

A large, detailed image of the official FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 ball, which is white with colorful, abstract patterns in blue, red, yellow, and green. The ball is positioned on the left side of the cover, partially cut off by the edge.

**Sports  
Journalism**  
*Guidebook*



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# Sports Journalism Guidebook



ALJAZEERA  
MEDIA INSTITUTE



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# Introduction

In recent decades, sport has developed around the world, becoming more intertwined with people's everyday lives for many reasons. This development is mostly attributed to the rise in demand for sports journalism worldwide. A report conducted by the American Journalism Institute concludes that sport is the most consumed news topic for 25 percent of people, followed by political news which is favoured by 21 percent.

Despite this major expansion in the field of sports journalism, it is often still considered to be separate from the professional rules of journalism and is treated as a form of entertainment journalism that does not require commitment to professional standards such as those adhered to by journalists covering politics or the economy.

This issue is just one of many in Arabic sports journalism, which is way behind worldwide sports journalism. One issue is that sport itself is not developed in the Arab world and this limits the extent to which Arabic sports journalists can expand their field. Sports news is still often restricted to just results and news, with little journalistic analysis or coverage to provide new information and insights to audiences.





It is for this reason that Al Jazeera Media Institute has devised this guide book, in an attempt to develop the field of sports journalism. This guide explains and deconstructs the nature of work for a sports journalist, and provides advice on covering major sports events while adhering to the principles of professional journalism, taking into consideration the rules that regulate sports journalism, as well as explaining the professional and technical requirements.

**Al Jazeera Media Institute**



# Chapter I: What is Sports Journalism?

Sports journalism has become a major field of journalism with the transition of sports to a major independent industry. This media specialism now has a vital role.

Sports journalism is no longer considered merely the domain of fun and entertainment, it is now a field of its own that has its own risks and sensitivities which practitioners need to be aware of. A sports journalist speaks to an audience that considers sports to be a primary element of their lives, and as such should be measured in terms of importance alongside those of journalistic fields covering issues such as health, politics and social issues.

## Sports journalism is not an 'easy life'

The field of sports offers journalists the opportunity for regular involvement in field work, particularly when covering major tournaments, and grants them access to those involved in the area of sport, whether they are athletes, coaches or others. Because of this, some consider sports journalists to be privileged, with the impression that they have things "easy" compared to those working in other fields of journalism. However, the requirements of sports journalists are such that they





need to develop in-depth experience which takes time and skill to amass. Sports journalists must also acquire a large background knowledge of the various categories and types of sports, while also keeping abreast of all the new developments in the field. Journalism, generally, is a rapidly evolving industry, especially with the advent of digital platforms. Developments in both sports and journalism itself means there are now many different areas of specialism within the field of sports journalism; today there is journalism in sports economics, another in transfer markers, specific websites for market valuation appraisal of athletes, sports clubs, and many others.

### Phil Andrews

major instructor in Journalism department – Sheffield Hallam University in the UK

“It’s the best job in the world, isn’t it? Travelling the globe, watching the big sporting events free from the best seats in the stadium, mingling with star players and athletes, seeing your byline in the newspapers or broadcasting to millions on radio or television, and being paid a lot of money for the privilege. That’s the way many people see a sports writer’s job. The reality can be rather different. Hard and demanding work to tight deadlines, long and unsocial hours (most of them worked in the evenings or at weekends), a lot of time spent in research and preparation, acquiring the same depth of knowledge about the sports you cover as the most fanatical of your readers or listeners, earning the trust of a wide range of contacts among players, coaches and administrators, and the skill to write accurately and entertainingly at great speed and often under difficult conditions.”



## More Than Just a Game

Sports journalism requires effort and stamina because sports events do not stop; the regular flow of tournaments, world tours, friendly matches and other events mean sports journalists are constantly busy.

Sports journalists must take extra care with accuracy in each news piece they produce as well as being on the constant look out for other angles. A football match could mean hundreds of thousands of fans taking to the streets to celebrate their team's qualification for the World Cup. Another could re-

- During the 1998 World Cup held in France, the French police stood prepared for the possibility of riots ahead of a match between the US and Iran teams. However, the worst happened ahead of that match between fans supporting the England and Tunisia teams in Marseille: a three-day major riot erupted, triggered by England fans, leaving at least 32 injured.

sult in violent protests or even cause a diplomatic crisis. All this places major responsibility on sports journalists.

Examples of such events:

- A match between the Egypt and Algeria teams almost caused a diplomatic crisis between both countries in 2009 and was dubbed in the media as the "Battle of Omdurman". It was a match to determine the qualifier for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and was followed by many protests and incidents, a major one of which was an attempt to break into the Algerian embassy in Cairo.



- During the Egyptian local league tournament in February 2012, the match between Al Ahli and Al Masry football clubs in the city of Port Said, ended in chaos when a group of spectators who were sitting in the seats of Al Masry fans launched an assault on the Al Ahli fans. Some 72 Al Ahli fans were killed, and this event later came to be known as “the genocide of Port Said”.





## How Sports Journalism has Developed



There is not only one type of sports journalism. The work of a journalist covering football news is not the same as that of a journalist covering tennis, athletics, gymnastics or other sports. This is because each sport places its own mark on journalism and journalists with its distinct features. Professional players in some sports are more enthusiastic about media coverage than others, for example. While football gets a lot of air-time, golf is “quieter” in the media. Other types are distinguished by accuracy more than anything else, especially those requiring time and distance measurements such as athletics, where journalists are required to provide analysis of measurements, while other sports require more metaphorical descriptions. In the end, all sports journalists must be committed to balance, objectivity and accuracy of information, which form the basis of professional journalism.





Social media has also played a big role in the way that sports news has developed. Social media has certainly widened the horizon of sports journalists, but it has also thrown up new challenges regarding the speed of news and the changing preferences of online audiences. Audiences no longer need a journalist to report the results of matches or who scored goals and points. Instead, they are looking for sports journalists to present in-depth analysis and statistics, or more behind-the-scenes colour such as the discussions which take place in locker rooms, explanations of coaches' plans and other information that cannot be easily accessed.

## Sports Journalism and the Phases of Change

### Mohamed Amour

Head of News Management at beIN Sports:

Sports journalism is a specialism that requires journalists to keep up with, describe and analyse sports events, providing commentary and even carrying out investigations of sports' more shady areas. Journalists must also have a good understanding and knowledge of how sports is developing its own independent economy and how it is gaining more and more public interest.

Sports journalism as a specialism first emerged at the start of the 19th century in the US. Newspapers covered boxing and horse racing. Over time, rising popular demand for sports news prompted newspapers to start offering special sections devoted to sports, offering sports journalists their own platform.

More recently, sports journalism has undergone a transformation again in the era of digital publishing; public posts on social media are now what shape public opinion and digital news platforms are leading the way when it comes to news reporting and commentary.

These days, professional athletes are often more trusting of social media influencers than they are of professional journalists. After his transfer to Paris Saint Germain, for example, Lionel Messi gave his first interview to the Spanish social media influencer Ibai Hanos on Twitch, broadcasting the ceremony direct from his phone to hundreds of thousands of viewers.

The way in which sports has been influenced by advances in science and technology is also reflected in the development of sports journalism. Journalists no longer report just from the stadium - news is broadcast from inside locker rooms and sports team buses.





