

## A Historical Overview of Sports and Media in the United States

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Although the United States is a relatively young country, it has spawned many of the world's preeminent developments in sports communication, several of which epitomize modern sports-media relationships. In fact, the idiosyncratic nature of U.S. culture has greatly facilitated this close-knit, even symbiotic, association. As McChesney (1989) noted:

The nature of the sport-mass media relationship has been distinctly shaped by the emerging contours of American capitalism since the 1830s. On one hand, much of sport and virtually all of the mass media have been organized as commercial enterprises throughout this history. Many of the specific developments in the sport-mass media relationship can be fathomed only through the continual recognition that each of these institutions has been constituted of individual units first and foremost striving for economic profit in some level of competition with each other. On the other hand, sport emerges as an institution especially well suited culturally and ideologically, first, to the emerging capitalism of the century, and, second—and indeed, far more so—to the mature corporate capitalistic society of the twentieth century. (pp. 49–50)

We have no disagreement with the thrust of McChesney's (1989) assertion. However, for the sake of completeness and veridicality, we think the claim is overly narrow in two ways. First, we would argue that many cultural forces and social movements other than capitalism helped shape the complex, mutually interdependent relationship between sports and media in the United States. Second, it is important to recognize that some of the essential elements of the sports-media union in the United States, capitalistic or otherwise, were derived long before the

1830s. In fact, some of the most important formative roots of the relationships between sports and media in America were developed during the colonial era.

Looked at somewhat differently, during the more than two and a quarter centuries of America's existence, as the country made its transition from an agricultural society, through an industrial society, and finally into the early phases of an information society (Rogers, 1986), each epoch of social evolution has witnessed important sports-media developments that were affected by the evolving socio-cultural environment. In this chapter we attempt to highlight some of the most important developments in sports and media in each of these historical epochs, and we attempt to identify key motivational factors for these effects. Taken together, these developments have helped create a society whose citizens are voracious consumers of mediated sports, and media systems that are highly dependent on sports for their manifest content as well as their economic well being.

## **SPORTS AND MEDIA DURING THE AGRICULTURAL AGE**

The type of society that most early settlers of the American colonies experienced, and that is experienced by many citizens in developing countries around the globe today, is what is often called an agricultural society or an agrarian society (cf. Black & Bryant, 1995; Rogers, 1986). Typically life in agricultural societies is a struggle for survival, a series of challenges that must be met to garner one's daily bread. According to classical formulations of agricultural societies, neither sports nor media typically play dominant roles or fill essential social functions because leisure time is a rare commodity and so-called discretionary income is largely nonexistent. Despite these odds, some vital taproots of the sports-media interface were established in America during the agricultural age.

Undoubtedly the first and most important sports-media development during this era was the inclusion of sports reports in newspapers. "One of the earliest known sports stories appeared in the *Boston Gazette* on March 5, 1733. It was a description of a prize fight held in England, and it was copied from a London newspaper—a practice typical of the day" (Enriquez, 2002, p. 198). It is noteworthy that this event was covered as general news, as a matter of surveillance of the general environment, albeit long after the event took place. Also noteworthy is the fact that this earliest development in sports and media was imported from Europe. As we will see, most future innovations in sports and media were to come from America.

Because most colonial newspapers were written for the relatively small number of wealthy, better educated, elite potential readers—an orientation that lingered until the *Penny Press* era of the 1830s (Thompson, 2004)—and because many colonial sports events were grassroots in origin, newspaper coverage of sports occurred particularly when the sporting event was relevant within some larger social context. For example, newspapers might well cover a horse race, but only when a Northern horse raced against a Southern horse (i.e., regionalism), or they might cover a boxing match, but primarily when an American boxed against a Brit (i.e., nationalism; Enriquez, 2002). The sports covered most commonly were horse racing, which was the most popular sport of the day, and boxing, a sport that in those days was popular among the common folk and elite alike.

To functionally address this void in sports coverage by newspapers, the sports magazine, an early specialized medium, emerged and became quite popular. Seven sports magazines came into existence between the mid-1820s and mid-1830s, although some of them died soon after birth. These magazines, which constitute the second sports-media innovation of the agricultural era, only remotely resembled their modern heirs, and their journalistic standards typically were quite rudimentary. "In general, the editor-publisher was the sole owner, manager, and primary author for his or her particular magazine" (McChesney, 1989, p. 50). The most popular and influential of such magazines were John Stuart Skinner's *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine* (1829) and William T. Porter's *Spirit of the Times* (1821). Not only did these two magazines help popularize horse racing, they also did much to standardize thoroughbred racing nationwide, by reporting in substantial detail rules, betting standards, weights, times, and the like. In 1839, Porter purchased the *Turf Register* and folded it into the *Spirit of the Times* (Enriquez, 2002), thereby foreshadowing a trend that would come to typify the media institutions of the modern era. This forerunner of modern corporate media mergers provided a third major sports-communication innovation of agriculture-age America.

By the end of the 1840s, interest in sports and sports journalism had increased substantially. Porter's *Spirit of the Times* became quite successful, reaching 100,000 readers. It also expanded its coverage to include boxing and began to promote other less popular sports. Its most concerted effort to stimulate the American appetite for sports and to increase readership was a failed attempt to establish cricket as the national game (Nugent, 1929), so even the market leader of sports media during the agrarian era had one notable failure.

The 1830s and 1840s also witnessed a marked change in newspapers and their readership. The most remarkable change was the birth of the Penny Press, which made newspapers extremely profitable by expanding circulation through offering and promoting popular content; by targeting and attracting a new audience of middle-class, urban readers; and by shifting the burden of the costs of readership from circulation to advertising (Thompson, 2004). As might be anticipated from such shifts in markets and content, sports coverage increased in the Penny Press. Many of the innovations in sports journalism in this era came from James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*, although Bennett sometimes expressed regret about the increasing prominence of sports in society. Despite his own misgivings about his paper's sports coverage, "Bennett was one of the first exponents of 'sensationalism' as a means of generating circulation, and sport fit comfortably within this rubric" (McChesney, 1989, p. 51), so cover sports he did. Other prominent Penny Press newspapers that included sports content were Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* and Henry Raymond's *New York Times*. However, coverage was more occasional than regular, and nothing that approximated a daily sports page or sports column emerged in America during the agricultural age (Betts, 1974).

## **SPORTS AND MEDIA DURING THE INDUSTRIAL AGE**

The Industrial Revolution began in Britain in the late 1700s with the invention and widespread adoption and adaptation of the steam engine, which augmented human potential exponentially in the service of manufacturing and transportation. Although other countries such as France, Belgium, and the United States witnessed

Britain's success with considerable envy and began to gear up for industrial development, three fourths of the U.S. labor force was still engaged in agricultural pursuits in the 1790s. In fact, it was the middle of the nineteenth century before the United States fully entered the industrial age. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had become the global industrial leader in manufacturing and transportation, beginning what has become known as the Second Industrial Revolution. This second period of intense industrialization facilitated the development of numerous communication technologies, such as the telegraph, telephone, radio, and television, as well as major improvements in printing and composition technologies, along with the invention or refinement of many other industrial goods ("Industrial Revolution," 2005).

