

# **TACKLING THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF SPORTS JOURNALISM**

A look at sports journalism in the United Kingdom and United States

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## INTRODUCTION

People increasingly want more.

More money, more time, more space.

And it is no different with news. Audiences are expecting sports news on an as-it-happens-basis and, as digital technology continues to develop, that news is being readily presented.

Not so long ago sports fans would have had to wait until the next day's newspaper or the evening's news broadcast, to find out the score of a sports match. Now, via a huge array of platforms, they can access the score, a match report, post-match comments, video highlights and every imaginable statistic almost as soon as the final whistle is blown.

It's telling of the age we are living in and the impact digital technology and, in particular, the internet, is having on traditional sports media. But what does it mean for sports journalists, sports journalism and the audience?

The digital era is certainly presenting sports newsrooms with constant challenges. Not only is it having significant financial implications for traditional media – print media in particular – but it is also challenging sports journalists to use a multitude of skills.

Sports news consumers are no longer satisfied to consume their news on just one platform: they are looking everywhere for it.

Whether it is through websites, social networking sites, blogs, print newspapers, television – live or on demand –, radio, sports websites, dedicated sports television channels or radio stations, fan-based websites, tablet devices or via mobile: the choice of where and when audiences access sports news and information has never been greater.

Six out of ten Americans access some news online during a typical day and almost half of Americans get their news from four to six different platforms. Of those that use the internet for news and information, more than half access sports news and information. [Edmonds and Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2010]

The challenge for sports media is ensuring there is constant, up to date and accurate information on whatever platform the news consumer is on, whilst maintaining high journalistic standards and quality of work.

The Scotsman digital editor Alan Greenwood says people use different platforms for different types of news.

“The Scotsman has been around for more than 260 years and there's a market group who will always want to buy the paper. But the online audience is different. People go to the site, interested in a specific score or rugby club or issue and hone in specifically on that – they're not traditional newspaper consumers.”

The depth of journalism required on each platform varies. Via mobile it is likely people will be looking for a score or a bit-part news item, rather than an investigative piece.

That bit-part information is now being provided with an immediacy never seen before.

Tim Franklin, director of America's National Centre for Sports Journalism, says now is the "golden age of news consumption", and believes, while the audience is now enjoying a wealth of sports news and information on every level, there are dangers with that.

"We've never lived in a period in our history where you could get instantaneous information on so many different devices as you can now," he says.

"Although there have been studies that most people go to the same set of news sources during any given day – they're not out trolling for new and different news sources, they're going back to the sources they know and trust for information."

This indicates people are opting to get tailored news and may not be as well-rounded in their news consumption habits as they were, Franklin says, and, as the future becomes increasingly digital-based this could have wider implications for sports news consumers.

It seems, for the moment, sports newsrooms are adapting well to the digital era – perhaps even better than other news sectors.

Sports departments often need to deal with immediacy in news that other departments do not face on a regular basis, not only with full match reports but with blog posts, live game updates and tweeting. [Brown-Smith and Grove: 2010] They are used to presenting news as it happens, because the demand for that news, particularly sports scores and results, has always been high.

Sports coverage fits the web. [Fry: 2010] Game updates, in particular, fit brilliantly with the opportunities the web presents for continuously updated coverage.

Television broadcasters can – when broadcasting rights allow – stream live games, post-match interviews and game highlights. Audiences can check in on games or sports news at any time – they don't have to wait until the game is over and the match report is written.

Digital technology also allows out of town – even out of country – fans to follow their favourite sports teams and can access live score updates on any number of websites.

Ronnie Ramos, who has 25 years of print media experience in the US and now manages the digital operations for the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), says sport has been at the forefront of the digital revolution.

"People try stuff in sports more readily than they would in other departments, mostly because they're not seen as being quite as serious as news or politics or that people are more ready to let sports people try something new. Blogs took off much better in sports before they worked in other areas of newspapers. Most of the record days on Twitter have been sports related. And partly, I think that's because the whole genre has embraced that more rapidly than the hard news. They've all come along now, but I think a lot of innovation happens first in sports areas."

News habits are changing, audiences are changing, sports organisations are changing and, as such, sports journalism is changing. We are in a historical period, where digital technology is forcing

developments in sports reporting, however traditional methods of sports journalism are being sustained and even improved to keep up with competition presented by digital coverage.

The need for traditional sports media to produce consistently high quality work is more important than ever, because competition from online is so fierce.

But there is a healthy, seemingly inexhaustible demand for sports news and information. Sports fans have long looked further than the sports section for information on the teams they support or issues within sport. Now they can virtually get as much news as they want – whenever they want it. [Fry: 2010]

The future of sports journalism may indeed be digital, but it seems there will long be a need for the printed word. Sports journalism is becoming increasingly complementary – there is still a need for all forms of it on a huge variety of platforms. Many sports fans are no longer satisfied with one source of news: they want the blogs, the tweets, the constant updates, but they also want the longer form documentaries and the crafted narratives.

Sports journalism is about reporting, enquiring and explaining sports news [Boyle: 2008] and the hunger for that news is such that there will always be a place for sports journalism.

This paper will examine the ways traditional media are using digital technology to improve audience experience. It will look at the impact digital evolution is having on sports journalism, the changes that have been forced upon many sports departments and the approaches leading media in the United Kingdom and United States are taking to ensure they maintain high quality content.

Given the constant evolution of digital technology and that a clear business model for the digital age is yet to be established, this paper gives a broad overview of the changes in sports media at this time and of an anticipated future revolving around digital coverage, whilst maintaining and improving traditional forms of sports coverage.

It will also look into what leading sports journalism schools and courses are focussing on as we herald a new age of multimedia sports reporting. It will examine the ways sports organisations are taking over their own publicity online and the impact of this on sports journalists. It will also discuss new media and how it can operate on a communications level for high profile events such as the London Olympics in 2012, and it will look into Major League Baseball and its success in securing its own digital rights and charging a subscription rate for access.

Finally, this paper will offer a broad conclusion as to how sports journalists can prepare for a digital future, whilst maintaining high journalistic standards.

It is a challenging time to be a sports journalist, but it's also a hugely positive one and this paper will explain why.

## **NEWSPAPERS TO NEW MEDIA**

Of traditional media, it seems print newspapers have been the hardest hit by the digital age.

There is intense competition, a 24/7 news cycle and more ways to present news than ever before.

Hence, the future of print newspapers has been cloudy at best; tainted by the recession, cut backs and job losses.

From 2007 to 2009 roughly 13,500 jobs for fulltime newsroom professionals in the United States disappeared, shrinking newsrooms by 25percent in just three years. [Edmonds & Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2010]

Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) figures show that in December 2010 all of the national UK newspaper circulation rates were lower than in December 2009. Six national newspapers saw year-on-year circulation decreases of more than 10percent.

Between 2000 and 2009 cumulative newspaper circulation in the US has decreased by 25.6percent. [Edmonds and Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2010]

Overall, newspapers' audience is growing but there is a clear migration to the web. In December 2010 41percent of Americans cited the internet as the place they got "most of their news about national and international issues" – up 17percent on the previous year. [Edmonds and Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2011]

Sports editors in the UK and US remain optimistic about the future of print newspapers. In 2010, there were less cutbacks and newspapers started re-hiring staff. Sports editors admit there are challenges, but also see huge benefits in digital coverage and are slowly working out how to take advantage of constantly increasing online audiences.

The situation for print is far from all doom and gloom.

More than 12.5million newspapers are sold every day in the UK. With a population of just more than 60million it is, proportionately, a very encouraging figure. Professor of Journalism at London's City University, Roy Greenslade, says the figure shows the UK is a "nation of avid newspaper readers."

"The power of the British press is not an illusion and it is obviously not a thing of the past," he says.

The power of the press is very much a thing of the future – but that future is being heavily influenced by the digital age and, in particular, a migration to consuming news online.

The work sports journalists do is now reaching more people than ever – at times with audiences in their millions – and, while circulation may be down, online audiences are growing quickly.

In October 2010, ABC figures show the UK's Daily Mail became the first UK newspaper to surpass 50million unique monthly browsers and it has maintained that figure since. Its website attracted 3million daily browsers in December 2010 – up 60percent on December 2009.

The digital era has led to a massive increase of sports news available and not only from certified news organisations. User generated content, fan-based sites and blog sites are providing increasing competition to print. But competition is, in many ways, improving the quality of sports news in print.

Sports departments are making changes to adapt to digital developments and these changes are leading to more innovative, creative and analytical sports writing.

## **THE CHANGES**

New York Times sports editor Tom Jolly says, while the print version of the paper has maintained a solid subscription base, digital evolution has had a big impact on the news cycle.

Print newspapers have traditionally been once-a-day news mediums. They have now become 24/7 news machines, constantly updating and breaking news online and to mobile devices.

As such, demands on sports journalists have never been greater. With a once-a-day news cycle sports reporters would write one or two stories for the next day's paper. Now, at the New York Times at least, they are required to write stories for the web, update those stories throughout the day, write another updated story for the print paper and perhaps write a blog item or tweet an update. They might also be asked to be interviewed for the paper's TimesCast daily video, or to capture video and/or audio from a press conference.

There is a lot of pressure on sports reporters but, inevitably, this is leading to a higher quality of sports journalism. Sports reporters have to look into more angles, talk to more people, get more investigative lines of enquiry and, in many cases, they are getting a much more rounded story than they might have previously.

Another impact of the digital age is the potential demise of the printed match report.

Given the huge amount of information available digitally and the increased ability to watch sport on different platforms, many newspapers are opting not to run match reports; instead looking at a key moment in a game, or taking the result forward for the next day's newspaper.

Jolly feels it is more important to give readers an insight into why things happened than it is to run play by play details of a game, which are details that may be used for online use only, if at all.

