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**Tackling the Establishment with Technology: A Study of Sports Media
Cases**

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**Tackling the Establishment with Technology: A Study of Sports Media
Cases**

by

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the entry-level journalist who works the worst hours possible far away from home in a small town with one dive bar and an even smaller paycheck. You are building for bigger. Never compromise your integrity, fight for what's yours and make your own trail. The rules have changed, and fortunately for you, the ball's in your court.

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Abstract

Tackling the Establishment with Technology: A Study of Sports Media Cases

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In today's new media landscape, who tells the story and how it is told has changed from the traditional journalistic rituals of the past. This study examines four cases within sports media that challenge the sports media complex, a complicated partnership between sports organizations and personalities and the outlets that cover them. This research focuses on the impact of technological advances in communication on this institutionalized connection between media and sport and finds that while there are several factors that have affected the strength of the sports media complex, new media continue to serve as a catalyst in the erosion of the relationship between legacy media and sports' governing bodies.

Table of Contents

Introduction	01
History of Sports Journalism	05
The Sports Media Complex	08
New Media and Sports Journalism	12
Case Study as Research Method.....	16
Case #1: Jay Bilas vs. the NCAA	18
Overview	20
Aftermath.....	18
Analysis	21
Conclusion.....	22
Case #2: Deadspin Scoops Mainstream Media on Manti Te'o Coverage	24
Overview	24
Aftermath.....	25
Analysis	26
Conclusion.....	29
Case #3: Selena Roberts and Roopstigo.com's Coverage of Auburn Football	31
Overview	31
Aftermath.....	32
Analysis	33
Conclusion.....	35
Case #4: ESPN Ends Partnership with PBS Frontline	37
Overview	37
Aftermath.....	39
Analysis	41
Conclusion.....	44

Discussion.....	47
References	50
Vita	63

Introduction

The story goes that on a train in Louisiana, a group of sportswriters traveling with the New York Yankees witnessed a frantic Babe Ruth scramble onto their railcar with a screaming woman wielding a knife in close pursuit. The Babe, running through the car no doubt faster than he'd ever run the bases, eventually lost the woman on the train. Fred Lieb, a sportswriter covering the team, said, "I still wonder why we newspapermen acted as we did. There were eleven of us sitting there and no one said a word. We just went on typing, reading magazines, and playing cards." (Lieb 1996) Such was the life of a sportswriter in 1921, where reporters were embedded with teams and wary of publishing any negative press that could cause tension with the organizations and players they covered.

Today, had the Great Bambino run for his life past a slew of sportswriters and bloggers, would they have done the same? Would they have turned a blind eye or live-tweeted the situation? Regardless of their actions, the other passengers on the train would have utilized every form of social media to disseminate their own "breaking news" to their friends and followers. With those videos and pictures, news outlets would have no choice but to provide their own insight into the incident.

The present technology-driven society allows sports enthusiasts to access more sports media than ever before. Fans can receive up-to-the-minute updates on their favorite teams and athletes through websites, message boards and apps. They can also access their favorite sports figures through social media, eliminating the middleman to find out everything from what a player had for breakfast to their social and political

views. This instantaneous news and information cycle is not unique to sports media, but the national obsession with sports creates an intriguing dynamic with which to examine this phenomenon.

Sports media uniquely offers the “opportunity for community, memory, and identity because the object of this journalistic coverage and adoration (sport) is itself a platform for collective memory.” (Serazio 2010) This area of journalism also provides an excellent opportunity to better understand the effects of technology on the field as a whole, given its previous evolution with the rise of radio and television broadcasts, as well as the current online and mobile transformation. Previous research has focused on how the rise of sports blogs and social media has impacted gatekeeping and agenda setting, as well as the daily routines and practices of journalists adapting to this new media landscape. However, there are few studies that address the impact of new media practices challenging the status quo in regards to the established relationships between the sports organizations and the journalists that cover the teams and athletes attached to these governing bodies.

This research focuses on the intersection of sports journalism and new media in order to observe how the shifts in *who tells the story* and *how the story is told* has the potential for sports journalism itself to change. While there are multiple factors that have increased the critical nature of many sports publications, both legacy and new media, this research will focus specifically on the relationship between new media opportunities and its impact on the sports-media complex, the intertwined relationship between sports journalism and sports organizations.

This thesis will examine four recent cases within the sports media world that involve new media and a critical perspective on established sports organizations such as the NFL and NCAA. The first case depicts the immediate impact of social media with college basketball analyst Jay Bilas challenging the NCAA through a series of tweets. Bilas used the ShopNCAAsports.com website as a tool to expose hypocrisy within college sports' governing body, and the NCAA was forced to not only disable its search engine within hours of Bilas' first tweet, but to eventually acknowledge that its sport paraphernalia site violated the NCAA's stance on profiting directly from a specific athlete.

The second case involved a sports website, Deadspin, scooping ESPN on a bizarre story involving college football player Manti Te'o's deceased girlfriend who turned out to have never existed. While ESPN had the information before Deadspin, its reluctance to report the story ultimately allowed a new media site to produce a long-form investigative piece and gain recognition not often attributed to a website of its caliber.

The third case of this research involves former Sports Illustrated and New York Times writer Selena Roberts, who started her own sports website, Roopstigo.com. In a scathing report, Roberts detailed the numerous NCAA violations and ethical issues surrounding the Auburn University football team. This case, as well as the resulting criticism, shows how a traditional sports journalist is carving her own way on the new media front.

The last case of this study is an analysis of ESPN's decision to end its partnership with PBS Frontline on a two-hour documentary detailing the correlation between brain

trauma and football. After working together on several pieces as well as book written by two of its reporters, ESPN withdrew its connection to the Frontline documentary less than two months before it aired, ending a 15-month collaboration and raising questions of whether the NFL pressured the media giant to sever ties with a project potentially damaging to the league's brand. While this particular case involves two legacy media entities, it serves an excellent example of how traditional media are adapting to the erosion of the complex relationship between sports organizations and the journalists who cover them.

These four cases are representative of what has seemingly become more of a common practice in the world of sports journalism through small schisms in an established partnership between sports journalists and collegiate and professional athletic leagues. By analyzing the specifics of each case, as well as the immediate mainstream reaction, a more thorough understanding of the methods and implications of new media within sports journalism can be reached.

History of Sports Journalism

Sports journalism dates back to the 1830s, where major sports coverage included rowing, hunting and fishing. By the end of the 19th century, the first sports-specific publication, *The Sporting News*, became popular for its baseball coverage and soon after, major newspapers began carrying their own sports sections. (Dorsher 2009) The amount of sports covered increased by 50 percent at the beginning of the 20th century, and continued to grow in the first half of the 20th century, doubling the scores, recaps and articles as it became a larger reason males bought their local paper. This increased presence of sports in print media spread the popularity of modern athletics at the turn of the century. “In particular they stimulated interest and spectatorship and generated civic, regional, and national pride in sports teams.” (Falcous 2005) With the growing demand for more sports and the growth of the sports section to meet it, managing editors faced “uneasiness” about what their beloved newspapers were becoming. (Oriard 2001) They didn’t view the sports page as “serious news” and realized that sportswriters had “far greater license than other journalists.” (p. 29) This boom in the sports media industry shaped the sports section as we know it today. (p. 27)

Early sports journalists were not particularly critical of the organizations and athletes they covered. It has been described as moving from “epic” in nature to “heroic” to “realistic” over the course of the first 40 years of popular sports media, with each style of writing blending over into the next. (p. 29) “Sportswriters felt if they told the truth about athletes, readers would revolt and there would be no need for sports sections or sports reporters.” (Telander 1984) These early sports journalists made a conscious effort

to avoid any negative coverage of their beats. “This reluctance to attack baseball stars was the norm of the day and was evident not only in other sports but in the coverage of entertainment and business leaders.” (Rein & Shields 2007)

This protective style of sports coverage was confronted by a scandal in 1919, when rumors began circulating and were later confirmed that, during the World Series, players from the Chicago White Sox were bribed into losing the championship. News outlets around the country had no choice but to report every detail of the shameful story. (Dorsher 2009)

Beyond baseball’s “black eye” of 1919, few papers during this time addressed the impact of sports on society, such as the “unresolved contradiction at the heart of a million-dollar popular spectacle sponsored by institutions of higher learning” that existed within college sports. (Oriard 2001) The only outlet that covered this and other issues consistently within the sports realm was *The Daily Worker*, a Socialist newspaper. *The Daily Worker* consistently fought against racial injustice in sports, pushing for integration within American sports. (p. 38) Its own staff was integrated in the 1940s and 1950s. The expansion of critical sports reporting would not occur until the 1960s and ‘70s, with the age of New Journalism.