As the United States began its industrial revolution, sports were becoming increasingly popular, as well as becoming better organized and more commercialized. In fact, the industrial age seemingly provided a most hospitable climate for the development of sports. "As it did with many other aspects of society, the industrial revolution dramatically changed things as far as sports spectatorship was concerned" (Bryant, Zillmann, & Raney, 1998, p. 257). Or, as Zillmann and Paulus (1993) suggested,

Lending some degree of support to the orthodox Marxist view that spectatorship, as a significant form of recreation, is an outgrowth of the monotony of machine-dictated labor, sports events became the weekend love affair of all those whose workday was strictly regulated by production schedules. (p. 601)

As important as industrialization was to the development of sports communication during this period, the dominant social development of the time was regional divisiveness in the developing nation. During the devastating mid-nineteenth century Civil War, some new developments in sports took place. "The Civil War introduced baseball to an entire generation of Americans, as the troops on both sides played the game when time permitted. Indeed, baseball emerged as the preeminent national team sport during this period" (McChesney, 1989, p. 52). Shortly after the war, the first professional baseball league; the National League, was formed. Newspaper sportswriters were very influential in the development, advancement, and legitimization of the league. Much like the impact of sports magazines on horse racing during the prior century, a new generation of sportswriters and advocates, most of them newspaper-based this time, helped standardize and make more sophisticated the rules of and techniques for reporting about baseball, developing format innovations like box scores and detailed statistical analyses of pitching and hitting, which helped draw new fans to the new league. As Enriquez (2002) concluded,

Baseball was a solidly middle class sport with considerable appeal to the working man, a perfect sport for newspapers trying to expand downward across class lines to reach the middle and working classes. One such newspaper was James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*. Bennett's strategy for creating a broad-based truly popular newspaper centered on the use of news features, including sports news, to attract a wider audience. (p. 199)

With these breakthroughs came several "firsts," including (1) the first specialized sports reporters: "Earliest specialization in sports news is represented by the 'turf

men' who on some papers covered races in addition to other duties" (Mott, p. 443); (2) even more specialized baseball reporters: "Probably the first baseball reporter was Henry Chadwick, who had written about cricket matches for the *Times* and later the *Tribune*, but who went to work with the *Herald* as a sports reporter in 1862" (Mott, p. 443); (3) the first woman sports reporter: "A 'wild Irish girl' of robust stature named 'Middie' Morgan covered races and cattle shows for the *New York Times*, beginning in 1870" (Mott, p. 443); (4) the first newspaper sports pages (Stephens, 1987) and sports department: "Sports news increased in the seventies, and when Pulitzer bought the *World* he organized a separate sports department" (Mott, p. 443); and (5) the first sports editors: "By the end of the period, virtually all the great papers in the leading cities had 'sporting editors'" (Mott, p. 443)—all important innovations of the early stages of America's industrial age.

Sporting magazines continued to play an important role in sports development, including the advancement of baseball. Two new magazines—*Sporting Life* (1883) and *The Sporting News* (1886)—focused on baseball, and both were located outside of the New York media center (in Philadelphia and St. Louis, respectively). These magazines helped further legitimize baseball and fueled the fervor associated with this new, relatively egalitarian, national pastime.

This regular, routine reporting of sports in newspapers and specialized magazines helped shift the cultural attitude towards sports in general, and during the 1870s through the 1890s, America's love affair with sports began. The antisports attitudes of the Puritan era quickly dissipated and were replaced with a new "progressive" credo that sports were important for the development of mind, body, and society.

A second major contributory factor that aided the development of sports journalism was the adoption of compulsory education laws by several states, beginning with Massachusetts in 1851. The compulsory-education movement had the desired effect of upgrading the literacy of the common citizen, at least to the extent that readership of newspaper sports pages and sports magazines became much more widespread.

A third critical dimension of the social and economic development of sports was the infusion of new waves of immigrants into the American cultural milieu. These immigrants helped energize the new American industrial expansion, and because many of them lived in cities, they contributed importantly to the urbanization required to provide the critical mass needed to support professional sports teams. Moreover, because different ethnic groups tended to choose different cities—and even relatively homogeneous neighborhoods within a city—in which to live, this helped develop cultural distinctiveness in the fan bases in different cities, which helped create very distinct team "personalities," which, in turn, enhanced competition. These team identities led to the increased use of human interest elements in writing about sports contests and in myriad other ways facilitated the expansion of baseball and other team sports, as well as sports fans' interests in the coverage of those sports by the emerging mass media. Moreover, many of the immigrant groups brought with them interests in sports that had previously not been popular in the United States, which were covered by the specialized newspaper serving these groups, adding further diversity to the sports-media profile in America.

With these several developments, the symbiotic relationship between sports and media grew closer and closer. As Michener (1976) observed, "one of the happiest relationships in American society is between sports and the media. . . . In the early

years of this century baseball prospered mainly because it received at no cost reams of publicity in daily and Sunday newspapers" (p. 355). Seymour (1960) commented on this interconnectivity even more directly in discussing the development of a national association of baseball writers in 1887:

All sides now recognize that their interests are identical. The reporters have found in the game a thing of beauty and a source of actual employment. The game has found in the reporters its best ally and most powerful supporter. Hence the good feelings all along the line. (p. 351)

Several shifts in emphasis in sports coverage occurred during the late nineteenth century, and not all of the important changes in sports journalism were initially directed towards the new mass audience.

Middle-class newspapers also created a middle-class identity for the elite sport of intercollegiate football. Since colleges enrolled the sons of the well-to-do, intercollegiate matches became elite social events. Most newspapers covered football games with relatively little emphasis on the game itself and significant emphasis on the spectators. In a story on the Yale–Princeton match in 1897, the *New York Times* wrote, "A list of the well-known men and women who went to the football game from this city yesterday would be simply made up of the rolls of the Princeton and Yale Universities, the New York Athletic Club, and the Social Register." (Enriquez, 2002, p. 200)

Naturally, middle-class readers who desired upward mobility became very interested in this collegiate football phenomenon, which increased the demand for football tickets and for coverage of college football games in mass-audience newspapers. Once again, sports journalists help codify the rules of the game and the techniques for covering football contests as they explained details of the games to these new sports fans.

Not all sports coverage of the era was of team sports, of course. Some of the individual sports of the day that received extensive newspaper coverage might even seem a bit esoteric by contemporary criteria, such as newspapers' love affair with wheeled sports long before NASCAR came on the scene. Mott (1950) reported, "Throughout the bicycle craze of the nineties, many of the leading newspapers maintained special departments for wheelmen, sometimes edited by authorities in the field, giving news of cycle racers, of the activities of wheelmen's clubs, and of manufacturers' new models" (p. 579).

During the period bridging the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sports reporting gradually became a regular feature of daily newspapers. Major events, such as championship prizefights and leading horse races, drew substantial attention from most papers. When the first baseball World Series was played in 1903, even the stodgiest major newspapers developed an interest in sports, and sports gradually ascended the national stage. As Mott (1950) put it, "Emphasis on sports was characteristic of the yellow press, which developed for that department a slangy and facetious style. This exploitation did much to promote national interest in league baseball and in prizefighting" (p. 579). McChesney (1989) added, "The 'nationalization' of sport was greatly encouraged by improvements in transportation,

communication, and social mobility" (p. 54). With nationalization and increased public interest, "News of sports had a remarkable development during the period. It came to be segregated on special pages, with special make-up, pictures, and news-writing style" (Mott, p. 579).

