BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINT JOURNALISTS AND SPORT INFORMATION DIRECTORS

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1. Survey
Introduction

Print sports journalists and sports information directors share a rare and special relationship. All journalists know many different techniques of how to obtain information and contacts in situations involving organizations and government issues. This set of skills does not work the same for sports journalists. In the sports world, journalists depend on the sports information directors to provide access to student-athletes, coaches and “inside” information. In the same regard, sports information directors rely on journalists to report on their programs or colleges in a fair and factual manner.

This relationship may possibly be the only example of the two-way symmetrical communication model demonstrated and implemented between two professions (Grunig, 1992). Typically, the two-way model is executed between organizations and media.

In the early 1900s journalists were writing about the highlights of the game, and broadcasters were listened to over the radio (Stoldt, Dittmore & Branvold, 2006). According to Stoldt, Dittmore and Branvold, as sports began to blossom through television, and how sports “has grown more comfortable in its relationship with the mass media, the need for public relations personnel has emerged” (2006, p. 84).

The public relations personnel position was then given to the sport information director. The sport information director (SID) is not only the journalist within the organization, but also the sports public relations practitioner. Dealing
with media, communicating with coaches, media training the student-athletes, issuing statements and organizing media events are just a few key jobs in the sport information director’s job description (Stoldt, Dittmore & Branvold, 2006).

With the development of a public relations outlook in sports, new rules and policies were set. Grunig’s (1992) two-way symmetrical model is reflected within those rules and policies.

David (2004) describes the two-way symmetrical model that has developed over the past two decades by James Grunig and his colleagues as a model that provides direction and prominence within public relations. The two-way symmetrical model is one of four models of communication which are: press agentry, public information, one-way symmetrical and two-way symmetrical (Grunig, 1992).

It is necessary to understand the meaning of the two-way symmetrical model and how the development of this relationship evolved over time. The research within this paper focuses on the use of two-way symmetry and why sports journalists and sport information directors may implement this model into their relationship.

The research involves a detailed examination into what the sport information director’s perspective is of the relationship that they share with the journalists. Likewise, an in-depth look into what the journalists feel their relationship is between the sport information director and themselves is analyzed. Work done by J. Grunig, L. Grunig and D. Dozier (2006) in researching and developing the two-way symmetrical model is also presented.
The methodology utilized within this research was an analytical survey. This survey asked questions determined to discover the thoughts and views of the public relations profession by the person taking the survey. This survey was distributed online via e-mail to print journalists and sport information directors. The population was all of the Mid-American Conference sport information directors and the sports reporters covering those schools.

The importance and goal of this study is to answer the following questions regarding sport information directors and print sports journalists relationship:

RQ1: What is the true relationship between the sport journalism profession and the sport information profession?
RQ2: Do journalists view the sport information profession the same status as journalism?
RQ3: Do sport information directors help journalists obtain accurate, complete and timely news?
RQ4: Do sport information directors and journalists carry on a running battle?
RQ5: Do journalists have to rely on sport information directors for information due to the lack of staff?
RQ6: Do sport information directors try to deceive journalists with trivial uneventful happenings?
The literature review of this paper begins with a look into sport information director’s perception of journalists. It then proceeds to look at the viewpoint of journalist’s perception of sport information directors. From there, research involving the development of a two-way symmetrical model of communication and its purpose, was addressed. The review then continues to explain the understood relationship between sport information directors and journalists.

Sport Information Director’s View on Relationship with Print Journalist’s

Mass media is normally viewed as a channel to send messages to the general public. To sports organizations, mass media is most likely their prominent public (Stoldt, Dittmore & Branvold, 2006). Stoldt, Dittmore and Branvold believe “a much closer relationship exists between the media and sports organizations” as well as “the two are partners in delivering sport content to consumers” (p. 64).

Stoldt, Dittmore and Branvold (2006) define the work sport information directors do as a “…managerial communication-based function designed to identify a sport organization’s key publics, evaluate its relationships with those publics, and foster desirable relationships between the sport organization and those publics” (p. 2). The sports publics consist of the mass media, fans, stakeholders, alumnae, employees and donors.
The sport information directors have obtained a great deal of added responsibilities over time. In an interview with John Humenik, executive director of the College Sports Information Directors of America (COSIDA), Stoldt (2008) asks about the added responsibilities SID’s now have; Humenik’s responded with:

There are so many more demands on the communication staff’s time – multiple media-based interest and growth; recruiting, fund-raising, marketing, and fan-based support aspects of the job; and the time-consuming aspects of Web-site management. (p. 462).

