

University of Nevada, Reno

**WHAT'S THE QUESTION: OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEWING, QUESTIONING, AND
NEWS CONFERENCE COVERAGE IN PROFESSIONAL SPORTS JOURNALISM**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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by

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Abstract

The study delves into the dynamics of professional sports journalism, focusing on interviewing techniques, questioning strategies, and news conference coverage. The research evaluated perspectives on five pivotal aspects, primarily interviewing techniques, question types, the role of press conferences, the industry's evolution, and the self-perception of sports journalists. The findings highlight a contrasting narrative between traditional and digitally native journalists in the digital age, where the lines between professional and amateur reporting are increasingly blurred. Despite its immense societal and financial influence, a significant revelation was the perception of sports journalism as being less critical than other news domains. The research revealed an overall preference for one-on-one interviews, and non-verbal communication emerged as a vital tool for effective interviewing. A distinct area of investigation was the ethical considerations surrounding sports journalism, especially when probing into sensitive topics, and the challenges associated with defining boundaries. Limitations of the study, such as participant diversity, were acknowledged. Conclusively, the research provides a view of sports journalism's current state, underscoring the need for adaptability, ethics, and skill enhancement.

Dedication

This thesis is devoted to the extraordinary individuals in my life whose unwavering support made my academic journey at the University of Nevada, Reno, a realization. I am profoundly grateful for the emotional, financial, and spiritual backing you provided over the last two years, most notably, my parents, Sabrina and Lenny De Leon; my grandparents, Roy and Connie De Leon; and my brother, Gerald Patterson. Your belief in me was the backbone of my resilience.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This study aims to answer the question of what improvement can be made in interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage to better the relationship between athletes and sports media.

The motivation behind this research topic is based on the controversy surrounding tennis star Naomi Osaka's saga with the media, as she pointed to her interactions with the media, specifically the negative interactions, being a source of anxiety and having a significant effect on her mental health.

Upon diving further into this topic of athlete-media relationships, an interest was sparked regarding what aspects of this relationship needed improvement and, if so, how an improvement can be achieved to further the betterment of this relationship. In a relationship, both sides' thoughts, ideas, and opinions must be present for improvement, meaning both the negative and positives of this relationship must be shared, including the perspectives of both sides involved, professional athletes and sports journalists.

The scope of the thesis is from the perspective of the sports journalists who are interviewed for the research. The purpose of the interviews is to get the sports journalists to look introspectively, providing their thoughts and opinions on interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage, gathering positives and negatives relating to these components of sports journalism. Furthermore, this study was meant to better understand the mindset of sports journalists, ranging from new in the field to decades-old veterans and see their approach to these journalistic components.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Sports Journalism Is Not “Real” Journalism, or is it?

A sports journalist's job is to report on the ins and outs of sports, often meaning they attend and cover games. Games like basketball, baseball, and football, to name a few. Games that many people played as children, except these are grown adults making millions of dollars playing these games. For some, sports may be the most important thing in their life, but it holds little significance in the grander scheme for the majority.

In journalism, sections like breaking news, national news, politics, and crime often take precedence and carry more weight. These sections deal with life and death, a far cry from the outcome of last night's basketball game. As individuals mature, they often outgrow their interest in sports, dismissing it as inconsequential compared to life's more pressing issues. Newsrooms sometimes view the sports section as the younger sibling, preoccupied with child's play. Journalists working in sections deemed more likely to be recognized for a Pulitzer Prize foster an air of superiority, considering their work to be of greater significance, and perceiving themselves as being on a different level than their sports counterparts. This perception persists despite the significant impact that sports journalism has had on history and its ability to bring about change.

Oates and Pauly (2007) said that sports journalism has long been considered “the sandbox of the newsroom” because of its more playful and childlike atmosphere than the rest of the newsroom, which has led sports journalists to seek to be taken seriously by the journalism establishment. Salwen and Garrison (1998, as cited in McEnnis, 2020) found that the reputation of sports journalism within the newsroom, often labeled as the “toy department,” is a source of insecurity for sports journalists constantly striving for greater professional recognition.

In the digital age, “professionalism” has become a critical discourse for journalists for maintaining a dominant role as a response to losing monopolistic control over information (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Lewis, 2012; Waisbord, 2013, as cited in McEnnis, 2020). Lewis (2012) stated that journalism, especially how it is practiced in the United States, lacks the trappings of a classical profession because of the absence of a monopoly on training and certification of its workforce, prevention of others from engaging in its work, and even with self-policing mechanisms of ethical codes, minimal power of enforcing compliance. While sports journalism may be viewed as a toy department, it also sticks to the profession's professionalism, which is a core value.

While sports can be considered the sandbox of print journalism, throughout history, sports and key figures with a sports-based background have played a vital role in broadcast journalism by innovating, enhancing, and keeping networks afloat. One example is Roone Arledge, who led sports into primetime television viewing in the 1960s, eventually inheriting ABC News in 1977. Once prosperous, ABC News was floundering and lightly regarded in the industry, and by the late 1980s became the dominant news department in television. Arledge popularized or created some of the most critically acclaimed shows ever, including sports-focused "Wide World of Sports" and "Monday Night Football" and after shifting to news, "World News Tonight," "20/20" and "Nightline.”

This impact can still be felt five decades later as sports, with revenue and ratings, dominate cable and broadcast television decisions. Nielsen Media Research, which tracks ratings, released data that stated sports accounted for 94 out of 100 of the most watched telecasts in 2022, with football being a record 82 of those telecasts (Adgate, 2023). And for the networks, the Global Sports Viewership Thematic Intelligence report predicts that the sports media rights

markets will grow to almost \$60 billion by the end of 2024, representing a 31% compound annual growth rate between 2020 and 2024 ("Sports Viewership - Thematic Intelligence," 2023). JPMorgan issued a report this year which aggregated the sports media rights payments and revenues for network television, regional sports networks, and streaming, totaling about \$26 billion in rights fees spending this year (Ozanian, 2023).

While sports journalism, and sports in general, may not seem crucial in the hierarchy of importance in societal issues, it does hold the attention of the world and audiences where it is a significant player whether some want to agree or not.

2.2 Ghosts of Journalism's Present: Defining Journalists in The Digital Age

As journalism has shifted into the digital age, the rise in issues surrounding its normative (ethical standards), cognitive (knowledge, skills, and techniques), and evaluative (assessment and judgment) dimensions have become ubiquitous, especially with the integration of social media into journalism. Several factors play a hand in how journalism is viewed in the digital age, like the rapid pace information is disseminated online, raising questions about accuracy and leading to a decline in trust. Or, aggregation sparking debate about the quality and legitimacy of online journalism and the inferiority complex attached to it. It could also be the autonomy of digital journalism, where commercial interests threaten integrity and professionalism despite the greater freedom from traditional media. Singer (2003) studied online journalism's — now referred to as digital journalism — normative, cognitive, and evaluative dimensions.

Firstly, referring to normative dimensions, several ethical issues, from privacy considerations to sourcing issues, raised concerns, with two issues becoming focal points indicating the delineation of professional behavior from unprofessional behavior. The separation of commercial and editorial content raises autonomy concerns, and the other is the digital

medium's capability for speed. With intense competition and perpetual deadlines, the speed at which information is rushed onto the internet is problematic (Lynch, 1998; Kansas & Gitlin, 1999; Lasica, 2001b, as cited in Singer, 2003). Kovach and Rosenstiel (1999, as cited in Singer, 2003) stated that a "warp speed" version of journalism creates a never-ending news cycle with stories containing bits of evidence, leaving accusations or speculation to be sorted out by the public throughout the day.

This issue is evident today with the rise in social media and the continued reportage in the digital world. Hermida (2013) stated that the emergence of social media, mainly Twitter, as a source for breaking news, coupled with the pace of information shared on the platform, impacts the discipline of verification. While being fast and right is not new, it holds even more significance in an age where the audience can disseminate the news as readily as journalists (Hermida, 2013).

Furthermore, Hermida (2013) stated that tensions between publication and verification have emerged for journalists reporting on breaking news, as professionally sourced information and details pulled from social media are becoming intertwined. Singer (2003) stated that with intense pressure to get information out to the public, the difficulty of verifying information arises, and an emphasis on speed blends with an emphasis on novelty, resulting in a de-emphasis of fact-checking and a decline in trustworthiness. She pointed to the Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics, "to seek truth and report it," maintaining implications that what is not truth should not be reported. However, digital journalists take a different approach, "put everything on the table and hope that truth will somehow separate itself from falsehood amid the clutter."

Kovach and Rosenstiel stated that a third issue arises from the previous two mentioned, a fundamental shift in what passes for journalism online and how the culture of argumentation is a direct counter to professionalism because it devalues expertise by placing a premium on newness and controversy rather than public service (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 1999, 2001, as cited in Singer, 2003).

Secondly, referring to the cognitive dimension, Singer (2003) said that this dimension of professionalism incorporates two components: the knowledge and techniques professionals use and the training needed to master concepts and skills. She points out two ways that “online” journalists gather information, such as those affiliated with traditional media outlets, whose goal is to enhance original content created for that outlet and most newspaper-affiliated websites, print content “re-purposed” or posted virtually unchanged online (Singer, 2003, p.148), which 20 years later is still being seen at media outlets.

Additionally, Singer (2003) posited that online journalists not affiliated with traditional media outlets largely gather information by compiling originally written stories from other sources, such as from news wires. Singer (2003) argued the knowledge needed to keep news services current is immense, but the knowledge is largely technical and organizational skills. A traditional journalist’s reportorial skills — negotiating and interviewing with sources, witnessing and recording events, and turning that learned information into cogent and original stories — remain largely unthreatened (Singer, 2003, p.149).

Coddington (2018) said aggregation had been a centuries-long practice in journalism, only being identified and developed as a form of journalistic practice, like reporting, in recent years, with it re-emerging as a significant component in the digital news landscape and dominant form of journalism in the last two decades. In a later publication, Coddington (2020) further

stated that aggregation encompasses broad practices, and those who engage in these practices have incomparable informational products and services, defining it as taking news from published sources, reshaping and republishing it in an abbreviated form.

However, the argument can be made that over the last 20 years, with aggregation technology becoming increasingly relied upon and the downsizing of media outlets, these reportorial skills are now being challenged as they are less heavily relied on than before. Coddington (2018) said drawing from published sources primarily distinguishes aggregation from pre-publication editing and reporting, and reshaping that news is where aggregators diverge and become content syndicators or plagiarists by synthesizing and adapting it.

Molyneux and Coddington (2019) stated that the growth of aggregation is fueled by driving traffic to a site for having the hottest stories even if reported elsewhere, which draws criticism itself from other journalists, who characterize aggregated news as a low rung in the journalism ladder if they even qualify it as journalism at all. As aggregation becomes an even more frequent part of journalism, concerns over quality and legitimacy have persisted (Molyneux and Coddington, 2019).

Singer (2003) added that if journalism is about reporting, but most online journalism is not, questioning surrounding the cognitive dimension of professionalism arises: What is the requisite set of knowledge or skills, and how does a professional acquire them? Furthermore, while every media outlet wants to hire the best journalists with the best skills to be a journalist, they stated that they are actually seeking journalists with skills tailored to the medium's demands, not what is needed for overall "real journalism" (Singer, 2003).

At this time, Singer (2003) discussed the idea of "converged newsrooms," where journalists simultaneously gather and disseminate content for multiple media formats,

mentioning only a handful of media outlets attempting to incorporate this idea into their newsrooms. This idea has become commonly implemented in today's journalistic landscape and is often the expectation. The concern of journalists dealing with multimedia chores and "working for two or three different bosses" arose (Hickey, 2000, as cited in Singer, 2003), which is now the norm in newsrooms, and the focus on completing several multimedia chores can take priority over doing several basic, singular tasks pertaining to one medium.

Finally, referring to evaluative dimensions, Singer (2003) stated that the Internet allows for greater autonomy for digital journalists than traditional media, allowing independent journalists to disseminate their work free of connection to a media outlet, even without being tethered to the freelancer label. Online information distributors claim greater autonomy from concentrated media power, and the dominance of elite sources is a crucial asset (McClintick, 1998, as cited in Singer, 2003).

However, Singer (2003) stated that organizational affiliation broadly defined the professional journalist in the past because what qualifies a journalist as a professional is the loss of individual control over the publication or broadcast of one's work. Singer (2003) stated that those seeking to define a "journalist" are now forced to evaluate closely what the person does rather than the bureaucratic environment in which the work occurs, resulting in a still-unresolvable debate about who journalists are.

Furthermore, Singer (2003) stated that a threat to the notion of professional autonomy for digital journalists are inadequately independent of commercial pressures, with the separation of church and state — the divide between editorial and business sides of media operation — has become a significant concern. McChesney (2000, as cited in Singer, 2003) pointed to evidence of digital media sites integrating content that generate revenue from advertiser and marketers with

content intended to fulfill the professional obligation to provide information whose sole purpose is public service.

During this time, the worry about autonomy and its link to professionalism was based on advertising and sponsored content blurring the lines of “real journalism,” and evident now with the addition of social media and its engagement numbers, clicks, and page views use to gauge advertising money, and unethical practices like clickbait being used to raise these numbers. Molyneux and Coddington (2019) stated that aggregation paired with clickbait headlines would surely erode credibility and lose long-term readers as they will grow tired of them viewing them as uninformative, low-quality news, despite these practices producing short-term gain in web traffic.

2.3. Us vs. Them: Traditional Journalists and Online Journalists

In the digital age, the defining roles of a sports journalist can be confusing, even more so what category sports journalists fall into. Given that, in the present, journalists have taken on more aspects found in the new digital age of journalism and traditional aspects of the past. McEnnis (2020) stated that sports journalism routines have intensified, with journalists producing stories for both print and web, but many of the essential characteristics are still the same. He splits sports journalists into two roles: a “traditional role,” focusing on more newspaper-oriented work practices, and an "online journalist," primarily office-based, working directly with digital platforms via content management systems.

A “traditional role” involves beat aspects of reporting, including press conferences, sporting events, and engaging in more conventional source relations with professional insiders, such as media managers, players, and coaches (Boyle, 2006; Sugden and Tomlinson, 2007, as cited in McEnnis, 2020). According to McEnnis (2020), sports editors, assistant editors, and

sub-editors working in newspaper production also belong to this category, and sports writers who produce analytical and column pieces as well (Boyle, 2006; Rowe, 2004, as cited in McEnnis, 2020). While “traditional” sports journalists may engage with digital media, like social media and podcasting, these are supplementary practices and are not what define their core and primary journalistic purpose.

In comparison, “online journalists” are expected to have greater technological knowledge and skill and be more web-savvy than their traditional counterparts (Lange et al., 2007, as cited in McEnnis, 2020). McEnnis (2020) stated that journalists have “online” within their job titles to signify their digitally oriented role, while they provide a dual role of writing/producing original content and integrating, repurposing, or rewriting second-hand, third-party information from both inside and outside news organizations (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Lange et al., 2007; McEnnis, 2016, as cited in McEnnis, 2020). “Online journalists” engage in online-only practices like, live blogging, podcasting, repurposing newspaper content, integrating multimedia content, writing online headlines, adding hyperlinks to text, curating social media content, and sourcing from social media (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; McEnnis, 2016; Singer et al., 1999, as cited in McEnnis, 2020).

Despite innovations in the digital age, McEnnis (2020) stated that sports desks are still susceptible to criticisms, as online sports journalism has seen a decline in journalistic standards, with an example being sports journalists “characterized as engaging in the activity of attention-grabbing rather than simply providing sports news” (Hutchin and Rowe, 2012, p. 142, as cited in McEnnis, 2020). Greenslade (2012, as cited in McEnnis, 2020) posited that live blogging has become a source of skepticism about whether it has been “good” for journalism because it prioritizes speed at the expense of accuracy and verification. Furthermore, McEnnis

(2020) stated that contrasting claims of innovation and inadequacy suggest that what online sports journalists mean for the profession is unclear.

Greenslade (2012) also stated that while social media sped up the process of gathering information, it also increased the chance for inaccuracy, but this does not mean the new media is an issue; journalists are and have always been guilty of factual inaccuracies enhanced by rushing to judgments. Additionally, Greenslade (2012) stated that journalists should never forget the first rule of journalism, i.e., verification, but remember that mistakes occur in the urgency to report, so restraint is an undervalued skill. So, journalists must avoid amplifying false information and adding to the speculation, which is the onus of the journalists, and whether they decide to take the extra step to do so.

