Sports Journalism Content When No Sports Occur: Framing Athletics Amidst the COVID-19 International Pandemic

Sean R. Sadri\(^1\), Nicholas R. Buzzelli\(^1\), Patrick Gentile\(^2\), and Andrew C. Billings\(^1\)

Abstract
On March 11, 2020, the National Basketball Association suspended its season after a player tested positive for COVID-19. Within days, the rest of the sports world similarly suspended play in the wake of the pandemic. This study focuses on sports media storytelling when covering athletic competition was no longer an option. Utilizing four distinct time periods and framing theory as the foundation of our theoretical framework, the content analysis examined shifts from the normal reporting routine and how those shifts morphed as pandemic information dictated. As the pandemic grew more widespread, health and safety became the predominant focus of national sports media. In spring 2020, sports news experienced a significant shift in coverage as economic and fairness frames were replaced with health, safety, and quality of life as the principal frames in the coded articles. By pinpointing the major differences in coverage across time, the study revealed that sports content and frames quickly shifted to reflect the perceived severity to the global health

\(^1\) Department of Journalism and Creative Media, College of Communication and Information Sciences, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, USA
\(^2\) Department of Communication Studies, College of Communication and Information Sciences, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, USA

Corresponding Author:
Sean R. Sadri, Department of Journalism and Creative Media, College of Communication and Information Sciences, University of Alabama, 400A Reese Phifer Hall, Box 870172, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, USA.
Email: srsadri@ua.edu
community, while the sources used in those articles stayed largely the same. The theoretical and applied implications of the study are discussed.

**Keywords**
framing theory, pandemic journalism, sports media, COVID-19, content analysis

Cross-pollination between hard news and sports journalists has routinely happened for decades, blurring lines over time when stories necessitated. When football star O.J. Simpson stood trial for murder, sports journalism contributed to the shaping of the story (Hunt, 1999). When football quarterback Colin Kaepernick kneeled during the national anthem and sparked a national debate, hard news journalists navigated sporting terrain to understand and render the story (Rugg, 2020). Some sports stories become political with societal ramifications; likewise, some political and crime stories become sports stories with competition ramifications.

However, never was the potential for overlap quite the same as it was in 2020, when the COVID-19 international pandemic led to shelter-in-place orders and the temporary suspension of all sporting competitions. It appeared that a positive test by an NBA player—which led to the suspension of all league play—became the harbinger of things to come, stressing the severity of the moment. As Utah Jazz star Rudy Gobert tested positive, he became “Patient Zero in the eyes of the American public” (Lupica, 2020, para. 8). He largely also shifted the agenda of virtually every part of sports journalism from one based on game results to one based on health and assessing the risks of playing sports in the future, particularly with fans (Schrock, 2020).

Previous research has established the degree to which innovation is spurred in journalistic times of crises (Konow-Lund et al., 2019), with a wide range of scholars focusing on how journalism unfolds in disaster communities (see an edited volume by Matthews & Thorson, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique confluence of such principles given its scope, lack of a disaster-based epicenter, and ability to reap havoc across the majority of capitalistic sectors, including sport. This study focuses on what unfolded within sports media agendas when Topic A, the results of athletic competition, was suddenly removed from the equation. It is built upon the question of what topics sports reporters advanced in lieu of being able to write from their own position of expertise. As results illustrate, some advanced health expertise, others prognosticated on an uncertain economic future, while others focused on reflection, time-capsuling and waxing nostalgic about past sports moments. Utilizing four distinct time periods (spring 2019, March 2020, April 2020, and May 2020), the content analysis focuses on shifts from the normal routine (encompassed in the 2019 portion of the sample) and how those shifts morphed over time as pandemic information dictated.
Related Literature

Pandemic Journalism

Ever since the 1721 Smallpox outbreak infected Boston (Thomas & Senkpeni, 2020), those tasked with disseminating pertinent health information to the American public have served a dual role, one focused on both the distribution of relevant scientific facts and the other dedicated to the deconstruction of false narratives. Thus, the main tenets of journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001) align with the principles of pandemic reporting since print, broadcast, and digital media must educate the masses on the potential health risks. However, because of the influx of new disseminators dotting the digital landscape (Buzzelli et al., 2020), individuals now question the precision and veracity of published information. Pandemic journalism in the age of COVID-19 illustrates the need for unbiased information devoid of health-related hearsay.

Unlike media coverage of prior mass global health pandemics (most notably the 1918 Spanish Flu outbreak, Spratt, 2001, in which newspapers and scientific publications were credited with communicating medical truths to the public), one’s trust in pandemic journalism in the era of online information can fluctuate with the oversaturation of quasi-news stories in the media marketplace, allowing coronavirus misinformation to spread. From social media falsehoods being passed as fact to mainstream news organizations slotting reporters from different departments to the health beat—many of whom “sometimes lean too heavily on traditional journalism values like balance, novelty, and conflict” (Pazzanese, 2020, para. 9)—fewer Americans followed and trusted news reports centered on coronavirus several months into the pandemic (Mitchell et al., 2020).

Despite this downturn in news consumption and trust, journalists still serve the public as disseminators of truth. In a time of social distancing and self-isolation, media scholars assert that mainstream media cannot fall into the trap of portraying an inaccurate reality; in other words, the press must “provide the truth, even if that truth is grim” (Jones, 2020, para. 1). As Ward (2004) maintains, the field of journalism should redefine the meaning of objectivity moving forward, instead of attempting to reject it altogether, in a reporter’s diligent search for the truth. However, the coronavirus pandemic (despite exemplifying the need for reliable information) has drained communal news institution resources needed to properly contextualize the virus’ impact on local communities (Radcliffe, 2020). As evidenced by a Brookings Institute study centered on the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on local news, over half (57%) of the 2,485 U.S. counties that reported a COVID-19 case during the first 3 weeks of this health crisis lacked a daily newspaper (Hendrickson, 2020). While journalists covering COVID-19 still influence the salience of stories tied to this specific health issue, they are also instructing the public on preventative actions to take, what not to do, what symptoms to look for, and where to go if infected (Neason, 2020).

In terms of the pandemic’s influence on sports journalism, varying types of sports media were impacted differently, depending on the norms and routines associated
with each type of platform. Because legacy sports journalism, for instance, is reliant on one-on-one player and coach access for storytelling, those working for newspapers and sporting magazines were forced to focus on unique story angles to differentiate their work from their media counterparts using the same Zoom press conference quotes (Allsop, 2020; Moritz, 2020). This form of journalistic creativity that was bred from the absence of live sporting events, though, was a challenge that hit the blogging and sports social media community differently, as both forms of information dissemination rely less on player/coach reaction and more on writer insight, analysis, and game breakdown. Thus, this distinct segment of sports media often emphasized listicle-type content and hypothetical stories that centered on the major “what ifs” in a sport organization’s history, meaning that the pandemic bred creativity in the sports journalism sphere (Mosby, 2020). Much like their legacy news counterparts, those in digital-only sports media suffered an editorial setback that forced new and innovative angles to be explored because of the disruption to live games. Even sports broadcasting giant ESPN was relying on its collection of old games and 30 for 30 documentary library to supplement the lack of live event programming during the early stages of the pandemic (Strauss, 2020).