There are many different views of the media to student-athletes, coaches and SIDs. An article by Marc Isenberg (2007) provides feedback from various athletes and coaches on their views of the media. Mack Brown, the head football coach at University of Texas, regards the media as “not everything is always going to be fair and you’ve got to deal with it. That’s life, and it will really help you when you learn to handle criticism, fair or unfair, when you get out in your real life” (p. 4). Another positive outlook on the relationship comes from the University of Missouri’s head football coach, Gary Pinkel:

I don’t really look at it as a divide (between coaches and media). I just look at it as reality… With my players, it’s education – educating what has happened and how it has happened…and the credibility of the criticism. (p. 4).

Sport information directors are constantly looking for ways to bring their organizations positive media coverage. A strong and popular tactic the SID can use to do this effectively is allowing interviews to be conducted. Stoldt, Dittmore
and Branvold (2006) point out the interviewee should realize the interview is more than just a response to a question, and he or she should “think of the interview as a two-way street, where the organization is using the media to reach a wide audience” (p. 127). It is advised that the interviewee be trained for how he or she will conduct himself or herself in an interview. Stoldt, Dittmore and Branvold (2006) give the following advice:

Public relations professionals who recognize that interviews can be used to the organization’s benefit can assist the process from the moment a member of the media calls to request an interview by fielding the request professional, selecting an appropriate interviewee, and preparing the interviewee. (p. 127)

This exemplifies the beneficial way sports organizations can obtain media time while providing opportunities to the journalists as well.

It is an unwritten rule known by both the journalist and the sport information director that media advisories are to be issued whenever a press conference is to be held (Stoldt, Dittmore & Branvold, 2006). The direct definition according to Stoldt, Dittmore and Branvold (2006) is close to that of a news release, with the exception of its goal being “to give the media enough information to get their attention but not so much information that they don’t need to attend the news conference” (p. 137). In a situation where the sport information director failed to inform a journalist, that journalist could then decide to choose a disapproving route of reporting versus an upbeat take on the issue.
In some research, one would assume sport information directors communicate with the media on a regular basis, Scott (2007) states in his review that:

> It is my experience as a media-relations practitioner in various professional sports that those with experience in a sports-information department do not think about the areas of sponsorship fulfillment, marketing, VIP relations, player/athlete representation and sponsors, community relations, ticket sales, and so forth and how these areas affect and are directly connected to media relations. (p. 124)

In a different interview with COSIDA executive director John Humenik, Brown (2008) asked about his view on SID’s relationships with sport journalists. Humenik stated, “I was struck by the fact that both the sport PR and media communities need to work much harder on building and establishing relationships” (p. 1). This brings up more issues involving the possible troubled relationship the two professions share.

Many sport organizations and their sport information directors have had to become strict with how much access they grant the journalist. A recent article by Ballard (2007), who covered the issues of new media evolutions and sports organizations wanting to produce ticket sales, recalled an incident where a reporter was thrown out of a press box at an NCAA Super Regional game for live blogging.

> The limitation against play-by-play on the Internet is intended to support our media partner’s efforts to provide guaranteed, comprehensive coverage,” says NCAA spokesman Bob Williams. ‘The policy provides ample opportunity for other media to cover NCAA events. (p. 1)
One way sport organizations have dealt with the growth and fast advancement of live blogging, is allowing the journalists to proceed with the new trend. Ballard (2007) discovered the creation of a “blog box” within some sport organizations. The bloggers are not in the same area as the game reporters and writers. The goal of this is to adapt to the fast growing media and unlike the NCAA, work with the journalists and publics in effort to build a stronger two-way symmetrical relationship (Ballard, 2007).

Other incidents, along with blogging, that have made the relationship between the sport information director and journalist less trusting, is the many complaints the media is reporting about college sports. These complaints consist of multiple unpleasant incidents conducted by sport information directors protecting college student-athletes and coaches. Moran (2008) states “the athletic industry has become so specialized, right down to its language, that keeping track of its daily evolution has become a full-time job” (p. 83). With this extra strain on the sport information directors, their reluctance to allow journalists free-reign with their university has affected their possible growth of a stronger two-way symmetrical relationship.

A reporter sometimes may attempt to bypass the organizational protocol and contact an athlete or coach personally due to the pressure and need to be creative to gather information. Stoldt, Dittmore and Branvold (2006) stated due to this occurrence, there is normally a media policy established between journalists and sport information directors communicated throughout both professions. Once
the sport information director understands the warrant of the journalist’s inquiries, he or she may then refer the journalist to the athlete or coach he or she wishes to speak with (Stoldt, Dittmore & Branvold, 2006).