For the 2010 Baseball World Series, along with its typical print coverage, the New York Times assigned one reporter to write in-depth for the web only, with the aim of uploading copy at 11am the following day. While, at present, that is a luxury only large newspapers can afford – with staff and resources still tight – it shows the papers' commitment to its digital coverage and ways it is diversifying that from its print product.

Many newspapers do opt to run match reports in print. The Scotsman is one of those and digital editor, Alan Greenwood, says it has maintained its traditional philosophies, whilst showing a commitment to online development.

However, he says, print is where the sports department will run most of its analytical pieces.



“The website has become more the place where stories are broken and people have a chance to engage more, but we won’t necessarily go into analysis. They (print and online) are more two distinct products.”

In some respects, print can be the more powerful medium.

The Scotsman publishes several magazines with its weekend newspaper and, while publishing these online can feed a bigger audience, it is nowhere near as effective as print. In a magazine context, much as with a newspaper, people often won’t know what they are looking for until they see it and it is hard to create that aspect on the web.

But online-only content has clear advantages as well.

Greenwood says one particular advantage with online coverage is the ability to link hard news articles or match reports to comment, opinion and analysis as well as to other stories of interest. The opportunity to navigate through the site in a clear and straightforward way, while offering a wealth of news and information that could not be accommodated in a self-contained print newspaper, is a huge benefit of publishing sports news online. It benefits the audience, but also gives the newspaper a chance to offer unique, original content in its analysis and opinion pieces.

It also offers the chance to present information in varying ways, including the addition of video and audio.

## **VIDEO/AUDIO**

Sports editors in the US and UK appear to have similar approaches to streaming video and/or audio online and will use it when and if it can contribute to a story in an effective way.

The New York Times has access to what Jolly refers to as a “fairly small” video department, which is shared across the whole news organisation. It is important, he says, not to overdo the use of video and that when it is used it enhances the written article.

Prior to major games the paper will often create a video outside the host stadium, discussing the series or upcoming fixture, and will upload it to the web five hours before the game. This gives a sense of live and of authenticity, but eliminates any issues over broadcast rights.

The New York Times sports department also has several regular video fixtures. During the college football season it will run weekly videos, with an editor and reporter discussing the week in college football and upcoming games. It will run similar videos during the NCAA basketball tournament.

It will also use video to accompany interesting stories, where words can only tell so much.

Audio, alone, can also enhance stories. When tennis player Michelle Larcher de Brito made headlines for her excessive grunting during Wimbledon, the New York Times ran audio to give readers a clear idea of how intense it was.

The web has also given newspapers an outlet for the dozens of high quality photographs that are taken during every sports game. Newspapers are often limited to printing one or two images due to space restrictions, and online publishing opens up opportunities to present galleries and slideshows.

While audio and video can work for newspapers that have the staff and resources to put into it, for many other newspapers it is not quite as simple to put innovative visual ideas into practice.

At The Scotsman, video and audio is not a priority, simply because it lacks the resources to be able to do it properly. The paper does carry a small amount of video and podcasts online, but Greenwood says that aspect is only worth doing if it can be done as well as your competitors. Given the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a competitor of The Scotsman, it is unlikely its quality would compete. However, Greenwood says, in future, the paper may look to involve itself with a technology provider so it can carry high quality video and audio files.

There appears to be little hard data on newspapers that carry video online, but a quick glimpse at the online sports pages of several major US and UK newspapers suggests it is now a staple of the webpage and will continue to be in future.

## **BLOGS**

Blogging is also becoming an essential part of sports journalism and, in the world of sports, can be particularly insightful.

Blogs can give fans a more personal, inside look at a player, a team, an issue or a sporting environment. They offer unique, original content that audiences can and do return to regularly.

For The Scotsman, live blogs prove very successful, particularly when they are covering a sports match not available via broadcast.

When the Scottish rugby team toured Romania in 2010 The Scotsman ran live blogs on each match. The Scotsman generates a lot of print and online readers through its coverage of Scottish rugby, which few other Scottish newspapers do. While this was a lesser-publicised tournament, the live blogs attracted very positive traffic for the paper's website.

It also runs live blogs when Scottish tennis player Andy Murray is playing in major tournaments, though the traffic for these varies according to the profile and timing of the event.

The New York Times runs sports-specific blogs online, which various reporters contribute to. The paper also runs seasonal blogs, relating to certain events, and Jolly is keen to bring all of these together into one blog that would be customisable for readers.

Jolly's theory is that some sports are seasonal, therefore so are the blogs relating to them. By bringing all of the blogs together there will always be up to date and relevant copy. When major tennis tournaments are on, tennis-related blogs get a high uptake of hits, as it is with the Triple Crown racing season which lasts about 90 days. If the sites were pulled together in a customisable format, it would lead to higher traffic all year.

Again there is little hard data, specifically sports-related, on the use of blogs on newspaper websites. But given newspapers' strong affinity with opinion pieces and columnists, blogs are a nice fit for print's online purposes. They can work particularly well for sport, whereby journalists can give their take on a game or issue and engage with readers almost instantly online. They can also offer more light-hearted copy than news reports, and – where a word count in print limits all angles being explored – they can offer more information to readers.

Blog-centred sports websites are becoming increasingly popular among US audiences.

Sports website Deadspin takes a blog format and provides a mixture of content – at times not even sports-related – that ranges from rumours to breaking national sports news stories. The site attracts 2.3million monthly readers; however many would argue that Deadspin is not sports journalism. It has broken national news stories – including one involving NFL quarterback Brett Favre sending inappropriate texts and photos to a reporter – but admitted to paying for photos to accompany that story and the site’s editor AJ Daulario has oft been criticised for publishing content that traditional sports media may not.

There is debate surrounding the relevance and nature of some of the site’s content, but the site is increasingly attracting the attention of sports fans and media.

Another popular sports blog site is SB (Sports Blog) Nation, a fan-based sports blog site. It has 275 distinct team and sports-specific sites, and its main website states it “believes sports objectivity is a myth – we are relentlessly passionate about teams and sport we cover”. It has tapped into a strong market – attracting 100million monthly views. It has also launched regional sites.

Neither Deadspin nor SB Nation is regimented by the guidelines of objectivity that traditional media are, so both offer something different. While they are extremely popular, and increasingly so, the one thing they cannot offer is the air of authenticity and credibility that come with blogs published on newspaper websites.

The future of blogs is evolving and will continue to do so, as will the ways and means audiences use to access them.

## **TABLETS, SMARTPHONES AND MOBILE**

The iPad and similar tablet devices are being touted as a positive way forward for newspapers. Their screen size and clarity, easy of navigation and potential for advertising revenue make them an almost ideal platform for subscription newspaper models.

Readers can scroll through the newspaper on their iPad – seeing the newspaper as it would be in print format. News Corp has even launched the first paid-for iPad-only newspaper, The Daily, though it is too early to gauge its true success.

The penetration of the iPad is, though, relatively small at this stage. In January 2011 7percent of Americans owned an electronic tablet, whilst in the UK penetration is predicted to grow to 10 to 11percent by 2014.

The Wall Street Journal reported that 97percent of online newspaper reading is still on traditional computers, with just 2percent on smartphones and less than 1percent on iPads. These figures are expected to change in 2011, with increased sales of iPads and the continual development and improvement of smartphones, but any significant migration to wireless devices could take years. [Edmonds and Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2011]

The Guardian’s head of media and technology, Dan Sabbagh, suggests the iPad is not a replacement for newspapers and warns editors against pinning too many hopes on it. It is a digital device which,

he says, means people will get easily distracted and will start “playing Scrabble” or listening to music, rather than focus on the news.

“It is also too easy to jump from one news source to the next because digital has fundamentally changed peoples’ relationships with printed news sources,” he says.

“Once, a newspaper was not just a source of information, but a statement of identity, where most buyers would not dream of picking up a competing title. Now, in an era where identities are altogether more protean, and when any app can disappear from view at a single touch, it is not obvious that people will simply sit down and spend 20 minutes engaged in silent contemplation over a single title. It’s not how the modern mind works.”

Some research also suggests newspapers’ presence on tablet devices may be to the detriment of their print product.

Surveys by the Reynolds Institute and Scarborough Research suggest iPad buyers are prolific newspaper readers, but that many will cancel print subscriptions and read the paper primarily on their tablet device in future. [Edmonds and Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2011]

However, newspapers are increasingly aware that they need to be active on these devices to keep up with competition and to promote their products; and are producing applications – and charging subscription rates – with some success.

The Scotsman charges less than £2 per month for its iPhone application, which includes news, sport, photographs and other content with a newspaper scroller. It has thousands of subscribers.

Many newspapers are looking to mobile to serve their audiences snippets of news, sending out text alerts for sports scores and at times even breaking news via mobile alerts. In the US this service has a wide reach: 47percent of Americans get some kind of local news on mobile devices, such as cell-phones or other wireless devices. [Edmonds and Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2011]

The New York Times sends out text alerts for major games – the New York Yankees and New York Jets in particular – and will use mobile more frequently during major events, such as the Olympic Games. However, its mobile alerts are almost always results-only.

The paper launched a revised version of its iPad application in late 2010. Its original version only allowed publication of 50 stories from across the paper, of the editor’s choice, so fans were often unable to the app and get an in-depth report on sports. The new app features the whole paper and it is something Jolly uses himself, largely due to the flexibility of reading it and the colour photography. In late 2010 the app was free, however Jolly believed it would become a subscription model and believed it had a lot of possibilities.

Many media commentators have touted the iPad as newspapers’ ‘saving grace’. How that plays out, though, is yet to be determined. The iPad is still reasonably new and it is clear newspapers will need to experiment before they come up with the most successful model.

It seems print newspapers still have a strong future, which buys them time to develop consistently good and profitable smartphone and iPad applications.

## **BREAKING NEWS**

The notion of breaking news is one in which print newspapers have excelled in the past but it is also one that is changing due to the digital age.

Breaking news in print format is becoming less common, particularly with sports news. Sports organisations are increasingly breaking their own news online, the social networking world allows rumours to flourish and countless news sites are putting news online virtually minutes after it happens.