During this time, sports coverage shifted from box scores and superstar interview to more in depth writing that examined the role of sports in society. Sportswriters in this era “chose to write about sports not because it was merely entertaining or fun but because it evoked wider cultural themes that interested them.” (Oates & Pauly 2007) These

themes included comparisons between politics and sport, cultural differences illuminated through sport and how journalists related to the sports they covered. (p. 342)

The introduction of the broadcast medium significantly changed sports journalism. As previously mentioned, sportswriters and athletes were connected by everything from transportation to games throughout the season to the exclusive nature of reporting what transpired during a game. This relationship shifted as sports fans were able to watch games and interviews on their televisions and teams began traveling on airplanes. (Rein & Shields 2007) “The era of restricted disclosure was ending, and the media conduits such as sportswriters found themselves increasingly at the margins of the major stories.” (p. 64)

Currently, the sports media complex is shifting due to the latest technological advances since the invention of the television. “The first decade of the twenty-first century has created practical dilemmas for traditional sport reporting, or in the case of newspapers a challenge to completely rethink the platforms on which breaking news and results should be reported.” (Zion, Spaaij & Nicholson 2011)

Throughout history, two of the driving factors of sports journalism have always been 1) technology and 2) the influence of sports organizations. The latter has cultivated a unique relationship between sports journalists and the teams they cover.

The Sports Media Complex

The sports media complex is “the interconnection between media and sports that incorporates media institutions, sports organizations, and the processes, products, and services that emerge from the interconnection.” (Falcous 2005) It has been called a “very symbiotic relationship” (McChesney 1989), primarily because,

on one hand, the staggering popularity of sport is due, to no small extent, to the enormous amount of attention provided it by the mass media. On the other, the media are able to generate enormous sales in both circulation and advertising based upon their extensive treatment of sport. (p. 49)

Due to this complicated relationship between sports reporters and the teams they cover, some question whether or not sports media can even be considered true journalism. They have been called “the world’s best advertising agency” and the “toy department” of news outlets. (Rowe 2007) Sports journalism as a niche area of the field provides a particularly difficult challenge for journalism ethics:

It is economically important in drawing readers (especially male) to general news publications, and so has the authority of its own popularity. Yet its practice is governed by ingrained occupational assumptions about what ‘works’ for this readership, drawing it away from the problems, issues and topics that permeate the social world to which sport is intimately connected. In doing so, it seeks reinforcement and affirmation from the largely closed circle of sources that creates the insular world of sport in the first place. (p. 400)

Rowe also argues that the sourcing practices of sports media lend the resulting coverage into isolation from the world beyond the athletic events and personalities involved. (p. 401) Other critics of sports journalism say that its overly promotional, advertisement style is “more common than journalists like to admit.” (Oates & Pauly 2007)

While sports media have obviously influenced by the athletic governing organizations and leaders they cover, journalists and news outlets also exert their own influence on sports. Through coverage, broadcasting rights and sponsorship, sports journalism has propelled sporting events and athletes into a national obsession. (Zion, Spaaij & Nicholson 2011) With new television deals and hefty fees for the rights to live programming as TV broadcasting became popular, athletes were paid higher salaries. They, in turn, tended to lean more towards TV interviews instead of the print reporters and columnists they had maintained relationships with for so many years. (Rein & Shields 2007)

The ties between sports organizations and journalists range from unspoken rules for access to team personnel to formal business agreements, and they have been intact for much longer than the billion dollar broadcasting deals that dominate headlines today. In 1901, two sportswriters joined two other partners to purchase the Philadelphia Athletics baseball team. (Trumbour 2007) With 25% ownership of the franchise, the two journalists, one a sports editor for the local paper, would be considered ethically unfit to cover the team within their jurisdiction. This is an extreme example of how “sports coverage routinely violates the ethical norms by which the profession asks to be judged. These shortcomings would not pose a problem except that audiences love sports stories, and news organizations unapologetically cater to their enthusiasms.” (Oates & Pauly 2007) While ethical violations of this type are rare, smaller, more subtle ties exist within sports journalism.

In the 21st century, the relationship between sports organizations and personalities

and the media has eroded, with more investigative journalism with devastating results for the sports media complex. George Dohrmann, sportswriter for the St. Paul Pioneer Press uncovered NCAA violations within the University of Minnesota men's basketball team that ultimately disqualified the team from the championship tournament. Allegations that a staff member wrote papers for the team led to the resignation of the basketball coach and athletic director and won Dohrmann a Pulitzer in 2000. (Dorsher 2009) The reporting conducted during the MLB's steroid era led to Congressional hearings and eventually, new policies on drug testing in baseball in 2002. (Denham 2004) The book *Game of Shadows*, released in 2006 by Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams, investigated a Bay Area lab's involvement in the development and dissemination of performance-enhancing drugs. Their work was a crucial element in the case against former MLB player Barry Bonds, who was indicted on perjury charges. (Dorsher 2009)

These instances sometimes prove to be harmful to the sports media complex that relies so heavily on a positive public perception. "Members of the sporting public may be outraged, for while they thought they were cheering for unaltered human performance at its best, they, in fact, have to face the harsh reality that they were applauding altered performance." (Denham 2004) Within sports media, journalists have the opportunity to use the entertainment aspect of sports to draw viewers and readers into larger, more substantial societal issues. How often this occurs depends on many factors, one of which is of course, the many influential factors of the sports media complex. However, beyond the gates monitored by high-ranking officials and executives within both sports

organizations and media outlets are the newsmakers that determine which stories to tell and how to tell them. “Through the process of agenda building, journalists can engage audiences with substantive issues in sports, even though fans, for the most part, interact with the spectacle of sport and not substantive policy matters.” (p. 56)

However, sports media have also received substantial criticism for agenda setting rituals that may cause harm to certain people or groups by creating a “distorting image of sports culture.” (Falcous 2005) “The underrepresentation of women's sports, for example, and the capacity to present stereotyped characteristics of gender or national identities have been cited in criticisms of the distorting power of the media.” (p. 994) These decisions that affect the portrayal of certain groups based on descriptors such as race, gender or sexual orientation, for example, have long-term ramifications for society as a whole. “Even when sports coverage does not offer citizens crucial information, it may offer them cultural narratives that frame and shape their understandings of the group identities and relations of democratic society.” (Oates & Pauly 336) While these ethical challenges have plagued sports journalism for some time, an understanding of the complexity of this relationship is imperative when examining how this partnership is shifting today. Many factors have caused the sports media complex to change; this research focuses specifically on the addition of new media to this industry.

New Media and Sports Journalism

Sports have driven technological advancements for over 100 years. From early sports newsreels to live game and boxing radio broadcasts, athletic endeavors have been at the forefront of new communication technology. With the invention of television, and eventually color TV, new opportunities to expand the medium's ability were viewed through the lens of sports, whether it was slow motion or HDTV. (Boyle & Whannel 2010) In today's fast-paced online media world, new media have introduced sports fans to a new group of writers, photographers and "celebrities", members of their own creating their own blogs, YouTube pages and podcasts. Through this shift, these newsmakers "are in the process challenging the traditional stars of sports, entertainment, business, and even law." (Rein & Shields 2007) In their research, Irving Rein and Ben Shields use Deadspin.com's founder Will Leitch as an example of a fan turned sports blogger that has impacted sports media today. Deadspin is prominently featured in one of the case studies in this research.