The growing importance of technical information and analysis has contributed to the rise of data journalism within sports media, with the emergence of new organisations such as “Opta” for technology and analysis.

Cosy relationships between sports journalists and their sources have made it harder, not easier, for corruption to be uncovered. Therefore, it is not surprising that most investigations into the world of sports have been carried out by investigating journalists with no background in sports journalism at all.

Part of the problem here is the amount of money within the sports industry. Television is now one of the major funders of sports through exclusive television broadcast rights, and advertisers have cooperated with the media by amplifying the image and status of athletes and clubs and amplifying the phenomena of stardom to generate more audience and revenues.

This poses ethical and professional questions about the independence of some sports journalists, particularly where media organisations hold exclusive rights leading to a conflict of interests.



## 10 Top tips:

**1- Plan your coverage:** unlike sudden and unexpected news events, sports events are announced at the start of each season, so you can plan coverage well in advance.

**2- Expect the unexpected:** sports journalists should be familiar enough with the intricacies of the sports they cover to be on the lookout for the unexpected, such as a match being postponed or a coach being sacked.

**3- Stick to the field:** make sure you go to all the training sessions and matches that you can - that is often where you will find the best stories.

**4- Build networks:** your information is only as good as your sources. Therefore, a sports journalist must form a network of contacts including managers, coaches, athletes and others involved in professional sports.

**5- Don't get too friendly with sources:** good relationships are essential to getting scoops, but you could run the risk of being exploited by your sources. Showing favouritism towards a coach or a player can affect the worth of a player in transfer markets. Don't allow yourself to be used in this way - always be sceptical about information you receive and make sure you verify it.

**6- Develop your technical skills:** journalism is constantly changing, so you need to keep up with new approaches and technical skills - such as interactive storytelling, for example.

**7- Make use of digital platforms:** digital platforms such as news websites and social media platforms have afforded more opportunities for journalists to present news in different ways - often going well beyond what is possible in traditional news media. Ensure you are familiar with the different formats for telling stories which are required for these platforms.





**8- Understand algorithms:** If you want your sports story to reach the most possible viewers or readers, you need to understand how the algorithms of different platforms work. Stories are presented in different templates supported by different platforms – such as short videos – and must be appropriately designed for the content privacy for each platform. Content supported by Instagram is different from content supported by Twitter or YouTube, and it must consider the content preferences for each audience on these platforms.

**10- News is not enough:** sports journalism is no longer limited to covering the results of the matches or real-time news. Many specialised websites have emerged and built up large audiences in a short time because they are able to provide in-depth analysis in different formats, including investigative journalism, real-time journalism, explanatory journalism and historical journalism. The experience of The Athletic website in this type of sports story is worth mentioning. The website was launched in 2012 and, in 2022, had become so popular that the New York Times acquired ownership of it.

**9- Present your own identity:** strive to present an individual type of journalism that incorporates in-depth details about the sports event or news you are covering. Ensure you have a distinctive style which will become familiar to your audience. So much sports journalism is the same and highly formulaic in style. You need to stand out.

## Vincent Deleck

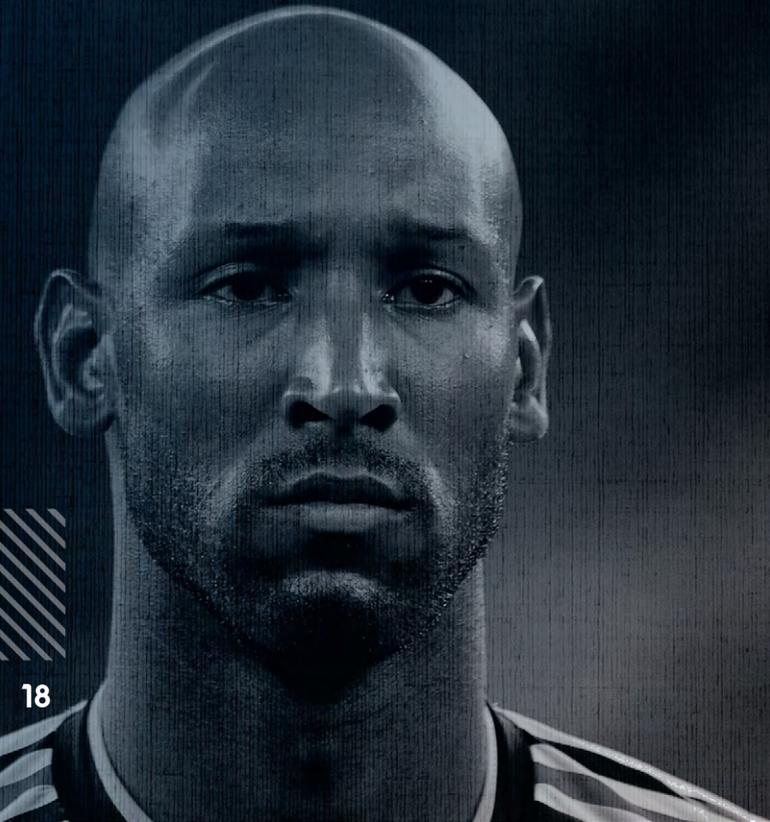
Novelist and sports journalist, specialising in football

It is the role of the press to tell the story, to analyse. It is not the role of the press to take sides.

I don't see why mainstream journalism should be expected to be honest and objective while sports journalism should not. Instead that it should be nationalistic and biased without criticism.

Of course the French media is invested in the idea of the French team winning at the World Cup but there is no question that should mean turning its back on the basis of journalism - news, information, commentary.

Sports journalism is much closer to the heart of matters than people may imagine.





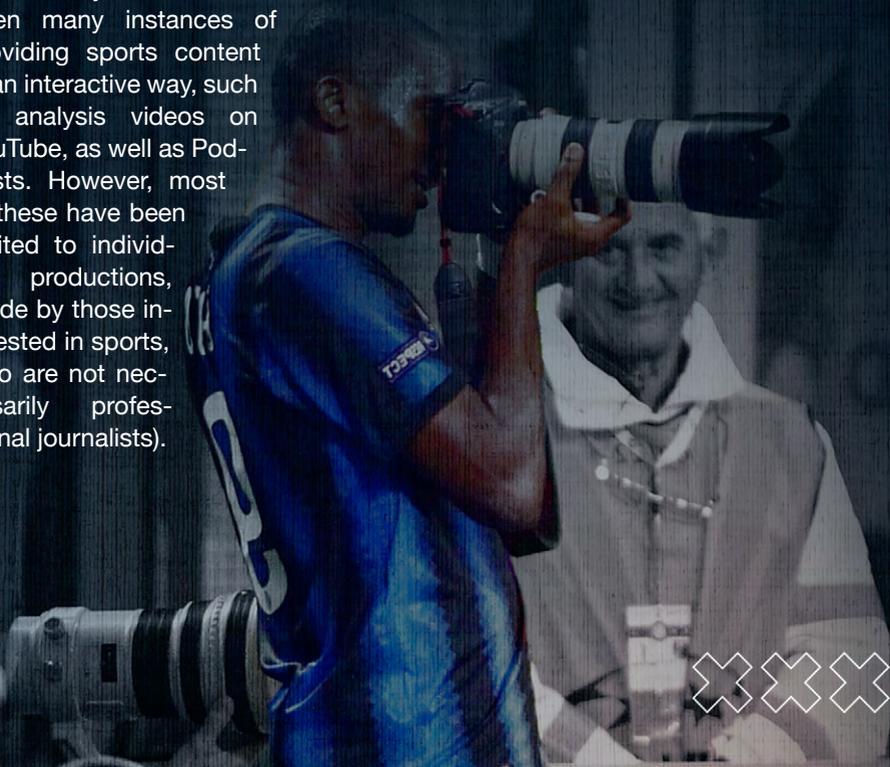
There is nothing harder than reporting on football transfers. The information changes from minute to minute. If you want the media to refrain from reporting a player's transfer from one club to another until it is completely official, that will mean leaving the reporting to social media. If you have to wait until something is official before you report it, there will be no more news."

