts and description, sports broadcasters undercut their reportorial function by emphasizing an entertainment ethos that led the viewer to believe the telecast represented the only acceptable version of sport. Ultimately, this has compromised the sports journalists’ ability to pursue important stories. As Klatell and Marcus explain, “To the dismay of those few within broadcast sports who want to be regarded as serious journalists, their viewing audiences often seem offended when they act that way in pursuit of legitimate stories.”<sup>156</sup> Aggressive and contentious sports announcers or reporters often are vilified by an audience conditioned to sports programming that no longer confronts living in the drama of alienation, as defined by Marx, but instead leaves viewers entranced within the ecstasy of communication, as set forth by Baudrillard.<sup>157</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that television presentation of sports was impacted by two key technological innovations, videotape and satellite communications. In 1951, five

years before the advent of videotape, CBS provided a program featuring highlights with “live” commentary of college football games as a way of getting around the limited broadcast schedule of NCAA games on NBC that fall. Videotape’s impact was immediate in that it allowed stations not on the coaxial cable to present a much improved version of programs. Not only did videotape allow for easier time shifting of programs, but it also spurred the development of omnibus-format sports programs like CBS’s *Sports Spectacular* in 1960 and ABC’s *Wide World of Sports* in 1961 that were shot live and edited to fit the program’s time-slot.

Satellite technology offered television networks the means to share programming with stations in Europe and Japan. Presented with an opportunity to televise the 1964 Tokyo Olympics live from Japan, NBC offered only the Opening Ceremonies to viewers in the Eastern Time Zone and tape-delayed the telecast for the West Coast. The issue brought into focus the conflict over use of television as a means of fostering cooperation and communication in the national interest and the use of television to satisfy the commercial interests of the networks. Significantly, *New York Times* reporters like Val Adams, Jack Gould, Orrin Dunlap Jr., and Richard Witkin covered the emerging importance of television and its relationship with sports with considerable insight, offering incisive criticism.

Videotape was also used to provide instant replay during live coverage of sporting events and to facilitate the use of highlights during the sports segment of newscasts. Instant replay not only changed what viewers saw in a sports telecast, but it also eventually changed the way several sports were officiated on the field. With more effects

at their disposal, network presentations of sports and sports news became more entertaining in order to cultivate and maintain an audience to present to advertisers. The interdependency between broadcasters and advertisers resulted in less criticism of contractual partners. Sports journalists increasingly reported on those events being covered by the television station. As the commercial dimension of the sports industry became more substantial, television's view of sport did not significantly change.

The reporting of sports scores and the presentation of highlights during newscasts arguably suffered from the same sense of routine that plagued newsreel coverage of sports. Part of the problem stemmed from the very same issue that impacted live reporting of the accounts and descriptions; namely, television stations were dependent on the teams they covered for access to the games, coaches and players. Although never stated explicitly, sports journalists traditionally avoided controversy in their coverage of the local team and its players, believing that to expose wrong-doing or ineptitude would result in a loss of the broadcasting rights, sponsorship support, and access to highlights. One of the results of this relationship was that sports newscasters took the lead in focusing more on celebrities and the sporting celebrity culture. As Whannel notes, "Sport is presented largely in terms of stars and narratives: the media narrativise the events of sport, transforming them into stories with stars and characters, heroes and villains."<sup>158</sup> Highlights have the power through repetition to elevate the status of certain athletes into iconic figures. In this way, not only does the *who* often determine which highlights make the newscast, but the athlete's celebrity status also steers the newscast away from controversy (emphasis added). Not surprisingly, sports journalists have argued that

politics should be kept out of sport. However, the reality, as Rowe argues, is that “Sports journalism is addressed to a popular cultural realm which, while saturated with politics and power, is commonly apprehended as transcending or bypassing the structured conflicts of everyday life. Most sports writing colludes in this misrecognition of sport’s place in the reproduction of social inequality.”<sup>159</sup> While recognition that this collusion occupied a prominent place in sports journalism through most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has begrudgingly become accepted, sports journalists have largely continued to sidestep their responsibilities in covering issues related to gender, race and ethnicity and in doing so, perpetuate sport’s place in reproducing social inequality. As the links between sports and television outlets, both national and local, grew closer, a vested interest in promoting and presenting sport in a positive light became part of the sports journalist’s routine. Significantly, television’s refusal to change its view of sports in light of the changing cultural, economic and ideological forces mirrored the same stubborn approach the newsreels had employed. That approach, of course, doomed the newsreels.

The model used to cultivate an audience for sports on television was anti-mediatory, wherein viewers were led to believe that what was presented to them constituted the natural and universally accepted version of sport. As Rail points out, the many enhanced production techniques—music amplification of noises on the sport field, collages, superimposed graphics, rapid cuts, computer simulations, color arrangements, shocking images—are used “to capture and sustain the audience’s gaze. Mediated sport is oriented toward the consumption of images, aesthetic forms, and brilliant but empty signs.”<sup>160</sup>

That sports telecasts' enhanced production values have the capacity to distort a viewer's perception of what is being watched is evidenced in the findings of a study conducted in 1983. According to the *Miller Lite Report on American Attitude Toward Sports*, almost half of all adult Americans, and sixty-four percent of those who regularly view televised games, "feel that given the right training they could at least sometimes perform as well as the athletes in their favorite sport."<sup>161</sup> For those under thirty-five years of age, the proportions were even higher. Two in five believe they could do at least as well, if not better, than coaches and referees, despite the lack of specialized training. Rather than being drawn to sporting events by their respect for and appreciation for athletic prowess, viewers are drawn, Hughes and Coakley argue, "by the belief that anyone can play and there is nothing special about those who do, at least nothing special enough to discourage active emulation."<sup>162</sup> In other words, the very scientificity that characterizes effects like slow-motion action replays can be employed to deny differences in ability and competence, even in "activities [professional sports] where those differences are clearly observable and objectively demonstrable."<sup>163</sup> This paradoxical situation occurs as a result of mediated sport becoming a victim of its own popular appeal. Hughes and Coakley argue that as viewers become more attentive to style than substance, the criteria for measuring worth lurch toward the more sensational and less nuanced aspects of the sport. Christopher Lasch has described what happens to sports when they depend on support of a mass audience. "As spectators become less knowledgeable about games they watch, they become more sensation-minded and bloodthirsty.... What corrupts an athletic performance...is not professionalism or

competition but the presence of an unappreciative, ignorant audience and the need to divert it with sensations extrinsic to the performance.”<sup>164</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>4</sup> Val Adams, “TV Network on Film,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1951, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, “The Dawn,” 48.

<sup>9</sup> Val Adams, “TV Network on Film,” 8.

<sup>10</sup> Stewart Volpin, “The Race to Video,” *Invention and Technology*, (Fall 1994), 52.

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<sup>13</sup> Val Adams, “Television Film Men Question Scope of New Tape Recorder,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1956, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Rob Turnock, “The Arrival of Videotape.” [http://www.birth-of-tv.org/birth/assetView.do?asset=123173128\\_111778977](http://www.birth-of-tv.org/birth/assetView.do?asset=123173128_111778977).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jeff Neal-Lunsford, “Sport in the Land of Television: The Use of Sport in Network Prime-Time Schedules 1946-1950,” *Journal of Sport History*, 19.1 (Spring, 1992): 76.

<sup>17</sup> Brad Schultz, *Sports Broadcasting* (Boston: Focal Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 16.

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<sup>20</sup> Ron Powers, *Supertube: The Rise of Television Sports* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1984), 144.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>23</sup> Roone Arledge, *Roone: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 58.

<sup>24</sup> Anna McCarthy, “‘The Front Row is Reserved for Scotch Drinkers’: Early Television’s Tavern Audience,” *Cinema Journal*, 34.4 (Summer 1995): 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>26</sup> Raymond Boyle, *Sports Journalism: Context and Issues* (London: Sage, 2006), 67.

<sup>27</sup> Charles P. Ginsburg, “The Birth of Video Recording,” Paper first delivered at the 82<sup>nd</sup> Convention of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers on October 5, 1957. [http://www.labguysworld.com/VTR\\_BirthOf.htm](http://www.labguysworld.com/VTR_BirthOf.htm), 3,

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>31</sup> Martin, "The Dawn," 51.
- <sup>32</sup> Wolpin, "The Race," 52.
- <sup>33</sup> Martin, "The Dawn," 53.
- <sup>34</sup> Val Adams, "TV is Put on Tape by New Recorder," *New York Times*, April 15, 1956, 1.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Val Adams, "Television Film Men Question Scope of New Tape Recorder," *New York Times*, April 16, 1956, 51.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Jack Gould, "TV: Color Film on Tape," *New York Times*, October 24, 1956, 56.
- <sup>40</sup> Ginsburg, "The Birth," 9.
- <sup>41</sup> Val Adams, "C.B.S. Shows Off Tape-Recorded TV," *New York Times*, December 21, 1956, 43.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ginsburg, "The Birth," 9.
- <sup>44</sup> "N.B.C. Schedules Hour-Long Films," *New York Times*, April 2, 1957, 52.
- <sup>45</sup> Martin, "The Dawn," 55.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 57.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 56.
- <sup>48</sup> Val Adams, "News of TV and Radio," *New York Times*, August 19, 1951, 97.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 114.
- <sup>51</sup> Arledge, *Memoir*, 17-18.
- <sup>52</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 163.
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- <sup>58</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 169.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., 168.
- <sup>60</sup> Sugar, *The Thrill*, 129.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 128.
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- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> Jack Gould, “Delay in Televising Olympics on Coast Irritates Japanese,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1964, 1.
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- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>80</sup> Jack Gould, “When TV Lost the Olympics,” *New York Times*, October 18, 1964, X10.
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- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>89</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 127.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.
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- <sup>105</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sale*, 213.
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- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>115</sup> *United States v. National Football League et al.* 116 F. Supp. 319; 1953 U.S. Dist. Lexis 2218, 1.
- <sup>116</sup> *United States of America v. National Football League, 1961*, 1.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>118</sup> Val Adams, "TV Football Pact Voided by Court," *New York Times*, July 21, 1961, 1.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>120</sup> Richard F. Shepard, "U. S. Will Study Sports TV Pacts," *New York Times*, July 26, 1961, 63.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>122</sup> "U. S. Doubts Legality of TV Sports Pacts," *New York Times*, July 28, 1961, 45.
- <sup>123</sup> "National Football League Denied Plea to Delay Voiding TV Pact," *New York Times*, July 29, 1961, 39.
- <sup>124</sup> "N.F.L. Gains Right to Pool TV Pacts," *New York Times*, October 1, 1961, 81.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>126</sup> Ira Horowitz, "Market Entrenchment and the Sports Broadcast Act," *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 21.3 (January/February 1978): 418.
- <sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.
- <sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 423-424.
- <sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.
- <sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.
- <sup>135</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sale*, 220.
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

- <sup>137</sup> Ibid., 219.
- <sup>138</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 147.
- <sup>139</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>140</sup> MacCambridge, *Game*, 279.
- <sup>141</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>143</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sale*, 226.
- <sup>144</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>145</sup> Ibid., 229.
- <sup>146</sup> Boyle, *Journalism*, 67.
- <sup>147</sup> Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 81.
- <sup>148</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>149</sup> Timothy W. Luke, *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 43.
- <sup>150</sup> Neal-Lunsford, "In the Land," 72.
- <sup>151</sup> McCarthy, "The Front Row," 32.
- <sup>152</sup> Ibid., 37.
- <sup>153</sup> Ibid., 43.
- <sup>154</sup> Rail, "Seismography," 151.
- <sup>155</sup> Morse, "Replay," 60.
- <sup>156</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, & Contemporary Culture* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1987), 52.
- <sup>157</sup> Whannel, *Fields*, 23.
- <sup>158</sup> Rowe, *Media*, 110.
- <sup>159</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sale*, 215.
- <sup>160</sup> Robert Hughes and Jay Coakley, "Mass Society and the Commercialization of Sport," *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1.1 (March 1984): 58.
- <sup>161</sup> Ibid., 59.
- <sup>162</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>163</sup> Christopher Lasch, "The Corruption of Sports," *New York Review of Books* 24, 7: 24-30, 25.
- <sup>164</sup> Rail, "Seismography," 153.

## **CHAPTER 6: SPORTS JUNKIES, JUNK JOURNALISM AND CATHODE RAY STERILIZATION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explicates the developments related to cable television that spurred the proliferation of the sportscast highlight form. Arguably, the most important among the developments was the creation of the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) by William Rasmussen and his son Scott. Until May 27, 1978, Rasmussen served as communications director of the New England Whalers of the World Hockey Association (WHA) and executive director of Howe Enterprises. On that late May day, Rasmussen received a phone call from Colleen Howe, who informed Rasmussen that she was terminating his relationship with Howe Enterprises and that Howard Baldwin, managing general partner of the Whalers, was firing him from his position with the Whalers. As Rasmussen related in his book, *Sports Junkies Rejoice! The Birth of ESPN*, that call from Colleen Howe “sparked a series of events that no scriptwriter worth his salt would concoct.”<sup>1</sup> Over the next few weeks, Rasmussen, his son Scott, Ed Eagan and Bob Beyus hatched the idea for a cable network that forever changed the sports mediascape.

Until Rasmussen received the fortuitous phone call, he had almost no experience with the world of domestic satellite communications and very little practical experience with cable television. While satellite communication’s impact on television had been realized throughout much of the 1960s, cable television’s genesis was anything but spectacular. Started in the late 1940s in Pennsylvania by John Walson, cable television

was Walson's pragmatic response to poor reception caused by the area's geographic topography. Walson decided to put up a much higher antenna and to provide television signals to people in the mountains who bought sets from his appliance store in Mahanoy City, charging \$100 per hookup and \$2 per month.<sup>2</sup> Known for most of its first twenty-five years as Community Access Television (CATV), cable television literally took off with the launching of the RCA Americom communications satellite in December 1975. Until the launching of the RCA Americom satellite, programming was not the concern of the fledgling CATV industry; rather, reception of existing television programming was its only concern. Even after its launch, the RCA Americom satellite was greatly underutilized because there were only two earth receiving stations—one in Jackson, Mississippi, and one in Fort Pierce, Florida. As a result, in 1976 there were fewer than twelve million households receiving cable television, which represented less than twenty percent of the total number of television households in America. By 1980, the number of receiving stations exceeded three thousand and more than eighteen million households, or one quarter of all television households, were receiving cable (Illustration 6.1).<sup>3</sup>

Within five years from the day ESPN launched its programming, the television schedule was saturated with sports, fragmenting the audience, driving ratings down, and creating Friday afternoon "fire sales" for advertisers.<sup>4</sup> The result was predictable: by the mid-1980s no station, cable or broadcast, was making money telecasting sports. Competitive bidding invariably drove up the rights to major sporting events. For example, almost two years before the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games were held, cable television executives pitched the idea to representatives of the Seoul Olympics

Organizing Committee that the exclusive rights to the 1988 Seoul Olympics would be worth \$750 million and that a “pay TV package offering 19 straight days and 24 hours of Olympic activity at \$200 a household might generate as much as \$1.8 billion just from the United States.”<sup>5</sup> Even though those predictions proved to be more than twice the actual amount paid by NBC, cable television drove up the rights fees for sporting events until the market was saturated and prices decreased.

Further complicating the television landscape were several legal decisions that wreaked havoc on an already teetering empire. In 1981 after two universities challenged the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) right to control television contracts, a federal judge ruled that the NCAA could no longer negotiate television contracts with the networks for coverage of football games. Ruling that the NCAA had engaged in unlawful restraint of trade under the Sherman Antitrust Act, the judge created a veritable free-for-all in allowing all broadcasters a share of the television pie. Other decisions directly impacted the regulation of cable television. One ruling by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1980 allowed cable television systems to broadcast as many distant signals from commercial networks and local stations as they wished. That decision reversed a 1972 FCC ruling that had limited the number of distant signals that local cable systems could pick up.<sup>6</sup> Almost immediately, the NFL contested the 1980 FCC ruling because cable systems were then able to telecast several professional football games to a given city each Sunday. The NFL challenged the FCC in court and was joined in the suit by the three major professional leagues and the three broadcast networks. The 1976 Copyright Act had provided cable systems with

considerable leverage in being able to import signals into their systems. The act also fixed compensation rates, further compromising the rights holder's ability to make a profit on the distribution of the signal.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter also explores how cable television's use of the highlight form changed not only the way events were telecast, but also how it changed the stadium and arena experiences, long regarded as the last bastion from television's encroachment on the sporting spectacle. In 1982, the *New York Times* reported, "the public's fascination with replays is one reason why many arenas and stadiums have installed large scoreboards equipped with slow-motion and [instant] rerun capabilities."<sup>9</sup> Other improvements included the use of blimps in live coverage of the 1983 America's Cup race, which earned ESPN its first Emmy. That production values increasingly became a critical aspect of how viewers perceived a sportscast was evidenced by the fact that as early as 1982 communication research was cited in newspaper reports about cable television.<sup>10</sup>

The proliferation of sports programming stemmed in part from the creation of more regional sports enterprises (e.g., Sportschannel), further fragmenting the audience and dispersing advertising revenues. As coverage of sporting events became more segmented, sports audiences became more specialized in the same way as readers of magazines. This forced networks like ESPN to broaden its programming in 1983 by adding a non-sports program to its morning line-up and scheduling morning fitness shows for women.<sup>11</sup> Despite the addition of those programs, women's sports were rarely covered, and women sports journalists were underrepresented in the broadcast booths and

production studios.<sup>12</sup> Because of increased competition, both the over-the-air and cable networks offered live sports coverage at all hours of the day and manipulated playoff schedules and starting times to maximize exposure.<sup>13</sup> For example, ESPN offered live coverage of the 1980 NFL draft at 9:30 a.m. on a Sunday, and both NBC and ABC provided live coverage of select events during morning hours. Cable networks like ESPN also enjoyed the advantage of being able to show an early event live and then re-broadcast the event again later that evening and perhaps even a third or fourth time over the next day.

By the mid-1980s, increased competition and the proliferation of programming led to a drop in ratings for televised sports programming. For example, in 1983 ABC's *Monday Night Football* earned its lowest ratings for the telecasts of its sixteen games that fall. Not only did the loss of rating points hurt ABC in terms of its battle for prime time supremacy, but it also meant the network had to compensate advertisers with free commercial spots during other sports telecasts.<sup>14</sup> Cable television also wrestled with ratings, although for distinctly different reasons. For one, it took several years before cable networks reached enough homes for Nielsen to gather data. Additionally, the cable networks had to sell advertisers on the idea of reaching a target rather than a heterogeneous audience. Advertisers did not readily adopt this concept since the size of the audience remained their controlling factor. Cable networks such as MTV and ESPN employed complementary measurement strategies tailored to reflect cable's strengths.

This chapter also explicates the problems that sports journalists continued to struggle with as a result of the proliferation of live coverage and televised news

programming. In a *New York Times* article titled “Highlights Aren’t Enough,” Michael Goodwin decried the lack of depth and “the bland menu of scores, taped highlights and tame interviews”<sup>15</sup> that dominated local televised sports news. Local stations were not alone in questionable journalistic practices. In a separate article, Goodwin noted that the news served up by the broadcast networks during the news segments of their pre-game shows (e.g., CBS’s *NFL Today*) “reveal themselves better at self-promotion than journalism.”<sup>16</sup>

The proliferation of sports on television also changed the way sports journalists performed their jobs. Most notably, the presence of women journalists in the press boxes, announcing booths and locker rooms changed the dynamic of the sports-media relationship. Women sportswriters and broadcasters were subjected to intimidation and sexual harassment by players, coaches and co-workers. Only after two much-publicized lawsuits brought by women sports journalists did the leagues and networks enforce policies intended to punish blatant sexism and allow access to locker rooms to both genders. Despite the publicity related to these cases, women remained underrepresented in sports journalism broadcasting and management positions.

By the time ESPN celebrated its fifteenth year of broadcasting in 1994, the line between sports and entertainment had been blurred beyond recognition. That ESPN had successfully “invaded the broader culture beyond sports”<sup>17</sup> was evidenced in the many times *SportsCenter* was cited in popular movies and television shows like ABC’s fictionalized *Sports Night*. Having adopted the self-proclaimed mantle of “the worldwide leader in sports,” ESPN fostered a discourse that played on being hip, witty and non-

threatening while inviting the audience to “crave” its ever-expanding stream of messages, highlights, and top-ten plays. The 1990s advertising campaign, titled “This Is *SportsCenter*,” was not merely an advertisement’s tag-line; moreover, it “induced viewers to crave more ESPN,”<sup>18</sup> to indulge their addiction and to never be satisfied. The sports junkie’s loyalty was largely predicated upon an operational aesthetic in which the highlight form became the network’s *sui generis*.

### **Liftoff**

Domestic satellite communication operations began in the spring of 1974 with the launch of the Western Union Corporation’s Westar satellite. It was equipped with twenty-four transponders, each capable of receiving and transmitting one color television channel or six hundred two-way voice signals at one time, as well as “telephone calls, data transmission, communications between land point and offshore points, television shows, movies and visual presentations.”<sup>19</sup> Although the Communications Satellite Corporation (Comsat) had served as the official representative of the United States in the international satellite field throughout the 1960s, it was not until 1970 when the FCC rejected Comsat’s argument that its charter entitled it to run the domestic satellite business and adopted an “open skies” policy advocated by the Office of Telecommunications that the domestic satellite industry took shape.<sup>20</sup> The FCC adopted the stance that satellite communications should be “open to any applicant qualified and financially able to handle the expenses.”<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the monthly cost of leasing a transponder, companies wanting to utilize satellite capability also had to factor in the cost of a ground station, which, the

*New York Times* reported in a September 1975 article, “run from \$1-million to \$4-million each, depending on size.”<sup>22</sup> The cost of smaller stations sought by oil companies to facilitate communications between oil rigs and shore ranged from \$50,000 to \$100,000.<sup>23</sup> The *New York Times* also reported that the number of applications to construct earth stations had increased from fourteen to sixty-eight during the preceding year. In response to the increased demand, the FCC streamlined the regulatory procedures regarding earth stations by consolidating into one application the requirements of obtaining one permit to purchase earth-station equipment and another to construct the station.

Significantly, satellite technology and cable television was first used to transmit a boxing match. On September 30, 1975, Home Box Office (HBO) became the first television network to deliver signals via the Westar satellite when it showed the boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. In this brutal fight, the third and deciding fight between the two boxers, Ali earned a technical knockout when Frazier did not answer the bell for round fifteen. Billed as “The Thrilla in Manila,” the fight was produced by Don King and broadcast to many countries worldwide via HBO’s signal. The fight also garnered tremendous media attention, thanks in large part to Ali’s taunting of Frazier in the lead-up to the fight. In fact, Ali played up the fight’s billing in news conferences by punching a rubber gorilla meant to represent Frazier while saying, “It’s gonna be a chilla, and a killa, and a thrilla, when I get the Gorilla in Manila.”<sup>24</sup> In 1999, ESPN’s *SportsCentury* listed the fight as the fifth greatest sporting event of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>25</sup>

On December 12, 1975, the RCA Global Communications Corporation, a

subsidiary of RCA, launched the Satcom I satellite from Cape Canaveral, becoming the second domestic communications satellite to be launched. Equipped with twenty-four transponders, Satcom I was originally built to provide long distance services between Alaska and the lower forty-eight states, as well as to offer competition with Western Union's Westar satellite and one proposed by AT&T and the General Telephone and Electronics Corporation (GTE), scheduled for launch in the summer of 1976. Built at a cost of \$50 million, Satcom I had transponders available in 1978 when Al Parinello, an RCA salesman, pitched the satellite's capabilities to Scott and Bill Rasmussen in a conference room leased for \$20 from United Cable because the Rasmussens did not want anyone to see the "very low-budget offices" of what was called ESP-TV.<sup>26</sup> Parinello described the leasing rates for a transponder on Satcom I, depending on the time requested, which in 1978 RCA was offering from one occasional hour to five hours nightly. Before leaving, Parinello mentioned one rate not on the card: a pre-emptible 24-hour transponder for \$35,000 a month with an increase after twelve months over the course of a five-year lease with termination liability.<sup>27</sup>

Despite not having financing, the Rasmussens determined that it was less expensive to lease a transponder for \$35,000 a month than it would be to pay the daily fee of \$1,250 for five hours seven days a week. Within days, ESP-TV had a 24-hour transponder with no money down and no payment due until ninety days after the contract was signed.<sup>28</sup> That ended up being the last transponder RCA leased under those particular terms. When the *Wall Street Journal* published a story predicting that the cable television industry was on the threshold of considerable growth and expansion because of the

availability of satellite communications technology (i.e., Satcom I), media companies like Time, Inc., Walt Disney Co., 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox, and Warner Brothers Communication began applying for transponders.<sup>29</sup> Having beaten several media giants to the punch, ESP-TV was not only guaranteed a transponder, but did so before the fees to lease transponders increased dramatically. Despite the fact that satellite communications technology was far from perfect—Satcom II lost control and pitched position and Satcom III was lost—its impact on cable television was profound. Writing for the *New York Times*, John Noble Wilford noted, “Cable television in this country is proliferating in large part because of the revolution in satellite communications.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Loosening the Cultural Glue**

Even before ESPN went on the air for the first time on September 7, 1979, several occurrences provided indications that the network would impact sports broadcasting. In addition to leasing a transponder on RCA’s Satcom I, Rasmussen acquired \$75,000 in funding from the K. S. Sweet investment firm, enough to keep ESP-TV afloat and produce a test telecast on November 17, 1978. That telecast featured taped coverage of a University of Connecticut (UConn) men’s soccer game, followed by live coverage of a men’s basketball game. The telecast was viewed by 850,000 households across twenty-six states, including several UConn alumni who contacted athletic director John Toner “to express how happy they were to see Connecticut sports on television.”<sup>31</sup>

Building on the interest that telecast generated, Rasmussen and J. B. Doherty, representing the Sweet investment firm, pitched the idea of a sports cable channel to Stuart Evey, who was in charge of Getty Oil’s non-oil ventures. Over the course of forty-

five days, Rasmussen shuttled between Getty's headquarters in Los Angeles and NCAA headquarters in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, attempting to secure funding from Getty, which, in turn, would satisfy the NCAA enough to grant ESP-TV the rights to NCAA contests. Throughout December 1978, ESP-TV, having used up all of the K. S. Sweet investment money, was on the verge of demise. Yet, at times, fortune seemed to be smiling on them: On the day Scott Rasmussen was supposed to pay \$18,000 for a plot of land in Bristol, Connecticut, on which the cable network's facilities were to be built, money they did not have, a snowstorm forced the meeting to be rescheduled for February.<sup>32</sup> Although Rasmussen ultimately had to sell off eighty-five percent of ESP-TV to secure the \$10 million investment money from Getty, he leveraged that security into a two-year contract telecasting a plethora of NCAA events, some live and some taped.

The trajectory from statewide cable channel to national all-sports network was as improbable as it was daring. ESP-TV's original stated purpose was "to complement rather than compete with current NCAA television contractual arrangements...[to] televise nationally a minimum of five hundred (500) NCAA Division I, II, III men's and women's athletic events."<sup>33</sup> Not only were events broadcast several times to maximize exposure, but "highlight packages, commercial network action segments, and extensive NCAA and member institution promotion [were] to be an integral part of ESP-TV's effort."<sup>34</sup> That modest proposal was enough to land in May 1979, almost four months before going on the air, a \$1.38 million contract with Anheuser-Busch, which the *New York Times* noted constituted "a record in the annals of cable television."<sup>35</sup> The deal's importance cannot be overstated. ESPN made use of the relationship in an advertising

campaign over the next year. For example, one display ad states: “Bud and ESPN. It’s a natural. Anheuser-Busch is the king of TV sports advertisers. ESPN, the 24-hour total sports cable network, is the future of TV sports.”<sup>36</sup> The ad mentions several other advertisers, including American Express, Michelin, Noxzema, Magnavox, and Hilton. That the hotel chain became another major advertiser of ESPN is understandable given Evey’s vision that ESPN would become what he called a “‘lift network,’ part of a basic package that cable operators could use to...entice viewers with the pay-movie channels like HBO and Cinemax, where the real profits were.”<sup>37</sup> Several weeks after the cable channel went on the air, its list of advertisers also included “such impressive and sophisticated promoters as Pontiac, Hertz, *The Wall Street Journal*, Sony and Getty.”<sup>38</sup>

On July 13, 1979, ESP-TV became ESPN, and five days later, Evey signed Chester R. Simmons, former president of NBC Sports, to take over the new cable network. Almost immediately, Simmons began to enlist the help of many NBC colleagues. Once again, a struggling television entity pilfered the older network’s treasure trove of talent, signing producers such as Scotty Connal and announcers such as Jim Simpson, who provided much-needed sports broadcasting experience both in front of and behind the cameras. In a *New York Times* article, Simmons added salt to the older network’s wound, noting that while the three broadcast networks combined to provide more than twelve hundred hours of sports programming, ESPN, “when it reached maximum programming, would have 8,700 hours...and the seven mobile units now under construction would make ESPN the best equipped network for covering sports.”<sup>39</sup> To punctuate the new cable network’s brashness, Simmons could have mentioned that the

center of the sports cable television landscape had moved from New York City to Bristol, Connecticut, a fact that was noted in a *Times* article soon after ESPN began broadcasting on September 7, 1979.<sup>40</sup>

When Lee Leonard said the very first words uttered from the ESPN studio, “If you love sports...if you REALLY love sports, you’ll think you’ve died and gone to sports heaven...”<sup>41</sup> it is doubtful that many viewers residing in the sixteen million households equipped to receive a cable signal took Leonard’s words literally. In part, that was attributable to the sports programming ESPN provided during the first year—rugby, hurling from Ireland, Australian-rules football, karate, table tennis, as well as NCAA football, basketball, soccer, and hockey games—constituted events that the three networks had no interest in broadcasting. Although a Nielsen study of subscribers to four hundred television systems that carried ESPN showed subscribers tended to be more upscale than network television viewers, both Simmons and Rasmussen described viewers of ESPN in separate *New York Times* articles as “sports junkies,” a description Red Smith emphasized in a column about cable television that was given the headline “Cable TV for Sports Junkies.” After describing a typical weekend of sports programming on ESPN, Smith created a brief exchange in which one man reacted to hearing the schedule: “That is the ghastliest threat to the social fabric of America since the invention of the automobile.” The other responded: “No, it is ESPN, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network for sports junkies who have to have a fix everytime they touch the dial.”<sup>42</sup>

In Smith’s column and in other articles, Simmons explained that ESPN did indeed

attract the sports junkies, as well as insomniacs and workers coming off the night shift.