It should be noted, however, that both print and digital sports media platforms had to furlough staff because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bay Area News Group, whose properties include San Jose’s Mercury News and the East Bay Times, cut their entire sports operation while media giant Sports Illustrated laid off 6% of its staff (Hare, 2021). Additionally, Vox Media, owners of the SB Nation brand of team-centric sports blogs, slashed 9% of its total workforce in response to the coronavirus crisis (Horn, 2020). Similarly, with the 3½ month delay to the 2020 MLB season, popular baseball website FanGraphs, whose main focus is statistics and analytics, and its sister site, Hardball Times, laid off its paid contributors and asked for reader donations to help keep the operation afloat (Appelman, 2020; Strauss, 2020).

**Editorial Equilibrium of Sports Journalism**

To gauge what journalistic routines mainstream news outlets are likely to enact during the COVID-19 pandemic without live sports, it is important to first understand the news dissemination subset of sports journalism—traditionally rooted in coverage of athlete and team performance both on and off the field (Stofer et al., 2010). From the traditional viewpoint that sports journalism represents a newsroom’s “toy department” because publicization of athletes and the games that they play can sometimes stray from basic journalistic ideas (Hardin et al., 2009), like objectivity and impartiality, sports journalism has long struggled to maintain a sense of professional identity since the distribution of this type of information is rarely believed to possess critical perspectives (Rowe, 2007). Whereas the standard for defining what constitutes legitimate journalism is often linked to the observation of ethical and moral values, those within sports media are sometimes unable to meet
these basic principles since stories woven around athletics tend to lack “social or political importance” (Oates & Pauly, 2007, p. 332).

The experience level of sports media members and the type of beat they predominantly cover can influence probability of deviating from the industry’s “toy department” moniker, with those assigned to cover prep and high school sports often exhibiting a more lax code of ethics than their counterparts on the major collegiate and professional sports beats (Hardin & Zhong, 2010). Similarly, Weedon and Wilson (2020) argue that veteran sports editors are more likely to avoid controversial and/or sensitive topics within the sporting realm than younger, more progressive members of the newsroom because of their conventional norms. Because of the notion that the press serves a watchdog role over society, sports journalism scholars have advocated for greater ethical engagement in sports reporter training (Hardin, 2005), more focus on investigative journalism within a sporting context (Rowe, 2007), and more social and political-based reporting (Forde & Wilson, 2018). Hardin and Ash (2011) even extended the watchdog function of the sports press a step further by confirming that professional sportswriters are more likely to infuse social context into their reporting than sports bloggers.

The call for increased ethical standards in the realm of sports journalism, though, is not a new standard initiated by recent academic research. Rather, professional organizations dedicated to improving sports media standards, like the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE), implemented its first code of ethics in 1974, aimed at curbing the acceptance of gifts from sources, gambling on events, and other general conflicts-of-interest (Bradley, 2009). Although the APSE code of ethics received an update in 1991, Ramon-Vegas and Rojas-Torrijos (2018) propose that a new ethics code should be developed emphasizing more of a public service approach to sports journalism than entertainment-based strategies.

Recent coverage of mainstream sport, however, has begun to shift perception of this news genre away from its “fun and frivolity” moniker (Rowe, 2007, p. 384) and more toward a vital watchdog function of the press (Reinardy & Wanta, 2015). Ultimately, games occurring within the sporting sphere are no longer isolated to a star player’s statistics or wins and losses by the hometown team. Sport and its subsequent media coverage are, thus, an integral part of modern society by providing a platform for financial, social, and political issues to be debated in a public forum (Hardin et al., 2009). Thus, the “just a game” mentality no longer applies to modern sports journalists who must find a balance between covering the outcomes of games and putting the national or global impact of these games in perspective (Schmidt, 2018, p. 2).

As Chotiner (2014) asserts, all facets of sports journalism can be boiled down to two distinct types of content: serious reporting and entertainment-based stories, whose sole purpose is to bring “joy to sports fans” (para. 4). The serious side of sports journalism examines the aforementioned issues through a critical lens, providing practical recommendations for audiences to better understand inherent divisions of power. Alternatively, entertainment-based sports journalism (e.g., daily player, team,
and game coverage) is more prevalent because it depends on cultivating personal relationships with sources (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2007). Therefore, from Boyle’s (2017) standpoint, the main difference between this editorial equilibrium of hard and soft sports news is that the former is infused with the type of integrity that reporters “associate with their self-image,” while the latter lacks “rigor and credibility” (p. 493).

Perhaps one reason for mainstream sports media’s shift from light-hearted game stories to substantive reporting, though, is the notion that coverage beyond the box score has the ability to promote communal healing during times of hardship (Butterworth, 2014). From Major League Baseball’s resumption in New York just ten days after the September 11 terrorist attacks to the Houston Astros’ 2017 World Series run following Hurricane Harvey’s devastation, mediated sport has been used as a distraction from the perils of the real-world, one that can serve as a “crucial sign of recovery” (Wagner, 2020, para. 15). Consequently, the ways in which news organizations framed sports news during the first 6 months of 2020 may have reflected a proposed return to normalcy amid the coronavirus pandemic as well as protocols being implemented for player and fan safety.

North American amateur and professional sporting leagues (specifically the NCAA, NBA, NFL, NHL, and MLB) were not the only forms of organized sport whose season was postponed and/or delayed because of COVID-19. Like virtually all other sports, the international football calendar was disrupted, to an extent, during the spring and summer months of 2020. However, during the early stages of the pandemic, top European soccer leagues proved the viability of a return-to-play plan that was modeled by other leagues. Before resuming its season in May, Bundesliga, Germany’s top football association, issued a “handbook” to players that outlined strict hygiene and quarantine guidelines (Smith & Panja, 2020, para. 6). Other international soccer associations (e.g., La Liga, Premier League) also added to the precedent for the return of sport at the major professional level through constant testing of players and team personnel (Matthews, 2020). This proactive approach to sport’s return is one Armour (2020) equates with each country’s individualized response to the coronavirus outbreak, noting that the areas that were able to have their sports return quicker than others were those that had “widespread and robust testing programs” (para. 8).

**Framing Theory**

From a sociological perspective, framing was based on attribution theory, which helps to explain people’s behavior by trying to put together past information until a conclusion is reached (Heider, 1959). For psychology, framing was founded on “frames of reference” (Sherif, 1967, p. 9) and the assumption that information can be processed differently based on how the information is being presented to them. It later developed into its own communication perspective when Goffman (1974) introduced frame analysis to study how situations are defined and developed, which mainly focuses on stereotypes in media presentations. Thus, the examination in this
analysis provides “background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being a human being” (p. 22).

Within media messages, there are packages, including arguments, information, symbols, metaphors, and images that can influence one’s viewpoint; these packages comprise a frame (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Media framing occurs when journalists and other media members choose images and words that can influence how audiences understand and evaluate issues, policies, or events (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and offer suggestions for how the audience should feel. Frames are also about salience, which Entman (1993) describes as making a certain piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to those processing the information. Gitlin (1980) suggests that frames allow journalists to understand massive quantities of information before disseminating it to a large audience; this strategic process is a way of showing the audience what the media wants them to see. Echoing Goffman’s (1974) perspective, individuals use their interpretive schemas to classify and interpret messages. Thus, these interpretive schemas can influence how the audience perceives and views a topic (Gitlin, 1980).