Hence, breaking certain types of news is becoming less important for newspapers, particularly when it comes to sports scores and results which can now be accessed on a huge range of platforms, instantaneously. Many newspapers are becoming less concerned with breaking results-based information or player transfer news and are more concerned about breaking investigative news and in-depth stories.

At the New York Times, Jolly says the preference is to be insightful.

“That’s not to say we don’t try to be first with certain kinds of stories, but we’re less interested in being first with a signing of a player or the death of somebody than we are with being first with an important news story that is maybe something we’re the only ones that know anyway,” he says.

“There are instances where we know we’ve got information and within four or five hours it’s going to be known by other people, so we’ll try and be aggressive there, but it is in instances where we are very sure of our information.”

It is a similar situation at The Scotsman where Greenwood says the focus is more on the ‘why’ than the ‘what’.

He says breaking news ahead of competitors such as Sky and the BBC is often unrealistic – “it’s something you can only win if you have a lot of resources behind you” – but what is important is being quick.

“If something does happen it is important we respond quickly and get something reasonably considered. We would probably sacrifice a bit of speed to make sure we were doing a bit more than just the news.”

The Scotsman is in a rare situation whereby it does not have many direct competitors so, generally, it should be first with its localised sports news. However, the focus is on presenting something considered – for The Scotsman, there is little point in a story saying a football manager has resigned without knowing why.

The digital era has also presented challenges in that it is tempting to rush the news simply to be first and there have been many examples of this, to the point where websites have reported the death of somebody only to retract it later. With traditional print newspapers this is less of an issue: reporters generally only have one print deadline, so any news published is – or should be – verified. Now, news can go out on Twitter in an instant, presented to thousands of people with little to no verification.

## **A POSITIVE FUTURE**

Print sports journalism is changing at a rapid pace, but in many cases it is for the better.

More competition is often leading to better quality and more-researched sports news. Sports editors in the UK and US are confident the printed newspaper will not die out, perhaps even within our lifetimes. While circulation rates are falling, online readership is increasing at a huge rate and newspapers are reaching audiences in their millions.

Sports journalists need to be much more creative and inspired with their copy, as well as updating content throughout the day, working to virtually a never-ending news cycle, and it is leading to more thorough work.

Says Jolly: "It's pretty amazing, for me to think how we've managed to change our practices in such a way that we're now virtually a 24/7 news delivery system and basically the same number of people are managing to produce news around the clock; and not only news, but slide shows, video, audio, reader interactivity and all those kinds of things."

"The thing I've held onto through the difficult economy, the light at the end of the tunnel, is that information is now being dispersed at a rate that is historical – it's never been seen in history – and there has to be value for the best of that information. Certainly, I think the New York Times is well established as one of those providers and somehow I still believe we're going to find a way to finance what we do."

## **BROADCAST TO BROADBAND**

Sports broadcasters appear to have taken full advantage of digital technology and have used it wisely to improve audience experience.

An explosion of space – on television and online – has led to an explosion of choice for the audience, particularly in terms of sports coverage.

There was always an abundance of sport as well as sports-related news and information, but there has never been as much space or opportunity to screen so much of it as there is now, with interactive television and live streaming of games online opening up more and more options for audiences.

Audiences are becoming increasingly interested in the benefits offered by enhanced television services and what that offers them. The top three capabilities audiences desire from broadcasters are: on demand content, time shifting and play-again capabilities – all of which come down to increased control. Audiences want to watch what they want, when they want and how they want. [Venturini: 2008]

Increasingly, sports broadcasters are offering new opportunities to do this.

When the BBC covers Wimbledon, no longer is it only the main matches screened on the main BBC channels. Viewers can choose to watch any court, often along with a choice of commentary. They can go online and view statistics, or another match being played concurrently. With the introduction of HD and now 3D television, sports viewing – and the way audiences consume sports media – is being transformed. It seems it is a win-win situation for audiences, broadcasters and sport itself.

Improvements in broadband penetration as well as capabilities for screening high quality live and on-demand content online are assisting broadcasters to ensure the quality of product is not diminished regardless of the device it is accessed on.

Audiences are turning to a variety of devices to watch sport and sports news.

Ofcom UK figures show nearly four in 10 people watch television services online and 14percent of people listen to radio over the web.

US broadcasters have launched iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch applications.

NBC News vice president for specials and digital Mark Lukasiewicz says broadcasters have more platforms than ever in which to present their work and believes the network should “push the boundaries of that to find new ways to do it”. [Edmonds, R & Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2011]

Increasingly, people want to access sports on their own terms, and the web provides broadcasters with the perfect outlet for that.

## **THE EXPANDING BROADCASTING MIX**

For the BBC, internet is a third platform, alongside television and radio. [Huggers: 2010]

For Roger Mosey, former Director of Sport at BBC who is now responsible for the BBC's London Olympic Games coverage, it is very much a 'both and' situation, where internet can be used as a complementary form of sports news coverage.

"(Online coverage) is critically important, but then so is a 42-inch plasma. People are used to having a range of options – they decide what the platform is," he says.

When Mosey started at the BBC in 2005, online and radio reach were the same. About 15percent of the UK population used BBC Sport online and the same applied to radio.

When Mosey left his Director of Sport position in 2008, online was up to 30percent, while radio had stayed the same.

Mosey says television, radio and online coverage all have their benefits.

"They're all important to us, but it's the audience need that changes. At 11am on a quieter day people may well be sitting back listening to the radio. But when the 100m final comes on at 10pm people's choice of platform might change to a 42-inch television. It's offering people a range of ways of watching sport and they make the decisions of when and what they use."

A lot of sports stories will break simultaneously on various platforms. The crucial thing for the BBC is not which platform breaks it first, but to get the key information.

#### **INTERACTIVE TELEVISION: WHERE TO FROM THERE?**

One of the key elements of digital broadcasting is interactive television. Audiences are no longer subject solely to the interests of the masses: the choice of what sport to watch has never been greater.

The BBC has 'red button' services, which offer viewers additional sports coverage. In broadcasting Formula 1, practice rounds are generally screened through the red button so the day's broadcasting schedule on the primary channels stays the same. Main racing will, though, screen on the main channels. In several sports there is also a choice of commentary, with English viewers able to listen to Scottish commentary and vice versa. Radio commentary is also an option.

Interactive television and online broadcasting rights free up space for a huge amount of sport to be covered.

At the Athens Olympics in 2000 the BBC was able to screen about a quarter of the entire Games. In 2008 BBC audiences were able to see more than half of the sporting action from the Beijing Olympics – 2700 hours of the 5000 produced. When the Olympics are held in London in 2012, the BBC aims to make every hour of sport available (about 5800 hours).

The red button has, according to Mosey, reached its capacity. Although it has served the BBC well, he believes BBC Online and the internet in general present huge opportunities for sports coverage in the UK.

Mosey believes that connection with the internet is the future of television.

The next stage will be Internet Protocol TV (IPTV).



**Internet Protocol television (IPTV)**, in broad terms, relates to any television content delivered through broadband rather than satellite or traditional aerial. Examples include BBC's iPlayer and various on demand television services offered online. Web-enabled televisions mean viewers can access interactive web content directly through their television sets and television providers can work with online content providers to create services directly for TV. [Chapman: 2010]

Says Mosey: "Ultimately, probably everything will move to the internet. The red button is essentially an addition to linear TV. IPTV will start replacing the current red button."

"What IPTV does is it allows you to put together linear TV with the internet. As opposed to choosing 100 pages of red button text, you can use the internet."

### **ESPN: APPROACHING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

ESPN has aggressively pursued digital developments to the point that it is one of the world's leading sports content providers.

With its online and mobile sports coverage, the business is becoming far more than a US sports network and has a commitment to staying at the forefront of innovation.

More than anything, the numbers paint a telling story:

(Figures from 2010, taken from [espnmediazone3.com](http://espnmediazone3.com))

#### **ESPN.com**

Average minute audience was 77,000

Visitors watched nearly 1.4billion videos – nearly 115million streams per month

#### **ESPN Insider**

Surpassed 1.5million subscribers, with subscribers up 23percent

#### **ESPN3.com** (rebranded from ESPN360.com)

Delivered 4300 live sports events including the Football World Cup

The Spain-Germany Football World Cup semi-final attracted an average of 355,000 viewers per minute

The Football World Cup was viewed by 7.4 million unique visitors

#### **ESPN Mobile**

Delivered nearly 3.5billion alerts to fans (up 300percent on 2009)

Was the leading mobile web sports site, and the eighth most trafficked site on mobile web overall

Averaged 12.4million unique visitors per month

More than 950 live events were delivered via ESPN Mobile TV, including all 64 Football World Cup matches

ESPN iPad apps also generated more than 750,000 downloads.

Vice President (Digital Media) for ESPN International, Tom Gleeson, says ESPN is actively trying to reach sports fans on whatever device they're on.

"First mover continues to be a big advantage. If you're first on the internet with a sports offering it's going to be an advantage and we were very early on that and were very early on mobile and are seeing explosive growth as a result of that."

Gleeson sees a big future in streaming sports content to smartphones, but also believes tablet devices such as the iPad will play a part in the way audiences choose to consume sports news in the future.

Gleeson values the complementary nature of streaming content to different devices.

"By and large somebody on a mobile phone is not really looking to consume long form journalism. Our usage statistics would suggest, by and large, they're looking for a score; on the internet you can consume more considered journalism."

"TV is great as a provider, but it can't provide a considered level of information. If you're watching cricket and somebody is on debut or something happens, a lot of people use the internet to find out that bit more ... which state they played for, their first class record, that type of thing."

In some countries ESPN is attracting higher audience numbers on its digital platforms than it is on its television channels. However television is still where the company gains most of its revenue.

