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# "Bring the Fan to the Game:" Football, Baseball, and the Transformation of Sports Television into Entertainment

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“BRING THE FAN TO THE GAME.” FOOTBALL, BASEBALL, AND THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF SPORTS TELEVISION INTO ENTERTAINMENT

by

Ethan Collins

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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August 2015

## ABSTRACT

### “BRING THE FAN TO THE GAME:” FOOTBALL, BASEBALL, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SPORTS TELEVISION INTO ENTERTAINMENT

by

Ethan Collins

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015  
Under the Supervision of Associate Professor Elana Levine

This thesis analyzes the growing symbiosis of the sport-television relationship as it evolved during the 1960s. Professional football and baseball are primarily considered they demonstrate the ways television impacted local and national audiences. Football embraced television as a way to disseminate the game to a wider, national audience. Baseball, because of its long history as a local attraction, resisted the encroachment of television. Baseball prioritized the live game over the televised version, while football became more visually descriptive for viewers and took on characteristics of entertainment programming. These changes were technologically, industrially, and economically based, and this thesis discusses the interplay between the television networks and professional sports leagues in these arenas. Critics have decried television’s purported negative influence on fans and sport itself. This thesis instead argues that making sport more like entertainment television has brought a unique viewpoint to games that only became possible because of television technology.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

This thesis argues that the 1960s were a time of great experimentation and change for the sports television industry, and would pave the way for sports on TV to become the behemoth business it is today. During that decade, sports leagues influenced programming and advertising decisions at the networks, and television executives collaborated with team owners and commissioners to make games more conducive to recording. The symbiosis that developed between sports and television proved lucrative and influential beyond anyone's imagination, and helped connect a nation of fans to their favorite athletes and teams like never before.

The most important developments during this time revolved around professional football and baseball. Analyzed together, these two sports showcase the major influence television had in changing attitudes about sport. Both leagues used television to reach fans, but the degree to which they embraced television was very different. Baseball emphasized a minimalist broadcast because it believed the live game was sanctified and needed to be protected. This developed as a result of its long history as a local sport, which made some owners uncertain about the need for national exposure. Football, contrastingly, fully embraced television and understood how the medium could help the league introduce itself to many new people across the country. While baseball discouraged the use of new broadcast techniques so fans wouldn't become complacent with home viewing, football grew profoundly more popular by using new technology to enhance its broadcasts. Professional football and baseball diverged in their approach to television coverage during the 1960s, and those decisions have had a lasting impact on the attitudes about each sport.

Two key trends mark the 1960s as a transitional decade in sports television. First, the style and techniques used for broadcasts started as experimentation, but became solidified by the end of the decade. Vast improvements in technology in the early 1960s allowed producers to try new ways to give the home fan a better view of the game. Videotape became much more accessible and easier to use, allowing for the creation of instant replay and slow motion. Satellites gave programmers greater flexibility in what to air and audiences more exposure to geographically distant events, which became especially notable during Olympic broadcasts.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the decade, the experiments in style and breadth of coverage became the norm and had drawn many more viewers than most network executives could have imagined. Sports programming arranged itself to fit the contours of television, and the result began a very lucrative arrangement between the networks and the sports leagues.

The second trend marking the 1960s as a transitional decade was the shift in focus from local to national. Before satellites, radio and television audiences were only exposed to teams and games in their immediate geographic area. Team owners had always been uneasy about radio because they feared the medium's broadcasts would cut into ticket sales. They couldn't see their enterprise as anything but a local attraction, and continued to feel this way about television even into the early 1960s. However, after seeing the large sums of money that could be had through collective bargaining with the networks, a shift occurred that saw owners and leagues attempt to reach the broadest possible audience. This shift was especially prominent for the NFL, the history of which was marked by little fan interest and minimal legitimacy because college football was so well regarded. The lack of history as a local attraction, however, allowed the NFL to easily transition to the national stage by way of television. MLB (or professional baseball more loosely), on the other hand, had a long and

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Catsis, *Sports Broadcasting* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1996), 35.



rich history embedded in local communities across the country. The switch to a national, visual focus went against the well-established tenets of baseball, something the NFL didn't have to worry about. The switch from local to national is also a metaphor for the transition from MLB to the NFL as the most prominent and popular sport seen in the media. Moreover, this national audience mentality coincided with the worldwide broadcast of the Olympics and a subsequent rise in nationalism. Sport became entwined with patriotism in the midst of the Cold War, and American professional leagues benefitted financially from increased prestige.

Moreover, the broadcast innovation and emphasis on a national audience immensely helped the fan experience. Television viewers were privy to many more games than they would have been otherwise and became connected to teams across the country they would never have been able to see in person. Fans could move away from their favorite team's market and still have access to televised games. The technological innovations gave producers the tools necessary to transport the fan onto the field of play and into the locker room like no fan had before, and certainly not anyone in the stadium seats. Sports television in the 1960s provided unprecedented access to the home viewer because producers could offer new types of content impossible to encounter at live games. Fans are the lifeblood of sports and enhancing their experience will keep them loyal to certain leagues and teams. Producers in the '60s showed that catering to television fans could be a huge boon for networks and provide certified cultural phenomena like the Olympic Games and *Monday Night Football*.

However, some scholars like Garry Whannel and Benjamin G. Rader see television as cancerous to sport. For them, television has corrupted sport, turning it into a commercialized frenzy for ratings and profit. The amateur ideal of playing for love of the game is long gone

as athletes hold out for larger contracts and parade around in the celebrity spotlight.

Furthermore, critics support their argument by claiming that sport is an activity separate from entertainment and therefore should not be manipulated just to adhere to television's filmic practices. To these critics, the fact that television has transformed sport into a spectacle akin to other entertainment programming is an act to admonish.

These critics are nostalgic for a type of sport that never fully existed, but more so they are ornery about the medium of television. Underwriting all the criticisms of televised sport are the problems elitist and sexist scholars have always had with television. Arguments about mass culture and the domestic sphere are subtextually attached to criticisms of sports television commercialization. The problem, for critics, isn't so much that sport has changed to conform to television production but that television is an intellect-sapping, feminine medium trafficking in lowbrow content.

In this thesis, I refute the arguments of these critical scholars (both overt and subtextual) by showing how technological innovation made the fan experience more exciting and intimate, and by exposing the aspects of pre-televised sport that are forgotten when critics idealize the past. Furthermore, I show how sports leagues have changed the television industry in many ways, and are not, as critics assume, passive entities succumbing to the voracious commercial network machine. Lastly, I argue that sports are entertainment, and any critic claiming the two are separate entities is inherently revoking the agency of audiences and seeing television as a low form of culture because of its ties to women and the home.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review explores the established scholarship on the important sports broadcasting milestones from the first half of the twentieth century, the broadcast practices and technology that changed in the 1960s, and scholars' reactions to the incredibly profitable relationship between sports and television. Moreover, the end of the 1950s is analyzed because of the scandals that caused the television industry to reinvent itself in myriad ways.

### *Sports Broadcasting History*

John R. Catsis succinctly details the relationship between sports and media in his book *Sports Broadcasting*. Starting with telegraph operators receiving transmissions from baseball games and relaying the information to crowds using a megaphone, sports have long found a way to be part of technological innovation.<sup>2</sup> This process of re-creation by announcers away from the stadium carried over to the telephone and radio, and became the primary way most people experienced baseball games. By the mid-1930s, broadcasters were paying fees to cover games, but many of baseball's team owners denied broadcasters access to stadiums altogether because they feared radio was siphoning potential ticket sales.<sup>3</sup>

James R. Walker analyzes this period in which the norms of sports radio were being established in his article, "The Baseball-Radio War, 1931-1935." Baseball's old guard wanted to squash radio and continue their profitable relationship with newspapers. However, some forward thinking owners (and the bulk of broadcasters) saw radio as a way to draw in new fans. Games were played during the day, a perfect time to attract women around the house and children home from school. This debate would influence the sports broadcasting

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<sup>2</sup> Catsis, *Sports Broadcasting*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 16.

industry for years to come, even repeating itself when television became a household medium.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Walker and coauthor Robert V. Bellamy Jr. argue in the book *Center Field Shot* that the baseball owners consciously chose to favor the live game over the mediated version. Walker and Bellamy evoke the owners' point of view in saying, "Innovation could only be tolerated as long as it did not affect, or even appear to affect, the game on the field. Television was ancillary to the stadium experience.... Television was still the threat that must be managed, rather than an opportunity to exploit."<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, sports like football, boxing, and wrestling fully embraced television after the war as a way to attract new fans to sports that weren't entrenched in the American identity like baseball was. Dennis Deninger outlines the post-World War II primetime schedule as almost exclusively the domain of sports because it was easy to produce and didn't require paying screenwriters or actors. By 1948, sports occupied 27 ½ hours of programming between the hours of 7-11 p.m. EST, with at least one show for each day of the week except Saturday.<sup>6</sup> However, as more television sets were bought during the early 1950s, a greater diversity of content was desired. Entertainment programming became important to draw in the widest possible audience.<sup>7</sup>

Ron Powers calls the time after 1948 until the late 1950s the "Dark Ages" of television sports, as sitcoms, westerns, and game shows proliferated rapidly.<sup>8</sup> Networks scaled back sports programming for a few reasons. First, market research showed that

<sup>4</sup> James R. Walker, "The Baseball Radio War, 1931-1935," *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 19 (2011): 53.