New media, driven by technological advances, are changing sports journalism in every part of the news making process. "We are witnessing the emergence of new tools and practices, phenomena that are yielding both a flurry of new ways to produce information and a redefinition of the place of professional journalism in this new information system." (Van Der Haak, Parks & Castells 2012) There are significant debates concerning how these changes affect the quality of journalism today, but some, such as Van Der Haak, Parks and Castells, believe that these trends point towards better, more independent journalism. (p. 2923) Even traditional outlets are regularly attributing

information, pictures and video to social media outlets. (Bruns 2011)

Previously, traditional media practice provided a more closed approach to news production; journalists (and their editors and directors) decided what constitutes news and how it should best be framed to reach readers, viewers or listeners. Due to this one-way flow of communication, “letters to the editor” and “caller segments” were the only methods of feedback for print and broadcast journalists to gain audience participation. (Toney 2013) “Interests and reactions of news audiences are implied and assumed by journalists and editors who believe they have a ‘feel’ for what their readers, listeners, and viewers want, but rarely actively sought or tested by the journalism industry, beyond mere token gestures (readers’ polls, vox-pop statements) or commercial market research.” (Bruns 2011)

New media have provided the opportunity for more active public participation in the news process. Two separate resources have emerged to change the previously-held “gatekeeping” theory to “gatewatching”: more channels to choose from, more collaboration in newsworthy content creation often referenced as “Web 2.0” (Bruns 2011) As more content emerges through these channels, there is a shifting role between the creators of widely-consumed information, especially within sports media. Who is considered a worthy gatekeeper is changing, and Axel Bruns asks, “As news publications establish themselves in online environments, where available page counts or broadcast lengths no longer inherently limit the depth, breadth, and length of journalistic coverage, why should a strict regime of gatekeeping still be necessary at all?” (p. 120)

Currently, the fourth most popular sports website in the United States is Bleacher

Report, described as “an army of citizen reporters” who compete against the more established mainstream media sites such as ESPN and Yahoo! Sports. With an abundance of graphics, slideshows and video, sites like Bleacher Report have successfully carved out a space to contend with more established columnists and analysts. (Toney 2013) In fact, in 2013, Bleacher Report acquired several veteran sports journalists to its staff, legitimizing its reporting and expanding its long-form pieces.

Websites like Bleacher Report or Yahoo! Sports, in addition to their increasingly legitimate staffs and payrolls have social media on their side as well in delivering timely sports content. The Twitter accounts of athletes, for example, provide an outlet for sports personalities to step outside of the journalistic process of a reporter filtering their answers into their own work and can speak directly to their fans. (Hutchins 2011) New media curators receive instant reaction from athletes, reporters and fans and can piece these tweets together to enhance their own work. In this way, it becomes significantly more difficult for sports organizations to regulate positive public perception of their personnel as they did in the past. (Rein & Shields 2007) Traditional journalists find themselves more useful in a new media landscape as intermediaries piecing together an abundance of information into a cohesive, useful, easily digestible article or segment for public consumption. (Van Der Haak, Parks & Castells 2012)

These innovations and their real-life application have redefined what we consider journalism and who can now be considered a journalist.

If journalism consists of observing facts and asking questions, understanding answers and explaining those answers to others, do we say that anyone practicing any of these is a journalist? Or is a journalist someone who masters and practices

all three of those in sequence? (p. 2923)

This new media environment has made it easier for journalists to research statistics and history, follow games and storylines and connect with potential sources and stories. However, these innovations have also increased sports journalists' workloads. "It is now not uncommon for a reporter to attend an event, conduct an interview on camera for a video package and then provide separate copy for use online and in a printed product." (Toney 2013) As seen in these cases, it has also increased the competition and speed of reporting sports today.

Case Studies as Research Method

Case studies involve examining articles, conducting interviews and reviewing records in order to understand a topic. (Poindexter & McCombs 2000) Case studies do not focus on results that can be generalized. Rather, they serve to better understand a specific idea, trend or phenomenon. (Gagnon 2010, Bardin 1996) According to Yin, the distinguishing characteristics of case study research examine “a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (Yin 1981)

Gagnon and Benbasat believe that there are four questions that must be answered “yes” in order for research to be properly conducted through case studies.

- 1) “Can the phenomenon of interest be studied outside its natural setting?
- 2) Must the study focus on contemporary events?
- 3) Is control or manipulation of subjects or events unnecessary?
- 4) Does the phenomenon of interest enjoy an established theoretical base?”

(Gagnon 2010; Benbasat 1987)

For this particular research, these cases can be studied outside of their natural setting by analyzing the content from the specific events as well as the related post-coverage that followed. In this way, the first requirement can be answered in the affirmative. The second requirement, a focus on contemporary events, is satisfied by four separate events that all occur within the past 12 months. Regarding the control or manipulation of subjects or events, this research does not require an experiment-like setting to understand and explain the phenomenon of technology’s impact on sports journalism. The third

requirement can also be answered in the affirmative. The fourth requirement, an established theoretical base, is achieved through previous research addressing new media and the gatekeeping theory. Other research addressing the relationship between sport and its media counterpart analyze how agenda setting theory can explain what controversies are covered and other that are not. With these two established theoretical bases, this particular phenomenon can best be researched through the case study method.

This research is best described as an explanatory case study, which is by definition, “a) an accurate rendition of the facts of the case, (b) some consideration of alternative explanations of these facts, and (c) a conclusion based on the single explanation that appears most congruent with the facts.” (Yin 1981) Each case of this particular study will attempt to increase an understanding of the correlation between new media technology and the current state of the sports media complex through both legacy and non-traditional news sources.

In addition to the actual methods and content of each case, the surrounding media commentary surround each issue will be analyzed for a greater understanding of the impact and reach of each situation on the sports journalism world. This research includes data from over 100 sources, utilizing audio, video and print interviews and online articles from national and local news outlets online (many of which are owned and/or managed by legacy media). The aftermath of each case will be studied as well. In addition to the news and sports outlets represented online, media critics publishing relevant material during this time will also be included in these findings.

Case #1: Jay Bilas vs. the NCAA

OVERVIEW

Jay Bilas is an ESPN college basketball analyst for several of the network's shows, including College Gameday, a popular program that travels around the country to the site of the week's biggest basketball game. Bilas' personality has made him popular with viewers, partly due to his online persona on Twitter. He interacts frequently with fans and fellow members of the media, and frequently posts pictures from his travels. Bilas' Twitter account is unique in that he does not follow anyone. As of late 2013, he has over 595,000 followers.

Jay Bilas primarily uses Twitter to 1) Share stories, pictures and video of himself and other analysts on the road during the basketball season, 2) Provide his opinion and insight on sports, mainly college hoops, 3) Post rap lyrics from Southern hip-hop recording artist Young Jeezy and 4) Heavily critique the NCAA's management and policies regarding student athletes.

On August 6, 2013, Bilas tweeted, "Go to <http://ShopNCAAsports.com> , type in "Manziel" in upper right search box, hit enter. This comes up." (Bilas 2013) Attached to the tweet was a computer screen shot of the website with sports apparel labeled with the jersey #2, Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Manziel's number. He then in rapid succession fired off several similar tweets, each including a different star football or basketball player, further proving that it was no coincidence that team apparel could be directly linked to a player, even those who had run into trouble with college sports'

governing body. Suspended players' merchandise was still being sold on the site, as well as those who had committed NCAA violations in the past.

Bilas' accusatory tweets mattered for two reasons. One, the NCAA constantly argued that they did not directly profit from individual players. A class action lawsuit during the time of these tweets charged the NCAA, gaming company EA Sports and the Collegiate Licensing Company with directly profiting from the names and likenesses of student athletes. The information provided by Bilas' tweets could be used as evidence against the NCAA in the case. Secondly, the tweets were sent as the NCAA was looking into rumors that Texas A&M University quarterback Johnny Manziel had been paid to sign merchandise by sports paraphernalia dealers. Bilas' tweets came at a time where the NCAA was already heavily on the defensive both in the court of law and public opinion, and the information provided concerning the ShopNCAASports.com website provided further ammunition for those that felt student athletes should be compensated or that the NCAA was wrong to punish Manziel for supposedly making money from his own autograph.

