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**SPORTS
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Introducing PR and Sport

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of key discipline sources and to provide contextual background to sports PR in relation to the media environment, celebrity, commodification and representation. It provides an introductory review positioning sport and PR in relation to one another; an overview of sport in its sociocultural context, and introduces issues surrounding sports' media representations. The relationships between PR, sport and politics, and between sport, celebrity and PR are also introduced. This chapter begins with an overview review of some historical literature relevant to a consideration of the role of PR in sport. PR is contextualized within the converged media environment and journalism practices linked to sports business imperatives.

The chapter covers:

- PR and sport: sources and developments
- Convergent media in a digital networked world
- Sport celebrity and PR
- Commodification and representation
- Personal PR

Key Concepts

- Celebrity
- Commodification
- Convergent media
- Discourse technologist
- Legacy media
- Mediascape
- Moral panics
- News subsidy

- Primary definition
- Representation
- Secondary definition
- Source-media relations
- Sportscape

PR and Sport: Sources and Developments

Within PR relatively little attention has been given to sport. Exceptions include Curtin and Gaither who, writing from an international perspective, noted the value of sports business to PR consultancy and pointed out that the topic is ‘overlooked in international PR texts, yet sports can unify nations, promote social change and affect the national psyche, making it a powerful cultural agent’ (2006: 29–30). Authors from sports management, sports marketing, sports journalism, events management, and sports media sociology all touch upon PR concerns and activities though with little reference to PR concepts or literature. In the US, sports PR is uniquely defined as a separate occupational and academic specialism, that of ‘sports direction’ (Johnson, 1996; Helitzer, 1999; Neupauer, 2001; Irwin et al., 2002). Nichols et al. (2002) focused on sports media relations (L’Etang, 2006: 386). Anderson (2006) explored the use of PR to seek support for a business merger between two pro football leagues in the US. Sports marketers (Shank, 2002; Chadwick and Beech, 2006) took some interest in the field but it was Hopwood (2006) introduced public relations perspectives to sports marketing and the role of PR in sports marketing in her study of PR practice in English county cricket (Hopwood, 2005). Sports management and event management texts (for example Bowden et al. 2003) have not generally given PR the attention it deserves. However, Rojek’s (2013) text on events written from a sociocultural perspective presents a useful engagement with PR activities. Finally and most recently, Pedersen’s (2013) edited collection *Routledge Handbook of Sport Communication* marks a major step forward in the development of the field.

From a PR perspective Hopwood et al.’s (2010) edited text made a specific specialist contribution in presenting an explicitly functional account of the field. They framed the role of PR as response to crisis – all of the examples they give in their opening pages are critical incidents and scandals, although topics covered by contributors range more widely across corporate social responsibility (CSR), marketing, relationship management, fan relations, PR for individuals and international and cross-cultural communications. Critical work including an interpretive analysis of the purchase of a baseball team focused on source-media relations, media content and subsequent impact on media framing (Trujillo, 1992); and a textual analysis of a sports organization’s community relationship programme that drew out competing rhetorical positioning (Boyd and Stahley, 2008). A Special Issue of *Public Relations Review* largely focused on reputational issues such as those surrounding player transgressions (Wilson et al., 2008); crises (Bruce and Tini, 2008; Dimitrov, 2008; Pfahl and Bates, 2008); reputation and image repair (Fortunato, 2008; Brazeal, 2008); publicity and marketing techniques (Anderson, 2008; Mitrook et al., 2008) including online (Woo et al., 2008). Several contributions explored rhetorical strategies and discourses including techniques of apology and diversion (Brazeal, 2008;

Pfahl and Bates, 2008; Jerome, 2008) or based on Benoit's **image repair** framework (Benoit, 1995, 1999; Benoit and Hanzicor, 1994). The subject matter in some cases was uncompromising, dealing with violence, sexual attack, activism, professional jealousies and emotions – all unusual topics for PR journals. Benoit's framework is used as the basis for a **Think Critically** box in Chapter 3, p. 57).

Sport studies include a range of sociological themes including gender, class, race, politics, economics, national identity and globalization (Riordan and Kruger, 1999; Gratton and Henry, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Allison, 2005; Maguire, 2006; Jarvie, 2006). But there has been a growing interchange between sports and media studies reflected in special issues in *Media, Culture & Society* and the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport; Sports Media*. More journals are now available such as the *International Journal of Sport Communication*, and *Communication & Sport*. Within sports studies, it has taken time for PR to be given attention. A typical approach was taken by Whannel (2000) who focused on media sport failing to take account of PR's contribution to the business development of the sport industry. *The Handbook of Sports Studies* (Coakley and Dunning, 2000) defined the field of sports studies, its histories, paradigms and concerns, and included a contribution focused on production, content and audience, but made only passing reference to the potential for information to be 'controlled by press and PR departments' (2000: 292).

Media studies sociologists have focused on professional sports, news media – especially TV (Whannel, 2000: 291) – TV rights, media economics (Haynes, 2005), sports fans and fanzines (Haynes, 1995; Crawford, 2004), national identity (Boyle, 1992; Blain et al., 1993), concentrating on mainstream team sports covered regularly on sports pages and occasionally on news pages of newspapers (Boyle and Haynes, 2000, cited in L'Etang, 2006). As Campbell (2004: 203–4) pointed out, entertainment, sport and lifestyle media have tended to be 'dismissed or ignored rather than analysed' as mainstream media academics have focused on political public affairs and news media practice and this narrow focus was illustrated in the *Sage Handbook of Media Studies* (Downing et al., 2004) which did not index either sport or PR (L'Etang, 2006).