In the literature over the media’s outlook of the relationship with journalists, there are few examples of two-way symmetrical communication. The overall perception is the sport information directors view the relationship with the journalist as transactional.

**Print Journalist’s View on Relationship with Sport Information Director’s**

Bourgeois (1995) defines the work of a sports journalist as “a position that intersects the spheres of journalism and of the sports spectacle” (p. 197). The journalists realize that in sports, or any area of journalism, there is a massive amount of competition. It is crucial to stay credible and maintain relationships with people that act as the gatekeeper to sources of information, such as sport information directors.

Many years ago, the reporters and journalists would protect the stories of drinking and drug use, because all that was being reported was the game. In fact, many of the journalists would travel with the team and create personal relationships with the players and coaches (Klatell & Marcus, 1993). Klatell and Marcus argued that in this day and age with television, Internet and immediate game updates, the journalist has to go deeper within the “behind-the-scenes
aspects of sports and they began to reveal the complexity and turmoil that had long been just below the surface” (p. 237).

In the sports journalism world, there is a different way to go about obtaining information and accessing interviews and important documentations. In an interview conducted by King (2008) with sports journalist legend, Dave Zirin, King asked for Zirin’s opinion about the purpose of the “role of sport journalism” (p. 341). Zirin states what he feels sports journalism should be, but also what he feels that it has become. According to Zirin:

The purpose is to critically examine sports, from the play to the politics behind the play. Too much of sports journalism though is an effort to trade access for attendant privileges. This forms the basis of the whole athletic industrial complex. Fans, political athletes that buck the system, and people damaged by publicly funded stadiums get left out in the cold. (p. 341)

As a result of the amount of work needed to obtain information to write or produce stories, many journalists have come to terms with the situation, and they strive to build a relationship with the sport information director. Not only do journalists maintain relationships with sport information directors, but also with the coaches and athletes they interview. Bourgeois (1995) recognizes that due to the similarity in interests, sports journalists and sport information directors tend to form a bond. The bond that journalists share with sport information directors is understood to be solely a transactional relationship. When discussing the understanding between the two professions, Bourgeois (1995) describes, “the sociocultural context of sports journalists prompts them to develop bonds with
their sources of information while establishing and maintaining a social distance” (p. 197).

Many non-sport journalists criticize what the content of the sports journalist’s stories have evolved into. Where many facts point to the sports pages producing the best writing, many other facts support the lack of reporting on actual sports, but more on contract negotiations and nothing about the athletes themselves (Fotheringham, 2001). An interesting observation was made by Fotheringham (2001) in reference to the National Newspaper Awards. The observation was that there were three nominations for sportswriter of the year, and “none of their submissions had anything to do with sport” (p. 88). This is an argument within the sport journalism profession that journalists are straying from the old fashioned trade of writing about the game, to writing about the scandals within the game and organizations.

An example of a journalist not seeming to care about maintaining a positive relationship with sport information directors, or even coaches and athletes, comes from Grant Wahl in an article about ESPN’s Doug Gottlieb. The article discusses how Gottlieb personally insulted a college basketball player on live television (Wahl, 2005). The coaches were outraged along with many fans and journalists that criticized Gottlieb for his actions. The argument-everyone has a right to an opinion was Gottlieb’s side, and the sport information director’s side of the argument was that the college basketball player has more obligations than practice and games (Wahl, 2005).
Along with the criticism of reporting on more scandals and quandary within sports, non-sports journalists also criticize the “brown nosing” tactics some sports journalists use. Crothers (1999) criticizes Dick Vitale when he “dropped the names of 22 coaches, often in reverential and gratuitous soliloquies” (p. 26). In Crothers article, he referred to Vitale as a “butt-smooching of coaches” type of person (p. 26). This shows what measures some journalists will go to just to maintain a relationship that could reflect that of two-way symmetrical communication.

A strong motive in most journalists reporting styles, is the opportunity to obtain a well paying job. According to an article in The International Herald Tribune, Perez-Pena (2007) recognized the rewarding salaries of sports journalists that have mastered the skill of writing well and maintaining credibility and relationships with the sport information director. Perez-Pena also referenced to ESPN’s “hiring binge” and how they have “gone after the biggest stars at the newspapers and magazines, signing them for double and triple what they were earning - $150,000 to $350,000 a year for several writers, and far more for a select handful” (13).