# Chapter 2:

## What Type of Sports Journalist Do You Want to Be?

**1- Choose your media:** This might be newspaper, television, digital, radio or podcast journalism.

(Over the years, there have been many instances of providing sports content in an interactive way, such as analysis videos on YouTube, as well as Podcasts. However, most of these have been limited to individual productions, made by those interested in sports, who are not necessarily professional journalists).





**2- Choose your specialism: whether it is being a field correspondent, or an expert in transfer markets or match analysis, or something else entirely.**

(The Analyst UK website went even further. It hired a correspondent to cover each team of the English League for football, including some second-division clubs. This helped with building fan bases for those correspondents. For example, James Pierce covers Liverpool for the website and now has more than 900 thousand followers on Twitter).

**3- Decide where you want to work: find out about the editorial policies and work flow of the organisations you would like to work for or collaborate with.**

(Italian journalist Fabrizio Romano, 29, is one of the most well-known and trusted journalists writing about football transfers. He collaborates with many media organisations and has more than 11 million followers on Twitter. So well trusted is he by football fans, that several major football teams have collaborated with him in announcing transfers.)



## Getting started in sports journalism



**1. Have passion:** Get to know every detail about the sport you want to cover - its rules, its stars' names - and build up a wide background knowledge. Without passion, you will find it hard to start a career as an expert journalist in a specific sport and continue with it.

**2. Start with your local team:** Attend the training sessions and matches of your local team or any club that will welcome you in for a close-up on your favourite sport. This will enable you to build your knowledge on your chosen sport, and the path players and teams take from training to matches in the stadium.





**3. Keep a keen eye on the news:** To further your knowledge, keep up with all the news related to your favourite sport. Take note of the various styles of writing, analysis and commentary.

**4. Archive anything that catches your eye:** Whenever you find a distinctive headline, a strong article, an interesting angle or description, or an interesting link to information you lack, document it.

**5. Write, write, write:** Work on your writing and editorial skills. Writing is the only way to develop your journalism skills, whichever format you want to work in - a written script is the basis of any broadcast content. This will also help you find your own style and develop your individuality.



## Hossam Barakat

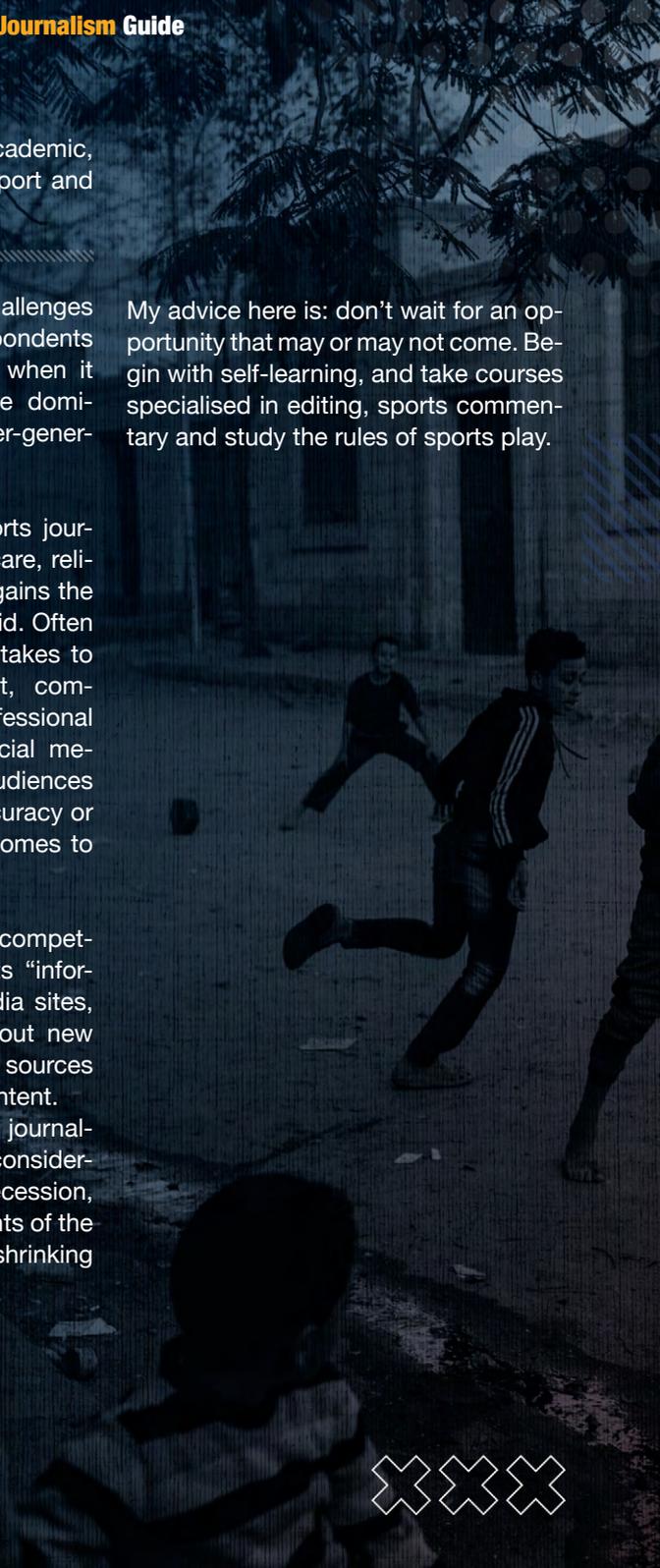
Jordanian journalist and academic, former editor-in-chief of Yoursport and Kooora websites

“There are now endless challenges to sports editors and correspondents in the Arab world, especially when it comes to competing with the dominance of social media and user-generated content.

The content produced by sports journalists, written with linguistic care, reliable and objective, no longer gains the attention and interest it once did. Often this is because of the time it takes to produce professional content, compared to the instant, unprofessional postings and musings on social media platforms. It seems that audiences have given up any care for accuracy or reliability of sources when it comes to gathering information.

If they stand any chance of competing with the plethora of sports “information” posted on social media sites, sports journalists must seek out new journalism tools, broaden their sources and produce faster, simpler content. Getting into a career in sports journalism is fraught with difficulty, considering that the work market is in recession, as reflected by the developments of the state of the economy and the shrinking advertising market.

My advice here is: don't wait for an opportunity that may or may not come. Begin with self-learning, and take courses specialised in editing, sports commentary and study the rules of sports play.



It is up to those who wish to become professional sports journalists to seek out opportunities for field training and volunteer work, to sharpen their writing skills and develop their professionalism, and to produce content in a professional manner.

To the journalists covering the World Cup, I advise that you attend each and every press conference and media gathering, no matter how far away.