Lewis (2012, as cited in McEnnis, 2020) stated that marking professional boundaries has become increasingly challenging for journalists in the digital age. Additionally, McEnnis (2020) said the boundaries are discursively constructed because of the lack of structural features like credentials and licenses to practice. Non-professionals like bloggers and citizen journalists have adopted journalistic norms and practices, leading to searching for questions of journalism's jurisdictional control (Anderson, 2008; Anderson & Schudson, 2008, as cited in McEnnis, 2020).

2.4 Just a Fan with a Keyboard

In sports journalism, more so than any other specialized journalistic industry, questions surrounding what constitutes journalism, ethical practices, and appropriate behavior loom large as sports journalists face skepticism and accusations of being mere fans with keyboards. This designation is why sports journalists strive to differentiate themselves from non-professional bloggers and public relations professionals. Traditional sports journalists raise concerns

regarding the ethical practices of online journalists, criticizing online sourcing as secondhand reporting and plagiarism, deeming quality control in the online sector inferior.

In Carlson (2015), he wrote that with no entrusted body declaring who is and who is not a journalist, the question of what makes someone a journalist hangs in the air, especially when questions about what equates to journalism, what is ethical, and what is appropriate, with these questions blurring the boundaries - involving people, practices, and places (p. 2). Furthermore, Carlson (2015, as cited in McEnnis, 2020) stated that “boundary work is essentially a jurisdictional struggle over ‘who counts as a journalist, what counts as journalism, what is appropriate journalistic behavior and what is deviant’” (p. 2).

According to McEnnis (2020), because of skepticism around claims of special knowledge and skill, sports journalists have struggled to establish a clear jurisdiction of boundaries, which consequently leaves them to be accused of being “fans with typewriters” (as stated in Boyle, 2006). McEnnis (2020) stated that the struggle to secure jurisdictional control involves convincing fellow non-sports journalists and the public that the knowledge and practices sports journalists possess and put forth are distinct from both professional fields (public relations) and non-professional fields (blogging).

Sports journalism is littered with criticisms for its production, as McEnnis (2020) stated that sports journalists identify more closely with subjectivity than objectivity when prioritizing opinion over the news, are primarily concerned with rumor and speculation rather than hard facts, and their focus, “sport,” is considered trivial subject matter compared to more “life and death” news coverage. Boyle (2006, as cited in McEnnis, 2020) stated that sports journalists, at times, fail to be neutral and unbiased in their reportage, and sports journalism as a media, fails to

deliver on a cognitive level, with news journalists intervening when a weighty and complex story needs better coverage because sports journalists lack the technical journalistic competencies.

McEnnis (2020) stated that sports journalists rely on their accreditation and access to professional sports to assert exclusive rights and mark occupational boundaries, with reporters mobilized by highly routinized practices covering specialized beats organized according to different sports and geographical lines. While covering specialized beats, sports journalists are tasked with attending sports events, news conferences, and media briefings, which forces sports journalism to be defined by its access to the professional sports environment (McEnnis, 2020).

Additionally, McEnnis (2020) stated that the professional knowledge possessed by sports journalists is gathered through covering sports events and gaining access to inside information; because of this, interviewing and developing close source relationships are highly valued skills. Moreover, Sugden and Tomlinson (2007, as cited in McEnnis, 2020) mentioned that sports journalists create a mythology surrounding “press packs,” defined as elite reporters working in rival news organizations operating as colleagues through a blend of competition and camaraderie.

Participants in McEnnis' (2020) study raised concerns that online sports journalists' practices are ethically unsound, with traditional sports journalists interviewed criticizing online sports journalists for sourcing stories and information from the internet because it is considered secondhand reporting and a form of plagiarism, and believe online journalists rewrite and regurgitate stories without checking accuracy and veracity of information. McEnnis (2020) stated that participants voiced concerns that quality control for digital platforms was inferior to newspapers, resulting in online publishing being characterized by inaccuracies like incorrect

facts and misspellings and that traditional journalists were critical of online sports journalists not publishing their work in favor of uploading material from other sites.

Of the interviewees in McEnnis (2020), one assistant sports editor from a popular newspaper stated, “Most stories are picked up from other sources – they haven’t got contacts,” while another newspaper sports reporter said, “They tend to be scouring global websites, every newspaper, every foreign website, every foreign newspaper and they are lifting and putting it up (on the website) straight away,” (McEnnis, 2020).

Furthermore, McEnnis (2020) stated that online sports journalists were criticized for how they produce content, like live blogs and news stories, and how they source information from television feeds of sporting events and press conferences, which many feel is unethical, because it has a misleading impression that the story is produced first hand, with on-the-sport reportage and broadcasts only convey partial elements of actual situations. According to McEnnis (2020), traditional sports journalists’ perspectives may derive more from fears that traditional routines are being displaced than a genuine concern for ethics.

Within his research, McEnnis (2020) stated that traditional sports journalists consider cultivating contacts and sources an essential professional skill alongside interviewing, a vital component of beat reporting within sports journalism, where attendance at news conferences and media briefings is a standard routine. Sports journalists’ professional knowledge traditionally consists of unique insight from access to professional sports environments and regular attendance at sports events (McEnnis, 2013, 2017, as cited in McEnnis, 2020). This aspect raises a premium on the accessibility needed for sports journalists to do their jobs correctly. And with online sports journalists, not out in the field, at games or events, office-based, McEnnis (2020) stated they lack the unique insights that inform historical understanding of professional knowledge. This belief

was reinforced by one of McEnnis' (2020) interviewees discussing source relations, stating, "I'd like to see more of them out in the field, doing stuff, building up relationships, going out for lunch, having a few beers, doing things at a personal level."

2.5 What Makes Them Qualified as Sports Journalists?

Within journalism, an ongoing dialogue between traditional and online sports journalists regarding qualifications, practices, and the shifting nature of journalism brings tension, reflecting the struggle between established norms and the ever-changing landscape of the profession. Traditional sports journalists uphold practices and attitudes as culturally valuable compared to their digitally native counterparts, despite criticisms labeling their approaches as lacking critical inquiry. Online sports journalists find themselves excluded from professional recognition, despite their sports desks being sources of media innovation.

In McEnnis (2020), traditional journalists also expressed concern that online journalists' professional qualifications or experience prior to employment was insufficient. While McEnnis' (2020) study was United Kingdom-based, and the requisites for becoming a journalist are slightly different from the United States, he did lay out what was expected of someone who becomes a journalist and how this is changing. A standard entry route into journalism in the U.K. involves acquiring professional qualifications awarded by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ). Beyond this, journalists were historically expected to start their careers with local/regional newspapers before working for national organizations, in a way similar to the United States. The traditional sports journalists in the study, McEnnis (2020), considered this an industry-valued route to not apply to online journalism, with interviewees referring to the youthfulness of online sports journalists, who they feel have not gone through enough training

and a fellow online journalist agreeing with the standards of online news organizations being less strict.

McEnnis (2020) found that credentials, qualifications, and conventional entry routes are essential discourses for establishing a professional jurisdiction around newspaper culture-rooted methods and practices, with industry qualifications being considered synonymous with traditional sports journalists, reinforcing their status as professionals and positioning online sports journalists as occupational outsiders. Furthermore, McEnnis (2020) stated that online sports journalists are conditioned to believe they are professionally deficient because of the lack of credentials, and a lack of competency implies that digitally native practices are inferior to traditional norms of sports journalism.

Moreover, McEnnis (2020) stated that online sports journalists situated their career aspirations within traditional role orientations. However, they felt this could only be achieved by demonstrating traditional skills outside their standard work routines. Additionally, McEnnis (2020) stated the expectations of traditional sports journalists to aspire to conventional norms and values, even if full digital platforms are the eventual future of journalism. There is a dynamic of the old guard holding on to the traditional beliefs as the current and future journalists, in the digital era, shifting the norms, which they feel are inferior to how journalism is done.

Online sports journalists are excluded from professional consideration even though their sports desks are considered areas of digital innovation (McEnnis, 2016; Morrison, 2014; Dowling and Vogan, 2015, as cited in McEnnis, 2020), and regarding professional acceptance and integration, despite growing maturity surrounding the medium within the industry, little is changing (McEnnis, 2020).

McEnnis (2020) stated that normative concerns persist, including speed over accuracy, fact-checking and verification in online work, and ethical issues surrounding the practice of “creative cannibalization,” the practice of lifting and repurposing stories from other websites (Curran, 2011, as cited in McEnnis, 2020). Additionally, McEnnis (2020) stated that the office-based routines of online sports journalists’ are unsuitable for occupational culture because being physically present in the professional sports environment is crucial for claims of knowledge and expertise, and the lack of being physically present further de-legitimizes their practices and routines. This expression of concern shows the feelings traditionalists have toward the new guard of younger journalists and their practices, as well as the ever-changing process of journalism, which feels like traditionalists are trying to hold some semblance of what they have continuously been familiarized with.

Finally, McEnnis (2020) found that traditional sports journalists assert maligned professional attitudes and practices as culturally essential and valuable compared to their “sub-standard” digitally native counterparts. For example, McEnnis (2020) pointed to sports journalists prioritizing the importance of developing contact and attending news conferences in professional sports environments without showing awareness that the aforementioned “toy department” label is a criticism of the way the occupational group approaches these practices, with some being too close to sources and lacking critical inquiry in their interviewing techniques. So, these traditionalists instead put forth blame on the lack of skill and knowledge of a group within their group, as opposed to looking inward as a whole, which McEnnis (2020) stated reinforces the status quo rather than committing to addressing the shortcomings of the “toy department” label.

The initial dive into athlete-media relationships and an overview of interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage in professional sports journalism were inspired by the controversy surrounding professional tennis star Naomi Osaka's withdrawal from the French Open in June 2021 following a fine and threat of expulsion from the tournament for choosing not to speak with the press during the tournament. According to Matthew Futterman of the New York Times (2021), the reasoning behind her intention to skip media obligations was based on the effects interacting with media was having on her mental health.

2.6. Chapter 2 summary

The literature review section summarized relevant research, firstly highlighting how sports journalism is often viewed as the “lesser” form of journalism in the eyes of many traditional news professionals, referring to it as the “sandbox of the newsroom” or the “toy department.” This perception persists despite sports’ significance historically, its profound influence on broadcast, and its dominant presence in media viewership metrics.

Furthermore, as the journalism industry morphed into the digital age, new challenges and considerations arose, affecting both traditional and sports journalism. The integration of social media, rapid online information dissemination, and blurred lines between commercial interests and journalistic integrity raised questions regarding accuracy, ethical standards, and the very nature of journalism. In this landscape, the need to be first is often prioritized over accuracy, leading to reduced trust in the media.

This transformation has also sparked a debate between traditional and online journalists. Traditional sports journalists, rooted in tradition, lean toward established practices, emphasize in-the-field reporting, and see rigorous pathways to becoming a professional as necessary. Online sports journalists, on the other hand, navigate digital platforms, curate content, and deal with

immediate online demands. These newer journalists, viewed skeptically by traditionalists, are perceived as lacking foundational skills or credentials emblematic of the profession but play a critical role in the modern digital-first era of journalism.

This mindset has led to an ongoing debate over qualifications and practices. The tension between the traditional and the new, or the established norms and the ever-evolving professional landscape, is discernible. Older journalists often uphold their practices as valuable, while younger, digitally-native journalists are shifting the industry's norms. Yet, both groups seek recognition and respect within the broader profession.

In summary, sports journalism, like the broader field of journalism, grapples with the challenges and opportunities brought about by the digital age. While traditionalists and newcomers might differ in their approaches, the central question remains: how can the industry adapt to ensure integrity, relevance, and value in an increasingly complex media landscape?

Chapter 3. Case of Naomi Osaka and Critical issues in Athle-Media Relationship

For this thesis, I will discuss Naomi Osaka's interview at the 2021 French Open as a case to further develop my research questions. At the 2021 French Open, Osaka wrote in a statement about her absence at Roland Garros, "...I'm writing this to say I'm not going to do any press during Roland Garros. I've often felt that people have no regard for athletes' mental health, and this rings very true. Whenever I see a press conference or partake in one, we're often sat there and asked questions that we've been asked multiple times before or asked questions that bring doubt into our minds, and I'm just not going to subject myself to people that doubt me. I've watched many clips of athletes breaking down after a loss in the press room, and I know you have as well. I believe that the whole situation is kicking a person while they're down, and I don't understand the reasoning behind it. Me not doing press is nothing personal to the tournament, and a couple of journalists have interviewed me since I was young, so I have a friendly relationship with most of them. However, if the organizations think that they can just keep saying, 'Do press, or you're gonna be fined,' and continue to ignore the mental health of the athletes that are the centerpiece of their cooperation, then I just gotta laugh..." (Futterman, 2021).

A glaring example of Osaka's tumultuous relationship with the media can be seen in an exchange with a reporter during a news conference at the Cincinnati Open, her return to the Women's Tennis Association Tour later in August 2021 (Naomi Osaka in Tears During Cincinnati Conference, n.d.). Paul Daugherty of the Cincinnati Enquirer, the reporter at the forefront of this exchange, asked Osaka about her relationship with the media, in what some, including Osaka's agent, felt "the tone of the question was all wrong and [the reporter's] sole purpose was to intimidate," which led to Osaka leaving the podium, in tears, before returning and finishing the

media availability (Walker, 2021). While fellow tennis reporters, like Ben Rothenberg, agreed the question's tone was inappropriate; however, the topic she was asked about was appropriate (Walker, 2021).

Daugherty asked Osaka, “You’re not crazy about dealing with us, especially in this format, yet you have a lot of outside interests that are served by having a media platform. I guess my question is, how do you balance the two?” How the question was worded, the tone to which it was asked, the timing, and the appropriateness of the setting it was asked, all played a factor in the outcome of the interaction between Osaka and Daugherty. This situation analysis was further motivation to look deeply into the relationship between professional athletes and the media, mainly focusing on the relationship aspect regarding interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage in sports journalism.

3.1 Sports Journalists’ Perspectives

The goal of looking further into the relationship was to see what aspects associated with it are adequate at their current stage and what can be improved upon. If an improvement is needed, then find what each side must do to improve the relationship.

For this research, the scope was narrowed to focusing on the side of the relationship from a sports journalist's standpoint. To do so, professional sports journalists were sought out to give their perspectives, insights, and opinions on interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage in sports journalism.

The reasoning behind focusing on the journalist side of the relationship and their perspective on interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage in sports journalism, was inspired by the analysis of the Osaka/media saga by highly regarded sports journalists Michael Holley and Michael Smith, the hosts of the NBCSports sports podcast, *Brother From*

Another. In a segment titled *Naomi Osaka is turning point for athlete-media relations*, Holley, formerly a columnist at the Boston Globe, and Smith, formerly a commentator for ESPN, shared their opinions, thoughts, and analysis of the situation surrounding Osaka and the media.

Instead of focusing on Osaka's dislike of the media or inexperience of how the then-23-year-old handled the media setting, Holley and Smith decided to look introspectively at sports journalism, journalists, and the industry as a whole.

Holley first analyzed sports journalism and news conferences, where he described covering his first news conference as a paid journalist in 1990, saying, "Nobody really taught me how to do it. Nobody said, 'This is what we're looking for from the press conference setting. This is what we're looking for from you. And this is your approach'" (Brother From Another et al., 2021a).

While discussing the prominent places he worked at, like the Boston Globe, Fox Sports, and ESPN, Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) said there was never once a serious conversation about how to approach a mass interview, with the point being that while Osaka is figuring out what navigating news conferences means to her, maybe sports journalists should figure out their approach to news conferences and what it means for them.

Choosing to look inward at the sports journalism industry, Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) said Osaka does not know the right approach to news conferences, but neither do the majority of sports journalists, providing some potential solutions to improve this side of the relationship from the aspect of sports journalists. One is an annual conference or summit focusing on sports journalism and mass media interviews; the other is how news conferences are conducted and need to be reconstructed.

3.2 Critical issues in athlete-media relationship

Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) proposes that the inadequacy of interviewing and questioning skills could harm the athlete-media relationship. Smith discussed being in his mid-20s, after leaving the Boston Globe for ESPN, having the mindset that there was no need to improve his interviewing skills, as he believed he had proved he knew how to interview and ask questions given his track record.

“You couldn't tell me I didn't know how to ask the right questions. You couldn't tell me I didn't know what I was doing. Hell, whatever I was doing, I was doing something right. It got me to the Boston Globe. Got me to ESPN at 25. I know what I'm doing” (Brother From Another et al., 2021a).

After attending a summit procured by John Sawatsky, a Canadian journalist turned professor and author focusing on the science behind interviewing, Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) realized that because someone is a credentialed journalist and journalist by trade, it does not equate to the skill of questioning and how to ask a good question.