In Australia and New Zealand ESPN has less of a television presence but attracts very strong ratings in its relatively-newly acquired website cricinfo.com: a site that presents largely unbiased cricket coverage, live blog commentary of games, statistics and a general wealth of cricket information. Sites like cricinfo and its football equivalent soccernet are not as strongly ESPN branded as the network's television channels, but ESPN is keen to align the brand more closely with the sites in future.

But why is ESPN so successful digitally? Gleeson puts it down to a real commitment to delivering sports news to audiences in every way they want to consume it. Having an already strong brand in ESPN, having the resources and staff required to have such a strong digital presence and getting in early on the digital revolution of sports media has put ESPN in extremely good stead – as the numbers suggest.

## **LOCALISATION**

Localisation is one of ESPN's key priorities in terms of its digital coverage.

The network has rolled out five localised news and information websites in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York and Boston.

The sites play host to breaking sports news and information, video (highlights, news and original ESPN content), mobile sites and podcasts, blogs and commentary, real time scores and even small college and high school sports coverage: all localised.

The sites are among the top in their local markets for sports coverage and collectively attracted 8.8million unique visitors per month between September 2010 and December 2011. [Chong: 2011]

It is not only ESPN tackling local digital transformation – the University of Texas is looking at creating its own cable channel with 24/7 news on the University’s sports.

From an ESPN perspective, Gleeson believes localisation can also work on an international level.

“We think of ourselves as being quite global, but increasingly we are having to be more and more local,” he says.

“Sports fans follow a local team or a national team, which is still a local team.”

“From an international perspective it’s very, very difficult to have one piece of paid content that can work in multiple markets. If you write a match report for a football match, say Manchester United versus Blackpool, firstly you write it in English or what you would consider to be UK English with spelling etc. You’d probably need to re-write it for US English with spelling and general knowledge. We haven’t got to this point yet, but you’d potentially need to translate it into dozens of different languages.”

“You may need to tweet a piece of content. Or if there’s a French player you might need to write another piece for a French audience and have more focus on that player just because it’s relevant to a French market.”

Gleeson says while localised city sites such as [espnchicago.com](http://espnchicago.com) have worked, city-wide sites won’t necessarily work on a global scale. International sites, such as [espn.co.uk](http://espn.co.uk), can work and, with expansion into covering more Australian-based sports such as Australian Rules and Rugby League, [espn.com.au](http://espn.com.au) is a distinct possibility.

## **QUALITY OVER QUANTITY**

Neither Gleeson nor Mosey believe quality of sports news is being compromised by the wealth of sports news and information available; however they admit it is important to get news as quickly as possible.

Gleeson says ESPN’s standards are “very, very high” and the digital age enables journalists to gauge reader or viewer feedback almost instantly. That instantaneous aspect is also translated into deadlines – everything has to be immediate, especially if it’s on mobile.

And Mosey says quantity can result in quality – especially when audiences are using various technologies as complementary ways of consuming news and information.

He says what the BBC presents, sports-wise, is a “sensible number of stories” across multiple platforms and a range of platforms doesn’t necessarily mean more stories.

For Mosey, it comes back to being “both and”, whereby there is room for the 90 minute football match and the long form documentary, but also the up to the minute news bytes, the blogs, the commentary, opinion, and the tweets.

The digital era is complementing broadcast nicely. Broadcasters are no longer limited by their medium and are able to offer viewers increased control over what they watch and when they watch it.

## **CASE STUDY: MLB.COM**

Mlb.com is a one stop baseball shop dedicated to providing news and information about Major League Baseball (MLB) on any device fans are looking for it.

Through online and mobile devices fans can access live and archived games through video and audio. They can pause and rewind those games, access 24/7 (often breaking) news and information on any MLB team, buy tickets and/or merchandise, view statistics, seek out comment, analysis and opinion via video streams ... virtually anything fans want is there online and streaming to an ever-increasing variety of digital devices.

Major League Baseball has become its own digital broadcasting partner, owning the digital rights to live MLB games and making the most of that – screening 15 live games a day during the season.

Is it the way of the future for online sports coverage? That's yet to be determined, but one thing is certain: foresight has had some very profitable benefits for MLB.

### **THE HISTORY**

In 2000 MLB owners voted unanimously to centralise the industry's digital rights. The vision was to create an independent technology company – MLB Advanced Media (MLBAM) – that would leverage those rights on a local and national level.

The start-up funds came from all 30 of the MLB clubs and mlb.com – one of America's most successful digital sports media providers – was born.

In 2002 the company screened its first live game: New York Yankees versus Texas Rangers, attracting an audience of about 30,000 people.

According to MLBAM vice president corporate communications Matthew Gould, it was an insightful move.

“In 2002/2003 here, in the States, nobody was watching video on the internet, there was no YouTube, none of that existed and people thought we were crazy. People thought first: nobody wants to watch video on the internet, they want to watch video on TV and second: nobody's going to pay for it.”

At the time, broadband connections and high quality files were extremely limited, so the company bet on the notion of broadband penetration and it's been a gamble that has paid dividends.

In 2003 the company started streaming the whole MLB season live on MLB.TV.

In 2005 it launched its mobile service.

In 2010 more than 1.5million people subscribe to some form of live streaming product, the site has housed more than 1billion live video streams, and the company brings in more than US \$500million annually.

It seems there are very few limits.

Says Gould: “Our job is to be on every device that has a battery or a plug and to give the best baseball experience on that device whether it’s an iPhone, iPad, Blackberry, a set top box or PC, a Mac – whatever device at that instant a fan is on and wants to engage with baseball it’s our job to make sure that fan gets the optimal experience for that device.”

More than 95percent of the mlb.com site is free, including news and information, columns and images. It is the live content that holds the monetary value and for that, MLBAM has been charging consumers since 2002.

The subscription rate is based on an out-of-market model, whereby local teams’ games are blacked out (whether they are being played at home or away), but are available to watch online immediately after the game has finished.

And people are signing up in their thousands, to the benefit of themselves and to MLB.

“You charge for it and it allows us to develop better technology to expand that experience, make it more interactive, make it better,” says Gould.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

Bob Bowman is the chief executive for MLBAM – the only chief executive it has had in its decade-long history. There have, he says, been three major changes in the past 10 years:

1. The abundance of digital content available

Consumers now rely on digital devices more than ever. Says Bowman: “Content publishers are beginning to realise digital media has to be near the centre of how they approach their fans and customers.”

2. Video

When MLBAM was established, live video barely existed. Now the company streams billions of minutes of live video and audio. “Live and on-demand, video has to be a focal point of any digital media strategy – people expect to watch video,” says Bowman.

3. Mobile

Mobile coverage has and continues to evolve to the point that it makes up almost 20percent of mlb.com’s overall traffic. “It is becoming increasingly apparent that the personal device – the one you have on you all the time – will be the dominant device,” Bowman says.

Bowman is keen to explore as many new devices as possible, and sees a strong future in streaming MLB content to wireless devices.

“Every content provider has to be on wireless with everything they’ve got, whether it’s live video, on demand video, mobile commerce, text-based commerce,” he says.

The key is, when mlb.com branches out to new devices, the company ensures it does it to the same high standards of its website. It’s not simply about being on every device possible – there is a very clear focus on presenting a high quality product, regardless of what the device is.

Says Gould: “In 2010 fans could access live games on their computers, iPhones, iPads, we had some deals with set top boxes and PlayStation 3, Roku, Boxy ... if the device’s technology can handle live streaming we need to be there. That’s our charter.”

The company has had huge success with applications.

MLB’s At Bat 2010 application for iPhone and iPod Touch was named Apple’s highest grossing application of 2010 and At Bat for iPad was the highest grossing sports application.

With Bowman at the helm and a commitment to providing baseball fans with access to mlb.com on the personal device – whichever that may be – mlb.com’s future looks bright.

## **EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE**

There is no getting away from the fact that MLBAM is under the same ownership and revenue-sharing group as MLB itself; however it stresses it does have editorial independence.

Bowman and Gould maintain that mlb.com and its content is objective. If it wasn’t, they say, the fans would look elsewhere for their baseball news and information.

The company hires 30 beat writers – all of whom came from newspapers – as well as sub-editors and editors.

Says Gould: “It goes back to (then MLB Commissioner) Bud Selig and (MLB President) Bob DuPey (who created mlb.com) – they knew how smart fans were and knew that in order to attract fans you had to play things right down the middle. You couldn’t be a mouthpiece for the league or the teams – you had to give the fans the facts.”

“We hired a lot of folk right from newspapers and we have some columnists who have been covering baseball for decades, so we have very credible journalists that are part of our team. That editorial independence is crucial because if fans feel like they’re not getting the story straight they’ll go somewhere else and it doesn’t take long to type in another URL.”

Unlike the approach typically expected of more traditional media, boss Bowman isn’t overly concerned about breaking news.

His philosophy is about being fast – not necessarily first – and about getting things right.

“We can’t ignore controversial issues. If something is said about steroids then we’ve got to have that on our site because if people think we’re pulling punches or not being honest with them they’ll go to another site. We have to be thorough and we have to be right. It has to be the most reliable place for people to get information and day in, day out we think that wins the day.”

Bowman believes the notion of negativity in the media is “overplayed”. Most fans, he says, just want the facts. As such, a quick glance at the columns on mlb.com shows most of the opinion is largely positive, or at least down the middle and featuring both sides of an argument.

Mlb.com also steers away from what Bowman refers to as “gotcha”.

“If they (a player or manager) make a mistake we’ll say they made a mistake, but we really don’t care what they do at 2am. And most fans don’t care. That’s not to say a lot of Americans don’t care, but fans who go to the ballgames, who buy the tickets, they really don’t care what a player does at 2am.”

The traffic to the site, along with its subscription rates, suggests the site is presenting credible and newsworthy information that is more than satisfying the fans. At times fans will only want a score and Bowman is keen for mlb.com – rather than a search engine or aggregator site – to be the place fans access it, so its credibility and objectivity with its other information is vital.