A concomitant development during this period was the emergence of star sportswriters, who fused their journalistic fervor with a love of sports and of colorful language, the combination of which made sports journalism a recognized and celebrated form of communication and entertainment:

Joe Vila, of the *New York Sun*, who invented play-by-play reports of football games; Damon Runyon, of the *Denver Post* and the *New York American*; W. O. McGeehan, who began a distinguished career on San Francisco papers and finished it on the *New York Herald Tribune*; Charles E. Van Loan, of various California and New York papers, and many others. (Mott, 1950, p. 579)

World War I contributed to the nationalization of sports and to the centrality of sports to American culture because military leaders thought that keeping their soldiers, sailors, and pilots who were posted overseas abreast of sporting events back home was good for the morale of the troops. Therefore, sports were covered by military publications, and military personnel from all areas of the United States discussed and cursed each other's teams. This focus seemingly primed the returning military personnel's interest in sports when the fighting ended and the troops returned stateside to family and home.

When U.S. military personnel returned from Europe, they found newspapers with increasingly sophisticated sports coverage. Moreover, they found a generation of gifted sportswriters who left their imprint on sports journalism and the American psyche in the post-World War I period. Charley Dryden in San Francisco and Grantland Rice in Nashville, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and New York City made their popular sports columns some of the most widely read and entertaining features of newspapers of the day. Rice, in particular, seemed to be a person for the times.

Grant came into the world at a fortunate time for us all. . . . Life still meant, to the great majority of Americans, only work—hard work, long hours—the harder and longer the more commendable. Play was for boys and for fools. It was the function and duty of men to work.

This austere tradition Grant helped mightily to break down. He was the evangelist of fun, the bringer of good news about games. He was forever seeking out young men of athletic talent, lending them a hand and building them up, and sharing them with the rest of us as our heroes. He made the playing fields respectable. Never by preaching or propaganda, but by the sheer contagion of his joy in living, he made us want to play. And in so doing he made us a people of better health and happiness in peace: of greater strength in adversity. This was his gift to his country; few men have made a greater. (Rice, 1954, unnumbered prologue)

Rice's lead paragraph in the *New York Tribune* on October 19, 1924, describing a Notre Dame–Army football game, is one of the most quoted newspaper leads ever,

and we feel obligated to add to its total count in order to share his gift and a feel for the eloquent if overstated writing of the time:

Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden. They formed the crest of the South Bend cyclone before which another fighting Army football team was swept over the precipice at the polo Grounds yesterday afternoon as 55,000 spectators peered down on the bewildering panorama spread on the green plain below. (p. 1)

Novak (1976) called this opening “stanza” “the statue made of words” (p. 243), because the column led to the creation of an actual statue of the football version of the Four Horsemen. Enriquez (2002) reflected, “Rice’s style was lush, romantic, lyrical, full of classical and historical allusion, often written in verse. His voice was often imitated and satirized but, as with Dryden before him, never with his skill” (p. 201).

Writing that approached this level of insight or eloquence earned bylines for preeminent sportswriters, a very rare occurrence in journalism in this period, and their sports columns often graced the front pages of newspapers as circulation builders. Clearly sports journalism and sports commentary had come of age.

As Betts (1952) observed, “sport swept over the nation in the 1920s, and, at times, seemed to be the most engrossing of public interests” (pp. 422–423). Susman (1975) added, “It was in the ‘20s that the American infatuation with professional athletics began, giving a virtual coup de grace to religion as the non-economic and non-sexual preoccupation of millions of middle-class Americans” (pp. 191–192). Clearly the 1920s—often referred to as the *Golden Age of Sports*—saw media coverage of sports reach new heights in American culture, and the sports pages became a central, widely read, and indispensable section of the daily paper. Schlesinger (1933) reported that whereas the average newspaper devoted .04% of its editorial content to sports in 1880, and 4.0% in 1900, by the 1920s the average paper devoted between 12% and 20% of its editorial space to sports coverage.

One of the considerable challenges for journalists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was knowing how and where to draw the line between journalism and public relations, between sports news and sports publicity. The emerging sports teams and sports leagues witnessed firsthand the power of the press to build and sustain audiences for their games (and dollars for their coffers) and, knowing that sports journalists were poorly paid, rolled out the red carpet and put on the feedbag to make reporters act like cheerleaders with media megaphones. The teams, especially major league baseball teams, plied journalists with free food at the ballpark and free transportation, food, and lodging if they accompanied the team on the road (Enriquez, 2002). In return, they expected the sportswriters to serve as publicists for their team and their sport (another innovation that lingers as a curse of modern times).

A worthy case study of the extent to which such publicity resulted in competition between newspapers, albeit with boxing rather than baseball, is Stephens’ (1983) examination of newspaper coverage of “The Fight of the Century” (a boxing match between “Gentleman Jim” Corbett versus “Ruby Rob” Fitzsimmons that was held on Saint Patrick’s Day in 1897) by the *Chicago Tribune* and the *San Francisco Examiner*. As journalism historian Mott (1950) suggested, “No sports story had ever been played up so prominently as was the Corbett–Fitzsimmons bout in Nevada City in



## 2. SPORTS AND MEDIA IN THE U.S.

1897" (p. 578). According to Stephens (1983), both the *Tribune* and the *Examiner* featured numerous stories and illustrations about the fight for several days leading up to it, with some of the sensationalized stories commanding the front page of the papers, and with both papers running specials or extras to cover the fight even more extensively. "Stories set in larger than average type, huge and prominent illustrations and novelty style headlines were used" (Stephens, 1983, p. 11). On the actual day of the fight, the *Chicago Tribune* ran 15 articles on the fight, including a front-page article. Not to be outdone, the *San Francisco Examiner* ran 16 articles and 8 illustrations on the fight on March 17, and on March 18 ran 21 articles and 16 illustrations. That's sensationalism!

Speaking of the *Tribune*, Arch Ward, the sports editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, was probably the most blatant publicist among the prominent journalists of the early twentieth century. Among Ward's public relations activities for various sports were founding the major league baseball All-Star Game, an annual football game between the National Football League (NFL) champions against a team of college all-stars, the Golden Gloves amateur boxing tournament, and the All-America Football Conference (a rival to the fledgling NFL). Ward actively curried the favor of the sports leagues and teams, but in return he expected access to sources that others did not receive and information well before it was released to other newspapers. It is anyone's guess how intimate Ward and kindred sports-media bedfellows would have become had it not been for the development of alternative celluloid and electronic media, which soon vied successfully for favors of their own, reducing the grip that sports seemed to be developing over newspapers (Enriquez, 2002).

The incursion of the newer media of the early industrial age into sports journalism is foreshadowed by a note in Stephens' (1983) aforementioned case study of "The Fight of the Century." On the day of the fight (March 17, 1897), the following note appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*: "The *Tribune* will display bulletins today on the prize fight. It has secured a telegraph wire to the ring in Carson City and a competent man will describe the progress of the fight, blow by blow, until the contest is decided. The bulletins will be posted thirty seconds after they are written in the far Western city" (Stephens, 1983, pp. 10-11). "Media historians have devoted a substantial amount of attention to the effects of the telegraph on newspapers" (Smethers & Jolliffe, 1992, p. 83). One of the noteworthy features of their reports is who first utilized the telegraph for sports reporting—none other than "the father of wireless": "Wireless was first used for news reporting in connection with the international yacht races of 1899. Guglielmo Marconi, a young man of 25, handled the transmission of this report for the Associated Press" (Mott, 1950, p. 579). Although some of the changes wrought by the telegraph have been evaluated negatively (e.g., standardization of content and format), others have suggested that the telegraph helped build the enormous power of the press, adding increased timeliness to the content of newspapers (e.g., Tebbel, 1974). For certain, the telegraph helped impart timeliness to sports communication and furthered the nationalization of sports.

