

## **Guidelines on Writing Sports Articles**

Writing in sports can be some of the most enjoyable journalistic activity that can be done. The story lines, amazing moments, and atmosphere are captured by the writer for the enjoyment of the audience. However, sports writing can also be challenging if you don't know where to begin. These are some simple guidelines to help you get started and complete your first article on a sporting event.

### **Determine Your Angle and Audience**

Believe it or not, one can actually have an angle in a sports article. We will divide articles into two types of groups: rundowns and opinions.

Rundown pieces will essentially be summaries of the games and players of any particular sport. These pieces will utilize statistics heavily and are more for an audience who is just trying to get the play-by-play of any game.

Opinions are pieces that will not only show statistics but where you, the writer, will also analyze the statistics and draw conclusions. These are great articles to write and give you more liberty to show off your writing talent. This is a good article to write for when you are writing toward a fan base of a particular team. This audience can usually be satisfied by a simple recap and reasons for why a certain team won or lost.

Now that you have decided what angle you will take for the event you will cover we can move to some general rules for your specific article.

### **Know Your Sport**

It goes without saying that one must be familiar with a sport to give proper commentary on it. Knowing strategy, players, and schemes in the sport you are covering is vital to writing a proper article. Another thing to make sure that you know is commonly used abbreviations for your sport as they are regular used in sports articles.

If you feel your knowledge of the sport is substantial but you are not quite comfortable writing analysis yet, it is good to begin with rundown articles. Due to the fact that rundowns are just reporting, an extreme in-depth knowledge of the sport is not required. Writing these rundowns will also give you a better understanding of the game and help you on your way to writing full opinion pieces.

### **Structure**

Sports articles have a similar structure to how most news articles are written. Use short and easy to understand sentences. Keep your paragraphs short and focused. For example, a paragraph with one or two short sentences on the stats of a player and one or two short sentences analyzing the player will be good.

Your introduction should include the most important information on the game. Who won, who were the playmakers, and a quick overview of the game. Your body will include further specific stats,

description of impact plays, analysis, and quotations. Closing with a quotation from a team member is a good way to end your

### **Statistic Presentation**

Statistics are the backbone of all sports articles. They provide a quick way for the reader to analyze aspects of certain players and teams. The way you present your statistics will depend on your article.

If you are writing an opinion article, most statistics can be used in the writing itself. For example, "Manning threw 14 for 18 passes on the day."

Another way to present statistics for both articles is in a table format. See Figure 1.1 for an example.

A good way to give a quick rundown of a game is by writing out a play-by-play. Play-by-play usually contain the major and game changing plays listed on a chronological chart. See Figure 1.2 for an example.

### **Statistic Use**

If you are writing a rundown article, your statistic use will be heavy. Rundowns are not open to any real opinion so most of your article will be solid statistics and play-by-play description.

For an opinion article however, the statistics you choose are to make up less of your actual article but are still extremely important. All your analysis must be backed up by statistics. If, for example, you put forth that a basketball team won a game due to its passing, you must show the amount of successful passes made and other relevant statistics such as assists.

In an opinion or rundown article, it is good to for you to include the "impact" players statistics and plays. "Impact" players are usually the most important part of the game and it is always good to include information about.

### **Use Quotations**

Although you might not always be able to get postgame interviews with players, coaches, and staff, you should try to incorporate quotations from them. These words straight from the participants can contain interesting insight into why the game went the way it did and what the team was trying to get done during the game.

The words from the team can be inspirational, insightful, and even rude. These all add to the depth of your article. Even if the quotation you give relates to something outside of the sport, it can be telling to why a player or team played the way they did.

If you cannot attend a post-game press event or get an interview with a player directly, you can always view the postgame interviews through various sources. Be sure to credit those sources.

### **Use Media**

If you are writing an article that isn't text only, media is a must. Using relevant photographs from the sporting event is important. If you cannot obtain photos on your own, there are various companies, such as Getty Images, that sell their photo rights for a small fee. Always make sure you credit the photographer.

If you are writing for a website, it may be possible for you to include video highlights as well. The same rules required for photography apply to video as far as obtaining rights and giving credit. Video can provide a dynamic way for your reader to see what you are talking about.

### **Suggestion for Shaping Your Opinion Piece**

There are a few things you can do to give your opinion piece some more depth.

Making predictions is one of the major types of opinion pieces. One should always work from the statistics to make a prediction and use these to back them up. As long as you have sufficient backing though it is perfectly alright and even interesting to the reader to write an article like this. These can range from stating why a team will win a game to changes a team must make to do better.

Knowing the history of teams can give you some interesting depth to the article. Ask yourself, do these teams have a history? Is there a bitter rivalry? These are interesting factors to consider when writing a piece. Other things to consider are personal storylines of a team or player. Is the player having legal issues outside the game? Is the team undergoing extensive personnel changes? These factors are sometimes just as important as the stats which are results of the storylines and are great for opinion pieces.