## **TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER**

MLBAM also acts as a technology provider for several high profile media organisations. The company provides the streaming infrastructure for ESPN’s 24 hour digital network espn3.com and CBS’s March Madness on Demand.

It also has web development partnerships with regional sports networks, tigerwoods.com and Minor League Baseball where it runs the web operations and streams video and audio for about 160 minor league teams.

MLB is the primary business, but because MLB Advanced Media has built the infrastructure to such a massive scale it makes good business sense to use that to create more revenue. In turn, that new revenue allows MLB to grow the business further and branch out into new technology.

The agreements are viewed as direct partnerships, rather than hold any competitive element, as the editorial and content are separate.

## **WHY IT WORKS**

Owning the digital rights to Major League Baseball is clearly a huge advantage for MLBAM and certainly that is crucial to its subscription product.

It also gives mlb.com and its associated sites an air of authenticity: it provides a service audiences cannot get anywhere else online.

And so it is with news and information. Fans believe every word on the site, because it is mlb.com – it’s straight from the league itself.

The business also works because of its primary focus: baseball.

During the season there are 15 games of baseball almost every day. Teams in the National Football League (NFL), in comparison, play just once a week and often during a weekend. It is easier to make time to sit down and watch a football game, because the team you support only plays once a week, than it is to watch an often-lengthy game of baseball every day. With every MLB game streamed live, as well as archived online it is easier and more likely for fans to tune in – even if only for half an hour.

There is more to update, more content – particularly game-related – with professional baseball than there is for many other sports. If fans miss a game, they want to know who pitched well, they want



to see highlights, they want to see hits that are being talked about around the water cooler – and mlb.com allows them to do that.

What also contributes to mlb.com’s success is the variety it offers: it’s not only a live and on demand baseball game streaming service. It provides up to the minute news and information, statistics, highlights, it even has its own studio to present original shows. You can buy tickets, buy merchandise, check out any team, any player – and get all of this online and via mobile.

Says Bowman: “You have to be more than TV and it has to have more capability than TV, whether it be joining Twitter or posting something on your Facebook wall, or seeing stats or checking out fantasy players – it has to have all of that capability.”

And what Gould and Bowman emphasise – and what adds significantly to the success of MLBAM – is that there is a very clear focus on the fan.

If you put the fan first, the rest will follow – and this has evidently been the case for mlb.com. As Bowman says, the fan and revenue work “hand in glove”.

“The most important thing is to get people talking and involving themselves in baseball. More than 95percent of what people do on our various sites is free. If every now and then they want to buy a jersey or, more importantly, a ticket we certainly encourage them to do that. But the most important thing is really to be promoting the game of baseball. Economically what our most important task is, is to sell tickets. Once somebody goes to a baseball game they become better fans, spend more time, talk more about it and maybe spend more money ultimately. But it certainly isn’t how do we get their wallet first then we’ll worry about baseball – it’s always let’s give information about baseball and everything else will follow.”

The key to mlb.com’s continued success in the future is what it can offer its fans.

“We have the ability to give our fans a superb experience in digital media regardless of where they live, regardless of if they’re travelling,” says Bowman.

“They could be as far away as Christchurch, they can have the same experience and not be dependent on whether or not a club did a deal and whether or not something’s working. I think that’s a huge advantage that will pay dividends as this generation ages and thinks about how they’re going to consume content.”

## **SPORTS MEDIA: SPORTS TAKING CONTROL**

Sports teams and leagues are increasingly taking control of their publicity in the digital age. The online world effectively allows them to break their own news and reach global audiences via websites and social networking sites.

Leagues and teams are employing former journalists to run virtual newsrooms, so that they can manage their own press, encouraging fans to come directly to them rather than go through the media to consume their sports news and information.

In many cases, it's working.

When Liverpool FC signed Joe Cole in 2010, the team's website liverpoolfc.tv attracted more than 480,000 page impressions in one hour. That, combined with the signing of then manager Roy Hodgson at a similar time, attracted more than 4million unique users in July 2010. [Online: 2010]

Manchester United has more than 11million Facebook fans and, in August 2010, its website (manutd.com) attracted 18.2million unique monthly page visitors. The club has also launched Korean, Chinese and Japanese versions of the site to cater to its global fan base. [Online: 2010]

During the 2010 Football World Cup the FIFA website attracted 150million users and 7 billion page views across the 31-day tournament. [Kiss: 2010]

Sports can, and do, break their own news to millions of fans, almost instantaneously via websites and social networking sites and without the 'middle man' and interpretation of the media.

This may be positive for sports organisations, but it is having a huge impact on sports journalism and one that may not be fully realised.

National Centre for Sports Journalism director Tim Franklin says there have been attempts by leagues and conferences across the United States to restrict what journalists can do during games, including the South Eastern Conference proposing a ban on live blogging during games.

Other organisations are looking at restricting media photo galleries online, or putting limits on how long video on media websites can run for and it is, says Franklin, even going down to the high school level.

"It is changing the dynamic of how sports is being covered and could be covered in the future," he says.

"I think it emboldens them (sports organisations) to try to control the message because there are more ways to control the message."

Franklin says, previously, there was a feeling in journalism circles that teams and leagues needed the press: it was the primary means in which all news and information about sports leagues and teams got out.

"I think that a lot of reporters knew that and maybe they felt that because of that they didn't have to be as careful about criticising a player, or a team or a result. Now though, these organisations have created their own news operations, many of them are on their own regional cable channels, and

they can use those platforms to get the word out about their own teams – maybe they don't need reporters as much. I think that dynamic has changed and is changing.”

Franklin also acknowledges that many sports teams are restricting media access to players. Franklin is a former sports editor of the Chicago Tribune and says, even 10 years ago, sports journalists could wander through the Chicago Bulls locker room and chat to Scottie Pippin and even, to an extent, Michael Jordan.

Now post-game reporting has changed dramatically.

“Post-game interviews are being moved to media rooms, you don't see the locker room, you don't hear it, you don't smell it; you don't see the byplay between players that you might have seen 10 to 15 years ago. It's all staged, the athletes and the coaches have media training about what to say, what not to say and they're much more cautious because the dollars are so large in contracts and you don't want to jeopardise that.”

“There are still very good beat reporters who are getting to know players on teams as people and getting the knowledge of them beyond the playing court but that's increasingly a challenge. Even to talk to players off the court you have to go through agents, public relations directors, and it's created a distance between players and the media and I think because of that, maybe more of a distrust than has existed before.”

#### **NCAA: GOING DIGITAL**

Ronnie Ramos is the managing director for digital content at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): the officialdom charged with organising the athletic programmes of US and Canadian colleges and universities, as well as looking out for the wellbeing of student athletes.

The organisation oversees some of the most popular college-level sports tournaments in the United States.

Ramos has more than 25 years print journalism experience and the main component of his new role is to run the content development for NCAA websites and its social media strategy.

He says newspapers have not adapted well to the digital era, so sports organisations such as the NCAA have.

“The media has gotten more fractured. Newspapers continue to decline so there's been this void and it's been filled by niches and people that have an interest in a specific kind of sport and it's getting more and more fragmented. So I think that's helped organisations like us because the public is now getting used to coming to us for information as opposed to traditional media,” Ramos says.

“That's something we've preached here and we've worked with individual schools and universities so that they do the same and not rely on their local newspapers to carry their messages for them.”

Since Ramos has taken on his role he has organised NCAA's various websites and its social media strategy. He has launched 12 Facebook pages and six Twitter accounts to try to capture relevant audiences.

Video and audio is also a key for Ramos and one he feels the NCAA can use to its advantage, given its access to college athletes across the country.

The goal across all of the NCAA's digital platforms is to get the organisations' message out and to let people know what they do, without simply relying on the media.

Ramos says the digital era has given minority sports a voice and believes that is one of the biggest advantages of digital coverage. The NCAA's most popular Facebook page is wrestling. Not basketball, not football – because you can get information about them in a lot of places.

“There aren't a lot of places to get wrestling information and it would be very costly to run a wrestling magazine or newspaper, but you can now create a very good website with not a huge investment of resources. That's just one example of how the not-so-popular sports benefits tremendously from online.”

The main digital tools the NCAA utilises are:

#### Websites

It runs several websites, its main sites being ncaa.org and ncaa.com. Potential to add more websites in future

#### Facebook

The NCAA has at least 12 Facebook sports-specific pages, most growing at roughly 20percent every month

#### Twitter

There are six Twitter sites run by the NCAA, used to engage people and let them know what the NCAA is doing. One example of its use of twitter was when dozens of national collegiate sports champions went to the White House to meet the President. One person pulled in all the twitter feeds from all of the athletes to one spot, so NCAA could publish what everyone was writing on Twitter – a successful and innovative method in generating page views

#### Blogs

The organisation runs several blogs on its main sites by various college-based experts and NCAA staff, including a 'week in review' blog

#### Video and Audio

The NCAA uses YouTube to promote its video content, but also its websites. One video that has attracted a lot of attention regarded a quarterback talking about what it's like to be a student athlete. He is prominent and successful academically, and the video had a wide interest

#### Mobile

Ramos would like the NCAA to branch into mobile in 2011, and to stream its content on iPad

## **CHALLENGES FOR THE MEDIA**

New York Times sports editor Tom Jolly says the paper has changed its approach to reporting, which means it doesn't rely quite so much on access to players and/or teams. It is also not as concerned with breaking news relating to things like player transfers. It is, in a sense, eliminating the impact of sports controlling their own publicity.

The New York Times is blessed with a strong reputation and readership, so teams and sports organisations still value its coverage and the validity of that; however it is still affected.

The sports department has adopted a more analytical and issues-oriented approach to its reporting. In this respect, the people journalists speak to don't necessarily have to be current athletes. The paper also does a lot of sports business reporting so, again, players and even people specifically involved with a team or league are not necessarily the focus. And Jolly believes that type of reporting can be much more interesting.