Tremendous amounts of literature have been discussed on the sport print journalists relationship with the sport information director. When it comes to the sports broadcasting journalists, it seems they have had a more difficult time with fan criticism versus print journalists. Klatell and Marcus (1993) make a good point when they stated that viewers are not as acceptable of seeing the broadcast journalist go through the pursuit of newsgathering. The viewers may be offended
by the actions the reporter must take to obtain an interview. Once the interview is obtained, they may be offended to see the emotion that is exposed between the interviewee and interviewer. Print journalists go through the same steps as broadcast journalists do, the sole difference is the broadcast journalist goes through their newsgathering steps on live television, whereas the print journalists go through the steps privately (Klatell & Marcus, 1993). Although a healthy two-way symmetrical communication may be established with the sport information director and the journalist, there are still many steps the journalist must go through to acquire the information he or she is seeking. Those steps consist of getting in contact with the sport information director, asking for information on the respective sport, gaining access to the coaches or players, and obtaining enough time to get a proper interview.

There are many positive examples in this literature of how sport information directors are cooperative with print journalists. Klatell and Marcus think differently. They argued that teams and organizations normally do not release information, and are weary of the motives behind the press (Klatell & Marcus, 1993). Klatell and Marcus (1993) also proceed to state the teams and sport information directors will not “regard to all mass media as partners, or adjuncts to beneficial public relations” (234).

Overall, the journalist’s outlook on where their relationship stands with the sport information director seems to be sensitive. The literature provides both positive and negative signs of a two-way symmetrical relationship. The journalist’s profession is more competitive than that of the sport information
director in ways such as meeting the demands of the general public. Therefore the journalist’s willingness to deal with the stipulations the sport information director enforces, is endured in hopes of securing a two-way symmetrical relationship.

Two-Way Symmetrical Communication

The excellence theory presents a concept of how an organization can create, or maintain, excellent communication between the organization and its publics (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006). Within the excellence theory, Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2006) presented that “excellent departments will design their communication programs on the two-way symmetrical model” (p. 47). The two-way communication models are derived from Grunig’s (1992) four models of communication in public relations. The models are: press agentry, public information, one-way symmetrical and two-way symmetrical.

The sports information director acts as the practitioner to their sports organization, whether it is a college or professional league. In the definition that Grunig (1997) uses in the difference between symmetrical and asymmetrical, is symmetrical assumes “that both the organization and its stakeholders may have to compromise and collaborate with each other” (p. 292).

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984) two-way symmetrical communications main focus is a give and take between the organization and their key publics, one of which includes the journalists and other media. Dittmore,
Stoldt and Greenwell (2008) defined two-way symmetrical communication as a mode that “used both research and dialogue to produce a dynamic relationship between an organization and its publics, resulting in public relations actions that are mutually acceptable” (p. 386). David (2004) refers to two-way communication as it being “generally viewed as a positive model of excellence for public relations practice” (p. 154). The understanding of two-way communication is using communication to negotiate with the publics, promote mutual understanding between the organization and its publics and manage conflicts (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2006).

Public relations practitioners in the past were viewed as manipulating and “spinners.” Grunig (1992) argued that the two-way symmetrical model represented a break from the dominating negative views from the publics regarding organizations. Dittmore, Stoldt and Greenwell also argued that “organizations employ varied tactics in two-way symmetrical communication in an attempt to develop relationships with key publics, with the ultimate objective being a relationship in which the actions of either entity, the organization or the public, positively affects the economic, social, political, or cultural well-being of the other entity” (p. 386).

Two-way symmetrical communication could be the summarizing model that surrounds the special relationship sport information directors and print journalists share.
Methodology

Internet Surveys

Surveys are one of the most commonly used methods of research in public relations (Stacks, 2002). It is a quantitative form of research, which contains many different variations of use. Telephone, Internet, mail and person-to-person contact are the four types of surveys that Stacks (2002) presents. Out of the four types of surveys, Internet is one of the easiest ways to contact busy professionals that are always in the office or traveling. The methodology that was utilized in this study was an Internet survey using a population consisting of Mid-American Conference Division I universities sport information directors and the print sports journalists covering those schools. This was distributed to various print journalists and sport information directors via e-mail. For an example of the survey, see Appendix A.

Lipke (2000) points out the advantages of using the Web for research as "lower costs, the ability to survey hard-to-reach respondents, and of course, speed" (p. 43). Internet software has relieved much of the workload that is accompanied with surveys (Haley, 2005). With the Internet, one can e-mail surveys to specific individuals and also give them an opportunity to complete the survey at their convenience (Lipke, 2000). Solomon (2001) presents different factors such as "personalized e-mail cover letters, follow-up reminders, pre-
notification of the intent to survey and simpler formats” that have proven increased response rates to Internet surveys (p. 11).

