

## HOW IT WAS REPORTED:

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# The most important thing in the world

Wherever two or three Norwegian sports journalists gather, you will normally find a football player amongst them

by Lars Gilberg

This week Copenhagen has hosted a world congress on the ethics of sport. Each day participants have heard shocking stories about doping, bribery and mafia control over sports journalism.

So you would feel reassured to learn that almost 50 Norwegian sports journalists and photographers have been in the Danish capital for the duration of the conference.

But did we see them at the conference? No.

Only three Norwegian journalists were interested in hearing about the mismanagement of international sport. One from this newspaper, one from Adresseavisen and one from TV2. There were no journalists from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, none from the newspapers Aftenposten, VG or Dagbladet.

The bus loaded with Norwegian media people instead flocked around the soccer players from the Norwegian national team who were busy training at the stadium in Brøndby on the outskirts of Copenhagen. TV2 had four teams on the spot. Twice a day the media had access to the players so that the hyped young men could refuse to answer questions.

I have nothing but admiration for the way the Norwegian Football Federation manages to get the media to help them in building their brand. Once the media has invested enough in football, football will also become the product of the media. And there is a very short way from journalism to promotion.

That was one of the issues raised at the conference on ethics. But it did not appear to interest Norwegian journalists. Maybe they would have come if John Carew had made a 30 second presentation?

## The world's best advertising agency:

### All about the match, little about the money

The survey shows remarkably few differences in the way that newspapers in different countries cover sport – when you exclude sport with a specific national interest. Instead the survey documents that sports journalism is a global culture just like sport itself. The priorities in sport journalism are more or less the same and it does not matter whether the newspaper is based in Washington, Bergen, Vienna or Budapest.

- **Match reports, results and previews dominate:** 58 per cent of the articles on the sports pages deal with current events
- **Stories about money are few and far between:** Approximately one article in 30 includes political aspects of sport and only one article in 20 deals with the commercial aspects of sport
- **The focus on doping is waning:** On average 1.5 per cent of the sports articles deal with doping which is less than in a previous survey of sports stories in Scandinavian media
- **Marginal exposure of social aspects of sport:** Only 2.5 per cent of all sports coverage deal with the social impact of sport
- **Women are invisible:** Men are the focus of 86 per cent of all sports coverage and only one in 20 sports articles is written by a female journalist
- **Journalism without sources:** 40 per cent of all sports articles refer to only one source in the text. 20 per cent of the articles do not refer to any sources at all.
- **The sources come from within the sports world:** Athletes, coaches and representatives of clubs dominate completely as sources for sports journalists
- **Increasing globalisation of sport:** Compared to previous studies, this survey indicates that sports coverage is becoming less focused on national interests and in European countries stories with an international focus make up more than half the coverage.

# THE SPORTS PRESS



## Fundamental journalistic ideals are routinely abandoned

by Søren Schultz-Jørgensen

Researchers in 10 countries have been studying news about sport in 37 different newspapers.

Here is the potent formula behind the booming sports economy: A global business partnership between the sports industry and the sports press. Together they have created an industry that excites and involves young and old all over the world and in Europe has an estimated turnover of 165 billion Euro (1.6 per cent of Europe's total GNP) and a turnover of 213 billion dollars in the US – annually.

But the most extensive survey of the global sports press so far, the "International Sports Press Survey 2005", documents that the powerful co-operation has some deeply problematic consequences for sports journalism. Sports editors of daily newspapers allow the sports industry to set the agenda and the priorities for coverage of sport events whilst fundamental journalistic ideals are routinely abandoned.

The survey comprises 10,000 articles about sport which were published in 37 newspapers

in the first six months of 2005. It shows that the sports pages in daily newspapers are dominated by the particular types of sport, sports stars and international events which create the biggest turn-overs on parameters such as advertising, sponsorship, numbers of television viewers and spectators in the stadium. Conversely, the sports press has great difficulties reporting anything that takes place outside the angle of television cameras and after the stadium spotlights have been turned off.

### Sports journalism under commercial pressure

A new EU report estimates that the sports industry now make up at least 1.6 per cent of the collective GNP for the Western world. According to industry analysts, the sports industry in the US is twice as big as the car industry – and seven times the size of the film industry. Sport is one of the fastest growing branches of industry at all.

Yet, only 6 per cent of the articles about sport in daily newspapers are looking at the economic and financial aspects of sport.

This is not the first time that the blind angles of sports journalism have been exposed. Dante Chinni is senior researcher with Center for Excellence in Journalism and recently completed a survey of sports journalism in newspapers in the US.