A lot of teams and leagues in the United States are closely aligned with broadcast partners – ESPN is affiliated with the NFL, and, as such, has invested a lot of reporting effort into information regarding player moves and trades and what's going on in the locker room.

While that can and does make for good television, Jolly feels the New York Times' value is greater by stepping back from that side of reporting and looking into issues that might require more thought and more reporting.

"We still want hard news, but what we want less of is the incremental news that the team websites tend to cover," he says.

Jolly also says newspapers still maintain a strong watchdog role over teams, which is often absent in team websites and various promotional digital tools and, to an extent, not as strong amongst the networks that have broadcast agreements with various sports leagues and teams.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

While sports organisations are presenting sports journalists with challenges in terms of placing restrictions on them and creating their own publicity, these moves also present opportunity.

Sports teams and leagues are hiring sports journalists to produce website content, as well as manage their social networking strategies. They write game stories, notebooks, profiles, break news stories on websites: much of the similar newsroom tasks they would complete for traditional media.

Where, five years ago a story about a player injury would be broken by local and national media, now it is often being put on the team's website first. Sports teams and leagues are encouraging advertising; creating revenue and putting their message out in the way they want fans to consume it.

And this brings with it opportunities for journalists to move into this field.

There is also opportunity for minority, or less popular sports – even to provide their own copy via the media.

Many newspapers now have virtually unlimited space online to run stories, but don't have sufficient staff or resources to fill it. So in some cases sports are stepping in, producing their own copy for online-only purposes, but still getting it on a media website.

## **SOCIAL NETWORKING: ITS PLACE IN SPORTS JOURNALISM**

Social networking is fast becoming part of daily life for millions of people.

Facebook, alone, has more than 500million users and that figure is expected to double, whilst another key site, Twitter, draws in more than 200million people.

Media research companies Arbitron Inc and Edison Research show that more than half of all Americans aged 12 and older use Facebook. Their research also shows that 92percent of Americans have some awareness of Twitter, and 20million Americans have a Twitter account.

These sites are having a huge impact on sports journalists and their work, and that impact brings with it a mixture of outcomes.

Sports departments are adopting social media guidelines, creating social media positions, promoting their brand online and media outlets and sports journalists are, at times, required to have a presence on various social networking sites.

The popularity of social networking is such that sports media professionals need not only to be aware of relevant sites, but using them on a very regular basis.

This brings with it both advantages and disadvantages but, handled correctly, social networking can and does benefit sports journalists.

The most popular social networking sites – Facebook and Twitter – are becoming an increasingly familiar part of the news itself. Stories on sports stars – their love lives, injury updates and even team namings – are often generated through the Twitter accounts of various athletes.

The sites are increasingly acting almost as sources for sports journalists particularly as more sports stars sign up to various social networks. A wide range of sports stars and athletes – from Shane Warne to Lance Armstrong to college athletes – have Twitter accounts, which are usually accessible to anyone and often these athletes are using these sites to communicate – and at times break – their own news.

There is, though, the danger of false accounts and hacking and, as such, traditional journalistic standards of verification are critical.

A classic example of this comes from Washington Post sportswriter and well-known columnist Mike Wise. Under a Twitter account that identified him as a Washington Post columnist, Wise tweeted a fake update to what was an on-going story, reporting that Pittsburgh Steelers' quarterback Ben Roethlisberger had been suspended for five games after allegations of misconduct – although the outcome had actually yet to be decided.

Wise says he wanted to make a point that online media can and do run with stories without verifying them.

Much as he went against all journalistic standards, he was proved right. The tweet was picked up by various media including the Miami Herald, the Baltimore Sun and NBC sports blog ProFootballTalk.

Wise was suspended from the Washington Post for one month.

His experience highlights the absolute need for verification, particularly when sourcing news from social networking sites and the inherent dangers of seeking out news solely from the web in general.

It also shows that sports media and reporters associated with media outlets need to be very careful with their own presence on social networking sites. Wise did not only damage his reputation, but could also have put in a dent in the credibility of the publication he worked for.

National Centre for Sports Journalism director Tim Franklin says he is worried that aspects of the digital era, such as social networking, are encouraging lazy journalism – and not just in terms of the lack of verification.

Reporters are not spending as much time in the field and are, at times, even conducting interviews via email.

Technologies have evolved to make reporting more efficient and allowed reporters to access information faster, however Franklin is concerned it can limit their personal interaction.

Social networking does, though, provide sports media with another outlet to promote stories as well as their brand and associated websites. A brief news bite on Twitter or Facebook may generate thousands of website hits and may encourage followers to buy the newspaper or watch a certain channel.

At the New York Times sports editor Tom Jolly has a strong presence on Twitter and Facebook, and tries to use Twitter as a professional tool and use Facebook as more of a personal and professional combined site. The New York Times' Twitter account - @nytimes – has almost three million followers, while Jolly himself has almost 8000.

Jolly encourages his reporters to be active on Twitter and there are links to their accounts on the paper's website.

Says Jolly: “The great thing about Twitter it it's a great opportunity to be pro-active in pushing news out to your readers. The website is great, but you're depending on people to come to your website. With Twitter it enables you to push the news to people who follow you and also to interact with your readers in a way that you can't in a more static environment.”

Jolly says it is important for reporters not to be too opinionated about certain issues and rather to use the sites as a way of promoting unique and interesting stories. While Facebook and Twitter are his main social media sites of choice, he also uses LinkedIn, YouTube and is experimenting with Tumblr, which is more of a blog site.

ESPN, too, has a reasonably strong presence on Twitter, attracting almost one million followers.

Popularity varies hugely and can depend on the population of the area respective media covers and also the amount of resources, time and effort each publication or broadcaster puts into its social networking. USA Today has 106,000 followers; the Chicago Tribune has 42,000 and the Indianapolis Star 15,000.

The uptake appears slightly lower among UK media, but major media institutions do still draw in followers in their thousands.



The Guardian newspaper has about 140,000 followers on Twitter, while its sport section attracts 45,000. The Daily Mail has 15,000; and the Telegraph has 21,000. BBC Sport has just 6600 followers and The Scotsman, under its @scotsmannews account, has 2200 and just 1207 under @scotsmanpaper.

Although sports media is able to reach a large number of people via this digital method, many sports editors feel social networking is yet to fulfil its potential in terms of building a connection with audiences; in particular in gaining their feedback.

The Scotsman digital editor Alan Greenwood says the paper “dips its toes” into the social networking realm at present, with its Twitter channels and Facebook pages, but he would ultimately like to see The Scotsman website becoming more interactive with various social networking sites.

“We want to make sure people interested in social networking are able to do it through our site and create opportunities for people to share their local stories or to engage with people who share the same interests. Then we can build a profile of user habits so we can target stories to them a lot more carefully.”

Jolly agrees social networking sites have unrealised potential, particularly in terms of getting readers to add, not only their feedback, but additional information that could be valuable to stories.

While social networking sites can be good avenues for sourcing stories as well as publishing news bites, there is also an inherent danger of falling victim to lazy journalism: finding a story online and publishing it before vetting or verifying any of the information.

Handled correctly, however, social networking can be an asset to a sports journalist.

## **CASE STUDY: LONDON 2012**

The 2012 Olympic Games have been heralded as the 'digital Games'.

And certainly, the London Olympic Games Organising Committee (LOGOC) will have a wealth of digital tools at its disposal as digital technology continues to evolve.

In the years since the summer Olympic Games were last hosted – in Beijing, 2008 – technology has continued to change and LOGOC have had to adapt to that. As such, via digital methods, the London Olympic Games are set to reach an audience in its billions.

Head of New Media for London 2012, Alex Balfour, presented the following figures in a slideshow in 2010, relating to the Winter Olympics in Vancouver that same year.

Vancouver2010.com:

Attracted 291million visits (compared to Beijing in 2008, which attracted 105million)

Had 83million unique visitors (Beijing 2008 had 70million)

Recorded 8.7million visits to its mobile site and 1.25million app downloads

Attracted 1.1million Facebook fans

Last year london2012.com was tracking double the traffic of vancouver2010.com at the same stage - and that's a trend Balfour is very keen to continue.

## **APPEALING TO THE MASSES**

But, while digital tools abound and continue to develop Balfour says it is crucial that the digital methods LOGOC put most of their resources into are those that can reach the most people.

Much of what Balfour and his team do in terms of new media is set in course even before the bidding process is entered into and, as he puts it, it is not exactly a "hot bed for innovation".

"Because we're a mass event we have to reflect how people use technology," says Balfour.

"Part of our broader vision is that it should be a Games for everyone – we don't wish to exclude people through our use of technology."

In some situations the organising committee is limited in that it must provide solutions that work and that are proven to work for a huge audience. For instance, while at least 95percent of people are expected to purchase their tickets online, the tickets themselves will be tried and tested paper tickets – not electronic or mobile.

Online tools have proved successful to date. Up to 10,000 torch bearers and 70,000 volunteers have largely been recruited online, the online shop sells more product than its offline equivalents, and half a million people receive a regular newsletter from LOGOC: its primary means of direct communication.

There is some scope to expand the digital mix, including looking into smartphone applications, tablet and touch screen devices, but Balfour reiterates his initial point about appealing to the masses: “We don’t want to miss opportunities, but if they’re not mass opportunities it’s not a great use of our resources to pursue stuff the majority of people don’t even know about.”

Balfour says, with digital, the organising committee tries to “move where people are moving” and, in that sense, he expects social and mobile media to become a bigger part of the committee’s digital mix.

In early 2010, the website, social networking and mobile were forming the primary digital tools.

## **London2012.com**

### **The london2012.com website is likely to attract up to 10billion visitors**

In early 2010 london2012.com was attracting about 1million visitors per month and is more of a ‘need to know’ site.