Jay Bilas' tweets resulted in thousands of retweets, comments, and within hours of the first tweet, the disabling of the search function on the ShopNCAAsports.com website, where many were going to type in players' names to see if the correlating merchandise would show up. Two days later, NCAA president Mark Emmert held a conference call and addressed the issues surrounding the tweets, saying, "I can't speak to why we entered into that enterprise, but it's not appropriate for us, and we're going to

exit it.” (Sporting News 2013) An attempt to access the ShopNCAASports website as of late 2013 redirects to an NCAA page with the following statement:

Moving forward, the NCAA online shop will no longer offer college and university merchandise. In the coming days, the store’s website will be shut down temporarily and reopen as a marketplace for NCAA championship merchandise only. After becoming aware of issues with the site, we determined the core function of the NCAA.com fan shop should not be to offer merchandise licensed by our member schools. (NCAA 2013)

As the NCAA faced a highly-scrutinized court case and a slew of pending investigations within various programs, a tweet generated by one basketball analyst had enough of an impact to cause immediate change.

AFTERMATH

Social media analyst Sunny Cadwallader traced the original tweet that led to Jay Bilas’ discovery of the ShopNCAASports.com’s search engine function. She took issue with the fact that Bilas never credited his follower by name. In following interviews, Bilas would reference the fact that he received a tip online about the website, but never mentions the user by name or Twitter handle. The actual user, Jeff Hirst (@JHirst941), sent Bilas the following tweet the morning of August 5th: “@JayBilas Quick NCAA. It looks like someone is making money from selling Johnny Manziel's likeness. Oh wait...” (Cadwallader 2013) The tweet included a link to the ShopNCAASports.com site where Hirst had made the discovery attributed to Jay Bilas in the media the day before the basketball analyst sent his first tweet about the controversial search engine. While Bilas never claimed to have figured out the website on his own, he never discussed the specific Twitter follower that tipped him to the story.

ANALYSIS

As Jay Bilas' tweets were retweeted, favorited and responded to, media outlets began reporting on his Twitter timeline, the search function eventually disabled on the website and the NCAA's response. This supports Witkemper, Lim, and Waldburger's research that more and more stories are originating from Twitter, as mainstream sports media picked up Jay Bilas' story to make it their own. (Witkemper, Lim, and Waldburger 2012)

Most articles included screenshots of Bilas' tweets with the site's picture of its sports paraphernalia offerings. One of the most frequently used terms was "embarrassing" when describing the NCAA's alleged ignorance of the ShopNCAASports.com's offerings. Another popular word was "hypocritical", used in the majority of articles. Throughout the samples, articles with a non-neutral tone seemed either cynical of the NCAA or amused at the reach of Bilas' tweets. Jeff Eisenberg of Yahoo! Sports wrote,

Pretty amazing Bilas could singlehandedly send NCAA officials scrambling to remove the search function from the online store connected to their site. And pretty amazing the NCAA can continue to insist jerseys for sale aren't connected to specific players even when the shop on its own site appears to contradict that notion. (Eisenberg 2013)

In an interview, Bilas admitted he was surprised at the speed of the reaction from the NCAA and recognized the impact of the site adapting to his tweets, saying, "If not for the NCAA disabling its search function, this whole thing would have been of interest primarily on Twitter and some opinion pieces. But the search shutdown was like an admission of wrongdoing by the NCAA, and everything blew up from there." (Deitsch

2013)

Almost every article addressing either the NCAA's actions or Jay Bilas' tweets also referenced one or both of the pending issues within college sports' governing body – the pending investigation alleging Manziel was paid for his autograph and the class action suit involving the names and likenesses of players on merchandise and in video games.

CONCLUSION

The impact of Bilas' tweets was immediately felt, in part due to the instant nature of Twitter, the popularity of Jay Bilas as an on-air sports personality and the pending cases against the NCAA. One might argue that if Jay Bilas did not have such a strong following, the NCAA would not have been forced to take action at all. A lawyer by trade, Bilas is not considered a traditional journalist, but his influence and ability to reach an audience made him as informative and investigative as anyone else within the journalism field in that moment. This participatory journalism led to other media outlets, including ESPN, Bilas' employer, running with the story and following both Jay Bilas' reaction to the NCAA, as well as college sports' governing body's reaction through the disabling of the site through president Mark Emmert's comments two days later. The question of whether or not Jay Bilas should have attributed the ShopNCAASports.com finding to the original tweet sent to him by Jeff Hirst is a worthy one in today's new media landscape. Should Bilas have referenced the original tweet at all? How should journalists handle crediting their sources of stories found through social media? News and sports outlets are beginning to address ethical issues with new media and which rules are appropriate to carry over from traditional media, but without rules set in stone, they remain difficult to enforce.

This case is unique in that it could not have occurred with the same urgency, interaction and end result without new media websites and applications like Twitter. All of the specifics of this case take place online – the apparel website, the Twitter user who contacted Bilas and the public reaction from other media websites that resulted. No other medium would have provided a direct outlet to a popular sports personality, who could then share that information with thousands of people instantly, who would then retweet and continue to share the search engine of a website that officials felt forced to disable. However, this particular social media frenzy has serious long-term implications offline. The pending lawsuits and the public perception regarding whether or not student-athletes should be paid affect thousands of former, current and future athletes and the universities they represent. The other cases of this research could have occurred completely outside of new media, but the fact that this online event trickled over into so many crucial cases shows in an isolated way how new media will impact so much more than Twitter feeds and apparel websites.

Case #2: Deadspin Scoops Mainstream Media on Manti Te'o Coverage

OVERVIEW

Known mainly for its off-color commentary on the sports world and critical coverage of major sports entities, Deadspin.com was hardly viewed as a source of investigative journalism. Its most popular article to date had been a report on a series of lewd picture messages sent by former NFL quarterback Brett Favre to a woman from his phone. However, the site received a tip in early January 2013 regarding University of Notre Dame linebacker Manti Te'o, a Heisman Trophy finalist and NFL draft prospect that had just finished playing in the BCS National Championship. One of the more popular collegiate athletes, Te'o had been featured in every major media outlet in the United States both for his athletic accomplishments and his story of overcoming adversity. Te'o's grandmother and girlfriend had both died of cancer within 24 hours of one another during the 2012-2013 football season, and as Te'o helped lead Notre Dame to an undefeated regular season and a title run against the University of Alabama, reporters wrote human interest stories detailing the bond he shared with both women. Te'o, already an interesting story due to the fact that he was a Mormon of Samoan heritage that had chosen to attend a Catholic university in the Midwest, was further propelled into the spotlight due to his team's winning record and the personal tragedy he overcame during the season.