The media sociological concept of **source-media relations** is relevant to interrogating PR's influence (Hall, 1969, 1978; Ferguson, 1990; Schlesinger, 1990; McNair, 1996; D. Miller, 1998), or PR's role in **primary definition** whereby media sources generate initial and particular interpretations of events, issues and other actors in an attempt to protect reputation or promote particular **frames of reference** or ideologies, thus reducing the media to **secondary definers**. It has been noted that sports journalism has had lower status than other forms of journalism, and sports journalists often find it hard to gain professional autonomy because they may be former sports stars themselves (or fans) and therefore find it challenging to maintain critical distance (Boyle, 2006). Sports journalism encompasses a range of media including magazines that appear to attract different personalities, as one former journalist commented,

‘I wanted to work in a magazine because I preferred the environment, newspapers are more pressurized, political and stressful ... everything was just about contacts and finding a story, not about the writing. I found magazines much more satisfying

and the fact that it is participatory journalism in that I get to do the things we write about, it's service journalism.

Media sociologists (Boyle and Haynes, 2000; Haynes, 2005; Boyle, 2006; Wanta, 2013) have also produced useful insights into relationships between media, sources, sponsors and sport, but tended to focus on traditional media relations rather than the broader aspects of PR work. The **converged media** context has impacted the sports environment and operation and this is discussed below. Historical studies that focused on the relationships between news sources (including PR practitioners) and the media 'on the beat' – were explored from the perspective of the sports journalist, employing concepts such as **gatekeeper** (people that sift incoming news items and determine which items are retained as possible news stories), **agenda setting** (people and institutions that set the news agenda), disinformation and focusing on the ambivalent interdependence between sports promoter and journalist (Bourgeois, 1995; Lowes, 1987).

Bourgeois considered the **bonding** processes that take place in the sociocultural context of sports journalism and the precariousness of maintaining professional distance from PR sources. Bourgeois suggested that the strategy adopted by sports journalists could be defined in processual terms, within which journalists,

Must transform interactions between sports teams and between athletes into an entertaining sports spectacle ... through a process of spectacularization, which is founded on the ethics of entertainment, on the use of the lexicons of fantasy, combat, and passion, and on dramatization ... because the outcome is unpredictable. (1995: 199)

Bourgeois's analysis suggested that stories may begin with co-operative tendencies between PR practitioners and journalists, proceed to an identification of flaws that become socio-dramatic anchors or foci for a variety of narratives and speculative scenarios and solutions (L'Etang, 2006). In short, an initially collaborative relationship might unravel, through inconsistencies or alternative stories and rumours, subsequently developing into a reputational crisis for an individual, a team or a whole sport, as has happened with drug-use allegations in various sporting contexts. These processes accelerated with digitization and social media.

The tensions between media and sources are not always unhelpful to sources, however. In September 2011, the International Cycling Union (UCI) hosted the World Road Cycling Championship in Copenhagen. In the weeks leading up to the race, the media was filled with negative headlines predicting traffic chaos and road closures. However, according to Lars Lundov, Sport Event Denmark, the negative media coverage helped organizers to solve problems and communicate alternative modes of transport, claiming that, 'It went in our favour ... we didn't have any problems' (Evans, 2012a: 26).

Collaborative tendencies may also be mitigated by competitive pressures and the temptation for **sting journalism** that may involve tempting sportspeople into compromising situations.

What Happens on Tour, Stays on Tour?

In the UK *The Sunday Times* highlighted alleged corrupt practices by two members of FIFA's Executive Committee. These were pursued and the two members were disciplined. However, the Head of the Federation's Ethics Committee criticised the media exposé. Commenting on this incident Kevin Roberts, Editor of *SBI* noted the changing relationship between media and sport, and urged closer co-operation,

In an ideal world [media and sport] would feed off each other, making the other stronger and richer. But today the relationship is driven by distrust and fear rather than the mutual respect which was once the case ... early Test Match cricket ... was a six-week journey by sea. Players and the gentlemen of the press travelled on the same ships, often with the journalists in first-class and the cricketers ... in standard. Inevitably, men who spent time together travelling formed bonds and friendships, which overlapped and supported their professional relationships. One of the results was the 'what happens on tour stays on tour' mentality, which recognised that humans – whether or not they are sportsmen – are likely to do dumb things from time to time. Today everything has changed. Intense competition, in the print, online and broadcast media sectors creates unprecedented pressure for journalists to go way beyond match reports. Journalists and professional sports people might as well live on different planets and deep personal relationships between the two sides have become extremely rare. (Roberts, 2010b: 7).

Discuss!

How close should journalists be to their subjects or their PR representatives in the pursuit of a story and why? What are the societal implications of close or hostile relationships? How close should the relationship between sports business and the media be? How does social media influence these relationships? Finally, what does the quote reveal about historic gender assumptions that prevailed upon the cultures and practices of sport and sports journalism, and to what extent may these affect sports in society today and social attitudes more generally?

Convergent Media in a Digital Networked World

Following Meikle and Young (2012), the term **convergent media** is used in this book to capture the range and linkages between contemporary media. **Networked digital**

media (Meikle and Young, 2012) suffuse private and public spheres offering multiple opportunities to consume, remediate and participate in online discussion. It is self-evident that this communicative potential has been taken up by sports business and the PR industry and is a matter for much debate and experimentation. **Social media** offers multiple spaces for communicative interactions and experiences. Globally there are cultural preferences, for example Facebook is ubiquitous in the UK but elsewhere there is Friendster (Asia), Orkut (Brazil and India), Cyworld (Korea), Mixi (Japan), QQ (China) and Vronktahte (Russia) (Meikle and Young, 2012: 63). Social media organizations themselves use PR services, for example Twitter employed M&C Saatchi to challenge the view that Twitter 'is mainly used as a resource for journalists and as a promotional service for celebrities ... the brief [was] to present the social network as a people-focused brand' (PRW 2012a: 1).