In addition to the advantages, there are many success stories involving the use of online surveys. AOL used a survey to obtain feedback from potential customers about the program “AOL BlackVoices” that resulted in their ability to launch a site that spoke directly to their customers (Haley, 2005). According to Lipke, General Mills conducted 20 percent of their research online in 1999. Due to their success with Internet survey research, that number was expected to grow to 60 percent the following year (Lipke, 2000). The popular show Survivor experimented with Internet surveys and, according to Kathleen Frankovic, had a surprisingly successful response. No numbers were given to support this statement. Immediately following the live final episode of Survivor, the viewers were encouraged to fill out an online survey (Lipke, 2000). According to Lipke’s (2000) article, CBS’s Kathleen Frankovic remarked the response as “the first time I’ve seen survey results actually applauded” (p. 42).

With the positive aspects of Internet surveys, negative criticism is acknowledged. According to David Solomon (2001), “several studies have found Internet surveys have significantly lower response rates than comparable mailed surveys.” (p. 11). Gary Goldblatt, Johnson & Johnson executive director of marketing research, commented in Lipkes (2000) article, “There are a lot of questions still out there about this methodology” (p. 43). Another criticism is that the Internet restricts feedback from people who are not online; therefore, this
type of research doesn’t represent a broad cross section of Americans (Lipke, 2000).

Internet surveys have become more advanced as technology becomes more advanced. There are many forms of research that can have much success by using the online survey methodology. The design established in this research benefited the use of an Internet survey.

There is no sampling in this research design. Each member of the population was sent the survey; therefore, it was considered a census. According to Stacks (2002), in a census “the universe, population, sampling frame, and sample are all the same” (p. 154). There aren’t many censuses conducted, but times such as these, allow for a census to occur (Stacks, 2008).

The census has had success in recent past. In 2000, the United States Census Bureau conducted an advertising campaign. Ira Teinowitz (2000) reports, “return rates - - that had been falling nearly 10 percent every decennial census - - not only didn’t decline this year, but rose nearly a point to 66 percent” (p. 8). This is beneficial information when deciding whether a census is the correct way to survey the population.

*Research Design*

The population of this research was collegiate schools and the print journalists and publications that cover those schools. The population consisted of
Mid-American Conference sport information directors and the print sports journalists that cover those colleges and universities.

Research and past studies have reported success when using Internet surveys. Since the Internet is the fastest and easiest way to obtain contact with this group of individuals, the survey methodology, via e-mail, resulted in the easiest outcome.

In this research design, sport information directors and print journalists were the main focus. Both professions are demanding, due to the mandatory deadlines their career requires, and also the amount that each travels.

A census survey was sent to each sport information director within the Mid-American Conference schools. The same survey was sent to the sports reporters at the publications that cover the sports news at the MAC school in its area. There are a total of 12 MAC schools with 56 SID’s, and a total of 17 sport print journalists that make up the population. The total population was 73.

The goal was to obtain an adequate response rate in order to analyze and quantitatively answer the research questions.

RQ1: What is the true relationship between the sport journalism profession and the sport information profession?

RQ2: Do journalists view the sport information profession the same status as journalism?

RQ3: Do sport information directors help journalists obtain accurate, complete and timely news?
RQ4: Do sport information directors and journalists carry on a running battle?

RQ5: Do journalists have to rely on sport information directors for information due to the lack of staff?

RQ6: Do sport information directors try to deceive journalists with trivial uneventful happenings?

Institutional Review Board

This research has been reviewed and determined to be exempt by Ball State University’s Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

The survey was issued through the program Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey analyzed the findings to determine the relationship between sport information directors and print journalists.
Results

Results of this study were encouraging in regards to the relationship sport information directors and print journalists share. The response rate resulted in a positive one, only to further validate the research of the study of this relationship. Within this section, demographics, research questions, and an analysis of survey questions answered, are discussed.

Results

The results of this study were filtered to only include the participants who completed the survey; therefore, if a question was not answered, it seems it was purposefully done. As previously mentioned, each sport information director within the Mid-American Conference was surveyed, as well as the print sports journalists that covered the university’s sporting events. Of the 73 surveyed, 43 professionals responded creating a 58.9 percent response rate. Of the 43 resulting responses, 47.1 percent of print journalists responded, and 60.7 percent of SID’s responded.