<sup>5</sup> James R. Walker and Robert V. Bellamy Jr., *Center Field Shot* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 112.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Deninger, *Sports on Television* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ron Powers, *Supertube* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1984), 52.

women controlled family viewing during primetime, causing programmers to search for shows that appealed to families. Second, the unpredictable end times for games caused headaches for programmers. Lastly, and perhaps most telling, snobbery existed among network executives, who felt sports were a form of low culture not suited for such an important mass medium as television.<sup>9</sup>

Advertisers helped networks realize the potential of sports, and Robert McChesney outlines this attitude change within the television industry. The discovery by advertisers that sports had access to a very desirable market was the “most critical factor” for the relationships between television and sports to blossom, and end Powers’ “Dark Age.”<sup>10</sup> Especially after the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 was enacted, through which sports leagues were given anti-trust exemption to negotiate television deals as one entity, networks saw the profitability of buying the rights to all of a league’s games and offering spot advertisements.<sup>11</sup> Advertising, therefore, is seen as a key catalyst for the increased interdependence between television and sports.

The sources discussing the industry before 1960 show how the landscape of sports television looked before it was treated as entertainment. Moreover, this literature helps contextualize the reasons why the NFL began to surpass MLB as the nation’s most popular sport- by using television to make changes to their product. In this thesis, I draw on this material to show the beginning of the sport-television relationship and the industry practices that initiated a growth in popularity that would culminate in the pop culture sensation of *Monday Night Football*.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>10</sup> Robert W. McChesney, “Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States,” in *Media, Sports, & Society*, ed. Lawrence A. Wenner (London: Sage Publications, 1989), 62.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 61.

### *The 1960's Innovation Revolution*

Sports television in the 1960s underwent profound changes that would realign network priorities. Sports became a major ratings draw and a major revenue stream for networks once producers realized they could adopt filmic techniques used in entertainment programming to make games more appealing to the home viewer.

Most scholars would agree that talking about sports television in the 1960s begins and ends with ABC. The perpetual third-place network used sports more effectively than its competitors to eventually become the number one network in the late 1970s. According to Bert Randolph Sugar, ABC Sports found great success at the very start of the decade, leading to an aggressive pursuit for sports contracts as a way to stay relevant. One success was the introduction of the anthology series *Wide World of Sports*, in which small crews would scour the globe finding obscure or unknown sporting events to showcase to American audiences. Sugar notes that *Wide World* was formed as a necessity to hold onto affiliate stations clamoring for sports programming during the summer. The show became a huge hit in part because the sports shown couldn't be seen anywhere else.<sup>12</sup>

*Wide World* was also popular because of its unique emphasis on the dramatic elements often not evident in the event itself. Simply showing these obscure sports to American audiences with no prior investment would not arouse any interest. However, Richard O. Davies explains that ABC got viewers invested “by emphasizing underlying storylines- colorful personalities, danger to contestants, feuds between competitors, and the

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<sup>12</sup> Bert Randolph Sugar, *The Thrill of Victory: The Inside Story of ABC Sports* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1978), 86.

exotic location.”<sup>13</sup> The event almost became secondary to the story being told about the athletes and their backstories.

This emphasis on the drama of sports beyond what happened on the field of play is attributable to Roone Arledge more than anyone else, producer for and eventual head of ABC Sports. Davies notes that Arledge joined ABC in 1960 and had “the conviction that if he offered casual viewers entertainment and drama that went beyond the game itself, they would tune in.”<sup>14</sup> Arledge wanted to get the “total atmosphere within the stadium” by using all kinds of microphones and cameras that had at that point never been introduced to sports telecasts.<sup>15</sup> Arledge was adamant about creating a spectacle, not just relaying a game, and audiences responded very positively.

The vision Arledge had, however, wouldn’t have come to fruition without considerable advances in the technology needed to produce sports telecasts. The most notable advancement came with the Ampex Corporation’s introduction of videotape in 1956. As Michael Z. Newman outlines, videotape was a welcome reprieve from film both because it could be reused and looked exactly like live television.<sup>16</sup> Videotape allowed for greater manipulation of images than film and was instrumental in the creation of the instant replay, the most important technological development for sports television in the 1960s.<sup>17</sup>

Videotape gets most of the credit for making sports productions easier, but Deninger argues that the Zoomar lens was equally as important. The lens “brought visual drama to sports television” by allowing camera operators to move from a wide shot into a close-up

<sup>13</sup> Richard O. Davies, *Sports in American Life* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 195.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Z. Newman, *Video Revolutions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 17.

instantaneously or vice versa depending on the situation.<sup>18</sup> Previously, cameras were equipped with three or four lenses of varying focal length, and operators would have to manually switch between the lenses for the desired shot. Now, though, any camera could enhance the drama of a situation with a timely zoom or close-up without cutting away.<sup>19</sup>

The other major development, discussed by Catsis, is the launch of communications satellites. In 1962, Telstar went live, which linked the U.S. and Europe through television. Catsis outlines two advantages satellites gave programmers. Firstly, choice and flexibility within the schedule became much easier. Portable satellite trucks could transmit signals from anywhere with a road, providing access to more games.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, satellites improved over microwave transmission, which had a limited signal and gave viewers a single game on the television schedule. With satellites, however, instantaneous switches between games could be made, and later in the decade the “squeeze zoom” allowed two games to be shown on the screen at the same time.<sup>21</sup>

These sources show how sports television became entertainment in the 1960s, which helped the home viewer gain more and better access to sporting events. Sport and television mutually created these changes. By making sports broadcasts more like entertainment programming, both professional leagues and the networks benefitted. Using advanced technology to make televised games indispensable to fans gave sport the power to ask for higher rights fees, and gave broadcasters the power to demand higher advertising fees. Furthermore, I use these sources to emphasize sport’s contributions to the changing face of television because most scholars see television as the active force of change in this

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<sup>18</sup> Deninger, *Sports on Television*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Catsis, 35

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



relationship. Sport, however, was not passive during this time, but actively sought to better adhere to the filmic practices of television, as well as instituting procedures that the networks would adopt. In this thesis, I use this material to solidify the argument that the sport-television relationship is symbiotic, and show how the emphasis to make sports broadcasts look like entertainment programming made sports more culturally relevant to a wider audience than ever before.

### *Similarities between News and Sports*

The 1960s revolution of sports television was not the only large scale shift in the industry's approach to programming. News shows changed format and increased in number as a response to scandal at the close of the 1950s. Documentary news launched, which provided more detailed information on a single subject of pertinence to national or international relations. This emphasis on more and better news brought the networks positive public relations at a time when the viewing public was becoming wary of television's role as public servant.