In addition, you should also look for hidden angles and untold stories. Try analysing events in a non-traditional manner, to document every image, to 'sleep less but walk more'."

# Chapter 3:

## Entering the World of Sports Journalism

Most sports journalists enter the field in one of two ways: either by studying journalism at university or college and majoring in sports or by independently beginning their journalism careers without an academic background in journalism. Those who have successfully gone down the latter route have usually either built up sufficient work experience to qualify them for positions at media organisations, or they have entered those organisations through training programmes and then gradually risen through the ranks to become professional journalists.





Those who reach the ranks of successful sports journalists do so through strenuous hard work and by building up a very wide background knowledge of sports. This includes a detailed knowledge of most of the sciences related to sports, as well as sports law, sports medicine, humanitarian sciences, sports economics and business, and others.

Successful sports journalists must first be professional journalists before they become specialists in sports or related fields. They are required to understand all types and patterns of journalism and commit to the professional rules and ethics of the profession, mainly objectivity, integrity and reliability.

## 7 things to master:



### 1- Develop your language skills:

This can be achieved through constant reading and practising narration tools.

### 2- Practise different styles:

Follow the work of other journalists - not only in the field of sports - and understand their writing styles. Adapt them to your own journalistic pieces. To develop your narrative skills, read both fiction and non-fiction and adapt these styles in your sports stories.

### 3- Understand the social issues:

A professional sports journalist should have a broad background knowledge of the historical and sociological dimensions linked to each sport as well as its interaction with society, and much more.

### 4- Develop your critical thinking:

Dig through the details of sports events, read up on a sport's history and understand its tiniest details. This will help you ask unique questions which will distinguish you from other journalists.

### 5- Diversify your content:

Try out different forms of journalism. Diversifying through scripts, videos and podcasts and others will help you determine the most accommodating type and which is most likely to reach your particular audience.

### 6- Gather resources:

This is best achieved by building a network of active parties in the sports field. Attend training and competition fields, build professional relationships with athletes and coaches, and engage with sports fans and sports journalism communities.

### 7- Be critical of your own work:

A professional journalist constantly asks questions of themselves. After you finish a story, try to evaluate it objectively. Look for the weak points to avoid in the future as well as the positive elements to build on.



## Wojciech Novakowski

Polish independent sports journalist

“My advice to young journalists is to seize every opportunity to gather as many sources as possible and create connections with new people - you never know who might be of use to you in the future.

It is impossible to absorb all the information that is out there; that is why I focus on the subjects closest to my professional interests. If something important is happening in the world, it will surely affect me as well. Regarding sources, I mostly use Twitter, where I look for accounts worthy of following in different lists, as well as RSS feeds of websites worth following as well. I try to update my list of websites as much as possible and allow push notifications and pop-ups.

In some cases, I also allow notifications from Twitter accounts that post the most important information for me, for example Łączy nas piłka kobieca, which is the official account for the Polish Women’s Football League.”

## Want great stories? Stick with the photographers



Accompanying sports photographers is one of the easiest and most efficient ways to come up with new story ideas.

Because of the nature of their work, sports photographers get close to the action and have the ability to capture details that an editorial journalist may not be able to spot.

Sports photographers are also close enough to catch the sounds coming from the cameramen, thus they can provide you with many stories.

## Tips for working alongside photographers

### 1- Stay in direct communication:

This will ensure you work quickly and efficiently and get the news as it happens. Use messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Messenger or others.

### 2- Stay alert:

The presence of photographers on the front line of action means they get the details you won't catch on the sidelines. For example, a photographer may hear what an athlete says when storming out angrily after the coach's decision to replace them, in addition to many other important details.

### 3- Get story ideas from images:

Scrutinising photos can reveal important details unnoticed by other reporters. When the semi-final between Cameroon and Egypt took place at the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon went to penalties, a photograph taken revealed the water bottle of Egypt's goalkeeper Mohammed Abo Gabal plastered with white stickers. When the journalists scrutinised the photos, they found that the stickers displayed details about each Cameroonian player's likely shooting tactics. It made for a great story.

### 4- Prepare a list of specific footage demands:

Ask the photographer to head to specific places, or to take a picture from a certain angle to serve the narrative of your planned story.



## 5- Find new sources:

Having a photographer on the field, close to the athletes and managers means they have the ability to directly communicate with them. This may enable you to hold exclusive interviews outside the stadium and secure a network of connections that serves you in any future stories.

## Pierre Grigoriev

Bulgarian sports journalist and producer

“If I could give one piece of advice to young journalists, it would be this: try to pursue your passions and interests from a different perspective. Try as much as you can to look for people you have never met or talked to, in order to find the stories that have never been told before. Don’t always just go for general topics or follow what others do because they seem popular. I strongly believe that added-value journalism work, based on the interests of journalists themselves, is always of higher quality. This is because journalists that work like this try to find people, stories, events and places that other photographers and journalists haven’t yet reached.

When it comes to handling sources, best practice depends on the type of press coverage you are producing. Sources for a breaking news story will be different to those you need for a report or field investigation. One valuable piece of advice given to me by an experienced American journalist was this: remind yourself that you know nothing, that you have no prior “truth” on the topic or story you are working on. This will stop you from being biased and will help you keep the required objectivity for professional journalism. I always try to discuss subjects further and more widely with all sources I contact, and I find that leads to better results.

I also try to record all information from my sources in several ways, such as on a notepad or on a computer, so that I can be sure I have documented and archived my sources and won’t forget the relevant details. Relying on memory alone can often lead to mistakes.

Finally, the most important thing - it might seem obvious but it is the most important piece of advice - is always make sure you verify information through more than one source, and do not rely on only one source no matter how much you trust their information.”



# Chapter 4:

## Sources in Sports Journalism

Sources are as important for sports journalists as they are in any other field of journalism.

Sources can range from athletes, coaches and agents to anyone else active in the sports industry such as lawyers and analysts. These are all sources from whom sports journalists can source ideas for stories, background information and even gossip.

Get to know the people managing and working at Olympic or sports federations, even those involved in parliamentary affairs or local councils. Other places to get involved are fan clubs, associations, veteran associations, referees' associations, among others. All these are sources that help you hear news first or find out information that could potentially be the basis for a news piece.



To build strong connections with sources, meet them face to face. The first step is to attend training sessions and matches at sports clubs. Here, you will meet officials, athletes, other correspondents and VIP figures - often many times over and in a relaxed atmosphere, since more formal occasions necessitate protocols that do not always allow for a smooth interview. By taking this approach, you will form useful connections.

Don't forget social media, especially the official pages of sports leagues and associations, Olympic associations, athletes and others. These can often provide information that will form the basis of good stories.

## Building a network of sources

**1- Attend training sessions and matches** at the sports clubs you cover to meet and follow up with your contacts in the stadiums.

**2- Find out where teams will be based during major tournaments.** For example, Qatar University is hosting the Argentina team during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Being present there will provide you with multiple sources as well as opportunities for interviews and news stories.

**3- Respect the privacy of your sources.** Don't publish information they don't want you to publish unless you want to run the risk of losing them as a source.

**4- Being professional and abiding by the ethics of journalism** will earn you trust from your sources. If they believe you are reliable and trustworthy, they will give you exclusive information when the time comes.