Smith was critical of what is considered tough questioning and pointed out that most of the time, journalists are not even asking questions, saying, “We got it twisted as to what is a tough question. We think tough-sounding questions are tough questions. Half the time, we're not even asking questions to begin with. Half the time, we're just saying, ‘Talk about.’ Half the time, we're coming in, and we're looking for the athlete to confirm what we've already assumed or presumed once we get there. We've already made up our minds about what the story is, and we already have our opinions. And then, we ask these loaded questions. The vast majority of us fail to ask open-ended lean and neutral questions” (Brother From Another et al., 2021a).

When discussing questioning with research subjects, several referred to fellow journalists not asking questions but making statements or demands for information in place of questions. What makes a question is the use of interrogative words or phrases such as who, what, where, when, why, and how. These interrogative words clarify understanding and engage in conversation or communication with others. The purpose of a question is to elicit a response or answer from the person being addressed.

Furthermore, Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) said that even when asking questions, journalists fail to ask questions with these interrogative words that force subjects to tell stories. Additionally, he focuses on the components of tough questions, which incorporate open-ended, lean, and neutral components, which he believes are the most challenging questions to answer.

“Open-ended, not yes or no [questions], why, how, what forces the subject to story-tell. It makes them do the work. That's a tough question. The shortest and most neutral and open-ended questions can be the toughest because it makes the subject have to be much more reflective and thoughtful. Make them do the work versus just yes or no” (Brother From Another et al., 2021a).

First, he breaks down open-ended questions as a question worded to avoid yes-no answers and forces the subject to tell a story. Then, said lean refers to the quickness to which the person asking the question gets to the point of what is being asked. And finally, neutrality means the interviewer adds an opinion to the question because the subject will respond to the opinion in the question, not the question itself.

Referring back to the Osaka/Daugherty interaction, Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) said Daugherty loaded his question in the front end with an opinion by pointing out how Osaka is not crazy about interacting with the press, which Smith said set the tone of the

interaction. And then, Daugherty proceeded to ask an open-ended, lean, and neutral question by asking, "...You have a lot of outside interests that are served by having a media platform. I guess my question is, how do you balance the two?"

Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) said that Daugherty's question could have been effective without the opinionated component, but he failed to get the most productive answer because of this. Smith said that just because a question gets an answer does not mean it was the best possible answer.

"A lot of times an answer just because somebody gives an answer doesn't mean it was the best possible answer. It could have been a better answer if you asked a better question. And there are so many bad questions that elicit the responses in kind that end up going viral. Or somebody walks away, or somebody gives a flippant response. So that's like, 'Oh, well, you did your job.' But not really, not really, and you don't know what you don't know. So you think you did something right when you really asked a crappy question, but they responded" (Brother From Another et al., 2021a).

Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) believes journalists should realize what type of discussion they want with speakers, meaning if they want to do an interview, the focus should be on the output, not the input, with the reporter, concentrated on the answers, not sounding intelligent, thoughtful, or informed when asking because that is more of a conversational focus.

"Just like a window ain't about the muck on the window, it's about what's on the other side of that window. Windows serve a purpose, but it ain't to cloud what's on the other side. And when you cloud up your question with all kinds of opinions, thoughts, and preconceived notions, you ruin the answer. So if you're doing an interview, do an interview" (Brother From Another et al., 2021a).

Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) believes that news conferences, as a traditional obligation, should not be a requirement for athletes, despite understanding why it is a requirement, and sports journalism as an industry needs to evaluate the value of a news conference. In addition, he said news conferences being a requirement should be evaluated because there are enough athletes who are comfortable with the news conference setting, while there is a slight handful who are not comfortable in that setting, and with a compassionate approach, the sports journalism industry needs to understand the difficulties attached to these obligations.

“Let her figure it out in real time, not on our timetable, and moving forward, do not continue to judge her or any athlete like her that is struggling with this obligation. There needs to be some separation, some objectivity when it comes to journalism, but it doesn't always have to be combative. It doesn't always have to be adversarial... Maybe we got it wrong. Maybe we got it all wrong” (Brother From Another et al., 2021a).

Additionally, Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) said the way interviewing and news conferences may have been correct in the past, but the evolution of sports, society, and sports journalism calls for a change in the norm. Once again, pointing to how, decades ago, news conferences were the primary vehicle for athletes to export their message. However, now with Twitter and Instagram, athletes ask, “What’s in it for me,” which was more clearly defined decades ago.

Furthermore, Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021a) points to the sponsorships between media outlets like ABC/ESPN, NBC, CBS, and Fox, and sports leagues and how this changed interviewing and media access years before multi-billion dollar deals were in place.

These deals change what an insider in the late-1980s looks like compared to an insider in the 2020s.

“When I said, ‘Is sports journalism dead? I hope not. But I think it's becoming more and more rare, like the so-called purity of sports journalism. It's hard to find purity in it because there are just so many things to consider...It's just different now. And we all have to just look at where we are and how we manage in this new ecosystem that, for some of us, offers some of those who are under 30 is not new. It's just what you know. [And] Those of us who are on the other side of 30. It takes some adjustment. So the athletes are adjusting. We're adjusting too. We just got to figure out the best way to do it” (Brother From Another et al., 2021a).

More changes are highlighted in a previous segment, *Is Naomi Osaka Right not to Talk to Media at French Open*. Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) emphasizes the unprofessionalism seen in the media regarding where they stand as critics vs. journalists and journalists vs. fans. He asks if journalists are synonymous with critics because he argues that some are and are present in news conferences, and others are just there to hear a speaker talk.

Furthermore, Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) discusses how journalists, more akin to fans, are masquerading as sports journalists in the golf media. Some cheer on golfers and react negatively to journalists who ask “real questions.” Several subjects interviewed for this research see this unprofessionalism, who see journalists who would rather have friendships with the athletes than professional relationships. However, journalists have difficulty defining the line between professionalism and unprofessionalism regarding relationships, which Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) said athletes, too, have a difficult time defining relationships, with some believing those who ask friendly questions are not out to get them

compared to those who ask tough questions, who may also not be out to get them, but doing their job.

Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) continuously questions an athlete's obligation to the press. He argues that in the context of reporting on athletes, the press is not the good guy, and fans are less inclined to feel sympathetic toward the media when they become criticized about their job or the lack thereof.

Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) said that in the age of social media, athletes can speak directly to fans or create their own content for fans, so most fans are unwilling to hear the media complain about the access to athletes the media has because the days of the press being the mouthpiece of the fans are over. Although, while speaking with research subjects, some still believe that the media is the mouthpiece for fans and still plays a significant role in the access between athletes and fans.

Additionally, because of the advent of social media, players no longer need the media the way they did in the past to bring exposure to their brands. However, Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) points to the \$50 million off the court Osaka has earned, which can somewhat be attributed to her being one of the best tennis players in the world, but also attributes it to how she has curated her brand in the public eye, which the media plays a continued role. This continued role can be argued to call for her to have an obligation to speak with the media, which several research subjects have expressed when discussing an athlete's obligation to answer questions.

Smith said, "...Because she's used media and uses her platform so well, that's part of the reason why she was able to set a record for female athletes last year. I would encourage Naomi Osaka not to shut off any opportunity to speak to the public. Use the press, which she's done

brilliantly so far. Continue to use the press, but use the press to advance conversations instead of saying, 'No, I'm just not dealing with it. I'm just not talking to you.' Bring the fight to the media, bring it to the press professionally. If you want to affect change for other athletes who don't have the luxury of saying, 'You know what, I'm just not talking to you'" (Brother From Another et al., 2021b).

Furthermore, Smith (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) said that as a sporting society, we are still learning, growing, and evolving on how to approach the relationship between athletes and media, especially when discussing mental health and the role interacting with the media plays. In response, Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) argued that because of the contentious setting with the media, athletes have turned toward creating their content and narratives because of the comfortability of being questioned by someone in what can be considered an adversarial role.

In turn, Holley (Brother From Another et al., 2021b) believes athletes need journalists who are playing the role of checks and balances and will not buy everything an athlete sells. He said this leaves athletes in the mindset that they are always right because they control their own narrative, and having nobody criticize it can be dangerous. "This is the dangerous part, the thing that you're always right. And that's the problem. If you're constantly shaping your own story and creating your own content, you're never wrong. And that's not realistic. Sometimes, she is going to be wrong. Sometimes she will lash out at somebody, not just her, but anybody will lash out, and then we can sit back objectively and view the exchange and say, 'Oh, she is dead wrong'" (Brother From Another et al., 2021b). Several research subjects have discussed the role of athletes being their own public relations, marketing, and storytellers and the issues that may arise

with this. The first issue is the lack of access to athletes for the media, and the second is how the media's job is to be present to get the story to the public and a source of accountability as well.

Jonathan Liew (2021), a sportswriter for The Guardian and the 2021 Sports Journalism Association sportswriter of the year, echoes Holley's sentiment in an article regarding the Osaka/media saga. Liew said that news conferences' effectiveness as the direct line from the athlete to the public is no longer the case. Osaka's function as an entertainer and corporate billboard hinges on playing tennis "rather than being forced to sit in a windowless room explaining herself to a roomful of middle-aged men" (Liew, 2021).

Additionally, Liew also harshly criticized the press and news conferences, biting in his criticism, stating, "And so the modern press conference is no longer a meaningful exchange but really a lowest-common-denominator transaction: a cynical and often predatory game in which the object is to mine as much content from the subject as possible. Gossip: good. Anger: good. Feuds: good. Tears: good. Personal tragedy: good" (Liew, 2021). Furthermore, Liew (2021) questions if there is a better way of gathering information from athletes, instead of propping an athlete filled with emotion, either in victory or defeat, with the expectation of answering the most intimate questions from strangers in the least intimate setting. To him, news conferences are ritualistic, with the same speakers, in the same seats, giving the same cliches, and wasting millions of words.

In his conclusion, Liew looked introspectively and said, "Read the room. We are not the good guys here. We are no longer the power. And one of the world's best athletes would literally rather quit a grand slam tournament than have to talk to the press. Rather than scrutinizing what that says about her, it might be worth asking what that says about us" (Liew, 2021).

In the article, *What Is Sports Media's Role When It Comes to Mental Health?*, Brian Moritz (2022) examines athletes prioritizing their mental well-being, with many pointing to media interactions and new conferences as a source of stress and anxiety. Osaka was also at the crux of his research, talking with athletes, journalists, researchers, and mental health professionals about Osaka's withdrawal from the 2021 French Open.

Moritz (2022) gathered from those he spoke to that the Osaka story was a more specific situation and “not endemic to the entire sports media industrial complex.” He stated that Osaka's story is the first time an athlete publicly and explicitly connects mental health and media obligations.

Helene Elliott, sportswriter and columnist for the Los Angeles Times, who had covered Osaka before and spoke with Moritz, said, “I think that her saying that the interviews were causing her pain to reflect on losses, I mean, I had participated in press conferences with her before, and that had never really been an issue. She's been engaging. She'd been thoughtful. She'd been intelligent, reflective” (Moritz, 2022).

Moritz (2022) said categorizing this as an issue between sports media and athletes is generalizing both rather than seeing these situations individually. He stated that some players hate talking to reporters. Some love it.

While Moritz (2022) focuses on both the athlete and the journalist perspectives, our focus will be the journalist perspective since it is closely related to the research gathered from discussions with our research subjects.

Moritz (2022) highlights the belief that the importance of access has become stronger among journalists over the past two decades, as a shift to digital journalism and the advent of social media has strained the sports journalism business model but also given fans and players

their own platforms, stating that journalists differentiate what they can offer by their ability to interview.

Interviews differ from team to team, league to league, sport to sport, and both how and where they are conducted, which several research subjects say can become a frustrating part of the job. Additionally, Moritz (2022) said teams prefer news conferences, allowing them to control which players speak to reporters and how many questions are asked, which has become more strict following the pandemic. Once again, the regimentation of news conferences is another issue many research subjects have had when trying to report. Moritz (2022) said the ideal situation would be an open locker room, where all players who stay in the room are fair game for journalists to approach. This situation is similar to how favorable the idea of one-on-one conversations is to many research subjects.

According to Moritz (2022), University of Florida researcher Dr. Roxane Coache, a participating author in the study of meta-journalistic discourse (journalists writing about journalism), shared the results of research based on the Osaka story. The results, presented at the International Association for Communication and Sport Summit in March 2022, suggested that English and French journalists framed their coverage of Osaka in a way that defends news conferences and paints them as a necessary reporting component.

Coache told Moritz, “People don’t necessarily like (the news conference), but at the same time, I think there’s the uncertainty of ‘How are we going to replace it?’ This is something that is being put into question, something that is not perfect but somewhat works. And for journalists, it’s being put into question with no solutions offered” (Moritz, 2022).

In the article (Moritz, 2022), Dr. Andrew Wolanin, a sports psychologist in the Philadelphia area, said media obligations are rarely a source of anxiety but can be a stressor for

athletes. And even with mandatory cooling-off periods postgame, Wolanin said being interviewed is stressful and that news conferences are a form of public speaking that many people widely fear.

Moritz (2022) said if reporters do not like news conferences like Coche mentioned, and athletes do not need them as much as in the past, with the advent of social media, what is the next step? He said the easy answer would be to eliminate news conferences. However, the reporters and former athletes he interviewed for the article did not believe doing away with news conferences was realistic.

This belief is similar to some of the opinions of the research subjects, with several saying that while one-on-one interviews are the best form of gathering information from a speaker, it is unrealistic to have every athlete speak with one person individually. Therefore, while mass interviews may have flaws, it is the best option for many media members when scale is considered.

Moritz (2022) mentions the issue with scale, imagining Super Bowl media week, where instead of one large news conference to speak with Tom Brady, he would have to speak with hundreds of media members individually. Moritz said this setting could be more stressful, not less.

As for improvements, Wolanin was quoted, “I think the keyword is ‘relationship,’ right? So in an ideal world, having the ability to form relationships with the athletes, it is incredibly effective for journalists and for the athletes” (Moritz, 2022). Additionally, former NFL player Donte Whitner, who was interviewed for the article, said, “When it comes to a reporter and a player’s relationship, I think it has to be an empathetic relationship. And it goes both ways. So until both sides are empathetic towards each other, I don't think that is a true depiction of sports”

(Moritz, 2022). Moritz said that instead of changing the mechanics of the athlete-journalist relationship, the change should be with news conferences and making them less detrimental to mental health, which would require a change in attitudes involved.

3.3 Chapter 3 summary

Using the case of Osaka's 2021 French Open, several research questions presented themselves, which are listed below.

RQ1. How do sports journalists believe modern press conferences serve or hinder the objectives of both athletes and journalists?

RQ2. How do sports journalists perceive their role and responsibilities in the context of mass interviews and news conferences?

RQ3. To what extent do journalists believe the industry's approach to news conferences is practical or requires change?

RQ4. How can sports journalists improve their interviewing techniques when interacting with athletes?

RQ5. How does the type of question (open-ended vs. closed, neutral vs. opinionated) affect the responses of athletes during interviews?

RQ6. How do sports journalists believe the sports journalism industry can evolve to better cater to the needs of both athletes and journalists?

Chapter 4. Research Method

4.1 Introduction

In this section, the research method will be explained, starting with the research methods by which information was gathered and the data used. The data collection was gathered through qualitative research, which involved collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research.

4.2 Interview sample

For this research, the goal was set to interview a sample of at least 10 "professional sports journalists." The journalists were defined as those who cover professional sports events where athletes earn a salary, such as the NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, Olympic sports, professional golf, and similar leagues.

The ambition was to include individuals actively reporting on professional sports for at least five years, ensuring they are well-versed in environments like press conferences, games, and locker rooms. The rationale behind this specification was to ensure insights and perspectives were derived from journalists with a robust understanding of such settings rather than those still in the budding stages of their careers.

While the objective was to engage with 10 or more journalists fitting this description, a total of nine seasoned sports journalists were interviewed.

4.3 Interviewee Qualifications and Recruitment

Due to scheduling constraints and looming deadlines, necessary adjustments were made to the targeted research group. The criteria for journalist participants was revised to include those

with at least five years of general journalistic experience, with a portion of that time dedicated to covering professional sports.

The spectrum of interviewees was broad. It spanned from individuals just over the five-year minimum mark to veterans with decades of journalism experience. Some had even transitioned from active reporting to other roles within sports journalism.

To identify and recruit potential interviewees, personal points of contact were leveraged as a starting point. The “snowball” method was facilitated for the recruitment approach. For instance, upon interviewing Dylan Hernández from the Los Angeles Times, he recommended and provided contacts for current and past Times colleagues. This referral led to an interview with T.J. Simers. A similar pathway was established with Sam Fortier of The Washington Post, who bridged the connection to Matthew Paras of The Washington Times. Every individual interviewed was then prompted to suggest other potential participants who would meet set criteria and could provide valuable perspectives for the research.