Simmons explained the phenomenon by using the concept of narrow-casting:

Twenty-four hours of sports sounds like a lot, but not in the concept we call narrow-casting. Cable subscribers have about 18 channels to choose from. There are 24 hours of news, 24 hours of religion, 24 hours of movies, etcetera. We offer 24 hours of sports, so we can repeat a lot of shows in different time slots for people who can't tune in the first time. In no way do we expect anyone to watch all 24 hours, though a few may try at first.<sup>43</sup>

By February 1980, television critics were describing cable as “an electronic magazine rack” with channels devoted to almost every interest, as well as programming “specifically for children, the elderly, blacks and Hispanics.”<sup>44</sup> People’s willingness to pay for what they wanted to watch on television marked “a monumental cultural development”<sup>45</sup> that was as important as the technological revolution. This was evidenced by the fact that consumers were not so much interested in the technology as what programming it provided. In this way, Les Brown noted, “cable is not only breaking up the mass market of television but also is loosening the cultural glue that has bound the country for three decades with the three-network system of commercial television.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Challenging Big Daddy**

If the cultural glue was loosening, cable was also loosening viewers’ purse strings, as well as those of major advertisers and, more importantly, sports organizations and professional leagues. *Television Digest* estimated that in 1979 cable revenues reached \$1.87 billion, and predicted that at the current rate of growth, revenues would exceed \$6

billion by the mid-1980s with a third of the revenues generated by pay-cable.<sup>47</sup> Because the broadcast networks were barred under FCC rules from owning cable systems, they were forced to track cable's growth from a distance, knowing that it was only a matter of time before cable impacted their control. In a *New York Times* article, Kevin O'Malley, the vice president of program planning for CBS, noted that cable, even though it was only available in thirty percent of the country, was already competing for showcase sporting events. He said, "When cable gets to about 50 percent of the country, they will become more competitive. It'll be fascinating, because then Madison Avenue will call the tune."<sup>48</sup>

If, as the *New York Times* opined, television had become "America's Big Daddy of sports during the 1970s...building its own games and names...and tantalizing viewers with sophisticated space-age toys like mini-cameras and videotape machines,"<sup>49</sup> then the 1980s marked the beginning of the decentralization of television broadcasting dominated by the networks for three decades. ESPN made inroads into that domination with a two-pronged strategy. The first strategy was to secure live events that the networks did not telecast. For example, in March 1980 ESPN aired over four hundred hours of NCAA men's college basketball or related programming, especially the early rounds of the tournament, which were completely ignored by the networks.<sup>50</sup> In April 1980, ESPN began a weekly boxing series to which a Saturday night series was added in the fall of 1982 to counter a college football game-of-the-week deal signed by Turner Broadcasting System (TBS). Beginning in July 1982, ESPN began airing its 16-game schedule of the Canadian Football League (CFL), which, the *Times* reported, drew no official comment from the NFL "over what possible long-term effects would follow a successful TV

show.”<sup>51</sup> Also that summer, ESPN and The Spanish International Network between them offered every game of the World Cup for home television, the first time in Cup’s history the entire tournament was shown in America.<sup>52</sup>

The second prong of its strategy was to increase news programming with its first highlight show, *Sports Recap*, eventually dropped in favor of *SportsCenter*, with which ESPN began its weeknight broadcast schedule. The most significant hurdle faced by the show’s producer was the dearth of highlights, which, Freeman notes, “underscored the gaps in ESPN’s coverage.”<sup>53</sup> Seeking permission to use network highlights, Simmons approached network contacts. NBC, tired of losing employees to the cable network, offered its highlights with the condition that Simmons stop hiring away NBC employees.<sup>54</sup> ABC also agreed to share its highlights, believing that the cable station posed no serious threat to its sports programming. When CBS balked at his numerous requests, Simmons decided to take them without permission. Despite complaints, Simmons continued using CBS highlights until the network relented, “realizing that fighting Simmons was a waste of time, as taking legal action would be.”<sup>55</sup>

In addition to securing network highlights to complement its own footage, ESPN borrowed from reliable sources like NFL Films, with which it signed an agreement in the fall of 1980 at a significantly lower rate than its owner, Steve Sabol, normally charged.<sup>56</sup> Sabol hosted the program himself during early morning hours; however, the program became such a viewer favorite that the show’s producer requested use of Sabol’s films during its Monday night football show, *NFL Prime Monday*, which preceded ABC’s telecast.<sup>57</sup> The strategy proved fruitful, and viewers migrated from the cable show to the

network telecast. That would be but the first of many ESPN news programs related to the NFL, which came to include *NFL Gameday*, *NFL Matchup*, *NFL Live*, *Sunday NFL Countdown*, and *NFL Primetime*. In fact, the very first NFL gem ESPN secured was the rights to the NFL Draft, which it broadcast for the first time on April 29, 1980, after convincing the NFL to shift the date from a Tuesday to a Sunday. ESPN advertised the event, emphasizing that the draft was “LIVE ONLY ON ESPN.”<sup>58</sup> Although few could have imagined that the show would attract much of an audience, over time it became one of the events ESPN became known for covering.

While the decision to secure the rights to the NFL Draft was consciously taken, coverage of other events was prompted by viewers. For example, in September 1983, viewers requested nonstop coverage of the seventh and deciding race of the America’s Cup being contested by *Australia II* and *Liberty*. As Peter Alfano noted in his review of the overall poor coverage by both the networks and cable channels, ESPN had passed up the opportunity to acquire exclusive rights to the races, believing “that sailing was too specialized to appeal to a sport-oriented audience.”<sup>59</sup> It was only when the Australian challengers tied the series at 3-3 after having fallen behind by deficits of 2-0 and then 3-1 “that the network sports divisions scrambled to catch up to what had been an intriguing and controversial story all along.”<sup>60</sup> Alfano decried the networks’ coverage, which treated the race “as lightly as some of the winds blowing off Newport, R.I.,”<sup>67</sup> relegating race results to the morning news shows (i.e., *Today*, *Good Morning America*). While admitting that it was unrealistic to believe that the networks would devote five to six hours televising the races live, Alfano argued that “a nightly 15-minute or half-hour recap

following the 11 P.M. news would have been nice. And more elaborate coverage on the weekend anthology shows [*Wide World of Sports, Sports Spectacular*] would not have been asking too much.”<sup>61</sup> Although ABC’s Jim McKay provided a brief segment during *Wide World of Sports*, he offered nothing more than setting and atmosphere since light winds had forced the race to be rescheduled until the following Monday.

Significantly, if only by default, ESPN provided the most complete coverage. Having planned to provide occasional updates beginning at noon, ESPN made the decision “to stay on the air with live coverage of the race, once it had started.”<sup>62</sup> ESPN aired WJAR’s feed, which included aerial views that Alfano described as breathtaking. He noted, “The America’s Cup might not make for action-packed viewing, but it is one of the more esthetically pleasing sports events. And because this was the deciding race, all the elements of excitement, drama and urgency were present. If nothing else, it was different and more interesting than two-minute drills.”<sup>63</sup> In responding to the demands of its viewers, ESPN learned an important lesson about broadcasting special events. The next time ESPN had the opportunity to secure the exclusive rights to the America’s Cup in 1987, it would not need prompting from viewers. In fact, it showed Big Daddy how to produce an esoteric event like the America’s Cup into a full-fledged sport media spectacle.

### **End of a Classic Cartel**

Even though long-range optimism for cable’s prospects remained high—buoyed by promising numbers that showed the industry in the final months of 1982 was adding one thousand jobs, two-hundred and fifty thousand subscribers and one satellite service

monthly<sup>64</sup>—warning signs that all was not well with sports programming were becoming clearly visible. The most telling development occurred in September 1982 when U. S. District Judge Juan Burciaga struck down the NCAA’s college football television contracts with CBS and ABC after two college football powers, the University of Georgia and the University of Oklahoma, brought an antitrust suit in 1981, contending that the NCAA, acting like a classic cartel, “has unreasonably restrained trade in the televising of college football games.”<sup>65</sup> Judge Burciaga’s decision was upheld by the United States Court of Appeals for the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit in May 1983. The NCAA and the networks were able to operate under the terms of the old contract for the 1983 college football season only after U. S. Supreme Court Justice Byron R. White, a former University of Colorado football standout, issued in July a stay of the appeals court’s decision so that the U. S. Supreme Court could consider the case.

The following year, in a 7-2 decision, the U. S. Supreme Court upheld the rulings of Judge Burciaga and the Court of Appeals that the NCAA’s power to negotiate television contracts and to set limitations on the number of appearances a school’s team could make constituted an unreasonable restraint of trade that violated Section I of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Associate Justice John Paul Stevens wrote the majority opinion, in which he agreed with the District Court’s findings that “competition in the relevant market had been restrained in three ways.”<sup>66</sup> In addition to fixing the price for particular telecasts, the NCAA’s exclusive network contracts “were tantamount to a group boycott of all other potential broadcasters...and placed an artificial limit on the production of televised college football.”<sup>67</sup> These anticompetitive practices resulted in individual

competitors losing their ability to compete in the marketplace. Justice Stevens argued, “Price is higher and output lower than they would otherwise be, and both are unresponsive to consumer preference. The latter point is perhaps the most significant.”<sup>68</sup>

The Court rejected the NCAA’s arguments that it had no market power, “no ability to alter the interaction of supply and demand in the market.”<sup>69</sup> It also rejected the argument the NCAA had used since 1950 that its television plan was necessary to protect live attendance, holding that argument “is not based on a desire to maintain the integrity of college football as a distinct and attractive produce, but rather on a fear that the product will not prove sufficiently attractive to draw live attendance when faced with competition from televised games.”<sup>70</sup> In effect, the NCAA’s television plan protected ticket sales by limiting output, “just as any monopolist increases revenues by reducing output.”<sup>71</sup> While noting that the NCAA needed ample latitude “in the maintenance of a revered tradition of amateurism in college sports,” Justice Stephens concluded that “rules that restrict output are hardly consistent with this role.”<sup>72</sup>

Issued on the day Division I schools were meeting in Chicago to consider intercollegiate legislation, the ruling sent the members in search of a direction to follow for the coming football season, scheduled to begin within two months. Until the NCAA received clearance as to what role it could play from the federal court in Oklahoma City where the antitrust suit had originated, schools were reportedly “eager to avert a circumstance in which each would negotiate separately with over-the-air and cable networks.”<sup>73</sup> Coincidentally, at the very same meeting, representatives from the one hundred and five schools in Division I-A rejected a proposal for a post-season

championship game, despite the fact that it was, and remains to this day, the only sport in the NCAA that does not have a national championship game, preferring to award what was often called by broadcasters its “mythical national championship” to whatever school “finishes atop the season-ending polls compiled by the news agencies.”<sup>74</sup>

The ruling’s impact on the networks was mixed. On the one hand, as Peter Kaplan reported in the *New York Times*, the Supreme Court’s affirmation of Judge Burciaga’s decision to strip the NCAA of its power to negotiate contracts for college football telecasts “will most likely save the big networks money and give them better games to broadcast.”<sup>75</sup> Removing the limitation on the number of games that could be televised greatly expanded the number of games available, driving down the price for rights fees. For example, shortly before the 1984 season began, the *Times* reported that CBS was paying \$10 million for fourteen games involving the Big Ten and Pac-10 conferences over ten Saturdays. ABC offered \$12 million for a package of twenty College Football Association (CFA) games over thirteen Saturdays while ESPN paid \$9.2 million to televise fifteen CFA games, primarily on Saturday nights.<sup>76</sup> That meant the price for nationally televised games ranged between \$525,000 and \$575,000 while the maximum price for a regional telecast was \$400,000.<sup>77</sup> The lower price was directly attributable to the coverage by “two major networks, two national cable networks [TBS and ESPN], five syndicators, countless local cable or pay-per-view systems and even the Public Broadcasting Service.”<sup>78</sup> With almost two hundred games being broadcast in 1984, a number that more than doubled the previous year’s total of eighty-nine, coverage of college football was certainly lurching toward saturation.

On the other hand, the glut of games invariably produced lower television ratings, especially for the broadcast networks. While the ratings for the 1982 and 1983 seasons averaged 10.7 and 9.7 respectively, after four games of the 1984 season, the two networks were averaging only 6.9.<sup>79</sup> Complicating matters was a stipulation in the contracts signed by ABC and ESPN with the CFA, which gave ABC the 3:30 p.m. start time and ESPN the 7:30 p.m. start time for their games, meaning the CFA's 63-member schools were prohibited from televising their games on regional cable or syndicated networks during these times.<sup>80</sup> In games involving CFA schools and Big Ten or Pac-10 teams hosted by teams from the two conferences, ABC and ESPN attempted to withhold consent to have the games televised by CBS; however, two teams from the Pac-10, UCLA and USC, filed suit challenging the stipulation that CFA schools were prohibited from allowing telecasts of any games against non-CFA opponents.<sup>81</sup> Federal District Judge Richard Gadbois Jr. ruled in favor of the Pac-10 teams, holding that they would be harmed by the loss of television revenue if the CFA rule were allowed to stand. He noted, "By issuance of this order, ABC and ESPN are not measurably harmed, other than by some perceived diminution of their ability quickly to dispatch CBS from the market for nationwide college football telecasts."<sup>82</sup> Judge Gadbois's ruling clearly admonished the attempt by ABC and ESPN to prevent non-CFA schools from acquiring rights fees for any games involving CFA schools. Perhaps ABC's director of college football media relations, Donn Bernstein, described the situation best when he asked, "Is it healthy to have 7 ratings? Is it healthy to have a million games on TV each weekend? No, it's not healthy for anyone, except for the college football junkie at home."<sup>83</sup>

## **Cathode Ray Sterilization**

College football was not the only sport to saturate the television market in the 1980s. Having endured a brief challenge from Gary Davidson's World Football League (WFL) in the mid-1970s, the NFL faced another challenge from the upstart United States Football League (USFL), which in May 1982 entered into a two-year, \$18 million contract with ABC calling for the network to televise a game on Sunday afternoons when the league began play in March 1983. A month later the USFL hired Chet Simmons away from ESPN to become its first commissioner and days later announced that it had signed a contract with ESPN and its almost 18 million subscribers to broadcast two games a week during prime time.

The USFL's hope for football in the spring was buoyed by a survey of six hundred professional football fans conducted in 1980 by Frank N. Magid Associates in which seventy-six percent of the respondents replied favorably to the question of whether or not they would watch televised games of a top-quality professional league during the March-July period.<sup>84</sup> Comparisons with the AFL, which had begun in 1960 with eight teams and earned yearly average ratings of 5.8, 6.3 and 7.3 in its first three years on ABC, provided optimism for the USFL. As Neil Amdur noted, "The unknown resource attached to a network television agreement, aside from obvious weekly exposure, is promotional value."<sup>85</sup> Amdur explained that in ABC the new league had Boone Arledge, "and no network official has had more success in the packaging and promotion of sports than Boone Arledge."<sup>86</sup> The league was also banking on the idea that the second quarter of the year was traditionally very good for male demographics, thanks to bad weather and

the fact that baseball did not attract considerable interest until after the All-Star break. Similarly, neither professional hockey nor professional basketball earned great ratings on network television until their play-offs.<sup>87</sup>

That the USFL's success was predicated on coverage by ABC and ESPN, of which ABC had purchased a ten percent share in August of 1982 for \$20 million with an option to purchase another thirty-nine percent at \$2.2 million per point, was cleverly articulated in January 1983 by George Vecsey in a [Sports of the *Times*] column titled "All Leagues Look Alike." Reacting to the USFL's first official public event, its draft of college players, Vecsey explained the USFL men conducting "the cattle auction by telephone" looked exactly like their counterparts in the NFL except for one small detail: draft selections were written in a calligraphy "more suited for health-food restaurants than for the manly meat-and-potatoes sport of football."<sup>88</sup> Explaining that such visual trappings were essential to the new league, Vecsey concluded, "Marshall McLuhan, the late prophet of the television age, might very well be the patron saint of the USFL."<sup>89</sup> Vecsey reserved judgment on the new league's fate, noting that the USFL's market research had been taken before the NFL's fifty-seven-day strike in the fall of 1982 resulted in a spike in the number of unused tickets from 3.7 percent and 5.7 percent before the strike to fourteen percent after the strike.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, after the strike television ratings plummeted.

Simmons was quoted as saying that baseball had recovered from its strike and then set attendance records, and, more importantly, that the demographics were ripe for spring football. However, Vecsey lampooned this idea:

What Simmons is saying is that in front of the television set, there are no seasons anymore, no budding of the lilacs, no crickets buzzing on an August night, no autumn leaves, no crunch of footsteps in the first snow. When the cathode rays are sterilizing your brain pan, it is a perpetual southern California of the soul.<sup>91</sup>

Vecsey's assertion that television sterilization was capable of superseding the seasonal (dis)order of American sports was doubtlessly a witty, veiled sarcasm intended to show how truly saturated the television sports landscape had become.

### **Packaged Reality**

Not only did the emergence of sports on cable television engender a plethora of social, legal and economic changes, but the cable networks also altered the texture, perceptions and images of sports for both stadium fans and television viewers. Decreased advertising revenues and slumping ratings precipitated by a saturated market did not forestall the advance of ever-increasing "refinements in editing, replays from a variety of camera positions, slick graphics and lighter, more mobile cameras."<sup>92</sup> In late 1982, Neil Amdur of the *New York Times*, cited Dr. Jennings Bryant of the University of Evansville in Indiana, who described what the viewer actually sees on television as "packaged reality." Bryant defined package reality as "not the reality of the stadium or arena. It's what the producer and director, by their shot selection and pictures and the addition of commentary, create."<sup>93</sup> Not only did television's technical innovations result in changes at arenas and stadiums with the addition of scoreboards equipped to show slow-motion instant replays, but television also fostered other changes including "more attractive, tighter-fitting uniforms, the liberalizing of rules in many sports and the focusing on Olga

Korbut and Nadia Comaneci in Olympic gymnastics, a relatively obscure sport, as further examples of television's ability to rearrange reality."<sup>94</sup>

That television had become totally enamored with technology was evidenced in such innovations as use of blimps for overhead shots, installation of cameras in stock cars, and the use of wireless microphones on football and basketball coaches, runners and outriders at thoroughbred race tracks.<sup>95</sup> Further, in the 1984 Super Bowl, CBS provided over 100 replays in little more than one quarter of play.<sup>96</sup> The following year, the USFL introduced the use of a television instant-replay system to review on-field decisions by officials during a pre-season game. While instant replay was being used "to eliminate the second-guessing that surrounds crucial calls in many games,"<sup>97</sup> it was also being used to entertain viewers. In his column, Amdur cited Dr. John Ledingham, an associate professor at the University of Houston, who said, "For many people, watching Dr. J [Julius Erving of the Philadelphia 76ers] flying through the air for a dunk is not as exciting as watching the rerun of the dunk. And the athletes have caught on to the theory that they're show-business people."<sup>98</sup>

Packaged reality also depended on an increase in dramatic rather than descriptive commentary. Bryant's seminal study of the impact commentary can have on viewers' perception of a sporting event was cited in Amdur's column. In Bryant's study, one hundred college students listened to dubbed commentary of a routine tennis match between two veteran players. One third of the group listened to commentary in which the players were reported to be good friends; one third heard commentary describing the players as bitter enemies, and the last group heard commentary in which the relationship

was not specified. The study's results suggested that "viewers who perceived the competitors as hostile found the telecast more interesting, exciting and enjoyable."<sup>99</sup> Integrating more drama into a telecast, then, was shown to elicit more involvement from viewers. This resulted in a trend toward more commentary emphasizing player-versus-player conflict. Amdur's column included one of Dr. Bryant's conclusions about the difference between the stadium experience and the television experience that remained for many years unchallenged: "Viewers expectations of sporting events have changed because of television. Because TV has to rely on dramatic elements that often have to do with high risk, giving all and violence, the event on television is different from what is unfolding on the field."<sup>100</sup>

Other technological innovations included the use of a computer software program to count punches thrown and those landed by boxing contestants. HBO Fightstat, a program developed by Sports Information Data Base of Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, was first used in February 1985 during the televised rematch between Livingstone Bramble and Ray Mancini. The software program required that two counters, one for each fighter, feed the statistics into a computer that was available to HBO's boxing analysts, one of whom, Larry Merchant, told the *New York Times*' Michael Katz that he was looking forward to using it. "You can't break down a fight punch by punch any more than you can an opera note by note or a painting stroke by stroke. But I'll be looking forward to having some fun using it in a discreet-enough way so that it supplements what our eyes tell us," Merchant said.<sup>101</sup> The pay-channel had a distinct advantage for using the Fightstat information in not breaking for commercial spots between rounds. HBO's

producer for the fight, Ross Greenburg, explained that he would not use the computer's data during rounds, noting, "Those three minutes are intense enough. And in the wrong hands, it can be the stupidest statistics in the world."<sup>102</sup>

When the cable and broadcast networks attempted to enhance their live boxing coverage by keeping viewers apprised of the judges' official scoring for a fight in progress, the innovation was "doomed by ostrich-like commissions that were worried about the effect on 'gaming'—whatever that means—and partly as protection for the judges from second-guessers on television."<sup>103</sup> Katz's sarcasm is well-employed here in that the term "gaming" was doubtlessly used as a euphemism for gambling, although it is unclear why knowing exactly how each judge had scored a round could have an effect on "gaming" interests while a fight was in progress. Each judge's round-by-round scoring was made available to the press following a fight, and second-guessing by reporters, both in print and broadcasting, had always been a part of boxing coverage. Katz quoted Bob Lee, the acting commissioner of New Jersey's State Athletic Commission, as saying, "Not knowing who's winning, that's part of the suspense."<sup>104</sup> Katz decried such reasoning, explaining that the only problem with open scoring occurred "when the arena crowd can immediately second-guess the judges. But when only the television audience is involved, there is no reason [not to use it]."<sup>105</sup> In not providing television announcers the judges' scores immediately after a round, the state boxing commissions' desire to protect judges only obfuscated what should have been a transparent process.

### **Junk Journalism**

Even though Katz lamented the failure of state boxing commissions to embrace

open scoring, he took exception over what he considered a cheap shot directed at boxing by ESPN *SportsCenter* anchor Tom Mees. In reporting on a nationally televised fight between Meldrick Taylor and a fighter named Roberto Medina, who was, in actuality, John E. Garcia, an escaped convict from a Colorado state penitentiary, Mees said, among other things, “Only in boxing.”<sup>106</sup> Noting that boxing was “such an easy target for the Tom Meeses of broadcasting,” Katz sarcastically decried the cryptic remark as “the kind of in-depth commentary one expects from television sports news.... There are a lot of escaped convicts; for all we know, some may be working on television.”<sup>107</sup> What fueled Katz’s ire was the lack of serious television reporting on boxing, such as that provided for a time by Howard Cosell, who, although he had enhanced his journalistic stature covering boxing, became an outspoken critic of the sport and covered his last fight in December 1982, “a healthy sign that television sports broadcasters do have the intellectual capacity to change their mind.”<sup>108</sup> Cosell provided quality investigative reporting on the award-winning program *Sports Beat*, regrettably canceled by ABC in 1985 after Cosell published his autobiography, *I Never Played the Game*, in which he criticized colleagues at ABC Sports.

In the same column, Katz criticized CBS’s omnibus program, *Sports Sunday*, for its coverage of the Tour de France by implying at the top of the taped show that “the final leg Sunday down the Champs-Élysées would decide the overall winner. What nonsense. CBS knew very well, as it explained graphically later, that Bernard Hinault of France was going to win his fifth Tour and that Greg LeMond, his American teammate who finished second, was not allowed to even try to beat Hinault. In boxing, they call this a fix.”<sup>109</sup>

Claiming that boxing was a lot cleaner than bicycle racing, Katz parenthetically remarked that drug use was rampant and that one should never “bet against the chalk in the Tour de France.”<sup>110</sup> He saved his most stinging criticism for reporter John Tesh, who “deserves a purple jersey for his prose,” with which Tesh compared the leader’s yellow jersey, saying, “the golden fleece was up for grabs where Pyrenees and mist had fashioned this bizarre battleground.”<sup>111</sup>

Katz was not the only *New York Times* columnist who offered criticism of television sports reporters. In a piece titled “Highlights Aren’t Enough,” Michael Goodwin used the occasion of two New York stations’ search for sports anchors as a vehicle to comment on the sorry state of local television sports news. Goodwin began the piece with his own classified ad that delineated the qualifications. “Good teeth and nice hair essential.... Must believe in the divine right of athletes.”<sup>112</sup> While admitting that there were indeed good television journalists in New York, Goodwin added “none covers sports,” and he doubted the new hires would “provide any major relief to the bland menu of scores, taped highlights and tame interviews that dominate local sports news.”<sup>113</sup> In addition to his criticism of sports journalists’ reverential attitude toward the athletes they cover, Goodwin allowed the outgoing reporters to point out the failure of the sports report to provide anything more than a headline approach that prevented serious investigative journalism. The lack of pressure “to do any digging”<sup>114</sup> stemmed from the absence of competition between stations, all being equally comfortable with what was done and not done to entertain viewers, many of whom cared little about sports. Goodwin concluded by debunking the idea that if the sports reporter were given more time, more serious

journalism would be presented. “If more sports time would only be wasted on more headlines, let’s hope extra time at channel 9 goes to the weatherman. Better yet, why not give him the sports job? Hellllloooooo sports fans!”<sup>115</sup>

Goodwin’s criticisms were not limited to the sports reporting on local television stations. In “The Perils of Slapdash Journalism,” Goodwin attacked the networks’ “breezy viewer warm-ups to Sunday’s [NFL] game telecasts.”<sup>116</sup> Despite aspiring to be more than fun by providing a news segment, these pre-game shows (i.e., CBS’s *NFL Today* and NBC’s *NFL ’86*) were better at self-promotion than journalism. As evidence, Goodwin cited examples in which NBC announced the teams playing in that year’s Fiesta Bowl and CBS announced it had retained the rights to the men’s college basketball championship. “Neither network included an important aspect of such ‘news’—the price the network paid for these events. And neither generally finds such items newsworthy at all if it means mentioning a rival network.”<sup>117</sup> Goodwin offered a more blatant example of slapdash journalism in which NBC’s Bob Costas reported that “informed sources” had intimated that Miami University football coach Jimmy Johnson might be headed for the University of Texas. Even though Costas denied asserting that Johnson was going to Texas, his cleverly worded statement that “speculation may have him headed for the vacancy” constituted, for Goodwin, little more than a sleight-of-hand, “intended to give that impression while not exactly saying so.... Knowing that, and seeing how they constructed their report, it is hard to believe NBC didn’t want viewers to think they meant to say Johnson was going to Texas. Call it junk journalism.”<sup>118</sup>

ABC’s coverage of the 1988 Calgary Games also drew criticisms, although not

for spreading rumors. Rather, the criticisms were directed at ABC's team of analysts covering the Olympic Winter Games in Calgary, many of whom were former athletes. These athletes-turned-announcers were most comfortable providing detailed analysis of a performance, especially during highlights; however, as Gerald Eskenazi noted, "when it came to fleshing out an interview, it was a different story."<sup>119</sup> For Eskenazi, the general coziness between athletes-turned-analysts and competing athletes was symbolized "by Peggy Fleming's impulsively hugging Debi Thomas in an interview after Thomas's missteps cost her the figure-skating gold medal."<sup>120</sup> Eskenazi also noted that ABC was beaten to the punch by newspaper reporters in covering controversies surrounding the bobsled and speed-skating teams. In fairness, Eskenazi posed the question as to what a televised Olympics is supposed to be—showcase for tough journalism or television event—and then provided the answer with which most television critics would agree. "The lines have always been blurred and always will be."<sup>121</sup> As a sports journalist working for a print medium, Eskenazi readily criticized television's failure to offer hard-hitting reports while pointing out how newspaper reporters covered controversies more effectively; however, in overlooking newspaper reporters' often cozy relationship with athletes, Eskenazi demonstrated a bias for the work of print journalists.

That the lines had become permanently blurred was evidenced not only in weak interviews by analysts who, for the most part, had little or no journalistic training, but also in questionable journalistic practices that at times turned a blind eye to issues of violence and sexism in order to achieve sufficient ratings within a highly competitive, saturated marketplace. With the increased access provided by cable and satellite dish

technology, viewers watched more sports on the airwaves. Even though broadcasters did not completely ignore violence that went above and beyond what is allowed in the rules, the message being provided by sports reporters was often overwhelmed by the pictures on the screen. Richard Horrow, a Florida-based attorney who wrote a book about law and sports violence, said, "I really think that exposure with a disclaimer is as significant as exposure with nothing said. As for kids, the trickle-down effect is that they're learning about elbowing, sliding with spikes high and jabbing with hockey sticks."<sup>122</sup>

Local sports broadcasters inadvertently contributed to increased exposure of violence by showing more highlights gleaned from games all over the country. This concentration on violence in sportscast highlights led to charges and counter charges by league and media executives. Warner Wolf of WCBS in New York said, "It's not that I condone it. It's a journalistic issue. If I don't show them, I'd be censoring the news. I'll stop when they stop fighting."<sup>123</sup> Wolf's assertion illustrates the tendency of broadcasters to sidestep the issue of whether or not a fight or a violent hit actually merits consideration as a sportscast highlight. More germane to the issue was Horrow's argument that whether or not fighting and other violence actually increased was not as important as the perception that it had, fueled by media's concentration on violent plays as highlights.

### **Offensive Interference**

More disturbing than the conflicting signals television broadcasters sent out about violence were those issues related to women's role as sports journalists and control of the sports broadcasting discourse by the hegemon. Not only were women's sports largely underreported, but when women's sports were covered, they were often covered without

women in the broadcasting booth. NBC's coverage of the 1983 French Open women's final included Dick Enberg and Bud Collins in the booth with Donald Dell and Bjorn Borg at courtside. In his review Neil Amdur noted that Borg was too reticent and Dell did not belong because of a conflict of interest stemming from his role as a lawyer who represented players and tournaments. Amdur added:

More conspicuous during the final two days, however, was the absence of a woman announcer during the taped telecast of the women's singles final on Saturday between Chris Evert Lloyd and Mima Jausovec. Any number of current or former players...could have contributed more about the players and the women's tour than Dell or Borg, who were obviously positioned as a dress rehearsal for Sunday's men's final.<sup>124</sup>

Women sports journalists' struggle to gain equal access to broadcast booths, press boxes, locker rooms and production facilities made headlines in the 1970s. On January 21, 1975, the NHL became the first professional sports league in America to allow women sports journalists to enter the players' dressing room for interviews after its All-Star game.<sup>125</sup> Shortly thereafter, the NBA instituted a rule opening the locker room to all reporters until forty-five minutes before the start of a game and after the first ten minutes following a game. Despite that progress, in late 1977 Melissa Ludtke, a reporter for *Sports Illustrated*, brought suit against the commissioner of Major League Baseball, the New York Yankees, the mayor of New York and other city officials for barring her from Yankee Stadium's locker rooms during baseball's playoffs and World Series. Ludtke and TIME Inc., the parent company of *Sports Illustrated*, sought "an injunction enjoining

defendants from denying Miss Ludtke and other accredited representatives of *TIME* access to professional baseball clubhouses on the basis of their sex.”<sup>126</sup>

MLB Commissioner Bowie Kuhn’s prepared response stated that he would allow “female sportswriters” into locker rooms if they “could satisfy us that we have violated any law” with current policy. Kuhn considered the policy of “providing female reporters with interview facilities adjacent to the teams’ dressing quarters completely appropriate and consistent with the views and interests of the press in general, the players and our fans.”<sup>127</sup> By invoking the interests of the media, players and fans, Kuhn subtly shifted the issue from one of access to “standards of decency.” The implication was that allowing women access to locker rooms where ballplayers wander “naked and semi-naked” near their lockers “would be offensive” to those standards.<sup>128</sup> Ludtke decried the way MLB successfully made “equal access appear as a moral and not a political problem and as a sexy, but not a sexist issue that it is.”<sup>129</sup>

Baseball was not alone in questioning women’s pursuit of equal access. In January 1978, *ABC Sports Magazine* aired a segment exploring the issue, and two *New York Times* columnists, Roger Kahn and Red Smith, employed variations on the modesty rationale in addressing the issue. Kahn compared the restrictions imposed on Ludtke with those imposed on him: “Covering the Yankees, she cannot catch Thurmon Munson in the shower. I remain slightly restricted. Covering Wimbledon, I cannot catch Chris Evert in the tub.”<sup>130</sup> Noting that the women’s basketball team from Immaculate had not invited a *New York Times* reporter into their changing room, Smith framed the issue dichotomously—press freedom vs. indecent exposure, right to know vs. right to privacy,

and “the equal rights movement vs. the manly modesty of Catfish Hunter.”<sup>131</sup> Absent from Kahn’s column was any mention about the importance of allowing women the access needed to function on a level playing field with their male colleagues.