**5- Make use of general sources.** These include agencies, players' websites, clubs and associations, as well as official accounts on social media, and other agency pages and fans' associations,

**6- Keep up with other media outlets - especially your main rivals.** This is very important to ensure you are following all lines of inquiry.

**7- Make use of raw information from open sources.** There are networks specialising in data journalism relating to different sports, which will provide you with a large number of major numbers and statistics.



## Major websites specialising in sports statistics and information:

### Football:

**Soccerstats.com** : publishes numbers and statistics which are constantly updated, on most football matches around the world, as well as in-depth statistics relating to most angles of concern for any expert sports journalist.

**Whoscored.com** : publishes in-depth statistics about players' performance including evaluations of performances after each match.

**understat.com** : publishes in-depth statistics on matches in the major five leagues (English League, Spanish, Italy, German, French) which will help journalists write their analysis reports of matches.

**fbref.com** : is for those interested in the accomplishments of footballers, in numbers. For example, how many goals has Lionel Messi scored throughout his career? Who scored the highest number of goals in the 2010-2011 season, Messi or Ronaldo?

**transfermarkt.co.uk** : specialises in following player transfers between football clubs around the world. It covers most of the world's league championships, including Arab leagues.

## Other sports:

### Tennis:

[ultimatetennisstatistics.com](http://ultimatetennisstatistics.com)  
[tennisstats247.com](http://tennisstats247.com)  
[coretennis.net](http://coretennis.net)

### Basketball:

[hoopshype.com](http://hoopshype.com)  
[proballers.com](http://proballers.com)

### Athletics:

[worldathletics.org/stats-zone](http://worldathletics.org/stats-zone)

## Other sports :

**statsperform.com** : covers more than half a million matches annually of different sports, analysing numbers and statistics.

**gracenote.com** : provides statistics of different types of sports.

**sports-reference.com** : this website presents a free database of various sports, in addition to following players' performance in many different sports.

# Chapter 5:

# How to Write a Sports Article

Producing a great sports article requires sharp observation, sensitivity and excellent narrative skills.

One French journalist who was passionate about athletics closely studied the career of the Moroccan World and Olympic champion middle-distance runner, Hicham El Guerrouj, in the run up to his retirement in 2006. The journalist knew one year in advance that the champion was coming up to retirement and would not be back on the running track, but he needed to write the story in a creative way, without giving away that he received the information from someone close to El Guerrouj, or perhaps even from El Guerrouj himself.

He began his piece, therefore, by noting that El Guerrouj's cheeks were no longer as hollow as they had once been. This suggested he had stopped training, or training extensively, and that he had put on weight. Thus he was able to write a piece saying that El Guerrouj would soon be retiring from running.

The journalist used sharp observation skills to tell this story, based on his own knowledge of the athletics field.





You also need a great headline. On November 26, 2020, The Sun, a British newspaper, chose an interesting headline to report the death of football legend Diego Maradona - "Under Hand of God". This was a clear reference to the moment when Maradona scored the famous goal against English goalkeeper Peter Shelton during the semi-finals of the FIFA World Cup Mexico in 1986. When Maradona was asked if he scored with his hand, he answered: "It was the hand of God."



## Practical steps to writing a good sports story

1- Build a wide background knowledge. An in-depth knowledge of any sporting event or issue will enable you to come up with new approaches and angles for your story.

2- Use critical thinking. This will help you to process and come up with different angles, particularly ones that will really resonate with your audience.

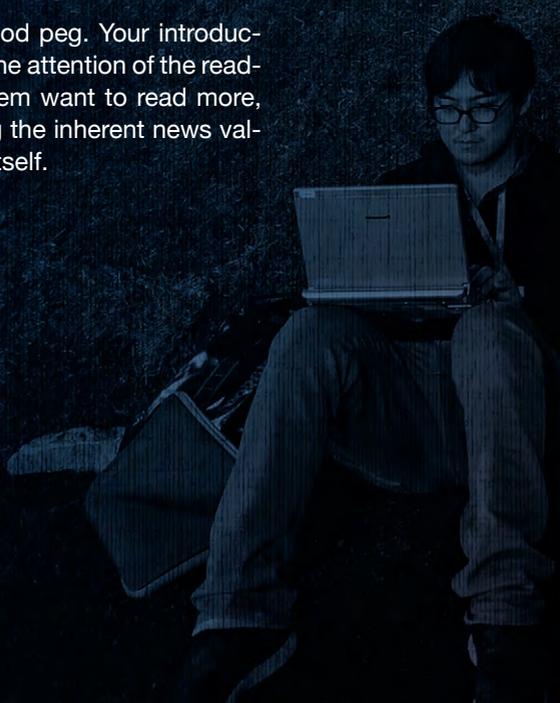
3- Record all details. When working in the field, introduce yourself to as many people as possible, follow the fans, listen to their chants, ask them about their journey to the match and their personal experiences (do not just ask them about what they think the results of the match will be).

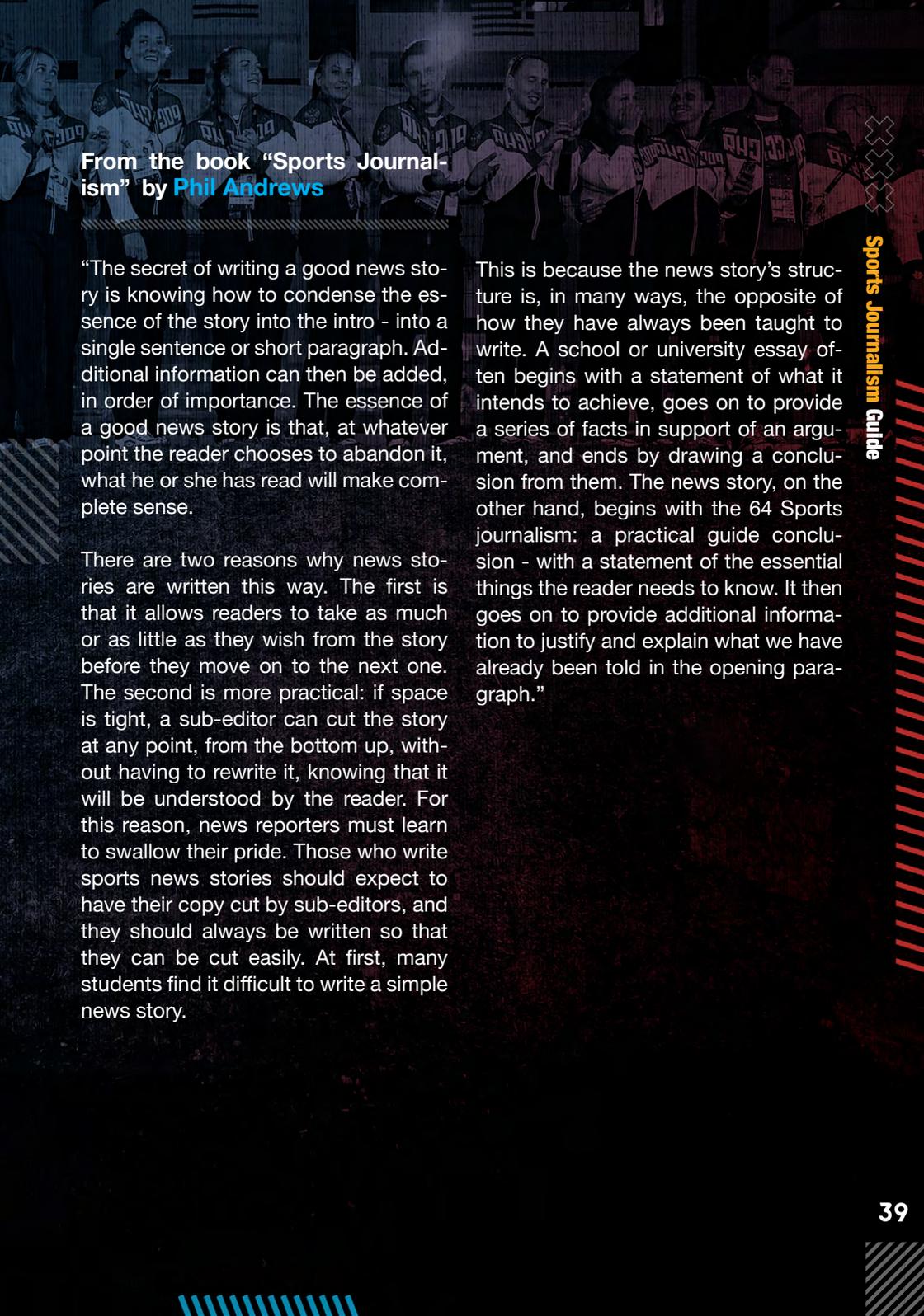
4- Choose a good peg. Your introduction must grab the attention of the reader and make them want to read more, while preserving the inherent news value of the story itself.