Television was stigmatized at the end of the 1950s by the government and the public because of two scandals. The first involved the advertising industry and its manipulation of content. In 1959, it was revealed that contestants on many popular quiz shows had been engaged in cheating by representatives for the sponsors. The quiz show scandals rocked the nation, causing outrage aimed at both the cheating contestants and the networks for betraying the public's trust. A grand jury, a Congressional probe, and comments by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower describing his shock all highlight the public relations nightmare in

which the networks found themselves.<sup>22</sup> Michael Curtin mentions that critics of television's commercialism wanted the medium to be used for education and "serious engagement with public affairs."<sup>23</sup> One of the most vocal opponents of television's commercial nature was Newton Minow, who was appointed FCC chairman in 1961 in large part because of his critical stance on the medium. Minnow didn't only bemoan the state of television content with his "vast wasteland" speech, but offered a way to restore public trust: news department expansion.<sup>24</sup>

Minnow's appointment was not only due to the quiz show scandals and the subsequent backlash against television. The FCC itself had been embroiled in controversy over the distribution of station licenses. In 1952, the FCC had to allocate a limited number of "extremely valuable large-market VHF licenses," according to Boddy.<sup>25</sup> The next few years of license distribution caused "concern about ex parte contacts and conflicts of interest," and a Library of Congress study found that the FCC was granting licenses without any discernable pattern.<sup>26</sup> By 1957, a U.S. House of Representatives investigation had begun that would find evidence of "FCC misconduct sufficient to bring about the immediate resignation of one commissioner and subsequent resignation of the commissioner's chair."<sup>27</sup>

The quiz show scandals and evidence of FCC misconduct made television a target of public disdain. One way for the networks to regain the favor of viewers, and to appease Minnow's new administration, was to recommit themselves to performing a public service and the news documentary became the perfect solution. Networks took control of their

<sup>22</sup> William Boddy, *Fifties Television* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 219.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Curtin, "NBC News Documentary: 'Intelligent Interpretation' in a Cold War Context," in *NBC America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 176.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 215.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 216.

programming to ensure sponsors would no longer interfere and cause problems. Michele Hilmes, in *NBC: America's Network*, writes that spot advertising (multiple sponsors buying short segments of time during programs) overtook program sponsorship in the wake of the quiz show scandals as a way for networks to gain more control over content. Networks vowed to take an “activist role in programming,” and the documentary became a key component of this new mantra.<sup>28</sup>

### *The Symbiosis between Sports and Television*

The relationship between sport and television has been written about ever since the former began appearing on the latter. After the 1960s made sports television more prominent in American homes, the money exchanged between leagues and networks skyrocketed ever upward. The influence of commercialism on sports worried many, and by the 1980s cultural critics disparaged the seemingly insidious effect television had on sport.

Michael R. Real categorizes the different viewpoints on the sports-television relationship as symbiotic or parasitic. There are clear benefits for each: inexpensive content for television, greater exposure for sports.<sup>29</sup> The main dichotomy offered by Real, however, revolves around the “sports geek,” a religious watcher of sports who feels compelled to learn all available information.<sup>30</sup> Critics see these viewers as “beer-guzzling, chip-chomping, passive sponge[s],” but Real suggests they could also be seen as “self-realized, brilliantly

<sup>28</sup> Michele Hilmes, “Introduction to Part Three,” in *NBC America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 171.

<sup>29</sup> Michael R. Real, “Television and Sports,” in *A Companion to Television*, ed. Janet Wasko (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 337.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 338.

informed worshippers of high achievement.”<sup>31</sup> Both views certainly have real-world analogues, which make this argument so hard to unravel.

The critics of televised sport vehemently suggest that television has irrevocably changed the essence of sport. Garry Whannel argues that “sport-branded merchandizing” grew rapidly as sports became widely visible, and leagues gave networks whatever they wanted to secure the lucrative rights fees.<sup>32</sup> This in turn “led to the undermining of 19<sup>th</sup> century benevolent paternalist and voluntary sport governance by new entrepreneurial sport agencies and forced sport governing bodies to transform themselves to accommodate the primacy of television, commercialization and commodification.”<sup>33</sup> The inherent insistence that the earliest days of organized sport were its ideal version pervades all criticism of sports television. Television took sport, supposedly an innocent activity performed only out of love for the game, and morphed it into a spectacle entirely based upon profit.

Perhaps the most critical opponent of the sport-television relationship is Benjamin G. Rader, who blames both television and suburban life for ruining the “traditional sporting experience.”<sup>34</sup> Rader’s central argument is that “the changes induced by television have altered the role that sports play in American life.”<sup>35</sup> Before television, sport was a special form of human drama separate from other forms of entertainment. For Rader, “sports ideally exemplified how such opposing impulses as the individual vs. the community, play vs. work, and self-control vs. indulgence could be contained or reconciled.”<sup>36</sup> However, the influx of television money tarnished sport and made it into an entertainment spectacle rather than the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Garry Whannel, “Television and the Transformation of Sport,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625 (2009): 206.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin G. Rader, *In Its Own Image* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 196 .

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

transcendent form of human emotion, competition, and leisure. Television “ultimately trivialized and diluted the traditional sporting experience” with too many games, too much hype, too much extra attraction, and too much sensationalism.<sup>37</sup>

Rader’s argument is rooted in nostalgia, which is problematic because he is able to choose events and characteristics that help his narrative reconstruction of history and ignore anything else. Nathan and McDonald, writing about sports nostalgia specifically, say arguments like Rader’s “reassert the superiority of a past in which vivid gender role conformity and structured racial segregation were locked firmly into place.”<sup>38</sup> Rader’s problems with television’s place in suburban life show how he adheres to the outdated idea of the domestic sphere as feminine. His insistence that the past was a better time makes the strict gender roles of the post war years seem normal and natural. Television as a medium is not the problem, but its coding as feminine, especially during the time Rader is fondly remembering, warrants TV as unworthy of the masculine world of sport.

Thankfully, others have advanced the argument for symbiosis, including Edgerton and Ostrof, who call the sports-television union an “awesome symbiotic relationship.”<sup>39</sup> The authors see the bond between sports and television as a natural fit forming early in television’s history because “sports can readily provide plenty of excitement, entertainment, intimacy, spontaneity, and spectacle while almost never violating the properties of a network or the sensibilities of the viewing public.”<sup>40</sup> Because sports have always been a facet of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel A. Nathan and Mary G. McDonald, “Yearning for Yesteryear,” in *Sport in America, Volume II*, ed. David K. Wiggins (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2010), 382.

<sup>39</sup> Gary Edgerton and David Ostroff, “Sports Telecasting,” in *TV Genres*, ed. Brian G. Rose (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 258.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 257.

entertainment, the changes they have undergone to accommodate television and reach more viewers are “trivial.”<sup>41</sup>

Joan M. Chandler focuses on the audience to argue that sports have greatly benefited from television. The introduction to her *Television and National Sport* begins:

I love to watch sport on television. I have the best seat in the house, choose my own refreshments, and am told more about the game than I really want to know. Not for me the traffic jams, the hard benches, the chill or sweat of the stadium. And above all, TV takes me where I could never afford to go.<sup>42</sup>

Chandler emphasizes how television has granted access to fans that otherwise would have no way to experience sporting events. Sports are to be enjoyed, and without fans there would be no professional leagues operating with billion dollar budgets. Television provides that enjoyment and gives mass audiences an entertaining spectacle unlike anything else.

Moreover, Chandler notes that television has not fundamentally changed sport, but only exposed the tendencies that have always been there: “TV executives have simply built on the commercial foundations already laid by the sports industry.”<sup>43</sup> Ron Powers takes this same attitude about the commercial nature of sports further, saying it is a fallacy to think “that TV [is] the active force, and not a repository for human greed, moribundity, and narcissistic fantasizing.”<sup>44</sup> Essentially, sports teams and leagues have always been run for

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>42</sup> Joan M. Chandler, *Television and National Sport* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), xi.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Powers, *Supertube*, 106.

profit, but it wasn't until the money involved rose exponentially and sports started changing to accommodate television that anyone took issue.

However, while these scholars see the sports-television relationship as symbiotic, none of them promote the idea that sports can also actively change television. This thesis extends the arguments of the pro-television scholars to show how sports have also changed television, while also refuting the arguments of the sport-television critics that rely on nostalgia, sexism, and the dismissal of fan importance. I do this by reinterpreting the actions of sports leagues as active decisions rather than responding to network changes, as well as using popular press articles to show how people during the 1960s and 1970s gladly accepted sports' more prominent role on television. Furthermore, I analyze the time period in which the sport-television critics are writing to show how the political climate of the early 1980s fostered an attitude of fond, yet myopic, remembrance of the past. The fact that sports have transformed into a massively successful entertainment spectacle is not something to be decried as critics have done. Rather, the sport-television relationship should be embraced by anyone caring about sports for its ability to bring viewers more access than they could ever have visiting the stadium.