Gender

The majority (78.6 percent) indicated they were male and nine respondents (21.4 percent) indicated they were female. It was not asked, nor relevant for this research, to determine which profession the males and females were a part of.
Education

The level of education of each participant was also assessed. The majority of respondents (97.6 percent) held a college degree. One person (2.4 percent) did not hold a college degree, but was enrolled in college and taking courses. Along with the level of education held, the area of the degree held was also evaluated. The majority (29.2 percent) of the respondents held a bachelor’s degree in journalism. Eleven respondents (26.8 percent) earned a degree in communications, six respondents (14.6 percent) had a degree in sport management, three respondents (7.3 percent) held a degree in public relations and there was only one respondent (2.4 percent) for each of the following majors; journalism/communications, english, telecommunications, marketing, and sociology. Two respondents chose to skip the question.

Age

The average age of the 41 respondents who answered this question came to be 33.8 years of age. The oldest respondent was 62 and the youngest was 22.

Profession

The profession in which the respondents currently work was assessed. The majority of respondents (81 percent) practiced sport information whereas seven respondents (16.7 percent) practiced journalism. One respondent (2.4
percent) claimed “other” as their profession, with reasoning being they practiced both sport information as well as journalism. One respondent chose to skip the question.

The average length of time the respondents spent practicing their profession was 8.4 years. The longest respondent worked in their profession for 32 years and the shortest length of time a respondent worked in the profession was six months. An analysis of how many of the respondents started out in either sport information and then switched to journalism and vice versa, created an interesting response. Of the 39 respondents, 25 (64.1 percent) agreed to having switched professions at least once in their lifetime. The 14 respondents (35.9 percent) have stayed loyal to their first career of choice. Four respondents skipped the question.

Of the 42 respondents, 25 (59.5 percent) disagreed when asked if they felt their job to be managerial. The other half (40.5 percent) agreed to the thought of their work seeming managerial.

Research Questions

Study participants were asked to complete a questionnaire containing 25 questions that were placed on a seven range rating scale. Nineteen of the questions involved a rating from; strongly agree, agree, slightly agree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree. The third portion of the survey asked questions that were held on a five point rating scale of: very important, important, neutral, not important and not important at all.
Mostly the questions consisted of direct relationship qualities that the two professions share.

The responses that showed overwhelming similarities are the ones that will be examined and analyzed the furthest. The first portion of the survey regarded the relationship in which the professions share on a strongly agree through strongly disagree seven point scale.

There were 32 respondents (74.4 percent) who agreed that sport information and print journalism are equal in status. Of the 43 respondents, 36 (83.7 percent) disagreed that sport information directors act as obstructionists to print journalists. When asked if the communication between sport information directors and journalists are unclear, 38 (88.4 percent) disagreed. The majority of the respondents (69.8 percent) agreed that the abundance and quality of information that the sport information director has provided, has increased the quality of reporting. Surprisingly, 29 respondents (67.4 percent) or respondents disagreed with the question regarding sport information directors being deceitful to the press by attaching too much trivial importance to uneventful happenings. Of the 43 respondents, 10 (23.3 percent) agreed with that statement. When stating that sport information directors serve as an extension to the newspaper staff, 26 (60.5 percent) agreed. There was an overwhelming agreement that 35 respondents (81.4 percent) agreed to the statement of sport information directors being good willed, good sense and having a good moral character. A unanimous agreement (100 percent) of respondents agreed that sport information directors understand the journalistic problems such as deadlines and attracting readers.
Forty of the respondents (93 percent) disagreed on the question that one cannot trust a sport information director. A question that was pivotal to this research was that sport information directors and journalists carry on a running battle. Of the 43 respondents, 30 (69.8 percent) disagreed with that statement. When stated that sport information directors are always frank and honest, 33 respondents (76.7 percent) agreed. A strong majority, 42 respondents (97.7 percent), agreed that sport information directors help journalists obtain accurate, complete and timely news. The statement that the sport information role is necessary for the production of sports news, 37 respondents (86 percent) agreed. The last two questions resulted in overwhelming similarities with 41 respondents (95.3 percent) to each question. On the first question, the respondents disagreed to the statement that sport information directors are parasites to the press, and the last was an agreement that sport information directors news releases and statements are of news value and public interest.

The second portion of the survey served as a tool to understand the feelings the two professions share about news material. This section was analyzed on a five-point scale, starting with very important and ending with not important at all.

The majority of respondents, 42 (97.7 percent) thought it was important that sport information material contain timely news. Most, 37 respondents (86 percent), agreed it was important information contain local news. Of the 43 respondents, 33 (76.7 percent) thought it was important that material contain “should know information for journalists” audiences. Lastly, 28 respondents (65.1
percent) agreed it is important that sport information material contain news about prominent people or events.

