

MEDIA-SPORT COMMUNITY: GOING BEYOND AN AD-HOC COMPLICITY

Diana-Luiza DUMITRIU, Georgiana UDREA

Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration,
Bucharest, Romania

Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to address the media-sport nexus in terms of the interaction contexts and social practices that define the relationship between the journalists and the sport actors. In questioning the idea of a "media-sport community" we have focused on three dimensions that attest to the dialectical nature of this relationship: collaborative versus conflictive ends, in-group versus out-group identification, professional versus personal engagement. Each of these dimensions covers a complex process of symbolic negotiation between the media and the sport actors, revealing both ritualized practices, as well as some structuring effects of the celebrity media logic that the sport field has entered within. We argue that the media-sport community is a very debatable concept, as it brings along both convergent and disruptive forces in terms of the identification mechanisms, goals and corollary socio-professional practices. Moreover, the mixture of professional and personal grounds in building the relationships between the journalists and the sport actors makes them engage in a form of role-play complicity, which brings along important face management challenges. Despite the consistent interaction contexts and common experiences, we are rather speaking about a conventional community of action, mainly defined by an instrumental connectivity than an organic in-group belonging feeling. In addressing this inside-out resistance to the media-sport community identification, some of the ideas we have looked into are supported by the findings we have come across during a qualitative study that covered 23 in-depth interviews with Romanian handball coaches.*

Keywords: *media-sport community, celebrity, symbolic power negotiation, in-group identification, face management, sport journalism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays sport-related issues are discussed within the wider framework of the media social and commercial dynamics, as most of our sport experiences are, in fact, mediated ones. It is not only that the "history of sport has been to a large extent both dominated and documented by the mass media" (Boyle, Haynes, 2009:1), but the mere social imagery of sport has been redefined and strongly "tied down by the compelling structural force of the media field" (Bourdieu, 1996:64).

Thus, media have not only provided us with wide-scale accessibility to the sport world, which is now subject to high public visibility, but they ended up transforming that world (Whannel, 1992:3). The main coordinates of this process were the dramatization and spectacularization of sport acts, which have become highly marketable media-sport products. "By presenting sport as a social drama, sport stories can be <given legs>" (Craig, Beedie, 2008:163), exerting both a powerful entertaining and commercial magnetism over the

audiences. Along with this accelerated process of sport commodification, the win-win relationship between sport and media was significantly strengthened, consolidating their already successful "marriage of convenience" (Lever, Wheeler, 1993:130).

In addressing the centrality of the media logic within the social field of sport, the reconfiguration of the sport experiences and the marketization of the sport performances seem to be among the research topics that have gained prominence, serving both academic and non-academic interests.

Moreover, in this equation that brings together media actors, sport actors and audiences, the focus was rather directed towards the media-audiences dyad or towards the sport actors-audiences dyad. If the first approach brings to the fore the media discourses and the experiences of mediated sport consumption, the second one lays stress on the fan experiences and the sport celebrity culture. However, the sport actors-media actors relation has receive less attention in explaining the reconfiguration of the sport world and the corollary dynamics of the sport experiences.

Looking at what fuels this resourceful sport and media joint-venture, we can argue that one of the constitutive units of interaction between the two fields is the mere relationship between the media actors and the sport actors. It is this relationship that counts the most when addressing the field of media-sport production, whether we speak in terms of spectatorship experiences, sport events or sport celebrity stories. The aim of this paper is thus to discuss the media-sport nexus in terms of the media actors-sport actors dyad. What is at stake for both parts in this relationship? Which are the main interaction contexts and social practices that define it? In addressing these questions, we lay stress on the dialectical nature of this relationship and argue about the actual and potential basis for a media-sport community.

2. THE DYNAMICS OF THE MEDIA-SPORT LANDSCAPE

The success of the sport and media joint-venture inside the commodification framework has generated not only new products, but also new commercial fields *per se*. These commercial grounds that both sport and media share have increased the interdependency between the two social fields, favouring an intense hybridization processes between them.

Sport was not only one of the fastest-growing sector in media, but also subject to a spectacular evolution, which was, to some extent, similar to the hollywoodian success stories. Starting as the "toy department", always appendix to some other hard-core media products, sport made its way and came to the fore as a central pillar of the media system. "More and more mainstream news coverage is devoted to carrying sporting stories and the stars that the media sport industries work so hard to create" (Boyle, Haynes, 2009:vi), so that they meet the demand of the audiences.