4.4 Interview process

Data was collected through a single one-on-one interview with the journalists, conducted via Zoom, and recorded. The interview timeframe ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, with some slightly above the minimum time of 30 minutes and others going beyond the one-hour mark, up to one and a half hours.

The interviews were conducted with a semi-structured interview method, combining both structured and unstructured interviews. Each interview had a standard set of open-ended questions that every interviewee would be asked in a general plan. However, there was room for some flexibility if an interviewee wanted to speak further on a topic, if a follow-up question was needed, or if further explanation of an opinion was needed.

Additionally, the interview had elements of an online interview method because it was conducted via Zoom. This option allowed interviewees not to be present at an in-person location at a set time, allowing more flexibility for the interviewer and interviewee. Every interview was conducted during the daytime, as the interviewees fit the interview into their daily schedule either while at work or on a day off.

At the beginning of the interviews, interviewees answered survey questions about their personal lives and experiences as professional sports journalists, including age, gender, educational background, college major, publication, years active, other sections covered, and professional sports covered.

4.5 Interview questions

During these interviews, the subjects were asked what were considered 13 essential questions regarding interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage in sports journalism, with four having follow-up questions. Interviewees were also asked to analyze a short video of NBA superstar Trae Young addressing the media and his interaction with TV Sports Director Zach Klein, explained further in section 4.6.

The list of questions includes:

1. Can you tell me about your experience covering sports?
2. Can you tell me about your first sports-related or other press conferences? Who sent you to cover the press conference, and did the person guide you on how to cover a press conference or give a clear goal of what to take away?
3. Do you believe how press conferences are conducted is the most viable way of receiving information from a subject? (Based on the answer) Why or why not?

4. What aspects of press conferences work well and should be continued, and what aspects of press conferences can be improved?
5. What are your thoughts on the Zach Klein's line of questioning and conduct during his interview with Trae Young? Is there anything you would've done differently to optimize the viability of Young's responses?
6. Do you think the reporter crossed an ethical line during this interview? If so, when?
7. When do you believe an ethical line is crossed in an interview?
8. How do you know when to walk away from a tense interview or continue pressing an interviewee on a subject you want them to answer?
9. How much are you willing to press the interviewee?
10. How much does non-verbal communication (reading body language) go into conducting interviews and media conferences and getting viable information from an interviewee?
11. In your opinion, how can we, as an industry, improve how sports journalists conduct interviews and how we ask questions?
12. How do you approach a press conference when asking questions?
13. In your opinion, what makes a great question?

4.6 Trae Young's interview as a queue to draw interviewee's explanations

The reasoning behind showing the subjects the Klein/Young interaction was that it was believed that it was a good example of a tense confrontation that could lead to issues for both parties, between interviewer and interviewee, a situation the subject may or may not have experienced during their career. The goal was to gauge the subjects' thoughts on how the

interviewer handled the situation, where it may have gone wrong, and what they would have done differently in the reporter's stead.

Below is a full description of the Klein/Young situation subjects were asked about, including the questions they were asked.

Trae Young gets heated with reporter about altercation with Nate McMillan (CHAZ, 2022):



Fig. 1. "WSB-Ch.2 Atlanta (ABC-TV) Sports Director Zach Klein (left) waiting for the response of Atlanta Hawks point guard Trae Young (right).," *Trae Young gets heated with reporter about altercation with Nate McMillan*, 2022.

During interviews, subjects were tasked with an exercise that showed a clip of a media availability involving Atlanta Hawks' young superstar, Trae Young, and the Atlanta media. In addition, the subjects were asked to analyze the interaction between Young and WSB-Ch.2 Atlanta (ABC-TV) Sports Director Zach Klein.

The Atlanta Hawks listed Young as injured and inactive for a game against the Denver Nuggets on December 2nd, 2022. As a result, Young did not suit up but was also missing from the arena and team bench, which is customary that when an athlete is injured, they still attend the game and watch from the bench.

Two days later, an article published by Shams Charania and Sam Amick, reporters from the sports website *The Athletic*, said Young's absence was due to rising tension and a confrontation between him and then-head coach Nate McMillan.

The article stated, "While Young was receiving treatment on his right shoulder, sources say McMillan asked him whether he would participate in shootaround, receive treatment during walk-through and play in the game against the Nuggets. But Young made it clear that he wanted to focus solely on his treatment while missing shootaround and deciding later in the day whether he would play.

"That approach, however, was not McMillan approved. Since the face of the Hawks' franchise was deciding not to take part in shootaround, McMillan ultimately presented him with two options for that night's game. Sources said: Play off the bench — or do not show up to the arena."

On the Monday after reports of this conflict with McMillan, Young was facing the media, ready to answer their questions. But, before any reporter asked a question, Young remarked, "There is a lot of y'all today. Are y'all alright?"

Klein retorted, "We're worried about you. How are you?"

After a reporter's initial question about the situation, Young gave an initial statement regarding his absence from Friday's game.

Young said, “We're all grown men here, and there's sometimes you don't always agree. It's unfortunate that private situations and private conversations get out to the public, but I guess that's the world we live in now. But, I'm not just focused on basketball and focused on helping my team win, and that's what I gotta get to refocus.”

In what could be considered an accusatory tone, Klein asked, “What's public was that you not at the game, so, why weren't you?”

Young responded to his tone by saying, “It sounds like you were coming at me.” And Klein said, “I'm curious. You're the leader of this team.”

In a pushback, Young responded, “It's hard for people who don't know the full situation to understand it. So. I mean, it's like I said, it's a private matter again. It was made public which is unfortunate. If it had stayed private, it probably wouldn't have been as big of a deal. But, like I said, it's unfortunate. My job and my goal is to win a championship, and that's all I focused on.”

Klein followed up by saying, “But you can see the perception, Trae. You are a leader of this team, and when you're not there.”

And before he could finish his question, Young interrupted him by stating, “Well, when you're an outside guy like you are, you don't understand in a private matter and private situation, you should probably stay on the outside. Like I said, it's unfortunate that everybody has to understand and know a little bit of the details that went on inside, but I mean, inside here, we're all good. And yeah, if you have any more questions about that, you can talk to somebody else about it. That's all I got to say.” Minutes later, Klein once again engaged Young about his absence stating, “Again, I respect what you're saying about the private of the locker room and private of the practice court when we're not here. I guess it's just a public thing of you not going to support your teammates when you're healthy by not going on the bench.”

Young responded, “If I was healthy, I would’ve been playing.”

And Klein replied, “John [Collins] was in a boot, and he was still there.”

In a final back and forth, Young, visibly irritated, stated, “Yeah, but you don’t know the full story again. Again, [and] no, I don’t want to know.”

Klein finished his side by asking, “So, that's it? There's more to it of you being healthy?”

Young, staring at Klein, said, “A private matter needs to stay private.”

The goal of showing the interview was to gather information from the subjects on what they thought about Klein’s line of questioning throughout the video and if they would have done anything differently to optimize the viability of Young’s responses if they were in Klein’s stead.

After showing the interview, I asked **What are your thoughts on the reporter's line of questioning and conduct during this interview? Is there anything you would’ve done differently to optimize the viability of the responses?**

Additionally, interviewees were asked if Klein crossed an ethical line in how he presented his line of questioning and, if so, when. Moreover, to follow-up, interviewees were asked when they believed a reporter crossed an ethical line during an interview by a question, **Do you think the reporter crossed an ethical line during this interview? If so, when? When do you believe an ethical line is crossed in an interview?**

Because of the tension rising between Young and Klein during their interaction, interviewees were asked how and when to walk away from a tense interview or continue pressing an interviewee on a subject they wanted them to answer. Also, they were asked how much they were willing to press the interviewee, **How do you know when to walk away from a tense interview or continue pressing an interviewee on a subject you want them to answer? How much are you willing to press the interviewee? [follow-up question].**

Finally, because of the rise of tension, aggressive tone, and tense body language, the interviewees were asked how much non-verbal communication skills (reading body language) go into conducting interviews and media conferences to receive viable information from an interviewee.

They were asked, **How much does non-verbal communication (reading body language) go into conducting interviews and media conferences and getting viable information from an interviewee?**

4.7. Chapter 4 summary

This chapter describes the research method adopted in this thesis. This chapter explained the sampling process, sample size, interviewee selection criteria, snowballing method, interview process, interview questions, and a case of Tae Young's interview to stimulate the interviewee's thoughts.

Chapter 5. Results

5.1 Interviewees' previous and current affiliations

Here is a list of interviewees and their previous and current affiliations.

Paul Mitchell (University of Nevada, Reno)

With a career dating back to the mid-1980, Dr. Paul Mitchell, a current professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, served as a reporter and editor for the Philadelphia Tribune (the nation's oldest continuously-published African American newspaper). He also served as news editor for the Asbury Park Press newspaper and editor for The National Sports Daily, the first daily all-sports newspaper.

Chris Murray (Nevada Sports Net)

An award-winning sports journalist in the state of Nevada, Chris Murray's experience covering sports dates back to 2002, starting at the Reno Gazette-Journal. After serving as assistant sports editor, Nevada Wolf Pack beat writer, and sports columnist for over 16 years, he made the foray into broadcasting in 2018 with Nevada Sports Net, where he has been since.

Matthew Paras (The Washington Times)

Matthew Paras is a digital sports reporter with The Washington Times covering a wide array of Washington D.C. sports, including the Washington Commanders, Washington Wizards, Washington Capitals, and Washington Nationals, over the past six years.

Jesus Cano (Formerly Bay Area News Group)

Starting his journalism career at the age of 15, Jesus Cano has spent the last eight years covering sports at several levels, ranging from high school, collegiate and professional sports. For six years, he worked off and on with the Bay Area News Group as a freelance reporter and on staff as a sports editorial clerk.

Dylan Hernández (Los Angeles Times)

Dylan Hernández, a sports columnist with the Los Angeles Times, provides a stark, poignant, and brazen analysis of professional sports. With over 20 years of experience, Hernández spent the majority of his time Dodgers beat writer and, before that, working at the San Jose Mercury News.

Steve Kroner (San Francisco Chronicle)

With over 40 years covering sports, Steve Kroner has spent much of his time as a beat writer for various Bay Area teams like the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland A's, occasionally covering the NFL, college football, the NBA, and golf. Kroner joined The Chronicle in 1998 after spending 16 years as a sports producer/reporter for KPIX TV.

Sam Fortier (The Washington Post)

Joining The Post in 2019, Sam Fortier spent his first season covering the Washington Nationals' World Series-winning season, including game seven of that series in Houston. Since then, his experience is primarily covering the NFL, serving as a beat writer for The Post covering the Washington Commanders. Before this position, Fortier covered the Los Angeles Chargers for the Athletic.

Ron Kroichick (San Francisco Chronicle)

A University of California, Berkeley graduate, Ron Kroichick has spent the last 36 years covering California sports, starting at The Sacramento Bee and eventually moving to The San Francisco Chronicle in 1995, where he has been since. Kroichick is a sports enterprise reporter who covers the Golden State Warriors during the NBA season but also covers other topics like MLB, the 49ers, golf, college football, and basketball.

T.J. Simers (Formerly Los Angeles Times)

A once prominent sports columnist, T.J. Simers served as the sports columnist for the Los Angeles Times from 1990 to 2013, earning the title of California Sportswriter of the Year by the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association in 2000. In addition, his expertise has made him well-traveled with stints at The San Diego Union, the Rocky Mountain News, and the Morristown Daily Record, to name a few. Now retired, he works on his TJ Page 2 blog.

The results of the interviews are summarized by the topics below.

5.2 News Conference Coverage

The interviewees were critical of the interworkings of news conferences and lamented several aspects of the format that need improvement while emphasizing certain aspects that work well. They believe improvements in these areas will lead to better journalism and interactions with the interviewees they interact with daily. This section aims to answer the following research questions: How do sports journalists believe modern press conferences serve or hinder the objectives of both athletes and journalists? How do sports journalists perceive their role and responsibilities in the context of mass interviews and news conferences? To what extent do journalists believe the industry's approach to news conferences is practical or requires change?

5.2.1 Up Next At The Podium: Realities and Concerns about News Conferences

In terms of news conferences, the term frequently present in the sections regarding news conferences refers to the person who addresses the media as the speaker. This wording will be a catch-all term to avoid confusion and redundancy. It can be used in place of players, athletes, coaches, team presidents, etc.

While focusing on news conferences, depending on whom you ask, you can receive a wide array of personal feelings toward news conferences from journalists. Some enjoy access to speakers and feel they receive valuable information, while others think they are useless and antiquated. The feelings toward news conferences can also depend on what type of news conference is being conducted, who is speaking, and the openness with which the speaker addresses the media.

Nearly every subject was critical of news conferences in some way. However, M. Paras (personal communication, April 21, 2023) was the subject who provided the most glowing approval of news conferences. He said he is a fan of the news conference format and finds it very

useful, especially as a beat writer. He thinks it is the most accurate and informative way to gather information.

Although he may criticize news conferences, S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) of the San Francisco Chronicle believes the viability of information depends on the coverage and importance the speaker receives. He believes there is no more viable way to fairness to the speaker and the media's time because of the number of people who want to hear from them and the feasibility.

“In a perfect world, you would be able to get a one-on-one, a two-on-one, and even a three-on-one, and that is not going to be too big. But that's just not feasible with those types of people” (S. Kroner, personal communication, March 22, 2023).

S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) contrasted the media availability during news conferences for the Super Bowl and a week three game in the regular season. With how much media attends the event at the Super Bowl, the news conference format is the only viable way to gather information. However, in a week three news conference, there would be fewer people; a reporter would collect information from a news conference and have an opportunity to interview a speaker at their locker or office.

T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023), formerly of the Los Angeles Times, believes news conferences are a lazy way for the media to cover a story, and many times is just a way for whoever is conducting the news conference to get their message across the way they want it delivered. “I think it's a joke” (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023).

C. Murray (personal communication, April 19, 2023) of Nevada Sports Net said news conferences are not viable ways to extract information from an interviewee because he believes the interviewees are less likely to be open, honest, and more scripted when a person is in front of

multiple media members and cameras. While in some cases, like with Golden State Warriors star Draymond Green, a speaker may speak their mind and show personality, subjects tend to become tense and use more clichés.

5.2.2 Regimented and Clichéd Speakers

While news conferences have benefits, some journalists feel they could be improved in several aspects. One issue many find is that with the number of news conferences speakers participate in, they become regimented in the structure of the news conferences and more rehearsed with the answers and responses provided to the media. The system has also been criticized, with an organization's public relation department wanting control of the setting, structure, and speaker access.

T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023) feels that the results from news conferences are based on how the media present at an event approaches and covers a news conference, which he noticed was more evident in the past. Now, he believes organizations try to condense all media present at news conferences together, eliminating room for reporters to report independently. T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023) said he believes in a back-and-forth exchange with a speaker sprinkled with a repartee here and there, which news conferences are not designed for.

“The people delivering the message are trying to make you all one lump sum. So they're delivering their message. You're dutifully writing down what they're saying and going on to report what they want you to report. I think that's ridiculous. Your job as a reporter is to go get the news. So I don't like to be force-fed” (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023).

As a beat writer for the Washington Commanders of the NFL, S. Fortier's (personal communication, March 20, 2023) context for news conferences comes from his experience

covering the team weekly, with coaches and players participating in a news conference three times a week. “I think that the structure is a little too regimented. Everybody gets two questions, and I think that sometimes you want to have another follow-up, but I'm sure every reporter would say that. I know that news conferences can't be unlimited time. So it's a difficult balance” (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023).

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) pointed out the shift he has seen in how teams provide access to media and how it has become more restricted. He recounted how reporters could approach and question anyone in the past, but as the years passed, he noticed a shift. Teams and public relations members will now ask whom the reporters want to talk with and arrange the interaction, which Mitchell finds very sterile and unnatural.

Often, teams will make one speaker available, and that is who the media will be interviewing. P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) said this lacks an organic feel because it prevents reporters from being allowed to go around and ask other speakers questions based on the interview with the initial interviewee. P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) feels less access allows for less of a rapport with an interviewee because reporters could build a connection with the interviewee in the past because they would see a reporter more often, especially at the beginning, during, and after practice. “When you are on that level, you have to be seen by those folks in order to get in and build a rapport with them. Before, it was much easier to build a rapport; they would constantly see you in practice, [but now] they see you after practice. I think that dynamic has changed and also changed how you [a reporter] can put things together about athlete x or athlete y in conjunction with their teammates or coach or assistant coaches” (P. Mitchell, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) continued, “The relationships that you will see are becoming even more sterile. And, because these athletes are under such scrutiny, I think that you can develop that kinship with athletes, [but] I don't know if you can necessarily develop a friendship or nor should they. It should be separate.”