A second newer technology that helped publicize sports and add to the stature of athletes was the newsreel. Film began to develop as a mass medium during the late nineteenth century, and when movie houses became popular in the 1920s and 1930s, newsreels became a standard part of America's new Saturday pastime of going to the movies. Pathé News and Fox Movietone News produced hundreds of these celluloid news magazines. Among the most popular newsreel features were clips from sporting events, and sportsreels helped nationalize sports by visualizing

major sports heroes who had never before been seen by sports fans outside of the cities where they played.

However, it was with the emerging electronic medium of radio that sports really caught fire. The commercial birth of radio is typically dated 1920. "The entrepreneurs of early radio were quick to see the value of sports coverage, especially live play-by-play" (Smethers & Jolliffe, 1992, p. 83).

The first broadcast of a major league baseball game was heard on August 5, 1921, over station KDKA in Pittsburgh, the nation's first radio station. In 1923 the World Series was broadcast to an ad hoc network of stations across the country. The first program aired on the NBC radio network was a sporting event, the heavyweight championship fight between Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney on September 23, 1926. Radio broadcasts of sporting events allowed millions of fans to experience events with an immediacy that newspapers could not match. (Enriquez, 2002, p. 202)

Despite considerable early resistance to radio by team owners and managers, who feared that radio coverage would erode game attendance, loyal listeners soon regularly crowded round the family radio set to listen to sportscasts of all kinds. Bittner and Bittner (1977) suggested that radio was the first "personal medium" (p. 3), and they noted that it was sports that brought the nation together on radio—virtually, at least: "By January of 1927, NBC had two networks in operation, the Red Network and the Blue Network. NBC utilized them to cover the 1927 Rose Bowl Game, which became America's first transcontinental network broadcast" (p. 3).

Radio had the capability of infusing the immediacy of live sports coverage with gratuitous drama in ways heretofore impossible. The inimitable James Michener (1976) shared this story in his book *Sports in America*:

Let me explain how I became a connoisseur of radio and television broadcasters. I was working in Colorado back in 1936, and on a blustery Saturday afternoon I was driving home with my car radio on. It was a football game between two western universities, late in the final quarter. It was obviously a game of heroic proportions, with players from the home team—I forget its name—performing miracles. They must have been playing over their heads, because although I didn't catch the score, they were socking it to their opponents, and the announcer was breathless in his excitement over the performance of his heroes. Then the game ended and he revealed the score. His miracle players had lost, something like 42-0, and I realized for the first time that the announcer's job was to create suspense, sustain tension, and give the listener the feeling that he had participated in a game which had been decided only in the final seconds. (pp. 383-384)

Like newspapers and magazines before them, radio sportscasting was soon to develop its own stars. The preeminent sportscaster of the 1920s was Graham McNamee, who was not particularly knowledgeable about sports but had a great voice and a flair for the dramatic. When the Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney heavyweight boxing matches were broadcast on makeshift national radio networks in 1926 and 1927, more than 100 radio listeners purportedly dropped dead from listening to McNamee's blow-by-blow tense calling of the fight (Evensen, 1996; Rader, 1984). Evensen (1996) examined these Dempsey-Tunney fights not only in terms of

important social and media developments, but also as sports events that contained or were imbued with many of the ingredients of great drama, which, in turn, helped create a new generation of media celebrities:

The first [of two parallel struggles] is the story of two fighters of very different temperament and background whose personal drama was staged in a squared ring through the promotional genius of the era's greatest showman. The other contest was fought between star sportswriters and senior editors of different dispositions and values, whose struggle over tall-tale telling in the nation's sports pages, and eventually in radio, reflected journalism's uncertain complicity in the manufacture of celebrity in an era of personal publicity. Each battle sheds light on the role of sport, celebrity, and mass-mediated civic spectacle in defining and stylizing competing values of urban America during the nation's interwar era. (p. x)

The stories that could be told about the firsts and foibles of early radio sportscasting are legion, but we will offer only one more example of the electronic frontier mentality of the era, which also illustrates the fusion of radio sportscasting with another fledgling medium, with the resultant product seasoned with drama—a convergence that has characterized the sports-media relationship ever since. Coverage of home games by radio flourished in the 1920s, but because AT&T and its patent alliance charged exorbitant rates for long-distance telephone lines, covering away games was prohibitively expensive for radio stations. So the radio entrepreneurs of the day utilized dramatic “re-creations” to fill the void.

Like live game broadcasts, re-creations were colorful, lively, up-to-the-minute broadcasts of ongoing sports contests—provided by announcers who were nowhere near the games. . . . Instead these announcers broadcast from their home studios, re-creating the games using Morse code play-by-play coming in from distant ballfields via Western Union. This technique made continuous coverage of sports teams possible. Continuous coverage, in turn, helped develop a following among fans and a highly salable programming schedule for radio stations. (Smethers & Jolliffe, 1992, p. 84)

Re-creations remained popular until 1955, when the courts ruled that broadcasters had to pay teams a royalty for re-creating their games, which brought that practice to a screeching halt (Rader, 1984). Given the success of re-creations, is there any wonder that play-by-play and color commentators today feel free to add drama and illusion to their sportscasts and to our games?

As might be expected, radio's success with sportscasts left newspapers scrambling. One adjustment newspaper editors and writers made was to focus on areas not covered very well in radio play-by-play—strategy and analysis, sports personalities, off-the-field events, misdeeds of athletes, and so forth. In other words, they adjusted their focus and provided informational and functional alternatives, the way older media have responded to newer media through the years. This helped maintain newspapers' place in the media market among readers and advertisers alike.

A new and very different sports magazine also emerged to provide what radio could not. Simply called *Sport*, it was first published in 1946. “It was the first general-circulation magazine devoted entirely to sports. Its main distinction was its full-page color photographs, usually in heroic action poses or in strong close-ups and

well suited to being cut out and tacked to a boy's bedroom wall" (Enriquez, 2002, p. 202).

Again, the idea was to find a market niche to provide what radio could not, and because *Sport* hired a superlative slate of sportswriters, it succeeded admirably.

Newspapers also were to find two eloquent sports journalists in the post-World War II period. Red Smith, who did most of his best writing for the *New York Herald Tribune*, was the heir apparent to Grantland Rice, and he was the most widely syndicated sports columnist of the day. Like Rice, he offered a literate, witty style, although Smith was much more understated in delivery than was Rice. Jimmy Cannon, who also wrote for New York newspapers, primarily the *Post* and the *Journal American*, also provided a poignant voice for sports. "His style was romantic, world-weary, witty, and passionate" (Enriquez, 2002, p. 202). Smith and Cannon helped bring sports to life for a new generation of sports enthusiasts and chronicled the best sports stories of their time in their memorable manners.

But the biggest sports story of the post-World War II American industrial age was television. Like radio, television allowed sports fans to experience their games with immediacy and with more detail than newspapers or sports magazines would ever care to provide. Additionally, unlike any other medium to date, television provided moving pictures to accompany the sounds that radio offered, and with the addition of color commentators, cutaways, crowd shots, close-ups of emotional displays, and a wide range of special effects, television was to create a new sport of every sport it covered. Inevitably television was transformative—sometimes it transformed sports for the better, sometimes for the worse, sometimes it even created new sports of its own (e.g., Michener, 1976; Rader, 1984). As Enriquez (2002) reported, "Television broadcasting affected different sports in different ways. It devastated boxing, had mixed effects on baseball, and proved a boon to college and professional football" (p. 202).