Moreover,

sport has played a key role in television's change from being a predominantly nation-based and state-run medium toward one that is internationalized and privatized (Robertson, 2004: 293),

as sport media events are both globalized and globalizing. They manage to bring together wide-world distant publics, providing prominence to their global fan or sport customer profile over their national citizenship one. It is no wonder that these

interconnections between sport, the media and advertising have helped to create the impression

that the pivotal social and personal experience of the modern age is to be a consumer (Craig, Beedie, 2008:130).

Following the abundance principle of the consumer society, sport and media joined their forces in providing us with richer spectatorship experiences. This is how sport entered new competitive markets as the commodification process that it was subject to generated a snowball effect in terms of sport-related products, that go from TV shows, to sport related books, magazines, clothing, museums or media institutions.

Besides the proliferation of the media-sport products, another important aspect of these emergent markets was their increasing specialization. From the must-have sport page in every newspaper, sport ended up having its own prime-time newscast and, furthermore, attested to its autonomy through the success of sport TV channels and newspapers. Today we are not only speaking about general sport channels and magazine, but, moreover, about specialized media-sport products. From Eurosport to Extreme Sport Channel or Motors TV, everyone can customize his media-sport package to fit his interests.

We are now facing a wide variety of TV channels, websites, radio stations and social media pages dedicated to sport. Professional as well as amateur sport are highly integrated into a global '*sport-media complex*' (Law, Harvey, Kemp, 2002; Smart, 2007) that it is subject to constant reconfiguration. But what did this reconfiguration process involved in terms of media practices and media actors-sport actors relationship? What defines the general framework of sport journalism?

It all started with sport journalists having to cope with an outsider position within the media community, always challenged to prove they are more than a "toy department". Placed at the bottom of the media hierarchy, they were often criticized and teased with their underdog position as "fans with a typewriter" (Craig, Beedie, 2008:157). Nevertheless, the new visibility of sport and its increasing cultural centrality (Malcom, 2008) brought along a reevaluation of the sport journalist status, as they become key-players in the media's race for wide-sale audiences. And what can be more entertaining and guarantee a higher rating than a sport event?

In this context of sport being placed at the conjunction between journalism and entertainment, thus having "all the immediacy, authenticity, and unpredictability of news, but also the stars, the drama, the narrative structure, and the spectacle of

show business" (Whannel, 1985:54), the mere sport-related journalistic practices have faced significant changes. From the informative approach and the "practices of objectivity" (Richardson, 2007: 87) that the journalists used for providing that sense of neutrality in covering sport-related issues, the focus was moved to a more personal approach that has encouraged journalists to be more critical, as well as more involved in creating stories that are meant to move and captivate the public. The facts are no longer enough and, thus, sport journalists must turn to storytelling and tabloidization to maintain the attraction chains of the sport news.

The cyclicity of sport events provides a high level of stability and predictability in terms of sport calendar and corollary event-related news. Nevertheless,

different from most events whose news values would and could be judged only after they occur, sport competitions are presumed to be newsworthy before they take place (Craig, Beedie, 2008:156),

making the differentiation fight more about the way the same topics are addressed. Thus, what really counts in terms of media coverage of sport acts is *when* and *how* these news are released.

The value of major sport events as media products has led to a *prime-time synchronicity effect*. Media and sport actors understood the mutual benefits of scheduling a major sport event inside the prime-time period, as this meant larger audiences and higher public exposure, which can be further translated in profitability for both parties. Implicitly, this brought higher visibility for sport journalists, who won an important battle in terms of their recognition within the media community, as well as for the general public. The constant presence of sport events and news in the prime-time segment made the sport journalists' name seen or heard by a large portion of the public nearly every day, transforming them into minor celebrities (Smith, 1976:8).

Another important aspect in terms of sport-related news time-frame is that, within the highly competitive media landscape, the proximity to the event is an important competitive advantage. But this proximity battle comes with some costs and consequences, two of which we will like to address here, as they have a great impact for the overall process of the sport-related news production.

On the one hand, there is the standardization of the media discourses and the tendency to turn to sport journalistic clichés. It is this pressure of

being the first in releasing the news that sometimes leads sport journalists to a rather "habitual, unreflexive, and uncritical adherence to well established production routines and occupational formulae" (Negus, 2002: 510), turning them into what Bourdieu (1996) refers to as "fast thinkers". By turning to general accepted ideas and social representations, as well as stereotypes and categorization discursive practices, journalists can hence provide a consistent source for public's need for "familiar and known" (Rowe, 2004), while, at the same time, minimizing their effort and time for news' production.

