

Media

The World's Best Advertising Agency: The Sports Press

Home Ground. Money interests determine the agenda of sports journalism - Journalists overlook the economic and political aspects of the sports industry - Dominating types of sport and sports stars get preferential treatment - Academics: Give up the dream of critical journalism in the sports pages - The most wide ranging survey of the international sports press undertaken so far

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", now 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 sports events.

The survey conducted by the House of Monday Morning and academic research institutions in 10 countries on three continents shows that 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. The survey is financed by the Danish Institute for Sports Studies and the world communication conference on sport and society, Play the Game, which takes place in Copenhagen next week (see text box).

The survey 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 turnovers on parameters such as advertising, sponsorship, numbers of television viewers and spectators in the stadium. Conversely, the sports press has great difficulties reporting anything that takes place outside the angle of television cameras and after the stadium spotlights have been turned off.

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. Only 0.5 per cent of the stories in the sports pages zoom in on the massive interests in bookmaking and betting. And only 1 per cent of newspaper coverage of sport deals with amateur and

About the "International Sports Press Survey"

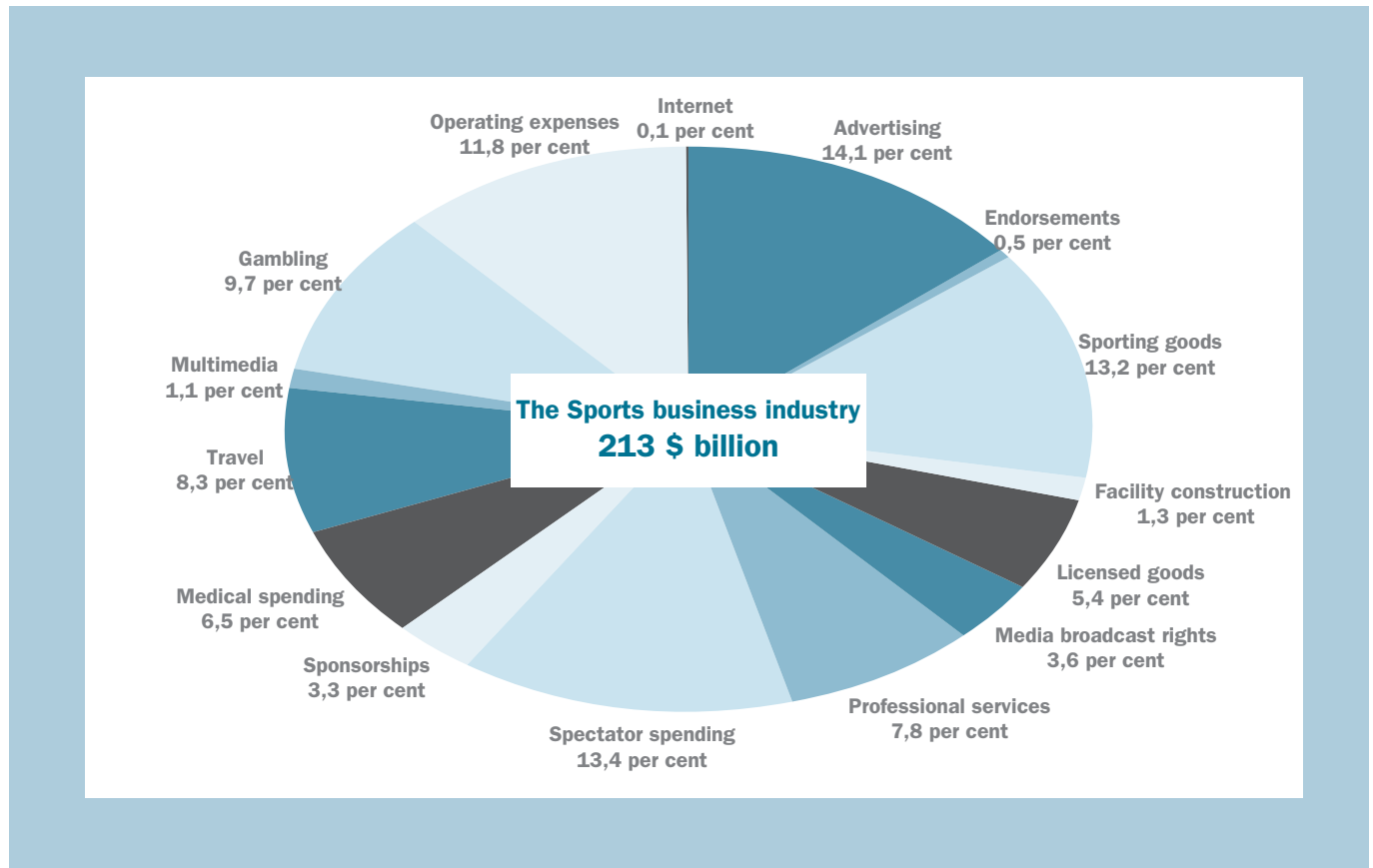
The International Sports Press Survey is designed by the House of Monday Morning and the collection of data has been undertaken in co-operation with Play the Game, the world communication conference on sport and society which from 6-10 November will gather 300 journalists, academics and sports leaders in Copenhagen to discuss issues such as corruption in sport, match fixing, doping and the media.