S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) believes that as speakers become more familiar with the news conference format, the familiarity can lead to the speakers knowing how to “play the game,” which refers to providing more guarded, cliché, and formulaic answers to questions by the interviewee. He points to this familiarity as a negative.

“There'd be many players who weren't normally involved in news conferences, and I think their responses became quite a bit more guarded or cliché because it's just an unnatural setting for them” (S. Kroner, personal communication, March 22, 2023).

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) said public relations departments tilt interviews and media access to benefit the organization or speaker. Because of mass media consumption, he indicates that the most notable sports journalists will receive important information first because organizations and speakers want the information to go national. The same goes for organizations and speakers who want the information not to go national.

“When a good reporter, a beat reporter, is going to be the person who is going to dig to get information continually. [It's] not necessarily to tarnish anybody's reputation, but stuff a franchise or an athlete may not want them, but they need to know” (P. Mitchell, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

5.2.3 The Interviewee's General Approaches to News Conference

With the range in ages and experience between the subjects, there too is a range in how the subjects approach covering news conferences when asking questions. For some, preparation

is critical, with them going into a news conference with several story ideas and questions they may ask. Others enter a news conference with an open mind, actively listening and asking questions based on the speaker's discussion.

For his approach to news conferences, C. Murray (personal communication, April 19, 2023) enters with a couple of story ideas and questions directed to gather information for those ideas. At the Nevada Sports Net, he works with many first-time or student journalists, advising them to go into an interview with a list of questions with a precise topic. But as a 20-plus-year journalist, he doesn't approach it that way, more so having two or three things he is interested in having the speaker discuss. "You do have to be agile enough that if there is something that pops up, but you weren't planning to talk about, to not just go off your list of questions, whether it's mental or literally written down. And you need to be able to get that information out if there's an interesting topic and have follow-ups on that topic. And if I go into a news conference and only get one story out of it, I feel like it's a failure" (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023).

For P. Mitchell's (personal communication, April 17, 2023) approach to covering a news conference, he has a combination of questions he may want to ask and uses active listening when a speaker addresses the media in case something newsworthy may arise from what is being discussed. P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) said active listening is a skill set a reporter must possess and is the difference between hearing and listening to somebody. Just like in a romantic relationship, he said knowing the difference between the two types of communication and enhancing this skill will improve how a reporter does their job.

5.2.4 Setting Sets Approach

D. Hernández's (personal communication, April 7, 2023) approach to news conferences depends on the type of news conferences he attends and his role. For example, when he was on a beat, he would make it a purpose to ask the bulk of questions to establish recognition of him as the beat writer. The reason for this approach was because, to him, news conferences were about more than that news conference on that day. It is about that news conference and all other subsequent interactions later on. D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) wants to be the main person asking the questions because he feels he asks the best. He finds it frustrating when asking multiple productive questions. Then another journalist will ask a question unrelated to the questioning he presented. D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said his ego and some delusion play a part in his thinking. However, he feels he needs to control the news conferences and has the skills to do so. "It puzzles me when I am rattling off like three or four in a row. And they're productive questions, and somebody else tries to [ask questions]. 'What are you doing? Just shut up. We'll get the best answer. Just let me ask every question right now'" (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

For S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023), the approach to asking at a news conference depends on its type. It depends on the circumstance and whether it is a postgame news conference, a pregame news conference, or an introductory news conference. As a reporter, he said he always has a few questions in mind and tends to assess how large the news conference is. He uses the examples of the Warriors being in the NBA Finals, and the news conferences surrounding them may have 50 to 60 media members in attendance. At a smaller news conference, a reporter may ask three to four questions, but in a situation like the NBA Finals, you might get only one, so you better be prepared with that one question.

The approach to a news conference for R. Kroichick (personal communication, April 11, 2023) depends on what type of story he is writing and what information will help enhance that story. For example, if he writes a column, he has an opinion angle, and his questions fit that premise. “You definitely can frame a question, that's, escorting your subject down the path you want...If you're just formulating your question on the fly, it often doesn't come out as well. The challenge is, which I don't think people always realize, is that a lot of times, I'm on deadline and writing the whole game. You don't have time to really think about how you're going to frame the question” (R. Kroichick, personal communication, April 11, 2023).

5.3 Accessibility

Access to athletes is vital for sports journalists to do their jobs, as this access allows them to get information and insight into the games they cover and the athletes playing those games. Even more so, access allows journalists to build rapport and relationships with their interviewees, which helps build trust and makes further reporting in the future easier. In this section, the results also aim to answer the following research questions: How do sports journalists believe modern press conferences serve or hinder the objectives of both athletes and journalists? How do sports journalists perceive their role and responsibilities in the context of mass interviews and news conferences? To what extent do journalists believe the industry's approach to news conferences is practical or requires change?

5.3.1 Open Access

An aspect of news conferences nearly every interviewee felt is beneficial for reporting is the amount of access to speakers, with some feeling the best component is the ability to regularly access players and coaches, whether at the professional level, where they are mandated, or the collegiate level, where the access is more restrictive (C. Murray, personal communication, April

19, 2023). In some instances, news conferences could be the only time a reporter would have access to some high-level speakers, like LeBron James, who, R. Kroichick (personal communication, April 11, 2023) said, rarely does interviews. While many would prefer one-on-one access, the reality is that this is not plausible, and news conferences can be a good alternative (R. Kroichick, personal communication, April 11, 2023).

R. Kroichick (personal communication, April 11, 2023) said, “He [James] just speaks in news conferences. So you have to get what you need there. And if you have a sensitive question, it's awkward to ask right in front of others. Sometimes, some teams will let you maybe have one question on the subject after he's done with a news conference on his way out in a walking and talking setup because some questions are not conducive to a news conference setting.”

For the interviewees, the quality of the news conference depends on how news conferences are structured (R. Kroichick, personal communication, April 11, 2023). Mass interview structure makes the process more doable; for example, when larger events like the Super Bowl or World Series occur, getting a star athlete to do hundreds of one-on-one interviews is unrealistic (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023; S. Kroner, personal communication, March 22, 2023). In addition, D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said it is beneficial to speakers, print reporters, and TV reporters who have to get clips and sound bites for the evening broadcast, and news conferences make it easier to achieve that.

5.3.2 Can I get a Minute?

Several interviewees were critical of the amount of access received and felt that the better the reporting would be if given more access to speakers (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023). But with the advent of social media, creating a direct line between athletes and their fans, the importance of sports journalists being the primary messenger for the players to the

fans has dwindled, especially with the likes of NBA stars LeBron James and Draymond Green, creating podcasts as active players and getting their message out (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023).

C. Murray (personal communication, April 19, 2023) said, “They're trying to be their own publicity agent, and they don't feel like they necessarily need the media to be able to do that. And I think that's short-sighted from the player in the league perspective because a lot of fans will read through that, and they want to know the backstory of these people. And I think the media can do a really good job of telling you those backstories. So I think the limited or more limiting access that we see across the country in professional and amateur sports is detrimental long term.”

Teams and athletes are taking over their promotion, like with The Players' Tribune, a media platform that produces and publishes daily sports conversations and first-person stories from professional athletes; now a source of player storytelling but can be compared to state or government-run propaganda more than trustworthy journalism (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023). This division could lead to friction and a divide in the athlete-media relationship, limiting access to legitimate journalists and leading the media to need more access (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023).

Furthermore, without access, the media is now focusing more on opinion-oriented and criticism-oriented, further leading to a divide between the press and interviewees because they only see all the opinions of media members, such as Stephen A. Smith and Skip Bayless (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023). C. Murray (personal communication, April 19, 2023) said, “If you give the access and you get the access to legitimate journalists, you're going to be much more oriented toward going to the storytelling rather than, ‘I don't have access

to get these players. I'm just going to sit here and criticize them or praise them, but it's going to be more opinion based and factual-based.”

5.4 Professionalism

The discussion of professionalism and unprofessionalism can be challenging to define, with many subjects having difficulty agreeing on what it may look like, with it being a gray area. For the research subjects, it is far easier to realize someone is being unprofessional, as it can be more noticeable if you can see someone's actions firsthand. For this section, subjects were asked to analyze the interaction between Klein and Young and share their thoughts on the professionalism and unprofessionalism of the interaction. The results in this section provide information toward answering the research questions: How can sports journalists improve their interviewing techniques when interacting with athletes?

5.4.1 Professional vs. Unprofessional

S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) considers the interaction borderline unprofessional because he said that sometimes reporters go too far with questioning. He said it was apparent Young did not want to provide an answer regarding his absence, but the reporter was obligated to ask about the situation.

S. Fortier's (personal communication, March 20, 2023) perspective of the Klein/Young interaction focuses heavily on the vibe and tone at which Klein asked the questions. He thinks the line of questioning, such as, "Why weren't you there," and pointing to Young's leadership role, were professional, but the phrasing of the questions and the interaction vibe may need to be more conducive to getting the best answer. "I think this is a really hard thing to police tone and police the vibe because there are some times where you do need to be aggressive, and you do need to be confrontational" (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023).

R. Kroichick (personal communication, April 11, 2023) does not believe Klein's lines of questions were unprofessional. However, he did think the tone Klein asked, which he considered too abrasive and aggressive, could be. "He [Klein] had to know that he was not going to get the answer he wanted, right? I mean, the objective here is to ask it in a way that's going to get an honest response. And he was kind of confrontational, and his tone [was] abrasive. And that's not productive" (R. Kroichick, personal communication, April 11, 2023).

J. Cano (personal communication, April 26, 2023) supposes that Klein's approach to asking Young these questions was slightly aggressive, although the questions were fair and appropriate. Cano felt that the way he asked the questions might be the issue. "I think that the way that reporter came at him was a little bit disrespectful and a little bit too hard...Players know that media have jobs to do, and that guy was asking that question because I'm sure whoever his boss is, was telling him, 'You need to ask him about this. We need to get answers about this.' This questioning is fair, but there are also ways to approach it...It was clear that he didn't care about Young's feelings. He just wanted an answer" (J. Cano, personal communication, April 26, 2023).

C. Murray (personal communication, April 19, 2023) believes that the questioning was valid, and it was the reporter's job to figure out why Young was absent from the game, but the lack of relationship between the two may cause the negative interaction. "I think he's [Klein] in a different situation than somebody who was there regularly and has earned the credibility to be asking those questions...When he asked that first question, Trae Young's initial response was negative, like, 'You're coming at me,' because they don't have that relationship. They don't have that bond. They don't have that trust. So I don't think the question is wrong" (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023).

In his video analysis, C. Murray (personal communication, April 19, 2023) refers to the idea of becoming familiar with the interviewee. From his knowledge and research of the situation between Young and Klein, Murray said Klein was not a regular at Hawks practices and is not close with Young. Murray believes this made Young feel threatened by Klein and standoffish because he feels Klein is only present to get a story. “If this is somebody who is a beat writer, who's covering the team on a day in, day out basis, that adds credibility that he legitimately wants to know the backstory of why he did not show up at that game” (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023).

D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) was surprised by Klein’s line of questioning because he feels that TV reporters are often unwilling to ask their interviewees more challenging questions. As a former beat writer, he prided himself on being the reporter grilling the interviewee. “After watching, my initial thing was he came in really hot. He came in with an aggressive tone. Now, I don't know if you need to. Here's the thing, though, I don't know their relationship. That’s the one thing none of us know. I'm guessing this isn't the first time Young talked to the guy” (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

5.4.2 Better Approach

D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said if he were Klein, he would only change when Young said he did not know what happened. Instead, D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said he would follow up the statement with a question asking Young to explain further. This approach would allow Young to inform everyone about what happened and present his side of the story. “That is a good line of questioning. Again, I sometimes think the players need to be reminded... You might be getting mad at me, but you're not talking to me. You're talking to the public. I'm just the conduit here. This is why they want to

know, [and] I try to explain it to them as much as possible so they get it” (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023) said he liked the approach Klein had in asking Young direct questions but felt Klein was neither good nor consistent enough of a journalist to get the information needed from Young. Simers said, in Klein’s place, he would have confronted Young when he kept repeating himself and giving rehearsed answers. “It isn't a private matter. People are spending good bucks to come here and watch the best player on the floor play, and you're not even at the game when you're not playing. So they want answers. So give it up. This isn't the Pentagon. I would have told him. This isn't that big a deal. You're the Atlanta Hawks, for God's sake” (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023).

S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) said he would have taken a more sympathetic, understanding tone to tease out his side of the story. “If he [Young] says, ‘Oh, it's a private matter made public, and I'm mad about that. It's like, ‘Hey, well, just so you know, the public is operating off just this one report. This is your chance to come out and tell your side of the story. Like if you don't do that, that's okay. But then you also can't get mad at people speculating’” (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023).”

J. Cano (personal communication, April 26, 2023) believes that if in Klein’s shoes, he would ask the questions differently, in what he feels would be a calm, respectful approach, compared to a more accusatory tone. He also pointed to how Young first addressed the media, pointing out that there were many of them there, maybe more than usual, or seeing people he never sees that would otherwise not be at Hawks practice under different circumstances.

“If Trae Young has never seen that guy before, at all, and he comes in and is automatically pressing him the way he was, that's going to leave a sour taste in his mouth, as

opposed to the beat report of the beat writer who's there consistently, who's seen Trae Young, grow and develop” (J. Cano, personal communication, April 26, 2023).

5.4.3 Acting Professional

Additionally, unprofessionalism can be shown through the actions of how journalists conduct themselves while on the job, even if they aren't interacting with interviewees.

D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) is highly critical of how sports journalists conduct themselves nowadays, often acting unprofessional, wanting to feel included in the atmosphere while neglecting the job they are there to do. “I think in our business, you have all these fucking idiots who will go to a game. I'm covering the Dodgers now, and they'll take selfies from the field and, [be] like, ‘Hey, look at me. Look, I'm getting close to the action here. You know, I'm part of the scene.’ And they're so happy about that. They forget to do their jobs” (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said that some journalists ask questions for selfish reasons, like trying to portray themselves as intelligent, which Hernández finds frustrating, unnecessary, and unprofessional. “It really bothers me when there's always a couple of these guys in every market. They don't work for the biggest place. They're in some second or third-tier outlet. But they think they're smart. They probably went to a good university. So they think they're a lot smarter than they actually are” (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) continued, “And they go into these long-winding philosophical questions that don't fucking say anything. And they just want to hear themselves talk. And the thing if you're going to use that in your story, go ahead and ask

it. But clearly, that's not the point. They're just trying to come across as [smart]. Like, what the fuck? You're wasting everybody's time.”

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) said some media need help distinguishing how they conduct a relationship with a speaker, when to have a rapport, and when a connection is unprofessional. Furthermore, he said it is hard to understand for people outside the journalism industry or with a journalism background. Finally, he points to the amount of “fanboys” (extremely or overly enthusiastic fans of someone or something) who just see the positives, which could skew how athlete x is viewed.

While for some, the line between professional and unprofessional can be very thin, like with those who analyzed the Klein/Young interaction and felt Klein was at fault for his unprofessionalism in questioning and tone.

However, for others, the line may be much more prominent or even non-existent depending on the journalist, which the case can be made for how Simers approached his role as a journalist. The toeing of this line plays a role in reporting, both negatively and positively. Simers, a self-proclaimed, obnoxious, over-the-top prima donna, said his conduct reflected how he wrote, proud of his irreverence, which led him to survive or to fail depending on the people around him and their tolerance of this irreverence. He attributes this behavior to his individuality, but from the outside looking in, some could consider it unprofessional. “I was rude, crude, but always in a funny way, which is why it's so hard. It's up to the individual personality. If you're a jokester, use your jokey inability in a news conference. If you're Mr. Stern, figure out a way to do it in a stern way” (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023).

Additionally, T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023) recounted his interaction with then-NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, whom he found boring and a waste of

time to hear speak, which he made known to the people working with Tagliabue and the commissioner himself. “I said, ‘That guy is so friggin boring. Why am I going to waste any of my life listening to this shit?’ ...So he took me to the back room, and there was Tagliabue, and it was me, the PR guy, and Tagliabue. So I asked all my questions. And I told Tagliabue, you’re so boring, and I don’t have to listen to this shit. From that point on, I could call Tagliabue in the NFL offices and get anything I wanted. They set up the access because you’re a different animal. And that is part of the process is being a different animal” (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023).