On the other hand, the differentiation card is hard to be played when it comes to the facts that are covered (as most of them are already known and open to all media actors). So, the interpretation component remains the one to serve this purpose. This is the actual added value that sport journalist can bring to the spectatorship experiences. People are attracted to sports journalism mostly because it can provide a frame of interpretation, the sport journalist being "often sought out by the public for his expert opinion on sports related matters" (Smith, 1976:8) and his cultural mediator role (Desmarais, Bruce, 2010).

Moreover, the expert opinion can be combined or even replaced by the preferential access to backstage information that people seek to in this overall tabloidization of the sport ethos. Infotainment is the referential position for sport-related news, but it is also the most controversial aspect when sport-related media practices become subject to public debate. Therefore,

an understanding of the way the media constructs meanings around sport and identities among its audience is central to a critical engagement with sport (Kennedy, Hills, 2009:6).

This change of the sport journalists' status within the media landscape, as well as in terms of their public exposure and social recognition had a great impact on the relationship between the media actors and the sport actors. One important aspect in this regard was the intensification of the dialectic nature of this relationship on three dimension that we will further address: collaborative versus conflictive ends, in-group versus out-group identification, professional versus personal engagement. Based on these constitutive aspects embedded in the media actors-sport actors relationship, we will then bring to the fore the idea and the nature of a media-sport community.

3. THE DIALECTICAL NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE JOURNALISTS AND THE SPORT ACTORS

Building on the generally accepted premises that the relationship between the media and the sport actors is mainly defined by a "mutually beneficial inter-dependence" (Boyle, 2006), we argue that both parties are facing significant dilemmas in managing this relationship. This comes as a consequence of the dialectical nature of their relationship, which we are going to discuss in this section.

3.1 A dynamic balance between collaborative and conflictive ends. When discussing the media-sport nexus, the dominant perspective was to lay stress on the increasing interdependency between the actors that perform within the both social fields. The "symbiotic nature of this relationship" (Smith, 1976: 5) was mainly translated in terms of their mutual commercial interest that allowed for the emergence and success of the wider sport-related circle of promotion. Thus, media actors and sport actors found themselves part of a win-win relationship that requires collaboration. While sport actors are expected to provide content that the journalists could build on and convert into news, media actors are the ones to make sport stories visible and to mediate the audiences accessibility to sport actors and events.

Nevertheless, this collaboration was rather the result of an instrumental approach of the media-sport nexus. In other words, both sport journalists and sport actors understood that they need each other in order to maintain their forefront position on the media agenda and, moreover, on the entertainment market. Even though they shared the same audience dependency commercial law, which requires constant presence and high public visibility, the means of achieving these goals bring them to conflictive positions.

Beyond the general collaborative component of their relationship, media actors and sport actors end up having conflictive approaches on "*how*" and "*about what*" sport news should be. While journalists tend to look for the spectacularity of sport news outside the sport field, the sport actors plead for finding it within the sport arena.

The neo-media logic (Casetti & Odin, 1990) moved the focus towards a more and more entertaining news content. This, in turn, brought along a reconfiguration of the public-private life boundaries, as well as a hybridization of the front

stage-backstage regions of performance (Goffman, 1959/2003). People want to see more and to get access to "forbidden" areas that they find to be so fascinating, especially when it comes to actors and events that have entered the celebrity market. This transpassing of public-private or front stage-backstage zones are both newsworthy and highly entertaining. Therefore, sport journalists are seeking to reveal as much as they can about the private life of sport actors and backstage information from sport events, as these news have higher chances to gain the public attention.

Pleasing the public by relaying on this type of media practices can rise significant resistance from the sport actors' part, as this means forcing them to cope with high face management pressure (Goffman, 1967). Sport actors are as interested as the sport journalists in keeping themselves on the front page, but they prefer doing this mostly with news regarding their professional activity and less about their personal life, as this requires additional impression management strategies to maintain the consistency of their public face.