Lest we get ahead of our story, we should examine the roots of sports television:

Television came into the sports world on May 17, 1939 as the RCA mobile TV unit showed a Columbia-Princeton baseball game from Baker Field. A single camera stood near the third-base line, sweeping back and forth. By the time the unit went to Ebbets Field for a Brooklyn Dodgers and Cincinnati Reds game, they had added a second camera. (Hitchcock, 1989, p. 1)

Initially television was not to be the darling of team sports because the primitive video technologies and fledgling camera operators and editors were to make somewhat of a mockery of the complex games and play of team sports.

Indeed, two of the leading sports on television were professional wrestling and Roller Derby. They were often broadcast during prime time, since they were ideally suited for low-budget television; a single camera could focus on one or two people at a time. . . . At its high point, wrestling was broadcast by over 200 stations on a weekly basis, but it was quickly relegated to the fringes of television, along with Roller Derby, as television turned to baseball and football and more expensive nonsports prime-time fare by the mid-1950s. (McChesney, 1989, p. 60)

However, it was not until the early 1960s that television was to truly wrest control from its sibling broadcast medium, radio, and begin an ascendancy in sports

coverage that was to last through the portals of the information age to the present era. Videotape technology had emerged in the 1950s, in part developed by Bing Cosby Enterprises (Nmungwun, 1989), and this was to prove to be an essential technological development for advancements in television sportscasting. Relying heavily on videotape, ABC-TV created a sports anthology show called the *Wide World of Sports*, which launched in 1961 (Hitchcock, 1989).

Through the use of videotape and commercial jet travel, events from around the world (such as the world championships of track and field) could be recorded, returned and edited into a tight, exciting package. The use of videotape gave the game of football a whole new image. Videotape was used to create the "instant replay." It was first used during the 1963 New Year's Eve Army-Navy game. During 1964, it was a standard sportscasting technique. The instant replay changed football from brutal, quick collisions into graceful leaps, tumbles and falls. It gave football an aura of art in movement. It made football attractive to entirely new segments of the audience. (Hitchcock, 1989, p. 2)

McChesney (1989) has argued cogently that in addition to its audiovisual superiority, five major developments led to the supremacy of television in sports coverage. First was its skyrocketing penetration rate, as it rapidly entered the vast majority of American homes. Second was the radically improving technology of television, including the development of color technology. Third was the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961, "which permitted professional sports teams in a league to negotiate as one unit with broadcasters" (p. 61), and which prior to that time had been considered an infringement of antitrust laws. Fourth was a trend by networks and stations to purchase broadcast rights directly from the teams and leagues, which allowed the media to then sell time on their sportscasts to advertisers, which proved to be immensely profitable. Fifth, and most importantly, was simply that certain big-ticket advertisers, like manufacturers of automobiles, trucks, and business equipment, discovered that televised sports gave them an ideal entry into the living rooms—and thereby the eyes and ears—of the highly desirable male audience.

The importance of a single individual to the success of sports television also should be mentioned. Roone Arledge, a producer for ABC Sports, was one of the most influential change agents in all of television. As Sugar (1978) noted, "In a field devoted to fashioning halos for personalities, Roone Arledge wears a special nimbus. He is that rarity in American television, a behind-the-scenes superstar" (pp. 61-62). Or,

His stature rests not so much on being a one-man laboratory for the discovery of new forms, as in being a master of theory and techniques who has made important contributions to the development of both. . . . However you look at it, he has made ABC Sports the biggest jock on the broadcast block and has had a fertilizing effect on all of television sports. (p. 62)

What did Arledge do that was so different from his predecessors or competitors? Many things, but perhaps most important was that he presented all televised sports from the perspective of what the typical fan would see if he or she attended the game live.

He prepared a mammoth loose-leaf notebook, still legendary in the corridors of ABC, which said that covering a televised game should be just like being a spectator at the game; you not only looked at the game in front of you, but at other people in the stands, the players on the sidelines, and the action around you, whether that be cheerleaders or marching bands or personalities in the stands. (Sugar, 1978, p. 77)

In addition to bringing the viewers to the game—as well as bringing the whole game to viewers—Arledge revolutionized the production components of the game. He placed microphones on the field; he first doubled and then tripled the standard number of cameras used to cover the game; he accentuated the personalities of players and coaches; he oversaw the development and implementation of the instant replay; he allowed the play-by-play and color commentators much more freedom to dramatize and personalize the event, as well as to use replay and graphics to underscore analysis; and he made *Monday Night Football (MNF)* de rigueur viewing in sports bars and homes throughout America, thereby extending the weekend one more day for avid football fans. Enriquez (2002) summarized Roone Arledge's contributions quite well: "Under Arledge, television assumed every role previously played by print media: it served as the primary medium for experiencing events, it provided detailed analysis, and it gave human faces to the participants" (p. 205).

Perhaps because ABC trailed CBS and NBC in overall program ratings, the network attempted numerous sports innovations during the 1960s and early 1970s. In addition to launching *Wide World of Sports* in 1961 and *Monday Night Football* in 1970, it also pioneered coverage of the Olympic Games, taking the games "from relative anonymity to the premier sporting event telecast every four years" (McChesney, 1989, p. 63). ABC also made the Olympic coverage lucrative, and rights payments for Summer Olympics broadcasts jumped from \$5 million in 1968 to hundreds of millions in the 1980s.

While ABC sports was developing its innovative sports department, which would ultimately result in Roone Arledge becoming Vice President for Sports (and later, of news), CBS was staking much of its sports future on the fledgling National Football League (NFL), which also proved to be a sage move. Prior to the late 1950s, professional football had been a relatively minor attraction in the sports world, although it certainly had a loyal nucleus of hardcore fans. However, as television developed into a national medium and television's production values and professional announcing teams rapidly became more sophisticated, the NFL began to capture the imagination of fans nationwide. This was a sport that seemed ideally suited for television. Football's periodized action allowed sportscaster commentary and special effects like instant replay to complement and dramatize play, and its violence and mayhem and its relatively slow ball movement and highly visible ball were easy for viewers to see. Season these and other favorable ingredients with the wise guidance of the NFL's television-savvy early commissioners Bert Bell and Pete Rozelle, two of the most gifted architects of televised sports in the history of the sports-media tradition, and CBS had a recipe for great success. Indeed, within a decade of its regular coverage by national television, the NFL had become America's leading spectator sport. In 1962, CBS agreed to pay the NFL the then unheard-of amount of \$4.5 million per year for broadcast rights. Two years later, with rising visibility and concomitantly spiraling Nielsen ratings, Rozelle negotiated a rights fee of \$14 million per year (McChesney, 1989), and the stage was set for the ascendancy of the NFL to become America's sport—at least its most beloved televised sport.

Despite its successes and innovations, the NFL was relatively conservative in its expansion policies throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Entrepreneurs in major cities without NFL teams wanted in on the action at a much faster pace than the NFL commissioners thought was beneficial to the league. Therefore, in 1960, team owners in heretofore-unserved cities formed a competitive professional football league—the American Football League (AFL)—and the AFL negotiated a contract with ABC Sports prior to its initial kickoff. This set a new precedent in terms of sports-media relationships because for the first time a new sports product and brand was created with the hope that new audiences and advertisers would make the venture financially feasible largely through television revenues. This was a model that would become quite common in the information age.

