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The Myth of Objectivity in Sports Reporting

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Objectivity = the balance of subjectivity? –
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an incident as it is, and it is meant to be neutral as possible, without holding any kind of prejudices. Importantly, it is an achieved quality by a journalist, or a news media outlet. Ironically, many analysts observed that this very *objectivity* is missing in sports reporting lately. It raises a few questions. Does reporting about sports not call for *objectivity*? If not, what might be the reasons? Or, is it satisfactory to *not* be *objective* in reporting sports?

Before getting into the core discussions, let us quickly consider how news is produced in sports. It differs from other genres of journalism like crime, politics, business and war. In almost all contemporary cases, important and popular sporting events receive a live telecast and the viewer's enjoy the action of their favorite teams and athletes with live pictures and commentary. The audience gets the opportunity to experience the *real* events, well before they read about it in newspapers. In a true sense, the reporter and the audience have the same amount of information in hand to think and interpret a product of knowledge. The reporter is left with his skills of making the known information interesting for the audience. The reporter has to bring different views, perspectives, stories, interpretations, statistics, colors and illustrations to sell even to those readers and audiences who perhaps have more knowledge about that event than she or he has. This is where; reporting about sports principally differs with other reporting styles where the audience discovers the incident by reading the news. Thus merely being informative wouldn't make the news in sports. Today people receive sports results and updates at their leisure through online means. How much is this mere information worth? Not much!

This is how, interpretation becomes news in sports reporting. Practically there is hardly any '**fresh**' news in the sports pages. What makes it to print are mostly features, personal stories and commentaries. Still, people of all ages enjoy reading the sports pages of a newspaper. Studies show that a significant portion of

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paradox.

What draws the interest of the audience then? Apparently there are two reasons: firstly, people are crazy about sports and they want to know about sporting events, despite having enjoyed the game live last night.

They are also very keen to learn about their favorite athletes in detail. Secondly, the audience loves to read how other people (including the reporter) have viewed the event. They love to interact with the stories rather than just to get informed by it. On the contrary, the editor wants his or her pages be the most popular. After all, it's all about business. The rate for advertisement multiplies with the number of copies published. And, more significantly, reporters enjoy when their reports generate gossip and comments. And, the commentators want to test whether their ideas get sold. This is how; demand and supply talk to each other. Now, where is journalism then?

Well, that's a very significant question as well as a difficult one to answer. Before trying to answer that let's find what we are looking for – **objectivity**. Sports reporter and editor, Ronnie Ramos says, '*Objectivity is obsolete in sports social media*'. He believes that though there is scope for objective watchdog investigative reports in sports, in most cases they are missing. Sports commentator Steven Downes cites Professor Raymond Boyle (renowned sports media analyst and a career academic) to defend how **objectivity** is missing in sports reporting. "*Framed by entertainment rather than journalistic values and with too many vested interests involved, football coverage on television tends now to be driven by soft opinion rather than hard analysis. Television often appears to see its role as promoting sport, rather than reporting, investigating and analyzing*", says Professor Boyle. He also states, "*Too many journalists and former sports people abdicate their responsibility to report honestly because they may upset important people or damage their own career trajectory*". It is quite obvious that sports media have rarely practiced **objectivity** in recent times

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sports. It's a subjective world. Firstly, as mentioned before, the readers want to read the opinions, comments and views. Secondly, the reporter is also a supporter of a team, of the team of his or her country; this makes it almost impossible to avoid the subjective views. Thirdly, most sports reporters want to report about sporting events simply because they are passionate about sports, and it becomes very difficult for them to be objective while reporting. And, finally we need to admit there is big similarity between the battle and the game between two nations, identity or community. No one wants to loose in the field. Very often it's more than just losing in the field. No one, neither the reporter, nor the reader is out of this subjective world. Perhaps that's why we often like to call it sports writing, as opposed to sports reporting.

Nevertheless, it's fun to report, write and read about sports. As long as it is valued it should be considered as journalism. If we look at it holistically, too many subjective reports bring pluralism within itself. And, that seems fair enough. So, whether there is *objectivity* or not, is not the concern – **we may just need admire the trend.**

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