## **Method**

This thesis has two major prongs of analysis. The first involves how sport and television worked together to improve each other and reach unprecedented popularity and exposure in the 1960s. Within this analysis, I focus more on the contributions sport made to television because most scholarship on this topic tends to argue that television was the

primary agent of change. The burgeoning sport-television relationship of the 1960s was symbiotic, and any research taking a technologically determinist stance is missing the full picture. Secondary sources from both the television studies perspective and the sports history perspective are used to cover the milestones of the sport-television relationship through the end of the 1960s. I interpret the underlying assumptions of each source and argue that sport changed television even as many authors see sport as the passive recipient of change.

The second prong of my analysis involves the implications of the sport-television relationship and its influence on attitudes about the television industry. Many see television as having changed sport because the medium arose after the establishment of most professional leagues and intercollegiate athletics. Yet so much more is involved in studying sport and television, especially from an industry perspective. As Michele Hilmes writes, “industry study is the translation of authorship into a dispersed site marked by multiple, intersecting agendas and interests, where individual authorship in the traditional sense still most certainly takes place, but within a framework that robs it, to a greater or lesser degree, of its putative autonomy.”<sup>45</sup> Simply stating that television changed sport is a grossly underdeveloped argument that doesn’t take into consideration all the decisions that have to be made within and between the networks and the governing sport bodies, as well as the influence of advertisers and audiences.

My analysis looks at how existing attitudes about television shaped the way sports were understood once they began to take on characteristics of entertainment programming. It is important to study the sport-television relationship from an industrial history perspective to gain a better understanding of the many entities that contributed to its growth. Looking at the

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<sup>45</sup> Michele Hilmes, “Nailing Mercury: The Problem of Media Industry Historiography,” in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 22.



interplay between radio and sport reveals the precedents set between broadcasters and leagues that would impact how television was first received. Also, using sources that provide first-hand accounts of production policies and tactics reveals how the networks and leagues collaborated to produce those changes. I use Roone Arledge's autobiography and other sources discussing the new production emphasis for sports to show how sports television changed and how the sport-television relationship was symbiotic. Moreover, looking primarily at the television industry rather than the content contextualizes the reactions to the changing look of sports broadcasts. Critics like Benjamin G. Rader analyze sports television, but his arguments are rife with underlying attitudes about television as a medium. The more sports took on characteristics of entertainment programming, the more the assumptions about television influenced how viewers understood sports. I parse popular press articles and secondary scholarly research to show how attitudes about television shaped a new way of thinking about sports in the 1960s. This analysis includes sources written during the 1960s and critiques written during the 1980s, the latter of which discusses the ways the political climate can influence nostalgia and reveal certain attitudes about television as it pertains to sport.

Overall, this thesis takes the existing scholarship on sport-television and reanalyzes the basic assumptions made about technology's role in the specific cultural context of sports. I show how sports changed television to debunk claims of technological determinism in previous scholarship. I also show how sports television developed in the 1960s by adopting traits and techniques akin to entertainment programming, offering the home viewing fan a new kind of access to sport. Lastly, I argue that those who dismiss the reinvented look of sports television that began in the 1960s because it bastardizes the purity of sporting

competition are rewriting the past using nostalgia to construct a narrative that suits only their vision of sport and disregards larger socio-historical forces.

## **Chapter Breakdown**

This thesis has four chapters, including the current introduction. Chapter two analyzes the sport-media relationship prior to 1960. This contextualizes events leading up to the radical changes involved in making sports television an entertainment spectacle. The relationships between professional leagues and the media before World War II influenced how television would become part of the broadcasting package. The attitudes toward media that the NFL and MLB had prior to 1960, and especially during the later 1950s, are contrasted to show how the former embraced television and became much more popular at the expense of the latter and its hesitance to use television to enhance the on-field product. Also in this chapter I detail events impacting the television industry as a whole in the late 1950s. Scandal caused the networks to shift priorities in their programming approach, which I argue is one factor that made the early 1960s a perfect time for production experimentation. I explore television news to show how the industry was shaken up at this time, and to provide evidence that games were not the only kinds of content making changes to broadcast production. This chapter relies on cross-referencing between secondary scholarly research to draw connections and conclusions about the NFL and MLB, and about the similarities between news and sports leading up to 1960.

Chapter three covers the technological innovations and changing production philosophy of the 1960s. Football is prominently analyzed because it took advantage of the

new style better than anything else. Roone Arledge is discussed in this chapter as well, as his contributions to sports television directly impacted football and the Olympics. This chapter highlights changes made by both Arledge and others in the television industry to help improve sports broadcasts, and changes instituted by those representing the sports leagues to show how the sport-television relationship is symbiotic. An analysis of *Monday Night Football* ends this chapter, showing how the experimental techniques and emphasis on entertainment for the home viewer coalesced into a cultural phenomenon that extended sports in the realm of pop culture.

Chapter four explores the varying attitudes about the sport-television relationship. This chapter acts as a conclusion to the thesis by discussing the different ways sport was thought about as it became increasingly tied to television. The implications of the sport-television relationship, notably the ways attitudes about television have influenced how viewers and fans feel about sport, shows why studying sports television in the 1960s is important. I look at popular press articles talking about the changing face of sports on television from the '60s to show how attitudes during that time began to take shape. Also, I refute the arguments of Benjamin G. Rader and others to show how their crusade against sports television is really about distaste with television as a medium and how it reflects the conservative political climate during the time of their writing. The attitudes about the sport-television relationship speak to larger cultural undercurrents about technology, tradition, domesticity, and the public/private divide, and this chapter shows how my historical industrial analysis ties all these ideas together.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Sports Broadcasting Before 1960

Many developments occurred within and between sport and television prior to the 1960s when sports were transformed into television entertainment. Radio set precedents that would initially impact sport's place on television. Professional baseball and football reacted to television's encroachment into stadiums in different ways during the 1950s that would impact the future of broadcasting rights. News went from under-budgeted experimentation to vital and fully embraced network programming in a way that sports would mirror in the next decade. This chapter will go into detail on each of these developments that would prime the television industry for a new, more entertaining and artistic type of sports television beginning in the 1960s.

#### *Sport and Radio*

Radio's development has implications for the sport-television relationship, but the newspaper-sport relationship must first be acknowledged as an important precursor. During the Industrial Revolution, ideas about mass appeal proliferated. Immigrant populations were moving headlong into cities and sport provided entertainment that needed no translator. More people acclimated to the U.S. and literacy rates improved, leading to the success of the *Spirit of the Times*, a weekly New York City sports newspaper that reached a circulation of 100,000 in the 1850s.<sup>46</sup>

Eventually sports were included in daily newspapers, and by the end of the century the organization of professional baseball led to more print attention for the sport. The amount

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<sup>46</sup> McChesney, "Media Made Sport," 51.

of space given to sport jumped from 4% in 1890 to 16% in 1923, and this “sensitiv[ity] to popular demand” led to “a stream of editions in the afternoon to report on the progress of games.”<sup>47</sup> After the turn of the century photographs began appearing in sports sections, for the first time giving those unable to attend games a glimpse inside the stadium. Editors also gave reporters more freedom to give accounts of trade speculation, players’ offseason stories, and rule changes to “heighten anticipation” for the coming season.<sup>48</sup> By 1913, newspapers were a firmly entrenched part of baseball as the AP had wires in every major league ballpark and tons of afternoon newspaper offices.<sup>49</sup>

Once radio arrived, sport provided cheap content for the fledgling medium. The first sports radio broadcasts began in the early 1920s and were characterized by re-creation, a process that allowed radio stations to broadcast an event without an announcer present. Stations could pay to receive information about a baseball game or boxing match via telegraph from someone present at the event, which helped work around geographic distance or lack of available radio lines. Announcers could then recreate the event for their audience as if they were there, changing inconsequential details but relaying the major developments.<sup>50</sup>

While distance or lack of available infrastructure contributed to re-creations, the financial savings that could be had were also a factor. Broadcasters could avoid the costs of telephone lines and didn’t have to pay travel expenses for announcers. Also, because announcers weren’t at the live event, broadcasters could delay the start time, cut out the time between innings or rounds, and complete an event in less time than normal. Stations using re-

<sup>47</sup> Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 92.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Catsis, 2.

creation could then fit more programming into their schedules, thus making more money from advertisers.<sup>51</sup>

The mindset of broadcasters trying to save money is linked to the advertising boom of the 1920s according to Robert McChesney, who in this context writes about newspapers, but whose ideas can translate to radio as well. At this time there was a greater insistence on profit and mass appeal, and sports were a perfect fit because of their popularity and cheap production costs. Moreover, subscriptions to the AP wires were cheap and all sports were available on them.<sup>52</sup> Sports were easy for broadcasters to promote to all demographics because they were ideologically safe and wouldn't antagonize or polarize audiences like politics.<sup>53</sup> There was also the added benefit of "civic boosterism" that gave a community an identity through sport, which inherently positioned the station as the facilitator of this local cohesiveness.<sup>54</sup> These trends dealing with mass appeal and cheap content would rise again with the advent of television.