Though well-documented by major news and sports outlets in long-form print and broadcast features, football fans around the world would come to know a different Manti Te'o story. On January 16, 2013, Deadspin.com released a long investigative piece titled

“Manti Te'o's Dead Girlfriend, The Most Heartbreaking And Inspirational Story Of The College Football Season, Is A Hoax”, revealing that not only had Te'o's girlfriend Lennay Kekua not died from leukemia, she had never existed. (Burke & Dickey 2013) Timothy Burke and Jack Dickey's work detailed a bizarre story that involved a young man, Ronaiah Tuiasosopo, who had created Lennay Kekua using pictures from another woman's social media accounts. Tuiasosopo and Te'o had evidently met before, creating a possibility that the star player may have known or been a part of the hoax. Mainstream media picked up on the story immediately, linking to Deadspin and expressing disbelief that a story of this magnitude had been fabricated all along. The Te'o article, and the resulting media attention given to Deadspin brought over 10 million U.S. visitors to the Gawker family of online networks and six million more internationally. (Romenesko 2013)

AFTERMATH

After Deadspin's article generated media attention around the country, media outlets scrambled to obtain interviews with Manti Te'o and Ronaiah Tuiasosopo, with ESPN interviewing Te'o off-camera and Katie Couric eventually securing the first on-camera interview with the college football superstar. Daytime TV host Dr. Phil interviewed Ronaiah Tuiasosopo in an exclusive that included Tuiasosopo imitating the voice he used to speak to Te'o over the phone. Te'o denied having any knowledge of being a part of the hoax and only admitted to lying about details of his relationship Kekua, including how they had met and in several interviews that occurred after he learned that she did not exist in early December 2012. The story of Lennay Kekua

brought several journalistic issues to the forefront, including the ability in such an information-driven society for a large-scale hoax of this nature to occur and the impact of a humorous sports website serving as the sound investigative unit uncovering the truth behind a story that had supposedly been reported by some of the best reporters in the business. A website for investigative reporters and editors wrote:

Stories like that of Manti Te'o, however, do more than serve as a cautionary tale for journalists about why to background their subjects -- they raise questions about how and when it needs to be done. Neither Te'o nor Kekua were public officials or powerful businesspeople. Neither had been accused of a crime. The story was simply of a football player and his girlfriend. Yet at some point the story grew into a phenomenon and captured the nation, and all the while more and more of it didn't add up. (Schick 2013)

Media outlets reporting Deadspin's findings had to acknowledge that at some point they had missed a crucial step in their reporting.

ANALYSIS

Some articles acknowledged that every member of the media had missed this massive hoax. Sports Illustrated reporter Pete Thamel, who had written a long feature on Manti Te'o, offered the transcripts from his interview in order to provide full transparency of what he knew and didn't know about Te'o's relationship with Lennay Kekua at the time of his piece.

Many praised the efforts of the two reporters and two editors behind the piece, giving them full credit for a thorough and well-executed piece of investigative journalism. Others, such as Will Leitch, the founder of Deadspin who now serves as a senior writer for SportsonEarth.com and contributing editor for *New York Magazine*, said,

It's an amazing piece of journalism, and they deserve every plaudit they've received for it. But let's not pretend this required them to do years of research and travel the earth to find the story. They just simply had to start digging. The crime is that they're the only ones who thought to." (Leitch 2013)

Some agreed with Leitch, pointing out that Deadspin's contribution said as much about other news outlets and the state of sports media today as the status of just one website or article. David Freedlander of The Daily Beast, an online news site, wrote,

A website, once derided as little more than a repository for juvenile jokes and throwing spitballs at the mainstream press, had become a permanent presence in the sports mediasphere. And that the line between major news outlet and supposedly inconsequential blogsite had dropped considerably, if it hasn't disappeared altogether. (Freedlander 2013)

There was also a debate about the methods Deadspin used to gather information for its story. Critics of Deadspin's coverage point to one particular quote within the piece that they believe any reputable news source would not have included. In the piece, Burke and Dickey write that, "A friend of Ronaiah Tuiasosopo told us he was '80 percent sure' that Manti Te'o was 'in on it,' and that the two perpetrated Lennay Kekua's death with publicity in mind." (Burke & Dickey 2013) This information turned out to be untrue; both Te'o and Tuiasosopo said that the football player had no idea before December 6, 2012 that Kekua was not real, months after he was told that she had died. Tommy Craggs, one of the Deadspin editors involved with the story, explained the difference between his employer and the legacy media so often mocked on Deadspin's front page, saying, "Is our bar for publishing lower than, say, *The New York Times*? Of course. Have we published stories that lacked perfect, according-to-Hoyle sourcing? Yes. We're a tabloid at heart." (Randhawa 2013) He continued:

I'll get killed for this, but: Journalism ethics is nothing more than a measure of the scurrilousness your brand will bear. That's it. Ethics has nothing to do with the truth of things, only with the proper etiquette for obtaining it, so as to piss off the fewest number of people possible. That works fine for a lot of news outlets; we don't have to worry about niceties. (Randhawa 2013)

One of the news outlets that perhaps has to worry about “niceties” when building stories is ESPN, who was tipped to the Lennay Kekua hoax one day before Deadspin and later admitted that they had spent time debating whether or not they had enough information to publish a story revealing what they knew. “We were very close. We wanted to be careful,” said ESPN news chief Vince Doria. (Sandomir & Miller 2013) Some executives argued that the story was sound, but others wanted to secure an interview with Manti Te'o first. Critics of ESPN's delay in reporting also acknowledge the company's direct link to Te'o. “Just days before learning that the Kekua story might be a hoax, ESPN televised Notre Dame's loss to Alabama in the Bowl Championship Series title game before the second-largest audience in cable television history.” (Sandomir & Miller 2013)

Awful Announcing, another critical sports media blog, wrote,

ESPN lost the Te'o scoop because of its own identity struggle. Were ESPN merely an online outlet, perhaps they would have gone ahead with the story without having to worry about cannibalizing its broadcast interests. But because ESPN's priorities emerged as access to Te'o and an on-camera interview, they lost out. It's an issue Deadspin did not have to encounter at any point along the way. (Yoder 2013)

ESPN's missteps on publishing the story caused it to be scooped by a new media website and cost the media giant an exclusive interview with Te'o.

CONCLUSION

Unlike the other cases presented in this research, Deadspin's report on the Lennay Kekua hoax and the articles that followed challenged the media side of the sports media complex, rather than the sports teams or governing institutes such as the NCAA or NFL. The Columbia Journalism Review wrote,

Deadspin's subversiveness when it comes to sports media is what often makes it great. Deadspin exposes idiocy, hypocrisy, clichés, and lazy tropes that we all put up with as sports consumers. At its best, it has forced sports media to try a little harder. When ESPN writers plagiarize, for example, Deadspin is there to shame them into fixing their errors. (Berinato 2013)

Deadspin's piece added legitimacy to its website, although it did not change the overall nature and purpose of its existence. It serves to challenge traditional media outlets as opposed to competing with them.

This case also varies from the other cases in that it involves two sportswriters that are fairly unknown to the public. Jay Bilas, while not a traditional journalist, is seen in millions of households as a college basketball analyst for ESPN. Selena Roberts has written for The New York Times and Sports Illustrated before starting her website Roopstigo. The producers at PBS and the Fainaru brothers working on the Frontline documentary boast a bevy of awards between them with important pieces contributing to quality journalism within news and sports. Timothy Burke and Jack Dickey lack the extensive backgrounds of those involved in the other cases, yet they found a way to contribute significantly to the world of sports journalism in what became one of the biggest storylines of the year.

What is unknown is the long-term impact of redefining who is a journalist. Will future content creators who lack the journalism education backgrounds and traditional career paths of the past further erode the sports media complex? With increased participatory journalism and new media content, the competition has the potential to permanently change the relationship between sportswriters and broadcasters previously entrenched with the teams they cover. With more independence in sports coverage, future journalists may be more likely to report without fear of retribution from their employer or a coach who disliked their coverage of their program. While a more competitive sports media market could be viewed as a positive with more balanced coverage, adequate training for new media journalists must be incorporated to ensure quality reporting. Will the new media journalists of the future adhere to the same rituals in fact checking, sourcing, etc.? Burke and Dickey's work for Deadspin reflects the possibility that new media journalism will continue to carefully construct well-sourced and researched pieces of investigative journalism. However, with the one critiqued quote in the piece suggesting Te'o's possible involvement in the hoax, their work also shows that training and responsible coverage remain an important part of the journalistic process.