The survey was financed by the Danish Institute for Sports Studies and Play the Game. It has been implemented in co-operation with universities and researchers in the US, Britain, Scotland, Norway, Germany, Romania, Austria, Switzerland and Australia. The survey is based on articles about sport published in three to five major newspapers in each country - with a least one tabloid newspaper, a broadsheet paper and a local newspaper. A total of 37 newspapers are included in the survey that covers 14 days of publication in the period from 11 April to 24 July 2005.

All articles on the sports pages of the newspapers have been analysed - apart from brief notes. A total of 10,007 articles have been registered in a database with information about 14 different parameters including the article's journalistic format, the gender of the journalist, the type of sport, the theme of the article, geographical focus, the gender of the athletes, and the number and types of sources.

M/M | Seven times the size of the film industry

The American sports business industry, 2004



Figur 1: The sports business industry is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the United States. Our annual survey of the size of the industry estimated the sports business industry last year at 213 \$ billion. It is far more than twice the size of the U.S. auto industry and seven times the size of the movie industry.

Kilde: SportsBusiness Journal, 2005.

recreational sports despite the millions of people globally who practice it.

That the UN has designated 2005 the “International Year of Sport and Physical Education” is only mentioned in three articles of the 10,000 articles in the survey - and they were all published in Swiss newspapers. Obviously, the political statements of Kofi Annan do not sell as many tickets - or newspapers - as David Beckham’s haircuts.

This is not the first time that the blind angles of sports journalism have been exposed. Three years ago, Monday Morning conducted a survey of the sports press in Norway, Denmark and Sweden - and reached similar conclusions. According to Danish sports researcher Knud Larsen from University of Southern Denmark, it could be an indication that it is time to give up the ambition of critical and investigative sports journalism. Knud Larsen says to Monday Morning: “Maybe we will just have to accept that critical and independent sports journalism is never going to find its way into the sports sections of newspapers. Instead of being fru-

strated about the inadequacy of sports journalism we could hope that business and political journalism will answer the questions that sports journalism leave untouched. That way we can continue to enjoy the fascination in the sports pages.”

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.”

Similar priorities anywhere in the world

There are remarkably few differences in the way that newspapers in different countries cover sport - when you exclude sports with a specific national interest. Baseball, basket-

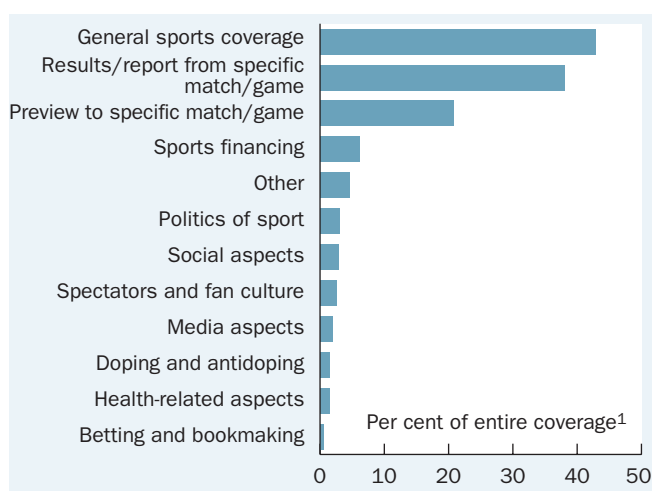
ball and American football dominate media coverage in the US. Skiing is more important in Norway than anywhere else, and cricket fills up the columns of sports pages in England and Australia where Australian football also receives massive exposure. And Denmark is home to the best female handball team in the world and therefore Denmark has the most intense media exposure of handball in the world.

But apart from such differences determined by history and culture, the International Sports Press Survey clearly documents that sports journalism is a global culture - just like sport itself. The priorities in sports journalism are more or less the same and it does not matter whether the newspaper is based in Washington, Bergen, Vienna or Bukarest.

- **Match reports, results and previews dominate:** 58 per cent of the articles on the sports pages deal with current events - the match yesterday or the expected line-up this evening.
- **Stories about money and politics can only be located with a magnifying glass:** Approximately one article in 30 includes political aspects of sport. Only one article in 100 deals with public funding 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 one of the biggest challenges in recent years to sport: the use of illegal drugs by athletes.

M/M | Economic underpinnings ignored

Main themes of sports coverage



Figur 2: 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.