Within PR the shift in communication dynamics is fundamental, because a major part of PR work has traditionally been around media relations, publicity and promotion based on models of **mass communication** and **media effects** and two-step dissemination of messages to key **opinion formers**, relying on the media to reach wider audiences. The provision by **sources** (Nike, national associations, government departments responsible for sport, sponsors) of issue-relevant, newsworthy, appropriately written and presented material performed the function of a **news subsidy** (Gandy, 1982) and facilitated the chances that those messages were reproduced or represented as closely as possible in key media (relevant sections of the most important titles written by influential journalists). One-to-one, face-to-face relationships with journalists also facilitated close understanding between journalists and PR practitioners, despite underlying tensions over who was really making the news and journalists' resentment of their dependency on PR sources (particularly since many former journalists 'crossed over' to PR, eliciting criticism of 'poacher turned gamekeeper'). It was not unusual to be asked at an interview for a PR job which journalists you knew and had in your **contacts book**. However, now it is the case that although,

Media relations was (and is) important in terms of editorial status (often referred to as third-party endorsement) and in terms of its power to circulate organizational discourses and ideologies ... it is now one of many information sources and is not the societal filter it once was. The historical model of filter then publish has been reversed. (Shirky, 2008: 81–108)

PR is often evaluated in terms of media coverage, for example counting the number of times key terms/phrases (**content analysis**) were used in editorial or looking at the extent to which source material was used. However, analysing media coverage on its own does not provide any insight into reader perspectives. It is still the case that some PR campaigns are flawed in their design in that they state objectives of attitudinal or behavioural change among particular stakeholders or demographics but then proceed only to evaluate media content, which provides some insight into the media but does not

give any information about the targeted readership. The fact that much PR evaluation is limited to media evaluation implies an underlying assumption that readers believe what they read in the media. However, there has been a long tradition in media and mass communication studies that has argued that readers are not passive but active, using media to their own ends, constructing their own interpretations and judgements – and it is precisely this process that has moved to some extent from the private to the public sphere. The Internet provides the potential to view processes of opinion formation within particular networks. A multiplicity of media forms are now integrated with one another and easily consumed through a single device, but are also diverse in form, style and reach offering consumers the ability to make interventions and edits. The opportunity to **reconfigure** or **recombine** enhances participation, interactivity and communicative action (Lievrouw, 2011).

These opportunities have changed the way in which reputation and relationships are formed and the methods employed by PR practitioners. Nevertheless, communicators need to retain their prime focus as Matt Farrell, Chief Marketing Officer of USA Swimming pointed out,

“Connectivity should not depend on technology, but should rather *build relationships*. Content creates connection, not the device. ... Connectivity is a *mission*, not a device. Accomplishing connectivity takes *trust*. We *work hard* to earn the *respect* of members and communicate USA Swimming to them and explain how our sponsors represent their values. We seize opportunities to tell stories about our sport and how our organization is trying to lead it. This is a real opportunity to make a *deeper connection* beyond venue signage. And it works – 74 per cent of our members are likely to purchase our sponsor’s products: 91 per cent of members feel sponsors are promoting their brand positively; and we are on track for a 100 per cent renewal rate of our top partners. When I think about connectivity, I focus less on technology and more on *trust, loyalty, authenticity, leadership* and *inspiration*. Then I tweet it. (SBI, 2013d: 114) (Author italics)

Continuous development in converged media impacts the structures and practices of PR. For example, Aloft Hotels invited PR consultancies to pitch for a business proposal via Twitter, and to participate in an ongoing discussion over a period of four weeks after which the client would draw up a shortlist for a formal pitch and meetings (Stein, 2012: 9). PR campaigns are now expected to integrate all forms of available media as Kindred MD Laura Oliphant pointed out,

“Our clients want to see digital and social media as part of their campaigns at a time when the lines between these disciplines are becoming increasingly blurred. (Hay, 2009: 13)

Discuss!

What does the quote above reveal about the nature of public relations work? How might the qualities ‘respect’, ‘trust’ and ‘loyalty’ be gained?

This has been an important development because for a period specialists in social media were recruited, and although this is still the case, the trend is now for integration, as the social media manager Kerry Bridge at Dell pointed out,

‘We are moving from a central social media team towards it being embedded into people’s roles across the board. We’ve trained more than 1,000 employees globally and we will continue to roll that out. (Wicks, 2010 10)

Converged media profoundly affects the way in which PR activity is conceived and enacted because it is now only one of many sources of discursive influence. And it is particularly challenging for those accustomed to a communication outputs and publicity approach that did not go beyond basic content analysis of print media or the comparison between media releases and media coverage. The effects of PR generally are rather under-researched, although groundbreaking work was carried out by Cardiff University’s School of Journalism that showed how dependent the non-tabloid newspapers were on PR-generated news releases for their content (Lewis and Franklin, 2008). The problem with the dominant media-centred approach in PR is that it stops short of evaluating actual impact beyond the media (even though the campaign objectives may specify attitudinal or behavioural change of a particular group). If PR is defined as being purely about influencing media content then it is not surprising that the sobriquet ‘spin doctor’ is applied to the occupation. PR practitioners have been described as **discourse technologists** (Leitch and Motion, 1996) but they are not alone in this activity. This historical approach to media relations was typically predicated on one-way communications in which publicists tried to write in a sufficiently newsworthy style to pass media **gatekeepers**. The **one-way** model was criticised for its similarity with propaganda models’ persuasion (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), and early PR theorists endeavoured to deal with this critique by formulating a model of PR which was dialogic and met equal exchange conditions of **two-way symmetrical communication**. The difficulty with this model has largely been that it has failed to engage with notions of power or to indicate criteria in which the process of communication might be judged to have been truly dialogic. Thus it has been posited as a largely idealistic model that appeared not to bear a great deal of relation to a practice largely concerned with dissemination to the media, publicity, persuasion and lobbying. Networked digital media has clearly changed the context in a way that facilitates user-authorship and editorship and has a different sort of communication potential: the question is whether communicators adapt to the paradigm or retain standardized approaches; established models may be too rigid.

On the other hand, if PR is seen as being around **stakeholder relations**, then that is going to demand a more sophisticated approach to evaluating PR work (advocacy/persuasion, reputation, relationships). Networked digital media offer a lot of communication options but they are not just ‘one more medium’ or ‘another technique’, they require a different approach, namely investment in thought and time to develop communication strategies that will engage key opinion leaders and develop and enhance interactive relationships. However, practitioners who overly focus on how to evaluate

this or that digital medium miss the point that the sum is worth more than the whole of the parts. It is the way in which users relate to, use, and recreate media as part of multiple networks that matters. Media convergence forces PR practitioners to think holistically and consider usage rather than in terms of particular tools or techniques and outputs of corporate messages.