5.5 Interviewing

The interviewees were critical of several aspects that need improvement, including questioning, relationship building, and accessibility, which they have witnessed first-hand and analyzed as lacking. They believe improvements in these areas will lead to better journalism and interactions with the interviewees they interact with daily. Information in this section aims to answer the research question: How can sports journalists improve their interviewing techniques when interacting with athletes?

5.5.1 Calling Iso: Love for One-on-One

In the findings, many interviewees are much more favorable toward one-on-one interviews, with many feeling that it is the best way to gather information for various reasons—reasoning ranging from accessibility, openness, truthfulness, and comfortability, with some feeling the best answers come from the one-on-one setting when the interviewer sits with a tape recorder and converses with the interviewee (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023). As a member of the broadcast media, C. Murray (personal communication, April 19, 2023) said the locker room setting works well for obtaining necessary information, even more, if

the interviewer can speak with the interviewee without a camera, unlike news conferences, which he said does not allow for more insight and honesty.

Additionally, S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) stated that news conferences are only necessary when a situation calls for it, while for him, day-to-day news conferences will not provide the best or most insightful answers to topics a reporter has to write deeper about.

5.5.2 Relationship or Trust Building: The Closer I Am, the Better the Scoop

Relationship building is seen as a critical component of interviewing by many of the interviewees, especially in the improvement of how sports journalist interview and ask questions, as reporters build familiarity between themselves and interviewees by being present often and highlighting the human aspects of themselves and interviewees (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023). This familiarity leads to trust, where an interviewee can be at ease knowing that they are not being interviewed by a faceless reporter trying to have a quote or clip go viral, and ultimately, the better the relationship, the better the interviewing (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023).

S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) referred to the Klein/Young confrontation as an opportunity for relationship building and understanding, stating, “I think investing and showing them you're a real person, that you care, and you just want to understand [is essential]. The distillation of Trae Young saying, ‘You're an outsider, you'll never be on the inside,’ is actually a perfect distillation. You're right. I'm never going to be a part of your team. I'm never going to understand what it's like to be frustrated with your coach and have it be under the magnifying glass. But I want you to tell me what it's like. I want you to try to help me understand because that's really all we're going for here.”

Furthermore, P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) stated that the sports journalism industry could improve by stopping the search for “gotcha or “aha” moments when interviewing, as he believes the only true way to have these moments is by developing relationships with interviewees, because of the level of trust present.

J. Cano (personal communication, April 26, 2023) added that relationship-building with the interviewee is crucial to success and holds that when a journalist writes stories about people, there is a psychological aspect behind it, as whether the star athlete or the fringe roster spot, interviewees are human beings and should be seen and treated as such.

5.5.3 Silent Discussions: Non-Verbal Communication's Impact

While interviewing and questioning may be the two of the most important skills a journalist must sharpen to become a great journalist, non-verbal communication is one overlooked skill that holds less weight. Non-verbal communication skills, such as facial expressions, body movement, gestures, eye contact, space, voice recognition, and inconsistencies, play a role in effective communication and reporting. Knowingly or unknowingly, many reporters practice non-verbal communication skills by reporting.

R. Kroichick (personal communication, April 11, 2023) stated he believes body language, nonverbal cues, facial expressions, and history all play a part in effective interviewing, especially when interacting with interviewees who have a history of being private and guarded, which leads him to frames his questions differently to get more viable answers, in contrast to a player who is more outgoing and willing to answer more personal questions.

M. Paras (personal communication, April 21, 2023) stated he focuses on the demeanor of his subjects, and even more so when the usual demeanor has shifted, often acknowledging it and addressing the interviewee about the behavior change.

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) added an excellent reporter would read an interviewee's body language and know how to react and interview based on the reception given by the interviewee, especially if the interviewer is familiar with and around the interviewee often because they should be familiar with the interviewee's body language and tendencies.

Pointing to the Klein/Young interactions, P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) stated Young gives several examples of negative body language, putting his head, making light of the situation, and fidgeting with his hat. P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) said, "He's [Young] trying to keep whatever he's trying to say on a task, but he doesn't want to give away too much information. And then when the guy pressed him, that's when he turns, and he looks at him, and the look that he gave him was like, 'You need the backup off from the right now. You need to leave that alone right now.' And he was sending a message not only to him but to everybody else."

"When you study body language, and you watch that, a good reporter is going to understand body language. What it means and what it's saying. And also, what it's not saying" (P. Mitchell, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

Journalists must be perceptive in telling when a subject is not in the mood to speak with them, whether perturbed by, questioning, having a bad moment, or otherwise responding to questions and understanding as a reporter, they may not get what they want from a subject that day (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023).

From a journalist's standpoint, if a reporter is trying to pin down a concept or better understand a topic or an interviewee, repeating what a person says back to them or expressing how you conceptualize a topic shows active listening, which benefits the reporter and the

relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023).

5.5.4 Press Coverage: To Stay in the Fire and Press or to Walk Away for Another Day

When dealing with some of the most famous people in the world and considered alpha personalities, the interview setting can become tense, depending on the question and the speaker's willingness to answer questions. We can see the Klein/Young situation as an example of this tension rising throughout an interview, and there are numerous examples throughout the decades of tense moments between sports reporters and interviewees.

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) referred to how Young approached the media at the beginning of the video as an example of how quickly a media availability could become tense, where Young remarked about how much press was present, leading to the tension between Young and reporters. This statement led to Young telling Klein he and the media are outside of the organization and should stay out and do not know what is going on as an indicator that Young would not answer questions in a straight manner.

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) felt Young played his hand early on how the interview would go because Young expected what everyone was searching for and was trying to leave the interview while providing as little information as possible. Mitchell believes Young took this approach because in attendance were local media, who were always present, and national media, who are not at Hawks practices regularly, leaving Young less willing to disclose important information. “As soon as he said, ‘Man, there's a lot of y'all here today,’ I would have been like, ‘I’m not getting anything from this guy’” (P. Mitchell, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

Setting can become tense depending on the situation the interviewers and interviewees find themselves in. For example, a reporter can expect a more vibrant, pleasant answer and interaction with an interviewee who just won the championship or had a great game compared to the interviewee who just lost the championship or had an awful performance.

S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) believes walking around a tense situation depends on the setting and circumstances. For example, how many reporters are there, are cameras rolling, and is it a one-on-one conversation? S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) stated that the interview setting plays into the type of questioning, using the example of a one-on-one interview at an interviewee's home. However, he said the interviewee might expect the reporter to ask more personal questions privately.

In contrast, S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) believes reporters should not ask personal questions during postgame news conferences when the focus should be on the game that just occurred. "If you're just talking, and if it's just me one-on-one with Wiggins or Curry, it's a little different than if cameras are rolling. I think you can calm someone down easier or change the subject easier" (S. Kroner, personal communication, March 22, 2023). "Part of the reason Trae Young probably got so sensitive is he knows it's all on camera. He knows this is all being recorded. I'm guessing Young probably didn't have any significant bond or relationship with that reporter...It was pretty clear by the second time, five minutes into the interview, that there wasn't much point in revisiting that he [Young] clearly wasn't going to bite. You could try to rephrase it in a more polite way. But when a subject clearly doesn't want to answer and says that twice. I think it's probably time to move on," (S. Kroner, communication, March 22, 2023).

S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) said he has rarely had an interviewee get upset with him. Still, it has happened occasionally, either because he was at fault for asking too many questions or inappropriate questions. Other times, he said the interviewee was to blame for being too thin-skinned.

“You have to have respect for the interviewees' perspective of what questions are legitimate and what aren't. And the longer you do that, the interviewee will have more trust in you and will be more willing to answer a borderline question,” (S. Kroner, communication, March 22, 2023).

While these situations aren't frequent, when tension arises between an interviewer and interviewee, subjects felt it is the job of the the interviewer to be prepared for what the next moment could bring and quickly find a way to de-escalate the tensions in the spur of the moment. S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) believes that the best approach is never to escalate the situation, and more importantly, it is his job never to make it personal, no matter how frustrated an interviewee can get and how disrespectful they can be. “Never make it personal. They can get frustrated and call you out, or they can say demeaning stuff, but you can never ever fight back. You can't be disrespectful back. You just have to keep going with your job, and because your job is to get answers, information, and insight from the subject” (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023).

Under certain circumstances, reporters must press an interviewee during an interview continuously, which is often when a source of tension arises. Reporters must be willing to press an interviewee for several reasons, including accountability, rehearsed or useless quotes, or confirmation of impactful rumors, to name a few. However, doing so may be an uncomfortable

situation a reporter puts themselves in. Therefore, at some point, they must decide whether or not to continue and consider the consequences of these interactions.

S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) said the willingness to continue pressing an interviewee is based on the context of the situation, depending on how important the information is and how soon the reporter needs it. For example, if a reporter is working on a feature story on an interviewee or topic, but the interviewee does not want to be involved or is not essential to the story, S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) said to forget about including them or try again later because the reporter is not on deadline.

On the contrary, S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) said if the information needed is essential, and there is more pressure to make a deadline, then a reporter is, and should, be more likely to push the issue with an interviewee. Then, the reporter could get the answer by asking questions in various ways.

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) stated his willingness to continue pressuring an interviewee during an interview is based heavily on his relationship with the subject. P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) believes building relationships between reporters and interviewees is crucial to good journalism.

So, going back to the Young interview, P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) said, “If you have a relationship with Young, you continue asking questions because you may get the desired answer. But if the willingness to answer is not there and you don’t have a relationship with the interviewee, let it go.”

C. Murray (personal communication, April 19, 2023) believes in pressing an interviewee past two questions because, as a reporter, he thinks you have the right to ask the question initially

and a right to a follow-up. However, if the interviewee makes it clear they do not want to discuss something publicly, at that point, you move on to other topics.

J. Cano (personal communication, April 26, 2023) shared similar views, stating reporters would abide by what he considers the rules of thirds, where they will ask a question in various ways three times. For Cano, he said he would ask a question twice, like Murray, and if the interviewee gave him the same answer, he would leave it at that.

J. Cano (personal communication, April 26, 2023) said if he were to have asked Young the questions regarding his absence the first time, and he was given a rehearsed answer, he would then ask a follow-up question. “It's going to get asked. It's going to get addressed regardless. And I think the best of the best time to walk away from a tense situation... Yes, you have a job to do, but you're also interacting with other human beings. You're not talking to a robot. You're talking to someone with feelings that have gone through a whole life. So I think the moment you see that it starts to get tense, I would probably walk away from it or avoid asking any other questions about that” (J. Cano, personal communication, April 26, 2023).

As a polar opposite to other subjects, D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said he could not walk away from a tense confrontation with an interviewee. He seems to enjoy that situation more than the typical pleasant interaction but admits that the type of platform he has as a print journalist allows for that more so than if he was on TV. However, he does not shy away from confrontation because he said a person could tell a lot from how someone handles situations under duress. “For the most part, I actually enjoy it [talking to athletes]. But it's potentially depending on who it is. Some days it is like the worst part of the job. And sometimes, a lot of times, these guys are not respectful. [Someone] will be like, ‘Oh, you get to talk to so and so.’ And inside, a lot of reporters are thinking, ‘Yeah, that guy’s a dick...But what they don’t

want to do is tell their friends, “That guy has no respect for me.”” (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said he sees this with superstar athletes, who he said are sensitive for various reasons, one being that they have always been outstanding and the best in their whole sense of identity. Moreover, when they fail, they often deal with failure very poorly. “They react very violently to situations. At the same time, what that tells you, though, is that he's not in control of his emotions. That guy is in danger of falling off a cliff. And I've seen this happen. Now granted, those are a little more nuanced reading. Here's the thing, the fans will always side with the player. The fans are going to get upset, like, ‘Why are you asking this guy that? Why are you bothering him?’ Well, because I'm trying to figure out some information” (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

Additionally, T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023) shared a similar sentiment to Hernández, describing how coaches would try to intimidate him and other media during news conferences and setting rules for the media to follow. Simers said he would use this opportunity to challenge the coaches and how it paid off in the long run when interacting with players. “What happens is you're in sports. So if the great intimidators can't intimidate, the athletes love that. It shows them something because they don't have any respect for the media” (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023).

5.6 Questioning

Interviewees were highly critical of the current state of questioning, focusing on how questions are asked in several different settings, alongside the overall goal of when and why a question should be asked. Many are frustrated with how sports journalism is being conducted, and shared their thoughts on how it can be improved. In this section, the findings aim to answer

the research questions: How does the type of question (open-ended vs. closed, neutral vs. opinionated) affect the responses of athletes during interviews? How do sports journalists believe the sports journalism industry can evolve to better cater to the needs of both athletes and journalists?

5.6.1 Ummm...Tell Me About

The best journalist can turn questions into art by constructing questions that extract essential information from an interviewee. However, this can go beyond just the construction of a question. It can also be the timing for which a person asks a question, how they ask it, their simplicity, and the overall goal behind the question. At times, and for many, it can be effortless, and for others, it can be the toughest challenge in the world.

In fear of sounding elitist, S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) sometimes feels that reporters ask unprofessional questions in other news markets he has been in, mainly regarding reporters asking questions, not germane to the purpose of the news conference. “I think that anytime you go from an information gathering process to a grandstanding or a show, that hurts the news conference itself, but also the media relations. It doesn't feel like a very productive or succinct answer to say the thing that should be discontinued at news conferences are bad questions. So I'll say that right now, while the process isn't perfect, I think it's the best situation that we have” (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023).

Additionally, M. Paras (personal communication, April 21, 2023) thinks the availability of press credentials, which is prevalent in the NBA, needs to be improved. While he believes getting access is helpful for smaller outlets and early journalists trying to make a name for themselves, sometimes inexperience can ruin the flow of a news conference and make other reporters' jobs harder. “It [sometimes] dips into a realm of opinion. It's not professional. And so I

would really like some places to clean up who they're letting in to ask the questions” (M. Paras, personal communication, April 21, 2023).

Referring to how journalists in the industry ask questions, S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) shared his frustration with the questions being asked that are not questions, such as, “[Insert interviewee] tell me about [insert topic].” He feels the lack of asking actual questions could be improved industry-wide, referring to news conferences. “It’s called a Q&A, a question and answer. Now, sometimes if you ask a question, your follow-up might not be specifically a question, but the phrase ‘talk about’ to me is very frustrating because that's not a question” (S. Kroner, personal communication, March 22, 2023).

S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) believes that asking a question in this form leaves room for the interviewee to refrain from answering the question. Although “tell me about...” might elicit information, it is not a question, and the answer received will not be optimal.

R. Kroichick (personal communication, April 11, 2023) said the first improvement that could be made is journalists asking questions better and not providing statements in the form of questions. He said many young reporters and TV reporters ask questions this way. “It's just sort of thinking about, ‘What are you trying to find out?’ There's no point in asking about something you saw yourself or an indisputable stat. You're trying to get insight into the why and the how,” (R. Kroichick, personal communication, April 11, 2023).

R. Kroichick (personal communication, April 11, 2023) continued, “So the more you can ask open-ended questions, where you're giving them latitude to answer in a variety of ways and to provide you with insight. Again you got to think about what am I trying to get here, right? I'm not trying to impress anybody with my question. I'm not trying to show anybody I'm smart.

You're trying to frame a question in the right way and ask it in the right tone, which will encourage a good response.”

T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023) believes sports journalists have an inherent fear nowadays compared to years past, and is an unfixable detriment and the industry is to blame, as many good reporters have been weeded out and are now on TV, writing for blogs, or freelancing. “I don't think it can happen. I think people are inherently afraid. It's like going back to fourth grade and raising your hand. A lot of kids can't do it...It's hard to put yourself into [this situation], and it's hard for your own media peers” (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023)

T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023) said a fearless reporter's peer would hate them because they know they should be doing the same thing. He said that because he is a fearless reporter, he can get information, acknowledgment, and one-on-one time with speakers they cannot.

5.6.2 I Hadn't Thought About That:

The makings of a great question can vary from journalist to journalist, with many not having a specific example but more a list of elements of a question they feel should be included when asking. Furthermore, determining what makes a good question changes so much that it depends on the questions being asked and how the interviewee will respond.

S. Kroner (personal communication, March 22, 2023) believes the makings of a great question are simple. Firstly, it has to be a question, not just a sentence or a command. Secondly, it needs to be information the public wants to hear from the interviewee and has a good idea of what the interviewee will say about it. He also said an answer to a question does not always need to be newsworthy because not every story in sports is life or death. A quote can be funny,

which makes your interviewee endearing to the readers, or information that will liven a story up. However, a reporter must read the context and circumstance in which the question is asked and ask the question accordingly.