Thus, to some extent, we can say that, despite understanding the common commercial grounds of the media-sport nexus, it seems that media actors are more inclined to stand for the fact that the "end justifies the means", while the sport actors are rather looking for a more moderate approach, trying to keep the costs of the public exposure and the walk of fame under control. These different perspectives on how to fulfill the audiences' need for spectacularity and fresh new information about the sport world gives rise to a constant process of negotiation between sport actors and journalists. To what extent can journalist reveal private or backstage information about the sport actors? When is their collaboration called in question? Who and what has to win or lose by entering the conflictive zone of this relationship? What is at stake in coping with this dynamic balance between collaborative and conflictive forces?

On the one hand, by narrowing down the distance to the sport actors and events, media built up the exclusivity positioning and provided the public with some sort of preferential access to what was perceived as being a very restricted area. Moreover, this form of exclusivity and complicity in revealing what was supposed to be out of the spotlights is a source of spectacularity, as the "logic of presence gradually takes over the one of representation" (Charaudeau, Ghiglione, 2005:34). Thus, this unrevealing process that sport journalists fight for, forcing the collaborative terms of their

relationship with the sport actors, is meant to be played as a tacit complicity between the public and the media.

On the other hand, sport actors try to minimize the vulnerability that this race for unrevealing private and backstage information brings in terms of face management. Extending the regions of public exposure can come with high costs in terms of impression management and redressive/remedial face management strategies (Goffman, 1971, Brown, Levinson, 1987). Celebrities or just public figures, sport actors have understood the risks that come with mixing public and private aspects of their lives.

However, there are other unavoidable things that they have to take into consideration and cope with: the tabloidization of media and the general infotainment wave, as well as the fact that celebrity is not just about sport achievements, but rather "it is constituted discursively, by the way in which the individual is represented" (Turner, Bonner, Marshall, 2000:11) in the media. Moreover, the celebrity as role model, which serves both self-esteem and commercial purposes, "is both made and undone by press and television coverage" (Smart, 2005: 8), making them even more media-dependent.

Thus, although they do not agree with the offensive media practices of pushing the public visibility further than the actual borders of their professional activity, sport actors are rather cautious in dealing and negotiating these aspects. This is how the complicity between the journalists and the public is, sometimes, artificial, as the access to certain "hidden" information about sport events or actors is actually negotiated and provided by the sport actors themselves. These practices are meant to rebalance the relationship between the journalists and sport actors, giving the latter more control over what is revealed in the media, while maintaining the captivating feeling of the journalist-audiences complicity.

3.2 In-group versus out-group identification for the media and the sport actors. The everyday activity of both journalists and sport actors brings them together into a relationship that is not only strategic, but first of all operative for the dynamics of the wider media-sport system. It is not only that journalists and sport actors interact with high frequency but, more important, that this constant interaction has given rise to a highly institutionalized communication cycle. Within it we can distinguish between communication contexts and corollary communication contracts

that define the interaction and discursive practices involved by both the media and the sport actors (i.e. pre-competition interviews and press conference, media corner prompt reactions after the competitive act, post-game press conferences, sport talk-shows etc.).

This functional interdependency between the journalists and the sport actors makes them act as a group, sharing not only commercial interests, but also common knowledge and experiences. However, as much as the media-sport nexus acts as platform of convergence for this group, there are also factors that come to probe this instrumental convergence.

Another aspect that is worth discussing is that on both the sport actors' and sport journalists' part, there is a slow change when it comes to the front stage figures. Not only do we face a gradual change of generations, but there is a significant migration of sport actors inside the same narrow walk of fame circle. Most of the coaches and staff members come from former athletes, which means that there is a high retention rate in terms of sport front stage actors. This, in turn, allows for developing long-term relationship with the media actors.

Coaches and journalists tend to have the longest career path when it comes to professional sport, changing teams or press institutions, but finding their place in a similar sport-related position. Top sport journalists end up being referential public figures that dominate the national field of sport press, some of them even "rivalling" with sport actors in terms of public visibility and fame. In these cases, the media actors are not only enjoying the expert position when it comes to sport related issues, but they become stars *per se*, gaining a considerable influence inside the sport field. Moreover, there are many sport actors who enter the journalistic field, capitalizing on their notoriety, expertise and familiarity with the media-sport world. This type of professional mobility contributes to the hybridization between the two fields, while also enhancing the in-group feeling.

While the common contexts of action and interaction, which are mostly sport event-related, favour a working-group identification, the distinct professional agendas allow for the emergence of conflictive approaches. The group identification mechanism is thus very much dependent on the context and the third party reference point, and, even more dependent on the intentionality and the degree of the instrumentalization of the group identification.