Case #3: Selena Roberts and Roopstigo.com's Coverage of Auburn Football

OVERVIEW

Selena Roberts, a seasoned sports journalist, had previously worked for the New York Times as well as Sports Illustrated. Two of her most famous pieces involved an investigation into Major League Baseball player Alex Rodriguez's use of performance-enhancing drugs and a series of columns regarding the Duke Lacrosse rape allegations. Upon leaving Sports Illustrated, Roberts founded a sports website, Roopstigo.com, which produced long-form video segments and online articles focused on the intersection of sport and society. The website describes itself as "the revolutionary digital network that presents original sports content on demand for fans who demand more." (Roopstigo 2013)

Auburn University had been under investigation by the NCAA during the 2010 football season, as junior college transfer quarterback Cam Newton was accused of being paid to join the Auburn football team, a direct NCAA violation. The NCAA investigated the rumors that Newton's father had demanded or received money from Auburn during the season, but found that the quarterback had not broken any rules. Newton would help led the team to an undefeated season and national championship, winning the Heisman Trophy along the way. Roberts, who graduated from Auburn University, found herself investigating the school in 2013, after reading about an armed robbery allegedly committed by a group of players from the school. In an April 2013 piece titled "Auburn's Tainted Title: Victims, Violations and Vendettas for Glory" Roberts examines the role

that Auburn played in cultivating an environment that “operates as an underground society beneath the NCAA’s radar.” (Roberts 2013) This included coaches and personnel paying players, academic fraud involving the changing of grades for players, recruiting violations and rampant drug use. The article also alleges that there was racial tension between some of the players and Auburn football head coach Gene Chizik, who supposedly did not like tattoos or dreadlocks on his players. All of these allegations stemmed from Roberts investigating one player, Mike McNeil’s involvement in a 2011 robbery and whether or not he had been involved at all or simply used as a scapegoat for the team. (Roberts 2013) With so many different accusations within the article, as well as firsthand accounts from former players, Roopstigo.com generated an abundance of attention following the posting of the piece on the website.

AFTERMATH

The next day, some of the sources involved in Selena Roberts’ story began to deny that they had witnessed any of the violations mentioned in the story and argued that they had been misquoted throughout the piece. (Berkes 2013) Auburn would eventually release a statement addressing the report with a “point-by point analysis of the specific facts of each case.” Their formal review refuted most of Roberts’ accusations, and the NCAA did not launch an investigation into Auburn’s football program (Jacobs 2013) McNeil who had maintained his innocent throughout the story and the two years prior took a plea deal just as his trial went to court. He was sentenced to three years in prison and three years probation for first-degree robbery. (Sallee 2013) Gene Chizik, the Auburn football head coach during the allegations, denied asking for grades to be changed, any

players being paid during his tenure and discriminating against black players in any way. In a statement, he said, “Unfortunately, Ms. Roberts' story is long on accusation and inference, but short on facts and logic.”(Hinnen 2013) In response to both the program and Chizik, Roberts said in an interview, “I thought it was an interesting and self-revealing statement by Auburn,” Roberts said. "As I report out a separate story that remains a work in progress, I'll address the important issues Auburn has raised." (Crepea 2013) Jack Smith, Auburn’s director of Strategic Communication called Roberts’ article “gotcha, hide-the-ball journalism at its worst.” (Brenner 2013) He also took issue with the fact that Roberts did not let him know that her article would address academic fraud or paying players. “Had we known that, we would have responded immediately.” (Brenner)

ANALYSIS

Many of the outlets critiquing Roberts’ piece pointed to her reporting past, with two particularly controversial articles marring her legacy with Sports Illustrated and The New York Times. "Divorcing Roberts’ past from the story is hard. Her A-Rod PED reporting raised some heckles,” said Ty Duffy, contributor for USA Today-owned sports blog, The Big Lead. “So did her columns on the Duke Lacrosse case which, with hindsight, were inaccurate, following what the New York Times’ sports editor termed ‘a rogue prosecutor.’” (Duffy 2013) Columnist Guerry Clegg of The Columbus Ledger-Enquirer referenced both the highs and lows of Selena Roberts’ career, and did not seem to find her status as an alum of Auburn particularly interesting. He noted, “The fact that the

writer, Selena Roberts, "broke" the story of Alex Rodriguez's steroid use is of little relevance. It was well-reported, but it wasn't exactly Woodward and Bernstein Watergate stuff." (Clegg 2013) Bloggers, columnists and other contributors commenting on Roopstigo.com's investigative reporting in Auburn's football program acknowledged that the school's recent run-ins with the NCAA could possibly point to a legitimate ethical and institutional issue within the school's athletic department. However, many seemed unclear on how to feel about the allegations after Auburn's response, with one blogger saying,

Auburn football culture might be 'off the rails.' But Roberts' report, when parsed down to the substantiated allegations, presents little direct evidence. Dismissing the shadows entirely would be naive, but the report still leaves us where we were with Auburn's 2010 title team. (Duffy 2013)

Rodger Sherman of SB Nation, in an article titled, "A List of People Named in Selena Roberts' Auburn Story Yet to Issue Denials", wrote,

This doesn't mean that Roberts' story is wrong. After all, a lot of the people who have issued denials have something to lose from this story. And the majority of the denials relate to the issue of Auburn committing NCAA violations, not the more difficult-to-prove angle that the Auburn community perhaps contributed to a former player facing trial. (Sherman 2013)

Selena Roberts' report has been described as "scathing" (Schwab 2013) One journalist stated that these situations no longer "shock" or "outrage" him" and that he had been in Roberts' position before on a story where he exposed NCAA violations within a program and later found the credibility of his piece questioned. "My sources were highly placed, including one within the SEC office. But when it went public, they all denied it. One even looked me in the eye and said, 'Hell, I had to lie.'" (Clegg 2013) Deadspin

writer Tom Ley said, "The main issue with Roberts's story is that it is actually two distinct stories jammed sloppily together." (Ley 2013) The first is McNeil, the athlete claiming to be innocent and potentially facing prison time for the robbery. The other is the alleged NCAA violations, with one sportswriter stating,

It's the latter that has the principals walking sideways in the other direction, and it's the attempt to link the two stories—by suggesting a conspiracy in which Auburn, for some reason, leverages its political power in an effort to ensure a former player's conviction—that gives the whole report an air of grasping implausibility." (Ley 2013)

CONCLUSION

Selena Roberts piece, published on a start-up sports website, gained traction because of her history as a reporter with major outlets such as The New York Times and Sports Illustrated. A journalist by trade, she varies from both Jay Bilas (a non-journalist connected to a major sports entity using social media) and Deadspin writers Timothy Burke and Jack Dickey (two students – one graduate and one undergraduate – that posted a major investigative piece on sports website). Like Bilas, her name gives her work weight, and like Deadspin, Roopstigo.com is not a legacy media member. However, the reaction to her work varied significantly from the reactions to the two previous cases. Following Roberts' work, several other pieces by mainstream media members alleging NCAA violations in major college programs have been published. Some have faced scathing criticism similar to Roberts from both the schools and alumni involved as well as fellow media outlets. One of the most significant parts of this case is that a website like Roopstigo is able to publish the same quality and depth of work as its fully-staffed competitors, generating the same amount of attention and attacks as the Sports Illustrated

or ESPNs of the world. With more websites examining the sports media complex critically, whether it is Deadspin following up on a story told by a myriad of media members or Selena Roberts using her website to question the practices of Auburn's football program, traditional sports media outlets will have no choice but to follow suit in order to keep subscribing fans happy in the future. Also, if the best investigative journalists and beat reporters find more freedom in new media sites built on business models that can compensate them competitively, there will be more Roopstigo-like websites and an increase in trends like the aforementioned acquisition of veteran journalists by new media outlet Bleacher Report.