Sport's popularity on radio became almost immediately apparent. In 1921, the year commercial radio began, the World Series broadcast in New York resulted in 4,000 letters applauding the coverage, which speaks to the number of people tuned into the new medium and the way baseball could attract a large audience.<sup>55</sup> By 1925, radio had reached "a turning point" as people began to depend increasingly on the medium for information and entertainment. That year's World Series garnered 50,000 letters from listeners, proving that the union between sport and radio was an important one for broadcasters and the public.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>52</sup> McChesney, 56.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Catsis, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 6.

Stations certainly took notice of America's growing dependence on radio. Most early stations were used as tools to sell radios because electronics manufacturers owned them.<sup>57</sup> Manufacturers would want popular, quality content to grow the demand for receivers, and the fact that sports were relied upon heavily in the 1920s shows that sports were desired content. A perfect distillation of this process occurred in 1927 when the Dempsey-Tunney championship boxing match contributed to an estimated \$90,000 worth of radio sales in a single New York department store. McChesney uses this example as evidence that radio helped sport gather millions of new listeners that had previously never had access to matches, games, or other events.<sup>58</sup> Although I think McChesney should also emphasize how sport helped buoy and grow radio into a vast broadcasting web during its earliest and most impressionable days, his overall acknowledgement of the symbiosis between sport and radio is present. Moreover, this foreshadows the early days of television and the networks' use of sports as cheap content to anchor a schedule still developing other forms of programming.

In baseball, some team owners saw how radio could benefit their bottom line. Phillip Wrigley of the Chicago Cubs "believed the broadcasts added to the popularity of the sport, and certainly to his team."<sup>59</sup> Wrigley began allowing Cubs games to be broadcast in 1925, and by the end of the decade saw to it that all the team's games were available on radio.<sup>60</sup> However, a significant amount of other owners were stridently against allowing broadcasters into the stadium and giving their product away for free over the airwaves. James R. Walker calls this clash among owners and between baseball and radio the Baseball-Radio War, and details its developments in the 1930s. The fight over radio's place in baseball is significant

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>58</sup> McChesney, 59.

<sup>59</sup> Catsis, 6.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

both because it would set a precedent for how the introduction of television would be handled twenty years later, and because it shows how sport can have a decisive impact on the type and amount of media coverage it receives.

The opposing owner coalitions arose at this time because radio was threatening to replace the newspaper, with which baseball had enjoyed a symbiotic relationship for quite some time. Owners allowed newspapers to report on games because the columns got people interested enough to attend the game live, and newspapers benefitted from increased sales when ballgames were covered.<sup>61</sup> Radio, though, could give fans access to a game in the comfort of their own home without having to buy either a ticket or newspaper. There was great fear among many owners that radio would reduce attendance as more people simply stayed home out of convenience.<sup>62</sup> This sentiment that broadcasts would be “too appealing” would again arise in discussions about television.<sup>63</sup>

The owners were not the only people interested in the radio-baseball debate. A 1931 *New York Times* piece discusses the Western Union Telegraph Company and its place in the matter. Western Union had been paying large sums of money “for exclusive press wire privileges” and “complained that the radio stations had refused to reimburse it.”<sup>64</sup> The telegraph company’s business was being affected by radio’s encroachment into baseball, described by the author of the article as “the radio attack.”<sup>65</sup> Another aspect of the article reveals extra motivation to get rid of radio for certain owners with interests in minor league teams. These owners had “complained that broadcasts keep fans away from their parks so

<sup>61</sup> Walker, “The Baseball Radio War,” 54.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> “Ban on Radio or High Fee for Broadcasting Games Looms in Major Leagues,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1931, 41.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



they can hear play-by-play of major league games” on the radio.<sup>66</sup> Although the main debate pitted two factions of owners against each other, more was at stake for various groups with ties to baseball.

However, some teams saw a great potential to draw in new fans with radio. Games were played during the day, so some thought baseball could appeal to women working in the home and children after school. Radio could reach a wider audience than newspapers and attract new fans that had previously been unacquainted with baseball. Moreover, converting people into fans would help owners recuperate funds lost to lower attendance because of the Great Depression.<sup>67</sup> The teams fighting for radio in ballparks were led by Wrigley and consisted mostly of midwestern teams that had a wider, more geographically broad fan base than the anti-radio coalition led by New York Yankees owner Jacob Ruppert. Teams supporting Ruppert were on the east coast and in big cities, making newspaper coverage ample enough to reach the geographically small fan base.<sup>68</sup>

Ruppert and his cohorts embody the anti-technology sentiments that would eventually allow professional football to overtake MLB as the country’s most popular sport. Just like in the 1950s and 1960s, owners during the 1930s had to be dragged into modernity by promises of huge revenues from advertisers. Yet advertiser money would still take time to appeal to the east coast owners, who were transfixed with maintaining the status quo. Introducing night games into the baseball schedule would allow more people to attend games, thus increasing ticket sales, and would allow owners to ask for more advertising fees for radio broadcasts. This could have been an easy way for owners to ease into a union with radio, but owners like Ruppert were so obstinate in their desire to keep radio out of the stadium that only one team

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Walker, 53.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 55.

had any night games before 1938 (the Cincinnati Reds in 1935).<sup>69</sup> Advertisers eventually convinced the owners to convert MLB to radio by the end of the decade. Baseball was cheap to produce and helped to fill network schedules during the day, making it an attractive program to air. Advertisers were willing to pay good money to get the owners on board, and Wrigley's coalition continued to outvote the east coast owners on the question of a radio ban.<sup>70</sup>

The dissent among baseball's owners helps show the local focus of sport at this time. The east coast owners were only concerned with their teams and wanted a ban on radio even though the Midwest teams would have greatly benefited from coverage. Doing what was best for the individual team was the main priority, not growing MLB as a whole. The local took precedent over the national, but the owners should not be completely denigrated for their lack of foresight. Everything they knew about promotion and selling tickets was based on the local sphere. True national broadcasting may have seemed like science fiction to these men, and baseball's storied history made them even more adverse to change. The owners also had government policy working in their favor. The Radio Act of 1927 and the later Communications Act of 1934 included provisions that have come to be known as the localism principle.<sup>71</sup> The FCC encouraged radio stations to provide services that would benefit the local community. Indeed, the government "authorized very few high-power regional stations, instead authorizing primarily low-power stations whose signals typically carried only a few miles."<sup>72</sup> Until television could grab the collective attention of the nation,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>71</sup> Philip M. Napoli, "The Localism Principle in Communications Policymaking and Policy Analysis: Ambiguity, Inconsistency, and Empirical Neglect," *Policy Studies Journal*, 29 (2001): 374.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

localism dominated the media's mindset and had a great influence on Major League Baseball's attitudes towards media.

### *Industry Attitudes in the 1950s*

The first televised sporting event was a Princeton-Columbia college baseball game in 1939. The game only had one camera to cover the infield, and was by and large panned by critics. Yet sports on television would grow and expand during the 1940s beyond baseball to sports with less dispersed action that could be shot in smaller arenas, like boxing and wrestling.<sup>73</sup> Sports became vital to network schedules in these early days because they were easy to produce and required no scripts or actors. In 1945, the entire primetime schedule was comprised of sports. The next year, the fall television schedule had at least one sporting event on every night except Saturday. By 1948, 7-11 pm EST had 27.5 hours of sports programming per week.<sup>74</sup>

Here sport clearly has an impact on television. With very few programming options, television needed sport to fill the schedule. Television becomes a conduit for boxing matches, baseball games, and other events. The sports stay the same, and are simply transported onto the small screen for viewers to enjoy. Sport saved television from long gaps in programming during these early years while the networks slowly figured out how to appeal to audiences and sell television sets.

The problem for sports, however, was that once sets became more common-place in the home, networks shifted the style of programming toward scripted entertainment. During

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<sup>73</sup> Catsis, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Deninger, 14.

the early 1950s, the postwar boom was in full effect. Families were growing and moving into suburban houses where television sets were one of the first adornments purchased. Moreover, the work-week became shorter, leaving more time for leisure in front of the screen.<sup>75</sup> In 1950, 20 percent of homes owned a television. Five years later, that number jumped to 75 percent.<sup>76</sup> Reaching the widest possible audience became a priority for the networks, and sports did not fit that mold.