5- Be innovative with your headline. Instead try something more original. After the US and England teams tied in the FIFA World Cup 2010, The New York Post's first page headline was "USA Wins 1-1, Greatest tie against the British since Bunker Hill" (in reference to the battle during the American revolution against the British in 1775).

6- Avoid tired cliches. Don't just trot out old phrases that readers are bored of. Try to create new phrases to describe the event which capture its atmosphere.

7- A good story is one that focuses on critical details, not general information.





From the book “Sports Journalism” by Phil Andrews

“The secret of writing a good news story is knowing how to condense the essence of the story into the intro - into a single sentence or short paragraph. Additional information can then be added, in order of importance. The essence of a good news story is that, at whatever point the reader chooses to abandon it, what he or she has read will make complete sense.

There are two reasons why news stories are written this way. The first is that it allows readers to take as much or as little as they wish from the story before they move on to the next one. The second is more practical: if space is tight, a sub-editor can cut the story at any point, from the bottom up, without having to rewrite it, knowing that it will be understood by the reader. For this reason, news reporters must learn to swallow their pride. Those who write sports news stories should expect to have their copy cut by sub-editors, and they should always be written so that they can be cut easily. At first, many students find it difficult to write a simple news story.

This is because the news story’s structure is, in many ways, the opposite of how they have always been taught to write. A school or university essay often begins with a statement of what it intends to achieve, goes on to provide a series of facts in support of an argument, and ends by drawing a conclusion from them. The news story, on the other hand, begins with the 64 Sports journalism: a practical guide conclusion - with a statement of the essential things the reader needs to know. It then goes on to provide additional information to justify and explain what we have already been told in the opening paragraph.”



# Chapter 6:

# Sports as a Specialism

Sports journalists need an encyclopaedic knowledge of the sport they cover both in terms of keeping up with developments and understanding the finer details about whichever sport they specialise in.

Having a specialism within sports - whether it is a particular sports team or a geographical area of interest, for example - will give you an identity within the field of sports journalism which will appeal greatly to your audience.

While building a specialist knowledge of your particular area of sports, you should also develop a good knowledge and understanding of sports generally. You could easily find yourself out in the field and suddenly required to file a story on a sport you do not regularly cover to your news desk, for instance. You need to be ready for such eventualities. Understanding sports in all their types is important for sports journalists. Although it may seem that every sport has its particular features that distinguish them from the rest, in reality each type complements the others.



## The benefits of having a specialism

**1- Building a reputation:** A journalist specialising in an area of sports that may be popular but not covered enough, such as athletics, or in a technical field such as data sports journalism, has the opportunity to produce excellence for the audience. Such journalists can build a huge following and become a main point of reference for their audience and other journalists.

**2- Being a trusted source:** A specialist journalist can become a reliable source of news. The Italian journalist, Fabrizio Romano, who specialises in transfer markets news in football, formed a huge network of athletes' agents and club managers. He has become such a well-known source of reliable transfer news that some clubs now work in coordination with him when making transfer announcements.



**3- Building knowledge:** A specialised journalist will build an encyclopaedic knowledge of his or her subject and be able to verify numbers, information and other data about any issue or event relating to their specialist field.

**4- Writing a book:** After a career as a specialist journalist, you may well be qualified to write a specialised book drawing on your personal experience in the field, which could become an important point of reference for others entering the field.

**5- More career opportunities:** A specialist journalist will find themselves qualified for many job opportunities after building a long career in a sports specialism. This experience may qualify them to become sports analysts or university lecturers, for example. Sports clubs management may also become a possible avenue, or even working close to players in supervisory roles. All of these opportunities will be due to the wide experience you have gained as a specialist journalist.



## Silvana Marcheur

Austrian sports journalist – Kurier newspaper

“First of all, work out what you are most passionate about. Personally, I love MMA (mixed martial arts), and in the future, I would like to help athletes in Austria to improve and to take it more seriously.

Second, I always look deeply into things, because I want to have all the information on the subject I am writing about. I watch videos, google everything, talk to people, conduct interviews, read books, listen to podcasts and anything else I can think of. Always verify information you are going to use.

I upload all the information from my research to a document on my computer, frequently saving it in Google Drive, so I can always access it from my phone or my work computer or other laptops. It also has two-factor authentication available. When I have all my information for a story, I create a copy of this document, rearrange everything and divide it up into sections - such as who said what, what information is more important than the rest, etc.

After that I begin thinking about the most important pieces of information I have found, and categorise them by importance. Then I start putting all that into a third document, and by then I can start formulating a story.”



# Chapter 7:

## Professional Ethics in Sports Journalism

Just like any other journalist, a sports journalist is required to abide by a number of professional, ethical, legal and humanitarian rules. Even where stories are emotive, a sports journalist must work with honesty, integrity and balance. All sports news and information must be reported with impartiality and balance to allow the audience to form an objective opinion.

A lack of balance and impartiality in news reporting can lead to mistakes, defamation, discrimination or racism, and will serve only to confuse the audience about the facts.

### Important guidelines:

1- **Sports journalists** should have a detailed knowledge of the media laws regulating their profession.

2- **Showing favouritism** towards your favourite team or player in a news article conflicts with your professional objectivity.

3- **Sports journalists must describe facts and events as they are.** Never publish false information which is in line with the audience's wishes. This is "confirmation bias".

4- **Journalists should maintain a completely professional relationship** with their sources. Never accept any gifts or special invitations which could be seen to influence your coverage.

5- **A journalist's meetings with sources** should be arranged and carried out according to professional and ethical rules, and should in no way affect the objectivity of the journalist.





**6- Protection of sources** and respecting their privacy is crucially important.

**7- Do not write something that cannot be proven** to be correct - for example, accusing a player of cheating to lose a game in order to manipulate results, in the absence of any tangible or convincing evidence.

**8- When covering sports events** between opposing teams, journalists should not rely on information from sources within only one of those teams.