In other words, what still matters is understanding meaning-making processes and their wider implications within a community (much more accessible with digital networked media), and being canny about approaches that appear to offer clear metrics, for example, Facebook pages offer a 'like' option, but not 'bored', and methodologically such counts give no indication of the motivation or significance that lies behind the click.

‘The International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) meets annually to discuss and review the progress of evaluation practices in the industry, including those that relate specifically to social media. AMEC’s Social Media Task Force recommended that ‘Social media measurement needed to focus on outcomes, not outputs, so basic quantitative measures like number of followers was useful but not particularly valuable, and that the PR industry needed greater transparency from vendors of measurement’. (Magee, 2012b: 25)

In other words the same problems that were encountered with print media evaluation also exist in converged media, the fundamental challenges are that PR has not been perceived as a research-based discipline, which has contributed to the unwillingness of clients and employees to pay for research into impacts as opposed to outputs; some of its practitioners lack the social science expertise either to do the job themselves or commission someone else to do it on their behalf; evaluation is frequently not measured against behavioural or attitudinal objectives. Current models on social media evaluation are often adapted versions of an historic model referred to as AIDA – Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action. These models are predicated on persuasion and change that is supposed to follow the dissemination of messages via blog post, videos, blogger events and briefings, and evaluated by calculating visitors, fans, followers and likes. There are technical products on the market that will collect quantitative data on traditional media (media evaluation packages), but those designed for social media appear, at least in part, to be based on a pre-digital media paradigm. The challenge is not only to capture visits and usage but also the meaningfulness of any engagement in relations to other variables (competing discourses and relationships) and the dynamic of shifting relationships within key networks. Converged media offer a great deal of feedback potential, but evaluation needs to take account of multiple perspectives and the interplay between them in relation to a topic and connected relationships.

Thought also needs to be given in PR to the changed balance between remote and face-to-face communication and its implications. In the same way that in mid- and late-twentieth century London journalists used to network in pubs around Fleet Street to

exchange gossip and leads, so PR practitioners shared collateral in wine bars and clubs. Now that so much can be achieved instantaneously but remotely, it is interesting to reflect on what is or is not lost in a range of professional relationships, and how central an issue that is for communication professionals and the advice they give their clients. In short, while the quantity of communication opportunities for interaction continues to increase, practitioners also need to be able to contribute to and assess the quality of relationships, their sincerity, intensity, reliability and uniqueness. This is important because PR practitioners are (presumably) recruited for their overall understanding of human communication, of which digital networked media are a major part, but not the whole.

Within PR literature some maintain a distinction between 'old' (print) and 'new' media (which now it is not), occasionally referring to 'old' media as **legacy media** (for example see Holladay and Coombs, 2013). However, this is an artificial divide that obscures the way in which developments have extended and reincorporated a media mix that is built on assumptions of interactivity and remediation. This also has implications for the way in which PR works with other specialists such as marketing and branding. Corporate and consumer communications need co-ordination across digital platforms that still reflect their distinctive purpose, as do media relations for announcing news, for example sports celebrities often use Twitter and news journalists frequently source and cite Twitter. The London 2012 Olympics were billed as the first 'social Olympics': 9.7 million tweets were sent during the opening ceremony on 27 July 2012, 125 times more than on the equivalent day in Beijing when the platform was still in its infancy (Shearman, 2012: 15).

From an analytical perspective, it is important to understand strategic intent, policy, communication context and the fact that opacity, distortion and manipulation are still features of communication spaces. Responding to allegations, rumour and gossip demands immediacy, and it should not be forgotten that converged media offer opportunities for creative reinterpretations of stories and organizations that subvert the original meaning, known as **culture jamming** (Lievrouw, 2011: 22–3), interventions that can be subversive and defined as **activism**, indeed the proliferation of low-cost communication options has facilitated the growth in the numbers of new social movements. This has implications for sports business because:

“ All businesses are media businesses, because whatever else they do, all businesses rely on managing information for two audiences – employees and the world. The increase in the power of both individuals and groups, outside traditional organizational structures, is unprecedented. (Shirky, 2008: 107) ”

Access to digital networked media creates an expanded public sphere for debate and its openness encourages multiple commentators. These compete with established paid journalists and PR practitioners raising interesting issues over expertise, legitimacy and professionalism and professional status. There is now, according to Shirky, an age of **mass amateurism**, which is really the corollary of democratization and dissemination of publication and interactivity tools – ‘the linking of symmetrical participation and amateur participation’ (Shirky, 2008: 98, 107).

In sports business, converged media open up many opportunities in terms of new products and services, such as gaming. Owners and managers of major sports face communication opportunities and challenges, for example in being sufficiently responsive to their fans, who have been empowered and given a 'voice' that can endlessly resonate through re-mediation, re-Tweets and hashtags, repeated (if deemed significant) by news media in the dynamic spiral that is contemporary communication space.

However, in **sportscape**, converged network media have also raised expectations regarding the availability of the sports person and the extent to which they will communicate via Twitter and Facebook. Sponsors expect that professional sports stars will make themselves available, and will regularly comment on issues other than sport. Their 'private' spaces are also to be consumed as a crucial part of their individual commodification. Professional sport is one job, promoting sponsors is another, subjecting oneself to the voyeuristic gaze a necessary condition of celebrity. Predators, prey and parasites are virtually present in the self-promotional space, but which is which is not always obvious. Converged media has often been claimed by PR specialists as a new dawn of interactivity (which it is) but that in itself does not guarantee ethical communication (whatever we might mean by that) or authentic trustworthy relationships; people may not always think what they Tweet.