Ron Powers calls the time after the sports television apex in 1948 the “Dark Ages” because sports began a descent into television obscurity for a full decade.<sup>77</sup> In 1958, just before sports would start to make a comeback, the fall television schedule only had 2.5 hours of sports programming per week.<sup>78</sup> Sports were not seen as capable of capturing the attention of the whole family, and so networks instead emphasized westerns, sitcoms, and live game shows. Here television starts to embody broadcasting in the most literal sense. By 1951, television could go live from coast to coast thanks to the vigorous push to lay coaxial cable across the country.<sup>79</sup>

One of the few sports to stay relevant in the ‘50s was boxing. The sport had been popular for decades, and television only helped increase exposure at first. Moreover, boxing was aesthetically a perfect match for television at a time when a limited number of cameras could not fully mimic the feeling of being at the event. The ring was small enough to stay completely in focus and viewers only had to keep track of two combatants.<sup>80</sup> However, boxing may have catered to television audiences too well. As the decade wore on, more and

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Davies, *Sports in American Life*, 187.

<sup>77</sup> Powers, 52.

<sup>78</sup> Deninger, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Catsis, 31.

<sup>80</sup> Davies, 189.

more fights populated the primetime schedule as local broadcasters aired fight nights alongside the national networks. Not only did audiences begin to tire from oversaturation, but the athletes themselves couldn't keep up with the demand. Television promoters only wanted fighters with high winning percentages, leading to corruption and scandal as untested boxers were thrust into the limelight before they were ready.<sup>81</sup> By 1960, boxing was off the air.<sup>82</sup> This is one example of television significantly changing sport as boxing went from major ratings grab to programming afterthought. Television was the catalyst for boxing's downfall, but this was the first time a sport dealt with widespread success on the new medium. In the future, sports leagues and networks would work much more closely together to ensure the continued success of their partnership.

Beyond the need to reach the widest possible audience, networks decided to cut sports programming for three other reasons. First, market research showed that women decided what to watch with the family during primetime, and sports would not usually make the cut. Second, the unpredictable end times for games gave programmers headaches. Third, and most telling about the attitudes toward sports television, snobbery existed among the network executives who felt popular sports were not worthy of the new medium.<sup>83</sup> Men like William Paley at CBS and David Sarnoff at NBC thought sports were too working class, and imposed their own taste on programming decisions.<sup>84</sup> Unsurprisingly then, the first two sports CBS was involved with were horse racing and golf because they coincided with the interests of the rich class of executives running the network.<sup>85</sup> Once scripted and studio programming

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<sup>81</sup> McChesney, 61.

<sup>82</sup> Davies, 190.

<sup>83</sup> Powers, 52.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 53.

became more prevalent after 1948, executives had no trouble scaling back the amount of sports that had acted as a glorified placeholder on the schedule.

### *Advertising and the Resurrection of Sports Television*

Classist assumptions about sports and a desire to please the widest possible audience led networks to scale down the amount of sports programming as the 1950s got underway. Thankfully for leagues and fans, a different group of people saw the value of sport from this early stage: advertisers. Advertisers discovered the viability of sports programming because they started to recognize demographics sooner than the networks. Segmenting audiences was a novel idea in the 1950s, but it began catching on with the overpopulated world of magazines. Publishers started to differentiate themselves by targeting specific interests after advertisers realized that identifying types of buying power was more important than blanketing the whole audience with a message. Advertisers wanted “precision” rather than “sheer volume” from magazines, and “[b]y narrowing their editorial range and managing subscription lists, publishers could deliver a definable group of readers.”<sup>86</sup> Even though television was still enamored with mass appeal during this time, the ideas about demographics were certainly germinating within the advertising industry.

Demographic research was certainly applicable to the sporting audience. Sports reached a relatively small audience, but one with a lot of spending power: young men with disposable income or family men in charge of important purchases. Robert McChesney calls this group a “very desirable market” not only because beer and razor companies can easily

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<sup>86</sup> Richard K. Popp, *The Holiday Makers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 52.

appeal to them, but because “big ticket items” like cars and business equipment will also be attractive to this group.<sup>87</sup>

Sports were making themselves important for television with the help of advertisers, who were crucial to network success. As sports became more important to programming toward the end of the ‘50s, especially when the NFL caught the eyes of advertisers, sports changed television. They changed how the schedule looked and was created, and changed attitudes about sport among executives by making themselves worthwhile to the network’s bottom line.

The most prominent sports programming success to this point was Gillette’s *Cavalcade of Sports*, airing on NBC. The razor company first got involved with sports advertising in 1935 when they sponsored the heavyweight boxing championship bout on radio. However, their sponsorship of the 1939 World Series was the marquee event that showed the true potential of sports as commercial broadcasts. Gillette used special World Series wrappers on their packaging to mark the product tie-in and used 16 commercials during each game to promote their product. The company became discouraged, however, when the Series only lasted four games, thus giving them the least amount of exposure for the rights fee. Fortunately, the sponsorship still worked better than Gillette could have imagined; sales increased by 350% following the end of the World Series. The success prompted Gillette to head fully into sports sponsorship, grabbing prominent college football bowl games, the Kentucky Derby, and the 1940 NFL Championship game.<sup>88</sup>

Gillette also held onto the rights for the World Series (and later the MLB All-Star Game) until 1965, at which point NBC obtained the rights as sports broadcasting fees

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<sup>87</sup> McChesney, 62.

<sup>88</sup> Donald Edwin Parente, “A History of Television and Sports” (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1974), 143.

became too expensive for one sponsor to handle alone.<sup>89</sup> Until the mid '60s, NBC was content using Gillette's programming from *Cavalcade*, because "the network...had not yet attained any real comprehension of sports' appeal."<sup>90</sup> This goes to show how entrenched executives were in the sponsorship style of advertising. Because most companies that used sponsorship as a form of television advertising wanted to appeal to the broadest audience, the networks were bound to the same approach. Even though Gillette was going out of its way to procure sponsorship deals with major sporting events, the networks couldn't see the profit potential in getting the rights themselves and selling space to advertisers because of the nature of the industry. Still, sports continued to be seen by network executives as working class entertainment that couldn't appeal to the whole family. Richard C. Crepeau channels this sentiment in saying, "[n]etwork executives were not much interested in sports, and they had to be dragged into it."<sup>91</sup>

Edgar Scherick became one of the most important advertisers to do this dragging. Scherick had experience promoting baseball games for the ad agency Dancer Fitzgerald and their Falstaff Beer account. In 1956, he saw the potential of the NFL to supply ideal viewers for Falstaff, and bought half of the spots for both the Chicago Bears and Chicago Cardinals games.<sup>92</sup> The two Chicago teams used an ad-hoc, 11-station network in the Midwest to reach the geographically disparate fan base for each team, and Scherick noticed that this network overlapped with Falstaff's distribution map. Once the deal was in place, Falstaff benefitted from targeting the exact audience they desired, and the teams benefitted by obtaining media

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<sup>89</sup> Powers, 54.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Richard C. Crepeau, *NFL Football: A History of America's New National Pastime* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 47.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 48.



legitimacy they had lacked until that point.<sup>93</sup> Scherick understood the kinds of profits sports could produce for television, and after proving himself valuable after this deal, he accepted a job offer from CBS to sell spots directly for the network.<sup>94</sup> Scherick's professional trajectory epitomizes the sport-television relationship before the 1960s. Only after advertisers showed how profitable sports broadcasts could be did the networks catch on and start spending rights fees themselves. Sports and television would change each other symbiotically, but only after advertisers showed the way.

### *The Diverging Paths of the NFL and MLB*

Major League Baseball started the 1950s as an important part of television programming, but as the decade wore on, the league found itself embracing the medium less and less. Conversely, the National Football League would not gain relevance until the mid '50s, but would soon take advantage of television and skyrocket to immense popularity, proving itself invaluable to network programmers.

Baseball helped buoy local television schedules in the late 1940s because it was cheaper to produce than studio fare, lasted for a large chunk of time, and was played during the day when there was not much other programming.<sup>95</sup> Combined with coverage of minor league games and women's league games, Walker and Bellamy call this time the "zenith" of locally produced television baseball.<sup>96</sup> In these first years after the war, baseball proved invaluable to many local stations receiving little programming from the networks. Baseball

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<sup>93</sup> Powers, 81.