On September 27, 1978, Judge Constance Baker Motley ruled that all reporters, regardless of sex, should have equal access to athletes, even if such access included the locker room. What followed was, in Ludtke Lincoln’s own words, “a three-ring news circus” that bombarded the public with reports of the plight of women in the Yankee locker room. In a column she wrote for the *New York Times* shortly after the beginning of the 1979 season, Ludtke Lincoln lamented that “not one reporter chose to address the issue of why women need access to the athletes to do their job. Instead, some newspapers and television stations assigned women to report on how their presence affected the ballplayers.”<sup>132</sup> Later in her piece, Ludtke Lincoln explained the dilemma facing women sports journalists. She and other women journalists were being portrayed “as women who wanted nothing more than to wander aimlessly around a locker room, to stare endlessly at naked athletes and to invade the privacy of individuals whose privacy had been disrupted for years by our male colleagues.”<sup>133</sup>

Unfortunately, the accusation that women sports journalists used their access to male locker rooms to engage in voyeurism again surfaced in September 1990 when *Boston Herald* reporter Lisa Olson was accosted by several naked members of the New England Patriots as she conducted a practice-day interview in their locker room. According to the NFL’s official investigation, which produced a 108-page report, Zeke Mowatt, standing naked at an arm’s length from Olson, made an accusation, “You are not

writing; you are looking.” Mowatt and four other teammates then began fondling themselves, asking Olson, “Is this what you want?”<sup>134</sup> After the story broke, Olson received obscene phone calls and hate mail, and her car and apartment were vandalized. As a result of the investigation, Mowatt and two teammates were fined by the NFL. Victor Kiam, Patriots owner, publicly called her “a classic bitch,” and at a Stamford Old-Timers Athletic Association dinner, he told a joke that asked: “What do the Iraqis have in common with Lisa Olson? They’ve both seen Patriot missiles up close.”<sup>135</sup> Kiam was fined \$50,000 by the NFL on November 27 and publicly apologized to Olson for his comments. Olson filed a sexual harassment suit against the Patriots, Kiam and several members of the team in April 1991 and eventually settled out of court. Although the NFL strengthened its policies regarding equal access to the locker room, Commissioner Paul Tagliabue showed a lack of resolve when it came to collecting the players’ fines. Speaking to the Association for Women in Sports Media, Tagliabue said that he might not be able to collect the fines, citing the threat of a lawsuit from the players’ union, even though the league regularly instituted policies involving players without the union’s blessing.<sup>136</sup>

Significantly, by calling her a “looker,” the players attempted to curtail Olson’s publicly recognized role to criticize male performance as part of a profession that gave her access into the locker room. As Mary Jo Kane and Lisa Disch note, “As an authorized transgression of typical parameters of deference, her looking unsettles the certainties of binary sex, gender complementarity, and oppositional sexual orientation on which phallic potency is grounded. It is an excess that must be contained by constructing it as a

crime.”<sup>137</sup>

### **Split Personality**

Women sports journalists have also experienced sexual harassment outside of the locker room, particularly in the work environments of media organizations like ESPN. While the network has a commendable record of hiring and promoting experienced women sports journalists—Gayle Gardner, Katie Ross, Robin Roberts, Linda Cohn, Chris McKendry, Andrea Kremer, Doris Burke, Pam Ward and Suzy Kolber—it also has, what Michael Freeman calls, “a troubling history of sexual harassment...as hostile a work environment for women as any Wall Street brokerage firm.”<sup>138</sup> In his uncensored history of ESPN, Freeman provides summaries of specific sex discrimination lawsuits brought against the network, testimony from named and unnamed former employees, and statements and statistics provided from ESPN management.

One sex discrimination lawsuit involved Linda Whitehead, who worked as a sales assistant at ESPN’s Michigan sales office beginning in 1983. Whitehead’s lawsuit, filed on August 24, 1998, in a Michigan circuit court, claimed that she and other women were discriminated against on the basis of their gender by her supervisor Theodore Andrusz, and that she earned, at times, half the salary of male counterparts. After Whitehead complained about her treatment, she alleged that the network retaliated against her, violating state and federal laws. Whitehead reached a settlement of the suit for an undisclosed amount of money and the stipulation that neither she nor her attorneys would comment about the lawsuit.<sup>139</sup>

Elaine Truskoski’s discrimination lawsuit, filed in federal court, claimed that

ESPN retaliated against her for complaining about the pay system. Truskoski served as executive secretary to Scotty Connal, who had been with ESPN since almost the very beginning, until both Connal and she were demoted. Truskoski filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission over the demotion and accompanying decrease in salary, but withdrew the complaint when ESPN reinstated her salary.

Presented with a deadline of thirty days to find a job within the company comparable to her old one, Truskoski refused to accept any of the positions offered and was ultimately fired. Freeman explains that when other secretaries posted stories on the bulletin board about Truskoski's case, management "removed the articles and prohibited anyone at the network from discussing the case, not only with the media but with each other."<sup>140</sup> In 1993, Truskoski won the case, was reinstated in her position as executive secretary and awarded \$115,000 for legal fees.

For production assistants, associate producers and other women employed in the newsroom, the harassment ranged from the innocuous to the explicit. In Freeman's history, anchor Katie Ross offered several anecdotes related to the bartering of time in editing bays for sexual favors. Additionally, Julie Anderson, a former producer, described the rampant sexism at the network related to routine production responsibilities. "A guy would take your highlight package and rewrite it, and you knew it was only because you were a woman. You were up against people's ideals."<sup>141</sup> One former employee who worked in both television and radio production explained that almost every day there was some form of sexual harassment. "I would be walking down the hall and a total stranger would come up to me and say, 'You look really good today and I would love to have a

baby with you....’ Men look you up and down, staring at you. There was one manager who, when he spoke to you, would look you up and down and stop at your breasts and then your pelvic area.”<sup>142</sup> Significantly, this testimony constitutes another discourse related to being a “looker.” In this discourse, the woman becomes what Kane and Disch call “a feminine spectacle, an exceptionally attractive woman who advertises herself as an object of man desire.”<sup>143</sup> Kane and Disch posit that this discourse sexualizes the woman in an ideological construct that sets the parameters of the social relationship in such a way as to reproduce and normalize accepted certainties.

According to a former senior member of ESPN management who dealt with sexual harassment complaints, during a three-year period in the early 1990s, “between seventy-five and one hundred complaints of sexual harassment were made by women employees throughout the company, and between twenty to twenty-five of those cases were categorized as serious incidents.”<sup>144</sup> Although ESPN disputed those numbers, and suggested that its complaint numbers were “not unusual for a male-dominated company,”<sup>145</sup> Freeman offered a more telling piece of evidence—a memo from Steve Bornstein, who became ESPN’s president in 1989, that outlined the reorganization of the remote and studio production departments into one consolidated production department. In Bornstein’s memo, there is no mention of women in senior management positions. Freeman’s point is clear: “ESPN was for men, and the men were not uncomfortable making that clear to the few women at the network...”<sup>146</sup>

Despite the considerable progress women sports journalists have made since Phyllis George became co-anchor of CBS’s *The NFL Today* show in 1975, the number of

women who serve as sports editors, sportscast anchors, and play-by-play announcers suggests that in comparison to their male counterparts, women “are still literally and figuratively limited to the sidelines in men’s major sporting events.”<sup>147</sup> Nonetheless, in December 1987, Gayle Siemens made history by becoming the first woman to do play-by-play on NBC’s regional telecast of a NFL game between the Seattle Seahawks and Kansas City Chiefs. The *New York Times*’ Michael Goodwin, in reviewing her performance, felt compelled to note several gaffes, such as getting the final score wrong as well as the presentation of a bouquet to her analyst. While admitting that “some new blood in the broadcast booths is needed,” Goodwin explained that the use of Siemens, coming so late in the season announcing a meaningless game, “was so gimmicky as to be distasteful.”<sup>148</sup> Goodwin also complained that several weeks before Siemens’s debut, NBC employed a sports psychologist in the broadcast booth, a far cry from another gimmick NBC had tried a few years earlier when it showed a game without announcers. Several years later, Lesley Visser “became the first and only woman to host the presentation of the Lombardi Trophy”<sup>149</sup> following Super Bowl XXVI in January 1992. Having distinguished herself at CBS, Visser moved on to become a prominent reporter for both ABC and ESPN.

### **The New Economy**

By the time the NFL signed a new \$1.428 billion television contract in March 1987, cable’s impact on the television sportscape was undeniable. For the first time, a cable network, ESPN, was included in the package, paying \$153 million for three years’ rights to eight Sunday night games, four preseason games and the Pro Bowl game, which

ended the NFL season. The new contract marked the first time rights fees for NFL games actually decreased—by 3.3 percent—and the amount paid remained flat at \$476 million for each of the three years.<sup>150</sup> Many factors contributed to the decrease, including lower ratings and network losses (i.e., production and increased rights fees) for NFL telecasts over the previous two seasons with losses in 1986 alone reaching a combined \$75 million. Additionally, escalating player salaries, which had doubled over the course of the last television contract as a result of competition from the USFL, meant that television revenues, which had risen only fifty percent, were not keeping pace with other expenditures.<sup>151</sup>

One of the first indications that the market for professional football was softening occurred in the fall of 1983, the same year in which the USFL played a spring schedule, when ABC's *Monday Night Football* finished its fourteenth year on the air with the lowest ratings in its history.<sup>152</sup> The 18.1 rating and 31 share marked a decrease of 2.5 rating points from the previous year, the lowest since its first season in 1970. The other networks' telecasts on Sunday afternoons also slipped in 1983, although by a smaller percentage. While different reasons were offered for the decreased ratings, including an unappealing schedule of games assembled for Monday night, some industry executives said they believed that “the glory days of professional football in prime time may have passed.”<sup>153</sup>

One direct result of the decreased ratings was an accompanying drop in the cost of advertising. This drop in cost was directly attributable to the saturation of sports programming on television, which “has dulled viewer interest and fractured the

audience.”<sup>154</sup> These conditions created a situation in which broadcasters were unable to sell commercial time on many sports programs at full or nearly full price. For example, in 1985, selling was so difficult that “50 percent price reductions were not uncommon, even for major [sporting] events.”<sup>155</sup> Instead of leaving slots unsold, the networks were selling them for prices that were below 1984 prices, and in some cases, below those of 1983. What had once been an industry that earned profit margins that regularly reached 10 to 15 percent suddenly found itself losing considerable amounts of money. Goodwin reported that in 1985, ABC Sports lost upward of \$40 million, with both of its major attractions, baseball and football, believed “to be bathed in red ink.”<sup>156</sup>

With so much more sports programming being televised, traditional sports advertisers became more strategic in evaluating alternative advertising vehicles. While automobile makers and beer companies continued to advertise on sports programs, they also decided “to no longer focus their marketing efforts exclusively on the male audience that an athletic event provides.”<sup>157</sup> For example, Chevrolet reduced its emphasis on sports by 25 percent when studies showed that women bought 35 percent of all cars, an increase of 10 percent from the mid-1970s. Not only did Chevrolet move its ad money to prime-time shows, but what money it allocated to commercial time on sports programs was largely diversified. Rather than placing a package with one network, Chevrolet bought commercial time on college football broadcasts with CBS and ABC and purchased halftime coverage of ESPN’s Saturday night broadcast, as well as sponsoring its own post-game show on the cable network.<sup>158</sup> Even though beer companies did not spend less, they also diversified, reducing the concentration on network sports programming and

focusing more on cable options. Over the next two decades, however, sports sponsorship, the process of allocating resources for the production of sports events to achieve organizational objectives,<sup>159</sup> increased dramatically. The total amount of money spent on global sports sponsorship trebled in the 1990s alone, with 37.8 per cent of that being allocated for events in North America, 36.4 percent for Europe, and 20.8 per cent for Asia. Sport sponsorship and advertising rose from \$500,000 in 1970 to \$20 billion in 2000.<sup>160</sup>

The networks accepted the loss in advertising revenues because they were paying less for rights fees. The reduced payments the networks paid for rights to the NFL in 1987 was an extension of what had begun in 1984 after the NCAA lost its antitrust case. Further evidence was provided by the bidding for the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. Because ABC had generated \$450 million in revenues after paying \$225 million for the rights to the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, many industry experts believed the rights would “surpass \$500 million and perhaps reach \$1 billion.”<sup>161</sup> All three networks bid considerably less than that, with NBC ultimately paying \$300 million. Organizers of smaller events saw their payments decrease from the networks by as much as 70 percent.<sup>162</sup>

Cable networks like ESPN actually thrived in the new sports economy. Despite losses that exceeded \$100 million in its first six years, ESPN showed a \$10 million profit in the final quarter of 1984, and earned more than \$35 million the following year.<sup>163</sup> Several factors contributed to the upturn, including the decision to charge cable stations ten cents per subscriber rather than to depend solely on advertising revenues. Before

ESPN landed its part of the NFL contract in 1987, the price was twenty-six cents per subscriber. After the contract, ESPN promptly increased the price to thirty-six cents per subscriber.<sup>164</sup> Those increases were accepted by the cable systems largely as a result of the 1984 Cable Communications Policy Act, which “provided for full deregulation of fees,”<sup>165</sup> meaning cable operators could charge whatever they wanted for a basic package of channels, which invariably included ESPN. Profits continued to soar, in part because non-union labor reduced ESPN’s operating and production costs in comparison to network expenditures. Finally, in January 1989 ESPN was available in more than 50 million homes, becoming the first cable station to surpass fifty percent penetration of households in the United States.<sup>166</sup> By the time the Walt Disney Company bought ABC and ESPN in the summer of 1995 for \$19.08 billion, ESPN was deemed by Michael Eisner, chairman of Disney’s board, as “the crown jewel” of the purchase.<sup>167</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Cable television proved to be a Pandora’s Box for television sports. On the one hand, it decentralized sports programming, gradually forcing the networks to give up precious pieces of the sports pie to cable networks like ESPN and TBS. On the other hand, cable networks saturated television with live coverage and news programming that made up with quantity what was lacking in quality. Because the cable networks could not afford to compete with the networks for major sporting events, they showed sports that previously had not been seen on television. Cable networks helped to popularize sports like gymnastics, figure skating and ice hockey while the networks played it safe with traditional sports like football, basketball and baseball. The metaphor of the electronic

magazine rack was an appropriate one for cable television in its first two decades.

Television critics and communication scholars contended technological innovations continued to transform sports viewing into a mediated spectacle. Underpinning such assertions were the mass-mediated sport entertainment spectacles that represent the primary motor of sport's cultural economy, and a significant element of the broader cultural economy. According to Douglas Kellner, "the extent to which sports have become commercialized and transformed into a spectacle"<sup>168</sup> is one of the characteristic features of contemporary society, one that took shape with cable television's saturation of sports programming. Such an allusion to Guy Debord's concept of "the society of the spectacle" is wholly appropriate since Debord illustrated the multidimensionality of the spectacle and its dualistic function within spectacular society. "The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification."<sup>169</sup> Confirming this observation, Debord identified two, necessarily interdependent, orders of the spectacle: the upper-case Spectacle (the mass mediated mega-event) and the lower-case spectacle (the relentless outpourings of corroborating and/or parasitic culture forms). These, respectively, provided the monumental and vernacular architecture of a society within which the spectacle "is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production."<sup>170</sup> Arguably, a cable network became the prototypical purveyor of mass-mediated sport entertainment spectacle, namely, ESPN.

Bryant's assertion that what happens on the field and what happens on television are different gradually has, to a great extent, lost its significance. While fundamental differences between the stadium experience and the television experience still exist, what

unfolds on the field has been directly impacted by television. Examples include television timeouts, rules changes to enhance action, and instant replay to challenge on-field officiating decisions. Moreover, the addition of scoreboards with replay capabilities and enhanced audio technologies has significantly narrowed the differences between stadium and television experience. In fact, players and stadium fans routinely watch scoreboard replays, and their reactions are often picked up by the telecast.

The proliferation of sports programming has done little to improve the quality of broadcast sports journalism. Many of the analysts are former athletes, and many have struggled with the mechanics and techniques of fundamental journalistic practices like researching and interviewing. According to Klatell and Marcus, many sports announcers “get remarkably little training or support within their own organizations, and they face unremitting caution and wariness from their would-be subjects.”<sup>171</sup> Without appropriate journalistic training, these broadcasters struggle to identify, develop, and contextualize a story, or anticipate an audience’s state of knowledge and understanding about sports issues.<sup>172</sup>

That women sports journalists struggled to gain equal access into the press boxes, broadcast booths, locker rooms, and production facilities provides compelling evidence that “professional athletics participates in the construction of gender as an asymmetrical relation between two mutually exclusive but complementary categories and establishes that social construction as a fact of nature.”<sup>173</sup> Despite significant progress made by women sports journalists, producers and announcers, we have not yet, as a society, reached a point where we totally devote our attention to their accounts of sporting events,

and not to who happens to be reporting the story, but it is a goal worth pursuing. The presence of women sports journalists in the broadcasts booths, press boxes and production facilities of national media is important because, as Susan Tyler Eastman and Andrew C. Billings noted, women sports journalists serve “as important models for local sportscasters and sports reporters, and because of their large reach, they influence society’s perceptions of women athletes and women’s roles in world culture.”<sup>174</sup>

As cable television has emerged, the many references to television’s sports junkies that continuously need a fix from an unending stream of sports programming raises disturbing questions about the relationship between programmer/pusher and viewer/junkie. That a woman named ESPN as a codefendant in a divorce case during the summer of 1982, charging “that the network was instrumental in ruining her marriage by providing too much sports coverage,”<sup>175</sup> is perhaps indicative of a deeper, more pervasive distortion of values. As Richard Sandomir explains, “ESPN exists in a self-created wonderland, one that took root innocuously, then grew into a force so potent that it treats itself as a producer of events and studio shows as well as a newsmaker on par with the leagues it buys games from.”<sup>176</sup> The wonderland of highlights reflects tendencies of postmodernist thought in which the world becomes highly fragmented and meaning becomes elusive and slippery. Ultimately, however many highlights are shown during live coverage or on *SportsCenter*, the sports junkie is never satisfied, instead being fixated on a perpetual present of constantly changing texts—game recaps subsumed within pastiches of spectacular plays removed from game context followed by random images untethered to any meta-narrative. By utilizing a discourse of addiction to

rationalize its form of junk journalism, broadcasters demean viewers and trivialize the product they purport to celebrate.

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<sup>174</sup> Susan Tyler Eastman and Andrew C. Billings, "Sportscasting and Sports Reporting: The Power of Gender Bias," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (May 2000), 192-213, 196.

<sup>175</sup> Freeman, *ESPN*, 115.

<sup>176</sup> Richard Sandomir, "At ESPN," D1.

## CHAPTER 7: LITTLE SHOP OF HIGHLIGHTS

### Introduction

This chapter explicates the role played by ESPN in the proliferation and commodification of the highlight form. Since its initial broadcast on September 7, 1979, ESPN has grown “from a curiosity to the level of Kleenex, Coke or Band-Aids—brand names signifying products.... ESPN has changed how people receive sports.”<sup>1</sup> Before ESPN began televising, viewers relied on the three broadcast networks and their affiliates to receive sports coverage. Except for major events like the Olympics, sports were televised primarily on weekends. The television sportscast landscape changed drastically as ESPN’s nightly sportscast grew from fifteen minutes to thirty minutes to sixty minutes.<sup>2</sup> Occupying a ubiquitous place in our culture in reaching eighty-two percent of the one hundred and eight million homes in the United States, ESPN estimates that an average of ninety-four million Americans spend fifty minutes per day or almost six hours per week engaged with ESPN media.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to coverage of live sporting events, however, ESPN drastically altered the landscape of television sports news with the program that launched the cable network, *SportsCenter*, which the *Times*’ Richard Sandomir described as the heart of ESPN, “a news show with a hummable theme song, enormous breadth and creativity, stars like [Dan] Patrick and [Bob] Ley (backed by lesser-knowns plucked from stations nationwide or raised on a highlight-rich regimen on the ESPNEWS ranch), and others who believe a sports report cannot be justified without attempting a joke or snide allusion every 30 seconds.”<sup>4</sup> Sandomir’s description aptly captures some of the elements that have made

*SportsCenter* the premiere nationally televised sportscast.

The “hummable” theme song was composed by Annie Roboff for the Satellite News Channel, which quickly went out of business and sold the theme to ESPN. In an interview, Roboff explained, “I love that so many guys know that theme...I never saw a penny from the everyday play, because it had been sold to the Satellite News Service as a buyout (it was the very early days of cable when no 'rules' had been established).”<sup>5</sup> The theme became so well known to viewers and athletes that the final two bars—da-da-da da-da-da—have become synonymous with highlights, so that having made a great play and knowing the play will make that night’s *SportsCenter*, players hum the final two bars in a process of unabashed co-promotion.

*SportsCenter*’s breadth and creativity are both a blessing and a curse. Having broadcast its 30,000<sup>th</sup> program on February 11, 2007, passing the *CBS Evening News* for most broadcasts, *SportsCenter* has provided the breadth of coverage that no three- to five-minute local sportscast can duplicate. Not only did it spawn the network fictional series *Sports Night*, but it also engendered clones on other networks, including most notably CNN/SI’s *Sports Tonight* (1980-2001). *SportsCenter* also gave birth to eleven nation-specific namesakes that belong to its ESPN International division, including *SportsCenter Asia*, *SportsCenter Brasil*, and *SportsCentre*, the Canadian version of the program.<sup>6</sup> Each of these originates in the country it serves except for the one that is available on pay television in Australia and other Pacific Rim countries. That particular *SportsCenter* is produced and anchored by Australian journalists and personalities at ESPN headquarters in Bristol, Connecticut, to make use of the “state-of-the-art digital

production facilities and a ready-made staff of editors, technicians and other experts.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to the nation-specific *SportsCenters*, the program served as the template for spin-offs like *SportsNight*, which debuted on ESPN2 in 1993; *X Center*, a news program specifically created to accompany X Games broadcasts; *SportsCenterU*, which provides news and highlights from men’s and women’s intercollegiate athletics; and *BassCenter*, which aired on Saturday mornings from 2003-2006 within ESPN2’s “Outdoors” lineup.

*SportsCenter*’s most defining characteristic has been its personality, brought to life by its anchors. As Ted Miller notes, “You’ve given personality to sports reporting. And you’ve given too much personality to sports reporting.”<sup>8</sup> The long line of anchors—George Grande, Chris Berman, Tom Mees, Dan Patrick, Keith Olbermann, Kenny Mayne, Linda Cohn and Stuart Scott—changed the dynamics of how sports news was delivered. As Grant Farred posits, *SportsCenter* changed the discourse of sportscasts from one that focused on “the drama of statistics...the qualitatively banal...an emaciated discourse, too preoccupied with numbers and a commitment to fair reporting” to one in which the anchors “borrow intelligently and innovatively from literature, politics, and most important, popular culture, with a special predilection toward the world of hip-hop.”<sup>9</sup> Farred argues that the anchors’ discourse has reshaped *SportsCenter* into “a new kind of TV sports news show.... It is not the fragment dedicated to sport on the local 11:00 o’clock news; sport is at the center of the show. *SportsCenter* is both a substance (sport is the only focus) and a style (a carefully developed repertoire of representations).”<sup>10</sup> That repertoire included specific catchphrases that each anchor used over and over again. By repeating their own trademark phrases, these anchors not only

patented and claimed their expressions, they also distanced themselves from these articulations, “making them part of the public domain and, in so doing, making themselves omnipresent.”<sup>11</sup> So prevalent has the *SportsCenter* discourse become that many fan Web sites are devoted to the program. One, the “*SportsCenter* Altar,” was created with the expressed goal “to catalog and index all the popular catch phrases uttered by the sports anchors and trace them back to their origins.”<sup>12</sup>

Although the hip catchphrases, banter, and self-referential exchanges that characterize the anchors’ performance have certainly contributed to setting *SportsCenter* apart from all other sportscasts, the use of highlights serves as the program’s single most important element. As noted in the preceding chapter, it was not until ESPN secured access to the networks’ highlights that *SportsCenter* became a viable entity. In fact, the very first *SportsCenter* included no highlights since the first half-hour show of highlights was called *Sports Recap* and aired at 11:30 p.m. By the time ESPN began broadcasting twenty-four hours a day in 1980, *SportsCenter* had become the most important vehicle of the cable network’s sports news programming, thanks in large part to having begged (ABC), bartered (NBC) and stolen (CBS) from the networks to secure access to their highlights. As Chris Berman explained in the introduction to the *Ultimate Highlight Reel*, “The presentation of highlights has been the backbone of ESPN from our very start in 1979.”<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, with the publication of *ESPN Ultimate Highlight Reel* in November 2006 through ESPN Books, the self-proclaimed “worldwide leader in sports” has positioned itself as the foremost deliverer of sportscast highlights. This cross-media

morphing of a highlight reel into a book purports to present “The 365 Wildest, Weirdest, Most Unforgettable *SportsCenter* Moments of All Time” by selecting each calendar day’s most spectacular highlight over the first twenty-five years of *SportsCenter*. The book also marked ESPN’s second publishing venture devoted to its presentation of highlights, following the 2004 publication of *ESPN25: 25 Mind-Bending, Eye-Popping, Culture-Morphing Years of Highlights* by Charles Hirshberg. In his book, Hirshberg asserts that ESPN impacted the television sports landscape “by adopting, and perfecting, an underutilized, unappreciated method of communication: the sports highlight.... ESPN has made highlights the primary means by which the patterns and stories of sports are revealed. It’s a perfect medium for modern America...”<sup>14</sup> While these books are clearly promotional vehicles for *SportsCenter*, they also establish the program’s use of highlights as the primary form of sports journalistic discourse. These books capitalize on one’s familiarity with the ESPN brand and style of commentary to at once dissolve the boundary of one medium (television screen) and invoke participation through another medium (book) in creating a canon of “the all-time favorite highlights.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, ESPN’s attempt to stamp its imprimatur on sportscast highlights raises basic questions about how culture becomes commodified, produced and reproduced under transnational corporatized modes of acculturation.<sup>16</sup>

This chapter traces ESPN’s appropriation and commodification of the highlight form as *SportsCenter* became the network’s flagship program. While *SportsCenter* doubtlessly made the highlight form its primary means of communication, the Hirshberg contention that it is “a perfect medium for modern America” raises questions about what

impact the spectacularization of sport has had on viewers, anchors and athletes within a late-capitalist economy, what values are being promoted through the highlight form, and whose stories are being told. This chapter explicates *SportCenter*'s ubiquitous place in American sports journalism by considering its formation and development, its constitutive elements, and its offshoots, namely the "This is *SportsCenter*" advertising campaign and reality show, *Dream Job*.

Lastly, ESPN's distinct position among the producers of mediated sport is predicated on the fact that *SportsCenter* develops content within a cultural economy in which information, images and ideas are exchanged. Because audiences often know the outcome of games before they watch *SportsCenter*, they must be maintained as an audience.<sup>17</sup> As a result, both event coverage and the news programs have changed from being primarily information-oriented to being primarily entertainment-oriented by producing increasingly affective highlights and witty commentary. Hirshberg contends, "A good highlight is at once a poetic distillation of athleticism and a carnival barker's holler for your attention, a shameless effort to keep you from pressing that damned remote."<sup>18</sup> In turn, this "shameless effort" to maintain the audience dictates both quantitatively and qualitatively which highlights are presented and how commodification is achieved. It is within this sphere that "the key economic processes of production, distribution and exchange take place."<sup>19</sup> Producers of mediated sports texts have the capacity to shape social value and culture since, as Stuart Hall has noted, value lies in the immaterial nature of symbolic goods. In this sense, value is manifested in the design and appearance of the text, its sign-value, and in the ability to connect disparate economic

processes. Sportscast highlights, with their high levels of sign-value, “are almost perfect prototypes of signs in circulation, heavily loaded with symbolic value.”<sup>20</sup>

The entertainment ethos has only increased as media sport producers such as ESPN attempt to recoup the money spent on rights fees and production costs. Those costs have motivated producers to not only “develop video and audio technologies to nuance their coverage in ways that maintain viewer attention,”<sup>21</sup> but also to make sure that the production is fully sponsored and corporatized. No longer is it sufficient to broadcast game highlights that convey information about who won, who lost and what star led the way to victory. In today’s highlight culture, almost every segment of ESPN’s *SportsCenter* is invested with corporate sponsorship that results in considerable profits for the cable network and is used to seduce and fascinate viewers “by merging ideological codes and affective investments within the proliferating system of hyperreal commodity-signs.”<sup>22</sup>

*SportsCenter*’s use of the highlight form, which serves as the vehicle for an unending stream of encoded texts that emphasize the spectacle and the star, has enabled it to emerge as the dominant purveyor of cultural expression. As Sandomir explains, nobody knew in 1979 that ESPN would become a “wide world all its own with a manifest destiny to devour all sports and all manner of media. ESPN has become Microsoft, Wal-Mart and Audrey II—the carnivorous plant of ‘Little Shop of Horrors’”—demanding all to ‘Watch me.’”<sup>23</sup>

### **A Menu without a Main Course**

That *SportsCenter* was not always the heart and soul of ESPN was evidenced in

1983 when for a brief time after the departure of Chet Simmons *SportsCenter* was cut from thirty minutes to fifteen. Additionally, on March 1, 1983, the network began offering a two-hour program on weekday mornings between 6 and 8 a.m., *Business Times*, hoping, as Frank J. Prial of the *New York Times* reported, to “attract former viewers who have drifted to the networks rather than watch reruns of old football games.”<sup>24</sup> The addition of a non-sports program was precipitated by intense competition, lagging advertising sales, escalating rights fees and increased production costs. William Grimes, who succeeded Simmons upon his departure for the USFL, told the *Times* that while the network was committed to sports in prime time, “we have to look at daytime more closely. We have to look for opportunities to get more female-oriented advertising.”<sup>25</sup> The article reported that ESPN’s advertising was thirty percent behind projections for the year. Several fitness and exercise shows were already scheduled during early morning hours, but Grimes intimated that more would be needed. “Women between the ages of 18 and 49 are the advertisers’ favorite target, and they are not known to be a large part of ESPN’s audience.”<sup>26</sup>

Reaction to the cutting of *SportsCenter* by half was swift and decisive. Viewers were not alone in criticizing the move, as media critics joined in the chorus of complaints. As Michael Freeman notes, “George Grande, over breakfast with Grimes and [Stuart] Evey in Manhattan, pleaded for reinstating the thirty-minute time slot.”<sup>27</sup> The executive agreed and a month later, *SportsCenter* was back to a thirty-minute schedule. Having lost \$20 million in 1982 and expecting \$10 million more in losses the following year, ESPN doubtlessly believed something had to be done, including the decision to

charge cable operators ten cents per subscriber instead of four cents as a means of making up for lagging advertising revenues.<sup>28</sup> However, cutting a studio show that offered exactly what viewers could not get on over-the-air and other cable networks was not the right direction to take. The decision to return *SportsCenter* to its regular thirty minutes and even lengthen it during special events proved to be decisive in ESPN's ascension as the most available and reliable source for sports news.

Expanding *SportsCenter's* schedule was attempted the following summer during the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. Despite the limitations imposed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) of no more than three minutes of highlights three times a day after ABC completed its coverage at 2 a.m., ESPN increased the early evening *SportsCenter* to a full hour. Unable to show highlights, the network hired Olympic cinematographer Bud Greenspan to offer expert commentary for a feature series during *SportsCenter*, titled "Olympic Digest," that offered "profiles of the best-known athletes on the days they are competing."<sup>29</sup> In creatively overcoming the limitation of not being able to show Olympics highlights, ESPN enhanced the program to which viewers came for news by offering someone with Olympic credentials to narrate its profiles.

The following summer ESPN televised Major League Baseball's Hall of Fame induction ceremony at Cooperstown, New York, providing three hours of live coverage. Even though the acceptance speeches of inductees did not, as Michael Katz noted, necessarily make for compelling television, the cable network's coverage "was a public service, something ESPN does best. No major network was about to devote three hours to Cooperstown."<sup>30</sup> In the same review, Katz also complimented ESPN for its weekly series

on horse racing, *Down the Stretch*, as well as its host Sharon Smith. Katz explained, “Those are the kinds of programs ESPN should concentrate on, rather than filling its considerable time with replays ad nauseum of three-hour events it has already telecast.”<sup>31</sup> Those single-sport weekly wrap-ups on auto racing, baseball, basketball, hockey and eventually professional and college football became some of the network’s most popular programs, natural extensions of what it was beginning to do on *SportsCenter*.

ESPN showed exactly how far it could stretch its creative programming even when it did not have the rights to an event when it broadcast over fifteen hours of football-related programs before Super Bowl XX in January 1986. As Steven Schneider reported, “Faced with having a menu without a main course, the sports channel has chosen to address this shortcoming with an avalanche of supportive programming...”<sup>32</sup> The menu began at 2:30 a.m. with a special *SportsCenter* devoted primarily to last-minute developments related to the Super Bowl, followed by a team-by-team review of the 1985 season, then highlights from NFL Films of the first seventeen Super Bowls before a noon broadcast of *SportsCenter* with live reports from New Orleans, the site of the game. While NBC aired its telecast, beginning at 3 p.m., ESPN offered counter-programming that featured “nontraditional sports.”<sup>33</sup> At 9 p.m. it televised “the second theatrical offering it has ever presented,”<sup>34</sup> titled *Lombardi—I Am Not a Legend*, a ninety-minute drama that had been staged in several Canadian cities and at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland. After another round of NFL Films’ football follies, the menu concluded with another *SportsCenter*, including live cut-ins from New Orleans, as well as game highlights, analysis and interviews with players and coaches. Whether or not this

menu sated viewers was not as important as its creation, and within a few years, even the networks began offering their own day-long Super Bowl smorgasbords, gradually increasing pre-game shows from three to six hours.

### **Seminal Seventeen**

By the late 1980s *SportsCenter* had established itself as the ESPN's most popular programs and as ratings grew, more resources and personnel were devoted to its production. Athletes joined the audience as regular viewers of the program. Not only could they hum the final bars to the program's theme song, but as Freeman noted, they "began to tune in to see themselves on the extensive highlight packages or to watch their interviews."<sup>35</sup> Even though the program was increasing in popularity with viewers, it was the hiring of John Walsh as executive editor that turned *SportsCenter* into "an electronic version of a newspaper's sports section."<sup>36</sup> Walsh, who had honed his journalistic skills at magazines like *Inside Sports* and *Rolling Stone*, demanded and received more resources, reshaping *SportsCenter* around the belief that viewers could never get enough highlights, statistics and inside information.