Sport 'Celebrity' and PR

The phenomenon of sports celebrity is not new. The English cricketer W. G. Grace had 'a special place in the lives of people in Victorian England' and professional football players in the 1890s were feted in their neighbourhoods (Smart, 2005: 2) as were professional runners in the same era (Askwith, 2004: 60). Some sports have benefited from their association with stars from other cultural domains. For example, tennis became popular among Hollywood silent film stars such as Tony Moreno and Enid Storey in the 1910s and 1920s, and talkie stars such as Joan Crawford, Groucho Marx, Barbara Stanwyck, Carole Lombard, Marlene Dietrich, many of whom were taught by Eleanor 'Teach' Tennant at the Beverley Hills Hotel (Spain, 1953). From a modest background herself, Teach's social circle included William Randolph Hearst and Marion Davies, and she attracted stars to the hotel and brought it considerable publicity, so that soon Teach 'found herself very busy with the unpaid job of PR Officer' (Spain, 1953: 26). Ranked third in the US as an amateur, Teach later coached world-beaters Alice Marble, Bobby Riggs (who many years later, in 1973, lost 'the battle of the sexes' to Billy Jean King) and 'Little Mo' Maureen Connolly, who won the Ladies Championship at Wimbledon three times before the age of 20. This historical example illustrates the synergy between celebrity circles that generate glamour and mystique around particular trends or fashions. The notion of 'stars' and 'stardom' could easily cross from entertainment to sport, something taken for granted by sports business practitioners today who regard sport as an entertainment business.

Celebrity can be defined as being well-known for being well-known (Boorstin in Andrews and Jackson, 2001: 2) and while sporting heroes have always existed, the

development of ‘mega-celebrity’ has been facilitated by converged media and processes of globalization. According to Rojek (2001) democratization, the commodification of daily life and the decline of organized religion have been the key developments leading to the cult worship of mass-media celebrities (Smart, 2005: 9). Sports celebrities are commodified and become part of the currency of sports business and, more widely, in promotional culture. Andrews and Jackson identified key aspects of promotional culture, which helped manufacture celebrity:

‘The representation industry; the endorsement industry; the publicity industry; the communication industry; the entertainment industry; the coaching industry; the legal industry; and the appearance industry. (2001: 4)

These multifaceted aspects of postmodern Western-style cultures make a convincing case for analysing PR within broader cultural and less technically focused vocational frameworks. PR students often note popular culture’s assumptions regarding synergies between PR and celebrity, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that academics are often keen to deny or belittle the connection, regarding it as trivial. This academic evasion is as puzzling as it is interesting, suggestive of the desire to ‘scientize’ and ‘neutralize’ PR into a technocratic organizational practice. Sport celebrity is intrinsic to the commercialization of sport because sporting heroes are required to inject media interest and sponsors’ cash and that consequently,

‘Sporting heroes therefore offer themselves as products of the ‘culture industry’, to be fashioned into sports stars ... The modern sport star ... is ... both cultural product (as a brand to be sold) and process (part of the chain of advertising and brand or product endorsement that underpins the regime of capital accumulation. (Gilchrist, 2005: 126)

Achievement is not necessary for fame in an era of branding, and an environment in which ‘the celebrity as role model is both made and undone by press and television coverage’ (Smart, 2005: 8). The news agenda has long included an interest in sleaze, noted by Boorstin as ‘our morbid interest in private lives, in personal gossip, and in the sexual indiscretions of public figures’ (1962: 255 cited in McNair, 2000: 52). Converged media exacerbates and stimulates the ‘rumour mill’. Sporting victims include Tiger Woods (allegedly treated for ‘sex addiction’), John Terry the Chelsea and English footballer (allegedly involved with a team-mate’s partner), Ryan Giggs (who not only allegedly had an affair with a women but had apparently requested, and obtained, a super-injunction to prevent media coverage). Such examples are not simply moments of individual tragedy or public scandal, but have wider ramifications for consumer brands (and their values), sponsors, brand consumers, event and hospitality managers. We simply cannot understand sport unless we engage with the phenomenon of contemporary celebrity and associated paparazzi, celebrity magazines such as *Hello*, *OK*, *Heat*, and their online versions as well as news values and media and social **moral panics**.

Boorstin implied that such events have authority because they are not pre-planned, are not **pseudo-events** and therefore have an **authenticity**, but much has changed in media content, particularly entertainment media. Publicists, producers, media and participants (or are they actors?) in ‘reality’ TV tease viewers with performances that can dupe. A good example of this is the sport of wrestling and how it is performed on TV as entertainment. Serrels explored the various conventions and rituals regarding the ‘masculine melodrama’, the ‘search for a moral order’, and its own ethical system (Serrels, 2006): the wrestling industry presents performances staged as real but actually fake – outcomes are normally established prior to the contesters entering the ring. Afficianados and experienced fans will not be taken in, except in rare moments of reality (known in a wrestling argot supposedly based on pig Latin as ‘The Shoot’). As Boorstin noted in his discussions of authenticity and pseudo-events (the creation of which have often been denigrated and blamed on PR by the media),

‘Many sports become pseudo-events; and some (professional wrestling, for example) have actually flourished by exploiting their reputation for being synthetic. (Boorstin, 1992: 254)

Such fake performances also affect other sports, for example in 2012 there were suggestions that ‘diving’ in English football (giving the impression that the footballer has been fouled by the opposition) had increased due, it was interestingly and xenophobically suggested, to foreign influences.

Yet part of sports business is concerned with the creation and subsequent promotion of new styles and forms of sport, and the generation of new structures such as ‘world series’ are often central to re-branding or reinventing a sport that is not realizing its desirable commercial value.