The next major development in NFL-media relationships occurred in 1965, when NBC entered into a bidding war with CBS for NFL coverage rights and lost. Then NBC turned its attentions to the AFL, with which it negotiated a \$42-million rights contract over a five-year period, which gave the AFL near parity with the NFL in terms of coverage and compensation. “In effect, the network had become a copromoter of the AFL. The plan worked. The AFL began to sign top NFL players and the NFL, once it realized that the NBC contract guaranteed the AFL’s existence” (McChesney, 1989, pp. 62–63), realized that change was inevitable. In 1966, Congress passed legislation that permitted the AFL to merge with the NFL. “As part of the deal, NBC was permitted to telecast half of the merged league’s games along with CBS” (McChesney, p. 63).

The two parts of the merged league agreed to play a championship game after the regular season ended. The first game was played on January 15, 1967. It was technically called “The AFL–NFL World Championship Game of Professional Football”; fortunately, it soon became known as the Super Bowl—the Goliath of media-sports collaborations. The first Super Bowl was telecast by both NBC and CBS and was the first dual-network, color-coverage simulcast of a sports event. It also attracted the largest audience ever to see a sporting event at that time—73 million viewers. This, of course, proved to be par for the course. The Super Bowl is routinely the top-rated telecast of the television season, and 37 of the top 50 sports telecasts of all time are Super Bowl Games (“TV Basics,” 2005). Moreover, Super Bowl Weekend has achieved the status of a national holiday, created not by Hallmark but by television and the NFL.

Eying the success of the NFL’s television coverage, the commissioners of professional baseball, basketball, and hockey, as well as collegiate football and basketball, all negotiated lucrative network broadcast contracts during the 1960s. Building on the success of these affiliations, during the 1970s and 1980s the networks programmed more and more sports as they discovered the immense popularity that sports programming offered. The advertisers loved sports programming because it enabled them to reach the affluent male audience that was otherwise difficult to get en masse. By the mid-80s, the three major networks were all selling more than \$1 billion dollars in advertising on their sports programming (Powers, 1984; Rader, 1984), and the era of Big Sports–Big TV had definitely arrived. Viewing of sports television was to become the prototypical leisure activity of the industrial age—symbolizing the way the working man celebrated his free time.

As might be anticipated, Big Sports–Big TV was to create a new celebrity class—the big-time television sportscaster. Many names could be found on a list of sportscaster celebrities of the industrial age, including Curt Gowdy, Jim McKay,

John Madden, Pat Summerall, Al Michaels, Dick Stockton, Keith Jackson, Don Meredith, Frank Gifford, Brent Musburger, and Dick Vitale—many of whom survived or even thrived in the information age—but the archetype sportscaster of the industrial age was Howard Cosell. Howard Cosell was a sportscasting-lightening rod; for many years he was simultaneously voted the “most loved” and “most hated” sportscaster in America. “He had neither a pleasant voice nor a pleasant face, but he worked hard, never flinched from asking tough questions, and utilized his prodigious memory and prodigious vocabulary to great advantage” (Enriquez, 2002, p. 205). Cosell was a protégé of Rooney Arledge. Cosell’s early reputation was made as a highly competent fight announcer, and Arledge had supported Cosell’s unflinching endorsement of boxer Muhammad Ali through a string of controversies (i.e., Ali’s religious conversion, name change, political stances, refusal to be inducted into the Army). Cosell paid Arledge back for his loyalty with his much-heralded reporting for ABC at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, where he covered the Palestinian terrorists’ capture and execution of Israeli athletes, as well as the games themselves, with considerable sophistication and aplomb.

But it was for his controversial, opinionated announcing on *Monday Night Football* that Cosell is best known. As Cosell repeatedly claimed, “We make sports entertaining.” He was indeed a consummate showperson, and *MNF* provided a worthy stage.

He was intelligent, insightful, and provocative, utterly unlike the smooth, portentous commentators working NFL games on other networks. He was teamed with Don Meredith, a former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys. Cosell’s sesquipedalian, provocative persona contrasted nicely with Meredith’s folksy, regular-guy style. Keith Jackson, a veteran of ABC’s college football crew, provided play-by-play, but the main focus was the by-play between Cosell and Meredith. (Enriquez, 2002, p. 205)

When Keith Jackson left the *MNF* team after one year with Cosell, Frank Gifford replaced him, and the Cosell–Meredith–Gifford trio flourished for several years. However, “much of the show’s popularity derived from viewers’ loathing of Cosell. Viewers were angered when he told them that a player wasn’t particularly good or even that the player had made mistakes. Hating Cosell became a national pastime” (Enriquez, 2002, p. 205).

Two new sports media founded in the industrial age have also flourished in the information age. The first is an update of an innovation of the agriculture age: a new sports magazine. In many ways, *Sports Illustrated* offers a classic example of an old medium responding to a new one—in this case, the incursion of television into the world of sports. *Sports Illustrated*, or *SI*, was first published in 1954. Magazines were looking for sports that television was not covering, so *SI* first covered upper-class sports like yachting and golf. However, under the leadership of managing editor Andre Laguerre from 1960 to 1974, the magazine shifted its focus toward mainstream sports, developed a distinctive style, and “became the dominant national news medium for middle-class spectator sports” (Enriquez, 2002, p. 204). *SI*’s niche was explaining the nuances of popular spectator sports, like college and pro football, baseball, basketball, and hockey, to the armchair spectator long before the metaphor of the couch potato became popular. It also became the locus for innovative sports action photography and was noteworthy for constantly seeking new photographic and printing technologies and techniques. But the magazine was



best known for its excellent writing (and, much later, for its swimsuit issue; see Curtis, 2005, for an historical overview). Writers like Dan Jenkins and Frank Deford set the tone for the magazine, offering surprisingly sophisticated psychological and socio cultural insights as well as lucid prose. Not only did *Sports Illustrated* tackle traditional sports stories, it also wrote about and editorialized about the complex and pertinent sports issues of the day. It worked hard to become a complementary sports medium with television, and thereby became an important institution in its own right.

Another important sports-media innovation of the industrial age began on September 7, 1979. Father and son Bill and Scott Rasmussen began a bold and extremely successful new chapter in the history of sports and media in the United States that day, by launching the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, better known as ESPN. The new 24-hours-per-day cable network began as an alternative to the sports section of daily newspapers and originally featured short sports segments in standard television news-type broadcasts. It also featured coverage of relatively unorthodox sporting events, such as tractor pulls, games of the short-lived United States Football League (USFL), college soccer, and hydroplane and auto racing, which sometimes seemed to be covered to fill time as much as to attract viewers ("ESPN," 2005). Its signature program from the day of the launch was a highlight program originally called *Sports Recap* but soon renamed the more familiar *SportsCenter*. Featuring an engaging cast of smart-mouth, quipping, clever anchors like Chris Berman (hired one month after ESPN's inception; see "Chris Berman," 2003), Dan Patrick, and Keith Olbermann and managed behind the scenes by the brilliant John Walsh, *SportsCenter* become obligatory viewing for several generations of sports enthusiasts. Or, as Enriquez (2002) indicated, "*SportsCenter* inspired fanatical loyalty in viewers and became the standard for television coverage of sports news" (p. 206). ESPN ascended even more lofty heights in 1987, when the network landed a contract to cover National Football League games on Sunday evenings, an event that helped turn ESPN from just another cable television network "to a marketing empire and a cornerstone to the enthusiastic 'sports culture' it largely helped to create" ("ESPN," 2005, pp. 2-3).