Before Walsh's arrival, *SportsCenter* typically began with a report on the day's big game, followed by all the scores and highlights from that same sport, in the process burying stories with greater news value. Walsh jettisoned that singular approach, making sure that stories with the greatest news values led the broadcast and lobbying to push commercials even later into the show. Wanting to give the program more punch, Walsh overhauled graphics and increased the length and number of highlights. In addition to putting more reporters in the field to provide more in-depth coverage, Walsh insisted on

more extensive research, a tighter format and better organization in all aspects of production. Those changes extended beyond *SportsCenter* into the single-sport wrap-ups as well. As Freeman explained, a show like *NFL Primetime* increased its highlight packages from fifteen minutes to more than thirty minutes.<sup>37</sup> Not surprisingly, ratings increased dramatically.

In the early 1990s, the codification of highlights began at ESPN when highlight coordinator Dan Steir created a list of the various ways game highlights could be packaged to tell a story. Steir's list, which Hirshberg in his book referred to as "The Seminal Seventeen,"<sup>38</sup> became one of teaching tools used by Barry Sacks to instruct production assistants on the art of story-telling. While admitting that an infinite number of ways to report these stories existed, Steir estimated that ninety percent of the highlights seen on ESPN fell into one of these categories. These seventeen categories range from narrative-based like "The 'Who Won' Highlight" and "The Turning Point Highlight" to non-action-based like "The Cutaway Highlight," which focuses "on fans or mascots, or something in between like Hogettes" when the game "is just plain boring or bad."<sup>39</sup>

In effect, everything directly or indirectly related to an actual sporting event has the potential to be (re)presented as a highlight, and this condition produces a mediascape in which, as Debord suggests, "all of life presents itself as an intense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation."<sup>40</sup> Instead of sports news as part of a larger meta-narrative ground in reality, ESPN presents a discourse that relies on the production of spectacle. The viewer's lived reality "is

materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle while simultaneously absorbing the spectacle order.”<sup>41</sup> Significantly, the highlight as spectacle becomes a space of meaning generation and communication that “fuses the objective forms of commodified activity and the subjective content of individual consciousness into a reified and collective culture.”<sup>42</sup> Rather than interpreting messages according to the viewer’s own code and end, the viewer is positioned within a model that does not allow for communication<sup>43</sup> and in which the viewer can only consume or reject the sport spectacle. With its discourse of straightforward news reporting, irreverent commentary, frat-house gags, trivia and nostalgia,<sup>44</sup> ESPN’s *SportsCenter* has turned the highlight form into a cultural commodity.

### ***SportsCenter* Set, Format and Video Conventions**

The *SportsCenter* set and format have changed over the years to reflect advances in technology, as well as changes in management and ownership. Typically, during the week, the program airs for sixty minutes at various times in the morning and evening and for ninety minutes on Sunday evenings and Monday mornings. Designed by Walt Disney Imagineering, the current set was first used on June 7, 2004, the date *SportsCenter* first broadcast in High Definition. Shows typically begin with a graphic, showing the following: "Available on ESPNHD" (this animation precedes all high-definition broadcasts of ESPN or ESPN2). This is followed by a short *SportsCenter* animation before the screen comes alive with a montage of highlights accompanied with canned music, not necessarily specific to that show’s news. As soon as the anchors are shown, the *SportsCenter* "Rundown" is stacked vertically along the screen’s right hand side,

listing the stories in the order they will be presented, and the “BottomLine” ticker begins its crawl at the bottom of the screen. At other times, after the introductory graphics and animation, the show begins with a shot of one anchor standing in the studio. The program’s anchor typically introduces the top story, as a loop of video clips (with canned music) matching the script is played on screen. This is followed by another montage of video clips without commentary but with the *SportsCenter* theme, and then another *SportsCenter* animation loop.

Following this, a medium shot of the two anchors is presented, and an on-screen graphic displays the anchors’ names. The anchors introduce themselves, and one will begin the top story. In most cases, the broadcast begins with the most important (NCAA men’s basketball), most unusual (NAIA quadruple overtime), or most celebrity-infused (Kobe Bryant or LeBron James) game recap of the day. Before going to commercial break, the anchor provides voice over for a montage of highlights (e.g., “Still to Come”) that will follow the advertisements. Another montage of unaccompanied highlights leads into an animation that ends the sequence, and cuts to the commercial break.

Following the break, a graphic with the brand name and logo of a specific sponsor leads into the next (sponsored) segment. On-screen graphics flash the brand name and logo as the camera pans across the studio in the background. Halfway through the show, the anchors reprise or reset the day’s top stories in a segment titled either "*SportsCenter* Reset" or "*SportsCenter* Xpress." There is no noticeable difference in the format of either of these segments, other than the names and graphics.

Toward the end of the hour-long broadcast, the “Top Ten Plays” (Monday

through Thursday) or “Top Ten ‘Brilliant’ Plays” (when Guinness was the sponsor), “Top Ten Plays of the Week” (on Sunday), or “Hardly the Usual Top Ten” (Friday) segment is introduced by an anchor. Each play is separated by an animation graphic of the play's respective number in the ranking. The anchors alternate plays, with each anchor providing commentary, which typically includes one or more of their pet phrases, (e.g., “Cool as the other side of the pillow,” “Representin’,” etc.). Otherwise, the final segment of the show, “What 2 Watch 4,” promotes broadcasts of games or events either later in the day or in the coming days on the ESPN and ABC networks.

The show ends with a final shot of the anchors at the desk, who typically sign off by reminding viewers that “ESPNEWS is always on.” If there is extra time, the anchors fill the time with improvised attempts at humorous banter. This time can range from twenty seconds to more than a minute.

### **Segments**

*SportsCenter* segments refer to titled, often sponsored, parts of a *SportsCenter* broadcast that flesh out each story of the “Rundown.” A segment usually lasts from one to several minutes; several segments are usually included in a given sequence of six to eight minutes before another sequence begins or the program breaks for a commercial ad. While every *SportsCenter* program is unique and includes different segments, some segments have become regular features of the broadcast and can be classified into at least three primary groups—those sponsored by corporate entities, those featuring expert analysts, and those featuring specialty highlights. For example, corporate-sponsored segments include the “AT&T *SportsCenter* Minute,” which provides a focused

discussion of day's top story; "Budweiser Hot Seat," in which a personality (sports or non-sports) will be asked to take sides on issues, teams, etc.; and "Coors Light Cold Hard Facts," in which a six-pack of questions about a certain sport is directed to an analyst.

Expert analysts factor into many *SportsCenter* segments, depending on the season. For example, "Barry's Best" features NHL analyst Barry Melrose, who figured prominently as the primary analyst for *NHL 2Night* on ESPN2 when ESPN had the rights to the NHL. In this segment, Melrose picks his top hockey highlights of the night, which are divided into the top goals, saves, and hits. "Fact or Fiction," asks an analyst(s) to debate whether or not something is likely to happen (e.g., will the Boston Red Sox repeat as World Champions, or will the University of Tennessee women's basketball team repeat as NCAA champions). "On the Clock" is part of ESPN's never-ending NFL news programming in which every team's strengths and weaknesses are explored to frame the team's needs in anticipation of the late-April NFL draft. The segment features NFL draft expert Mel Kiper, analysts Ron Jaworski and Chris Mortenson, and host Mike Tirico. To a large extent, ESPN's *SportsCenter* has become the most highly rated national sports news program because of its ability to hire and feature the leading experts of the major professional and collegiate sports.

While the individual stories, game summaries, previews or profiles that comprise a *SportsCenter* broadcast each utilize a highlight package, an audio component and a graphics component, the program also includes segments that feature specialty highlights. These segments typically serve as teasers (e.g., "Still to Come" and "Inside *SportsCenter*") to whet the viewer's appetite before commercial breaks. These action-

packed montages string together a sampling of the best highlights (e.g., home runs, touchdowns, knockouts, dunks and goals) to follow by showing only the most intense images to produce affect. Montages are unquestionably the most frequently used editing technique to lead into and out of commercial breaks. Another specialty highlight used on *SportsCenter* combines a visual highlight clip with the radio broadcast of that particular play. “Pump Up the Volume” brings together the drama and narrativity of radio announcing with the affect and immediacy of video. Most often, the radio portion is gleaned from the broadcast of the team that scored and won the game since the segment’s goal is to ratchet up the intensity. Interestingly, this conjunction of two different media characterized some of the first live televised sports broadcasts by the BBC in 1938, often with disastrous results. Steven Barnett explains, “During coverage of the first FA Cup Final in April 1938, the radio commentary, which the BBC was carrying, failed for the first half-hour. By 1939, the Boat Race and Cup Final had their own television commentary, as Wimbledon had had since 1937.”<sup>45</sup> The BBC discontinued the pairing of a radio broadcast with television coverage because it quickly realized the effect produced was overkill, the very effect *SportsCenter* seeks to achieve with this particular segment.

One segment that has garnered considerable criticism from bloggers and media critics is called “The Ultimate Highlight,” shown during the 11 p.m. *SportsCenter* on Sunday evenings. Sponsored by Gatorade, the segment sets a week’s worth of highlights into a music video format, featuring popular music artists that clearly appeal to younger viewers. As a postmodernist text, the music video de-centers the viewer by presenting a flow of images and words without recognized boundaries or a contextualized past and

present. E. Ann Kaplan explains that the postmodernist music video operates without signifiers and signified:

What characterizes the postmodernist video is its refusal to take a clear position vis-à-vis its images, its habit of hedging along the line of not communicating a clear signified. In postmodernist videos, as not in the other specific types, each element of a text is undercut by others: narrative is undercut by pastiche; signifying is undercut by images that do not line up in a coherent chain; the text is flattened out, creating a two-dimensional effect and the refusal of a clear position for the spectator within the filmic world.<sup>46</sup>

Kaplan contends that the music video's constantly changing texts provide only "the promise of a plenitude forever deferred."<sup>47</sup> This idea of the music video's barrage of imagery leaving the viewer decentered and fixated but most likely unsatisfied echoes Geneviève Rail's concept of the sport of desire, in which there is "a constant and growing desire for new products, sensations and emotions—a desire fed but never fulfilled by the media, by the images."<sup>48</sup> Both argue that highlights concentrate events that are diffuse in time, leading to the effacing of history.

The idea that highlights efface history is counterintuitive to an appreciation of sport based on knowing and understanding its history. In fact, an understanding of sports within an historical context is one of sport historian Allen Guttman's primary tenets that characterize modern sports. The "Ultimate Highlight" has elicited considerable criticism from bloggers and media critics, many of whom decry it as pandering to young viewers. Despite such pointed criticism, ESPN used the title for its 2007 book.

“Top 10 Plays” has remained one of *SportsCenter*’s most popular segments. During the week, the top plays will be counted down in one segment. On the Sunday evening program, the segment is cut into two parts, the first counting down the top plays from ten through six and the second part presenting plays five through one. “Top 10 Plays” does on a daily basis what the *Ultimate Highlight Reel* book did for highlights as they happened across a calendar year and what other special highlight programs like “100 Greatest *SportsCenter* Moments,” “100 Greatest (North American) Athletes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” and “Greatest Games of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” have done to establish an ESPN canon of the most important games, athletes and highlights for ESPN viewers. In establishing these lists, comprised of syntagmatic and paradigmatic sports moments, ESPN uses its gate-keeping function to codify what historic achievements, displays of brilliance and athletic renown are worthy of consideration when in reality no objective means of comparison is readily available. However, as Chris Berman explained in the introduction to the *Ultimate Highlight Reel*, “It’s our job to *show you* the who, the what, and the why of the wins and losses that make your world—and ours—go around.”<sup>50</sup>

Berman’s contention that ESPN’s job is to show viewers which highlights are the “Top 10 Plays” of the day, the year, or the century establishes the preferred position assumed by the media giant. Although Berman admits that everyone has their own favorites, he can safely bet “some of them will turn up in the pages of the book you’re holding right now”<sup>51</sup> because codification works by reducing personal preference to a list with which one can either only agree or disagree. For example, John Bloom argues that since the ESPN panel that selected the greatest athletes was comprised of sports

journalists, celebrity sportscasters, and newspaper columnists, groups who play an integral role in publicizing athletic events within the commercial media structure, it is likely that status, connotations and cultural ideals played a role in the selection criteria.

Bloom explains:

... media organizations like ESPN and ABC, in attempting to avoid controversy and provide a positive image with which advertisers could associate their products, tend to consider ideology as much as quantified performance when promoting particular athletes as representative of a particular time or place.<sup>52</sup>

During the summer of 2004, ESPN counted down the top “100 *SportsCenter* Moments” of the previous twenty-five years, which of course coincided with its broadcast history, 1979-2004. Hosted by David Overton Wilson III, “ESPN25” consisted of thirty-second segments shown during the 6 p.m. *SportsCenter* each day from May 31, 2004, until it reached the ultimate moment on September 7, 2004. That moment featured the U. S. victory in men’s hockey over the Soviet Union in the semifinals of the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics. When ESPN created its own fan-based tournament of the “100 Greatest Highlights,” that very same event was selected by the fans. Arguably, this is not coincidence.

### **Audio Conventions**

That audio conventions, especially the prominence of anchor catchphrases, constitute a key component of *SportsCenter* production values was evidenced in a brief story in the March 18, 1997, issue of *Sports Business Daily* that reported ESPN had signed a licensing deal with Pro Player to capitalize on ESPN brands in apparel products.

The line of outerwear, polo shirts, T-shirts, knits, sweatshirts and fleece items were to feature ESPN and ESPN2 logos, as well as clothing “incorporating ad slogans and signature catch-phrases used by ESPN sportscasters.”<sup>53</sup> In a memo addressed to ESPN, ESPN2 and ESPNEWS On-Air Staff, *SportsCenter* anchor Keith Olbermann expressed concern about “whether we have any voice in how our own words are used” and “that many of the catchphrases in question could hardly be considered either our individual, or ESPN’s, intellectual property.”<sup>54</sup> Olbermann encouraged other on-air staff to seek legal protection since “the company’s haste to slap our work on the back of a Pro Player shirt might put us at individual legal risk somewhere down the line.”<sup>55</sup> Although nothing more came of the appropriation of anchor catchphrases, the incident illustrates the importance of anchor catchphrases to the production of *SportsCenter* highlight packages.

Anchor commentary within the newscast ranges from explicit news reading to implicit ideological values. Explicit on-camera commentary is used to frame specific events being covered, introduce segments, and provide context and continuity for the highlight and graphics packages that convey both information and affect. Having provided the narrative framework to set up the highlight, the anchor can then more creatively add voice-over to the visual components. It is within this aspect that *SportsCenter* anchors have created their own stylistic and linguistic flourishes. As Farred explains, an anchor’s identity is contained in the catchphrases and “by (repeatedly) quoting themselves, they are performing several narrative functions simultaneously, some of which contradict each other.”<sup>56</sup> On the one hand, the catchphrases draw attention to sports talk in general, and as a particular way of talking about sports in public; on the

other hand, the *SportsCenter* anchor's use of catchphrases "is unrecognizable to sports talk because it has completely changed the format, style, array of cultural influences, and discourse of the genre."<sup>57</sup> That dynamic relationship between the familiar and unfamiliar, Farred argues, is how *SportsCenter* "transforms the culturally alien into the indigenous through dissemination."<sup>58</sup> As a result of its ubiquity, *SportsCenter's* glib, witty catchphrases leak into the larger, non-sport lexicon.

Another important *SportsCenter* audio convention is the interview, conducted either in-studio with the anchor, from another off-site studio with the anchor, or with a reporter from the site of event. As already noted, interviews can also be formatted into specific segments like the "Budweiser Hot Seat." Getting interviews is predicated upon access, and access to players in locker rooms and on the playing fields is crucial to personalizing an athlete's performance. Viewers want more than scores and statistics because the practice of sports journalism has always been to frame narrative around combatants—winner and losers, favorites and underdogs, heroes and villains. Because ESPN is the largest sports news organization, it enjoys considerable leverage in getting interviews with the players because players understand that in talking with ESPN reporters, they get greater exposure. Leonard Shapiro, who covers golf for the *Washington Post*, expressed frustration in not being able to get an interview with Tiger Woods because Woods' handlers deny him access. Shapiro explained, "Then I pick up *ESPN The Magazine* and this *SportsCenter* anchor has a one-on-one Q & A with him that runs for six pages."<sup>59</sup> Gaining exclusive one-on-one interviews with athletes like Tiger Woods enhances ESPN's stature, and, as Jim Shea noted, "Athletes such as Woods favor

ESPN because they are familiar with, and often fans of, the network.”<sup>60</sup>

In addition to anchor commentary and interviews, *SportsCenter* utilizes a full range of expert analysts, including former players, coaches and practicing journalists. *SportsCenter*'s use of expert opinion, or punditry, can be structured in different ways. One involves a single analyst providing commentary over a highlight or statistical graphic or in split-screen shot with the visual component. A second option involves a pre-recorded segment in which two analysts face off and make predictions or play “Fact or Fiction.” Lastly, several analysts can be brought together for a panel discussion in studio or at a remote site. The rise of expert opinions, as Raymond Boyle notes, “has become an established part of the wider television news landscape, in part as a response to the rise in rolling news channels.”<sup>61</sup> Expert opinions only have relevance when based on insider information that beat reporters can not acquire, so again, as with interviews, ESPN's experts enjoy a distinct advantage of having sources that are willing to provide the kind of information that allows ESPN to break stories. Few question or complain when sports experts offer insider information from unnamed or anonymous sources. Providing information that experts glean from insider sources enhances ESPN's standing with viewers because it fosters the perception that the network has a better grasp of what is going on than other sportscasts. Moreover, as Klatell and Marcus explain, thanks in part to expert opinions, television newscasts can more easily “control the agenda for discussion, and can withhold praise and criticism with relative impunity.”<sup>62</sup>

Audio conventions constitute an important part of the discourse presented on *SportsCenter*. In his conclusion, Farred argues that *SportsCenter* talk is a discursive space

that can “tell us about events in the sports world in the most original or derivative or parodic form. Talk itself not only is the focus but constitutes the very essence of *SportsCenter*.”<sup>63</sup> If highlights form the backbone of *SportsCenter*, then catchphrases are its lifeblood.

### **This Is *SportsCenter*?**

ESPN leveraged the popularity of *SportsCenter* by promoting it in an advertising campaign titled “This Is *SportsCenter*.” Originally a thirty-spot campaign created by Wieden & Kennedy of Portland, Oregon, the campaign revolves around what happens behind the scenes of the program. In an early review, *Advertising Age* praised the campaign’s spots that “vividly capture the network’s unique combination of relentless dedication to, and irreverence about, the wide world of sports.”<sup>64</sup> The reviewer noted that the campaign works in large part because of its “tongue-in-cheek...straight-faced parody of behind-the-scenes looks—but the insight is nonetheless there.”<sup>65</sup>

Written by Hank Perlman and directed by the team of Bryan Buckley and Frank Todaro of Radical Media, the campaign incorporates “off the wall situations, absurd comic asides, hysterical cameos of athletes and team mascots...”<sup>66</sup> Anthony Vagnoni reported that Buckley and Todaro referred to the style of the shoot “as strictly run and gun,”<sup>67</sup> which itself utilizes a sports simile associated with an up-tempo basketball offense. Vagnoni explained that while some spots were tightly scripted, others worked from a one-line idea, often related to the anchors’ work ethic, their relationship with each other and the athletes, and the dynamics of the *SportsCenter* newsroom. For example, one spot plays on the idea that the *SportsCenter* catchphrases are made up on the spot, so the

ad takes the viewer into an editing room where anchor Kenny Mayne tries out various catchphrases that he is known for—"I am the most popular player in the land!" "Yahtzee!" "That must be a Homer, Simpson, cuz the pitcher just said, 'D'oh!" to accompany a highlight of Ken Griffey hitting a home run.<sup>68</sup> The spot and the catchphrase both play on the viewer's knowledge of sports and popular culture—in another spot anchor Charley Steiner is "traded" to *Melrose Place* in exchange for Andrew Shue—while also debunking the notion that being a *SportsCenter* anchor involves creativity and spontaneity, which, in reality, are required.

The "This Is *SportsCenter*" campaign was judged *Advertising Age's* Best of Show for television spots in 1995. The campaign garnered not only industry awards, but also earned for the network "continuous ratings growth, unprecedented brand recall and...a positive buzz among sports' elite," according to Allan Broce, ESPN ad director. Additionally, the campaign was adapted for print, and ran during late night sports and entertainment programming on both broadcast and cable.<sup>69</sup> Judy Fearing, senior vice president of consumer marketing at ESPN, explained that the campaign was designed to solidify the ESPN brand image "as not just a TV network but as a huge sports fan itself."<sup>70</sup> The campaign's success was certainly related to its ability to naturalize the perception that ESPN is a huge fan of sports just as the athletes that the network covers are equally loyal fans of *SportsCenter*. Garfield reported that after the campaign began athletes like Dennis Rodman called *SportsCenter* anchor Dan Patrick to offer several suggestions for "This is *SportsCenter*" spots.

Athletes, of course, figure prominently in many of the spots. The athletes'

presence has come under criticism from journalistic scholars and media critics who question how ESPN can run “delightful commercials praising ESPN that feature the very star athletes that ESPN covers.”<sup>71</sup> ESPN managing editor Bob Eaton responded to those criticisms by pointing out that the athletes are not paid for their appearance. “We don’t pay them and we don’t give them any special treatment.”<sup>72</sup> Al Thompkins, who teaches broadcast news ethics at The Poynter Institute, asked, “How would it be if you appear in a promo with an athlete, and then the next day you have to do a difficult story about their cocaine use? It would be difficult.”<sup>73</sup>

Other spots involving athletes tend to downplay their athletic abilities, perhaps to blunt criticism. One features NBA star Grant Hill’s piano-playing ability to soothe anchor Dan Patrick’s bruised ego after a difficult show by playing the chords for the “Charge!” riff that ballpark organists often play to rally a team. When ESPN conducted a poll at its *SportsNation* Web site to select the fans’ favorite “This is SportsCenter” commercial, it offered this tongue-in-cheek introduction: “Here at ESPN, we don’t just cover athletes—we employ them, often in thankless and low-paying tasks. We figure, hey, we give them enough recognition on the field. It’s about time they contribute off of [sic] it, as well.”<sup>74</sup> One of the most successful spots capitalized on the fame of Tiger Woods, who is shown strolling through the *SportsCenter* newsroom when he encounters Stuart Scott, who asks about meeting for lunch. The punch line is visual, for as Woods walks away, he is followed by a gallery, similar to those that follow him on the golf course.

The ESPN-as-fan-of-sports-and-athletes-as-fans-of-ESPN concept was utilized in other advertising campaigns, including the 1999 seven-spot “Old School” campaign for

ESPN Classic, formerly the Classic Sports Network, which ESPN acquired in October 1997. The “Old School” campaign employed the use of young celebrities to pay homage to athletes of years past, putting “a contemporary spin on a network that telecasts old sporting events.”<sup>75</sup> For example, in one spot Chamique Holdsclaw celebrates basketball star Julius Erving, and in another actor Michael Rappaport waxes nostalgic about tennis champion John McEnroe. In 2001, ESPN launched the “Which *SportsCenter* do you watch?” campaign, featuring sports stars out of uniform and watching the network’s premiere news program. The ads for this campaign were augmented with a ticker streaming scores and news that had been recently introduced on various programs. Also in 2001, ESPN launched campaigns with displays that featured the ticker—one on New York City taxis and another on phone kiosks. David Goetzl reported that the “displays are less about providing up-to-the-minute scores and more about serving as a marketing vehicle to impress fans with shock value and the network’s commitment to reach them in innovative ways.”<sup>76</sup>

The “This is *SportsCenter*” campaign was lauded as one of the most influential campaigns of the 1990s and credited with triggering a wave of “mockumentary”-style copycats. Despite the proliferation of imitators, Wieden & Kennedy and ESPN have continued to use the behind-the-scenes format in updated versions of the campaign developed over the past several years. Walter Berger reported in *Advertising Age’s Creativity* that the campaign has been updated “by introducing more topicality.”<sup>77</sup> That has allowed ESPN to capitalize on specific events, like Mark McGwire hitting a then record 62<sup>nd</sup> home run, the Y2K hysteria, and the launching of *SportsCenter* in High

Definition (HD). While that means the spots may not have a long shelf life and may require frequent productions, Fearing noted that “as long as we touch on what’s topical in the world of sports and do it in unexpected ways, then I think this campaign can evolve for years.”<sup>78</sup>

Significantly, the “This is *SportsCenter*” campaign reflects a subtle but important shift in ESPN’s overall mission. According to Lee Ann Daly, executive vice president of marketing, the company’s mission statement, written in 1993, was about risk taking, creativity and integrity in being the self-proclaimed “worldwide leader in sports.” Daly noted:

But our brand positioning was that we’re not an entertainment company, we’re the world’s biggest sports fan. And that’s really driven where we’ve extended the brand over time. We chose that position because a human position is more accessible than the “worldwide leader in sports.” We wanted a conversational role with the fans.<sup>79</sup>

Part of the “This is *SportCenter*” campaign’s success was predicated on the eccentricities, quirks and foibles of *SportsCenter* anchors and anchor wannabes. None of the spots uses the “worldwide leader of sports” claim, although it continues to be used to introduce live event coverage and other promotional spots. For example, in one spot Dan Patrick and Keith Olbermann are shown applying make-up while discussing the violence in hockey, revealing that even though they deal with the tougher side of sports, they retain an effeminate side concerned with rouge and foundation.

Humor has proved to be a key ingredient in all the campaigns because, in part,

*SportsCenter* has become a cultural icon for sports news broadcasting that spawned a network television series, *Sports Night*, which aired on ABC for two seasons beginning in 1998. Lastly, one spot played on the idea of a young anchor, who, like his athlete counterparts, comes to the “big leagues” too early and can not quite handle the pressure of being a *SportsCenter* anchor. Interestingly, that spot suggested that becoming an anchor, like becoming a professional athlete, requires more than a love of sports. Nonetheless, ESPN spun that spot’s premise into a reality series in 2004 that was anything but a laughing matter, especially to some of those occupying the *SportsCenter* anchor desk.

### **Dream Job**

Prompted by its mission statement to be the world’s biggest sports fan, ESPN literally offered one sports fan the opportunity to become an anchor on its most popular and prestigious program, *SportsCenter*. Titled *Dream Job*, the program marked ESPN’s second attempt at a reality series, following *Beg, Borrow & Deal*, which featured two teams of four racing against each other to get a specified destination by performing sports related tasks, a format similar to CBS’s Emmy Award-winning reality show, *The Amazing Race*.

ESPN aired *Dream Job* on Sunday evenings starting in February 2004. One significant difference that separated *Dream Job* from other reality shows was that the winner was offered a one-year contract to work for ESPN, sitting at the *SportsCenter* anchor desk. Like other reality shows, *Dream Job* had no difficulty attracting applicants, more than 10,000 of whom went through the initial auditioning process, which had its

own sponsor in Labatt's Beer.<sup>83</sup> From the auditions, ten contestants and one alternate won invitations to vie for the *Dream Job*, and a Wendy's promotion involving soda cups at franchises provided the twelfth candidate, called the "wild card" like the NFL and MLB teams that qualify for the playoffs despite not having won division races.<sup>81</sup> Shortly before the series aired, producers allowed the alternate to become the twelfth contestant.

The first season's contestants ranged in age from twenty-one to forty, and came from diverse occupational backgrounds, including several college students, a computer programmer, a retail manager, an attorney, an executive recruiter, an auto parts salesman, a comedian and an actor/singer. Both finalists were college students who had had some broadcasting experience. As Wade Paulsen noted, "Their biggest edge, though, was being very young on a network trying to maintain its cachet with youth so that it can continue to raise its sky-high subscriber rates to cable systems (currently \$2.61 per subscriber per month just for basic ESPN)."<sup>82</sup> In the show's final hour, viewers selected Aaron Levine to be cut, leaving Mike Hall as the first *Dream Job* winner. In addition to winning a new Mazda-3 and a one-year ESPN contract, Hall appeared on *SportsCenter* later that night to take a sports quiz in which each correct answer added \$5,000 to the value of his contract. Before officially joining *SportsCenter*, Hall was to be given on-air work for ESPNEWS.

The program garnered respectable cable ratings that averaged slightly more than one million households, triple the number from the previous year's ratings for NHL games that ran in the 10 p.m. time slot on comparable Sundays. Sandomir explained that the show capitalized "on the worship of wisecracking anchors and highlights massaged into a hyperbolic reality separate from actual games."<sup>83</sup> *Dream Job* was something of a

nightmare for others, including anchor Dan Patrick, who expressed incredulity on his radio show that the winner was being hired to serve as a *SportsCenter* anchor, asking, “Would you give the punt, pass and kick winner a contract to punt for the Bengals?”<sup>84</sup> Patrick’s rhetorical question brings into focus the mission statement and brand positioning that ESPN is the world’s biggest sports fan and that all sports fans share equally in its gestalt. As Sandomir pointed out in a review of the program, “It [*SportsCenter*] is a mystical place for fans, an Emerald City where the Wizard of Oz is Dan Patrick; it is a comfort zone where an hour’s worth of news, highlights and Top 10’s fulfills a craving that regenerates nightly.”<sup>85</sup> Pointing out that live television combined with on-air inexperience hardly made for compelling viewing, Sandomir also explained that *Dream Job* at least dispelled the notion that anchoring *SportsCenter* could be mastered by wannabes without “skills and personas honed delivering three-and-a-half-minute nightly reports in smaller markets.”<sup>86</sup>

After briefly sharing the anchor desk with Linda Cohn in July 2004, Hall was assigned to ESPNEWS. The following year Hall became, according to Burke Magnus, ESPN vice president, “the guy, the face and voice of ESPNU,”<sup>87</sup> the ESPN network devoted to college sports that was launched in March 2005. Given the long-term planning that invariably went into the decision to launch ESPNU, it is reasonable to conjecture that finding a young talent to host ESPNU was the ultimate, though unstated, goal of *Dream Job*.

## **Conclusion**

In a mediascape dominated by the proliferation and consumption of images, all

forms of production, including sportscast highlights, are impacted by the presence of spectacle. This has occurred, paradoxically, out of “the attempt to set up a separate sphere of leisure uncontaminated by the world of work and politics.”<sup>88</sup> One reason why mediated sport has been unable to resist the encroachment of a political economy lies in *SportsCenter’s* proven capacity to attract and deliver the most attractive consumer demographic to the marketplace in volume with regularity. The male demographic of eighteen to thirty-four-year-olds has been shown to have an insatiable appetite for not only mediated sports texts, but also for the consumer products that are advertised on those programs. David Rowe explains:

Media sports texts are perhaps, then, at the leading edge of this “culturalization” of economics: they cannot be eaten or worn yet billions of people desire them in a bewildering variety of types, and media corporations are willing to expend billions of units of currency to supply them, often ‘free of charge’, to the user.<sup>89</sup>

ESPN has certainly assumed a leading position in this process of culturalization of economics, having become ABC’s *de facto* sports division and in the process having raised its own profile, as well as the profiles of ABC’s other properties.

The success of ESPN’s *SportsCenter* within the political and cultural economy stems from its ability to harness power by controlling the production, distribution and consumption of mediated sport resources. Because political economy tends to concentrate on a specific set of social relations organized around the power to control other people, processes and objects, ESPN must continually create circuits of communication products that link a chain of primary producers to wholesalers, retailers and consumers whose

purchases, rentals and attention are fed back into new processes of production. What becomes critical for this circuit, as Timothy Luke notes, is “control of the code, rather than of the means of production.”<sup>90</sup> In the transmission of these codes, all types of consumer products and services from sports equipment to alcohol to travel destinations are associated with mediated sport events or serve as sponsors for specific *SportsCenter* segments (“Budweiser Hot Seat,” “Gatorade Ultimate Highlight,” “Top Ten ‘Brilliant’ Plays”). Luke argues that [Georg] Lukács’s insights into the cycles of commodification remain sound.