Note¹: 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.

es. Compared to Monday Morning's analysis of the Scandinavian sports press in 2002 there is a strong indication that the media has become less preoccupied with the fight against doping.

- **Marginal exposure of social aspects of sport:** Adding all the data from categories dealing with the social impact of sport - recreational and amateur sports, the importance of sport for children, the elderly and immigrants - the figure barely reaches 2.5 per cent of all sports coverage.
- **Women are invisible:** Men are the focus of 86 per cent of all sports coverage. The explanation may be found in recruitment patterns in sports journalism: Only one in 20 sports articles is written by a female journalist. Norway is also in this area the best in the world with women as subjects in one out of five articles and a female byline over one out of eight articles.
- **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. And only 16 per cent of all articles have three or more sources.
- The sources come from within the sports world: Athletes, coaches and representatives of clubs dominate completely as sources for sports journalists - and in only one out of 25 articles have journalists included quotes or comments from people outside the sports world such as academics or politicians.
- **Increasing globalisation of sport:** Compared to previous studies, this survey indicates that sports coverage is becoming less focused on national interests. In several of the continental European countries, stories with an international focus make up more than half of the coverage. The international focus is less pronounced in the British and American sports press where sport events outside the respective countries only take up one fifth of the total coverage.

The "pornographic amounts of money" in sport

The new survey is not only discouraging reading for women, amateurs, media critics and the professed humanists in the UN system. In a spectacular comment in Financial Times, one of the most prominent figures in world sport, FIFA president Sepp Blatter, struck out at the "pornographic amounts of money" and the "wild-west style of capitalism" that has turned football into a "multibillion dollar global industry". "FIFA cannot sit by and see greed rule the football

M/M | National sports to the fore

Most covered sports in the national sports pages

Europe		
Rank	Sport	Per cent of coverage
1	Soccer	50,9
2	Cycling	6,3
3	Tennis	5,8
4	Formula One	3,4
5	Golf	3,4

The United Kingdom		
Rank	Sport	Per cent of coverage
1	Soccer	53,8
2	Golf	8,1
3	Rugby	8,0
4	Cricket	7,1
5	Tennis	5,7

USA		
Rank	Sport	Per cent of coverage
1	Baseball	28,5
2	Basketball	14,2
3	Golf	11,5
4	American football	9,9
5	Other motor sports	8,1

Australien		
Rank	Sport	Per cent of coverage
1	Australian football	27,7
2	Rugby	22,2
3	Soccer	8,8
4	Cricket	6,8
5	Equestrian sports	6,7

Figur 3: National culture still holds sway in the sports pages. In a few aspects, this culture remains untouched by globalization.

Note: N=10.007 articles.

Kilde: International Sports Press Survey, 2005.

world. Nor shall we," he wrote. FIFA will now set up a taskforce to examine and combat the excesses.

Sepp Blatter did not ask for help from sports journalists. And for very good reasons according to media and sports academics. Their assessment is that sports journalists are unable to rise to the challenge.

"To a very large extent the sports press is in the same boat as the money interests in the sport industry. Both parties earn their living from selling the entertainment product that sport has become today. In that way a complex but also extremely dynamic business partnership has developed between the sports press on the one hand and the clubs, sponsors, tv-stations and license holders to big events on the other hand. It goes without saying that in such a structure there is little room for critical and independent journalism. Today sports journalism is characterised by the mechanisms of marketing," says Dr. Thomas Horkey, a former sports journalist with the German Press Agency and today a researcher with Hamburger Institute for Sports Journalism.

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 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.

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.

How the sports industry control the communication

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 Thomas Horkey.

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. Obviously this gives the much-courted main actors incredible opportunities for controlling the communication flow. Which they do to an increasing degree in order to get the right form of pr and public exposure.

The sports editors that Monday Morning has talked to all have the same stories about their problems with systematic attempts by clubs and sports stars to exclude critical journalists from getting interviews. At the moment only a handful of journalists are allowed to talk to the German Formula One champion, Michael Schumacher. The Danish football legend Michael Laudrup used the samme strategy for many years - and in that way a few lucky journalists were eating out of his hand. For a long time the football team Washington Redskins refused to talk to journalists from the Washington Post because the newspaper had published critical articles

about the club's new stadium. In a similar way, the Danish top football team Brøndby has tried to convince the sports editor of the daily newspaper B.T. that a certain journalist should not be allowed to cover the affairs of the club. The journalist's sin was to have written a number of critical articles about affairs in the club's management.