Case #4: ESPN Ends Partnership with PBS Frontline

OVERVIEW

The previous three cases have presented information from recent headlines related to new media outlets or social media contesting or investigating some aspect of the sports media complex. This case is different in that it involves two legacy media organizations, PBS and ESPN, who up until August, had been involved in a 15-month partnership involving nine TV and digital stories as well as a two-hour documentary, “League of Denial: The NFL’s Concussion Crisis”. The project centered on the correlation between brain trauma and football, specifically, what the National Football League knew about the long-term effects of concussions and how it addressed this issues with doctors, researchers and most importantly, its players. Frontline’s director and producer Michael Kirk told The Huffington Post that League of Denial aimed to “to discover what the NFL knew and when it knew it about concussions and what was going on.” (Greenberg 2013)

The documentary has been described as an "exhaustive account of how the league for years dismissed an issue critics have assailed as an epidemic." (Terbush 2013) Other critics have called it a “damning investigation.” (Vogan 2013) The documentary and other segments were also connected to a book titled *League of Denial: The NFL, Concussions and the Battle for Truth* by Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru, two ESPN reporters (and brothers) who were also heavily involved in the PBS Frontline documentary and other work involving concussions in football. ESPN producer Dwayne Bray, who was one of the leaders in the partnership had said a couple of weeks earlier that ESPN had "made a conscious decision when we were presented with this opportunity

to literally get in bed with 'Frontline.'" (Flint 2013) Vince Doria, ESPN's senior vice president and director of news, also commented "For ESPN and Outside The Lines to partner with the unit on such an important story, and to bring two of our strongest enterprise reporters to the effort, is a rare opportunity, and we believe it will result in some ground-breaking work."(PBS 2012)

However, in August of 2013, less than two months before the documentary was scheduled to air, Frontline released a statement on its website that ESPN had asked for its logo and credits to be removed from the documentary and other related endeavors. (Farrington 2013) Frontline had already faced some difficulty from the NFL, and in an interview, director Michael Kirk said, "The NFL has not been cooperative, in the way that the Defense Department wasn't cooperative with us, in the way that the Central Intelligence Agency isn't cooperative." (Hayden 2013) The ESPN connection was important in expanding the traditional viewers of Frontline documentaries, with PBS executive producer Raney Aronson-Rath stating in an interview, "My hope was in collaborating with ESPN that we would bring this story to a new audience -- people who don't necessarily watch Frontline. I was hoping that this story would not just get publicity but also have the editorial might of ESPN."(Deutsch 2013b)

An article by James Andrew Miller and Ken Belson in *The New York Times* suggests that a lunch between two NFL officials and two ESPN executives caused ESPN to terminate the partnership, writing:

The meeting was combative, the people said, with league officials conveying their irritation with the direction of the documentary, which is expected to describe a narrative that has been captured in various news reports over the past decade: the

league turning a blind eye to evidence that players were sustaining brain trauma on the field that could lead to profound, long-term cognitive disability. (Miller & Belson 2013)

Both the NFL and ESPN denied that this lunch or any possible pressure from the NFL was the reason that ESPN backed out of the documentary. (Zirin 2013) ESPN stated that it relinquished its branding from the documentary due to a lack of editorial control, no doubt partially influenced by company president John Skipper's opinion that the film's trailer was "sensational". (McBride 2013) NFL spokesman Greg Aiello told the Washington Post, "At no time did we formally or informally ask them (ESPN) to divorce themselves from the project." (Boren 2013) The NFL also sent an email to news outlets stating the meeting in question was arranged by ESPN weeks before and not scheduled in conjunction with the upcoming Frontline collaboration. (Deitsch 2013b) ESPN's senior vice president of corporate communications Chris LaPlaca told The Hollywood Reporter, "We should've paid attention to the marketing and the branding much sooner. That was a mistake on our part." (Hayden 2013) In any case, ESPN's decision came as a surprise to those at Frontline, including executive producer Raney Aronson-Rath, who described the relationship they shared with the sports media giant:

"There was no reason for us to believe that any of what he said or anything anyone said at the editorial levels were anything but genuine about our partnership. Besides what they said publicly, the proof was in the work we were doing together. Our journalists were eye to eye. It was one of the best partnerships we had with the journalists at ESPN." (Deitsch 2013b)

AFTERMATH

Media reactions to ESPN's withdrawal from the documentary were primarily negative, given that many felt that the company's reasoning behind ending the

partnership had less to do with editorial control and more to do with the partnership it had already built with the NFL. Derek Thompson, business editor for The Atlantic, compares it to the New York Times relying on the Treasury Department for funding while it tries to report on economic policy, saying "it's a pretty fraud relationship" (WBUR 2013) It was also called "a shocking end to fruitful collaboration" by media critic Richard Deitsch.

(2013b) Dave Zirin of *The Nation* wrote:

I spoke to several of the biggest names in journalism at ESPN this weekend and their thoughts on ESPN's official comments and reasoning for dropping out of the project ranged from 'mystifying' to 'deeply depressing' to 'palpable bullshit.' No one I spoke to believes that ESPN looked up after fifteen months and discovered to their collective shock that they didn't have final editorial control of the "League of Denial. (Zirin 2013)

Others told Zirin that they felt that the news may ironically work to the filmmakers' advantage. "A former ESPN reporter who has been doing work on concussions for years said to me, "On the bright side, 'It brings more attention to the documentary and now it has the gloss of 'This is the documentary that the NFL and ESPN don't want you to see.' So that's something." (Zirin 2013)

The week before the documentary aired, ESPN promoted the documentary and book on several of its shows, including *Sportscenter* and *Outside the Lines*. While no longer visibly attached to League of Denial, ESPN's inclusion of the Fainaru brothers to discuss their work was seen as a sign of support from John Skipper and other executives by some, but others felt differently. "Cynics claimed ESPN's promotion of the book and documentary were merely attempts to salvage its journalistic integrity. Whatever the motive, it buoyed internal journalistic spirits and drummed up interest in the book and

show.” (Lipsyte 2013)

There was also a suggestion that ESPN “damaged the credibility of all its NFL voices” (Raissman 2013) and that there is now a “crucial importance of identifying the forces that guide precisely when ESPN decides it suitable (or unacceptable) to give up editorial control.” (Vogan 2013) ESPN Ombudsman Robert Lipsyte described the reaction he’d received to ESPN ending the partnership as “mostly negative” (Lipsyte 2013) and there was some surprise that ESPN promoted the book and documentary prominently on its programming and website the week it debuted.

ANALYSIS

While some seemed shocked at ESPN pulling out of its partnership with Frontline, given its previous work on concussions in football, others were more surprised that ESPN agreed to work with PBS on the topic in the first place. (Morrissey 2013) A previous ESPN contributor, Viv Bernstein, wrote,

I thought most people understood that ESPN's financial connection to sports leagues and dual role of promotion inevitably affected coverage decisions by the network. I even had a conversation about that with an ESPN.com writer. We both agreed that writing for ESPN was not like writing for a newspaper. It was an unspoken truth. That's not meant as a criticism of the network, merely an observation. And it's one I've made before about all media outlets that have a financial connection to the sports leagues and athletes they cover. It's inevitable that the connection will alter the tone of coverage. (Bernstein 2013)

ESPN had also previously supported another documentary involving head trauma and football. "United States of Football", a film by Sean Pamphilon, examined why the NFL is becoming more strict on big hits while still promoting them on its website and tries to decide whether or not to allow his son to play football. ESPN would later

withdraw its support for the project "because of pressure from the NFL", according to the Chicago-Sun Times. (Kahler 2013)

ESPN's journalistic integrity has been heavily criticized in recent years, with many of the articles drawing on previous questionable endeavors, including *The Decision*, a one-hour primetime special announcing NBA superstar LeBron James' next destination. Many in the media felt ESPN gave up too much ground to gain the exclusive interview. (Steinberg 2013) Others referenced previous pressure by the NFL on ESPN programming such as *Playmakers*, a successful fictitious drama centered around a professional football team that may have hit too close to home. The scripted show aired for only one season on ESPN before then-NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue allegedly complained about the series and its advertising during NFL games. "If the NFL successfully compelled ESPN to abandon a fictional series that never directly references the National Football League, it stands to reason that it might try to put the kibosh on *League of Denial*—a documentary that makes many of *Playmakers*' lurid plot points seem blasé by comparison." (Vogan 2013)