In this new world, however, the electronic media—as the most expressive articulation of commodification under these economic, political and social conditions—are basic geocosmic forces that form both the molten core of today’s second nature and the hard crust of its image-driven phantom objectivity. Their broadcast transmissions bubble up in an electronic primordial soup that continuously swirls around the processes of everyday life.<sup>91</sup>

Luke argues that through this electronic primordial soup, corporate growth and production are designed to produce both the needs and need satisfaction for viewers. Viewers of ESPN’s *SportsCenter* are promised the exhilaration of athletic achievement and seduced into completing their part as consumers in a reproductive social order. Both producers and consumers, those behind and in front of the screen, are involved in a continuous (co)production of what Lawrence Wernick calls the promotional culture.<sup>92</sup>

The self-proclaimed mantle of “Worldwide Leader in Sports,” with all the brand recognition and prestige that such purported leadership entails, gives ESPN an important

competitive advantage in the sport-media-commercial-complex. Arguably, the power employed to captivate and move consumers through *SportsCenter's* constellation of signs and images resides in the highlight form. Luke explains:

Power here is essentially seductive, motivating its subjects with images to collaborate in reproducing or completing the codes' logic or sequence at their screens. Individuals recreate themselves continuously in the permissive coding of individual self-management.<sup>93</sup>

Luke points out that television personalities and sport stars serve as surrogate friends and neighbors for viewers in an electronic simulation of friends and community. As the distinction between simulation and the real disappears, "the forms of individual subjectivity and social consciousness are themselves manufactured to sustain consumption."<sup>94</sup> Ultimately, sustaining consumption is predicated on a flow of sport highlights that produce both needs and need satisfaction for viewers.

*SportsCenter* segments are branded, so that a constant stream of product names and icons act as lead-ins before the viewer gets to the actual highlight, commentary or interview. Arguably, these segments can be seen as examples of postmodern art that bring together advertisement imagery, ideological codes and symbols of consumer capitalism.<sup>95</sup> Viewers are implicated in consumerism based on affect. Rather than allowing people to satisfy real human needs, the market culture constrains individuals "to realize their needs in mass-produced material packages and professionally approved behavioral scripts."<sup>96</sup>

In ESPN's Little Shop of Highlights, *SportsCenter* constantly demands that

viewers watch its “Top 10 Plays,” its “Ultimate Highlight Reel,” its “100 Greatest Athletes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” its “This is *SportsCenter*” commercials. In doing so, it has codified a form and selected which sports moments, achievements, and athletes deserve to be in the canon. In this Disney-owned company’s culture of promotion, all signifying gestures are swallowed up, continually proffered and deferred, creating a maze “in which there is no final destination, no final reward, and where the walls are pictures (and pictures of pictures) of ever-multiplying varieties of cheese.”<sup>97</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rudy Martzke and Reid Cherner, “Channeling How to View Sports,” *USA Today*, August 17, 2004, D2.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Freeman, *ESPN: The Uncensored History* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 2000), 93. ESPN’s first *SportsCenter* program did not use a single highlight clip. Highlights were shown at 11:30 p.m. on a show called “Sports Recap.” One of the problems ESPN faced was securing highlights from the networks. NBC and ABC readily agreed to open their video archives because they did not view ESPN as competition. When CBS refused, ESPN began taking them without permission until the older network relented (pp. 105-106).

<sup>3</sup> Rudy Martzke and Reid Cherner, “Channeling How to View Sports,” *USA Today*, August 17, 2004, D2. That figure goes beyond watching sportscasts, however; it includes all ESPN programming on its numerous television channels—ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU, ESPN Classic, ESPNEWS, ESPN Radio, ESPN.com and ESPN Deportes.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Sandomir, “At ESPN, the Revolution Was Televised,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1999, D1.

<sup>5</sup> “Annie Roboff Web Site Interview.” <http://www.geocities.com/aroboff/interview2.html>

<sup>6</sup> Pat Eaton-Robb, “ESPN’s *SportsCenter* goes on walkabout.” [http://www.boston.com/sports/other\\_sports/articles/2007/01/15/espns\\_sportscenter\\_goes\\_on\\_walkabout.html](http://www.boston.com/sports/other_sports/articles/2007/01/15/espns_sportscenter_goes_on_walkabout.html)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ted Miller, “Happy 30,000<sup>th</sup>, ESPN; now cool it.” Retrieved [http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/miller/303426\\_miller13.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/miller/303426_miller13.html)

<sup>9</sup> Grant Farred, “Cool as the Other Side of the Pillow: How ESPN’s *SportsCenter* Has Changed Television Sports Talk,” *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 24.2 (May 2000): 99-100.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>12</sup> Chris Harris, “Welcome to the *SportsCenter* Altar.” <http://www.sportscenteraltar.com>.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Berman, “A...Picture...Is...Worth...A...Thousand...Words.” In *ESPN Ultimate*

*Highlight Reel: The 365 Wildest, Weirdest, Most Unforgettable SportsCenter Moments of All Time* (New York: ESPN Books, 2006), i.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Hirshberg, *ESPN25: 25 Mind-Bending, Eye-Popping, Culture-Morphing Years of Highlights* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2004), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Berman, "Picture," ii.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy W. Luke, *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Information Society* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 34.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Stam, "Television News and Its Spectator," In *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches—An Anthology*, ed., E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: University Publications of America, Inc., 1983), 23-43.

<sup>18</sup> Hirshberg, *ESPN25*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> David Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 65.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>21</sup> David B. Sullivan, "Broadcast Television and the Game of Packaging Sports," In *Handbook of Sports and Media*, ed., A. A. Raney and J. Bryant, (Mahway, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 135.

<sup>22</sup> David L. Andrews, "Excavating Michael Jordan: Notes on a Critical Pedagogy of Sporting Representation," in *Sport and Postmodern Times*, ed., Geneviève Rail, (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), 195.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Sandomir, "At ESPN After 25 Years, Happy Birthday to Us," *New York Times*, September 7, 2004, D1.

<sup>24</sup> Frank J. Prial, "Sports Channel Adds Business News," *New York Times*, February 5, 1983, 47.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Freeman, *ESPN*, 120.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Alfano, "ESPN Struggling, but Making an Impact," *New York Times*, May 24, 1983, B12.

<sup>29</sup> Steve Knoll, "More Coverage for Olympics Fans," *New York Times*, July 22, 1984, H22.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Katz, "ESPN's Public Service at Cooperstown," *New York Times*, July 30, 1985, B6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Steve Schneider, "Everything about the Game—Except the Game," *New York Times*, January 26, 1986, H32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Freeman, *ESPN.*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Hirshberg, *ESPN25*, 89.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>40</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1966), no. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 8.

- <sup>42</sup> Luke, *Screens*, 28.
- <sup>43</sup> Geneviève Rail, "Seismography of the Postmodern Condition: Three Theses on the Implosion of Sport," In *Sport and Postmodern Times*, ed., G. Rail (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 151.
- <sup>44</sup> Qtd. in Farred, 100.
- <sup>45</sup> Steven Barnett, *Games and Sets: The Changing Face of Sport on Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 8.
- <sup>46</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism & Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 63.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>48</sup> Rail, "Postmodern," 151.
- <sup>49</sup> Ted Miller, "Happy 30,000<sup>th</sup>, ESPN; now cool it." [http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/miller/303426\\_miller13.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/miller/303426_miller13.html)
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- <sup>52</sup> John Bloom, "No fall from Grace: Grace Thorpe's 'Athlete of the Century' Campaign for her Tather." In *Native Athletes in Sport & Society: A Reader*, ed., C. R. King (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 234.
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- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> Farred, "Cool," 112.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> Jim Shea, "The King: How ESPN Changes Everything," *Columbia Journalism Review*, January/February, 2000.
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- <sup>62</sup> David A. Klatell and Norman Marcus, *Sports for Sale: Television, Money, and the Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 219.
- <sup>63</sup> Farred, "Cool," 114.
- <sup>64</sup> "ESPN Sports Attitude Mixing Dedication and Irreverence," *Advertising Age*, October 23, 1995, 3.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> Anthony Vagnoni, "Jock Yocks: A New Promo Campaign For ESPN Gives Fun-Loving Sports Stars a 'Spinal Tap,'" *Advertising Age's Creativity*, November 1, 1995, 15.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> *ESPN25 DVD* that accompanied the book, *ESPN25: 25 Mind-Bending, Eye-Popping, Culture-Morphing Years of Highlights*, New York: Hyperion Books, 2004.
- <sup>69</sup> Bob Garfield, "The Best Awards; ESPN Scores Best in Show," *Advertising Age*, May 27, 1996, S1.
- <sup>70</sup> Jon Rappoport, "The Marketing 100; ESPN Judy Fearing," *Advertising Age*, June 24, 1996, S3.
- <sup>71</sup> Qtd. in Shea, 3.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> “Vote: which commercial is your favorite?”

[http://proxy.espn.go.com/chat/sportsnation/polling?event\\_id=3266](http://proxy.espn.go.com/chat/sportsnation/polling?event_id=3266).

<sup>75</sup> Wayne Friedman, “Young Stars Give Fresh Spin to ESPN Classic Programs: Ads Feature Contemporary Celebs Touting Heroes of Past,” *Advertising Age*, May 31, 1999, 75.

<sup>76</sup> David Goetzl, “ESPN Ad Effort Hails a Cab; Adapt Media’s Pilot Program Driving in NYC,” *Advertising Age*, May 28, 2001, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Warren Berger, “Equal Sequels,” *Creativity*, May 1, 1999, 30.

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<sup>79</sup> Melanie Shortman, “ESPN: Know Thyself (And Thine Audience),” *Creativity*, October 1, 2005, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Linnett, “The Buzz; What We’re Talking About,” *Advertising Age*, January 19, 2004, 33.

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<sup>82</sup> Wade Paulsen, “Mike Hall Wins ESPN’s ‘Dream Job.’”

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<sup>85</sup> Richard Sandomir, “‘Dream Job,’ the Nightmare, Showing Now on ESPN,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2004, D4.

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<sup>87</sup> Alexander Marciniak, “‘Dream Job’ Winner Gets Prime Spot with New ESPNU.”

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<sup>88</sup> Christopher Lasch. *The Culture of Narcissism: American life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979), 216.

<sup>89</sup> Rowe, *Media*, 92.

<sup>90</sup> Luke, *Screens*, 36.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>92</sup> Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression* (London: Sage, 1991).

<sup>93</sup> Luke, *Screens*, 48.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>95</sup> Geneviève Rail, “Introduction,” in *Sport and Postmodern Times*, ed., G. Rail (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>96</sup> Luke, *Screens*, 34.

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## **CHAPTER 8: THE REAL VIRTUALITY FOR AN AUDIENCE OF ONE**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explicates the developments in new media that reshaped the sports mediascape by providing new technological means of deploying the sportscast highlight form. Over the past two decades, sports broadcasters, fans, athletes and the leagues have all been impacted by the changes, especially those precipitated by developments in delivery systems (e.g., World Wide Web and mobile devices). However, because the integration of new media with coverage of major sporting events involved not only changes in technology, but also social and cultural practices, it is important not to fall prey to what Henry Jenkins calls “the Black Box Fallacy.”<sup>1</sup> This fallacy, Jenkins argues, reduces “media change to technological change and strips aside the cultural levels.... Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift. Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences.”<sup>2</sup>

The relationships between existing media and markets, genres and audiences underwent considerable change as a result of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which called for all restrictions on cable rates to be lifted in March 1999. The prospect of complete deregulation of cable rates that were already growing at a pace four times that of overall consumer prices raised concerns among consumer groups and members of Congress.<sup>3</sup> Despite new types of direct-broadcast satellite service (e.g., DirectTV and Primestar), cable still controlled eighty-seven percent of the market share. Increases in subscription prices were as constant as the changes in basic packages as cable systems moved to a fiber optic network capable of delivering expanded channel capacity, high-

speed Internet connections, video on demand, and residential phone service.<sup>4</sup> The Telecommunications Act also called for a change in the broadcasting standard from analog to digital, ensuring that programming, whether standard or high definition (HDTV), would be “picture perfect, free of ghosts and snow.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition to these changes, new media created even more delivery systems, genres and audiences, further complicating the sports media market. On the one hand, as delivery systems changed rapidly in the 1990s, their utilization was anything but smooth, as evidenced by International Business Machines’ (IBM) “extreme disaster”<sup>6</sup> with its computer network for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. Only two years later, however, the Internet provided football (soccer) fans of World Cup ’98 not only highlights of all the tournament’s goals but live broadcast of matches, as well as updates, complete rosters, schedules and souvenirs.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, cultural protocols and practices related to media were dynamic for both producers and consumers. To comprehend the dynamics of the new sports media landscape, it is necessary to consider the changed context of sportscasting and the changed model of consumer behavior, what Jenkins calls “affective economics, [a model] which seeks to understand the emotional underpinnings of consumer decision-making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decisions.”<sup>8</sup>

Before the end of the twentieth century a media giant like CBS found itself in competition with Internet media companies to provide the latest sports news and highlights. Not surprisingly, in March 1997, CBS announced that it had acquired a twenty-two percent stake in Sportsline USA Inc., a company specializing in providing

sports information to various Web sites, as “a vital first step” in the network’s Internet strategy.<sup>9</sup> At almost the same time, ABC News began its venture online jointly with Starwave Corporation, “a 300-person collection of software programmers and journalists behind a series of popular Web sites, led by ESPN Net Sportszone, an on-line sports service.”<sup>10</sup> At the time, Sportszone was the most heavily trafficked new-media service on the Internet apart from the major search engines like Yahoo and computer sites like Cnet and ZD Net.

Professional sports leagues and organizations also embraced the new technology. By 2001, the National Football League (NFL), which had the most valuable television contract in sports, signed the largest league Internet rights package worth in cash and non-cash value more than \$300 million with a consortium of America On Line (AOL) Time Warner, Sportsline.com and Viacom, which had purchased CBS in September 1999.<sup>11</sup> Although the NFL had an \$18 billion reason why its Web site should not draw viewers away from the coverage of football telecasts, the league quickly learned how to make its Web site and online shop “the parking lot after the game, where the fans can get close to the players as they make their way out of the stadium.”<sup>12</sup> That included sales of NFL team apparel and merchandise.

If the Internet was helping to create new alliances in the dissemination of sportscasts, then so too was it changing the way consumers accessed sportscasts and sports news. Television may have spawned the “Couch Potato,” but he was eventually joined by his online counterpart, the “Web Potato.”<sup>13</sup> Even though data showed that for many people the Web had already become “an electronic routine”<sup>14</sup> and companies were

employing software programs (e.g., Little Brother) to rein in employees' "digital dalliances,"<sup>15</sup> television traditionalists at the 1999 National Association of Television Executives' NAPTE convention predicted that people would never use their computers to watch their favorite television programs.

This chapter considers the contexts within which new media, despite enhancing access to the coverage of sportscasts, only further fragmented the audience for mediated sports, saturated an already soggy sports market and guaranteed staggering losses for the television and cable networks that continued to pay exorbitant rights fees that even Rupert Murdoch believed "have gone beyond an economic level."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately for the networks, the difficulty of attracting a mass audience for sports telecasts drove the cost of securing the rights for premium events upward. Although no one was quite certain why, television ratings for the major sports continued a decade-long decline. During that time, sports ratings had been eroded by cable television, home video and satellite dishes, a trend that continued with the Internet, TiVo and DVDs. Most importantly, for a generation nurtured on highlights, instant replays, and more cable versions of ESPN than there were broadcast networks for the generation that preceded it, sports were watched in a far different way than they had been during the three-network era.<sup>17</sup> As Richard Sandomir explained, "The bonds of loyalty to a nationally televised sport can be broken more easily because there is so much else to do and perhaps less patience."<sup>18</sup> Viewers constantly searching for marquee match-ups more readily passed over games and events in which star attractions were not competing.

New alliances between broadcast and cable networks, technology companies, and

wireless mobile phone providers helped to build a new fan base for sports by offering Internet pay packages, enhancing production values for live coverage of major events, and providing more infotainment, especially highlights. As broadband connections became more available, sports programming providers offered more online pay packages. For example, Major League Baseball (MLB) teamed up with Sun Microsystems to create MLB Advanced Media (MLBAM) in 2000. Through its Web site, MLB.com, the league began offering pay-packages that enabled visitors to “listen to and watch live games and highlights, check scores, buy game tickets, purchase team merchandise and even manage a virtual team.”<sup>19</sup> With an average of six million visitors daily, ten million page views per day and no application downtime in the latest two years of operation, MLB.com became the Internet’s most successful broadband Web portal devoted to professional sports.<sup>20</sup> In 2005, ESPN introduced viewers to ESPN 360 and its “Full Circle” coverage for the presentation of a men’s college basketball game, in which each of its networks presented a different angle of the game being broadcast. Wireless companies like Verizon utilized second- and third-generation systems like VCAST, which included more than three hundred daily video clips from channels and shows like CNN, NBC Sports and ESPN.

Lastly, at the same time the professional leagues were offering coverage of their games, highlights and previews to consumers willing to subscribe to pay packages, they were also seeking to expand control of their intellectual property rights. This desire to expand control of intellectual property rights pitted the professional leagues against the First Amendment rights of the news media, especially traditional print media and independent media seeking to cover “a public news event which ought to be in the public

domain.”<sup>21</sup> While the root of the issue can be traced back to the International Olympic Committee’s creation of Rule 49 to its Charter in 1956, which set strict limitations on news media coverage of the events, the newest battle was spawned by the creation of the Internet and alternate ways of distributing news.

### **Technology’s False Start**

The strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century sports mediascape was established before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: In order to maintain and add to its customer base, entities like the International Olympic Committee and NBC wanted the consumer’s attention, as well as the consumer’s time and money, at every possible moment. Harnessing and utilizing the technology proved to be far more difficult in practice than it was in theory. In 1996, organizers for Atlanta’s Olympic Games promised “the most technologically sophisticated Games ever.”<sup>22</sup> However, by the second day, IBM’s \$80 million information system, “Info 96,” was missing “large blocks of data, including any warnings about the continuing troubles to the Olympic transportation systems.”<sup>23</sup> Although IBM’s goal was to provide results in real time from the twenty-nine venues to its mainframe computers and then on to the rest of the world, Olympic technology officials were reduced to “a manual results system that the ancient Greeks could appreciate.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, results were transmitted by facsimile machines from the outlying venues to a central office and distributed by runners. News agencies, promised an electronic results system fed directly from Olympic computers, were reduced to having employees “watch the competitions on television and then type results into their systems.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite the problems with its communications systems, the Atlanta Olympic

Games were indeed the first Olympics that offered access through the Internet. Promises exceeded what was delivered, especially at the two largest sites, both of which were collaborative efforts—the IBM-Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games site and the NBC-IOC sites. Arguably, the best way to get information about specific sports was to access sport-specific sites like Velonews Interactive. For example, Ken Brown of the *New York Times* reported that although the IBM site promised “a continuous flow of digital images from nearly every venue,” what they got were delays and “relentless commercialism; the home page is like an infomercial for Olympic junk.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, NBC planned to integrate its television broadcasts with its Web pages. However, Brown explained that NBC’s plan to use new InterCast technology developed by Intel was mostly for show because “few computers have the equipment to use InterCast technology. Maybe next time.”<sup>27</sup>

With a little more digging at sport-specific sites, however, users of sites such as Velonews Interactive were provided “details only a fanatic could love, including pictures of Super Bike 2, which American riders will use in the Olympics...[and] expanded pages that show even the smallest details of a competition, noting that the winner of the 3-meter springboard diving competition nailed a forward 1½ somersault in pike position on his fourth dive.”<sup>28</sup> Rather than enduring NBC’s 171.5 hours of coverage primarily devoted to the most popular events and name athletes, serious fans of a less popular sport no longer had to waste hours “wearing a hole in the living room carpet waiting for a fleeting glimpse of a triumph or failure.”<sup>29</sup> Even those opposed to Olympism found information. At the interactive sports magazine, *Competitor Online*, visitors found a feature article

about how the Olympic Games were displacing Atlanta's homeless. Brown added, "The highlight here is Spoilsport, the anti-mascot of the Olympics."<sup>30</sup>

By the time of the next major world sporting event, World Cup '98 held in France, many of technological problems plaguing the integration of new and old media during the Atlanta Olympic Games had been solved. Not only were all sixty-four games of World Cup being broadcast live in the United States by ABC, ESPN, ESPN2 and Univision, the Spanish-language network, but a plethora of Web sites were available "to slake the thirst of even the most avid fans."<sup>31</sup> Because of the six-hour difference between France and the Eastern time zone of the United States, live coverage ended before most people had completed work. Nonetheless, several Internet sites offered live broadcast of the matches, including one that offered highlights of every goal scored during the tournament. One magazine's Web site featured the work of thirty-five photographers stationed in twenty-two countries around the globe "to chronicle how the world watches and reacts to the World Cup."<sup>32</sup> Matchday.com still operates and provides links to many other sites, including Rugby USA and Team USA.

Time difference also proved to be a major handicap for NBC's coverage of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, resulting in ratings that were "the worst in television history for the event."<sup>33</sup> The precipitous ratings drop was directly attributable to not only NBC's decision to delay broadcasting events in the United States until many hours after they had been contested in Australia, but also to "a flood of information about the Games...on the Internet and on sports cable channels and sports talk radio stations, some of which did not exist four and eight years ago."<sup>34</sup> Because the Sydney Olympic Games

were scheduled in late September, NBC's broadcasts faced competition from the other networks' coverage of National Football League games, pennant races of Major League Baseball, and college football games. Having invested more than \$3 billion in rights fees for the next five Olympics, NBC sought to "improve on ways it can keep viewers informed about Olympic athletes between the Games."<sup>35</sup> The most important way, according to NBC president Bob Wright, was the Internet, and at its Web site NBC offered features especially directed toward young fans. Bonnie Rothman Morris of the *New York Times* noted that most of the educational content for children on the NBC site was provided by Scholastic, as well as plenty of interactive games that came courtesy of sponsors, such as the IBM Basketball One on One game, the Visa Long Jump game and the Budweiser Boxing Battle.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, NBC was criticized for its overt commercialism during its coverage of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, just as it was for its patriotic jingoism during the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic Games, despite claims that it would not overemphasize patriotic elements in the wake of September 11, 2001, when it promised to carry "celebrations by Americans and athletes and fans from other countries."<sup>37</sup>

### **Niche Players**

Given the ability to promote their Web sites with almost limitless amounts of television advertising, the major television networks were presumed to have distinct advantages in attracting traffic to their sites. Despite brand depth and consumer loyalty to their television offerings, as well as millions of dollars in promotion, according to one *New York Times* reporter Saul Hansell, the networks, "who are more accustomed to being

mighty media monoliths than niche players scrounging for audiences,” experienced “a humbling comedown” in competing with the major portals like Yahoo, American Online and Microsoft’s MSN.<sup>38</sup> In part, the networks’ problems stemmed from an overestimation their own strengths. Although promotions helped attract users to their sites, a lack of depth and sophisticated features at the sites failed to turn the curious into steady visitors. As Hansell explained, once they waded in, the networks “soon found themselves up to their knees in a swamp of tedious portal necessities like building business directories and creating retail transaction services that have little to do with the media companies’ expertise.”<sup>39</sup>

One area of expertise that the networks transferred to their Internet sites was in providing sports news. When CBS acquired a stake in Sportsline, a leading Internet sports service, it used the partnership to gain a foothold online to disseminate its sports content. The \$100 million deal, which included an option to increase ownership to thirty-three percent in the following five years, was part of an overall strategy predicated on backing independent, specialized Web services like Sportsline and MarketWatch rather than trying to create a network-scale portal.<sup>40</sup> Successful integration occurred when CBS Sports used its sports broadcasts to encourage viewers to visit CBS Sportsline.com for updates and highlights of ongoing events (e.g., Masters golf, U. S. Open tennis) in the same way CBS News cited financial reports on CBS MarketWatch.com. CBS maintained the relationship with Sportsline for more than a decade. Finally, in August 2007, CBS SportsLine.com renamed the site CBSSports.com to unify the CBS Sports brand across its multiple delivery systems.

Unlike Disney's launch of Go.com, which failed to muster much of a challenge to the major search engines, ABC found a measure of success for its Internet venture by also collaborating with an innovative new-media company. In Starwave Corporation, ABC aligned itself with Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft Corporation, as well as a team of programmers and journalists who had already succeeded in developing a series of popular Web sites, including ESPNNet Sportszone. By the time the Walt Disney Company purchased Starwave, the ESPNNet Sportszone had already established itself as the most successful Internet site focused on a mainstream topic, namely, sports.<sup>41</sup> In 1997, the Sportszone, heavily promoted during ABC and ESPN sportscasts, received six-hundred thousand visitors and almost seven million page views daily, and brought in roughly \$7 million a year in advertising revenues.<sup>42</sup> Additional revenues came from the sixty-thousand subscribers who paid a monthly fee for premium services, called ESPN Insider, including special columns and fantasy baseball games. In 1999, Disney named Steve Bornstein, former head of ESPN, as president of the Web portal Go.com. Michael Eisner, Disney's chairman, pointed out that Bornstein, who joined ESPN "when cable was a nascent industry—much like the Internet today—was instrumental in building ESPN into the undisputed market leader."<sup>43</sup> While ESPN maintained its position as market leader in delivering online sports information, Disney pulled back from the portal business in 2000 under Bornstein's direction and focused on its mainstays—travel and entertainment.

While the networks struggled to find their niche on the Internet, the transition was considerably easier for the professional sports leagues, despite the seasonal nature of their operations. Like the networks, the major professional leagues depended on a

collaborative effort to host and produce their Web sites. For example, in 1998, the NFL signed a \$10 million, three-year deal with ESPN.com for its Web site, NFL.com; and Venator Inc., which owned the Foot Locker and Champs's sporting goods chains; for NFLShop section of its Web site and catalog operations.<sup>44</sup> At that time, the site offered scores of games in progress, text-based play-by-play descriptions and post-game articles. Even though it attracted an average of almost half a million individual visitors to its site, its vice president for broadcasting, Dennis Lewin, downplayed the site's significance. "We don't believe anybody really wants to sit at their computers and watch a game in text."<sup>45</sup> Lewin's comment is understandably understated in light of the \$18 billion television rights package the league had signed with the networks in January 1997, and he added that the NFL Web site would not be enhanced "in any way, shape or form that will ultimately draw people away from the game,"<sup>46</sup> by which he doubtlessly meant away from watching the game on television.

Two years later, the NFL.com Web site surpassed CBS Sportsline.com with 6.1 million users and moved behind only ESPN.com, still the most visited sports site on the Web. Its users spent almost \$40 million at the Web site, representing approximately one-third of the roughly \$125 million in yearly revenues generated through licensing agreements with makers of team apparel and merchandise.<sup>47</sup> Give its ubiquitous brand, more than six hundred free advertisements for NFL.com and NFLShop on network television broadcasts and CBS/WestwoodOne radio network broadcasts, and the minor role online commerce played in the NFL's business, the Web site was a guaranteed success. Commissioner Paul Tagliabue also pointed to the Web's importance in reaching

younger fans. “If you look at it in terms of who’s using the Internet now, it’s the technology optimists, the young people. And we do want to connect them to the game.”<sup>48</sup>

Internet analysts were not at all surprised when the NFL signed a new five-year deal worth \$110 million in cash and at least \$200 million in non-cash value with a consortium of AOL Time Warner, Sportsline.com and Viacom in July 2001.<sup>49</sup>

Sportsline.com replaced ESPN.com as the host of NFL.com, and AOL coordinated the site’s marketing, cross-promoted it with programming on Viacom networks (i.e., CBS, MTV and Nickelodeon), and offered a limited number of NFL video highlights. This last point had been the deal-breaker for ESPN.com, which was in the process of expanding its own NFL-only site and wanted more video rights than the NFL was offering.<sup>50</sup>

Significantly, as the number of visitors to its Web site increased, the NFL became increasingly vigilant in controlling the dissemination of video highlights, not posting them to NFL.com until after the ESPN Sunday night game. Why the NFL only posted game highlights after Sunday’s final game is not completely clear, since this enabled local television stations to use the highlights in their late night sportscasts before they became available at NFL.com. Perhaps not posting game highlights on its Web site earlier was a concession to the networks. This self-imposed embargo on its own site was not the last time the NFL imposed limitations on the use of highlights.

### **An Electronic Routine**

If the networks were not quite certain how to use the Internet as a delivery system, few knew how consumers would use the Internet. Even though the expression “surfing the Web” had become part of everyday parlance by the mid-1990s, the Web’s democracy

of opportunity did not necessarily translate into a democracy of equal outcomes. In fact, as more people spent more time online, they did so at a smaller number of sites.<sup>51</sup> As the *New York Times*' Amy Harmon posited, "That America's infatuation with the Web as a haven for cybersurfing adventures has morphed into a more mundane fondness for a useful information tool is in many ways testament to how quickly it has become a part of everyday life for so many."<sup>52</sup> A Jupiter Media Matrix study showed that in 2000 about sixty percent of Internet users visited more than twenty Web sites in a month, but by the following year the proportion had been halved, even though the study revealed that the time spent online was rising.<sup>53</sup>

This concentration of longer visits at fewer sites arguably shed light on the public's lack of interest in cultural diversity, but it was also attributed to strategies employed by the site developers. For example, in 1998 ESPN launched an advertising campaign for its ESPN SportsZone built around Netboy, "a sports-crazed, cyber-savvy twentysomething, interacting with athletes and ESPN on-air talent."<sup>54</sup> The ads sought to legitimize ESPN's online service with the television network's credibility in the same self-deprecating tone used in the "This is *SportsCenter*" campaign. Significantly, the ads positioned visiting the SportsZone Web site "as an everyday ritual."<sup>55</sup> Not only did Netboy become such an iconic figure that he was employed in promotions for upcoming television programming, but *SportsCenter* also ran segments that directed viewers to learn more about a story at the SportsZone. Additionally, SportsZone visitors were encouraged to find "Insider" information by subscribing to the site's ESPN Insider service.<sup>56</sup> That ESPN's SportsZone, renamed ESPN.com, became the Web's most-visited

sports only site was not surprising given the marketing and advertising budgets for campaigns on ESPN-owned television, print and radio to drive consumers to its site. As Bernardo Huberman, author of *Laws of the Web*, noted, “At the beginning it [Web] was like a beautiful, fertile ground where all sorts of organizations could theoretically survive. But the selection process has been incredibly fast.”<sup>57</sup> Large sites like ESPN.com and Yahoo quickly learned how to utilize features like Yahoo’s “Buzz Index,” which listed the most-searched stories and photos of the day, “build[ing] on themselves in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.”<sup>58</sup>

Only national, international and business news ranked higher than sports news among those who used the Internet as their primary source of news, a 1998 study revealed. These news consumers, who regularly signed on at work where connections tended to be faster, did not take the time to go “through the cumbersome business of calling up and playing video clips of news events.”<sup>59</sup> This may have been attributable to the employers’ attempts “to rein in such digital dalliances” by utilizing software programs like “Little Brother” that allowed managers to track which sites employees visited on the Web.<sup>60</sup> Of course, such measures gave rise to countermeasures like “Stealth Surfing,” software designed to avoid management computer monitoring. If employees were engaged in cyber-surfing, their digital dalliance stemmed, in part, from the proliferation of sports webcasts that were readily available from ESPN SportsZone, CBS Sportsline and “a handful of smaller operations that seek to simulate games as they happen, using animation or text updates fed from the sidelines.”<sup>61</sup>

In April 1998, ESPN’s SportsZone launched its first full season of Web-based

baseball coverage while CBS Sportsline was in its second, both having also provided Webcasts of football games the previous fall. As Matt Richtel noted in a 1998 *New York Times* article, “Baseball Live” was CBS Sportsline’s most popular online offering, attracting “hundreds of thousands of viewers each game.”<sup>62</sup> Although the experience of a Webcast, Richtel noted, “was not even a distant cousin of television,”<sup>63</sup> it did allow displaced fans to remain loyal and follow their favorite teams via the Internet. Richtel also explained that Webcasts were a harbinger of “what is called convergence, the melding of television hardware and content with home computer hardware and content.”<sup>64</sup> This form of convergence allowed visitors to the site to use a single screen to access the broadcasts, as well as all available statistics. Interestingly, these simulated Webcasts harkened back to the first decades of the twentieth century when baseball games were “shown” on large display boards that recreated the action forwarded over telegraph wires. Just as radio rendered these crude animations obsolete, so, too, would Webcasts eventually give way to newer technology. Audio-Net, a Dallas-based Internet broadcaster, was already offering play-by-play “for contests broadcast exclusively for the Internet, like events at some small universities.”<sup>65</sup> Although CBS Sportsline’s executive producer predicted that Web simulcasts would begin incorporating “not just audio but also video streaming and still shots to create a much richer experience,”<sup>66</sup> video streaming of live sporting events did not occur for several more years. Before Web simulcasts were made available, licensing issues related to rights fees had to be sorted out. A necessary first step on the road to live video Web simulcasts was the addition of streaming video highlights.