P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) believes what makes a question is when an interviewee is in a rush to answer a question but stops and further considers the question and responds with a thoughtful answer. He believes this is the reason body language is so crucial to reporting. Mitchell said that when a journalist sees someone thinking deeper, journalists should let it process and avoid stepping over the moment by asking another question. “In the beginning, they're in a rush to answer, and then they take a step back and go, ‘Wait a minute?’ And you could see them thinking about it. It’s almost coming over them like, ‘Wow, I hadn't thought about it that deeply and now, suddenly, I am.’ You can see it on their face when it happens” (P. Mitchell, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

Moreover, for a reporter to ask a question that makes an interviewee think deeper, P. Mitchell (personal communication, April 17, 2023) said, the interviewee will likely remember the reporter and look at them differently than their colleagues

R. Kroichick (personal communication, April 11, 2023) considers that a great question goes beyond the obvious and gets into the how and the why. He thinks this is how the sports journalism industry has changed dramatically in his 30 years as a reporter. “To get that insight, you have to ask thoughtful, original questions. But not necessarily the confrontational questions like that TV reporter asked Trae Young. That's just not going to achieve the desired goal. Something thoughtful that allows the subject to open up a bit and maybe feel comfortable is part of it. If you're trying to ask a question, to get a desired answer, or to get a desired topic

addressed, you also want to make the subject feel comfortable enough to give you a good honest answer” (R. Kroichick, personal communication, April 11, 2023).

M. Paras (personal communication, April 21, 2023) feels a great question will give you an unexpected answer, which he thinks can come from the most straightforward questions or what others consider “stupid” questions. He said questions do not have to be long, complex answers about strategies. “A great question is maybe something you haven't thought of yourself...or if they [the interviewee] say something unexpected. Or it's something observational...There are a lot of different ways to consider something a ‘great question’” (M. Paras, personal communication, April 21, 2023).

S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) acknowledges that the question of what makes a great question is challenging to answer because the interviewer does not have much control over the interviewee’s answers as they would wish. “I think that you can ask a great question, [and] you can get a shit answer... Or you can ask a short question to get a great answer, but the process of what is a good question is constantly evolving” (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023).

S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) said question-asking is about how much information you have about what you are asking and the person being asked. When a reporter wants to learn more about someone’s life story, gathering information becomes easy if they ask open-ended questions to a great storyteller. “[When dealing with a great storyteller], if you can ask open-ended questions, you would just basically ask, ‘What happened next?’ Or can I get a little more detail there? Or can you clarify this timeline for me?’ That's pretty easy” (S. Fortier, personal communication, March 20, 2023). S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) also said, “If you have someone who's not a good storyteller, you have to figure out the

best way to get the most amount of information out of them as possible. And then I can report around them with the people in their life who might be good storytellers and have stronger memories.”

Regarding questions for accountability, S. Fortier (personal communication, March 20, 2023) considers closed-ended type (yes–no) questions are the best. It forces the interviewee to pick a stance on a question, which allows the interviewer to further ask a line of questioning based on the stance chosen by the interviewee. Their answer will dictate your line of questions, whether you need to dig further into the evidence surrounding the chosen stance and discern whether it is true or false.

5.7 Ethics

This section looks at the ethics surrounding how sports journalists do their jobs, specifically regarding questioning, interviewing, and sourcing information. Interviewees shared what they believe an ethical line may look like, and when someone has crossed that line, specifically in sports journalism, and had a better time pointing out examples of people crossing ethical lines than they did defining one. The information in this section also aims to answer the following research questions: How does the type of question (open-ended vs. closed, neutral vs. opinionated) affect the responses of athletes during interviews? How do sports journalists believe the sports journalism industry can evolve to better cater to the needs of both athletes and journalists?

5.7.1 Ethical Line?

Similar to professionalism and unprofessionalism, an ethical line can be challenging to define, with many subjects having difficulty agreeing on what it may look like (J. Cano, personal communication, April 26, 2023; S. Kroner, personal communication, March 22, 2023). Asking

questions involving death should be navigated with an appropriate tone and care, and reporters should respectfully ask those questions (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023). However, for others, trying to bait an interviewee into an emotional response so the quote or video can go viral is an apparent ethical line, as well as being accusatory, personal, or aggressive in tone, which can lose some journalists the respect of their peers, colleagues, and interviewees (C. Murray, personal communication, April 19, 2023).

Whether information or reports are public or private can become a source of ethical discussions with determining whether a topic surrounding an athlete is ethical to report on, with some arguing the information is public domain because those being reported on are public figures getting paid millions of dollars (R. Kroichick, personal communication, April 11, 2023). While a different argument can be made for multi-million dollar public figure athletes, when the information is surrounding the player's private life, like with Golden State Warriors star Andrew Wiggins, who was on a leave of absence for seven weeks citing family issues, had rumor circulating about his absence and his marriage (R. Kroichick, personal communication, April 11, 2023).

In the past, an ethical demarcation line was the categorization of whether the information was private or public, and how that information was gathered, whether an interviewee initiated the conversation regarding private information or it was gathered through digging into the person's private life (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023). However, in the last 20 years, D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) has seen a shift in this ethical line, with the discussion of ethical lines regarding private and public information occurring between him and his colleagues at the Los Angeles Times, and how the line has become blurred. D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said this conversation

was prevalent when MLS soccer player Sebastian Lletget, who is engaged with singer Becky G, was reportedly having an affair, and with Lletget was set to face the Los Angeles Galaxy, the question raised was whether to ask him about the rumors or ignore them. “It did raise these ethical questions because, in terms of 20 years ago, we clearly do not ask this guy about it. But at this point, though, this is not a private issue because it’s out there. Everybody is talking about it. And you missed a game because of it. Now this goes into the realm of how accountable are you to your fans” (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

Similarly, another shift in ethics surrounds the endorsing of some losing their job, ever-present in the world of coaching, with D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023), using the example of former USC head coach Clay Helton and increasing frustration surrounding his program and the lack of success, which Hernández said in the past was taboo to call for someone to be fired, but now, with the massive salaries in sports, it is a normal occurrence.

“We've talked about these issues and, to be honest, I think we're kind of on the side of, like, fuck it. You have to write it, unfortunately. Also, it is different because the guys are making a lot more money than they used to. Before, a coach lost his job, and he's making like, \$80,000. He might end up destitute. It'd be like us losing our jobs. Whereas now, it's like, ‘Okay, well, they're going to pay him \$20 million to fuck off...’ So I think we've decided right now like, ‘No, I think this is fair enough’” (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) continued, “I think at this point, it feels like a case-by-case basis, and we just have to try to take it one thing at a time in terms of determining whether something's fair or not. We're probably going to make mistakes in the process of that.”

According to T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023), he believes he reached the ethical line every day he was reporting, as he believes everything—aside from death—is fair game to discuss, standing behind the basis of getting the information he needed to do his job by any means necessary, achieving this because of his willingness to confront prominent figures and interact with them like everyone else, which he is proud of. “I was legitimately trying to get information to write in my column, and they knew I would write it. They knew there was no bullshit. I would type that if someone said, ‘You know, ‘you're an asshole, T.J.’ I would write and quote them. Once they know you're a legitimate, fearless reporter, they will give you stuff and become your friend in the long run” (T. Simers, personal communication, April 12, 2023).

5.7.2 When did you cross the ethical line?

Referring to the Klein/Young interaction, the interviewees felt that because tough questions are asked and may be asked in a tone that is inappropriate or unprofessional, it does not mean the interviewer is acting unethical, with T. Simers (personal communication, April 12, 2023) stating, “I got ripped my whole career for asking impertinent, rude questions and everything else...My ethics are not involved when I'm asking a guy a tough question...I think it would be unethical if I didn't ask the tough questions.”

Several interviewees considered Klein questioning ethical, with some criticizing the unwillingness to press an interviewee further and a feeling of cowardice toward others unwilling to do so, pointing to this as a component of sports journalism that need improvement (D. Hernández, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

D. Hernández (personal communication, April 7, 2023) said, “Nobody wants to ask that [tough] question, and when you're that guy, even reporters behind you is either looking away or rolling their eyes to let Trae Young know, ‘I am not part of this.’” Even though they are going to

be using those quotes, which I find fucking hypocritical, there's this air of that's a bad guy...I bet there is a suck-up question in there too. Like, no matter what I say after that [suck-up questions], it's going to sound bad.

5.8 Chapter 5 summary

The results were summarized by six key themes: news conference coverage, professionalism, interviewing, questioning, ethics, and accessibility.

News conferences evoked an array of responses from journalists. While some discern tangible value in the format, others feel it is a controlled environment that impedes genuine interaction and encourages rehearsed dialogues. A prevalent concern among journalists is the seemingly rehearsed nature of responses at such conferences and the overarching control exerted by public relations departments. T. Simers bemoans the glaring absence of genuine back-and-forth exchanges, feeling they are meticulously orchestrated. Both S. Fortier and P. Mitchell touch upon the stringent structure of these conferences, emphasizing the dwindling organic interactions between journalists and interviewees.

The technique journalists employ when attending news conferences varies widely. Some come equipped with a list of questions, while others lean heavily on the art of active listening. C. Murray, for instance, champions adaptability during such events, believing journalists should be adept at pivoting based on unfolding narratives. On the other hand, P. Mitchell extols the virtues of active listening, highlighting its pivotal role in grasping the subtle nuances of the speaker's narrative.

When discussing professionalism, the definitive parameters remain elusive, but manifestations of unprofessionalism are more tangible, especially when manifested overtly. In seeking clarity on this nuanced topic, subjects analyzed the interaction between Klein and

Young, a case that served as a microcosm for the broader discourse on journalistic etiquette. Several interviewees characterized the exchange as teetering on the brink of unprofessionalism, suggesting that journalists, at times, might overextend with their probing. Additionally, subjects felt that the tone, rather than the content of the questions, skewed towards the abrasive and concerned over Klein's confrontational demeanor, emphasizing the need for tactfulness in such exchanges.

A broader examination of journalistic decorum unearthed diverse perspectives on professional conduct. D. Hernández critiqued contemporary sports journalists, who he felt often prioritized spectacle over substance. He was particularly critical of those who posed gaudy questions, branding them as distractions. Also, lamenting the current trend among sports journalists to prioritize the spectacle over substance. P. Mitchell touched upon the delicate dance between reporters and their subjects, emphasizing the challenge of discerning where professional rapport ends and unprofessional familiarity begins.

Of the findings for interviewing, a pronounced preference among interviewees for one-on-one interviews over group news conferences. Such settings are perceived as more genuine and revealing, allowing the interviewee to feel more comfortable, leading to open and honest disclosures. Another crucial element that emerged is the significance of relationship building. Journalists who invest time and effort in establishing genuine relationships with their subjects often reap the benefits of deeper insights. This mutual trust also acts as a buffer, reducing the chances of confrontational conversations. Equally important is the role of non-verbal cues in journalistic interactions. Expert journalists recognize and interpret these cues, which encompass body language, facial expressions, and changes in demeanor. These cues,

especially when dealing with reserved subjects, can guide journalists in framing their questions more effectively and discerning underlying sentiments.

However, interactions are not always smooth. Tensions can and do arise, especially when delving into controversial or personal subjects. The approach to these tense moments varies among journalists. While some advocate tactfully pressing for answers or strategically rephrasing the question, others lean towards backing off after an initial refusal. The context of the situation, the relative importance of the information, and the pre-existing relationship between the journalist and interviewee are critical in influencing this approach. This interview complexity paints a vivid picture of the complex dynamics in sports journalism. It underscores the importance of building rapport, adeptly reading non-verbal cues, and skillfully navigating confrontations.

The research scrutinizes the art of questioning in sports journalism, emphasizing its significance in extracting vital information from interviewees. Several factors, including the phrasing, timing, simplicity, and underlying objective, influence a great question's essence. A predominant sentiment shared by S. Kroner and R. Kroichick is dissatisfaction with the rising trend of questions not framed as actual inquiries like the oft-used "tell me about." They believe true questions delve deeper, prompting interviewees to think and respond more profoundly. Journalists need to refine their questioning techniques, avoiding mere statements and ensuring their inquiries are genuinely seeking new insights.

R. Kroichick emphasizes the need for journalists to ask more open-ended questions that seek an understanding of a situation's "how" and "why." Such questions have the power to elicit more insightful and honest responses. The overarching consensus is that while the essence of a

perfect question continually evolves, a journalist's ability to frame their inquiries thoughtfully, relevantly, and incisively is indispensable to the quality of the information derived.

From the interviews, an ethical line is a concept that professionals sometimes struggle to pinpoint definitively, as reflected in the differing views from multiple personal communications. Some argue that sensitive topics like personal tragedies like death must be approached with the utmost care and respect. Yet, the realm of what is deemed appropriate to report, especially when it concerns the private lives of public figures, sparks considerable debate. On one side, the argument supports the public's right to such information due to the athlete's public-figure status. Conversely, others emphasize the sanctity of privacy, even for celebrities.

Over the years, this once-clear boundary between private and public information has become increasingly blurred. With the significant sums of money now in play, the discussions around such subjects have become even more complex. Additionally, posing challenging questions doesn't inherently equate to a breach of ethics. T. Simers underlines the significance of these tough questions and firmly believes that refraining from them might be a real ethical violation. There appears to be an underlying tension toward reporters hesitant to delve into difficult queries due to concerns about backlash or reputation. This presents a paradox: while the same peers might frown upon a question being asked, they don't hesitate to utilize the information once it's out there. D. Hernández sheds light on this double standard prevalent in the industry.

Finally, for accessibility, one notable benefit of news conferences highlighted by interviewees is the significant access it offers to speakers, especially to prominent figures like LeBron James, who seldom give one-on-one interviews. Despite the preference for more direct interactions, the realities of logistics and schedules often make news conferences a viable

alternative. But reporters' limited access to speakers beyond news conferences is a persistent criticism. Reduced access pushes media towards more opinion-based content, widening the depth between journalists and athletes. A balanced approach, promoting storytelling over opinion-based narratives, is deemed essential for the future of sports journalism.

Chapter 6. Discussions and Limitations

In conclusion, the research behind this study provided significant insight into interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage in professional sports journalism, with the main focus being on what aspects of these journalistic components work well and others that can be improved, as well as an introspective look into the mindset of sports journalist currently working in the field. I posed research questions below in Chapter 3.

RQ1. How can journalists improve their interviewing techniques to foster a more conducive relationship with athletes?

RQ2. How does the type of question (open-ended vs. closed, neutral vs. opinionated) affect the responses of athletes during interviews?

RQ3. How does the modern press conference serve or hinder the objectives of both athletes and journalists?

RQ4. How can the sports journalism industry evolve to better cater to the needs of both athletes and journalists?

RQ5. How do sports journalists perceive their role and responsibilities in the context of mass interviews and news conferences, and to what extent do journalists believe the industry's approach to news conferences is effective or requires change?

Per the literature review and research questions, sports journalism, when contrasted with other forms of journalism, is viewed with a distinction of inferiority, prompting questions about its relevance and seriousness compared to breaking news, politics, or crime reports. In many traditional newsrooms, sports sections are viewed as child's play, leading to perceptions of triviality. However, these perceptions overlook the immense impact of sports, both historically

and financially, on the media landscape. The shift to digital platforms underscores the critical discourse around "professionalism" in journalism.

Because of this shift, the rapid evolution of journalism in the digital age has brought forth a plethora of challenges. The speed of online information dissemination has magnified ethical concerns, particularly when weighed against accuracy and trustworthiness. The rise of digital platforms introduced practices like aggregation, sparking debates about the legitimacy and quality of online journalism. These new practices further blur the lines of traditional journalistic professionalism as the requisite knowledge and skills for journalists. Incorporating multiple media formats in newsrooms, often termed "converged newsrooms," has become increasingly common, though it brings concerns about the dilution of journalistic focus and quality.

Furthermore, defining roles in the digital age becomes even more intricate. Traditionally, sports journalists emphasized event attendance and maintained close relationships with insiders, holding a more tangible presence in the sporting world. In contrast, while equipped with digital savviness, online sports journalists often miss out on the firsthand experience that traditional reporters cherish. Criticisms arise regarding online practices, especially when these practices prioritize speed over accuracy.

Criticisms force sports journalists to overcome skepticism and the often-dismissive perception of them as mere enthusiasts or "fans with keyboards." Struggling to delineate themselves from bloggers and public relations professionals, these journalists face criticisms on various fronts, from their sources to the quality of their content. The digital age has compounded these challenges as the ability to distinguish professional from unprofessional behavior becomes more intricate. Amidst the critiques, sports journalists navigate a landscape where they must reconcile traditional practices with innovative digital approaches.