Commodification and Representation

The injection of capital means that sports and sports people become **commodified**, in that they acquire economic status through celebrity, a concept that in itself is no longer entirely dependent on sporting prowess. Promotion is an essential part of the process that translates physical expertise not only into events to which tickets may be purchased, but makes the image of the athlete(s) in question so desirable in terms of the values and ideals it conveys that it can be sold many times over through multiple media. PR expertise includes understanding of media values and their implications in terms of the way in which athletes are presented; the way in which reputation can be built through wisely chosen associations and activities to build a particular image. However, athletes can and do take an active role in their own digital media promotional activities, and in less popular (and therefore less government or corporately funded) sports, gaining even small amounts of local sponsorship can make a difference in terms of being able to be a full-time athlete. Therefore athletes often participate in the process of **self-commodification** early in their careers when seeking sponsorship, consequently attractive women emphasize their looks alongside their sporting talents to potential sponsors, and sponsors seek out attractive sportswomen, for example,

Sharapova ... [an] ... intoxicating blend of commercial appeal of a huge, public personality ... movie star good looks ... Ivanovic ... smouldering looks surely guarantee her a fortune off the court [topped the UK tennis magazine *Ace's* poll to find the world's sexiest player] ... IMG are rubbing their hands together in anticipation when it comes to young Nicole Vaidisova. The attractive Vaidisova has already adorned a number of high profile magazine covers and fronted Reebok ads. (Britcher, 2006: 36–7)

Likewise, an *SBI* feature exploring the most powerful sports personalities for endorsements listed a top ten of which two were women (Maria Sharapova and Michelle Kwan), both of whom were defined by their 'great looks' and 'elegance, beauty, grace', whereas no mention was made of the physical appearance or attractiveness of the men, all of whom were described in terms of their sporting prowess (*SBI*, 2007b).

Thus the sports business trade magazine reinforces expectations about the demands laid upon elite female athletes: it is not enough to perform at an outstanding level at their chosen sport, they must have 'the look' and perform heteronormative gender roles in order to meet the expectations of sponsors. The process is viewed critically by those who see this as a form of patriarchal exploitation. As Vincent and Crossman point out,

Many of the narratives of sport journalists on female athletes conform to a White, hyperfeminine, heterosexual ideal ... Narratives about female athletes are frequently imbued with socially constructed sex-role stereotypes and are replete with references to their heterosexual familial roles as wives, mothers, girlfriends, and daughters. This mediated discourse of female athletes' heterosexual familial roles serves to reproduce the pattern of male dominance. Many of the mediated narratives about female athletes are predicated on how they conform to socially constructed gender stereotypes or how they 'do gender' rather than their athleticism. This process of devaluing and trivializing female athletes serves and reifies patriarchal ideology. (Vincent and Crossman, 2007: 80; see also Brookes, 2002; Giese, 2000)

Processes of **commodification** dictate that good-looking men and women will generate more income. Sports business practitioners try to talent-spot attractive performers who will be able to generate brand income regardless of their sporting talents. This is particularly the case for female sports stars who are closely assessed on looks and personality, for example, US gymnast Nastia Liukin was dubbed 'Queen of Olympics Gymnastics' after winning the Beijing title. *SBI* commented,

Liukin has a bright future ... has become the darling of many sponsors and advertisers ... presented with a slew of non-sports opportunities, appearing on a variety of TV shows and magazine covers, including a shot with Maria Sharapova in New York ... What Liukin has done is place herself in the realm of Mary Lou Retton, the 1984 US gymnastics gold medalist ... Liukin seems to possess those same traits [bubbly personality and the gist of veracity] plus the kind of looks that Sharapova has used to attract more sponsors and endorsers than almost any other woman on the planet. (*SBI*, 2008b: 17)

Commodification is linked to media representation; media texts and images are often gendered and heteronormative, and any image may be digitally enhanced to produce the most favourable aesthetic impression. Numerous studies have shown that coverage of women is limited, for example Lopiano (2000) found that 90 per cent of sports newspaper content was devoted to male sport, 5 per cent to women and 3 per cent to horses and dogs (women only overtook horses and dogs in 1992) (cited in Wanta, 2013: 80). Sports journalists are more likely to be men than women; sports business is also dominated by men as discussed later.

News-formation processes were put under the microscope by Knoppers and Elling (2004) in relation to the gendered processes of news selection by journalists, which, they argue, leads to the consistent under-representation of women's sport. Sports journalism is still a man's world (Knoppers and Elling, 2004: 58; Boyle, 2006) and Knoppers and Elling focused on how, within the structural constraints that shape journalism practice, journalists legitimize their choices. They found that giving more attention to women's sports was defined negatively as **promotional journalism**, clashing with a particular notion of (gendered) 'objectivity'.

Journalism values are made apparent in the quantity and quality of gender and race representation across a variety of genres including news media and specialist magazines. Inequality is evident across the board. Some magazines exclude women entirely, or, on the other hand, select the most photogenic examples. Despite an aging population, leisure sports magazines rarely, if ever, portray older men or women on their inside pages, and certainly not on covers. Likewise, covers do not reflect the ethnic make-up of the UK population. In some cases (see below) magazines overtly sexualize content.

Such predispositions within the media inevitably affect the way some sportswomen present themselves, for example one female golfer said 'I am careful to be well-presented and I am fortunate to be pretty'. PR is necessarily implicated in these processes in its impression management of individuals who are produced groomed and presented as brand representatives for products and services to be consumed.

Gendered and Sexualized Representation in Golf Magazines

Golf World

In one issue there were 188 images of men in 210 pages (including three on the front cover). The only images of women portrayed (except for one tiny unnamed image on page 210) were ghettoized in a single article about the Royal & Ancient's decision to permit women to compete in the Open. Passport-size photographs appeared of Isabelle Beisiegel, Mhairi McKay, Trish Johnson, Nina Reis, Laura Davies, Sophie Gustafson, Heather Daly-Donofrio, Laurette

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Martiz and Sandra Carlborg. Stephenie Louden appeared in a studio shot holding a golf club laterally behind her shoulders so that her breasts, encased in a purple cashmere twinset, were emphasized. Michelle Wie was the only female golfer shown in action in the whole of the magazine. Annika Sorenstam was depicted at a press conference. Sophie Sandolo – the only woman to merit a full-page shot – appeared sitting slightly backwards on a space-age sofa that on close inspection was comprised of giant golf clubs. Wearing a strapless virginal-white mini-dress, slit at the side and bondage-type knee-high boots that consisted only of a large tongue of silver leather clasped onto her legs with four straps, Sandolo pouted down at the camera, her expression ambiguous since her eyes were sunk in pools of dark eyeshadow. Her hands were clenched, appearing to be virtually manacled together.