At the 1999 television trade show, called NAPTE, sponsored by the National Association of Television Executives, the importance of streaming audio and video was preached by, among others, Mark Cuban, co-founder and president of Broadcast.com Incorporated, who told a ballroom full of television executives “that any day now people will use their computers to watch television, buy merchandise from their favorite shows and even send feedback to producers or advertisers.”<sup>67</sup> That Cuban had accurately envisioned consumers’ changing computer protocols and practices was evidenced not only in the fortune his company made, but also in the increasing number of people who used their computers to date, shop and watch sports. Whereas a seminar about how to sell advertising on a Web site had drawn ten people at the previous year’s NAPTE, that year it drew over one hundred, and more than a third of all the seminars were devoted to new media issues.<sup>68</sup> Despite the growing importance of streaming audio and video, one television executive boldly predicted that “people will never use a computer to watch ‘E.R.’ or ‘Everybody Loves Raymond,’ or any other hit show, movie, or sports event, for that matter.”<sup>69</sup>

### **Motion Sickness**

Such a prediction defied logic given the assortment of technological gadgetry already available to consumers. For example, exercising was enhanced with the first virtual-reality bike, the Tectrix VR bike, “which takes them [users] through simulated adventures projected by a CD-Rom on a computer screen.”<sup>70</sup> Golf and ski enthusiasts used multimedia technology to take video tours of courses or ski areas, get instructions or equipment reviews, talk with famous golfers or skiers and even play a free virtual game

at GolfWeb.<sup>71</sup> While the golf and ski sites presented photographs of scenic vistas and perilous plunges, they often lacked much objective content. As the *New York Times*' Verne Kopytoff noted, "On many sites, feature stories, especially about ski resorts, read as if they had been written by a publicist."<sup>72</sup> For hard news, there were sites like the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) Tour site, which offered live, hole-by-hole scoring updates during its events, as well as links to other tours (e.g., Senior, European and Nationwide).<sup>73</sup>

All sports seemingly utilized the Web to attract fans. With the development of Virtual Spectator, yachting enthusiasts enjoyed coverage of the 1999 and 2003 America's Cup races online. Thanks to telemetry data emitted directly from each race boat, subscribers to the service followed the competing boats' positions on the course "marked with an illustrated 'snail trail.'"<sup>74</sup> That new technology was employed to bring America's Cup races to sports fans in general—an occurrence that also occurred in 1897 with film, 1930 with newsreels, and 1983 with cable television—attests to the importance of aesthetics in the appreciation of a sporting event, especially one so visually compelling. The point has added significance when cast in the light of the sport's purported elitist appeal.

Those more interested in playing video games had several choices from ESPN Digital Games from which to choose: National Hockey Night, NBA Tonight and X-Games Pro Boarder. Not only did these games play like other video games for the personal computer Xbox, or Playstation, but they also included features similar to an ESPN television broadcast—shots from the goal-cam, color commentary from ESPN

announcers, and “instant replays from multiple points of view to cap the moment. On the PC version, you can see those replays on the Jumbotron...”<sup>75</sup> After playing for a week, the computer created “a 30-second ‘Plays of the Week’ segment, a cross-section of highlights from the league, including a few of your most spectacular plays.”<sup>76</sup> That a television segment featuring top plays and a montage of highlights was adapted and incorporated into a sports video game provides compelling evidence of the highlight form’s importance. Additionally, the intertextuality between a game and a real television program (i.e., *SportsCenter*) illustrated the ESPN/Disney reliance on synergy and cross-promotion.

ESPN was also quick to enhance its use of video highlights at its Web site with a technology called ESPN Motion. While most Web sites were offering video clips of news segments, sports highlights or music videos, the clips appeared in a separate window apart from the main body of the site.<sup>77</sup> ESPN’s approach involved a program that activated the graphic box in the center of the ESPN.com home page to play a video clip of game highlights associated with its lead story. The program “allows the video to start faster and be of higher quality than so-called streaming video, which downloads only when users initiate it.”<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the video remained an integral part of the home page rather than an appendage. Even though users had to download the ESPN Motion program and watch the ads that accompanied the video highlights, the technology marked for G. M. O’Connell, chairman of Modem Media, a significant “tour de force” for users and for the marketing community “it’s a kind of tour de interesting possibility.”<sup>79</sup> O’Connell added that attracting advertisers who had previously been ambivalent about

the Web was predicated on “enhancing the utility of the Internet, not duplicating what television and personal video recorders like TiVo already do better.”<sup>80</sup> The ESPN viewer performed well enough that ESPN began selling it regularly to its television advertisers, signing Gatorade and Lexus, among others. ESPN charged advertisers up to \$25 per thousand people who watched its Web commercials, CNET reported. While some criticized ESPN for shifting its focus from sports information to cross-marketing their television shows, magazine and the ESPN brand, ESPN Motion was only the first of several advancements in new media developed by the Disney-owned company. These included ESPN 360, the short-lived ESPN Mobile, and ESPN High Definition (HD) and ESPN2 HD. All of these delivery systems were developed to accomplish the network’s goal of shaping its brand reputation as the worldwide leader in sports or the world’s biggest sports fan, as Jenkins explained, “not through an individual transaction but through the sum total of interactions with the customer—an ongoing process that increasingly occurs across a range of different media ‘touch points.’”<sup>81</sup>

### **A Soggy Market**

By 2001, the \$250-billion-a-year sports industry stood at a crossroads. Broadcast television ratings for the four major men’s professional sports—baseball, basketball, football and hockey—were mired in a decade-long decline.<sup>82</sup> Faced with competition from sport-specific channels (e.g., The Golf Channel, The Tennis Channel), women’s professional leagues (e.g., basketball, softball and soccer), extreme sports, and the growing popularity of stock car racing, figure skating, and gymnastics, the audience for televised sports was as fragmented as its interest in television generally. Furthermore, the

way Americans experienced sports had changed dramatically as a result of the proliferation of sports sites on the Internet, regional cable sports networks and satellite packages offering many more sports channels.<sup>83</sup>

The numbers testified to the alarming dilution of broadcast networks' television ratings. Ratings for two of the past three World Series hit a record low and average attendance for MLB games was a thousand fewer than before the 1994 players' strike. The 2001 NBA Finals sank to its third lowest rated, and ratings for regular-season games dropped forty percent from the 1995-1996 season. The NHL earned such low ratings that it would be abandoned by the networks, even though revenues were up and average attendance had increased slightly from where it had been five years ago. Although the NFL continued to set attendance records, even its television ratings hit a low in 2000.<sup>84</sup> The ratings decline was partly attributable to an increased number of sporting events on the broadcast networks—from 1,572 hours in 1990 to 2,453 in 2000.<sup>85</sup> While some of this increase stemmed from the addition of Rupert Murdoch's FOX Network, the average increased from 524 to 613 hours per network. Although the average television audience shrank from 8.7 million to 6.8 million, representing a twenty-two percent decline, that was less than the thirty percent decline of overall network viewing since the mid-1980s.<sup>86</sup> Yet, despite a 2002 Morgan Stanley report that predicted ABC, CBS and FOX would each lose up to \$1.3 billion on sports rights over the next four years and \$2.5 billion over the life of their \$18.3 billion NFL rights contract, the networks remained optimistic, CBS claiming that it was not losing money from sports.<sup>87</sup>

The networks' optimism was predicated on the idea that "the more difficult it

becomes to attract a broad audience in these fragmented times, the more attractive major sporting events become to networks and corporate sponsors.”<sup>88</sup> Spending on athletic sponsorship rights by corporations grew by almost \$1 billion between 1999 and 2000 alone. For example, Pepsi-Cola Company paid MLB to let it sponsor the first pitch of each World Series game, which was in addition to the \$50 million, five-year deal it paid in 1997 to become a national sponsor.<sup>89</sup> To get the NFL’s telecommunications sponsorship, the Sprint Corporation paid a \$24 million annual licensing fee, which did not include spending on media, promotions or marketing campaigns.<sup>90</sup> For advertisers, sports programming remained the strongest avenue to reach men aged 18-34, “a demographic group that is still forming its brand loyalties and is especially valuable to companies marketing themselves to sports viewers.”<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately for the networks, this demographic continued to abandon television for the Internet, and by 2004 constituted the largest male group on the Internet.<sup>92</sup>

The networks also recognized that sports programming, especially football, attracted a larger male audience to primetime programs. In 1999, CBS cited twelve programs that attracted a larger male audience than the shows that were in the same time slots the previous year. The new line-up, including *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *King of Queens*, *Becker* and *JAG*, was heavily promoted during CBS’s NFL telecasts.<sup>93</sup> When CBS lost its right to broadcast the NFL in 1995, the loss had a “profound effect” on the entire network.<sup>94</sup> A similar situation occurred when NBC gave up its NFL rights after its telecast of Super Bowl XXXII on January 25, 1998; it returned with its *Sunday Night Football* telecasts on August 6, 2006.

Beyond the numbers, the most significant factor contributing to the soggy sports market was a thirst for a different sporting experience, one not as remote, structured, expensive, or spectacular. As professional players, coaches and teams moved with regularity, as athletes' salaries skyrocketed, and as ticket prices passed beyond the reach of many, a dislocation between fans and traditional sports occurred. According to ESPN, between 1997 and 2002, each of the major sports lost more than seven percent of its fan base earning \$30,000 or less while the number of fans earning at least \$100,000 was up at least thirty percent.<sup>95</sup> As professional sports stadiums catered to affluent fans and corporate entities that could afford to pay exorbitant prices for luxury boxes, many fans gravitated toward minor league baseball parks, thanks to their intimate, family-oriented atmosphere and inexpensive tickets.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, children's habits changed significantly. As Jere Longman noted, "Team sports have become so structured that individual sports like skateboarding and inline skating have become popular alternatives, a form of rebellion from strict youth sports organizations and overbearing parents."<sup>97</sup> Young people were not alone in desiring a different experience. In 1999, more than seven million American adults finished a road race, more than double the number in 1985. The chief executive officer of the track and field federation added, "I think people want to participate or attend where they feel like they have some connection. Participation in running and golf have [sic] gone up. Look at minor league sports.... You can take your family and get near the athletes..."<sup>98</sup> Others, particularly young males, simply preferred playing a John Madden video game to listening to the real person.

## **Broadband**

Even though a segment of the 18 to 34 male demographic abandoned “appointment television”<sup>99</sup> for the Internet, the group did not completely forsake sportscasts. In fact, sports sites ranked third among the Internet content sites with the highest concentration of male visitors, trailing only pornographic and music sites.<sup>100</sup> According to figures from comScore Media Metrix, young men tend to gravitate toward sites frequented by other young men. For example they were thirty-six percent more likely to spend time at Web sites devoted to computer games than the general Internet population, and nearly fifty percent more likely to visit sport sites.<sup>101</sup> While many enjoyed playing sports video games, others paid for a subscription to stream audio and video sports Webcasts. In 2002, more than 200,000 people paid \$14.95 for the complete season to listen to online radio broadcasts of baseball game and watch video of game highlights, “making baseball the most popular paid Webcasting service.”<sup>102</sup> The following year, baseball became the first major league sport to broadcast live video feeds online for a major portion of its games.

As new computers were loaded with the latest software and connected to high-speed broadband, the quality of video clips improved considerably. The use of free basketball highlights on NBA.com increased 500 percent in the 2002-2003 season, prompting the league to offer game highlights and other programming from its new NBA television network as part of a \$9.95 monthly service.<sup>103</sup> The major sports were not alone in offering subscription packages. RealNetworks offered “Surfing Live,” a service that showed classic surfing videos and live Webcasts of the waves at Banzai Pipeline and other beaches in Hawaii.<sup>104</sup> Others services complemented network broadcasts of events.

NASCAR's "TrackPass" offered a service through RealNetworks that provided subscribers with instrument readings and radio transmissions between a driver and crew chief, and its "PitCommand" used Global Positioning System to follow cars on the track.<sup>105</sup>

In April 2004, EarthLink, a leading Internet Service Provider, launched its EarthLink Premium Sports package, the most comprehensive sports premium product offered on the Internet. The new service bundled sports video and audio, including content from NASCAR, MLB, the NHL and college sports, along with fantasy sports games and information. Powered by Synacor's existing relationships with a variety of popular fee-based online services, the Synacor platform enabled all the content that made up EarthLink Premium Sports to be fully integrated and available through a single sign-in and interface.<sup>106</sup> Among the bundled content was "NHL Highlight Machine," which allowed subscribers to create their own video portfolio of players to track, create and store their own "ultimate highlight reel" and keep track of fantasy teams by watching them in action and tracking their statistics.<sup>107</sup>

MLB Advanced Media, the interactive media and Internet company of MLB, was established in 2000 through a strategic technology alliance with Sun Microsystems. At MLB.com, visitors were offered more than one billion minutes of streaming media and over 2,430 full-length games per season to over one billion visitors.<sup>108</sup> By providing every out-of-market game live, as well as game highlights, previews, scores and statistics, MLB's site became "the Internet's most successful broadband Web portal devoted to professional sports."<sup>109</sup> The site averaged six million daily visitors and ten million daily

page views, with a record-breaking ninety million views delivered during Game Seven of the 2004 American League Championship Series between the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox.<sup>110</sup> While most of the other major leagues offered streaming video highlights and live coverage of games with streaming audio, MLB's video pay packages set the standard in terms of accessibility.

ESPN began offering online Webcasts of sporting events as premium Internet programming in January 2005 with an all-access weekend for the *Winter X Games*. ESPN 360 was marketed as “an always-on application that provides sports content directly to your computer, including live sportscasts, on-demand video, interactive games, event coverage, news analysis and more.”<sup>111</sup> Rather than offering it directly to consumers, however, ESPN offered it through Internet providers, who had to pay special fees for the right to carry it in the same way that cable operators pay the Disney company to carry ESPN's various television channels (e.g., ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNEWS, ESPN Classic). Consumer groups expressed concern that the adoption of a cable television model, which forced Internet providers to pay for the service, would lead to higher prices for consumers, who invariably pay for premium services they do not necessarily want.<sup>112</sup>

In March 2005, ESPN 360 broadcast twenty-two live events over a twenty-two-day span, including college basketball games, college hockey games, two wrestling matches, plus a dual-screen presentation of an IndyCar Series race, taken from ESPN's linear networks, and a SuperCross event. The veritable blitz came at the exact time when operators were “in a dog fight with digital subscriber line providers for high-speed customers.”<sup>113</sup> It also meant that ESPN had to go back to the NCAA to renegotiate online

rights. Securing those rights engendered reasons for creating new and different advertising models, including the use of hot spots inside video wherein consumers could click on that hot spot and connect to that product at the advertiser's site.<sup>114</sup>

By April 2006, ESPN 360 was available in eight million homes and had already built up a library of 5,000 videos. It was incorporated into what ESPN called its "full circle" coverage of certain sportscasts. First employed for the Duke-North Carolina men's basketball game in March and again for the first game of the 2006 NBA playoff series between the Miami Heat and the Chicago Bulls, "full circle coverage" involved traditional cable television coverage with live commentators on ESPN. ESPN2 carried the same game from an above-the-rim perspective with commentary provided by ESPN's NBA analysts in a New York studio. ESPN 360 provided a live stream of ESPN's coverage, and ESPN Radio and ESPNEWS offered frequent updates.<sup>115</sup> Such overkill for a first-round playoff game between a 2-seed and a 7-seed served as an indication of what ESPN was planning for its coverage of *Monday Night Football* later that fall. John Skipper, head of content, said at a presentation that ESPN "will take over the host city. We want fans to think about [the game] all day across all of our platforms."<sup>116</sup>

### **Wireless**

Wireless cell phone companies began providing sports content in 2002 when Verizon and FOXSports.com joined with ActiveSky to "present live sports events and sports news to Internet-enabled cell phones for a monthly fee."<sup>117</sup> ActiveSky created the program that integrated visual action, sound, text and low-tech graphics in a facsimile of a live sports broadcast, enabling live coverage of baseball-game broadcasts "in which

tiny icons move around a color diamond while a box score and running text provide real-time updates on the game.”<sup>118</sup> The service, available to Verizon’s “Get It Now” customers for \$3.99 a month, also provided gamecasts of football and basketball games, as well as text updates for NASCAR races. As the *New York Times*’ Marc Weingarten noted, “While the service may be useful only to full-fledged sports fanatics, it’s at least a baby step toward the integration of wireless technology with entertainment content.”<sup>119</sup>

The full integration of wireless technology with entertainment content was realized with the development of so-called third generation, or 3G, networks that doubled the capacity from 150 kilobits to 300 kilobits of data per second.<sup>120</sup> Handsets had to have an add-on called EV-DO to run the service, which Verizon called VCAST, that included “more than 300 daily video clips from channels and shows like CNN, NBC, ESPN and *Sesame Street*.”<sup>121</sup> Carriers like Verizon, Cingular, and Sprint also offered pay-packages which allowed subscribers to receive music, television and mobile Web access. Verizon VCAST included the ESPN MVP service, which provided live gamecasts, the latest highlights on demand, real-time game updates, fantasy team updates and exclusive ESPN programming, including programming like *SportsCenter*, *Pardon the Interruption*, and *Around the Horn*.<sup>122</sup>

Verizon also offered premium sports programming from Setanta Sports North America, the only dedicated European sports and rugby channel in North America. In 2007, Verizon and Setanta offered a pay-package of the Rugby World Cup highlight clip footage to VCAST video customers. Even though live gamecasts were not available, subscribers received up to eight highlight clips from each televised match, “including the

hardest hits and final scores,”<sup>123</sup> as well as pre-show video clips that highlighted classic matches from the tournament’s inception to the latest championship. Additionally, in November 2007, Verizon and the NHL announced the launch of NHL game video alerts, “enabling hockey fans to receive video messages of game highlights on their mobile phones, moments after they happen on the ice.”<sup>124</sup> In what was marketed as “a first for all professional sports leagues,”<sup>125</sup> the NHL teamed with Verizon to capitalize on the concept of immediacy by providing subscribers to the \$2.99 per month/per team package with the latest scores and highlights, totally by-passing news organizations. Spokespersons for both Verizon and the NHL emphasized immediacy in the news release announcing the deal. The president of the NHL Interactive CyberEnterprises said, “The immediacy with which we receive information has grown significantly thanks in part to the introduction of mobile phones and the Internet.”<sup>126</sup> “The immediacy of mobile makes it a perfect partner for sporting events like NHL games,” said the vice president of Verizon’s digital media programming.<sup>127</sup> Significantly, these deals clearly illustrated the altered mediascape in which providers of sports content attempted to reach fans whenever they could and wherever the fans happened to be. Only by offering customers sports gamecasts and highlight packages on every device could they compete in the marketplace.

### **High Definition**

Although the professional sports leagues diversified their delivery systems, they were still largely dependent on the rights fees from broadcast and cable networks as their main source of revenues. Television still provided the largest segment of the audience

that in turn attracted the most lucrative advertisers and sponsors. That reality forced the networks to enhance production values of sports programming coverage in an attempt to forestall dwindling ratings. Some refined existing technologies; others added to the production repertoire. For example, in 1998 ESPN debuted Sportsvision Incorporated's yellow electronic first-down line on its *Sunday Night Football* telecasts, and each of the networks offered it or a similar but different technology the following year.<sup>128</sup>

Such an innovation pales in comparison to the network's deployment of high definition television (HDTV). Since the technology's introduction in 2003, ESPN HD and ESPN2 HD certainly became the crown jewels of ESPN's technological initiatives. Although some analysts forecast that HDTV would be a terribly expensive flop, those predictions echoed similar warnings before radio boomed in the 1920s and television took hold in the 1940s. As Brad Schultz notes, "In both instances, sports programming helped the struggling media grow from infancy to established power. It seems sports programming has the potential to do the same thing in the electronic age."<sup>129</sup> Arguably, the primary reason revolved around the fact that sports action was perfectly suited for what digital does best: namely, provide video and audio that together offer a sharper, clearer and larger than life quality. The Consumer Electronics Association accurately predicted that the number of high definition television sets sold in 2006 would match or exceed that of standard definition television sets, clearly indicating that HDTV had been accepted by the public.

ESPN built its HD repertoire around a triad of programming—most notably, a considerable number of remote events launched on March 30, 2003, with a *Sunday Night*

*Baseball* telecast. The numbers grew steadily from one hundred and forty-four events in the first twelve months to one hundred and eighty-four events in 2004 to over four hundred events plus more than two thousand programs representing more than six thousand hours in 2005, bolstered by the addition of ESPN 2 HD, which broadcast its first program on January 5, 2005.<sup>130</sup> The second component of ESPN's triad evolved from studio programming at its Digital Center in Bristol, Connecticut. This state-of-the-art facility opened June 7, 2004, with the first telecast of *SportsCenter* in HD. With over six million feet of cable and three HDTV studios totaling seventeen thousand square feet, the Digital Center has facilitated the network's transition of its most popular programs to high definition, including *NFL Countdown*, *NFL Primetime*, *Baseball Tonight* and *NFL Live* as well as the news and information programming built around game coverage. Programs from ESPN Original Entertainment (EOE) such as *Playmakers* and *TILT* constituted the third tributary to the flow of HD programs. These offerings have spearheaded ESPN's initiative to become the self-proclaimed Worldwide Leader in HDTV.<sup>131</sup>

The Digital Center was designed to provide employees across all ESPN entities access to footage from any company computer in the world. This tapeless concept provided the ability to select and edit high or standard definition video, eliminating the time-consuming process of searching for tapes. As noted at its Web site, "For the first time in ESPN's history, events can be simultaneously recorded while at the same time the content can be annotated, edited and taken to air without handling video tape."<sup>132</sup> ESPN's coverage of all sixty-four games of the 2006 World Cup Soccer tournament was

broadcast in HD. With five times more detail than analog and with a film-like 16:9 ratio perspective instead of 4:3 of standard definition and with six-channel surround sound, HD not only eliminated ghosts, static, snow and poor quality video, but it was perfectly suited to the wide-angle perspective of most field sports.<sup>133</sup> Given the propensity of its news shows for showing game highlights, ESPN has already begun the process of embossing its imprimatur on what the HD sportscast is supposed to look and sound like.

ESPN was not alone in enhancing production values. CBS's telecast of the 2001 Super Bowl introduced EyeVision, a new instant-replay technology developed by the Robotics Institute at Carnegie Mellon University that utilized thirty-three robotic cameras, DVD technical backup and 90,000 feet of fiber-optic cable "to see rotating 270-degree views of players with stop-action shots from simultaneous angles."<sup>134</sup> A camera operator panned and focused the cameras at the same point on the field to produce rotating three-dimensional-like pictures that offered conclusive evidence about on-field decisions. Although CBS planned to lease the robotics replay system to other networks for \$50,000-\$75,000 an event, the technology proved too expensive for regular use.<sup>135</sup> The networks' continued reliance on action replays was evidenced in coverage of NFL playoff games, which in 2004 were used for almost seventy percent of the plays (i.e., 161 plays, 111 replays), a figure which does not include lead-in and cut-away montages or promotional messages.<sup>136</sup> In a *New York Times* article about the actual amount of action during the telecast of a football game, Richard Sandomir noted, "One could argue that replays constitute an alternate form of action because they show what you just saw but this time at slower speeds or from different angles. So if one figures that each replay

takes 5 seconds, the amount of action in Indianapolis's triumph would soar by 11 minutes."<sup>137</sup>

## **Control**

In attempting to maintain control of sports content, the professional sports leagues enacted a series of legal barriers impeding the transmission and use of play-by-play coverage of games, as well as the use of still and moving images. In 1997, a federal appeals court ruled "that the National Basketball Association could not block Motorola and a paging company from sending real-time scores and plays to subscribers."<sup>138</sup> In 2001, MLB attempted to impose restrictions on the number of pictures that sports journalists sent out "while the game was in progress and how those photographs can be used after the initial news coverage."<sup>139</sup> Those restrictions were contained in the credentials reporters and photographers signed and carried to get access to ballparks. When several newspapers balked at the restrictions, preferring to "leave the games uncovered [rather] than accept all the proposed restrictions,"<sup>140</sup> MLB backed off on the restrictions by allowing reporters to transmit "historic" information, meaning "the progress of a quest for a significant record"<sup>141</sup> as it happened. In addition, news organizations were allowed to post up to seven photographs on their Web sites while a game was in progress.

More significantly, in 2006 the NFL banned local television cameras from sidelines during games in order "to protect one of the leagues' greatest assets—highlights of game action."<sup>142</sup> The NFL claimed that the policy was consistent with what other sports leagues and organizations were doing and that banning local television stations

would not impact viewers because the stations retained access to all footage shot by the national network telecasting the game. The stations countered that the ban limited their ability to capture “the local flavor of games, such as low-level camera shots, isolated film on players for feature stories, or pictures of the crowd.”<sup>143</sup> One journalism scholar explained the issue in terms of economics: “What you can prevent people from having, you can sell them. This is one more reminder that professional sports is [sic] first and foremost a business, and one more reminder that the NFL is protecting its people and marketing its teams, and they’ll control that however it is in their best interests.”<sup>144</sup> Directly related to the issue was the tremendous economic potential of video highlights as content for the Web and mobile devices. After considerable criticism, the NFL relented and allowed coverage by one “pool” crew, and the following year, the NFL changed the policy so that up to five local camera crews from each team’s market were granted sideline access.<sup>145</sup>

That video highlights constituted content with direct economic value became evident the following year when the NFL imposed a restriction of forty-five seconds of video and audio clips per day of team personnel at team facilities on Web sites of news organizations not affiliated with the NFL. Having seized control of its Web site from CBS Sportsline in 2006, the NFL re-launched the site offering the one thing that other websites could not: “highlights from games that can be tailored to focus on each fan’s favorite players and teams.”<sup>146</sup> As *USA TODAY*’s Michael McCarthy reported, before the restriction of forty-five seconds websites were free to post a reasonable amount of video highlights and streaming video from a team’s facilities.<sup>147</sup> McCarthy explained that the

change in policy reflected the NFL's belief that the presence of NFL video highlights was a way to attract advertisers to a website. Organizations like the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) and the Radio-Television News Directors Association decried the restriction as a way of diverting people from their Web sites to NFL.com. They argued that press restrictions were part of an overall strategy by the NFL to control its image by controlling the media's access.

The strategy has also been employed by individual teams like the Washington Redskins, whose owner Daniel Snyder has created "his own news coverage of the Redskins and team-produced programming,"<sup>148</sup> which are sold to local television stations. The team has also denied local newspapers such as the *Washington Post* the right to run online video clips. By creating their own broadcasting and Webcasting entities (NFL Network, NBA TV, MLB Channel), professional sports leagues have entered into direct competition with the media for advertising revenue. The leagues' media push also raises important questions about unbiased coverage. As McCarthy noted, "Such league-owned outlets can give fans access to players and teams that traditional media aren't granted—while casting news, and controversies, on the league's terms."<sup>149</sup>

## **Conclusion**

"Any pipe. Any device."<sup>150</sup> That was the mantra voiced by ESPN and ABC Sports president George Bodenheimer when discussing the network's philosophy about the development of new media technologies. Speaking at the UBS Global Media Conference, Bodenheimer articulated what has become clear to industry insiders, media critics and scholars over the past decade: that when it comes to sportscasting, neither the broadcast

networks nor the cable networks can afford to operate solely in the medium of television. Any network involved in sportscasting necessarily must present itself as a total sports media entity, which includes utilizing radio, television, game players, Internet and mobile phone technologies to send out both the accounts and descriptions of live event coverage and infotainment packages that include scores, highlights, interviews and other features related to actual and fantasy sports teams and leagues.

Recent initiatives by broadcasters, mobile phone companies and the professional sports leagues certainly bear this out. For example, in January 2008, *Advertising Age* reported that on several days in the fall of 2007 ESPN “had more visits to the NFL content on its mobile-phone website than it did to the same area on its PC [personal computer] website.”<sup>151</sup> The same trend was documented in Europe by M:Metrics, a mobile-measurement firm, that conducted a study over the previous two years showing “the mobile audience looking up sports information on mobile devices increased significantly around major events,”<sup>152</sup> the most significant of which was England’s Football Association (FA) Premier League.

The only way to do that was, in sports parlance, through a “Full Court” press, which, coincidentally, happened to be the name of an early ESPN pay-per-view packages. By providing content on home television, on the radio, on the computer, on mobile phones, on video game players, and even at their own restaurants, networks like ESPN have created a type of sport multiphrenia, which Kenneth J. Gergen describes as “generally referring to the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments ... [whereby] as one’s potentials are expanded by the technologies, so one

increasingly employs the technologies for self-expression; yet, as the technologies are further utilized, so do they add in the repertoire of potential.”<sup>153</sup> While Gergen points out that it would be a mistake to view multiphrenia as an illness, he also notes that while the technology of social saturation removes the impediments of space and time, this same freeing “ironically leads to a form of enslavement.”<sup>154</sup>

Accessing ESPN, FOX, CBS or the NFL anytime and anywhere has provided the sports fan with an ever-expanding potential for self-expression and an increasing repertoire of sports discourse, yet total saturation in attending to sports leads to total desire. As Gergen posits, “to desire is simultaneously to become a slave of the desirable. To ‘want’ reduces one’s choice to ‘want not.’”<sup>155</sup> ESPN’s foray into new delivery systems led *Fortune* senior writer Marc Gunther to conjecture that soon to come will be “a tiny ESPN alarm clock, to be implanted in a fan’s ear, so that he or she can be awakened each morning with scores and highlights of late games from the night before.”<sup>156</sup>

Perhaps total saturation is not as far away as one would think. Despite the growth of broadband connections in homes, usage still spikes during the workday, or, put another way, as soon as the diehard sport fan leaves the television and can get to a computer.<sup>157</sup> What new and traditional media have created with the technological innovations and new consumer protocols is a communication system that generates what Manuel Castells calls the culture of “real virtuality.”<sup>158</sup> Castells defines that system as one in which “all messages of all kinds become enclosed in the medium, because the medium has become so comprehensive, so diversified, so malleable, that it absorbs in the same multimedia

text the whole of human experience, past, present, and future.”<sup>159</sup> One of the features of this multimedia culture is that the communication of all kinds of messages in the same system “induces an integration of all messages in a common cognitive pattern.... From the perspective of the user (both as receiver and sender, in an interactive system), the choice of various messages under the same communication mode, with easy switching from one to the other, reduces the mental distance between various sources of cognitive and sensorial involvement.”<sup>160</sup> Today’s communication system captures, in this case, sport reality in its entirety so that the user, an audience of one, becomes fully immersed in a virtual image setting in which “appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience.”<sup>161</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Seth Schiesel, “Cable TV Lacks Competition, FCC Notes,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1998, D6.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Saslow, “New Channels and New Costs for Cable TV,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1997, L11.

<sup>5</sup> Eric A. Taub, “The Big Picture on Digital TV: It’s Still Fuzzy,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2002, G1.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry Schwartz, “Olympics Stung by Technology’s False Starts,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1996, D1.

<sup>7</sup> “Live From France on World Wide Web,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1998, C4.

<sup>8</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence*, 61-62.

<sup>9</sup> “CBS to Acquire 22% of Sportsline USA,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1997, D10.

<sup>10</sup> Steve Lohr, “Joining the New Media: ABC News Begins and On-Line Service,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1997, D9.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Sandomir, “NFL’s Internet Deal Will Be Largest Ever,” *New York Times*, July 11, 2001, D2.

<sup>12</sup> Bob Tedeschi, “NFL’s Site Gets Hits, as Well as Blocks and Tackles,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2000, H12.

<sup>13</sup> Matt Richtel, “For Fanatics, Sports Webcasts,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1998, G9.

<sup>14</sup> Amy Harmon, “Exploration of World Wide Web Tilts From Eclectic to Mundane,” *New York Times*, August 26, 2001, 1.

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## **CHAPTER 9: SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This research project has presented an evolutionary history of the sportscast highlight form as it took shape in the early days of film, became standardized in newsreels, then commodified on network and cable television and deployed ubiquitously across new delivery systems. While the delivery systems have changed, the utilization of the highlight form in both live sports coverage and news programming followed key principles that merit a final summary. The sportscast highlight form has been utilized for over a century now, yet little scholarship has been devoted to it. This study has attempted to show how, in its ability to distill, commodify and essentialize sporting events, the sportscast highlight form has served to popularize and nationalize sports and their stars, providing mini-narratives that brought the drama and spectacle of sport into the everyday lives of the nation. As such, the sportscast highlight as an aesthetic form has bridged the modern and postmodern, illustrating the concepts of contextualization and convergence. It has also illuminated important issues related to culture and media, such as hegemony, standardization, commodification, codification and viewer protocols.