<sup>94</sup> Crepeau, *NFL Football*, 48.

<sup>95</sup> Walker and Bellamy, *Center Field Shot*, 24.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 25.

helped to make sport an easy solution to blank slots on the television schedule, and gave viewers expectations of finding sport on the dial.

Furthermore, baseball was used to sell television sets during this time, proving that sport could have an impact on television and the ways people would understand a way to use the medium once it nestled itself in the living room. Manufacturers used baseball as a selling point when convincing families to buy new television sets, and still images and illustrations were used in advertisements for sets, a tactic still used today.<sup>97</sup> Even David Sarnoff, who saw himself and the future of television as too high-brow to associate with sports, would later say that manufacturers needed baseball to sell sets in the 1940s and he would have shelled out millions of dollars to obtain the broadcasting rights to keep that selling point.<sup>98</sup> Sarnoff was no doubt speaking with the benefit of hindsight, but the fact remains that baseball was used to sell TV sets and sell ideas about what television was to be used for.

The early 1950s, however, were not as promising for baseball. CBS and NBC each grew its affiliate networks and became national enterprises with link-ups across the country. Between 1948 and 1950 the two networks grew from 12 affiliates to 95, bringing a greater emphasis on appealing to a broad audience, and baseball was seen as a local attraction.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the FCC's station licensing freeze that began in 1948 and would last until 1952 meant that CBS and NBC were taking over already existing stations.<sup>100</sup> Baseball was not getting distributed to new markets, thus curbing any chances at nationalization.

Furthermore, within baseball, teams were not unified in their relationship to television. Each team had different filming protocols for the stations broadcasting games.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>100</sup> Boddy, 51.

First, determining which games to broadcast varied among teams. Some teams broadcast all home games, others chose only select home games; some restricted the number of games broadcast, and still others had dramatic increases or decreases in the amount of games broadcast from year to year.<sup>101</sup> Also, the camera placement in each stadium varied widely. Some stadiums had no room behind home plate and placed cameras side by side on the first baseline; others had the same problem but used the third baseline. Cameras were also placed in the press box, on the dugouts, or right on the field.<sup>102</sup> The differences between telecasts would not have been noticeable to fans at the time that were only privy to the local team's games. However, the inconsistent nature of camera placement and scheduling points to larger issues within baseball itself, namely the disjointedness between the teams and the lack of concern for this problem among the owners. This would not necessarily have been a bad thing for MLB, but as television became more important, a unified, national approach would have served the league much better.

Once again, localism proved to hurt baseball in the burgeoning years of a new mass medium. Just as owners solely focused on their own team to the detriment of the league as a whole during the 1930s, the advent of television allowed for the same sort of short-sightedness. Individual teams negotiated television deals with local stations, and owners were so transfixed with localism that a national game of the week would not surface until 1966.<sup>103</sup> While baseball was able to recover from the war over radio, the resistance to television cost MLB its coveted spot as the nation's favorite sport.

The NFL embraced television wholeheartedly and usurped baseball in popularity by the 1960s. One major factor was the league's commitment to national broadcasting and the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 43.

increased exposure to new possible fans this would bring. Unlike MLB, the NFL was not well established when radio began and therefore was not subject to the government's emphasis on localism. In fact, the NFL only stabilized as a coherent league in the 1950s. Formed in 1920, the NFL had significant turnover in the number of teams playing during its early years. The first six years saw the number of teams increase to 22, but by 1931 that number decreased, incredibly, to ten.<sup>104</sup> By the early '50s, the NFL had finally congealed into a true professional league, and it sought the help of television to legitimize its place alongside other sports like baseball. During that decade, with the help of television, the NFL grew in attendance from an average 25,300 per game to over 40,000, proving that showing games on TV could in fact attract people to the live game.<sup>105</sup>

The NFL's dealings with national television began in 1951 with DuMont. As mentioned previously, live broadcasts could stretch from coast to coast by 1951, and DuMont was more than willing to accept a national deal with the NFL. The network broadcasted five games that year, including the championship between the Los Angeles Rams and Cleveland Browns. The partnership pleased DuMont, leading to the purchase of the annual championship game through 1955, and a game every week by 1953. Moreover, DuMont and the NFL both found success working with one another. "Nine of the twelve NFL clubs ended the 1953 and 1954 seasons in the black, thanks largely to revenue from television, while DuMont realized its largest advertising income from coverage of professional football."<sup>106</sup>

Unfortunately for DuMont, the rest of its programming and poor affiliate relations led to a network shutdown in 1955, leaving the NFL adrift to once again deal directly with local

<sup>104</sup> David Harris, *The League: The Rise and Decline of the NFL* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 12.

<sup>105</sup> Davies, 192.

<sup>106</sup> Dale L. Cressman and Lisa Swenson, "The Pigskin and the Picture Tube: The National Football League's First Full Season on the CBS Television Network," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51 (2007): 480.

stations.<sup>107</sup> Yet CBS had taken notice of the profitable relationship between the defunct network and the NFL, and strove to be next in line to carry professional football across the country. CBS adopted the NFL, but the league would change the look of the Sunday programming lineup. Before 1956, Sundays were a time to air prestige, serious, and intellectual programming rather than broader appeal entertainment shows because advertisers weren't willing to pay for time that they believed would be used by viewers to get out of the house for family activities.<sup>108</sup> Sig Mickelson, former CBS executive, writes that broadcasters would refer to these shows as catering to the public interest but critics called this programming block the "Sunday afternoon ghetto."<sup>109</sup> Despite the network's altruism, the public interest programming was not garnering the kind of attention CBS would have liked. Affiliate pick up numbers were staggeringly low, having dropped precipitously in only a few years.<sup>110</sup>

The solution for CBS was professional football, and by the end of 1956 every NFL team had some deal to carry games with the network. NBC had also realized the potential of the NFL and nabbed the rights to the league's championship game after DuMont folded.<sup>111</sup> The national exposure would bring new fans to the game and help the NFL climb out of college football's shadow. The college game was well established, and most public interest in football surrounded rivalries that dated back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the old stadiums used for college games were not conducive to television production and set up costs were unattractive, especially for schools in rural areas.<sup>112</sup> Conversely, pro teams had stadiums in

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 481.

<sup>108</sup> Powers, 89.

<sup>109</sup> Sig Mickelson, *The Decade That Shaped Television News: CBS in the 1950s* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 173.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>111</sup> Crepeau, 47.

<sup>112</sup> Mickelson, *The Decade That Shaped Television News*, 173.

major cities within reach of coaxial cables and the majority of television set owners.<sup>113</sup> Once DuMont exposed the profitability of the NFL, the pro game began growing in popularity, especially when CBS began televising full seasons.

Not only did the NFL change Sunday afternoon programming from an advertiser wasteland to an advertiser's paradise, commissioner Bert Bell instituted changes to the league and the broadcasting style that would benefit the relationship with television. Contrary to what many might think, Bell and the NFL created TV timeouts in 1958. Bell mandated that a timeout would be called by officials if nine minutes had passed without a stoppage in the first or third quarters.<sup>114</sup> Bell understood how important advertising was to network support of professional football and made the timeouts a part of each game to allow for more commercials. Bell also had guidelines for how the NFL would be represented on screen and made sure CBS was compliant so a precedent would be set for future broadcasts. For one, fights between players were prohibited from being shown because Bell wanted to promote good sportsmanship to audiences, especially children.<sup>115</sup> Also, Bell made sure certain language would be used to evoke particular attitudes. Bell would insist that there were no exhibition games but "hard fought pre-season games," that there was "tackling" rather than "tripping," and that players could not be "wrestled to the ground" because football and wrestling were not the same thing.<sup>116</sup> Bell implemented these nuances because the presentation of the NFL was just as important to the commissioner as the product itself. Television's value in growing the sport was not lost on Bell, and these changes reflect this acknowledgement. Television provided the NFL a blueprint for growth and marketability,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>114</sup> Crepeau, 50.

<sup>115</sup> Crepeau, 47.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 50.

and the league, under Bell's guidance, made changes that helped both sides of the sport-television relationship.