The dialogue around qualifications in sports journalism underscores the evolving nature of the field. Traditional pathways to becoming a journalist, such as formal qualifications and experience with local newspapers, are juxtaposed against the less defined routes that digital platforms introduce. There's an ongoing tension between established journalists who uphold traditional norms and newer journalists adapting to the digital age's demands. Criticisms against online sports journalism practices persist, emphasizing the need for a more profound commitment to the field's core values and ethics. The juxtaposition of traditional and online practices, set against the backdrop of evolving societal perceptions and technological advancements, paints a complex picture of the future of sports journalism.

The research findings relating to the experience of young journalists covering sports-related news conferences, the study revealed that young journalists are often sent out to the field with little to no guidance from an editor or outlet, leaving them to navigate the interview process on their own, learning by trial and error. The lack of direction is not a recent phenomenon. The study also revealed that even experienced journalists like Mitchell and Kroichick were in similar situations when they started their careers decades before.

The study provided critical insight into the challenges faced by young journalists and the need for more guidance and training to develop their interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage skills. The experiences of Jesus Cano, Sam Fortier, and other young journalists underscore the need for outlets and editors to provide more precise directions on how to utilize and gain these skills.

Findings on the viability of news conferences ascertained the preference for one-on-one interviews by the subjects, with a wide array of personal opinions from interviewees' thoughts on news conferences in general. The results reveal a mixed perception of news conferences among

journalists, ranging from those who find them useful to those who consider them a waste of time. The preference for one-on-one interviews over news conferences was a common theme among the subjects.

Simers considers news conferences a lazy way for the media to cover a story and a means for the speaker to deliver their message. Murray believes that subjects tend to become tense and use more clichés during news conferences, making it difficult to extract valuable information. Kroner acknowledges that news conferences may not be the most viable way to extract information. However, in some cases, they are the only feasible way to gather information due to the number of people who want to hear from the speaker.

The research shows that news conferences can be ineffective in obtaining information, as they tend to be highly controlled and scripted, and the speakers may not provide candid responses due to the public nature of the event. In contrast, one-on-one interviews provide more valuable information, allowing for more in-depth questioning and a personal connection between the journalist and the subject.

However, the results of this study also suggest that news conferences may be necessary in certain situations, such as high-profile events with a significant media presence. Additionally, some speakers may prefer news conferences to avoid the time and effort required for one-on-one interviews with multiple reporters. The findings of this study suggest that the viability of news conferences depends on several factors, including the type of news conference, the speaker, and the openness of the speaker to answer questions candidly. While one-on-one interviews are generally preferred for deeper insights and personal stories, news conferences may still be necessary in some situations. Therefore, journalists should consider combining both methods to gather information effectively.

Indeed, news conferences are not without their faults. One major issue is the regimented and clichéd responses of the speakers, with the number of news conferences they participate in playing a factor, as speakers may become rehearsed in their answers, making it difficult for reporters to get original content. Furthermore, public relations departments often try to control news conferences, leading to a lack of transparency and a biased representation of the organization.

Interactions between reporter Klein and Young were analyzed by the interviewees, with the analysis findings showing a variety of perspectives on the role of reporters in questioning public figures and the need for accountability. The analysis shows that while the public has a right to know what is going on with their favorite teams, reporters need to approach the situation with care. In addition, the research shows that reporters need to understand the limits and boundaries of the players and their willingness to answer questions.

The reporters' opinions on the professionalism of the interaction between Klein and Young vary. Murray believes that the questioning was valid and that it was the reporter's job to determine why Young was absent from the game. However, the lack of a relationship between the two may cause a negative interaction.

The study provides insights into the role of reporters in questioning public figures and the need for accountability. The study shows that reporters need to approach the situation carefully and understand the players' boundaries. The analysis also highlights the need for players to understand their accountability to the ticket holders and the role of reporters as consumer advocates.

Focusing on an ethical line being crossed in the Young/Klein interaction, based on the interviews conducted with the various sports reporters, the majority did not believe that Klein

crossed any ethical line during his questioning of Young. On the contrary, most interviewees believed that asking challenging and sometimes uncomfortable questions is necessary for a reporter's job. Therefore, it is not unethical as long as it does not devolve into name-calling or personal attacks.

Kroner and Simers both believed that Klein's questions were tough but not unethical. Kroner felt that Klein might have gone a little too far in his questioning but did not think it was egregious. Simers stated that his ethics were not involved when asking a tough question and believed it would be unethical if he did not ask the tough questions. Hernández thought that Klein was ethical in his questioning and that reporters should press interviewees more, while Fortier believed that Klein brought a harder line of questioning, which was okay and not unethical.

This study's findings suggest that there is a delicate balance between asking tough questions and not crossing the line into unethical behavior. Journalists are expected to ask tough questions and hold those in power accountable. However, they must also be respectful and not engage in personal attacks or cross the line into harassment. The Society of Professional Journalists (n.d.) code of ethics includes principles such as seeking truth and reporting it, minimizing harm, acting independently, and being accountable and transparent. Based on the interviews conducted in this study, the journalists believed that Klein's questioning aligned with these principles and did not cross any ethical line.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed varied perceptions of what constitutes crossing an ethical line in sports journalism. While there was no unanimity, several themes emerged. Murray, for instance, felt that accusatory, personal, and aggressive questioning to elicit an emotional

response is unethical. Such an approach can backfire and cost reporters the respect of the people they cover, who may be reluctant to provide them with information in the future.

Simers had a different perspective, arguing that he approached the ethical line daily and crossed it sometimes. He believed that the only circumstances that should be approached with care and sensitivity are those related to death; otherwise, anything is fair game. For him, getting the information he needed to do his job was paramount, and he was willing to confront prominent figures and interact with them in a way that many others would not. He believed that his tenacity and fearlessness earned him the respect of many people he covered, even those with whom he initially clashed.

Finally, Kroichick argued that the ethical line depends on a public/private divide. In his view, public figures like Young and his coach are fair game for journalists because they are public figures who earn millions of dollars. However, he believed Wiggins' absence was a private matter due to family issues and should have been off-limits to reporters.

Overall, the interviews revealed that perceptions of journalistic ethics are complex and multifaceted. For example, while some interviewees believed that tough questioning is acceptable as long as it is done ethically, others felt that personal attacks and aggressive behavior clearly breach journalistic ethics. The different perspectives expressed suggest that there is no single definition of ethical behavior in sports journalism and that the boundaries of what is and is not acceptable are often unclear and subjective. Nonetheless, the interviewees' insights provide valuable food for thought for sports journalists who seek to navigate this complex and sometimes challenging terrain.

Additionally, the research findings suggest that tense interview settings can occur depending on the situation and personalities involved. Tension can arise due to various factors,

including the interviewee's willingness to answer questions and the interview circumstances. Therefore, the research participants believe it is essential to gauge the situation and decide when to continue pressing or leave the interview.

The study's findings indicate that journalists must navigate the delicate balance between pursuing information and maintaining professional relationships with sources. As noted by Fortier, the tension in an interview does not necessarily hinder the journalist's quest for information. In contrast, it may offer insight into the interviewee's perspective, providing an opportunity for more nuanced reporting.

The participants' recommendations for managing tense interview settings vary. Kroner highlights the importance of respect for the interviewee's perspective, while Kroichick notes that the setting and circumstances play a role in determining the appropriate course of action. Hernández takes a confrontational approach, preferring to remain in tense situations to observe how the interviewee handles pressure.

Overall, the study's findings suggest that journalists must be prepared for tense interview settings and capable of managing them effectively to achieve their reporting goals.

Additionally, the willingness of reporters to press interviewees for information is an essential aspect of journalism, with the research findings suggesting that the decision to press an interviewee is situational and depends on the importance of the information needed and the context of the situation. Finally, the interviewees' experiences suggest that pressing an interviewee can be uncomfortable and have negative consequences if not done appropriately.

Kroner's experience further supports the findings, suggesting that the decision to press an interviewee depends on the importance of the information needed and the context of the situation. If the information needed is essential, and there is more pressure to make a deadline,

then a reporter will likely push the issue with an interviewee. This finding suggests that reporters must balance the importance of the information needed with the potential negative consequences of pressing an interviewee.

Overall, the decision to press an interviewee is not always easy and requires careful consideration by reporters. The research findings and the interviewees' experiences suggest that the decision to press an interviewee depends on the importance of the information needed and the context of the situation.

The interviewees emphasized the importance of non-verbal communication skills, such as facial expressions, body movements, gestures, eye contact, and inconsistencies in reporting, believing that these skills help convey the message more effectively and better understand the topic being discussed.

Fortier endorsed active listening and suggested that repeating what a person says back to them or expressing how one conceptualizes it shows that they are actively listening, which benefits the conversation. He also emphasized the importance of non-verbal communication during news conferences and claimed that engaging with the news conference and standing out as a reporter is necessary.

Kroichick said that body language, non-verbal cues, facial expressions, and history are significant in effective interviewing, mentioning that reading an interviewee's body language and mood helps understand their response better.

Mitchell added that reading body language is a substantial journalistic component and shared his experience observing Young's negative body language during his media interaction. He suggested that an excellent reporter should read an interviewee's body language and know how to react and interview based on the reception given by the interviewee.

Non-verbal communication is an essential communication component and plays a crucial role in interpersonal interaction, with non-verbal cues conveying information more effectively than verbal communication in some cases.

The interviewees identified several areas that need improvement in sports journalism, including questioning, relationship building, cultural diversity, and accessibility. Regarding questioning, Hernández suggests that journalists must speak to interviewees like equals, setting aside their reverence for them and avoiding being too awestruck or friendly.

Kroner expresses his frustration with questions that are not questions, such as "tell me about..." which does not provide an optimal answer. Kroichick suggests that journalists should ask open-ended questions to get insight into the why and how instead of trying to impress or show off their intelligence. Paras highlights the issue of social media criticism and how interview clips, quotes, and soundbites are taken out of context, damaging the overall view of journalism.

The interviewees provide valuable insights into the areas that need improvement in sports journalism, particularly in questioning, relationship building, cultural diversity, and accessibility. These findings are consistent with preexisting suggestions for the need for sports journalists to continuously improve their skills to produce high-quality journalism.

The research findings provide insight into how journalists approach news conferences, with some common themes emerging, including preparation, active listening, flexibility, and relationship-building. The interviewees highlighted the importance of being prepared with a few story ideas or questions going into a news conference. In addition, they emphasized the need to be agile enough to pivot to new topics that arise during the conference and actively listen to the speakers to identify potential newsworthy topics.

Overall, the research findings suggest no one-size-fits-all approach to covering news conferences. Instead, journalists must be prepared, flexible, and adaptable to the situation and interviewee's preferences. They must actively listen to the speaker, ask open-ended questions, and establish relationships to improve the quality of information gathered during news conferences. The findings have important implications for journalism education and training, emphasizing the importance of teaching these skills to young journalists to enhance their performance and effectiveness in covering news conferences.

Finally, taken together, these findings suggest that great questions require careful consideration of an interview's content and context. Interviewers must be thoughtful and original in their questions but also attentive to the needs and perspectives of their interviewees.

A great question should encourage interviewees to think profoundly and reveal something unexpected or introspective. Ultimately, the success of an interview depends on the interviewer's ability to connect with the interviewee, foster trust and rapport, and ask questions that generate meaningful insights for readers.

Sports reporters must be skilled at asking questions that elicit insightful and informative responses from athletes, coaches, and other sports figures. They must also be knowledgeable about the sport and the context of the interview, as well as the needs and interests of their audience. The findings of this study suggest that significant questions are essential to effective sports reporting and help reporters stand out from their peers and establish a strong reputation for quality journalism.

Overall, the findings of this study have important implications for sports journalists and others interested in effective interviewing techniques. By understanding what makes a great question and incorporating these insights into their interviewing strategies, reporters can enhance

their ability to produce compelling and informative sports reporting that resonates with readers and viewers.

Regarding the study's limitations, the number of sports journalists interviewed for the research could be higher. Despite the low number of interviewees, the information gathered was significant enough for an inside look into the mindset of sports journalists and how they approach interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage. However, a more abundant pool of interviewees would better serve the research and allow for more correlations, similarities, and differences to be presented.

While criteria were not an issue with finding interviewees, the timing of the interviews and scheduling conflicts were factors in the number of interviewees gathered for this study. It was often difficult to find a set time to meet with interviewees. Many worked on moving schedules covering various professional sports, taking precedence over conducting research interviews, with several cancellations or reschedulings. During the research timeline, many professional sports leagues were amid crucial periods in their seasons, like the NFL playoffs, free agency, and preparation for the draft, MLB spring training and opening season, and the NBA playoffs.

Given more time to conduct this research, more access to sports journalists that fit the criteria, and at a time when sports leagues are in less crucial times in their season, the results may have been much more significant.

Furthermore, while the interviewees were diverse in experiences, age, and race, a female perspective was missing from the research, which, if included, may have provided different perspectives on interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage in professional sports journalism. While none of the interviewees were female, several female sports journalists were

contacted and scheduled to interview. However, conflicting schedules, rescheduling, and approaching deadlines played a role in being unable to conduct these interviews. This added perspective would give the qualitative research more depth and a more diverse look into the research topic.

For further research, while the interviewees were asked about ethics, it would have better served the research if they had been asked about unprofessionalism and unethical practices, defining and comparing the two. The questions regarding unethical practices and examples of unethical questions failed to yield significant responses and did not serve the purpose as initially believed.

Additionally, the minimum criteria —five years of journalism experience and experience covering professional sports in that time— set for the experience of the journalists involved in the research may need to be raised if further research were to be conducted. Although the less seasoned sports journalists had some great insight on the questions presented, especially on improving aspects of interviewing, questioning, and news conference coverage in professional sports journalism, the depth to which they answered the questions was less substantial than those who have had many years of experience. Some less experienced subjects had difficulty answering some questions because they lacked experience, or their answers completely shifted from what the experienced journalists provided.

One aspect that can be further explored is the impact of tense interviews on the journalist-source relationship and how these contention interactions further affect interviewing a source.

This research also provided insight into the media's role in sports reporting, which can continue to be used to inform future research, eventually leading to improved development of ethical guidelines for sports journalists to better the professional athlete-media relationship.

6.1 Chapter 6 summary

The study is an overview of the intricacies of interviewing, questioning, and new conference coverage in professional sports journalism, aiming to understand the strengths and areas of improvement in these aspects and gather perspectives on the current mindsets of sports journalists. The research presented five pivotal questions, primarily about interviewing techniques, question types, the role of press conferences, the industry's evolution, and the self-perception of sports journalists.

Traditional sports journalists find themselves contrasted with their digitally native counterparts, who some feel lack firsthand experience but possess digital expertise within the growing digital landscape. This landscape has further magnified challenges, causing the distinction between professional and amateur reporting to be more ambiguous. Amid these changes, the role and ethics of sports journalists are in flux.

The research revealed the commonly held perception that sports journalism is less serious than complex news sectors. This perception does not account for sports' profound societal and financial impact but focuses on transitioning to digital platforms. The profession has experienced rapid changes, raising questions about online journalistic practices, speed versus accuracy, and the dilution in converged newsrooms.

Inexperienced journalists, often younger, navigate their responsibilities without much guidance early on, reminiscent of seasoned journalists when they started their careers. The study

emphasized the importance of mentorship for these young professionals and how this mentorship affects the improvement of the practice.

Journalists generally preferred one-on-one interviews over news conferences, given the controlled nature of the latter. The relationship between reporters and public figures was also a focus point, emphasizing the balance between asking pertinent questions and respecting boundaries. This balancing act calls into question the distinction of an ethical line. Many believe that asking challenging questions is within a reporter's purview as long as it remains professional and adheres to an ethical code.

Non-verbal communication emerged as a crucial tool for journalists in interpreting interviewee reactions and adjusting their approaches accordingly.

The research highlighted areas in sports journalism that need refinement, such as questioning techniques, relationship-building, cultural diversity, and accessibility. Being prepared, flexible, and adaptable were vital for covering news conferences.

Regarding limitations, the study could benefit from a more extensive and diverse participant pool, especially with female perspectives. The timing and scheduling conflicts during critical sports seasons hampered the research. A deeper dive into unprofessionalism versus unethical practices and further refining the experience criteria for participating journalists would benefit future research.

Overall, the study provides a view of the current landscape of sports journalism, stressing adaptability, ethics, and continuous skill refinement. It underlines the importance of maintaining a balance between gaining information and respecting boundaries while navigating the evolving digital age of journalism.

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