### **Synecdoche**

The highlight became the most important electronic sports journalism form because capturing a part of an event and presenting it as a representation of the whole allowed broadcasters the most efficient means available to communicate the story. Even before sportscasts, the companies selling the fight sequences staged in Edison's Black Maria studio realized the importance of packaging and selling these fights by rounds. Not

surprisingly the knockout round was the most profitable because customers often skipped the first five rounds, wanting to watch only the round with the knockout. Rather than pay sixty cents to see an entire fight, customers paid ten cents to watch only the knockout round. Packaging and viewer preference determined the direction for the highlight form followed.

Equally important to the development of the highlight form was the formula Edison's cameramen used to capture an event—whether the event's duration lasted two minutes (e.g., horse race) or four to five hours (e.g., America's Cup race)—in fifty or one-hundred and fifty feet of film. In coverage of the 1897 Suburban Handicap and the 1899 America's Cup races, Edison's cameramen captured key moments of these two distinctly different races. In the former, the shots included the parade, the start and the finish. In the latter, which included several races, Edison's titles provide the key components, including "*Shamrock*" and "*Columbia*" *Jockeying for a Start*, "*Shamrock*" and "*Columbia*" *Rounding the Outer Stake Boat*, and "*Columbia*" *Winning the Cup*. Not only do the titles serve as indexical markers for the larger event, but these films also capture the essential action that conveys meaning. In sports, essential action is communicated in the outcome—what is of most interest to most people is who won. Even though results are not the only stories that comprise a sportscast or a newspaper sports section, they are the lead stories or the front page stories above the fold. Significantly, this concept of essential action changed as production values were enhanced by technology—who won became subsumed within spectacular feats by star athletes.

Even as newsreels standardized the sports segment, synecdoche remained the key

production convention. Faced with economic, technical and time limitations, newsreel cameramen developed the sequencing of shots that served to capture any and all sporting events. The highlight was comprised of an establishing shot (i.e., place and time), followed by a field-level shot, then by a crowd shot (e.g. cheering), a moment-of-truth shot (e.g. touchdown), a close-up of the victor, and the celebration shot.

To give the newsreel a sense of historical continuity, the event was condensed into a few shots that displaced actual time and space considerations in order to create a self-contained narrative. As this point in time, capturing a highlight was still very dependent upon the artistry of the cameraman. Because newsreel sports segments were composed of representations of multiple events, the production of a highlight reel gradually became more dependent on the artistry of the editor. Ultimately, production became so formulaic that newsreel sports segments did not change significantly from 1927, when sound was first introduced, until 1967, when the last newsreels were shown. In those forty years, the newsreels captured the pageantry and spectacle of major sporting events.

The introduction of videotape in 1956 allowed television, and later cable, networks far greater flexibility in recontextualizing the synecdochic part of the whole sporting event for maximum affective impact. The role of announcers in guiding viewers to a correct interpretation of the displaced images in their new context changed after the introduction of instant replay from one that added “color commentary” to one that provided detailed analysis of why plays worked and how athletes succeeded or failed. Sports news anchors on programs like ESPN’s *SportsCenter* provided commentary that

traded on both literary allusions and hip-hop vernacular. As this study has shown, it is not merely the synecdochic image that conveys the event's meaning, but the combination of the decontextualized image with a narrative reconstruction of the meaning context.

### **Limitations**

Another key consideration in delineating the contributions of each medium to the evolution of the highlight form is related to the limitations governing the technology and economics. For example, early film was limited by the camera's film storage capacity, which restricted sequences to fifty feet and one-hundred and fifty feet. Even after cameras were able to hold larger spools of film, the cost precluded shooting extended sequences. The early film's sensitivity to light also restricted shooting to outdoor subject matter or well-lit interiors. Edison's Black Maria studio utilized a type of retractable roof and was constructed on a track that rotated to maximize exposure to the sun. The development of indoor lighting allowed fights to be filmed indoors, although the heat had a debilitating effect on the boxers.

Early television cameras were limited in terms of what they captured. For this reason, television relied on coverage of boxing and wrestling because the participants remained close in proximity to each other, the ring's space was easily framed, and the duration of a boxing round was fixed at three minutes. Early coverage of sports like baseball and hockey suffered because of the difficulty of tracking a fast-moving baseball or hockey puck. Only after producers utilized a number of cameras located in strategic positions did the quality of the pictures improve. It should also be noted that television set screens were relatively small, compounding the problem for viewing fast-paced sports.

Other limitations were related to reception in that the broadcast signal was transmitted via a network of coaxial cable. Since the first coast-to-coast live broadcast did not occur until 1951 and outlying areas were not connected to the network, many stations were limited to broadcasting kinescopes that were filmed off television screens.

Even new media delivery systems were limited in their capacity. Because modem connections were limited in their capacity to deliver quality video, early Webcasts relied on animation and streaming audio. Only after broadband increased storage and transmission capacities were Web sites able to utilize streaming video to attract visitors. Wireless mobile service technology followed a similar trajectory in that the first two generations delivered half of the amount of digital information (i.e., 150 kilobits) that the next generation was able to deliver, and only then were able to transmit high-resolution content. Significantly, discourse about technology is often couched around advancement, yet the technology's limitations most often determine its utilization and deployment.

### **Cultural Hegemony**

The proliferation of sportscast highlights led to a cultural hegemony that marginalized women and minority athletes. For example, in the 1904 St. Louis Olympic Games, George Poage, an African-American, won two bronze medals, one for the 200-meter hurdle and the other for the 400-meter hurdle. However, an integrated audience was not allowed at either the Olympics or the World's Fair as the organizers had built segregated facilities for the spectators. As soon as Jack Johnson won the heavyweight championship in 1908, legislators and civic leaders attempted to ban the distribution of fight films. This ultimately led to passage of the Sims Act of 1912, barring the interstate

transportation of fight films for commercial exhibition. This legislative intervention was linked to a moral concern over the effect both of prizefights in general and the effect of images of Johnson's victories in particular. A racial ideology that demonized Johnson was draped in a discourse purporting to protect women and children. Later, newsreel and television presentations of America's black and Indian athletes were characterized by a discourse that sought to avoid controversy by presenting their contributions in a factual manner, as in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games in which Ralph Metcalf and Eddie Tolan won multiple gold medals in track and field. Those representations finally gave way after many years to reporting that often focused on race only with stories involving sensational, often criminal, activity (e.g., Daryl Strawberry's drug use, Michael Vick's dog fighting, and Ray Leonard's spousal abuse).

When the contributions of blacks and American Indians in Olympiads, for example, could not be avoided (e.g., Jim Thorpe in 1912, Jesse Owens in 1936), they were explained under the "melting pot" paradigm that celebrated these victories as evidence of the democratic ideal of inclusiveness. Often, the presentations employed a dialectic in which white athletic prowess was aligned from superior intellect, will power, and scientific training while black and Indian athletic prowess was aligned with natural ability, closeness to nature, and physical attributes peculiar to their race. The highlight form equipped the mainstream media with a vehicle to frame the achievements of black and Indian athletes without having to explain the total absence of minorities from national organizations and federations, as well as the absence of minority owners, coaches, and managers.

The sportscasts highlight form was also used to marginalize the athletic achievements of women. Women's sports were covered within a context of gendered power relationships, meaning women's sports have been almost entirely produced by men and edited by men with commentary written and provided by male sports journalists. That images of women were almost entirely produced through the male gaze to accommodate male interests and desires was evidenced in the *Pathé Weekly* newsreel directive in the 1920s that cameramen should get shots of only the most beautiful women athletes. Newsreel and television coverage of women's sports marginalized athletic achievement for a discourse that highlighted the athlete's femininity and her role as wife or mother.

Women's sports have remained largely underrepresented in sportscasts, comprising no more than five to seven percent, according to recent studies of national media like CNN, *USA TODAY* and ESPN's *SportsCenter*. Although in 1948 NBC broadcast a news program devoted to women, *Sportswoman of the Week*, it lasted less than four months. Even though more women than men have graduated from journalism schools ever since 1977, women sports journalists constituted less than fifteen percent of sports journalists, and an even smaller percentage of editors, managers and owners in that same period of time. Moreover, women sports journalists have faced considerable obstacles in gaining equal access to broadcast booths, press boxes, locker rooms and production facilities. Judicial intervention was needed before women sports journalists were granted equal access. Sports organizations attempted to use moral concerns and issues of privacy to deny them access. When women sports journalists did gain access,

they were sexually harassed by athletes and co-workers, evidenced by the case of Lisa Olson of the Boston Herald and several ESPN employees like Katie Ross.

### **Standardization**

Not only did the highlight form constitute the main technique used in the production of the newsreel and television sports segment, but it also became the primary element around which pre- and post-game programs were developed in the early 1950s and greatly refined with the addition of videotape. The fact that sports constituted their own segment, apart from news and weather, offers an important clue about our culture and a direct bearing on the relationship between sport, race, gender, ethnicity and national identity. This positioning of sports within electronic news media reflects the general place of sport in our culture as a well-defined enclave that Stuart Hall has posited bears little or no relation to the rest of the news.

With the arrival of sports news programs like ESPN's *SportsCenter* in 1979 and CNN's *Sports Tonight* in 1980, televised sports journalism truly set itself apart from the rest of the news. These programs had an immediate impact on local stations and the way they covered sports, leading some stations to conclude that there would not be much of a future in local television sports. At that time, sports ranked at or near the bottom in most research polls of why people watch local television news. A 1998 poll conducted by the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation found that the percentage of people (two percent) who watched local news because of sports matched those that said they watched because there were no other choices on television.

Even before the development of videotape, the television networks developed

wrap-around programs to complement live coverage of sporting events. Pre-game shows, which used highlights gleaned from kinescopes, were introduced in 1950. Although existing technology did not allow the use of highlights during post-game shows until the 1960s, the networks offered programs such as the *Philco Touchdown* show as early as 1948, featuring kinescope films of the season's outstanding collegiate football games. Pre- and post-game programs are still utilized in the production of local, regional and national sportscasts. ESPN has offered weekly sport-specific wrap-up shows like *Baseball Tonight* and *NFL Live* since the 1980s, and many of these programs are now offered nightly. Since the development of the Internet, the professional leagues have utilized their Web sites to offer previews and summaries of every league game, and highlights figure prominently in all of them. These pay packages have allowed fans who no longer reside in the vicinity of their favorite team to watch a Webcast of every game.

Media organizations have contributed to and maintained the widely held belief that broadcast sports are entertainment, rather than news, programs, staged to attract an audience to whom sponsors and advertisers can sell their products and services. This belief has had lasting implications in terms of how sports journalism's institutional values and practices were formed. As the costs to broadcast rights for sporting events have escalated, these privately controlled sports teams and leagues became immune to the usual intrusions of journalists into topics that surround sports other than what takes place on the playing field.

### **Commodification**

The commercial imperative governing sports programming is predicated on

attracting the largest audience to present to advertisers and sponsors. In order to attract the largest audience, broadcasters utilize production values that enhance an event's pageantry and spectacle. Moreover, sport, television, and advertising work together to create a single promotional entity. The increased pressures to create ever more dramatic and entertaining forms of sport spectacles are the result of the appropriation by this sport-media-commercial complex. The 1980s saw greater state support for economic development of sport facilities, international events, and the showcasing of world-class athletes.

Mediated sport provides a point of convergence for two dominant models of coverage—news actuality and dramatic entertainment. However, mediated sport production, especially in omnibus-format programs like ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, CBS's *Sport Spectacular*, and NBC's *Sportsworld*, often results in an alteration of the perception of time and space, giving emphasis to the creation of an entertaining narrative that retains its claims to actuality. Many supposed live broadcasts become live-to-tape representations or what are in actuality extended highlight packages produced as live broadcasts. In this sense, producers only pay lip service to news actuality coverage.

Arguably, this entertainment model is largely anti-mediatory, wherein viewers are led to believe that what is presented to them constitutes the natural and universally accepted version of sport. Many enhanced production techniques—music amplification of noises on the sport field, collages, superimposed graphics, rapid cuts, computer simulations, color arrangements, shocking images—are used to capture and sustain the audience's gaze. Montages of highlights and commentary constitute the most effective

means to achieve the desired end of maintaining viewer interest. Additionally, the conventions of sports commentary that evolved since the 1897 fight between Corbett and Fitzsimmons have become the primary discourse for thinking, talking and writing about sport. The viewer's participation is invoked through a familiarity with the form and style of commentary while emotional identification with specific players and teams dissolves the boundary of the television screen. So powerful has that dissolution become that many viewers believe with proper training and coaching, they could do as well as the athletes they are watching. In other words, the very scientificity that characterizes effects like slow-motion action replays can be employed to deny differences in ability and competence.

As the links between sports and media outlets grew closer, a vested interest in promoting and presenting sport in a positive light becomes part of the sports journalist's routine. The interdependency between broadcasters and advertisers has resulted in less criticism of contractual partners. Sports journalists increasingly report on events being covered by the television station. As the commercial dimension of the sports industry became more substantial, television's view of sport has not significantly changed. Stations are dependent on the teams they cover for access to the games, coaches and players. Although never stated explicitly, sports journalists traditionally avoid controversy in their coverage of the local team and its players, perhaps fearing that to expose wrong-doing or ineptitude would result in a loss of the broadcasting rights, sponsorship support, and access to highlights.

The commercial imperative is also reflected in not only the corporatized branding

of almost every segment of a broadcast, but also in the tightening of control over the dissemination of highlights. That the professional leagues have imposed restrictions on the use of highlights and still images of a game in progress speaks to their value in attracting fans and viewers to media.

### **Codification**

Codification of what constitutes the most important sports highlights resulted from the continuity of the twenty-four-hour news cycle in 1980 and the desire of news organizations like ESPN to produce ever more affective highlights to satisfy the sports junkie. By the 1990s ESPN had developed its own typology of highlights, referred to as “The Seminal Seventeen,” which became a teaching tool for training production assistants. This formulaic approach to producing sports news mirrors that which governed the newsreels for forty years. Producing the “Top Ten Plays” on a nightly basis invariably leads to a constricting, so that only the most spectacular dunks, the most vicious hits, the most spectacular shots, saves, goals by the most recognizable athletes can make the list. In this way, only the superstars of the major sports come to be represented in the ranked order. Not surprisingly, the quest for the nightly “Top Ten” invariably spawns “Top Ten Plays of the Week,” which spawns a weekly version of “The Ultimate Highlight,” which spawned a book, *The Ultimate Highlight Reel* that presents a calendar of the greatest highlights that happened to occur on a given date. The process regenerates itself, providing an unending stream of only the spectacular, based on its ability to shock and awe.

ESPN’s production of shows based upon a ranking include: The “100 Greatest

Highlights,” “Who’s Now,” “The 100 Greatest (North American) Athletes of the Twentieth Century,” “Greatest *SportsCenter* Moments,” “Top Ten Greatest Games,” and “Top Ten Greatest Coaches.” In creating a canon of what constitutes the “greatest,” ESPN appropriates athletic achievement in the service of brand recall and ratings, and enhances its aura of authoritativeness. As expressed in the introduction to *The Ultimate Highlight Reel* book, while everyone has his or her own favorite highlights, the “ultimate” decision of what highlights are selected for this book resides with ESPN. Of course, the first criterion is that they appeared on *SportsCenter*. The unfortunate side effect of such listings is the narrowing of sports discourse. One can agree or disagree with ESPN’s lists, but very few alternatives are produced, none that has the reach or marketing to create an impact. In this way, codification produces a canon of the “100 Greatest Highlights,” absent the contributions of most of the world’s athletes and most of the world’s sports.

### **Viewer Protocols**

The protocols associated with viewing sportscast highlights have changed considerably. Viewing a kinescope through a peep show was largely a solitary experience, though other customers were doubtlessly in the same parlor at the same time. Nonetheless, until the development of projection, reception occurred one person at a time. With film projection, the experience became communal, and viewers interacted with the commentator, the figures represented on screen and each other. Cheers, boos, foot-stomping and wild cries of joy were observed in newsreel audiences, and the evocation of a communal response testified to the medium’s power to reduce

individuality.

Before television sets became readily affordable in the early 1950s, sports fans often watched games from the bar or tavern rather than from the living room. Bar owners realized the opportunities that sportscasts afforded them and enacted rules to govern behaviors. Televised sports changed the social dynamic within the bar since people regularly came to the bar to watch television and not for the social drinking experience. Televised sportscasts impacted the social sphere of the bar as a venue for spectatorship and as a space of interpersonal communication.

As home viewing became the norm, how sportscasts' packaged reality impacted viewers became a concern of media scholars. Watching sportscasts was not only pleasurable, but an addiction that had to be continually fed. Terms such as "sports junkie" and "couch potato" were used to describe the excessive viewing habits. While cable acted like an electronic magazine rack providing programming for women, children and minorities, sportscast audiences remained largely male.

While fundamental differences between the stadium experience and the television experience still exist, what unfolds on the field has been directly impacted by television. However, the addition of scoreboards with replay capabilities and enhanced audio technologies has significantly narrowed the differences between stadium and television experience. In fact, players and stadium fans routinely watch scoreboard replays, and their reactions are often picked up by the telecast.

Viewers of sportscast highlights come to the experience with specific affiliations and expectations, meaning they may already have seen the sportscast and often know the

outcome. As a result, they may come to the experience with a fixed emotional attitude. Another important consideration is that highlight segments most often feature opponents, whether in the form of teams or individuals. Viewers come to the viewing experience from a number of different perspectives—those who identify with team or individual A, those who identify with team or individual B, and those who have no particular vested interest in either team. Granted, the strength of a viewer’s identification will vary along an emotional spectrum from strong to weak, as it will for those viewers who are without a vested interest in either team since few viewers are so completely neutral that the highlight will arouse no emotional stimulation about either A or B. Similarly, the way a highlight and its commentary are structured relative to the teams and individuals affect how viewers will be positioned to the highlight.

By ESPN’s own admission, *SportsCenter* highlights do not all focus on a game’s narrativity. These are the paradigmatic images, decontextualized highlights that do not recount a specific game or event. Removed from the context of the actual events, these highlight montages are relatively open, fractal texts that engender what Roland Barthes associated with an annulment of the subject. Typically these highlights serve as promotional vehicles to generate enthusiasm for ongoing events, to remind viewers “This is *SportsCenter*,” and to serve as lead-ins for upcoming segments or commercial breaks. For the viewer, these highlights do not focus on specific games and teams but depend on a rapid-fire display of athleticism. Having no game context and no team identification, the viewer can only watch this overproduction of images or semiotic excess. “The Ultimate Highlight” is an example of paradigmatic imagery that often evokes boredom,

resentfulness, emptiness, and loss.

Paradigmatic imagery can also transform signification into significance, which can be defined as meaning that is sensually produced. These highlights are designed to engage the viewer on a very visceral level. Often they showcase a series of games or a series of plays, as in *SportsCenter's* "Top Ten Plays," "Web Gems," "Buzzer Beaters," and "Jack U Up." Their significance emerges by escaping from context and producing its own effect. Viewers actively (co)produce their pleasure by providing the meaning, which lies beyond any final signified. What is disseminated is pure spectacle whereby the viewer experiences a transgressive pleasure, a momentary loss of self, a conjunction of text and self that seeks to escape social control but ultimately cannot elude the ideological underpinnings that ESPN's *SportsCenter* invariably attaches to the images.

For the past two decades, new delivery systems have provided individuals considerably more access to sportscast content. Ironically, these delivery systems, especially computers and wireless mobile devices, reached an audience of one, bringing the viewing experience full circle to the days of peep shows. That more sports fans are using devices like mobile cell phones to access sportscast highlights was evidenced in a report by the mobile-marketing industry that showed on at least three different occasions in the fall of 2007 more people accessed ESPN's NFL highlights with their phones than with personal computers. Additionally, in March 2008 CBS presented every game of the NCAA men's basketball championships on the Web for free, marking the first time a major U. S. sporting event has been made available online for free. Significantly, according to data from CBS and TNS, a research firm, the network made \$4.83 in

advertising for each of its almost five million online viewers compared with \$4.12 in advertising for each of its 132 million television viewers. As more people consume sportscasts online, generating more advertising revenue, the protocols for watching sportscasts will continue to evolve.

## **Conclusion**

Even though this study traced the evolution and deployment of the sportscast highlight form over more than a century, it is necessarily limited. Future research might employ production ethnography to explain the processes involved in selecting, editing and scripting techniques sportscast highlights. The decisions that go into such processes would help to understand the way sportscasts have been, and continue to be, deployed to shape cultural values. In turn, this would help educators to prepare a curriculum for future sports broadcasters. Additionally, audience ethnography would help to explain how audiences make meaning of the sportscast highlights and what values they find in sportscast highlights.

This study has shown that economic, social, legal and technological developments in film, newsreels, television and new media contributed to the evolution of the sportscast highlight form by providing the means to enhance and refine video and audio techniques. The sportscast highlight form evolved out of the operational aesthetics of each medium's particular style, mode of production and intertextualities that attracted audiences. As the rights fees for broadcasting the major sporting events increased, network and cable broadcasters increasingly made their broadcasts more appealing by focusing on the spectacular. Court rulings and legislative regulations stripped organizations like the

NCAA of their control over broadcast rights, facilitating a saturation of the market place that eventually led to lower television ratings and an increasingly commercial presentation.

Sportscasts, arguably one of the most important culture industries, have progressed through pre-commercial and commercial phases to their current iteration in which all aspects of the sport sector (i.e., goods, services, and experiences) are now transformed into commodities to be hawked within the commercial marketplace. As a result, virtually all aspects of the global sport infrastructure—governing bodies, leagues, events, teams, and individual athletes—are now driven and defined by the inter-related processes of: commercialization (the exploitation of an object or practice for capital gain); corporatization (the rational structuring and management of sporting entities according to profit motives); and, spectacularization (the production of entertainment-driven experiences). Contemporary sport has become subject to the logics of a society, and indeed a high-technology capitalist economy, propelled by commercially mediated spectacles and circuitry.

The commercial entertainment ethos has only increased as networks like ESPN attempt to recoup the money spent on rights fees and production costs. These costs have motivated broadcasters to not only develop video and audio technologies to nuance their coverage in ways that maintain viewer attention, but also to make sure that the production is fully commodified. No longer is it sufficient to broadcast game highlights that convey information about who led the way to victory and how that victory was secured. In today's integrated spectacle, almost every segment of ESPN's *SportsCenter* is invested

with corporate sponsorship that results in considerable profits for the cable network and is used to seduce and fascinate viewers. *SportsCenter* segments are branded, so that a constant stream of product names and icons act as lead-ins before the viewer gets to the actual highlights, commentary or interview. Arguably, these segments can be seen as examples of postmodern art that brings together advertisement imagery, ideological codes and symbols of consumer capitalism. Not surprisingly, ESPN has accomplished with sportscasts what MTV did with popular music.

The sportscast highlight form has facilitated an overproduction of images that are recontextualized by media to serve their own and their sponsors' interests. This proliferation of information has led to a decrease in meaning, which is literally imploded when decontextualized and then reformulated by the media to produce affect. Affective economics anchor people in particular experiences, identities, and pleasures that invariably promote and consensualize the dominant ideology's view of reality. Such power is essentially seductive in motivating viewers to not only consume the images, but also to manifest their emotional needs in conspicuous consumption. As Roland Barthes has noted, it is not when ideology hovers close to the surface and is easily recognizable that it is most powerful, but when it is strongly present but apparently absent, allowing myths to do their work on the emotions.

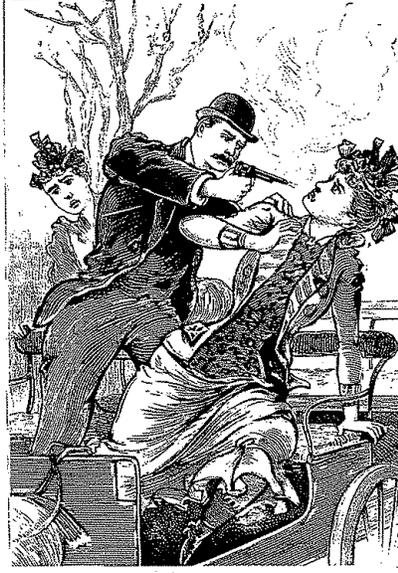
Rapid cuts, music, superimposed graphics, and computer simulations contribute to capture and sustain viewer attention and interest. Slow-motion instant replays and edited highlight packages, which are based on the principles of film montage, manipulate and fracture both time and space and result in a fragmentation of reality. Rather than

contextualizing sporting events by offering analysis and critical insight, sportscasters have deployed the sportscast highlight form to intervene in events, recasting them as something devoid of their original meaning and adding to the effacing of history and reality. By the time actual sporting events are reproduced as highlight images, the principal values associated with the nature and purpose of competition—such as hard work, innovation, cooperation and teamwork, self-determination, self-sacrifice and an emphasis on sportsmanship—become distorted in the pastiche of imagery and discourses that have no meta-narrative or unified theory. Removed from the context of the actual sporting event, spectacular dunks, towering home runs and jarring tackles become the means to instant gratification, transferring the excitement from the athletic contests into a continual, concentrated sense of exhilaration meant to maintain only that which is of commercial value. As this study has shown, we delude ourselves if we believe that sports and politics are not conjoined in a society of late capitalism

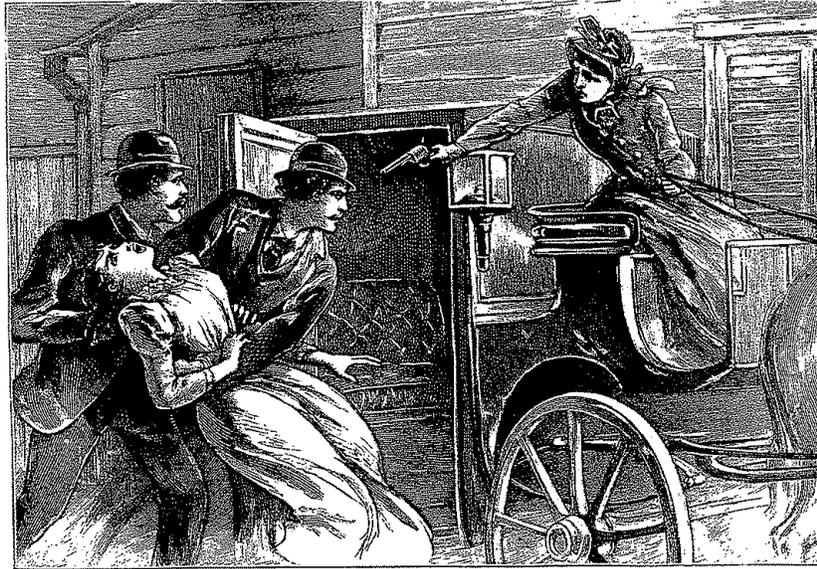
APPENDIX



A GIRL'S FIGHT FOR LIFE.  
MISS ANNE M'NASTY'S DEPERATE STRUGGLE WITH HER FATHER'S MADDENED  
BULLDOG IN HER ROOM IN HEADING, IA.



SHOT HER THROUGH THE HEAD.  
THE CRUEL AND UNCALLED FOR MURDER OF MISS ANNA MOTTAN BY HER  
LOVER, CHARLES JONES, NEAR LEDEN, ILLINOIS.



WAS IT HER AUNT?  
MISS ETTA FISHEL ABDUCTED FROM HER HOME AT NIGHT IN SALEM, O., BY TWO MEN AND A WOMAN.

Illustration 2.1: Sensational pictures from the *Police Gazette*, May 28, 1892, page 8.

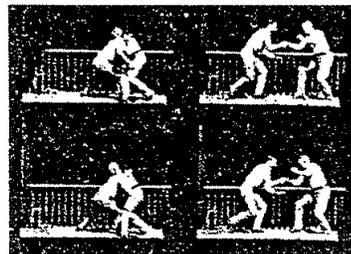
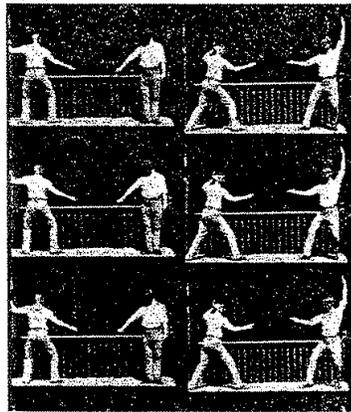
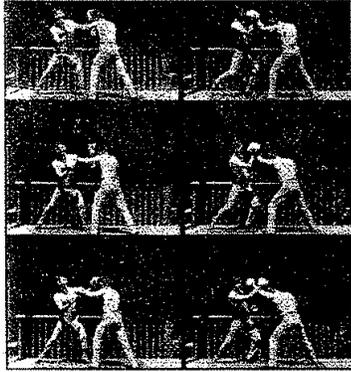
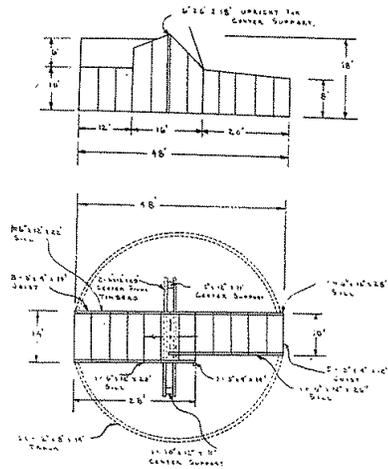


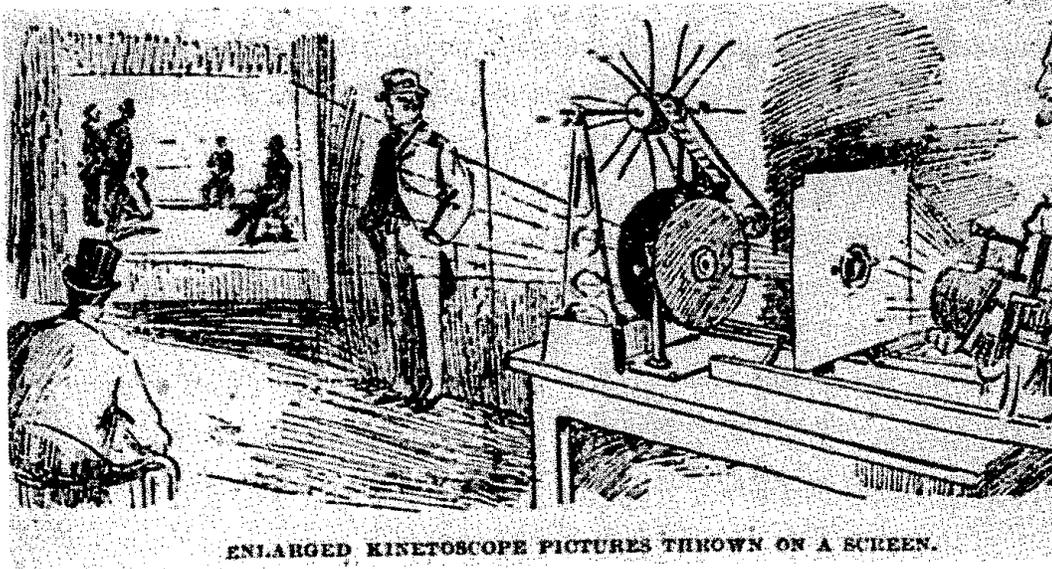
Illustration 2.2: Three of the films Dickson and Heise shot in the fall of 1892 with the improved motion picture camera involved Boxing (top), Fencers (middle), and Wrestling (bottom). Frames from these subjects were published in *The Phonogram*.



Illustration 2.3: (Above) Photograph of the Black Maria as of March 1894. (Below) Analytical drawing of the studio by William Brower, Sr.



3 Analytical drawings made by William Brower, Sr., of the Black Maria, from the lumber purchased for the project (see pages 23-25). Here, for the first time, the Maria's dimensions are established to be 48' (length) x 16' (height) x 10'-10" (width). Previously unpublished.



ENLARGED KINETOSCOPE PICTURES THROWN ON A SCREEN.

Illustration 2.4 Newspaper illustration that appeared in the *New York Sun* on April 22, 1895, showing the first demonstration of the Eidoloscope.

# \$5,000

TO THE  
**EDISON MANUFACTURING CO.**

If it can successfully dispute the fact that its scattering pictures of the

## Jeffries-Sharkey FIGHT

Are anything more than fragmentary snap shots of a few rounds, taken by cameras surreptitiously smuggled into the Coney Island Sporting Club and worked secretly, the view of the ring being often obscured entirely by the movements of the spectators, and interrupted by fear of detection, and the results being wholly without completeness or continuity.