Golfpunk

The magazine leaned towards the *Playboy* end of the magazine market, possibly unsurprising since its editorial team had backgrounds in *Loaded* and *GQ*. In one issue was a section on 'Bunkerbabes' where 'we fly the Golfpunk lovelies to Las Vegas for a night on the fruities. Nudge, Nudge' and pictures of a bikini-clad woman accompanied by the by-line 'You little tees' ('Contents' *Golfpunk*: 1). Scantly clad women posed provocatively with gold clubs, tees poking out of tiny shorts. A similar approach was taken on the magazine subscription form, where a model wearing black velvety underwear and a lace garter, peeks out from under a black hat while holding a golf club in her right hand behind her head (and thus emphasizing her right breast) and with her hand on the head of a (dead) stuffed cheetah. 'The Golf Nurse' gave basic golfing tips in a double page spread that included seven pictures of the nurse wearing hot pants, sleeveless top, stripy long socks and a mohair cap. Golf clothing was modelled on fully dressed men accompanied by bikini-clad blondes in killer stilettos. There was not a single image of a professional female golfer.

Sport reflects but also shapes societal patterns and flows, and there are some fundamental issues in the sports industry with which PR becomes implicated through the reproduction of discourses. These are strongly gendered and shaped by heteronormative assumptions and discourses. Gender inequality structures sports business. The most highly paid professional sports stars are inevitably men, an imbalance that the sports media complex connives in, and justifies on the grounds that male sports are more popular and therefore attract more sponsorship.

Inequity in Cricket

In January 2012 BBC News interviewed the England Women's Cricket team about the possibility of winning the World Cup for the fourth time in a row. In passing it was mentioned that they had travelled on the same plane as the men, but the men

had flown in the comfort of business class while the women travelled tourist class. The (female) interviewer asked the team if they were bitter. The answer was along the lines of, 'Not at all, we do it for the love of the game, not the money'. While this comment could be interpreted as graciousness or perhaps as a sideways dig at their much less successful but much more generously funded male counterparts, it also suggested submission, or at least accommodation to the inevitability of the status quo.

Sport business itself is a largely male occupation as is sports media and journalism, apparently reflecting and reinforcing societal stereotypes about feminine and masculine appropriate behaviour. Evidence of awareness of this issue was acknowledged by *SBI* in an article that reported major gender imbalances (Gillis, 2013: 36–40). The article quoted Sally Hancock, former director of Olympic marketing and group sponsorship at Lloyds TSB Bank and a high profile figure who won sponsorship personality of the year at the Hollis Sponsorship Awards,

‘It’s depressing to say the least. The industry can often feel like an exclusive boys’ club and does nothing to inspire confidence in women looking to move up the ladder in industry. I started out in sponsorship in 1988, and at the time there were significant numbers of women at agency account managerial level with very few in senior roles within sports administration. Twenty-five years later I am not sure that much has changed. (cited in Gillis, 2013: 37)

While inequality and prejudice in sports practice is challenged by lobby groups such as the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF), in the UK progress is slow. WSFF have highlighted issues of lower participation in sport among women from the teenage years and have argued that strong role models and media coverage are the way to correct the gender imbalance as well improving women’s health and fitness.

It has been documented that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) sports people are less well rewarded for their abilities in terms of sponsorship and brand opportunities. It is still the case that in some sports, such as rugby, it may be hard for sports stars to acknowledge LGBT and publicly fluid identities. Some LGBT sports stars elect to announce their sexuality in a formal press conference, for example, on the verge of his WBO world title fight Puerto Rican featherweight Orlando Cruz who competed at the 2000 Olympics announced ‘I have been and always will be a proud Puerto Rican. I have always been and always will be a proud gay man’ (BBC teletext, 6 October 2012).

Discuss!

How does this issue affect the reputation of sports business and how should the industry respond?

Sport reflects society in relation to prejudicial attitudes, something of which some sporting associations are aware. For example, Anna Rawson was asked by a reporter what ladies' golf could do to become more popular like ladies' tennis. As *SBI* reported,

Rawson was familiar with the line of questioning. When she's not playing golf she makes a good living as a fashion model so her views on 'sexing up' golf have an added frisson. She threw out a few suggestions but said that, on the whole, she felt things were improving. But she didn't just say that. She said that the game was shedding its 'dyke' image. Mistake. The interview was quickly relayed to LPGA headquarters in the States where, a few weeks later, the then tour commissioner Caroline Bivens welcomed Rawson to the LPGA by making her stand up and apologize for using 'the D word'. (Gillis: 16–17, cited in L'Etang, 2013: 507)

Discuss!

How can sports PR practitioners avoid stereotyping and practise authenticity? Are sports cultures and business heteronormative and if so, why? What implications does this have for PR practitioners?

Think Critically

Choose a sample of sports and fitness magazines from a variety of sports. Analyse the covers in terms of representation of gender, race and age. Choose individual magazines and carry out more detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis of the editorial and articles, noting any links between sponsors, advertisements and editorial. What does the exercise reveal about apparent journalism values? Finally, analyse news stories in the magazine and consider how those stories were sourced and what PR activity may have lain behind the stories.

Personal PR

Individual sports stars need a PR specialist in personal PR. Personal PR is all-inclusive in terms of its approach and is not limited to the star's sporting activities but includes their personality, private life and networks, including the inevitable scandals. In some sporting contexts there may be overlap between the roles of press agent, agent and PR.

Personal PR also helps the sport with which that person is associated. As Barry Hearn, Chairman of Matchroom pointed out,

'Having characters in sport is important. I've always had a concept that sport is a soap opera played out by characters. People talk about those characters and that helps the sports PR machine'. (*SBI*, 2013a: 56)

Nurturing of sports talent to celebrity status for long-term economic gain is central to sports business and marketing, but controversy can tarnish satellite brands and even squeaky-clean stars can be subjected to critique. Tom Daley is a British swimmer who found fame when he competed at the Beijing Olympics aged 14 and then again at London where he won a bronze medal. Clearly he was a marketing and public relations dream especially since he was articulate and relaxed in front of the camera. Professional Sports Group represented Daley and explained his brand potential,

‘Today’s stars have to be more than winners; they must have something extra to offer their sponsors and that means developing personal brands and media platforms that complement their athletic achievements ... Tom is a very unique mix. He’s a perfectionist who wants to be the best he can be. The 2016 Olympics is his focus. He is really bright – an ‘A-star’ student – and a fantastic communicator who understands and enjoys modern media. He is not bad-looking either and he has an incredible story. (Cunningham, 2013: 70)

However, somewhat ironically, in the run-up to 2012 Daley was criticised for spending too much time on promotional and marketing activities and was also the subject of offensive tweets that triggered further media debate.