Episodic and thematic frames comprise the most common usage of framing within media. Episodic frames describe specific events and concrete instances (Gross, 2008; Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Examples of episodic frames are those in which the topic focuses on one person or entity (e.g. a racial discrimination victim, a murder victim, etc.). Episodic frames make for “good pictures” (Iyengar & Simon, 1993, p. 369). Journalists use episodic frames because they seem to be more compelling, entertaining, and immersive (Gross, 2008). Conversely, thematic frames focus on public issues in a larger, more generalizable context that present collective, abstract, and general evidence. Examples of thematic frames are unemployment figures, terrorism, changes in public policy, etc. While episodic frames are visually attractive, thematic frames require audience interpretation (Iyengar & Simon, 1993).

Specifically in terms of framing in sports media, multiple studies have been conducted regarding episodic and thematic framing. For instance, Smith and Pegoraro (2020) found that when the media framed the USA gymnastics/Larry Nassar crisis, episodic frames were predominantly used to place blame on a single individual rather than thematic frames highlighting larger systemic issues across Olympic gymnastics and predatory sex abuse in sport. Furthermore, investigating how NBC’s Football Night in America portrays concussions, Mirer and Mederson (2017) determined that head injuries were predominantly communicated as episodic frames rather than larger discussions about head injuries and player safety from a thematic perspective. Similarly, Walker et al. (2018) examined frame prominence when NCAA Division 1 programs had a major violation, concluding that newspapers and the NCAA itself portrayed these issues significantly more episodically than thematically. The universities were blamed individually, rather than acknowledging issues that extend to the NCAA-level. Interestingly, this study did not find a single
thematically framed article that came directly from an NCAA publication (Walker et al., 2018). Ultimately, framing research in the sports media sphere demonstrates a consistent reliance on episodic framing in all facets of sports news.

The racial framing of athletes has been another prominent area of study for researchers. For instance, Mercurio and Filak (2010) found that White quarterbacks are framed more frequently as hardworking and natural leaders, whereas Black quarterbacks are framed as having achieved success through natural athletic talent. Similarly, White athletes in the 2012 London Olympics were most often framed as successful due to intelligence, and this intelligence frame appeared significantly more frequently than Black competitors in the same events (Angelini et al., 2014). Other areas of study in sport have touched on the framing of LGBTQ+ athletes (Soonhwan et al., 2014), and framing of athletes with criminal records (Seate et al., 2010). Sport framing can also be disseminated in concert with framing of health and well-being, with the frequency of these topics increasing over time (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2018).

News media platforms are one of the most reliable sources of health information disseminated to the public (Andsager & Powers, 1999). The way in which health topics are framed by the media can influence an audience’s understanding of certain health issues and protocols, affecting attitudes and behaviors. While these illnesses are widespread and are consistently being covered by the news media, global pandemics occur significantly less frequently, thus making research on the topic minimal. However, media framing plays an important role in how the public understands the impact, consequences, treatment, and statistics surrounding any disease (Lee & Basynat, 2013). Lee and Basynat (2013) conducted a content analysis of press releases on the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 and found that a majority of the frames focused on information updates (57%), with the second most common frame being preventative information (38%). Furthermore, thematic frames (54%) were much more common than episodic frames (17%) during the pandemic. The emphasis on thematic frames in both press releases and news stories may have had a more impactful effect on the audience, by shaping the pandemic as a problem to be solved by community engagement (Lee & Basnyat, 2013).

A similar content analysis examined how 13 different government organizations framed the 2009 H1N1 pandemic on both social and traditional media (Liu & Kim, 2011). Government organizations used traditional media to communicate their crisis responses 79% of the time, with the remaining 21% on social media. The researchers also determined that the term “swine flu” decreased over time, coinciding with an increase in “H1N1” over time. The government organizations also incorporated emotions (e.g., confusion, alert, fear, sympathy, sadness) more frequently on traditional media than social media. Lastly, disaster, health crisis, and general health issue frames were more prevalent on traditional media as well (Liu & Kim, 2011).

Power dynamics and journalistic hierarchies are critical in the framing process. Journalists do not only report news, but they also shape the events in which they write (Entman, 1991). For instance, Price and Tewksury (1997) believe that journalists look for aspects of stories that may be appealing to the desired audience, thus helping tell
stories that people want to see and hear. Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) hierarchy of influences model suggests that many factors contribute to media production and framing, including the gender of the journalist (Kian & Hardin, 2009; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003) as well as newsroom discourse and how it reinforces dominant frames (Lewis & Reese, 2009). Thus, journalists play an active role in reporting a story and shaping how it is disseminated to the audience (Bartholomé et al., 2015).

While framing has many positive aspects, there are limitations that should be addressed. First, it is not an original theory, as it has taken form based on agenda setting, priming, and persuasion. Because of this, it has been criticized for being ambiguously conceptualized (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009) causing some scholars to suggest that ubiquitous framing effects downplay the role of cognitive schema in producing framing effects (Cacciatore et al., 2016). Furthermore, most of the research on framing examines how audiences perceive issues and policies, but there is far less research on the framing effects on audience behaviors from news selection (Tewksbury & Riles, 2018). Thus, this theory does not account for selective exposure, as audiences often choose media outlets that frame stories to their preference.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Given the uniqueness of the pandemic situation, research questions form the first part of this analysis in order to understand the specific frames (Boydstun et al., 2014) used by major media outlets for sports news stories, as predictions could not be made about sports media regarding a circumstance not witnessed in the previous century.

**RQ1:** What sports, leagues, and sporting events received the most coverage over time?

**RQ2:** What were the most prominent frames in sports news articles over time?

**RQ3:** To what extent did the framing of sports news change over time?

**RQ4:** Which health sources will be most utilized in sports news articles in spring 2020?

However, the heuristics offered in the aforementioned framing and journalistic practice studies informed three hypotheses, which were developed to test potential significant differences in article tone, article sourcing, and episodic vs. thematic framing over time.

**H1:** Sports news articles published in spring 2020 will utilize significantly more health organization and health expert sources articles than in spring 2019.

**H2:** The majority of sports news articles in the three 2020 time periods will reference the COVID-19 pandemic.

**H3:** Articles published during the initial outbreak (March 2020) will have a significantly higher usage of thematic framing than any other time measured.
Methods

To determine whether differences in sports article coverage and framing emerged over time, 800 sports news articles were coded over four distinct time periods. Using LexisNexis Academic to locate, filter, and download sports articles, 200 articles were coded from each of the following time periods: (a) spring 2019 (March 1–May 31, 2019), (b) March 2020, (c) April 2020, and (d) May 2020. The 2019 time period served as a pre-pandemic status quo period in which one could ascertain typical frames within American media in the springtime; the latter three frames helped to uncover the unfolding of shifts within the atypical COVID-19 pandemic period. Articles were selected based on LexisNexis’ own relevancy algorithm, with the first 200 qualified articles from each time period being selected for coding. Eliminated articles included those that were duplicates, unrelated to sports, less than 150 words in length, and editorials.