**9- Never blur the lines between journalism and public relations.** You are not there to act as an official spokesperson for a player, team or an agent to the players.

**10- Avoid using over-emotive phrases** that could spark disputes among members of your audience.

### In general:

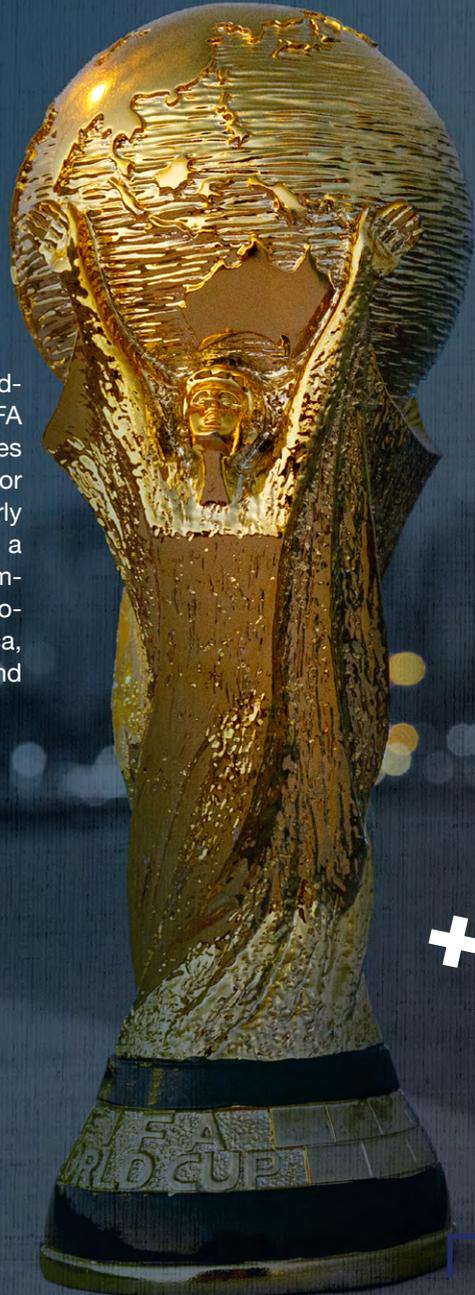
A sports journalist should maintain a professional distance from sports actors of all kinds. This will allow you to write with objectivity and impartiality, and to build the respect of your audience, whether they agree or disagree with what you report.

This can be a hard balance to maintain for sports journalists who often have very close working relationships with the players they report about. Journalists often spend long periods of time with players, particularly when covering tournaments or tours. It is easy to fall into the trap of over-empathising with players or teams. Work to avoid this.

# Chapter 8: Covering Major Sports Events



This chapter will focus on practical advice for journalists covering the FIFA World Cup. However, these principles can be applied to coverage of all major competitions and events, particularly those which occur over a relatively a short period of time, such as the Olympic games, Nation Cups (UEFA European Championship, Copa America, and others), world athletics games, and many other tournaments.



## 1: Plan Ahead



You should be in constant contact with all the relevant federations related to the sport you cover, whether they are local or international, such as the International Federation of Football Association (FIFA), the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or others. These federations are responsible for issuing accreditation for journalists who wish to cover tournaments and other events. Accreditation grants journalists the right to enter the stadiums, attend training sessions of the various teams as well as attend the press conferences before and after matches. It also ensures you get to stay in residential areas assigned to journalists, and much more.

All journalists are advised to join the International Sports Press Federation.

## 2: Patterns of Coverage



During major sports tournaments such as the World Cup or the Olympic Games, don't limit your coverage to what is happening in the stadiums and training sessions.

You will find many newsworthy stories among the fans as well, so keep your connection with them through social media. Listening to what your audience is talking about will alert you to issues you may miss on the field. You might hear a good story about a team by listening to people taking on the bus or inside the media centre, or even from a conversation with a taxi driver. Paying attention to these stories will spice up your daily coverage of tournament news and match results.

## How do you cover breaking news on the field?

**1- Be prepared and anticipate.** You should have plans in place, such as knowing the routes to the stadiums and training pitches, being on contact lists for press conferences and knowing their locations in advance.

**2- Have all permits for entrance to stadiums and other areas in advance.** If you are going to be in another country when news might break, research transport options for that location in advance.

**3- Make yourself known** in advance to officials and organisers who can give you important information in the early stages of a breaking news event.

**4- Make sure you have all the necessary technical equipment,** such as phone charger, laptop, photography equipment, and internet or satellite access. This will enable you to broadcast or file your news story as quickly as possible if there is a breaking news event.

**5- Listen to your instincts.** Look for the story everywhere and do not only cover the obvious angles that everyone else will broadcast or publish.

**6- It is more important to be accurate than to be first with the news.** Always verify all information before publishing or broadcasting. Develop a verification strategy and practise it well before you may need it.

## Getting scoops

Use your skills of observation and in-depth knowledge of your subject area to get news before anyone else.

**1- Familiarity with the players is very helpful.** Stay in touch with them through their official accounts on social media or make direct contact with them on a face-to-face basis to build relationships.

**2- Keep your eye out for stories** during training sessions as well as at matches. An image of the Moroccan player Faisal Fajr looking at his phone while training on the pitch, for example, created newsworthy controversy.

**3- Think about socio-political angles for stories** There may be a strong link between a sports event and politics and economics, architecture, cultural issues or even environmental controversies.

**4- Athletes are often restricted to specific locations** during major tournaments. This can make it easier for you to get exclusive interviews or important information from players. Stick close to the sports teams and take advantage of your proximity.





**5- Writing about**, for example, the texture of the shirts, how often players are drinking water and the tactics of training are important as well. They give another dimension the audience needs for a complete picture.

**Focus points for story ideas:**



When covering tournaments, the individual matches only last for a couple of hours. You should take advantage of the rest of the time to look for stories around the matches.

**1- Check out the stadium itself.** Is it an interesting work of architecture? Does it have a newsworthy history relating to the history of the location?

These aspects may deserve attention.

**2- The fans make the events**, so pay attention to them. You can often find rich stories by listening to what they are talking about.

**3- Monitor rival press organisations and journalists** - their stories may give you ideas for others or point you towards new angles.

**4- Stadiums buzz with newsworthy incidents an events** - not only relating to the athletes, coaches and referees, but also to other involved in the event, including the photographers, attendees, VIP guests and others.

**5- Keep an eye on social media** that you have identified as important in advance of the event. You may catch issues and incidents that you have not seen on the pitch.

**6- Look around the stadiums you are visiting during half time** and other breaks in the tournament. You might not get another chance to visit this particular stadium and this is your opportunity to spot interesting figures attending matches or to notice other details.

**7- Everything about the hosting country of the tournament** is up for writing about; architecture, people's habits, what the foreign fans are like, the weather, the colours and sounds - all these can form wonderful news material.