We thus argue that accepting, as well as questioning the in-group or the out-group position of the other, is actually part of a constant power negotiation between the journalists and the sport actors. Moreover, it is a matter of trust and legitimacy call. Whenever one party tries to take the lion share by making use of the privileged access and knowledge about the other party, the latter lays stress on the limits of this ad-hoc similarity and proximity of action. In other words, when conflictive approaches emerge, the gap between the journalists and the sport actors is enlarged. While one part insists on its in-group position, the other calls it into question, challenging the inside claim of the other party as source of power.

3.3 Professional versus personal engagement. The crowded sport calendar and, moreover, the pressure for sport-related news, in and outside the sport competition time-frame, means constant interaction between the media and the sport actors. However, the high specialization of sport journalists, as well as the backstage experiences that they share with the sport actors - before and after a sport event- come along with significant time and emotion investment from both parts. The proximity and constant interaction between the journalists and the sport actors consolidate a relationship that, in many cases, goes beyond the professional framework.

Besides sharing the same professional contexts of action and the "live" emotional experience of the sport performances, the journalists' access to backstage information is rather dependent on the personal relationship they manage to build with the sport actors. Gaining access, priority or even exclusiveness to reveal aspects that go beyond the mere sport performance on the field is, hence, dependent on the level of trust and familiarity that defines their relationship with the sport actors.

Nevertheless, this relationship building process has a dialectical nature. It usually starts from a rather instrumental approach. On the one hand, journalists believe that a more personal relationship with the sport actors means a easier and higher access to newsworthy information, while, on the other hand, sport actors find it helpful in terms of the media coverage and public image management. The deeper and longer the personal experience sharing, the higher the moral dilemmas in taking advantage of this position for professional reasons and unilateral gain.

Balancing the benefits and the costs of the instrumental use of this relationship is therefore

more difficult. To what extent they can take advantage of their position becomes a matter of long-term evaluation of both personal and professional consequences. It is not only the professional gain that is at stake, but also the emotional capital that has been invested in building that relationship. Moreover, an inappropriate call of action in this regard can be highly face threatening, thus affecting other similar relationships or potential ones, as this media-sport actors' cycle is quite closed.

The personal involvement of sport journalists in this relationship is also favored by a general consideration and fandom feeling towards top sport actors. They cannot bypass their spectatorship experience, which is, inevitably, embedded in their professional activity. Moreover, this multiple identification mechanisms activated in relation to sport actors - as spectators, as media professional or as friend - can bring along a certain bias that the journalist need to acknowledge and cope with. For example, a high personal involvement in their relationship with the sport actors can make journalists more cautious in choosing what and how to speak about. Going further, the

lack of distance from their news sources, who are very often subjects being reported on, means that sports journalists are reluctant to risk their good relationship with the sports organizations or sportspeople, which may have cost them years of efforts to establish (Craig & Beedie, 2008:157-158).

This is how we end up with a form of "complicity" between the journalists and the sport actors, which involves a constant negotiation in setting out the balance between what journalists know and what they actually choose to reveal to the public.

Another potential cost for this familiarity and high emotional involvement of the journalists, whether paternalistic or hostile, is that it can make the content and overall framing of the news too much dependent on the personal relationship that the journalists have with the sport actors. This, in turn, calls into question the objectivity and the professional deontology of the journalists and can affect their credibility and expert position in the eyes of their audiences.

As for the sport actors, the main risk in making the relationship with the journalists too personal is that of exposing themselves too much and becoming vulnerable in terms of potential personal information reveal. However, we can argue that the pressure and the moral dilemma in defining to what extent can the personal component of this

relationship can be used for professional purposes and unilateral gain is higher for the journalists than for the sport actors. The perceived short-term benefits of taking advantage of this relationship in order to provide high newsworthy content are very tempting for the journalists, while the costs are rather related to a long-term framework.

All in all, on this professional versus personal engagement dimension, we can say that both the journalists and the sport actors are involved in a strategic evaluation of the short-term versus long-term benefits and costs of taking advantage of their position. It is this decision to accept the risk of potential exposure (from the sport actors part) and to voluntarily conceal some newsworthy material (from the journalist part) that makes the discussion about media actors-sport actors' relationship not only a matter of professional bargain, but also a matter of personal complicity.

4. THE MEDIA-SPORT COMMUNITY

Given the dialectic nature of the relationship between the journalists and the sport actors and the general dynamics of the media-sport nexus, can we speak about a "media-sport community"? To what extent and in which terms can we argue its existence?