Newspapers did not stand still with the ascendancy of television journalism. "The level of sports coverage remained in the 12-20% of editorial content range that had been established in the 1920s until the 1970s, when it tended to move upward for the very reasons it was so high in the first place: Sports coverage was very popular, relatively inexpensive, and noncontroversial" (McChesney, 1989, p. 66). A newcomer to the newspaper scene devoted even more of its editorial content to sports coverage. The national newspaper *USA Today* devoted fully 25% of its editorial space to sports, and many subscribed to this paper because of its excellent and timely sports coverage. *Sports Illustrated's* "Frank Deford described it as 'a daily *Sporting News* wrapped in color weather maps'" (McChesney, 1989, p. 66).

All in all, by the conclusion of the industrial age in the United States, four of the conventional mass media—newspapers, magazines, television, and radio—had made sufficient adjustments that all of them were providing substantial sports content and making considerable income from the coverage of sports. Film, too, was doing quite well with its coverage of sports, albeit largely in the form of fictionalized sports drama (see chaps. 5 and 11, this volume). The sports-media relationships of the industrial age ended this era having achieved the level of a complex but well-integrated social system, complete with abundant interdependencies and occasional tensions and out-and-out conflicts.

## SPORTS AND MEDIA DURING THE INFORMATION AGE

Considerable disagreement exists over when the information age began. Some have claimed it began in the 1440s with the invention of the printing press (e.g., Southon, 2001), although few scholars would agree. Others have argued that the key line of demarcation was the development of the Internet and the introduction of digital communication in the 1960s, at least in the United States. But our preference is to delimit the information age in the United States from the period of the 1990s to the foreseeable future. Why? This is the period in which more than 50% of the workforce in the United States has been made up of information workers (currently at 55%), and this is the era of the World Wide Web, which made digital communication a practical reality for the average citizen (Black, Bryant, & Thompson, 1998).

More important than when the information age began is how life in information societies is different from life in agricultural and industrial ages. Rogers (1986) delineated five key differences in life in these three epochs, of which we will mention only two: In terms of the most essential *technology*, in the agriculture age, manual labor ruled the day; in the industrial age, it was the steam engine; and in the information age, computers and electronics became the technologies of choice. Regarding the predominant type of *communication medium*, for the agriculture age, it was one-way print media (e.g., newspapers, magazines); for the industrial age, one-way electronic media (e.g., radio, television, film) predominated; for the information age, interactive media that allow one-to-one as well as many-to-many communication (e.g., Internet) have become the main communication source.

Another key characteristic of the information age is that the *rate of change* is constantly increasing. As Dionne (1987) has said, "The Industrial Revolution changed the way we work in two centuries. The Information Revolution has done as much in two decades" (p. 2). Major information-age media developments also include a trend toward *specialization* of programming in order to meet the needs and interests of an increasingly *fragmented* audience. And a final characteristic that we would note is that media have engaged in so-called *convergence* in myriad ways. In discussing convergence, we follow the lead of Gordon (2003), who explicated that term to include convergence of ownership (e.g., merger of media conglomerates), convergence of tactics (e.g., partnerships between media entities), convergence in structure (e.g., shared space and resources by two or more media entities), convergence in information gathering (e.g., covering a story using multiple media), and convergence in presentation (e.g., new forms of storytelling across multiple media platforms). As we examine the evolution of sports and media in the information age, we will see that this is exactly what is happening in the sports-media world.

Our coverage of sports and media developments during the information age will, of necessity, be qualitatively and quantitatively different from our historical overview of sports-media in the agriculture and industrial age, for two reasons: First, we are still in the early stages of the information age; therefore, it is impossible to gain the sort of distanced historical perspective that such scholarship entails. Second, and more practically, many of the other chapters of this volume cover these developments in great detail. For example, the chapters by Brown and Bryant on "Sports Content on U.S. Television" and by Krein and Martin on "60 Seconds to Air: Key Developments and Production Basics of a National Television Sports Broadcast" examine a vast array of major new developments in television

coverage of sports. Therefore, although we will point out major trends and daily developments in sports and media relationships in the information age, we will do so primarily in a macroanalytic manner.

### **A New Broadcast Network Heavily Invested in Sports**

Ironically, one of the most important sports-communication developments of the information age is an extension of one of the main thrusts of the industrial age—the addition of a new broadcast network that has excelled in sports programming. A recent release from Fox Sports trumpets “FOX Completes 10th Anniversary Year as Top-Rated Network for Sports” and adds: “It is the eighth consecutive year the network has been number one” (“FOX completes,” 2005, p. 1). Through clever negotiating and positioning, and because of the financial commitment of owner Rupert Murdoch (through his News Corporation), Fox has managed to acquire the broadcast rights to “television’s most formidable audience-producing programming lineup, led by the NFL, MLB and NASCAR. . . . Five of the top-10 rated sports programs on television in 2004 were broadcast on FOX” (“FOX completes,” 2005, p. 1).

### **Fragmentation and Specialization of Programming**

It is now quite common for broadcast networks to cover several different games of the same sport at the same time, distributing their telecasts of the different games to affiliate stations within the geographic regions of interest. Often cutaways from a game will provide studio-based updates of various games that are common to all of the regional telecasts, which are presented by sports anchors, or if a game in one region gets sufficiently lop-sided to reduce its entertainment value, coverage may shift to a more tightly contested game outside of the geographic region of interest (much to the consternation of loyal sports fans who tuned in to see a particular game, for which coverage is now limited to occasional updates).

Sports coverage by cable networks has become even more specialized, with the News Corporations’ 2005 Cable Sports Division divided into Fox College Sports, Fox Sports Enterprises, Fox Sports in Español, Fox Sports Net, Fox Sports World, and the Speed Channel. Fox Sports Net includes more than two dozen regional sports channels or networks, all owned by the News Corporation. Via its regional cable networks, Fox offers numerous regional sports news programs (e.g., *Southern Sports Report*) in addition to coverage of regional games of all sorts. ESPN has become extremely specialized also. In addition to ESPN per se, the ESPN family of cable sports networks includes ESPN2 (typically more of the same), ESPN-NEWS (providing 24-hours-per-day highlights, scores, and breaking stories from the sports world), ESPN Classic (documentaries and replays of great games in sports history), ESPN Deportes (a Spanish-language sports network), ESPNHD (presents normal ESPN programming in high definition), and ESPNU (a college athletics channel).

For the truly hardcore sports fan, satellite networks like Dish Network and Direct TV offer an amazing array of premium sports programming, such as *NFL Sunday Ticket*, *MLB Extra Innings*, *NBA League Pass*, *NHL Center Ice*, *ESPN Full Court: College Basketball*, *WNBA Season Pass*, *MLS Direct Kick*, *English Premier League*, and the like, in addition to numerous boxing and wrestling events that are available on a periodic pay-per-view basis. With these specialized packages, which in 2005 were available

from between \$49 and \$299 per package, the avid fan can essentially choose any game in any sport he or she wants to watch from practically anywhere around the world ("Dish or Direct," 2005).