The Big Lead, a popular sports website owned by USA Today, compared ESPN backing out of its partnership with Frontline to former ESPN writer Bruce Feldman's departure from the company after a previously approved book deal with college football coach Mike Leach was considered a conflict of interest after the coach was fired after allegedly abusing a player whose father happened to also work for ESPN as an analyst. (McIntyre 2013) *New Republic* recalled the 2009 rape allegations against Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and many outlets accusing ESPN of

underreporting the case. Roethlisberger was one of the most popular players at the time, and was scheduled to appear on ESPN's sister company ABC that month. Marc Tracy wrote,

Most observers generally agree that, when it comes to the \$40 billion self-anointed Worldwide Leader in Sports, ESPN can do great work and also can also find its work corrupted. The latter happens when it caters to the lowest common denominator (see: Skip Bayless, saturated coverage of Tim Tebow) or, more ominously, when it pulls punches when reporting on sports because it is also broadcasting partners with the leagues it is reporting on. (Tracy 2013)

A long-time critic of ESPN, Deadspin founder Will Leitch believes that this is exposing a reality at ESPN that most assume exists but has rarely broken out in such public fashion. "It makes it look to the public like the journalism just acts as a front for the business." (Zirin 2013) ESPN president John Skipper maintains that a separation between journalism and business is not only possible, but currently in place as policy at ESPN. In an interview with The Hollywood Reporter, he said, "The single thing that irritates me most is the assumption that we have some sort of unmanageable conflict. We employ hundreds of writers and journalists, and I don't think you'll find a single instance of somebody saying they were asked to pull off of a story." (Hayden 2013) Others argue that this situation is a prime example of business controlling journalism at the self-proclaimed Worldwide Leader of Sports. Kelly McBride, a senior faculty member at the Poynter Institute said, "For the 18 months I was the lead writer on the Poynter Review Project, which served as ESPN's ombudsman, the brass in Bristol, Conn., insisted ESPN could do both. But investigative reporting is more than just acknowledging harsh realities. Investigative journalists take a stand." (McBride 2013) Former ESPN

contributor Viv Bernstein said,

Look, it was business that trumped journalism when it came to the "Frontline" documentary. And there should be no shame in that. After all, ESPN is a business and its success is inextricably tied to the NFL. The shame is in misleading the public by trying to maintain a pretense of unfettered journalistic integrity that simply cannot exist. (Bernstein 2013)

This relationship was most crucial at a time where the NFL was facing a massive court case involving thousands of former players or family representatives who felt the league had neglected its own after their time on the field. In a settlement of \$765 million over 20 years, former players would be given medical benefits and other resources. Part of the money in the settlement would also support future research, including analysis that would directly study the effects of football on the brain. (Lipsyte 2013) This settlement was reached the week that ESPN officially withdrew from the documentary with Frontline. While traditional media such as ESPN and PBS continue to investigate important aspects of sports, such as head trauma in football, there may be different influential factors affecting legacy media that have not yet reached new media outlets who lack deeply entrenched partnerships and contracts with sports leagues.

CONCLUSION

Unlike the previous three cases, ESPN ending its partnership with PBS Frontline serves as an example of how legacy media handle challenges to the sports media complex differently from their more independent new media counterparts. PBS, while certainly in a different category as a part of the public media, showed the potential of legacy media to critically examine the intersection of sport and society successfully, while ESPN showed the possible issues attached to large media companies financially and contractually

attached to the sports organizations they cover. PBS Frontline's work shows that traditional media still have an important place within sports journalism, with resources and quality reporting that are still valuable in the industry. ESPN revealed its complicated, multi-faceted relationship with sport in both its published contributions to journalism analyzing the impact of concussions in football and its inability to continue a partnership with PBS. While somewhat committed to quality sports journalism, ESPN's obligations to sports leagues also plays a part in its coverage of head trauma in football and other important issues within the world of sports.

Traditional media companies create content that must travel through several different channels in the production process before a journalist's work reaches readers or viewers. These channels, comprised of executives, editors, senior producers and other gatekeepers, ensure that an article, interview, program or documentary meets their standards and represents the company in an appropriate way. Unlike legacy media, many new media outlets are comprised of small staffs and have a shorter turnaround in the production process, which not only affects the amount of time required to prepare media for mass release but also the amount and type of editing along the way. An example of this is part of Timothy Burke and Jack Dickey's ability to scoop mainstream media companies like ESPN on stories like the Manti Te'o girlfriend hoax of the second case in this research. However, a company like Gawker/Deadspin cannot be seen as a competitor of the quality long-form investigative work involved in the PBS Frontline documentary series. These two very different types of media processes and content both challenge the sports media complex in different ways, and by including this particular case, broaden the

research to better understand how the relationship between media and sport is changing overall, but is most obvious in new media, given the ability to quickly disseminate content without many of the organization constraints of their legacy counterparts.

Discussion

As the sports media complex continues to erode and evolve from its closely-linked economic and cultural ties of the past, new media will continue to serve as a catalyst for these shifts through participatory journalism, technological tools for investigative reporting and new journalistic ventures online. What is most interesting about new media's effect on sports journalism is that they have in some ways negatively affected the relationship between sports organizations and the journalists that cover them, the opposite reaction from the last major technological advance in sports media: television. While million and billion dollar contracts between leagues and television networks strengthened the sports media complex, the increased presence of social media and blogs have created distance between the two entities.

As these shifts continue to occur, further research is needed to understand how journalists process their roles within the sports media complex today and create new rituals and ethical guides. On the other end of this relationship are the teams represented by players and personnel. How these individuals operate within this new media landscape is also of importance, given their ability to sidestep journalists to promote their own agendas online, with the possibility that.

In the future...bloggers might force sportswriters to be more critical of multimillionaire athletes and billionaire franchise owners, and sports journalists surely will have to interact more with their audiences online. The sports leagues, however, are unlikely to relinquish any more of the rights to retransmit their games until new media mavens, like their satellite television and radio forebears, are able to offer them large audiences and large fortunes. (Dorsher 2009)

The future is now, given the ability for a Twitter account to take down an NCAA-

affiliated website, a sports blog to scoop every major sports outlet and a fledgling sports outlet started by a popular sportswriter to investigate her alma mater. With these developments, new media norms and practices are influential in determining how sports journalists work in a 24-hour news cycle far removed from a scandalous Babe Ruth running through a train.

The cases in this study illustrate the shift in who is considered a journalist in today's media landscape. In the first case, Jay Bilas, who works primarily as an attorney and part-time as a college basketball analyst, "breaks" a story. In the second case, two students working for Deadspin are able to turn around a long-form investigative piece over their Christmas break. The third case features a traditional journalist in Selena Roberts, who has worked for two of the biggest news and sports outlets in the country. Lastly, the PBS Frontline documentary featured work by many producers and writers who easily fit into traditional definitions of journalists, especially in the Fainaru brothers who have been heavily involved in quality journalism for decades.

The diversity of content producers in this research illustrate that there does not seem to be a significant correlation between the background of the producers in these cases and the quality of the content presented. The title "journalist" has become more difficult to define in today's new media environment, given the many non-traditional backgrounds of those currently creating sports journalism on and offline.

This research illustrates through these cases the shift in how the story is told in the current state of media today. Even in the traditional media case involving PBS Frontline and ESPN, the collaboration included several online pieces and interactive elements in

conjunction with their documentary work. Selena Roberts, in parting ways with her former traditional media employers, found a new way to do the same quality work with Roopstigo. In the same way, Jay Bilas, involved with legacy media as an analyst, used social media to help break news in a new way. Deadspin, a new media website created in part to critique legacy sports media work, found itself involved in creating new content that rivals many of the outlets it so frequently mocks in its coverage. These cases, while significantly different in style and delivery means, represent an overall change in sports journalism in who tells the story, how it is told and how the media relate to the teams and governing bodies they cover.

Suggestions for future research include qualitative research such as depth interviews with those within legacy and new media to understand their routines in this current landscape. Future quantitative research recommendations include surveys to understand public perception and definition of who is a journalist along with the sports media outlets in which they are most likely to get news and analysis. This research will help in expanding the understanding of these shifts in sports journalism today.

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Vita

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