One aspect of personal PR is to maximize the value of the sports star by extending their career beyond sport. Fame delivers economic rewards but has the potential to lead to success in other areas as boundaries between sport and entertainment have become porous and sports stars may be reinvented in new roles. This reinvention or ‘cross-over’ process is part of the personal PR remit as shown in the following examples:

‘Facilitated by the professional marketing and public-relations services offered by global sport agencies such as IMG, Octagon, and SFX, many sport celebrities have transcended sport and crossed over into popular entertainment (Rowe, 1995).

‘Serena Williams, whose celebrity image is carefully managed by IMG, has acted in a television sitcom and appeared in numerous television commercials. (Vincent and Crossman, 2007: 91)

Sports stars have generally relatively short careers in their prime area of expertise (less true in some areas that are not so physically demanding such as snooker or darts), and from their perspective they need to make the most of the financial opportunities that arise and capitalize on their achievements and fame to develop a post-competitive career. Obvious routes are coaching, sports management or sports development, but in the era of media sports, the media itself is also a clear option. In the UK examples include Sue Barker (tennis), Gary Lineker (football) Clare Balding (amateur flat jockey) all of who commentate on a variety of sports. Balding also commentates on other countryside matters and animal-based events such as Crufts.

The ultimate transformation is from that of sports star to general and life-lasting celebrity. A sports star will be ‘tried out’ in various media chat shows to see if they can ‘cross-over’, for example Michael Phelps did many talk shows and hosted *Saturday Night*

Live on NBC (the network for the Olympics in the US), presented the VideoMusic Awards and became the face of a trading card (Wilner, 2008). Phelps also attracted a wide range of non-sports business sponsorship including Visa, Hilton Hotels, Omega Watches, AT&T, and Rosetta Stone language-learning software.

While sports business increasingly relies on sports stars to market themselves, display ‘personality’ and share personal details and opinions, the demands and availability of digital information may backfire, particularly where opinions are problematic or not directly related to sport. For example, in spring 2013 a new manager was appointed at the English football club Sunderland AFC – Paolo di Canio from Italy. On his appointment, the Vice-Chairman and Director of the Club, politician David Miliband, former Foreign Secretary, resigned from the Board in protest because di Canio had allegedly previously professed a belief in fascism (and had made a fascist salute when he played for Lazio in 2005, an act for which he received a ban). On 2 April 2013 di Canio arrived at his new club, but following intense media debate over the Easter weekend refused to answer questions about his political beliefs, stating that his beliefs were personal and that he would not talk about them. Many fans expressed criticism and the local miners’ association threatened to remove their official flag from the ground out of respect for the role that former miners had played in the fight against fascism in the Second World War. Subsequently, a statement was issued from di Canio on 4 April 2013 in which he declared

‘I am not political, I do not affiliate myself to any organization. I am not a racist. I do not support the ideology of fascism. I respect everyone. I am a football man. This and my family are my focus. Now I will speak only of football. (BBC Sport, 4 April 2013) ’

The case draws out some interesting points: apart from likely reputational damage to Sunderland, it suggests that not only sports stars but those in prominent leadership positions also need personal PR. Media coverage quickly extended. Sunderland’s executive had been seeking to rejuvenate the club’s finances and in autumn 2012 signed a shirt sponsorship deal with Invest in Africa for £20 million a season. Invest in Africa is an organization founded to dispel misconceptions about African commerce, to promote and encourage new investors; and to showcase companies already operating successfully on the continent (Harman, 2012: 16). Evidently Invest in Africa approached Sunderland because Sunderland’s Foundation of Light supports 120 employees working with 44,000 children each year, paralleling similar programmes in Africa associated with Invest in Africa. The connection also offers business and football opportunities in Africa. The crisis that was catalysed by David Miliband seemed likely to throw all of Sunderland’s activities, and more crucially, its values under the media spotlight for some time to come.

Think Critically

Choose a local sports person aged between 15 to 20, possibly someone at your college or university. Consider how you would go about gaining relevant sponsorship that would

allow them to train or attend events. What would the sponsor gain? Why should they choose this person above another person? And why this sport rather than another sport? How does the sport and the person align with the potential sponsor's values or extend them in a way that could be beneficial in terms of marketing or media coverage? How would you make the sponsor–beneficiary relationship a genuine relationship? Can you avoid stereotyping your sports person?

Discuss!

Consider the relative celebrity status of the following athletes relative to their achievements. Why do some have a higher profile than others? How is that profile achieved? Is that profile justified, and if so, why and how? Who handles personal PR for these stars?

- David Beckham
- Juan Manuel Fangio
- Florence Kiplagat
- Nichol David
- Li Xueni
- Usain Bolt
- Rafael Nadal
- Chrissie Wellington
- Victoria Pendleton
- Ma Long
- Alexandra do Nascimento
- Luis Scola

Summary

Modern sport is deeply embedded in image-making, celebrity, promotion, elite and intra-elite relationships. Sports events have cultural significance relating to individual processes of identification and punctuate societal flows. PR practitioners and journalists are meaning-makers and storytellers, combining corporate and populist concerns with human interest stories. PR is embedded in sports business, its promotion, sponsorship, events and hospitality, its risks and crises, and, most fundamentally of all, its policies and relationships. This chapter has summarized some key sources in PR, sports and media studies to provide background concepts relevant to contemporary sports PR practice. It has highlighted tensions and co-operation amongst media, sports business and PR and elaborated issues around sports PR and celebrity.

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