**RQ1:** *What is the true relationship between the sport journalism profession and the sport information profession?* This question was addressed in the results in which the respondents seem to share an understanding relationship. Each does their best to help the other profession achieve their duties.

**RQ2:** *Do journalists view the sport information profession the same status as journalism?* The results show they do see the professions equal in status. Also, in the profession portion of the results, many of the respondents admitted to have practiced the other profession at one point in their career.

**RQ3:** *Do sport information directors help journalists obtain accurate, complete and timely news?* This resulted in an agreement that this is the case. There was an overwhelming response on all the questions pertaining to this matter, and each proved to be in agreement that sport information directors help journalists to the best of their ability with timely, complete and accurate news.

**RQ4:** *Do sport information directors and journalists carry on a running battle?* Of the respondents who answered this question, 30 (69.8 percent) disagreed, making this valid in saying they do not carry on a running battle.

**RQ5:** *Do journalists have to rely on sport information directors for information due to the lack of staff?* The response to this question was an agreement of 21 respondents (48.8 percent), 18 (41.9 percent) disagreed, and four (9.3 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed. The majority agreed journalists
have to rely on sport information directors, but there was almost as many who disagreed with this statement. Further research with a larger population could help validate the agreement to this statement.

*RQ6: Do sport information directors try to deceive journalists with trivial uneventful happenings?* This resulted in a 29 respondent (67.4 percent) disagreement. Of the 43 respondents, ten agreed (23.3 percent). The other four (9.3 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed.
Discussion

There is an unsaid agreement between the sport information director and print sports journalist that no other area of journalism can compare. To some degree, the journalist has some leverage over the sports information director. If there is an unpleasant relationship between the journalist and sport information director, then distasteful reports may be a result due to the lack of two-way symmetrical communication. The situations that become crucial for the sport information director to have a well established communication with the journalist is when a story arises that may be written in either negative or positive light (Koppett, 1981).

The primary purpose of this research was to discover whether a relationship reflecting that of a two-way symmetrical relationship exists within the sport information and print sports journalist world. There were six research questions asked, one being very broad and the others targeting more specific aspects the relationship may contain. The views of a select number of individuals within those professions were questioned on their understanding of the relationship they share with one another.

Overall, the results of this study answered those questions with characteristics of a two-way symmetrical relationship. Each question referring to the relationship and understanding of each other’s profession proved to be positive from both parties. The majority of the respondents answered similarly on
the majority of the questions involving how the two professions work together to achieve a single goal.

Limitations

The major limitation to this study would be the comparison of the two professions. This research conducted a survey to both print sport journalists and sport information directors collectively versus separately. The results are based on the views of both professions as a whole whereas separate surveys could have been administered to get a more concise viewpoint of the two different professions.

This research was also lacking representation of journalists. Double the amount of sport information directors were surveyed and responded versus the number of print sports journalists. Choosing a wider population to study could eliminate this factor. The Mid-American Conference, although being a division one athletic conference, is rather small in scale to other conferences that receive more national attention.

Also, this study did not contain many women. This can be seen as a limitation in regards to different viewpoints some women may share versus men. This may not have been a key factor due to the mere fact that the representation of women in sport information and print sports journalism is limited.

Another limitation to this study is the amount of respondents is not enough to get an overall evaluation of the true relationship that all sport information directors and print journalists may share.
When looking at the survey, many of the questions may seem to be geared towards the journalists’ perception of the sport information director. There could be more questions asked about the print journalism profession to get a better view of the sport information directors’ feelings of that profession.

Finally, due to the population of the respondents being mainly within the Midwest, the relationship may be viewed differently in other portions of the United States.

**Implications**

Therefore, having addressed the limitations of this study, it has implications for sport information directors and print sports journalists in sport within this population. Possibly the most important implication of this study is the understood relationship each profession shares with one another.

The results of this research can come as a benefit to both the print sports journalist and the sport information director. All results stated in the previous section proved to show positive feelings and an overall understanding of each other’s profession. With this fact, the sport information director and print sports journalist can begin building a relationship based on the common knowledge that each understands the roles of their profession.

Another implication is the majority of the respondents stated they had worked in each profession. This is proof the two professions coincide and can respect each other’s obligations they may have to their respective profession.
An implication that may be a factor for print sports journalists and sport information directors is the lack of female representation. In the sample of respondents, nine (21.4 percent) were female. Of the 73 professionals surveyed 14 (19.2 percent) were women. Of the 17 print journalists surveyed, one was a woman. This is a staggering number and should serve as a motive to print sports journalists and sport information directors for their need to strive for a more diverse atmosphere.