Articles published in prominent newspapers in major media markets as well as articles published on the online websites of major cable news networks were chosen for coding: (a) New York Times, (b) Los Angeles Times, (c) Philadelphia Inquirer, (d) Washington Post, (e) USA Today, (f) Wall Street Journal, (g) CNN, (h) MSNBC, and (i) Fox News. The selection process for newspaper and online cable news articles was based on circulation numbers, market size, and access to the news outlet’s article catalog. The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, USA Today, and Wall Street Journal account for five of the six most read daily newspapers in the country, based on circulation numbers (Watson, 2020). The Philadelphia Inquirer was also included for coding because it remains the highest circulation newspaper in the country’s fourth ranked media market. CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News make up the three most popular American cable news networks by a wide margin—each garnering an average of 1.5+ million viewers each day from Election Day through Inauguration Day (Keveney, 2021). CNN and MSNBC generally attract moderate to liberal-leaning viewers “while Fox has more of the right-leaning audience to itself” (Keveney, 2021, para. 16). News outlets were specifically chosen for coding—not sports media outlets such as ESPN or Fox Sports—to gauge the ways in which a complete absence of sport could impact news coverage over time and how framing could potentially influence public discourse outside sports fandom.

To better gauge the range of sports being covered by these news organizations, the sport or league being discussed was classified as either (a) NFL/professional football, (b) MLB/professional baseball, (c) NBA/professional basketball, (d) NHL/professional hockey, (e) college football, (f) college basketball, (g) college (other), (h) international sport or league, (i) Olympics, (j) MMA, (k) eSports, (l) sports gambling, (m) sports (general), and (o) other. All sports and leagues (regardless of gender) were coded. Article word count as well as total mentions of COVID-19 or coronavirus were also coded to track changes in these totals over time. Additionally, the following sources were coded if they were mentioned or quoted in the story (either directly or indirectly):
Sadri et al.

(a) Center for Disease Control, (b) World Health Organization, (c) doctors/health experts, (d) President Donald Trump, (e) athletes, (f) coaches, and (g) team officials (e.g., GMs and owners).

Using frames established from Boydstun et al.’s (2014) framing study, coders on the research team determined the three most prominent frames found within each article and coded them as either (a) economic frames, (b) capacity and resources frames, (c) morality frames, (d) fairness and equality frames, (e) constitutionality and jurisprudence frames, (f) policy prescription and evaluation frames, (g) law and order/crime and justice frames, (h) security and defense frames, (i) health and safety frames, (j) quality of life frames, (k) cultural identity frames, (l) public opinion frames, (m) political frames, (o) external regulation and reputation frames, (p) and other frames. Boydstun et al.’s (2014) framing categories were used for the present study because of the robustness and depth of the frames listed which the authors “intended to be applicable to any policy issue (abortion, immigration, foreign aid, etc.) and in any communication context (news stories, Twitter, party manifestos, legislative debates, etc.)” (p. 5). Coders also determined whether the framing was either (a) episodic or (b) thematic. Finally, the tone of each article was also categorized as either (a) negative, (b) neutral, or (c) positive.

One member of the research team established coding protocols, while two others coded 15% of the total sample and a fourth member compared the results for intercoder reliability using Cohen’s kappa formula. Reliabilities were determined for the following variables: publication name (κ = .99), date (κ = 1.00), word count (κ = .99), sport/league (κ = .89), COVID-19 mentions (κ = .95), CDC (κ = .99), WHO (κ = 1.00), doctor/health officials (κ = .97), President Trump (κ = .96), coaches (κ = 1.00), athletes (κ = .99), team officials (κ = .99), framing (κ = .81), episodic/thematic frames (κ = .81), and tone (κ = .77). Intercoder reliability for the entire data set was also determined to be highly reliable (κ = .94). Reliability scores in all coded categories represent a good level of reliability between the researchers. Fleiss (1981) characterized kappas exceeding 0.75 as excellent, which was surpassed on each measure. Once this process was completed, the two coders analyzed half of the remaining sample (N = 800).

Results

A total of 800 analyzed articles (200 from each of the four time periods) were subject to analysis. The average number of words in the articles was 1,182 words in spring 2019 before peaking at 1,294 in March 2020 and then gradually getting shorter (1,002 words in April 2020 and 946 words in May 2020). Research Question 1 pertained to the sports, leagues, and events that received the most focus over the four time periods. Table 1 features the number of articles by topic within each of the four time periods.

Table 1 specifically highlights significant shifts in frequencies using paired chi-square analyses to show when a significant deviation occurred from one time
period to the next. In terms of overall frequencies, the third through sixth-most utilized topics were unsurprising, with foci on the three prominent men’s team sports in the United States (football \(N = 64\), baseball \(N = 46\), and basketball \(N = 42\)) followed by content related to the scheduled Olympics Games (\(N = 41\)). However, all of these were dwarfed by the two larger categories pertaining to sport writ large (\(N = 174\)) and international sport writ large (\(N = 70\)). Such frequencies highlight the degree to which ramifications on sport were not relegated to specific leagues, teams, or athletes and were instead holistic in nature.

In terms of differences over time, some of the significant differences are easily explained via the ebb and flow of the sports calendar, including the spike in Olympics coverage (with the Tokyo Olympics planned for Summer 2020), the drop in Olympic coverage (after the Tokyo Games were postponed until Summer 2021), and the rise in NFL coverage (coinciding with the NFL Draft in April, which carried on in a socially-distanced manner). However, two additional findings are noteworthy in that they likely pertain more directly to the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely a rise in general sports stories (\(\chi^2 = 6.64, df = 1, p < 0.01\)) and a drop in focus on sports stories beyond the normal scope of leagues and events (\(\chi^2 = 4.08, df = 1, p < 0.05\)). For many of the other leagues and topics covered, the relatively small cell sizes made meaningful significant differences unable to be detected.

**Research Question 2** queried the most prominent frames in sports news articles over time. Table 2 orders the frequency of topics from most to least prevalent.
Unsurprisingly, health/safety issues were at the forefront of the themes (234), followed by economics (188), quality of life (116), fairness/equity (92) and morality (81).

These themes shifted dramatically over time, though. Once one excludes the “other” theme, for instance, health was the fourth most-covered theme (spring 2019) before the emergence of COVID-19, then moving to second in March 2020 when sports shut down and then firmly staying in the top thematic position for both April and May 2020. Meanwhile, the theme of fairness and equity was the most prevalent in spring 2019, but the pandemic resulted in a considerable drop of this theme, moving to fourth in March 2020 and then fifth in both April and May 2020.

**Research Question 3** more specifically queried the extent to which framing of sports news changed over time. Ranked-order correlations were calculated between the time periods, with significant correlations indicating a consistency in frames between two time periods. Using the Spearman rho correlation, while the spring 2019 and March 2020 composites still synched thematically (r = .821; p < .01) the dramatic shift in framing occurred between March 2020 and April 2020 (r = .25; p = n.s.). The frames stayed constant between April 2020 and May 2020 (r = .933; p < .05), showing that again the dramatic shift could be detected between March 2020 and May 2020 (r = .21, p = n.s.). Thus, themes did shift over the time periods, with a clear point of demarcation occurring once April 2020 hit as sports coverage moved from breaking news/cancellations to routines of a “new normal.”