If we focus on the cohesive forces within the media-sport nexus, the media-sport community concept is easier to argue for. The high level of shared experiences, the common interaction contexts and similarity in terms of sport-related interests provide a solid platform to build on. Starting from here, the journalists and the sport actors share and even develop their own communication resources (i.e. media-sport jargon), stories and legends, as well as a consistent formal, but, most of all, informal rules of (inter)action. Moreover, when it comes to the top sport performance, the small number of both the sport actors and the journalists to cover their stories favor significant time and emotional involvement in developing a consistent long-term relationship.

Therefore, approaching the community concept in a broader sense, as it

encompasses a wide range of social ties and common interests which go beyond proximity or common residence (Jarvie, 2006: 328),

we can speak about a media-sport community. Nevertheless, it is mainly defined as a professional community or a community of action, building on the shared experiences, norms and practices that

come with these specific contexts of professional-related interaction. Within the media-sport community, both the journalists and the sport actors experience some sense of belonging to the group, being actively engaged in "continuous social relationships" (Schifirneț, 2002:167). In terms of boundaries, we thus relate to symbolic boundaries embedded in the dynamics of the media-sport nexus, as the media-sport community can be seen rather as an output of the day to day connectivity and identification activated by the professional display of both the media and the sport actors' practices.

However, if we focus on the divergent forces within the journalists and sport actors' relationship, we can find the media-sport community concept to be rather artificial and speculative. The fact that their professional activity makes them interdependent and brings them together with a high frequency can be seen as a necessary, but not sufficient condition to speak about the existence of an authentic community.

Moreover, it can be argued that this media-sport community representation is rather based on simulated closeness and engagement from both parts, serving an instrumental approach of this relationship. This is consistent with the media-sport marriage of convenience metaphor (Lever, Wheeler, 1993) and builds on the premises that the relationship between journalists and sport actors is projected to look more complex than it is. In the light of these arguments, the media-sport community can at the very most be understood as a strategic construct that serves commercial interests. The functional and strategic grounds thus rule over the emotional ones. This does not mean that all journalists-sport actors relationships are an emotional simulacrum, but that they should rather be discussed as dyads or small groups than related to the existence of a wider media-sport community.

To lay stress on the idea of the media-sport community as an inconsistent construct impelled by the strategic complicity between the journalists and the sport actors we bring into discussion some insights from a qualitative research conducted among professional handball coaches. The study was developed during the first months of 2011 and covered a wider spectrum of topics regarding the alternative logics of (in)success and the definition corollary roles of sport actors. The media actors-sport actors relationship, was one of the dimensions that have been explored in the 23 in-depth interviews with handball coaches from the Main and the Second League of the Romanian

Feminine Championship. The aspects we have chosen to address here are meant to reveal the dominant competitive framework that the sport actors themselves use in addressing their relationship with the journalists and the consequences of this positioning in terms of the media-sport community idea. Coaches discourses are more about "we" versus "them", which is not consistent with the community "we-ness" feeling and identification mechanism.

There is a general consensus when it comes to the high interdependency between the media actors and the sport actors' activity. Coaches are not only aware of the media's centrality within the sport world in general, but also in terms of the demanding process of building and managing their public image. Therefore, the relationship they have with the journalists is merely defined by its instrumental value, becoming an integral part of the overall success equation –

Media has a significant role in a team's success of failure.[...] It is very important for a coach to have a media that supports him and let him do his work in peace; it is very hard to do that if you constantly have to look over your shoulder and you are concerned with other aspect except your coaching responsibilities. (M.T.)

We can argue that this reflects a defensive strategy of preventing potential damage control and acknowledging a power position that the media actors can exert upon the sport actors. It also lays stress on the competitive rather than collaborative nature of the relationship between the sport actors and the journalists. Nevertheless, the distinct agendas of the media and the sport actors are the bone of contention that generates an opponency position in coaches identifying themselves with the journalists approach of the sport performance as news resource. In this regard, there are three main lines of criticism that media is subject to: the reality distortion, the tabloidization and the judgemental oscillation of sport performances.

The common perception is that what media reveals is far away from the truth and the reasons behind this are mostly correlated to the lack of professionalism or a biased position determined by the journalists' personal affinities –

I am not a friend of media, because they don't even get to 50% information that is close to reality. They tend to fabricate much of their information. There are people who hardly know anything about sport, but, none the less, they continue writing about" (G.C).

