

Field Guide to Covering Sports, 2nd edition

By Joe Gisoni. Published 2018 by CQ Press, Thousand Oaks, CA. 397 pp. ISBN: 9781506315683.

Reviewed by Travis R. Bell, University of South Florida, USA

Sport journalism presents an array of content that varies across type of sport, level of play, and depth of social issues, which requires a diverse scope of knowledge to be successful in the industry. Along with this opportunity to grapple with such a range of content, sport journalists face their greatest challenge, which is how one individual can know about every sport *and* be an expert. It feeds into a long-standing debate of whether it is better to be a generalist or a specialist in one's craft. Joe Gisoni unpacks this question and provides some answers in the second edition of *Field Guide to Covering Sports*.

This handbook tackles the challenge of how to produce expert knowledge across an expansive sport landscape and offers valuable insight for aspiring sport journalists to enter a field that now requires a generalist and multimedia approach to reporting. The book offers four sections: sport-reporting basics, multimedia storytelling, covering beats, and challenges, opportunities, and tropes of the industry.

Gisoni brings decades of professional experience to this field guide and supplements it with insight from more than 120 coaches and sport journalists to provide a roadmap for aspiring sport reporters. This template is not a catch-all for everything one needs to know to cover sport, but it provides a formula for the basic tenets of good storytelling, fact checking, and accurate statistics. Maybe most important, he writes that sport reporting requires aspirations of being a journalist, not a fan. The realization that to be a successful sport reporter requires substantiation over opinion is an important distinction that this book offers throughout its deconstructive process of offering journalistic wisdom.

The first section outlines how to begin a career in sport reporting. This area focuses on content development. It starts with an overview of how to write basic copy, which is often a difficult first step, through use of sport-specific language and terminology. This section moves into best practices for conducting interviews and emphasizes planning as paramount to this important process of storytelling. It expands across a range of storytelling styles to explain differences between feature and column writing, as well as blogging. The section concludes with ways to effectively implement and report analytics and metrics in manageable ways.

The second section is new to this edition and expands on how multimedia storytelling is pervasive in the evolving world of digital sport media, with Twitter as the primary opportunity. Gisoni emphasizes the “compulsory part” (p. 89) of social media in the daily workflow of sport reporting. This section highlights best practices for how to use social media as both a research tool and a vehicle for

sharing information. One chapter focuses on how Twitter centralizes previously unavailable opportunities for immediate reporting of live events, breaking stories, and use as a promotional mechanism to drive content (English, 2016). Additional short chapters offer a glimpse into differences between visual storytelling, radio broadcasts, and writing for television.

The third section offers an overview for how to cover 20 individual sports and is the most insightful section of the book for aspiring journalists. Gisondi breaks down each sport into four sections: prepare, watch, ask, and write. “Prepare” focuses on learning the basics and how to get ready for an event based on knowledge about prior events. “Watch” emphasizes what to look for specific to each sport, including tips on statistical trends and game strategy. “Ask” translates how to enter the postgame interview and center the conversation around the isolated event being covered. “Write” synthesizes how to organize thoughts to create a game recap.

The final section covers a variety of topics that do not readily connect but are possibilities and pitfalls in sport reporting, with an emphasis on student journalists writing for campus publications. The primary focus is about ethics and how to navigate both personal dilemmas such as accepting gifts from teams and reporting in a controlled environment like college athletics that limits media access to players. Gisondi also discusses fantasy sports as a billion-dollar growth opportunity in sport reporting. High school sports receive a separate chapter to outline best practices to not be overly critical when reporting about teenagers and the challenge of keeping stats without the technological assistance seen in college and professional sports. The book concludes with a consistent and necessary reminder that clichés are common in sports and highlight inexperience in sport reporting. Gisondi presents a concise synopsis of how to cover sports at a basic level, which provides a solid foundation.

There are a few missing topics that could add more context for challenges facing aspiring journalists in the complex, multimedia, 24-hour news cycle that sport encompasses. First, some discussion about how to manage covering multiple sports from various towns across a multitude of platforms would help raise concerns about the difficulty of the profession and unrealistic expectations that media place on their industry professionals. Second, challenges persist for women and minorities to obtain sport-reporting positions that adversely affect dynamics of representation in the profession and how stories are told or go untold (Mastro, Seate, Blecha, & Gallegos, 2012). This could be a valuable addition to a future edition. Third, the book offers little insight regarding how to report on transpiring social issues that interrupt the nuts and bolts of sport reporting. Stories like brain injuries, national-anthem protests, and sexual misconduct by athletes and coaches are more prominent than ever in sport, but media often miss the mark in a quest for good journalism (Weedon, Wilson, Yoon, & Lawson, 2018). Therefore, this field guide could provide more tips or suggestions for navigating these simmering issues that capture media attention beyond wins and losses.

Despite these noted limitations and suggestions, *Field Guide to Covering Sports* is a solid handbook for anyone entering an ever-changing media landscape. The book is practical, easy to follow, and specific enough to introduce new terminology and concepts even for an industry professional who may be thrust into a new sport to cover. Gisondi provides a book that can be a valuable resource for