**Hypothesis 1** argues that health organization/experts would be significantly more utilized in the 2020 pandemic months than in the spring 2019 time period. Table 3 highlights the times a given source was consulted in each time period.

As Table 3 highlights, athletes, coaches, and teams were still the most-used sources regardless of time period, likely a function of sports journalists relying on

### Table 2. Topic Frames by Time Period.

| Frames                        | Spring 2019 | March 2020 | April 2020 | May 2020 | TOTAL |
|-------------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|----------|-------|
| Health/Safety                 | 24          | 20         | 92         | 98       | 234   |
| Economic                      | 51          | 49         | 46         | 42       | 188   |
| Quality of Life               | 3           | 2          | 60         | 51       | 116   |
| Fairness/Equality             | 55          | 13         | 10         | 14       | 92    |
| Morality                      | 37          | 12         | 17         | 15       | 81    |
| Policy Prescription/ Evaluation | 17        | 16         | 1          | 0        | 34    |
| Political                     | 17          | 9          | 0          | 0        | 26    |
| Cultural Identity             | 11          | 10         | 0          | 4        | 25    |
| Law & Order/Crime & Justice   | 10          | 4          | 2          | 6        | 22    |
| Capacity/Resources            | 9           | 6          | 2          | 1        | 18    |
| Other                         | 72          | 124        | 104        | 118      | 418   |
| **TOTAL**                     | **311**     | **265**    | **335**    | **352**  | **1,263** |
pre-established contacts and sports knowledge. Nevertheless, when combining the three forms of medical/health experts utilized, these sources were significantly more likely to be included in sports stories in March 2020 than in March 2019 ($\chi^2 = 4.46, df = 1, p < 0.05$). Moreover, teams received greater sourcing between the spring 2019 and March 2020 composites ($\chi^2 = 5.71, df = 1, p < 0.05$), continuing to be a major component of reporting in subsequent months. Other sources, such as President Trump, had significant ebb and flow when combining sampling periods. For example, 69.2% of all Trump mentions and quotes came from the March 2020 and April 2020 sampling periods, significantly more than the other two time periods once combined ($\chi^2 = 3.92, df = 1, p < 0.05$). Overall, Hypothesis 1 is largely supported as health officials and organizations received considerably more focus during the initial pandemic designation.

Table 3 can also be used to answer Research Question 4, which asked which health sources were most utilized by sports journalists during the pandemic sampling periods. As Table 3 shows, doctors were the most consulted (53 mentions/quotes, more than the 24 for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] and 20 for the World Health Organization [WHO] combined). Doctors became a comparatively smaller proportion of the medical sources during the pandemic, presumably because doctors were still consulted on injuries during March 2019 while the CDC and WHO were not needed for much sourcing pre-pandemic. In March 2019, doctors constituted 81% of all medical sources referenced; during the pandemic periods, that dropped to 55% of all medical sources referenced. One could debate whether President Trump was being used in these sports stories as a medical expert. If included as a medical source, Table 3 shows that Trump was mentioned or quoted 41 times in the 2020 time periods, less than doctors, but more than the CDC and WHO combined. These results collectively answer the health source query embodied in RQ4.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the majority of sports news articles in the three 2020 time periods will reference the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 4 shows both (a) the proportion of articles within each time period that included at least one reference to COVID-19, and (b) the total number of times that COVID-19 was referenced.

Table 3. Entities Referenced by Time Period.

| Entity         | Spring 2019 | March 2020 | April 2020 | May 2020 | TOTAL |
|----------------|-------------|------------|------------|----------|-------|
| CDC            | 2           | 17         | 4          | 3        | 26    |
| WHO            | 2           | 13         | 7          | 0        | 22    |
| Dr./Medical Prof. | 17         | 17         | 26         | 10       | 70    |
| Pres. Trump    | 11          | 18         | 18         | 5        | 52    |
| Athletes       | 102         | 109        | 137        | 127      | 475   |
| Coaches        | 33          | 25         | 50         | 40       | 148   |
| Teams          | 49          | 98         | 89         | 74       | 310   |
| TOTAL          | 216         | 297        | 331        | 259      | 1,103 |
As the Table highlights, over three quarters of the articles within the time period (79.5% when combining March-April-May 2020) referenced COVID-19. The number of mentions gradually decreased over time (3.33 mentions in March, 2.39 mentions in April, 1.71 in May), likely a function of knowledge saturation about the pandemic as the weeks unfolded. Hypothesis 2 is supported, as the majority of articles did, indeed, reference the health pandemic altering the sports landscape.

Finally, Hypothesis 3 predicted that articles published during the initial outbreak (March 2020) would have a significantly higher usage of thematic framing than any other time measured. Table 5 offers the thematic/episodic breakdown of articles during each time period.

As illuminated within Table 5, the number of episodic articles peaked in the pre-pandemic time period (97%), gradually diminishing over time (86% in March 2020, 80.5% in April 2020, 75% in May 2020). Episodic frames were still represented in the large majority of articles regardless of time period, but the number and proportion of these articles did not significantly peak during the initial outbreak. Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

**Discussion**

Integrating framing as the foundation of our theoretical framework, this study examined the shifts in sports news coverage before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the frames that dictated the sports news cycle, and the sources that remained the most prevalent. As the pandemic grew more widespread, health and safety became the predominant focus of national sports media. In contrast to spring 2019, where economic and fairness/equality frames were highlighted most frequently, sports news in spring 2020 (particularly in April and May when sports had been cancelled
globally) experienced a demonstrable shift in coverage in which those frames were replaced with health/safety and quality of life as the principal frames in the coded articles. By pinpointing the major differences in coverage across time, the study revealed that the sports and frames quickly shifted to reflect the perceived severity of the impact of the pandemic by the global health community, while the sources used in those articles stayed largely the same.

First, when examining sports article topics, data analysis revealed significant differences among time periods as specific dates exhibited spikes in certain sports, leagues, and sporting events. Some of these topic upticks can be explained by major news events (e.g. the summer Olympics cancellation and coverage of the multi-day NFL draft) dominating a sports news cycle starved for any semblance of fresh sports. Other topic increases underscore a different pattern of coverage exemplifying how major media outlets determine what sports are considered “newsworthy” in a pandemic. Particularly, there was a significant increase in general sports stories from spring 2019 to March 2020 in which the coverage changed from discussing the entire gamut of the sports world individually to essentially: “Sports are gone. Now what?” This is further demonstrated by the significant decrease in “other” sports stories from those coinciding time periods in which fringe sports outside the mainstream (such as rowing, horse racing, youth lacrosse, etc.) were deemed inconsequential by reporters. Chotiner (2014) argues that all facets of sports journalism can be boiled down to either serious reporting or entertainment-based stories. During the COVID-19 pandemic, serious reporting was clearly pushed to the forefront.

Second, regarding article sourcing, the present study sought to determine the most utilized health sources during the initial American outbreak and subsequent sports shutdown, hypothesizing that articles published in spring 2020 will utilize more health sources than the previous year. Reporter reliance on sources significantly increased as time progressed, particularly with athletes and team officials, but the usage of doctors and medical professionals remained consistent. Interestingly, the CDC and WHO saw an initial uptick as sports article sources in March 2020 when American citizens were still learning about the potential health risks of COVID-19. As details became more widely known, reporters circled back to the primary sources on which they had always relied: athletes, coaches, and team officials—perhaps as a way to bring normalcy to a dire situation. Sports coverage that goes beyond the box score has shown a consistent ability to promote communal healing during times of hardship (Butterworth, 2014), and these familiar entities that resonate with fans may represent a glimmer of hope in the wake of a catastrophic economic decline and an “unemployment rate approaching the Great Depression” (Domm, 2020, para. 9).