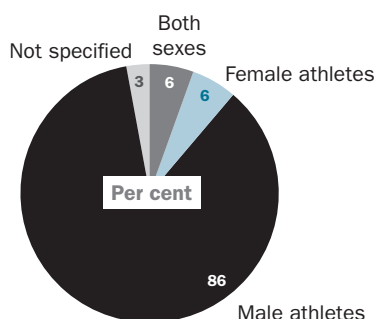
"There are hundreds of such examples in the sports business. Hundreds. It is the fate of sports journalism. There is little doubt that we have to fight that much harder against the dominating organisations and companies to do critical stories than journalists covering other beats. But we do take those fights. I simply do not agree with the contention that sports journalists are less critical than other journalists. I receive angry letters to the editor every day and therefore I know that we fully live up to our responsibilities as watchdogs," says sports editor at Washington Post, Emilio Garcia-Ruiz to Monday Morning.

Sports editor of the Danish daily newspaper B.T., Peter Brüchmann, shares the analysis: "The clubs feed the friendly journalists and exclude the critical journalists. That is the way it is. We just have to fight it, and we do," he says. He does admit, however, that the sports pages to a large extent are edited based on simple calculations about what celebrities and clubs might lead to greater sales on the news stands.

"I constantly update my lists of who are the best people to expose in different clubs and types of sport. I will be honest about that. It is a question of looking after consumer interests and taking the business side into account at the same time. But the fact that we allow ourselves to be directed by demand and readers, does not mean that we have given up on our ambitions to do critical investigative sports journa-

M/M | No women

Gender distribution of athletes featured in sports coverage



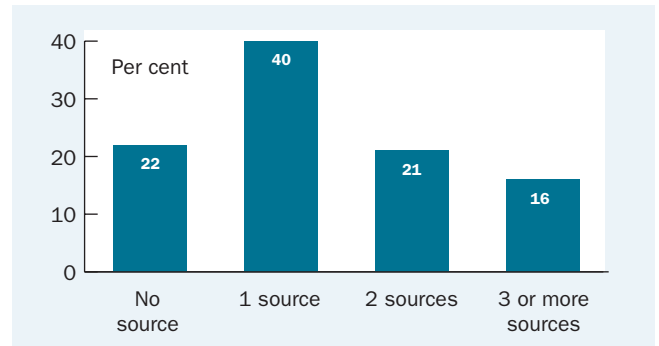
Figur 4: A male reserve is maintained within sports coverage. Male preferences dominate the coverage, the articles being in fact largely both written by and consumed by men.

Note: N=10.007 articles.

Kilde: International Sports Press Survey, 2005.

M/M | The source - a rare visitor

Number of sources cited in sports articles



Figur 5: A journalist needs no source in order to relay the action on the pitch. The huge bias of sports journalism towards play-by-play sports coverage means that sourced material is scarce.

Note: N=10.007 articles.

Kilde: International Sports Press Survey, 2005.

lism. On the contrary. I have a clear ambition to influence the strategic agendas in the board rooms of sports clubs. And I believe that we quite often do just that," says Peter Brüchmann.

"Compared to the situation 10 years ago, sports journalism definitely functions at a completely different level. We cover far more economic and political aspects of sport - and we do it in a far more critical and independent manner. We have a lot to be proud of if you compare to what you can see in the cultural sections of the newspapers. It is easy to say that we should celebrate less and criticise more, be a little less good guys and a little more bad guys. But that is not necessarily what the readers want," says Peter Brüchmann.

The readers hold the key to change

According to the editors the main reason why sports pages look and contain what they do can be directly ascribed to the readers of sports articles. The sports editor of Europe's biggest daily newspaper, Bild, with 10 million readers finds it easy to pinpoint causes and effects: "The readers prefer to see how football stars live, the cars they drive and who they are married to than to read about doping, sponsors and political power games in the sports federations. So we make our priorities accordingly. It is logical," says sports editor Achim Stecker to Monday Morning.

In its choices of stories and angles, Washington Post is a long way from Bild. But the newspaper's sports editor share the conviction that it is the readers who are holding back development in sports journalism - not sports journalists themselves.

"In our professional organisation, Associated Press Sports Editors, we have spent the last 10 years discussing

how we could change the way we report matches and general sports news. But each time we try something new we are inundated with complaints. Right now I have a letter to the editor in front of me which says: "Please explain to your reporters that they do not need to write the big American contemporary novel each time they cover a baseball-game. It is too much. We need facts, not great artistic writing." That is very typical. The sports readers have a very dedicated and fanatical relationship with our sports pages," says Emilio Garcia-Ruiz.

That readers of sports pages are conservative are by all accounts correct. The most inveterate of the kind are both old and male, according to a readers' survey from the Danish newspaper association. But the numbers also indicate that newspapers might be losing their grip on younger readers and that they still fail to attract women who otherwise are major consumers of fitness and health magazines. According to the International Sports Press Survey fitness and health are almost uncultivated in current newspaper coverage of sport.

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 the newspaper market," says Raymond Boyle.

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The "International Sports Press Survey

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