

## **Journalism 12**

### **30 Dirty Sports Writing Terms**

#### ***Sport Specific Terms:***

- \* Corny terminology is the first thing editors will cut out of your copy. Football players are not gridders; basketball players are not cagers. Don't try to be innovative and come up with nifty names for things that aren't considered mainstream.
- \* Use the word that describes the object. Keep it simple and try not to use slang or cute terms. A football is not a pigskin. "Nothing but net" and "going to the hoop" are cliché and over-used sayings.
- \* Clichés continued: never compare a sporting event to a war, even in quotations. Never compare a team's failures to a disaster.
- \* Avoid trite expressions, even when quoted directly. A team won or lost; defeated or was defeated. Avoid verbs such as "whomped, boatraced, pounded, walloped." The same goes for "take 'em one at a time, barnburner, cliffhanger, nailbiter, stomped, clipped and out for blood."
- \* Understand Jargon. Especially with medical/legal terminology. Look up medical terms such as anterior cruciate ligament and medial collateral ligament. Put it in simple, understandable terms.
- \* Deity. Sports aren't life or death, heaven and hell. Don't over-glorify your subjects.

#### ***Grammar & Construction:***

- \* Misused pronouns. A team is an "it" not a "they." Correct: The varsity basketball team ran its record to 4-4.
- \* Wordiness. A lead of more than 25 words can be made shorter and snappier. Be concise. Make it easy for the reader to know what's going on.
- \* Dead constructions. Avoid beginning a sentence, particularly a lead, with "there are," or "there is." Those words say nothing.
- \* Imitation. Be original and develop your own writing style. Don't copy the style of a well-known sportswriter. A writing style takes years to develop, even well beyond your post high school years. Young writers tend to overwrite everything. Keep your writing simple early in your career and expand your style as you mature as a writer and as a person. The copy desk, and other writers, will love you for it.

### ***Common Issues:***

- \* Misreported scores. You would be surprised how often this happens. Do your readers a favor. Look at the scoreboard as the final buzzer sounds and jot it in the corner of the scorebook or notebook. Make a last pass through the story to double-check the score against what you wrote down.
- \* Stories are often jumped off the front page after only a few paragraphs, and the reader shouldn't have to turn the page to get the final score.
- \* Over quoting. It makes the writer appear lazy. Three quotations from quality sources are usually good for a simple article. Use short quotations to bring color to a story, not bog it down with clichés.
- \* When talking about our writing about your high school or college team, don't refer to it as "we" or "our team." You might be covering a game from the school's angle, but you must remain objective.
- \* Buried quotations. Introduce the human element high in the story. Sports articles need quotations by the third or fourth paragraph. Stories need a human voice to be successful and draw the readers in.
- \* Poor stat keeping. Know the basics of scoring baseball, football and basketball. Practice scoring games on TV at home. For prep games, sometimes you are the official scorekeeper. Double-check your stats after the game with the team's statistician.
- \* Lack of understanding for rules. Have the rulebook of any game you are covering handy. Know the basics, and know to look up rules you don't know. Don't trust coaches to interpret it for you.
- \* Poor preparation. Call each coach before the game. Attend a practice if you can. Gather a few quotations for an advance story. Try to get an understanding for the team's strategy heading into the game (but don't share it with opponents). And be prepared to ask athletes (especially the pros) specific questions on issues or events. They have heard all the cliché, general questions before. Asking them again will turn them off right away.
- \* Play-by-play. Chronological play-by-play bogs down a story. Just highlight a few key turning points and stats and develop the story. Remember, many of the readers saw the game, but you're the privileged eyes and ears of the locker room.