Third, as shown in Hypothesis 2, the present study also determined that the majority of the coded sports articles in spring 2020 referenced the COVID-19 pandemic, evidenced by both the proportion of articles with a reference (ranging from 88% to 73.5%, depending on the month) and the number of references in each article (ranging from 3.33 to 1.71, depending on the month). This highlights the integral role of journalism during a pandemic as citizens look to news media to be
informed on a health crisis (Neason, 2020). By offering its own brand of health information, sports journalism transitioned from its normal position in the newsroom as a more fun and frivolous department (Rowe, 2007) to a vital member of the fourth estate. Individuals who traditionally had read nothing but the sports pages would have gained information about preventative actions to take, symptoms to look for, and hospitals to visit if infected. The number of COVID-19 article references diminished by half over time, but the initial inundation of pandemic information could have played a vital role in slowing the spread of misinformation for sports news consumers.

Finally, under the purview of framing theory, the current study examined article frames, how those frames changed over time, and hypothesized that the initial outbreak would have the most significant reliance on thematic frames. According to Entman (1993), frames exist to make issues more salient with the audience and work to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral decisions, and reinforce how news consumers should feel when presented with newsworthy information. Aside from “other” frames (e.g., gambling, player perspectives, sports comebacks, recruiting, etc.) which appeared most frequently but did not coincide with any specific framing categories, the most prominent frames in sports news varied widely over time. In spring 2019, the three most frequently used frames—fairness/equality, economic, and morality frames—represented the timely stories beyond the box scores that sports news departments deemed important. These articles consisted of stories championing burgeoning women’s sports leagues, the economics of potentially paying college athletes who generate billions for universities, and defining gender identity as a way to limit sports participation. Despite these profoundly impactful stories being told, the sports world (and the real world) carried on as normal.

Such findings bridge an interesting intersection with those of Staurowsky et al. (2020) whose COVID-19 sports media study revealed both similar and contrasting themes regarding women’s sports coverage during the initial pandemic outbreak. While the present study found that most stories involving women’s athletics were considerably positive, Staurowsky et al.’s (2020) findings suggest that coverage during this timeframe involved reactions to the loss of momentum in women’s sports, fears regarding a reversal in gains as the competition for limited resources escalated, concerns about decreasing women’s sport participation, and a focused commitment to gender equity. These discrepancies are perhaps due to the differences in media outlets being examined and the differences in coding methodology. The previous study was focused on all media outlets covering women’s sports, and it performed a more thorough textual analysis of a select number of articles, while data analysis was not conducted; conversely, the present study focused specifically on news article framing and coded hundreds of articles for a more quantitative approach to the study topic. Nevertheless, both highlight significant changes to the sports reporting landscape in the wake of the sports shutdown.

By March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic was well on the way to dominating everyday life in the United States, and with the closing of restaurants, schools, and
businesses came the inevitable shutdown of sports. Over the next 3 months, economic frames maintained a similar emphasis with fairness and morality frames replacing health/safety (e.g., player and fan safety while holding live sporting events, potential for community spread) and quality of life frames (e.g., diminishing quality of life from a lack of sports to act as a diversion) as COVID-19 became a public health crisis. With no live sports to cover and no end to the pandemic in sight, news organizations pivoted their sports coverage. Gitlin (1980) argues that journalists can benefit from framing because it allows them to better understand and compartmentalize broad topics before disseminating narrower conceptualizations to their audiences. Ultimately, the global pandemic was compartmentalized into three narrower concepts that could help audiences understand the severity of the situation.

This also coincides with a rise in thematic framing as media organizations began portraying COVID-19 as a catastrophic issue that would not be resolved at any point in the near future. Thus, themes began to emerge in pandemic storytelling. The health and safety of players, coaches, and fans became the most significant focus of sports media, while the economic impact of league shutdowns and cancelled games for virtually every sporting event worldwide also received a massive amount of coverage. Quality of life frames saw an immense surge in attention in April and May when schools around the country switched to online learning, millions were forced into unemployment, and sports could not act as a diversion from the mental and physical rigors of a global pandemic. Additionally, multiple frames often appeared in the same article; these overlapping frames highlight the nuanced nature of sporting narratives during crises. Ultimately, thematic framing requires audience interpretation (Iyengar & Simon, 1993), and the media frames changed when interpretation and calls to action (e.g., requiring face masks, sheltering-in-place, social distancing, frequent hand washing, etc.) became necessary aspects of daily life.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study’s research team attempted to code sports news articles that span a diverse range of newspaper, television, and online platforms, the study was limited by the media outlet options available on LexisNexis Academic. Prominent national newspapers (such as the Chicago Tribune and Dallas Morning News) as well as small-market, local newspapers and television stations were not included in the coding sample. Even the local newspapers included in the coding sample represent only media outlets on both U.S. coasts. Omitting small-market newspapers and media outlets that span the entirety of the United States may limit the generalizability of the study findings. Additionally, in order to code a robust sample of articles, a more cursory approach to coding was undertaken as opposed to complex textual analysis. A thorough textual analysis may have uncovered additional frames and nuance in the sample. Invariably, there are conceptual weaknesses associated with framing being used as a heuristic for understanding a complex and
multi-faceted process of discourse production, journalism, and editorial decision making that must be acknowledged as a limitation of this study.

Future research can compare findings from the present study to sports articles published in spring 2021—when the long-term effects of the virus will seemingly be more well-known and a vaccine may be publicly available—to examine the potential differences in sports coverage and determine if health and safety framing remains salient. Additionally, another content analysis can be developed to focus upon the COVID-19 sports landscape through the lens of social media. By examining how teams, players, coaches, politicians, and fans reacted to the worldwide shutdown of sports, a better understanding of exactly how this pandemic affected the livelihood of those most impacted can be ascertained.

**Conclusion**

With its examination of pandemic journalism in the 2020 sports media marketplace, this study uncovered that story selection and framing decisions among major U.S. media outlets changed drastically as COVID-19 brought sports (and the world) to a dramatic halt. The shift in emphasis to health, safety, and quality of life stories highlights the essential role of journalism as the first line of defense against a pandemic for which there is no known vaccine. Even for sport-obsessed audiences who avoid other news genres, this represents an aggressive attempt to reshape the media ecosystem and combat the spread of misinformation. Sports journalism has always relied on an appropriate balance of seriousness and entertainment (Chotiner, 2014). A new reality and a “new normal” forced news organizations to reevaluate their priorities as storytellers, and sports media adjusted to reflect these new priorities.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**ORCID iDs**

Sean R. Sadri [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9904-0461](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9904-0461)
Nicholas R. Buzzelli [https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6375-473X](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6375-473X)
Patrick Gentile [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9688-970X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9688-970X)
Andrew C. Billings [https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4818-5799](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4818-5799)
References

Allsop, J. (2020, July 28). The logistical and ethical challenges of sports reporters’ restart. Columbia Journalism Review. http://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/sports_media_nba_bubble.php

Andsager, J., & Powers, A. (1999). Social or economic concerns: How newspapers and women’s magazines framed breast cancer in the 1990s. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 76(3), 531–550.