He says that sport journalism is largely reactive and allows others to set the agenda. "Functionally speaking there is little doubt that sports journalists act as pr-agents. The sports press is one of society's biggest myth makers and it leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Unfortunately I see little evidence that these questions are answered elsewhere."

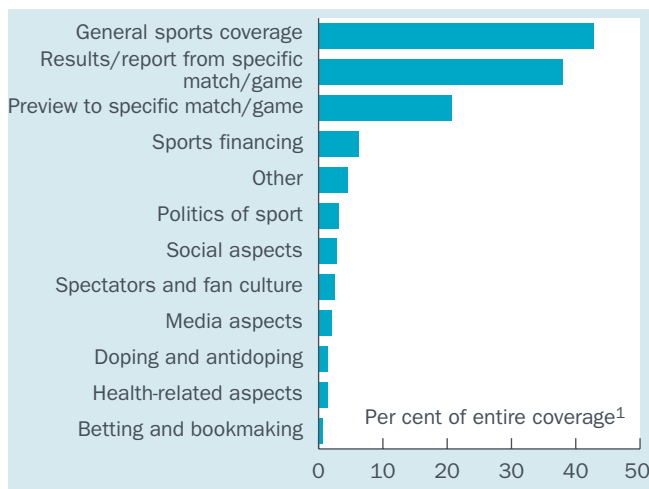
According to Norway's leading academic in the field, professor Knut Helland from University of Bergen, the majority of the sports press has de facto given up on the ideal of enlightening the

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## M11 | Economic underpinnings ignored

### Main themes of sports coverage



Sports journalism concerns itself overwhelmingly with the stadium spectacle of sport. Little attention is paid to what happens after the floodlights turn off and the camera crews leave.

**Note<sup>1</sup>:** Articles can reside in up to two categories, which brings the sum above 100 per cent.  
**Note:** N=10.007 articles.  
**Kilde:** International Sports Press Survey, 2005.

public. "Most sports journalism today is editorial advertising," he says. But the explanation is not that sports journalists lack professionalism, a critical mind or the desire to cover sport from other angles or in other ways, says Helland.

"Sports journalists are amongst the most professional in modern journalism. In general they are extremely good at delivering news and features in highly specialised formats and they have the high working pace of journalism generally. But the commercial game of sports is exerting such pressure on journalism itself that it has become almost impossible to work according to classic ideals of journalism," says Knut Helland.

### Advertising revenue determines editorial focus

The media game is about billions of kroner, Euro and dollars. But the plot of the game is as simple as what takes place on the pitch. For television stations the aim is to get exclusive rights to broadcast the most star-studded sports events. This is where the viewers and the advertising revenue is. And in order to attract viewers to the transmissions that the television station has the rights to – and can sell advertising for – the station uses its day-to-day sports coverage as a pr-tool. Exit journalistic independence.

The survey shows that the newspapers are following the lead of television stations when it comes to selecting which types of sport, matches and personal profiles to focus on. "Sports journalism is no longer done in the stadiums. It is

done in front of the television back in the office. It is quicker, easier and cheaper – and you get to watch details in slow motion," says Dr. Thomas Horiky of the Hamburger Institute for Sports Journalism.

This is the reason why the electronic and printed media flock to the same few types of sport and events, the same few clubs and sports stars.

### Readers hold the key to change

According to professor Raymond Boyle from University of Stirling in Scotland, the key to renewal of sports journalism lies in accommodating those segments of the population who have a more nuanced relationship with sport. During the past few years, a number of Britain's serious newspapers such as the Guardian, Daily Telegraph, the Scotsman and The Times have developed a far more enterprising and multi-faceted approach to sports journalism, he says.

"These are newspapers that 10 years ago would look down on sport. Today they shape the market through their focus on sport. To me it is a clear sign that the market of sports journalism is going through a phase of differentiation. The classic tabloid newspapers will probably continue their one-sided focus on stars, heroes, successes and failures. But the younger generations of readers and journalists are in the process of developing a new form of sports journalism in the so-called serious end of the newspaper market," says Raymond Boyle.

### Brief facts about the survey

The International Sports Press Survey is designed by House of Monday Morning and financed by the Danish Institute for Sports Studies and Play the Game.

Data has been collected from newspapers in Australia, Austria, Denmark, England, Germany, Norway, Romania, Scotland, Switzerland and the US.

The survey includes a total of 10007 articles from 37 newspapers.

For more details about the analysis see the full survey at

[www.playthegame.org](http://www.playthegame.org)

*"I have told everybody about my journey to Copenhagen. I was impressed. I have achieved more as a journalist and also as a person."*

Florian Petrica, tv-presenter, Romania