It was this exhibition that closed after ONE NIGHT at Sam T. Jack's. It was made to last 15 minutes by repeating films. The authentic representation of fight and preliminaries occupies 21 hours.

THE PUBLIC WILL UNDERSTAND  
ONLY COMPLETE AND ACCURATE PICTURES

## JEFFRIES-SHARKEY FIGHT

WERE TAKEN BY THE  
**American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.**

837-847 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

Any infringement upon its Copyright will be Vigorously Prosecuted to a Finish.

### HOW THE AMERICAN MUTOSCOPE AND BIOGRAPH

TOOK THE REAL PICTURES WITHOUT A BREAK

The great success was achieved by taking the pictures from the elevated station at Coney Island to the Club House, street from the distance to the 4th specially built and lighted.

The audience over the ring are lights were so arranged that a correct lighting could only be had from the position occupied by the four cameras of the American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.

There was a total cost of \$75,000. There was light enough to illuminate 250,000 inhabitants of New York City. The reflections were a 25 foot ring.

operate the lights eleven electricians were stationed near the ring.

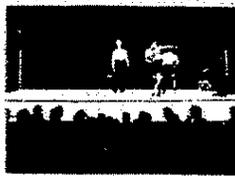
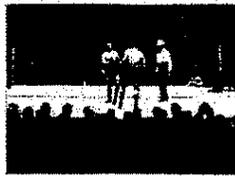
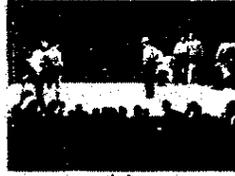
Each of the four cameras 15 skilled operators were kept on the ring, and were taking up the pictures continuously all day.

The entire picture developed 25,000 feet of film, \$1,000 for film, \$200 for the camera, \$200 for the camera, \$200 for the camera, \$200 for the camera.

There were a total of 216,000 distinct pictures.

These films are the largest ever made.

The Real Pictures.  
Since Spectators out of 75,000, and 40 at Coney Island.



# \$5,000

TO  
**S. LUBIN, OF PHILADELPHIA,**

If he can demonstrate that his alleged reproduction of the

## Jeffries-Sharkey FIGHT

Is anything more than a series of views posed for by boxers masquerading in a make believe contest for the real fighters.

### THE FAKE PICTURE SCHEME

Was fully exposed when dummy boxers, made up as the real contestants, were exhibited in a bogus representation of the recent Jeffries-Fitzsimmons battle, OF WHICH NO PICTURES WERE TAKEN, owing to a failure to secure satisfactory results by electric light.

THE PEOPLE KNOW THIS.  
FOR SALE,

TERRITORIAL and FOREIGN RIGHTS

To this Marvelous Moving Portrayal of the

## JEFFRIES-SHARKEY FIGHT

THE ONLY COMPLETE AND ACCURATE PICTURES.

APPLY TO THE  
**American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.,**

837-847 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

DO NOT BE DECEIVED  
OR WASTE MONEY, AND

DO NOT INVEST IN FAKES,  
WHEN

THE ONLY REAL PICTURES

Covering every instant of the GREATEST FIGHT BATTLE

OF THE CENTURY, are those of the

**AMERICAN MUTOSCOPE AND BIOGRAPH CO.,**

WHICH ARE FULLY PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT AT WASHINGTON and will receive their

First Public Exhibition

AT THE

**NEW YORK THEATRE**

Corner of Broadway and 11th St., New York City.

On MONDAY, NOV. 20

Wm. A. Brady FOR James J. Jeffries  
Thomas O'Rourke Tom. Sharkey

Illustration 2.5: American Mutoscope and Biograph Company ad placed in the *New York Clipper* on November 18, 1899, challenging the Edison and Lubin companies to prove that their film versions of the Jeffries-Sharkey fight were authentic.

8  
 7  
 6  
 5  
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 1

# International Race

## PURSE \$100,000

English Derby Winner

# PAPYRUS

Ridden by England's Premier Jockey, Steve Donoghue

And The American Champion

# ZEV

With America's Best Rider, Earl Sande, Up

## At BELMONT PARK

### Saturday, October 20th

Five other good races, including the  
 New Rochelle Handicap of \$5,000.

Special Trains from Penn. and Atlantic Avenue Terminal from 11 A. M. to  
 1:45 P. M. Special cars for ladies.

Tickets on Sale at Westchester Racing Association,  
 66 West 30th Street  
 and at Tyson's, McBride's and Bascom's.

<b>PRICES: RESERVED SEAT, INCL.</b> <b>ADMISSION AND WAR TAX:</b> ENCLOSURE, \$22.00 GRAND STAND, \$11.00	<b>GENERAL ADMISSION, INCLUDING</b> <b>WAR TAX:</b> GRAND STAND, \$5.00 INFIELD, \$1.50
--	--

Illustration 3.1: Display ad that appeared in the *New York Times* in the days leading up to the International Race between Zev and Papyrus.



Tewanima, the Indian Competitor in the Marathon Race,  
Leads the Fourth of July War Dance.

Illustration 3.2: A national sporting culture was constructed on the idea of the melting pot, although often that culture contained conflicting messages, as evidenced in a photograph that appeared in the July 26, 1908, issue of the *New York Times*. The photograph shows Lewis Tewanima, Carlisle Indian Industrial School student and member of the Hopi Nation, leading a "War Dance" on board the ship carrying American athletes to the Olympic Games in London.

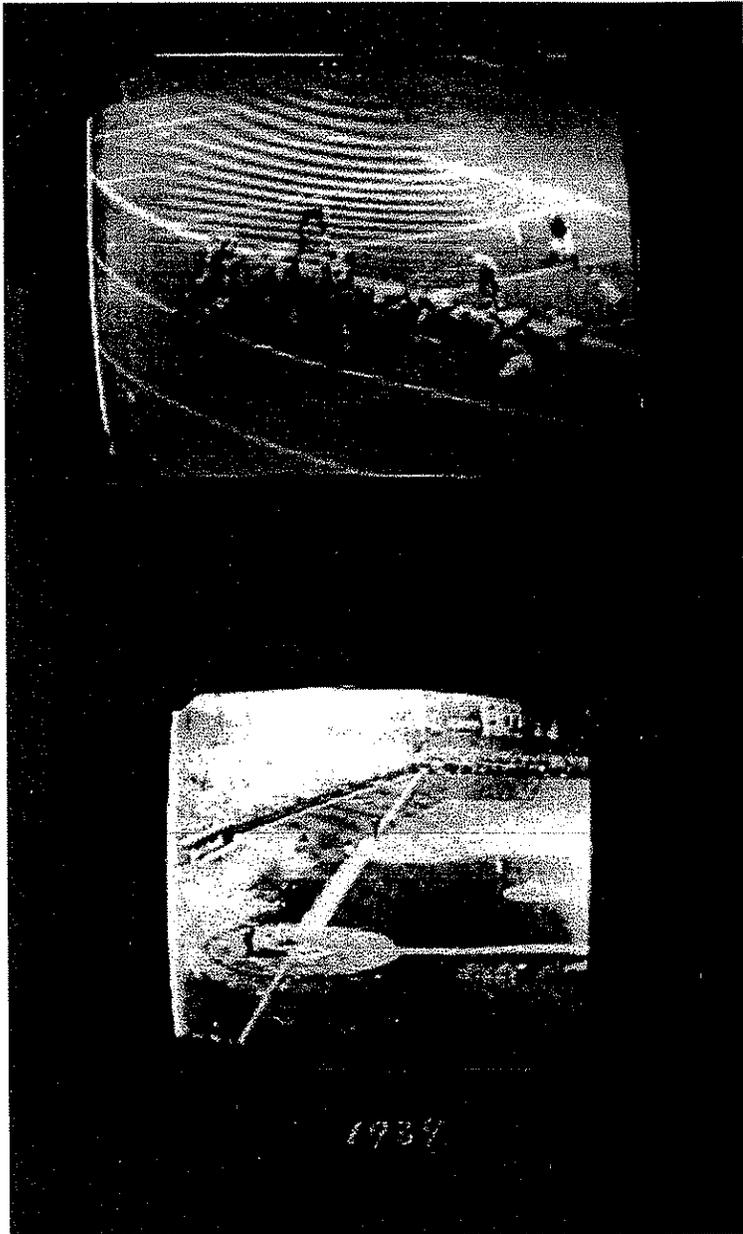
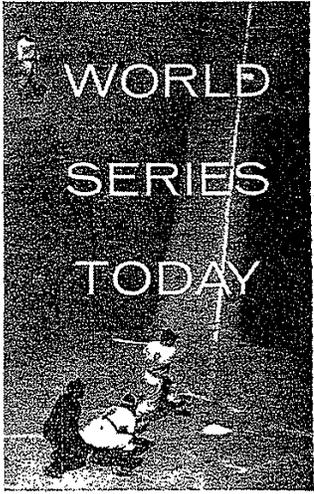


Illustration 4.1: Photographs of sports images on a television screen taken in the Zworykin lab in 1934

10:00 a.m. FEATURE PLAYHOUSE  
11:00 p.m. SEALY'S TV PLAYHOUSE

WABC-TV Channel 7  
ABC-TV In New York



WORLD  
SERIES  
TODAY

*and every day 'til conclusion*

**CLEVELAND INDIANS**

VS

**NEW YORK GIANTS**

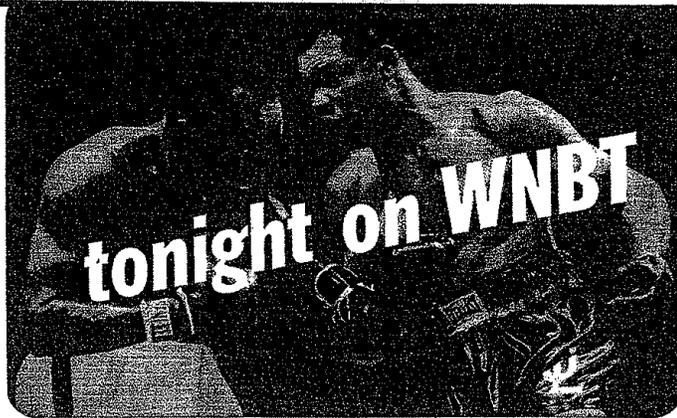
*another Gillette Cavalcade of  
Sports Feature*

NBC TELEVISION WNBT channel 4  
a service of RCA

Illustration 4.2: Display ad from September 29, 1954, for the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* presentation of the World Series.

N B C T E L E V I S I O N

# LOUIS vs. WALCOTT



Tonight's fight—like the last three World's Heavyweight Championship Bouts—will be seen on the NBC Television Network...WNBT in New York. ● It's another in the parade of exciting events which make NBC television's No. 1 Network. Sports, news, drama, children's programs, concerts, films, variety shows and special events—all are yours on Channel 4. ● Today, see complete television coverage of the convention...see the Giants vs. Chicago...see Kyle MacDonnell, Alma Kitchell...see America Song, Musical Almanac, and the newsreel—all on NBC Television. ● And then at 10, see tonight's blow-by-blow telecast of the fight—as it is presented in Yankee Stadium by the 20th Century Sporting Club, brought to you on television by the Gillette "Cavalcade of Sports."

## WNBT CHANNEL 4

NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY  
A SERVICE OF RADIO CORPORATION OF AMERICA

*The Red Hot  
Baseball News*

**Ruth's Final Bow  
in Yank Uniform**

Pictures and vivid description of dramatic scenes at Yankee Stadium show Ruth's final game. Babe Ruth and other Yankee players were spotlighted in dramatic scenes.

**Pitchers Who Win  
With Brains**

Dutch Leonard of the White Sox, whose fast ball would break a pair of gloves, is one of the most feared pitchers in the modern era. The weekly broadcast explains the success formula.

**These and Many  
Other Features This Week**

*Breezy—Authentic*

*The Sporting  
News*

**The Baseball Paper of the World  
ON SALE NOW!  
At All Newsstands**

Illustration 4.3: Display ad that appeared in the *New York Times* on June 23, 1948, for NBC's broadcast of the Louis vs. Walcott heavyweight championship fight.

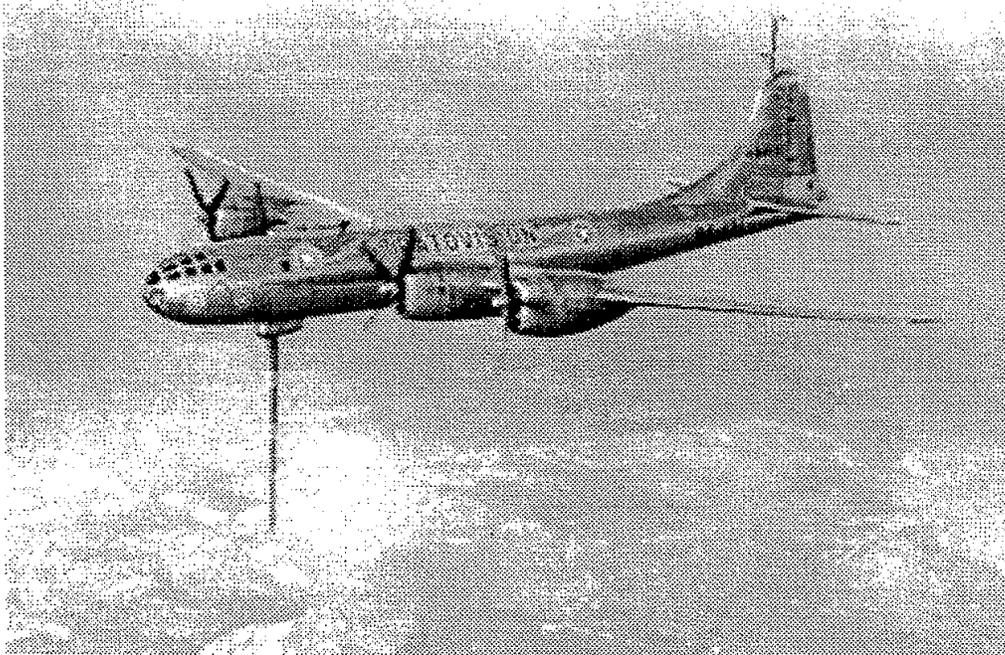


Illustration 4.4: B-29 Superfortress converted into a television transmitter that was used in the broadcast of the Republican National Convention on June 23, 1948. On that night it was also scheduled to broadcast the Louis vs. Walcott fight, which was postponed due to rain.

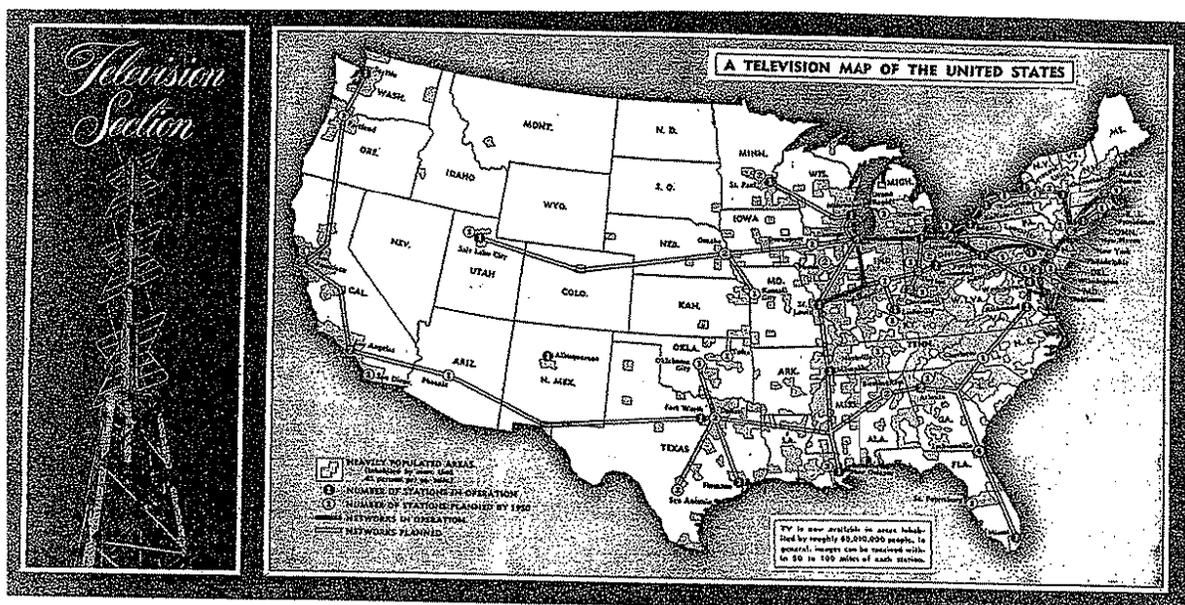


Illustration 4.5: A television map of the United States that appeared in the *New York Times* on April 24, 1949, showing which cities were connected by coaxial cable to the television network.

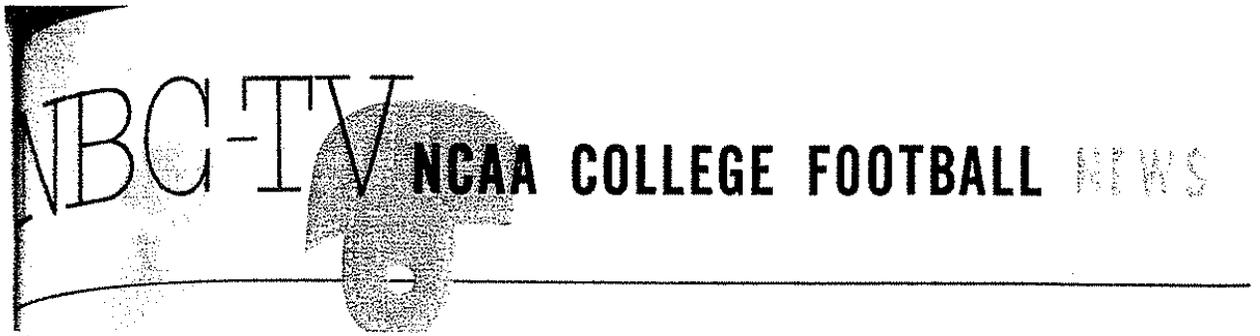


Illustration 4.6: Letterhead design used for NBC press releases about their broadcasts of college football in the 1951 season.

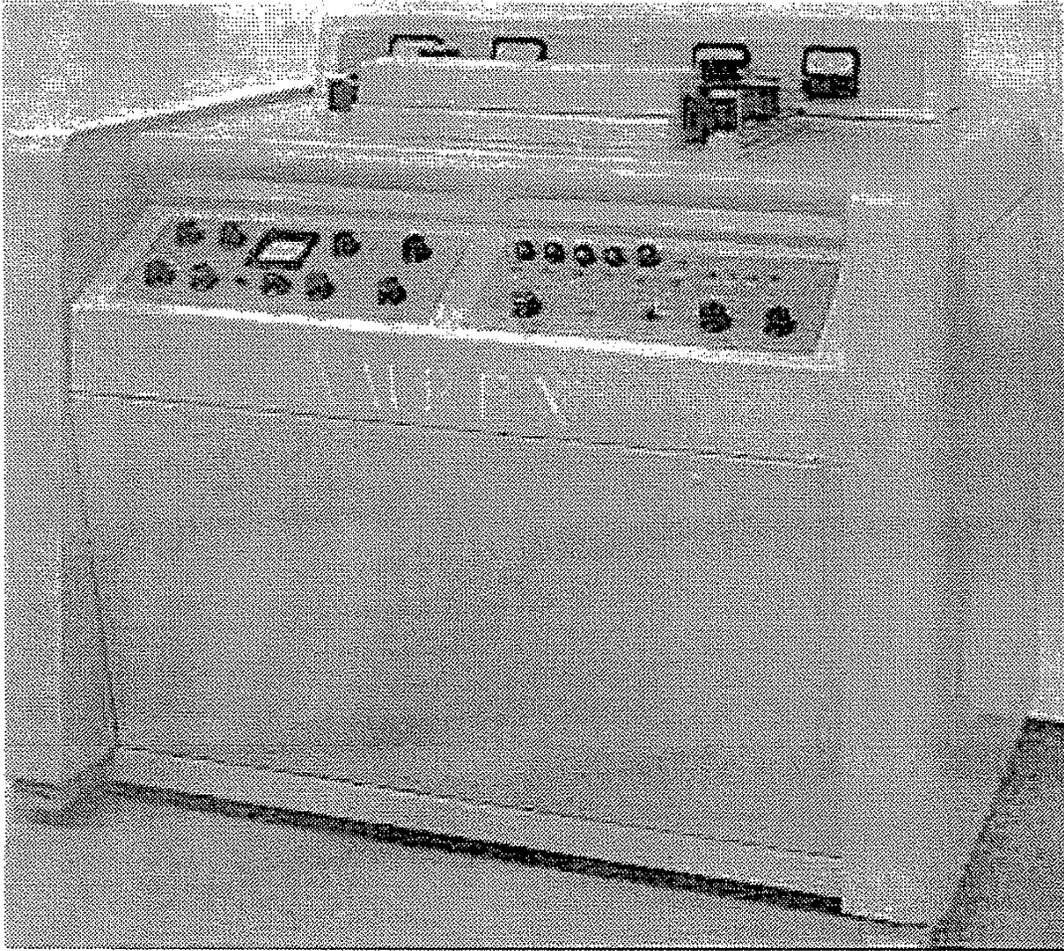


Illustration 5.1: The Ampex Mark IV Prototype Video Tape Recorder that was demonstrated at the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters in April 1956.

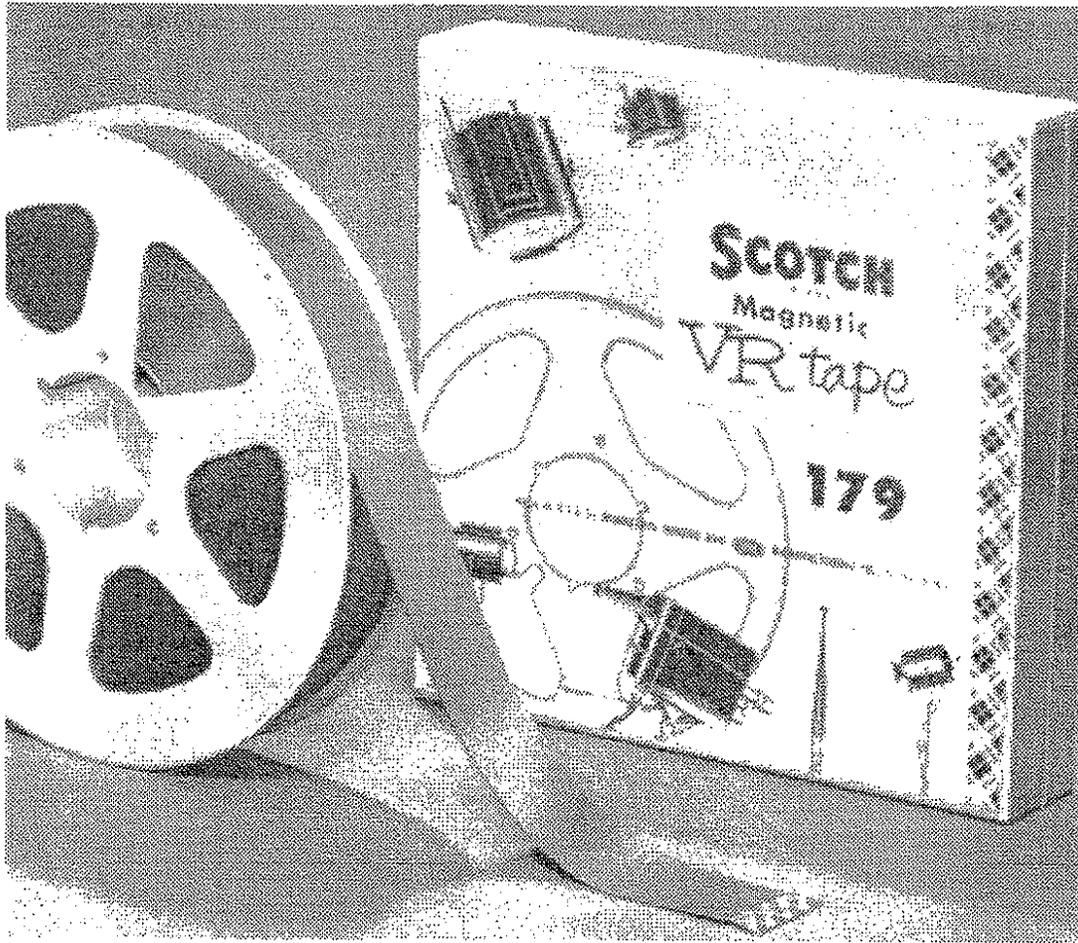


Illustration 5.2: The first commercially available videotape was sold by 3M beginning in July 1957, at a cost of \$306 per reel.

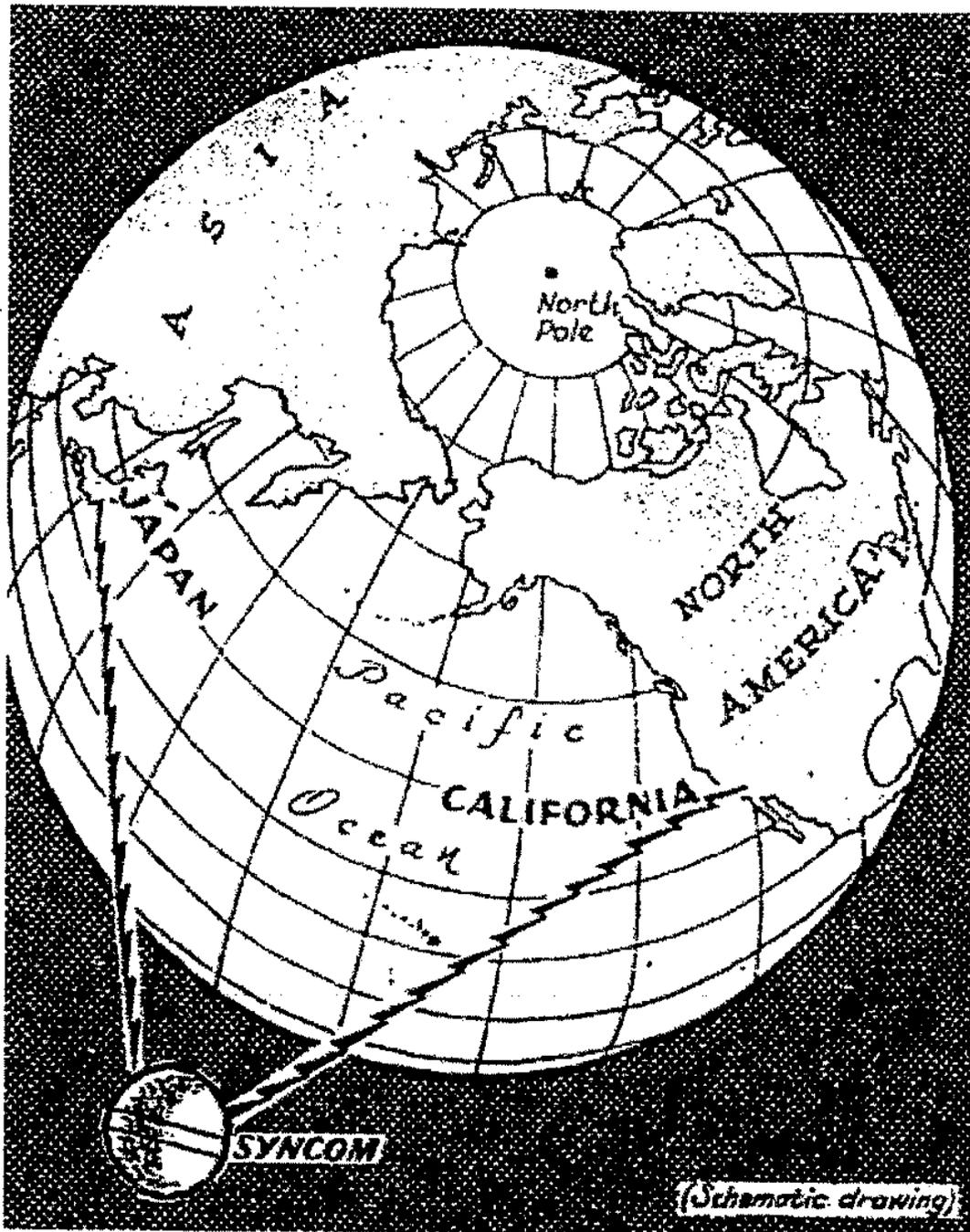


Illustration 5.3: Schematic drawing of Syncom III's synchronous orbit that appeared in the *New York Times* in 1964.

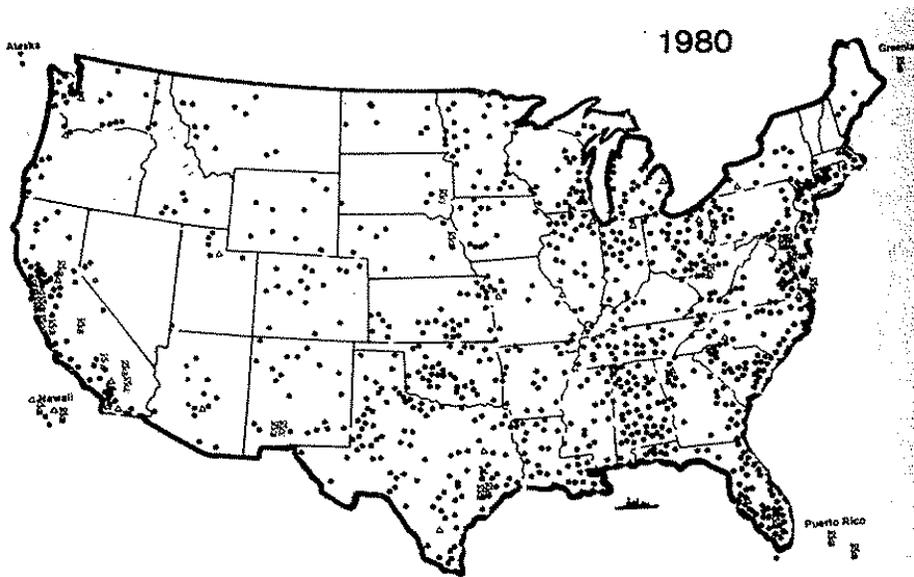
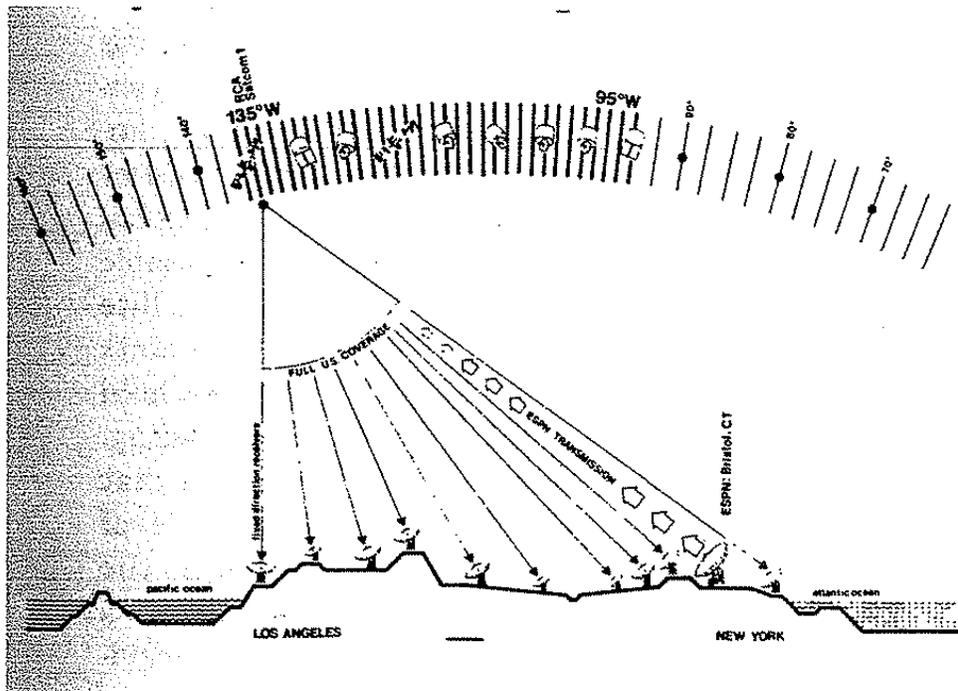


Illustration 6.1: (Above) Map of the United States showing the position of earth stations. (Below) Illustration showing how the Satcom I satellite relayed television signals to earth stations.



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