Angelini, J. R., Billings, A. C., MacArthur, P. J., Bissell, K., & Smith, L. R. (2014). Competing separately, medaling equally: Racial depictions of athletes in NBC’s primetime broadcast of the 2012 London Olympic Games. Howard Journal of Communications. 25(2), 115–133.

Appelman, D. (2020, March 30). A FanGraphs update: We’re asking for your help. FanGraphs. http://blogs.fangraphs.com/a-fangraphs-update-were-asking-for-your-help/

Armour, N. (2020, July 20). Opinion: As football looks more and more unlikely, Europe shows us what could have been. USA Today. http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/nancy-armour/2020/07/20/european-soccer-shows-what-could-have-been-possible-us-sports/5468653002/

Bartholomé, G., Lecheler, S., & de Vreese, C. (2015). Manufacturing conflict? How journalists intervene in the conflict frame building process. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 20(4), 438–457.

Boydstun, A. E., Card, D., Gross, J. H., Resnik, P., & Smith, N. A. (2014). Tracking the development of media frames within and across policy issues [Paper presentation]. APSA 2014 Annual Meeting. https://homes.cs.washington.edu/~nasmith/papers/boydstun+card+gross+resnik+smith.apsa14.pdf

Boyle, R. (2017). Sports journalism: Changing journalism practice and digital media. Digital Journalism, 5(5), 493–495.

Bradley, B. (2009, October 17). Where are they now: Dave smith, president 1974-1976. APSE. http://www.apsportseditors.com/where-are-they-now-dave-smith-president-1974-1976/

Butterworth, M. L. (2014). Public memorializing in the stadium: Mediated sport, the 10th anniversary of 9/11, and the illusion of democracy. Communication & Sport, 2(3), 203–224.

Buzzelli, N. R., Gentile, P. C., Billings, A. C., & Sadri, S. R. (2020). Poaching the news producers: The athletic’s effect on sports in hometown newspapers. Journalism Studies, 21(11), 1514–1530.

Cacciatore, M. A., Scheufele, D. A., & Iyengar, S. (2016). The end of framing as we know it and the future of media effects. Mass Communication and Society, 19(1), 7–23.

Cassilo, D., & Sanderson, J. (2018). ‘I don’t think it’s worth the risk’: Media framing of the Chris Borland retirement in digital and print media. Communication & Sport, 6(1), 86–110.

Chotiner, I. (2014, June 1). There are two kinds of ‘sports journalism’: Only one of them is really journalism. New Republic. http://newrepublic.com/article/117964/nba-finals-preview-greg-popovich-and-sports-journalism
Domm, P. (2020, June 4). The May unemployment rate is expected to be near 20% as millions more lost jobs. *CNBC*. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/04/the-may-unemployment-rate-is-expected-to-be-near-20percent-as-millions-more-lost-jobs.html

Entman, R. M. (1991). Framing US coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents. *Journal of Communication, 41*(4), 6–27.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51–58.

Fleiss, J. L. (1981). *Statistical methods for rates and proportions* (2nd ed.). John Wiley.

Forde, S., & Wilson, B. (2018). Radical sports journalism?: Reflections on ‘alternative’ approaches to covering sport-related social issues. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 35*(1), 66–76.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the new left*. University of California Press.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.

Gross, K. (2008). Framing persuasive appeals: Episodic and thematic framing, emotional response, and policy opinion. *Political Psychology, 29*(2), 169–192.

Hardin, M. (2005). Survey finds boosterism, freebies remain problem for newspaper sports departments. *Newspaper Research Journal, 26*(1), 66–73.

Hardin, M., & Ash, E. (2011). Journalists provide social context missing from sports blogs. *Newspaper Research Journal, 32*(2), 20–35.

Hardin, M., & Zhong, B. (2010). Sports reporters’ attitudes about ethics vary based on beat. *Newspaper Research Journal, 31*(2), 6–19.

Hardin, M., Zhong, B., & Whiteside, E. (2009). Sports coverage: ‘toy department’ or ‘public service’ journalism? The relationship between reporters’ ethics and attitudes towards the profession. *International Journal of Sports Communication, 2*(1), 319–339.

Hare, K. (2021, February 11). Here are the newsroom layoffs, furloughs and closures caused by the coronavirus. *Poynter*. http://www.poynter.org/business-work/2021/here-are-the-newsroom-layoffs-furloughs-and-closures-caused-by-the-coronavirus/

Heider, F. (1959). *The psychology of interpersonal relations* (2nd ed). John Wiley & Sons.

Hendrickson, C. (2020, April 8). Critical in a public health crisis, COVID-19 has hit local newsrooms hard. *Brookings Institute*. http://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/04/08/critical-in-a-public-health-crisis-covid-19-has-hit-local-newsrooms-hard/

Horn, A. (2020, April 17). Popular blog SB nation furloughs writers with few sports to cover during pandemic. *NPR*. http://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/17/837474437/popular-blog-sb-nation-furloughs-writers-with-few-sports-to-cover-during-coronav

Hunt, D. (1999). *O.J. Simpson facts and fictions: News rituals in the construction of reality*. Cambridge University Press.

Iyengar, S., & Simon, A. (1993). News coverage of the gulf crisis and public opinion: A study of agenda-setting, priming, and framing. *Communication Research, 20*(3), 365–383.

Jones, T. (2020, March 23). The role of the press in the coronavirus pandemic is to provide truth, even if that truth is grim. *Poynter*. http://www.poynter.org/newsletters/2020/the-
role-of-the-press-in-the-coronavirus-pandemic-is-to-provide-truth-even-if-that-truth-is-grim/

Keveney, B. (2021, January 22). CNN moves to no. 1, Fox drops in post-election ratings shake-up: Will it last? USA Today. https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/tv/2021/01/22/cnn-replaced-fox-top-rated-cable-news-network-post-election/6666017002/

Kian, E. M., & Hardin, M. (2009). Framing of sport coverage based on the sex of sports writers: Female journalists counter the traditional gendering of media coverage. *International Journal of Sport Communication, 2*(2), 185–204.

Konow-Lund, M., Hagvar, Y. B., & Olssen, E.-K. (2019). Digital innovation during terror and crises. *Digital Journalism, 7*(7), 952–971.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The elements of journalism: What news people should know and the public should expect.* Three Rivers Press.

Lee, S. T., & Basnyat, I. (2013). From press release to news: Mapping the framing of the 2009 H1N1 A influenza pandemic. *Health Communication, 28*(2), 119–132.

Lewis, S. C., & Reese, S. D. (2009). What is the war on terror? Framing through the eyes of journalists. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 86*(1), 85–102.

Liu, B. F., & Kim, S. (2011). How organizations framed the 2009 H1N1 pandemic via social and traditional media: Implications for US health communicators. *Public Relations Review, 37*(3), 233–244.