WORLD CUP  
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**8- Who else is staying at your hotel?**

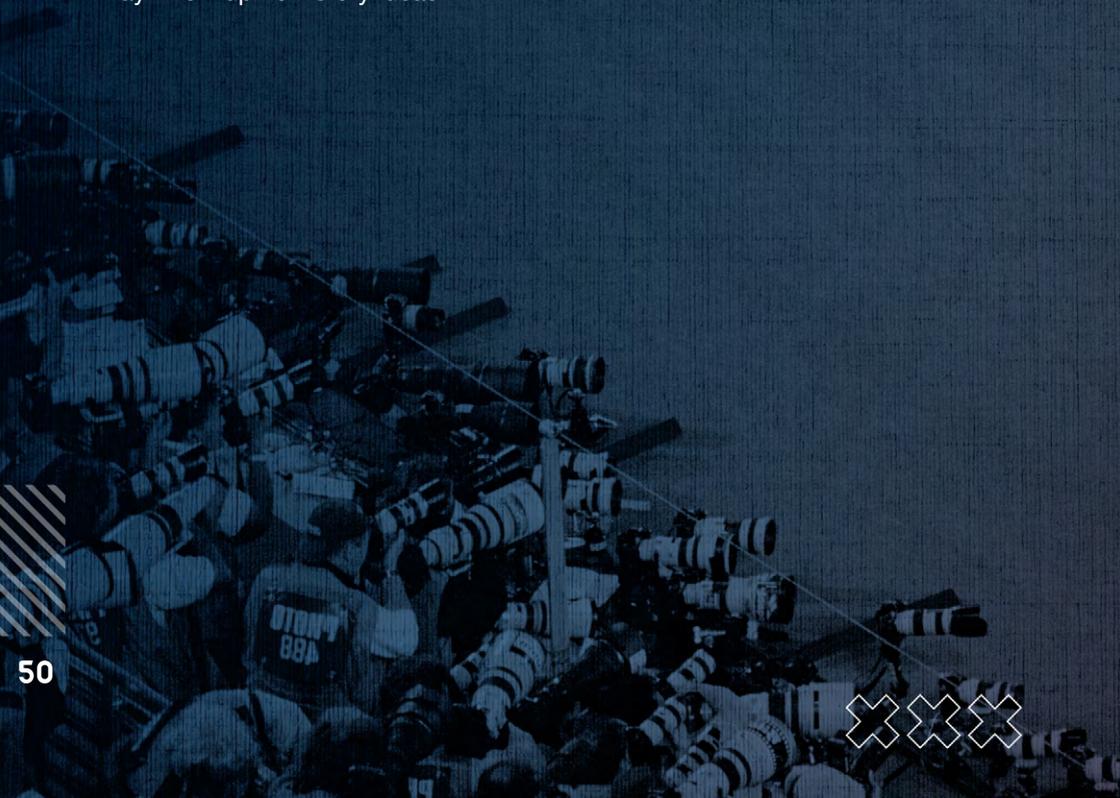
At the World Cup 2018 in Russia, one group of journalists found themselves staying at a hotel with an Iranian who resembled Lionel Messi. This became the basis of a funny news story.

**9- Watch and listen to the local news channels.**

You may learn about issues you knew nothing about.

**10- Try as much as you can to attend and record fringe events**

which are not necessarily in your diary. They may throw up new story ideas.



### 3: Lessons from World Cup Journalists



It is always worth watching and learning from the pros. Here we hear from three who have covered World Cup championships.



## Mohammed Al Rawli

Moroccan journalist at Bayan Al Yaoume newspaper, who covered World Cup championships in 1994, 1998, 2006 and 2018

“Coverage of the World Cup is not easy or ordinary. A journalist must prepare just like the players who prepare to participate.

- The first thing a sports journalist should do is prepare reports ahead, and collect enough information on the event or teams, including numbers and statistics. If, for example, the tournament includes your local team, then conduct special interviews ahead of arriving in the country hosting the World Cup. Preparing in this way will ease the job of the journalist once the matches kick off.

- Before travelling, find out information about the weather in the host country, its rules and regulations, and the workings of its transport system. Take appropriate clothing to avoid difficulties later on. This will ensure you don't waste time when you should be dealing with more important things. Also, make sure you are staying in a location with easy access to and from the media office and stadiums.

- You must be able to communicate in the local language if you want to avoid problems. A successful journalist is fluent in living languages, especially and foremost, in English.

- Connect with the other journalists participating in the tournament (the ‘press

pack’). This will widen your horizons and ensure you have quick access to important information needed for your coverage.

- Constant attendance inside the media office will help with your work. Take sufficient time ahead of the game to prepare for your coverage properly.

- Begin preparing your coverage ahead of the game and during it, right up to the end when the results are updated to make sure you send your piece on time. Consider time differences between your country and the hosting country of the event.”



## Camila Matuso

Brazilian Journalist at [www.folha.uol.com.br](http://www.folha.uol.com.br), who covered the World Cup in 2014 and 2018

“There are two ways to prepare for the World Cup. In my case, for example, when I found out I was going to be in Russia to cover the Brazilian team, the first thing I did was to start research on the team, coaches and where matches and training would be held. Being well-informed is the first step to knowing the news. The second thing is to map out the people involved with the team. I looked them up before the trip because they are the ones I would be looking to speak to when preparing any reports. For example, if Neymar was injured and you had never spoken to the team’s doctor before, it is not likely he would take your call, and highly unlikely he would give you any information about the player.

For the World Cup in 2014, I spent 50 days in the city of Belo Horizonte, where I covered games in Mineirão stadium and training sessions of the teams playing there, such as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. I was also in charge of preparing reports on the political aspects of the Brazilian Football Federation CBF - Confederação Brasileira de Futebol, which we call the Cartolas (top hats-leaders) coverage.

I learned a lot by watching the work of other journalists who had previously covered World Cup matches. One thing I learned was that during these types of coverage, there will be moments of calm, but it is always important to be prepared for the moments of crisis.

The biggest challenge is the ability to tell stories different from the other journalists. Most of the journalists are reporting match results and what happens during training. This is the reason why preparation is important because you will make a difference if you are well aware and have already formed your network of sources.”

## Mouldi Jamii :

Tunisian journalist at Al Kass Sports, who covered the World Cup in 2018

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“I was lucky to cover the World Cup in Russia in 2018, both versions of Club World Cup 2019 and 2020 in Doha, and the Arab Cup of 2021 where I joined the FIFA films team as a producer and journalist.

One major problem I have encountered in my work is when I don't get enough time to do my whole job. A fellow journalist who I met covering World Cup matches told me that he had been required to go on air 11 times since that morning and had no time to meet or interview any players or guests.

Also, it can be difficult to report on tournaments if you don't have permission to access all the areas you need to - including, for example, going inside the hotels where the teams are staying. The channel would ask the journalist I met to report from in front of the hotel where the teams were staying, rather than from inside it. So, he would stand outside or by the stadium going live and all he could do was repeat the same line over and over - nothing new.

Another issue in recent years - is that media institutions have stopped sending reporters to cover major sports events if they don't have the rights to broadcast the matches. But I firmly believe news organisations should always send reporters regardless of whether they have the rights.

I fondly remember beautiful and immersing stories from the World Cup in Brazil that were not told from the stadiums, but from the poorer neighbourhoods that follow football, made thousands of miles away from the event. For example, we may forget the results of the matches during the Brazil World Cup, but we cannot ever forget the great photo taken by the photographer of a French news agency of one of the favelas, which featured the fireworks for the opening of the World Cup 2014, and the symbolism it carried, combining the poor reality with rich dreams.

Most diehard football fans remember the story of Paul the Octopus - who was apparently able to predict match results - right? The octopus was located in an underwater zoo in New Zealand, some 7,456 miles from the events of the World Cup.”





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