This, in turn, leads to mistrust and diminished legitimacy for the media actors, limiting their relationship to a rather conventional framework.

Another media tendency that coaches' disagree with is the tabloidization and the disturbing chase for spectacular aspects that go beyond the professional sphere of the actual sport performance. Knowing and anticipating media's interest, coaches become part of an "avoidance dance", mutually accepted and recurrently played on the public stage. Moreover, this forces the sport actors to be more cautious and engaged in preventive or reactive face management actions –

Lately I have started to be more careful because, unfortunately -I don't want to generalize- the media are less interested in sport itself, but rather in those spectacular or conflictive aspects and, thus, you become more calculated with your words (D.M.).

When it comes to the media's judgmental oscillation in covering and evaluating sport performances, coaches notice a form of "schizophrenic media syndrome" that can be described as a dramatic turnover from praise to blame, which takes place in a short time distance: "After a period during which they have praised us to the skies, at our first failure they casted dirt at us" (G.A.). This lack of consistency affects the reliability and the general trust in journalists, contributing to the negative evaluation their professionalism.

Despite these aspects, the sport actors are fully aware of the need to maintain a functional relationship with the journalist, arguing for what we can call as "professional courtesy" that both actors can benefit from on the long run. There is, thus, a constant negotiation and give-and-take process which governs coaches' relation to the journalists –

You have to maintain a good relation with the media, even if you don't reveal the backstage details. It is better to speak to the press rather than leave room for speculation, because, at one point, we will surely need them or, on the contrary, will need them to leave us alone. You have to decide [...] Afterwards, they are doing their jobs (G.M.).

The findings of our study are, hence, consistent in laying stress on the instrumental professional-related nature of this relationship. However, its conventional and, moreover, latent conflictive nature call into question the idea of an authentic media-sport community.

All in all, it can be argued that the media-sport community seems more consistent from outside-in than from inside-out and that the sport actors are the ones that are more inclined to adopt a resistance position to this type of in-group identification as they find it very difficult to cope with such different agendas and logics of public exposure.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The new visibility of sport and the dynamics of the wider commodification process that this social field has been subject to brought along not only a reconfiguration of the spectatorship experience, but also a reconfiguration of the relationship between the media actors and the sport actors. Defined by an infotainment logic, the sport news production cycle was strongly influenced by the sport actors becoming central figures on the celebrity market, as this brought along a rather “make noise–make news–make change” model (Thrall *et al.*, 2008: 363). In terms of media practices this meant that dramatization, spectacularity and personalization became the main coordinates in sport news converge.

Within this general framework of the media-sport nexus, the relationship between the journalists and the sport actors is defined by a dialectical nature that makes the media-sport community idea highly debatable. The three dimensions that we have addressed in this paper: collaborative versus conflictive ends, in-group versus out-group identification and professional versus personal engagement are consistent in enhancing the high interdependency between the journalists and the sport actors. However, they also show a dynamic balance between the cohesive and the disruptive forces that act within this relationship. While the common audience dependency, their constant interaction and the shared experiences in and outside the sport field bring the journalists and the sport actors together, their different agendas in what and how to reveal to the public bring them apart.

The media-sport community is, thus, rather defined by the instrumental nature of what is mainly an unavoidable professional interdependence. This community representation is more consistent from an outside-in perspective, while being strongly challenged from inside-out. Moreover, the resistance to a media-sport community identification is stronger when it comes to the sport actors, as they find the journalistic

practices to be highly face threatening and feel forced to adopt a rather defensive and cautious position.

Although grounded on strategic professional interests, this long-term relationship between the journalists and the sport actors inevitably involves a personal component. Nevertheless, the constitutive professional nature of this relationship makes both parties doubt of the authenticity of their personal involvement, thus, undermining the solid grounds for a real media-sport community. We argue that the defining principal for the relationship between the journalists and the sport actors is a constant negotiation of power. This is usually translated in terms of the extent to which their position can legitimize the exploitation of this relationship for unilateral professional or personal gains.

Understanding the dynamics of the relationship between the media and the sport actors is a key-element in discussing the wider reconfiguration of the sport experiences. Further analysis of the way the media actors and the sport actors address their relationship and define their position within the media-sport nexus can provide useful insights in this regard. Therefore, arguing for or against the existence of a media-sport community and discussing the nature of this community is important in explaining not only the sport news cycle of production, but also the sport performances as wider social constructs.

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