Future Research

Because this research is the first of its kind in regards to surveying the relationship between sport information directors and print journalists, it is recommended that this study be replicated in order to determine similar results as this study has shown.

This study could also take a few steps further in regards to the sample size. The study could sample a larger conference within collegiate schools. The researcher could choose a different division, or simply choose a division that has a larger population of both print sports journalists and sport information directors.

Further research on this topic could survey each profession separately and compare the results. This would give the public a more concise view of how each profession views the relationship that currently exists.

A more significant research could involve not just print journalists, but both broadcasting and print. This would give a wider range of opinion, because print
and television are two separate entities, especially when sport information directors are involved. This would also give sport information directors and journalists, both print and broadcasting, a more overall understanding of the relationship that each share. Research could be conducted solely between sport information directors and broadcast journalists as well. This would be interesting to compare the difference in the relationship that broadcasters versus print journalists share with the sport information directors.

In conclusion, this study should result in future scholarly research on this important topic. It could also be replicated in applied settings to determine the relationship that journalists and sport information directors share in certain collegiate divisions.

From the results of this study, and from the implications of the results, it seems the relationship that sport information directors and print sports journalists in the Mid-American Conference share is a positive and respected one. This suggests that a two-way communicational relationship is established between the two professions.
References


Moran, M. “John Thelin Response.” *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 1, 82-83.


Appendix 1

The Relationship Between Sport Information Directors and Print Journalists
Survey

Thank you for your participation in this survey. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between sport information directors and the media. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. You may stop at any time. By returning this survey, you are giving your consent that your answers will be included in the study data.

Your responses will be kept confidential. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. This survey has three sections and should take about 10-15 minutes. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Natalie Nauman at njnauman@bsu.edu. If you would like an executive summary of the findings, please email me and I will be happy to send it to you at the conclusion of the study. Thank you for your participation.

Section 1

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following 25 statements with regard to the sport information director and journalism profession. The number 1 indicates “strongly agree” while the number 7 indicates “strongly disagree.” Please answer to the best of your ability by circling the number following the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Sports information is a profession equal in status to journalism. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Sport information directors often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Sport information directors have cluttered channels of communication with pseudo-events and phony phrases that confuse public issues. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by sport information directors has caused an increase in the quality of reporting. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. Sports information material is usually publicity disguised as news.

6. Sport information directors too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

7. The sports information practitioner serves as an extension to the newspaper staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.

8. Do sport information directors receive the respect from their athletic departments that is necessary to allow them to do their jobs.

9. Sport information directors are people of good sense, good will and good moral character.

10. It is unfortunate that because of inadequate staff, the press must depend on information provided by sport information directors.

11. Sport information directors understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space.

12. You can’t trust sports information practitioners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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</table>

14. Sport information directors are typically frank and honest.

15. Sport information directors help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news.

16. Sport information directors frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.

17. Sport information directors are necessary for the production of sports news as we know it.

18. Sports information is a parasite to the press.

19. Sport information directors typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.
Section 2

Please indicate how important you feel it is that Sports information material that is sent to journalists contains the listed characteristics. Please answer each statement to the best of your ability. You may stop at any time. Please indicate how important each item is, with 1 being “very important” and 5 being “not important at all.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Not Important at all</th>
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<td>1</td>
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</table>

1. How important is it that sports information material contain news that would be considered “breaking”?  
   1  2  3  4  5

2. How important is it that sports information materials contain news that is timely?  
   1  2  3  4  5

3. How important is it that sports information materials contain local news?  
   1  2  3  4  5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Not Important at all</th>
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</table>

4. How important is it that sports information materials contain “should know” information for a journalists’ audiences?  
   1  2  3  4  5

5. How important is it that public relations materials contain news about prominent people or events?  
   1  2  3  4  5
6. How important is it that sports information materials contain unexpected information whether good or bad?
Section 3

This section contains questions about you. This information will in no way be used to identify you, it is simply used for classification purposes. This information will be useful in better understanding the Sports information – journalist relationship. Please provide the best answer possible to each question.

1. In what profession do you practice?  ___ Sports information ___ Journalism
   ___ other: please clarify __________

2. How long have you been in this profession? (years)  ___ years

3. Would you describe your current position as managerial?  ___ yes ___ no

4. If you are in journalism, have you ever practiced Sports information – or if you are in Sports information, have you ever practiced journalism?  ___ yes ___ no

5. Please indicate your gender:  ___ male ___ female

6. Do you hold a degree, if so what area?  ___ yes ___ no
   area:________________________

7. What is your age?  ___ years of age