Lupica, M. (2020, Mar. 13). Rudy Gobert saved the world. *The New York Daily News.* https://www.nydailynews.com/sports/basketball/ny-rudy-gobert-coronavirus-nba-shutdown-20200313-parqbv2y5vehrp2csqqqrksydu-story.html

Matthew, D. (202, May 19). Fears over accuracy of Premier League coronavirus test results as company’s chief admits they are NOT 100% reliable with nearly 10 false readings on average for every 800 tests. *The Daily Mail.* http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/sportsnews/article-8337661/Fears-accuracy-Premier-League-coronavirus-test-results.html

Matthews, J. & Thorson, E. (Eds.) (2020). *Media, journalism, and disaster communities.* Palgrave.

Mercurio, E., & Filak, V. F. (2010). Roughing the passer: The framing of black and white quarterbacks prior to the NFL draft. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 21*(1), 56–71.

Mixer, M., & Mederson, M. (2017). Leading with the head: How NBC’s football night in America framed football’s concussion crisis, a case study. *Journal of Sports Media, 12*(1), 21–44.

Mitchell, A., Jurkowitz, M., Olipiant, J. B., & Shearer, E. (2020, June 29). Three months in, many Americans see exaggeration, conspiracy theories, and partisanship in COVID-19 news. *Pew Research Center.* http://www.journalism.org/2020/06/29/three-months-in-many-americans-see-exaggeration-conspiracy-theories-and-partisanship-in-covid-19-news/

Moritz, B. (2020). The year sports journalism changes for good. *NiemanLab.* http://www.niemanlab.org/2020/12/the-year-sports-journalism-changes-for-good/
Mosby, J. (2020, September 14). A world without sports: How sports journalists are handling the pandemic. *The Daily Egyptian*. http://www.dailyegyptian.com/102333/sports/a-world-without-sports-how-sports-journalists-are-handling-the-pandemic/

Neason, A. (2020, April 2). In a pandemic, what is essential journalism? *Columbia Journalism Review*. http://www.cjr.org/analysis/essential-reporting-and-analysis-amid-pandemic.php

Oates, T. P., & Pauly, J. (2007). Sports journalism as moral and ethical discourse. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 22*(4), 332–347.

Pazzanese, C. (2020, May 8). Battling the “pandemic of misinformation.” *The Harvard Gazette*. http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/05/social-media-used-to-spread-create-covid-19-falsehoods/

Price, V., & Tewksbury, D. (1997). News values and public opinion: A theoretical account of media priming and framing. In G.A Barett & F. J Boster (Eds.), *Progress in communication sciences: Advances in persuasion* (Vol. 13, pp. 173–212). Ablex.

Radcliffe, D. (2020, July 20). COVID-19 has ravaged American newsrooms. Here’s why that matters. *NiemanLab*. http://www.niemanlab.org/2020/07/covid-19-has-ravaged-american-newsrooms-heres-why-that-matters/

Ramon-Vegas, X., & Rojas-Torrijos, J-L. (2018). Accountable sports journalism: Building up a platform and a new specialised code in the field. *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics, 15*(1–2), 15–28.

Reinardy, S., & Wanta, W. (2015). *The essentials of sports reporting and writing*. Routledge.

Rodgers, S., & Thorson, E. (2003). A socialization perspective on male and female reporting. *The Journal of Communication, 53*(4), 658–675.

Rowe, D. (2007). Sports journalism: Still the toy department of the news media? *Journalism, Theory, Practice & Criticism, 8*(1), 385–405.

Rugg, A. (2020). Incorporating the protests: The NFL, social justice, and the constrained activism of the ‘inspire change’ campaign. *Communication & Sport*. Available online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2167479519896325

Schmidt, H. H. (2018). Sport reporting in the era of activism: Examining the intersection of sport media and social activism. *International Journal of Sport Communication, 11*(1), 2–17.

Schrock, J. (2020, Mar. 27). Steve Kerr praises Steph Curry for Dr. Anthony Fauci coronavirus Q&A. *NBC Sports*. https://www.nbcSports.com/bayarea/warriors/steve-kerr-praises-steph-curry-dr-anthony-fauci-coronavirus-qa

Seate, A. A., Harwood, J., & Blecha, E. (2010). ‘He was framed!’: Framing criminal behavior in sports news. *Communication Research Reports, 27*(4), 343–354.

Sherif, M. (1967). *Social interaction: Processes and products*. Aldine.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message* (pp. 781–795). Longman.

Smith, L. R., & Pegoraro, A. (2020). Media framing of Larry Nassar and the USA gymnastics child sex abuse scandal. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 29*(4), 373–392.

Smith, R., & Panja, T. (2020, August 24). Soccer played through the pandemic. Now it has to do it all again. *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/24/sports/soccer/champions-league-premier-league-virus.html
Soonhwan, L., Seungmo, K., & Love, A. (2014). Coverage of the gay games from 1980-2012 in U.S. Newspapers: An analysis of newspaper article framing. *Journal of Sport Management, 28*(2), 176–188.

Spratt, M. (2001). Science, journalism, and the construction of news. *American Journalism, 18*(3), 61–79.

Staurowsky, E. J., Koch, B., Dury, G., & Hayes, C. (2020). Exploring narratives of scarcity, uncertainty, and opportunity in women’s sports coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Sport Communication, 13*, 408–418.

Stofer, K. T., Schaffer, J. R., & Rosenthal, B. A. (2010). *Sports journalism: An introduction to reporting and writing*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Strauss, B. (2020, March 23). Think you miss live sports? Media companies feel your pain. And then some. *The Washington Post*. http://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/03/23/sports-media-coronavirus/

Strauss, B. (2020, March 30). Sports Illustrated endures another round of layoffs, this time prompted by the coronavirus. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/03/30/sports-illustrated-endures-another-round-layoffs-this-time-prompted-by-coronavirus/

Sugden, J., & Tomlinson, A. (2007). Stories from planet football and sportsworld: Source relations and collusion in sport journalism. *Journalism Practice, 1*(1), 44–61.

Tewksbury, D., & Riles, J. M. (2018). Framing in an interactive news environment. In P. D’Angelo (Ed.), *Doing news framing analysis II: Empirical and theoretical perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 137–162). Routledge.

Tewksbury, D., & Scheufele, D. A. (2009). News framing theory and research. In J. Bryant & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 17–34). Erlbaum.

Thomas, K., & Senkpeni, A. D. (2020, January). What should health science journalists do in pandemic responses? *AMA Journal of Ethics, 22*(1), E55–60.

Wagner, J. (2020, May 16). Can sports heal a country? Some fans don’t buy the emotional pleas. *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/16/sports/baseball/coronavirus-sports-comeback.html

Walker, K. B., Seifried, C., Soebbing, B., & Agyemang, K. (2018). A comparative framing analysis of major violations in the national collegiate athletic association. *International Journal of Sport Communication, 11*(1), 95–122.

Ward, Stephen. (2004). *The invention of journalism ethics: The path to objectivity and beyond*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Watson, A. (2020, November 20). Leading daily newspapers in the United States in September 2017 and January 2019, by circulation. *Statista*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/184682/us-daily-newspapers-by-circulation/

Weedon, G., & Wilson, B. (2020). Textbook journalism? Objectivity, education and the professionalization of sports reporting. *Journalism, 21*(10), 1375–1400.