Another initiative in specialization to seek a hardcore sports audience was the move to all-sports radio. Historically radio's important role in sports communication was to present games to national audiences, with play-by-play provided by legendary announcers like Red Barber, Mel Allen, and Dizzy Dean. When such coverage was usurped by television and the Internet, one of the new ways radio found to serve sports fans and survive was to supplement play-by-play coverage with sports talk and other sports information 24 hours per day, especially on the AM dial. Although sports discussion shows date from the 1950s and were quite popular, especially immediately before and after important games in major cities, it was the advent of interactive caller-based sports programs that ultimately led to the success of all-sports radio. Some of the programming of such niche radio is local, but many of the most popular sports talk shows are national and are provided by syndicates, or they are found on the all-sports networks, like ESPN radio. Some of the most successful examples of such sports-talk programming is abrasive and often is inflammatory if not incendiary, but it has become a staple for sports fans in major radio markets (Munson, 1993; Norman, 1990). With the increased popularity of satellite radio, specialized sports packages such as NFL or NBA radiocasts can be the constant mobile companion to the most avid sports fans, adding to the richness, variability, and customization of sports radio.

### **Related Business Ventures**

In the industrial age, sports networks basically presented sports coverage, news, and the like. In the information age, collateral sports-related business ventures have ruled the day. For example,

ESPN launched the ESPN Radio network on January 1, 1992, *ESPN The Magazine* on March 11, 1998, and its ESPN Zone franchise of restaurant/entertainment complexes in Baltimore, Maryland on July 11, 1998. . . . The ESPY Awards are also administered by ESPN, which it initiated in 1993. . . . Starting with their 2004 lineup of sports games, Sega acquired the ESPN license to integrate the "TV show look & feel" into its franchise of video games covering America's major professional sports leagues and college basketball. The deal will end after the 2005–2006 sports season. After the 2005–2006 season, Electronic Arts will acquire the ESPN license to use for 15-years on their video games. ("ESPN," 2005, p. 3)

Other sports entities are expanding their media-related enterprises in similar manners. Such entrepreneurial ventures greatly facilitate convergence as discussed by Gordon (2003).

### **Sports Dot.coms**

One of the hallmarks of the information age is the extensive use of computers and networks. Many of the giants of sports communication have employed or contracted with web designers and programmers to create exceptionally fine Web sites, including some of the most popular ones on the Internet today. "ESPN launched

their own website known as ESPN SportsZone in 1995. After 1998, the site was re-named to ESPN.com. In 2001, ESPN.com created a new website called *Page 2*, which includes sports opinion columns from several writers" ("ESPN," 2005, p. 3). ESPN has been a leader in using their Web sites as portals via which the fans can interact with games presented on ESPN or its sister network ABC (both owned by Disney), creating more active, engaged viewers of sportscasts. But not all has been rosy for the interactive division of ESPN. One of the hot stories of 2004 was MSN (Microsoft Network) switching from ESPN.com to FOX.com as its online provider of sports information, with Fox stories featured on—and the Fox site linked to—the MSN home page. It is obvious that many companies will increasingly join the competition for the dot.com sports fan.

In fact, an amazing array of Web sites is already available for information-age sports fans. In addition to classic Web sites associated with the cable sports networks are the Web sites associated with magazines (e.g., SI.com), networks (e.g., CBS.sportline.com), sports associations (e.g., NCAA.com), leagues (NBA.com), teams (e.g., HarlemAllStars.com), tournaments (e.g., NIT.org), camps (e.g., quarterbacksschool.com), specialized news (e.g., collegefootballnews.com), specialized talk (e.g., chicksonfootball.com), and blogs of every persuasion. Moreover, it seems that every player, coach, team—and even every youth league star athlete and team—now has a Web site devoted to its coverage. In fact, many have many more than one Web site, with major college and university athletic departments having a vast array of commercial as well as public-access Web sites devoted to their various teams. Offering what may be the ultimate in sports fan convenience, nowadays Web sites exist to help sports fans search for the best Web sites for each sport, team, and so forth (e.g., BestSearchers.com).

### Crossover as Convergence

An additional sign of the times is crossover representation between media, a form of convergence (Gordon, 2003). For example, *Sports Illustrated's* columnists regularly appear on ESPN as well as CNN, *Sports Illustrated's* Frank Defore does a popular weekly segment on National Public Radio, pro football stars show up on *Wheel of Fortune* for NFL Players Week, the sports stars de jour appear regularly on early morning and late night television and radio talk shows—and these examples are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

If Howard Cosell typified the industrial-age sportscaster, John Madden must be the information-age sports-and-media personality archetype. Madden, a Super Bowl winning coach, was paid \$7.5 million in 2002 to call NFL games for FOX, making him the highest-paid sportscaster in the world, and his four-year, \$32-million deal with FOX in 1994 provided him with a more lucrative contract than any NFL player at the time ("John Madden," 2005). Madden turned down a three-year \$15-million extension with FOX and the last year of his \$7.5-million-per-year salary to sign with ABC to provide color commentary for the network's venerable *Monday Night Football* for a mere \$5 million per year (Helfand, 2005). Not everything about John Madden is *IA* (i.e., information-age-like); in fact, in some ways Madden definitely is old school, with his refusal to fly and his "All Madden" team of bruisers and overachievers. On the other hand, because he is all over the tube and the Net doing commercials, endorsements, cross-program plugs, interviews, and the like, and because he is one of the most successful names in electronic gaming, he is a wonderful icon for the information age's fusion of sports and media.

## The Future of Sports and Media

Where do we go from here? What will the next phase of the information age bring? Some things are almost certain to get bigger and bigger. For example, "the worldwide television audience for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games was 3.9 billion people compared to the 3.6 billion for the Sydney 2000 games. The FIFA World Cup media rights value rose to \$879 million for the 2006 tournament, a 15% increase since 2002" ("Sport and the media," 2005). And it is highly likely that the cost for commercials during the Super Bowl will continue to rise; for example, the average 2005 Super Bowl commercial sold for \$2.4 million, whereas in 2004 it cost \$2.3 million, up from \$2.1 million in 2003.

However, the converse of all this gigantism—specialization and segmentation—undoubtedly will continue as a major trend as well. With the proliferation in coverage of women's sports, youth sports, and new sports, audience niches will be widely sought by media providers and advertisers alike, so long as a critical mass of viewers can be reached. With the movement of streaming video onto the Internet, not only can the mother of Ute All-American Andrew Bogurt stay at home in Australia and watch via computer and the Web her son play basketball in real time during the "Sweet 16" NCAA contest between Kentucky and Utah, but "EveryMom" can watch her youth league soccer son or daughter play in real time during a local match. In addition to providing T-shirts and soft drinks, tomorrow's team sponsor will be expected to provide sponsorship support for the Web site and maybe even a few bucks for the camcorder operator and Web sysop.

A recent Harris Interactive poll revealed some insightful information about the future of sports, sports participation, and sports and media. In a report entitled "Youth Trends and the Impact on Sportainment's Future," the following conclusions were drawn: "If today's youth are tomorrow's consumers, the future looks strong for sports" (HarrisInteractive, 2001, p. 1). Not only were today's youth found to be more interested in more different sports than were their parents, they were more likely to attend and watch sporting events than were their elders. The report concluded with diverse ways for "sponsors to learn how to effectively reach the diverse and 'fickle' youth market" through sports and sports programming (HarrisInteractive, 2001, p. 1). The more things change, the more they seem to remain the same.

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