It is an important tool in terms of promoting key milestones, such as the ticket launch and ‘one year to go’ initiatives ahead of events such as the torch relay, the festival of culture and the Games themselves. It runs blogs from key staff at LOGOC and provides key information, particularly regarding ticket sales.

Come Games-time, more than 10billion visitors are expected to view the site and is expected to be one of the world’s top three websites.

Broadcasting rights prevent the site from streaming live video, but Balfour believes the site can give “absolutely comprehensive coverage of the Games at least as fast as anyone else is”.

There are key challenges with the site: one being the small window of time organisers have to introduce an audience to it, and clear navigation will be critical. Audiences will be more familiar with larger and well-established media sites, such as [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk), which will carry a huge amount of content. But, despite that, london2012.com is expected to attract billions of page views and, as such, user testing will be crucial in the lead up to the Games.

For results, london2012.com is expected to achieve an extremely high hit-rate. Up to 90percent of traffic to the site is expected to be during the Games and 70percent of that traffic is expected to be for results-based information.

There is no denying london2012.com will be vital during the Games.

Says Balfour: “There’s 4500 hours of live sport in 16 days of the Olympic Games alone. Mobile can deliver a lot of that information and the mobile app and the website will be critical. Facebook and twitter will field a lot of the dialogue communication, but they can’t possibly convey the depth of the information we want to cover. The website will be critical and will be the base point of everything.”

While the website will clearly play a huge role in LOGOC’s digital communication during the Olympic Games, it is also clear that other platforms can and will play hugely important roles in the digital mix.

## **MOBILE**

### **LOGOC organisers expect 300million mobile phones to be in circulation by 2012**

Balfour's vision for mobile is to have a browse able version of LOGOC's information for any mobile device, as well as producing apps on several different platforms.

There will be a results-specific app, one relating to general information, an app specifically for spectators which may include results and information, one for the torch relay and possibly some smaller, quirkier and sponsor-related apps. It is likely the apps will be free.

The organising committee's use of mobile and smartphone related communication techniques will, though, be based around the technology that can reach the most people.

"Even the iPhone, its reach is still very small even relative to mobile phone distribution; however its reach is very high so it appears in our access log as the most used device. Its distribution is still five percent. There is talk of 40percent smartphone distribution, or certainly sales, by 2012, but still the majority of phones will not be smartphones," Balfour says.

At the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010 about three percent of traffic was across mobile. During London 2012 organisers expect it to be between 10 and 20percent.

As such, Balfour is expecting mobile to play an important role in communicating news and information – not only directly from the organising committee, but also in terms of spectators and the public being able to upload content from venues and share their experiences with friends.

During the Football World Cup in South Africa in 2010 one mobile operator showed that more information was uploaded from stadia than was downloaded, says Balfour, and that is one aspect LOGOC will look to build on: "People want to share their experiences, so we are really trying to make the most of all of those opportunities for people to consume the way they want to consume and to share their experiences."

A huge part of that will be based on social networking.

## **SOCIAL NETWORKING**

### **Facebook has more than 500million active users worldwide. Twitter has more than 200million users**

Social networking – particularly Facebook and Twitter – will be important tools in LOGOC's communications mix in the lead up to and during the Olympic Games.

In early 2010 london2012 has more than 123,000 Facebook fans and more than 62,000 Twitter followers and Balfour rates both as highly valuable networks.

Twitter, says Balfour, is about "communicating in the moment" and is a brilliant tool for circulating links and information. In early 2010 @london2012 receives a 100percent return rate on followers versus links.

With its Facebook account LOGOC tries to keep its tone light and encourage interactivity among its followers by asking Olympic-related questions.

While both sites are integral to the organising committee's digital communications strategy, Balfour acknowledges they both need to be carefully managed.

"The challenge with both twitter and Facebook is that you can't use them to channel all your communication because people who use them want to be entertained. They're often on these sites in their downtime and they don't want to be bored, they don't want to have repeated messaging and they don't want it to be too corporate."

"It's going to be an interesting challenge to see where we go towards Games-time."

Balfour says social networking can also be beneficial in encouraging the public to get involved with LOGOC and its associated events in the build-up to the Olympic Games. An example of this will be seen during the torch relay, where Balfour is hoping to run a 'tweet the torch' exercise, whereby all of the tweets relating to the relay will be collated and as it goes through certain areas where there are a large number of tweets an online version of the torch will grow larger.

"A lot of people are engaged but not necessarily in the way you might want to direct them," says Balfour. "In any case, it has to be light-touch, fun and easy and these things are getting tougher because the quality threshold is going up and up for entertainment. The experiences people are getting are getting better and better so you've got to compete more and more to get peoples' attention."

LOGOC has also created its own social network – MyLondon2012 – as an avenue for volunteers and torch bearers to communicate with one another. Initially it will have privacy settings and act as a platform for those involved with the Games to interact, before it becomes a more public site and the message boards will be removed.

It seems LOGOC has its core digital platforms covered. It is clearly focussed on using the tools that can reach the most people, and using them to every possible advantage.

But that's not to say the organisation won't look at new and innovative ways to present its information and Balfour says it will be flexible so that, if new developments emerge close to Games-time, it can and will adapt to those.

London 2012 may well be the 'digital Games' and it is likely more people than ever will have access to Games-related news and information than ever before. The organising committee now has more opportunities than ever to present that. The key will be ensuring the information presented is accessible, interesting, appealing and easy to navigate, whilst taking full advantage of the digital tools available. There's a fine balance, but it's one Balfour and his team are more than capable of striking.

## TEACHING FOR THE FUTURE

Those responsible for sports journalism courses face a tough battle. With so many uncertainties surrounding the future of sports journalism, it is increasingly difficult to prepare students for a career in the industry.

Media professionals do agree that the fundamentals of journalism will always be desired by employers within sports media and, as such, they should be at the core of any sports journalism course or degree.

Sports-specific journalism courses are becoming more familiar, and employers are more willing than they have been in the past to hire students straight into sports newsrooms without cutting their teeth in general news first.

In 2008 Indiana University established the National Centre for Sports Journalism. The centre, based in Indianapolis with further campuses within the state, is the only one in America offering a masters diploma in sports journalism.

The course covers a wide variety of issues, given the students should have learnt the fundamentals of journalism in their undergraduate course. It includes:

- Media and society
- Business of sports journalism
- Media coverage of sports (topic will change each semester, most recently has included ‘Sex, Scandal and Controversy’ looking at a variety of topics including Tiger Woods’ affair and investigative work)
- Sports journalism law
- Research project with USA Today (students to compile all data and research on a topic –e.g. profits and losses in college athletic programmes across America and analyse the data which USA Today will then use for a story)
- Digital sports reporting
- Sports reporting
- Issues-based classes
- Creative project or masters’ thesis
- Sports broadcasting

The course has both a practical and academic nature, but the basis of it all, says course director Tim Franklin, is the fundamental skills of journalism.

“What is fundamental is good writing, solid reporting and teaching good journalism that works across all platforms,” he says.

“We’re not teaching how to do HTML and we’re not heavily into web design – though there is an element of that at grad level, but it’s really about the fundamentals of journalism that works across platforms.”

One key component offered at the National Centre for Sports Journalism is in multimedia, and this is becoming a critical element of most sports journalism courses. Employers want sports journalists

who can work across a multitude of platforms and, as such, courses throughout the UK and US are incorporating this aspect in a practical way.

Franklin, who boasts more than 25 years media experience, says with sports journalism, in particular, multimedia skills are now crucial.

He believes journalism schools across America need to get better at giving students the tools and the opportunities to learn multimedia skills earlier in their careers: “It’s going to be critical and is critical already because employers need people who can walk in and do these things.”

“With blogs you can be much more conversational than you can with a news story, and a long narrative that might be powerful in Sports Illustrated might not work online necessarily because people won’t read longer stories online in some cases. Having the ability to shoot video, edit video, to put together a multimedia package, to do graphics online, to design web pages ... I think there’s greater demand for multimedia in sports than there is in other areas like news or business.”

Academic director and Associate Professor Pamela Laucella says the centre stresses the need for practical experience, but the industry is also pushing the need for knowledge of other issues including economic and societal issues that are intensively covered in the course.

“It’s academic and industry but we know it will help them in a career in sports and the course will give them the specific skills and knowledge required. Jim Lefko (Indianapolis Star sports editor) says he will not hire anybody who does not know about all of these other issues, especially the economic issues. The magnitude and expanse of the sports industry is such that they need to know about all these other things – not just the games.”

Laucella feels it is important to keep students up to date with the state of the industry, and emphasises the importance of being multi-faceted and gaining skills in various platforms regardless of their career intentions.

Franklin agrees: “If you’re working on a television news station not only are you putting together a package for television, chances are you’re also writing a news story for the channel’s website – you’re performing the functions a print reporter would have done before. If you’re a print reporter you are streaming video – basically broadcast – for your newspaper website and a lot of newspapers now have partnerships with TV stations in their markets so journalists are going on air as experts and authorities in their area. If you’re a sports web operator, as broadband streaming video online become more ubiquitous your reporters are writing stories but having to shoot video and audio packages to go with that. You’ve got to be cross-trained, you’ve got to be a multi-tasker and you have to be able to not just write it but speak it and text it and tweet it and blog it.”

Another element of the course offered at Indiana University is a Public Relations component. Franklin says it makes sense for the centre to offer this, given the increasing opportunities for writers in the PR departments of major sports teams – departments which are increasingly becoming more like news departments. It is also important for sports journalists to understand PR practitioners and vice versa.

In the UK, Southampton Solent University offers a three year Bachelor of Arts in Sports Journalism, led by journalist and course leader John May. It is one of about 12 sports-specific journalism courses in the UK.

It, too, mixes academic and theoretical components with a focus on the practical.

May says the web plays a vital role in the course outline and the course is designed specifically to produce sports journalists who can work on a variety of platforms.

There is strong emphasis on multimedia skills, driven by the fact that websites demand that aspect of sports reporting. Multimedia skills, says May, are crucial to any sports journalist and the whole basis of the course at Southampton Solent is driven by multimedia.

Students learn about multimedia production, how to shoot video and edit that and audio files, learn electronic publishing skills and how to work with content management systems and have access to industry-standard broadcast equipment.

They are also responsible for a university sports-specific website ([www.solent-news.com/sports](http://www.solent-news.com/sports)) where they source and present all stories using multi-dimensional publishing skills and ideas. At present this is a public site but, as it is part of an assessed component of the course it will become a two-tier site, whereby the site as it is now will be an intranet and only accessible by staff and students at the university, and the best stories will be selected for presentation on a public site.

Although May acknowledges all of the skills taught at Southampton Solent are valuable for students embarking on sports journalism careers, there are three skills he feels have particular significance: shorthand, news gathering and experience in running a content management system. While two of those will have been assets for sports journalists of decades past, the third one is a clear indication of the way sports journalism has changed and is changing, and it highlights the importance of journalism schools maintaining industry trends.

Both Franklin and May recommend that students blog. May says one of the first questions a sports editor will ask of a potential employee is: do you blog, followed by: where can I access your blog, hence all of his students – even those reluctant at first – blog.

While blogging is not an assessed part of the degree at Southampton, May feels there is scope to teach students about the structure and style that create successful blogs.

Franklin says he encourages students to learn about blogging and the style of blogging and believes there needs to be extensive training on blogging in journalism schools and in newsrooms; particularly regarding what the standards are for it.

While these degrees, and other courses focussing on sports journalism, will prepare new sports journalists for careers which could cross any number of platforms, that does not spell the end for those who started their career long before the digital age, or even in the midst of its development.

May says experienced sports journalists need to adapt to the digital age. Not only do they need to think multi-dimensionally about the ways they present stories that can show more than the written word, but they increasingly need to use technology to submit their stories. When once a sports



reporter could simply phone in a story, those days appear long gone. Older journalists simply need to adapt to the digital age, or face becoming redundant in more ways than one.

One aspect Franklin is keen to explore is offering working sports journalists the chance to enhance – even gain – multimedia skills, although he says this is something newspapers in particular are increasingly offering their staff.

“I can see in the not so distant future, having an online course for journalists so you can go to a meeting online or Skype or video conference courses with current sports journalists,” he said.

Courses need to be constantly re-assessed. Feedback from industry is critical to this and will continue to be so as the digital age develops and a clearer future for the industry develops.

## CONCLUSION

It is an exciting time for sports journalists but it is also an uncertain one.

While there is a huge appetite for sports journalism, just how the core news and information will be presented in the future is yet to be determined as major media institutions battle to create a sustainable business model for a largely digital future.

As it stands, traditional forms of sports media – print, television and radio – are being sustained and, in many cases, the sports journalism presented on these platforms is improving in both quality and quantity.

For now, the nature of sports journalism is very much complementary. Audiences are accessing sports coverage as well as news and information on an extremely wide variety of platforms and more often than not, they are using more than one platform. Sports media needs to understand the complementary need of many of its audiences, and adapt to that, providing content on whatever device their audiences are on.

What remains unclear, though, is what the dominant device or platform will be for consumers of sports news and information in the future. Perhaps tablets and smartphones will become the modern newspaper but that seems a long way off, particularly somewhere like New Zealand where a relatively small population can result in high prices for such devices.

The online presence of sports media is crucial. Sports news websites are subjecting the work of sports journalists to global audiences, at times in their millions, and news is being distributed at a pace never seen before. Sports media in New Zealand needs to maintain their web presence, they need to ensure both the technological and content side of their websites are of extremely high quality and they need to continue to offer new and innovative ways of presenting sports news and information on an as-it-happens basis, without compromising quality of work.

Sports media organisations must stay in touch with technology, and most importantly the devices that can reach a mass audience. For many high profile media institutions, such as ESPN and MLBAM, being first to these devices can result in explosive growth.

As such, New Zealand sports media organisations need to be experimenting with applications for smartphones and tablets while the businesses are still supported by the revenue from more traditional forms of media. They need to get digital presentation right, and ensure they can offer a high quality of news, information, video and audio on a wide variety of platforms so they can adapt quickly as new technology evolves.

It is difficult to present hard and fast recommendations to sports journalists looking to prepare for a digital future, because that digital future is reasonably unclear from a business and revenue standpoint.

But one thing is certain: sports journalists need to be multi-skilled and able to work on a variety of platforms. Newsroom professionals agree the fundamentals of journalism will always be vital to sports journalism regardless of the platform, and those basic skills and standards could ultimately be

what helps traditional sports media and sports journalism survive. However it is, simply, not enough to deliver news and information on just one level.

At times, a match report or even a score will suffice, but even then audiences want these delivered to mobile or smartphone applications or websites. At other times, audiences crave video highlights, or a photographic slideshow, or snippet of audio from a press conference – and sports journalists need to deliver this, regardless of whether they work for broadcast, print, radio or a website.

Advice from sports media professionals consulted in this research suggests new sports journalists should blog and there are numerous outlets for this. Not only does blogging offer another skill to the now required on a sports journalists' CV, but it can strongly develop writing skills and this is often reflected in longer-form narratives. All indications suggest blogging is a form of writing that will play a big role in the future of sports journalism, so it needs to be embraced by sports media throughout New Zealand.

New Zealand is a nation of sports enthusiasts; many of them not shy when it comes to sharing their sporting opinions. Creative blogs that show unique but considered and, at times, humorous opinion and analysis have the potential to do well in that environment.

Sports journalists need to keep up to date with their training and more opportunities need to be made available to them – whether those opportunities be presented by employers or by education providers. This study would recommend that employers take every opportunity to introduce their staff to digital ways of presenting information, and that they provide the platforms and resources for their employees to gain practical experience in this.

Sports journalists, too, should be taking an interest in the success of digital coverage at other media outlets across the world and take every opportunity to learn multimedia skills and experiment with video and audio at every change.

For all the advantages digital coverage presents, traditional forms of coverage must not be neglected. Now, more than ever, it is critical that New Zealand newspapers, television and radio stations create a quality of work that will contribute to their survival. It is no longer enough to present a match report in the following days' newspaper – most fans will have seen the game or, if not, may have read a match report or opinion online and even viewed highlights and statistics. Traditional sports coverage needs to provide more than this. It needs to be insightful, original and considered journalism that will produce a value for that media outlet and to audiences.

The same applies to social networking sites and sports media's presence on these. Used wisely, these sites can lead to a loyal audience following. It is not enough to simply have a presence on twitter and Facebook – sports media needs to use those sites to every advantage by, again, presenting considered information.

The attitude from major sports media outlets in the UK and US regarding breaking news is encouraging. It is more important for most of these outlets to present accurate, verified and considered information than it is to break one sentence of news online or via another digital outlet. This is an attitude that should be replicated by New Zealand sports media. It is an attitude that has made analytical and investigative breaking news more valuable.

Now is a hugely exciting time for sports journalists. There are so many opportunities – whether it is in newspapers, multimedia, online, broadcast, social networking, digital-only, or for sports organisations themselves. Skills sports journalists are gaining and developing through their studies, and then through practical experience in industry, are hugely valuable in an increasing number of workplaces so it is crucial they continue to develop these skills.

There is also huge opportunity to be creative on any number of levels. Original and creative ways of presenting sports news and information are constantly in demand, and there is scope to experiment – which New Zealand sports media should take advantage of. It is important not to overdo something – video, audio, slideshows and such should be used when they can add value to a story and its audience, not simply because they are available – and it is equally important that when these digital tools are used, that they are used to a high standard.

Journalism courses in New Zealand – at high school and higher education levels – need to incorporate multimedia and web tools. A multimedia element should now be a given for any journalism course and this is crucial to the future of how sports journalists in New Zealand develop. More sports-specific elements should be included in journalism courses and a core, sports journalism course at university level in New Zealand could also attract students, and lead to higher standards in sports departments throughout the country.

Quality of news and information is more important than ever, but so is how that news and information is presented. With so much competition, sports media in New Zealand needs to provide a high quality of work. Quantity is becoming more important – the appetite for and nature of sports news is such that it needs to be updated around the clock – but quantity will generally only attract loyal audiences when the quality of that news and information is of a high standard. Regardless of where the future lies, standards of sports journalism need to stay high.

Sports media in the UK and US is embracing the digital world. New Zealand sports media needs to do the same because it is where the future of the industry lies.

There may not be a clear business model as yet, but if New Zealand sports media waits to see what that will be without experimenting with digital tools and devices as they become more mainstream, then they will be left to play catch-up – and that's a hard game to play, particularly in sports media.

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The future of sports media is in very good hands.

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## INTERVIEWS

- |                   |   |
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| Bob Bowman -      | Chief executive at Major League Baseball Advanced Media (November 2010)   |
| Tim Franklin -    | Director of the National Centre for Sports Journalism at the University of Indiana (October 2010)   |
| Tom Gleeson -     | VP (Digital Media) for ESPN International (via phone, January 2011)   |
| Alan Greenwood -  | Digital editor at The Scotsman (June 2010)  |
| Matthew Gould -   | VP Corporate Communications at Major League Baseball Advances Media (November 2010)   |
| Tom Jolly -       | Sports Editor, New York Times (November 2010)   |
|                   | NB: Tom is now Associate Managing Editor / Night News at the New York Times. At time of interview and of writing he was the sports editor and, as such, has been referred to in that position in this report. |
| Pamela Laucella - | Associate Professor and Academic Director at the National Centre for Sports Journalism at the University of Indiana (October 2010)  |

- John May - Course leader and senior lecturer in BA (Hons) Sports Journalism at Southampton Solent University (via phone, March 2011)
- Roger Mosey - BBC's Director of London 2012 and former Director of Sport at BBC (May 2010)
- Ronnie Ramos - Managing Director of Digital Operations at NCAA (October 2010)