Baseball, on the other hand, continued to keep television at arm's length. As the NFL and CBS joined up, giving every football team a piece of national television revenue, MLB teams kept pursuing local contracts. This process allowed big market teams, like those in New York, to score large rights fees while other teams without metropolitan connections were not able to make as much money.<sup>117</sup> MLB was disjointed and the teams at the top had a vested interest in staying there, even to the detriment of the league as a whole. Moreover, owners worried about television's encroachment could point to attendance numbers that justified their concern. In 1948, 21 million people went to games at the league's 16 ballparks. In 1953, that number had dropped to 14 million.<sup>118</sup>

While the threat of falling ticket sales was a primary motivating factor for owners to deter television's role in baseball, they at least could claim at first that the televised game was inferior to the live version. Critics in the early to mid '50s claimed that telecasters removed agency from the fan by forcing them to focus on whatever the cameras recorded. More importantly, however, critics pointed out the obvious flaw for any baseball broadcast: the white baseball was difficult to see on the small screen.<sup>119</sup> Unlike the NFL, baseball games had various areas of action. The pitcher and batter stood in opposition, not lined up next to each other. Baserunners were far away from outfielders playing a deep hit ball. Fans might even care to see which relief pitchers were warming up in the bullpen.

Technology would improve drastically in only a few years, making broadcasts more visually descriptive and allowing for more cameras to cover more angles. Yet baseball's

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<sup>117</sup> Davies, 187.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>119</sup> Walker and Bellamy, 38.

owners would continue to shy away from using more innovation than was necessary to simply present the game. One perfect example came in 1959 when NBC began using an 80mm lens on its center field camera. The clarity from the new shots was so good that the camera began picking up the catcher's signals, a definite breach of baseball etiquette. Instead of finding a workaround to the problem so the lens could continue providing audiences with better views, though, commissioner Ford Frick demanded the complete removal of the lens from ballparks. NBC capitulated and MLB made sure teams had clauses in future television contracts forbidding the use of that type of lens.<sup>120</sup>

This situation is a perfect encapsulation of the differences between the NFL and MLB as the 1950s gave way to the 1960s. The NFL completely embraced television and used the medium to expand its relevance in the eyes of sports fans across the country. Conversely, the lens incident revealed the old school mindset of the MLB's top brass that "innovation could only be tolerated as long as it did not affect, or even appear to affect, the game on the field. Television was ancillary to the stadium experience...[and] was still the threat that must be managed rather than an opportunity to exploit."<sup>121</sup> MLB's insistence that television would ruin the game and that ticket sales should be prioritized above all else would make baseball less relevant than ever before as television became the most prominent mass medium in history.

### *News, Sport, and the Public Interest*

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 112.



As discussed in the introductory chapter, the quiz show and FCC licensing scandals drew serious admonition from television critics and the public at large near the end of the 1950s. The enlargement of news divisions at the three networks signaled an acknowledgement of the public relations crisis at hand, but also got the television industry thinking in a new way. The reformation of news broadcasts and explosion of primetime documentaries was (at least to the outside world) a recommitment to television's original goal to serve the public interest. The changes that took place at the dawn of the 1960s would also, however, pave the way for the subsequent changes to sports television.

Network news broadcasts began with short programming slots. In the fall of 1948, NBC and CBS had fifteen-minute weeknight newscasts.<sup>122</sup> The fifteen-minute format would remain as time progressed, but the documentary program would bring serious issues into the home in long form as the '60s began. Michael Curtin outlines the rapid growth of the documentary in the early years of that decade. One week in November 1960 specifically holds significant importance, as each network aired a special documentary, "signal[ing] the rapidly growing presence of informational programming in primetime television."<sup>123</sup> Along with the lead article in an issue of *TV Guide* titled "Television Can Open America's Eyes: The Medium Offers the Hope of Awakening Us to the Truths of a Perilous Age," the documentaries "represented a dramatic transformation of network programming practices, for only two years earlier, not a single documentary inhabited the primetime schedules of the major networks during a similar two week period."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Mickelson, xiv.

<sup>123</sup> Michael Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

The foray into documentary programming was warmly received by politicians, critics and the public at large. Tens of millions of viewers would tune into these documentaries during the early '60s and some were even awarded for their excellence.<sup>125</sup> In 1962, three of the five nominees for program of the year at the Emmys were documentaries, and the next year "The Tunnel" took home that top prize.<sup>126</sup> The volume of programs was also impressive, featuring six weekly primetime documentary series, as well as "frequent specials" like NBC's *White Paper* series, in 1962.<sup>127</sup>

Curtin calls documentary news' leap into primetime "a singular moment in U.S. television history."<sup>128</sup> The impact of the documentary on television is so important, however, because of what had occurred in the industry in the previous decade. The 1950s began with high hopes for television and its power to reach so many citizens, but the corporate mentality soon eroded the ideals of the public interest, at least in the ways the government was concerned. Curtin summarizes the reasons why documentaries became a priority for the networks in saying "[a]t the beginning of the 1950s, the new medium promised to offer exciting opportunities for enlightenment as well as entertainment. But as the decade wore on, the industry failed to deliver on such promise, and television became the subject of intense public debate and criticism."<sup>129</sup>

A profit-driven, bottom-line mentality pervaded television during the '50s, especially before ABC became an actual threat to the CBS/NBC near-duopoly. Mickelson describes the disconnect between how network executives would talk about public affairs programming to the government and how resources were actually allotted. Executives would often tout news

<sup>125</sup> Curtin, "NBC News Documentary," 175.

<sup>126</sup> Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland*, 2.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>128</sup> Curtin, "NBC News Documentary," 175.

<sup>129</sup> Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland*, 19.

shows as losing money to show their dedication to the genre in the face of lost profits.

However, a “willingness to open up the corporate purse for some efforts to serve the public in no way encouraged or even permitted free spending behavior by news personnel.”<sup>130</sup> There was constant pressure to cut costs even while entertainment shows could spend all the money they needed.<sup>131</sup>

With early television, the networks experimented with lots of different programming to appeal to the public interest and stay in the government’s good graces. However, once the networks had a hold on most programming and teamed up with Hollywood to produce shows at a lower cost, the variety of programming began to drop.<sup>132</sup> William Boddy outlines this “growing homogeneity with and across the program schedules of the three networks [as] reflect[ing] the shift from live anthology drama to filmed action/adventure.”<sup>133</sup> The decline of program diversity was especially steep from 1955 to 1960, as the number of live dramas dropped to one on the three networks while the number of westerns rose from 7 to 30.<sup>134</sup> Sponsors had a key role in a lot of the programming decisions at this time because their corporate image was intrinsically tied to the content. As care for the public interest waned, sponsors pressured for more editorial control, like choosing established stars for prominent roles and avoiding unhappy endings.<sup>135</sup> This type of sponsor control became most visible during the quiz show scandals, but it is important to note that the culture that prized profit above all else had been cultivated over the course of a decade and that the networks were complicit with the changes only until public outcry forced them to reimagine the industry.

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<sup>130</sup> Mickelson, 195.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>132</sup> Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland*, 20.

<sup>133</sup> Boddy, 187.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 189.

The documentary news explosion helped show network executives that television was better off with a wider array of programming, if for nothing else than to keep critics at bay. The narrow view that mass appeal was the only way to make a schedule became less prominent, paving the way for sports to find a niche audience and provide profit through a select group of sponsors. News also had an effect on the reinvigorated sport-television relationship of the 1960s by creating a blueprint of growth during the '50s. As the news and sports divisions were often intertwined at the networks, the path of the former would have surely impacted opinions and decisions on the progress of the latter. The descriptions of television news in the 1950s, as relayed by Mickelson, have clear analogues to sports that will be evident in the next chapter.

Gambles and experiments were commonplace in the '50s, and while “improvisation didn’t always yield positive returns...it demonstrated a vitality if not maturity that helped the medium grow.”<sup>136</sup> The trial and error used by news teams “led to more efficient approaches” that would establish a working set of methods that would last for decades.<sup>137</sup> When television news was brand new, networks had to hire personnel with other backgrounds like wire services, radio news, newspapers, and newsreels. The fusion of people with different expertise made television news “a new art form” that could “deliver a product that was distinctive [by] employing all capabilities of the electronic medium.”<sup>138</sup> These ideas of experimentation and raising the content to art are exactly how men like Roone Arledge would talk about sports programming in the early 1960s. Sports weren’t being created whole cloth like news, but the changing paradigm of the television industry as a whole, thanks to the influx of the news documentary, was breathing new ideas into the networks that allowed

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<sup>136</sup> Mickelson, 3.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 18.

sports to shift focus and become itself a significant contributor to the schedule and source of network pride.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Sport's Transformation Into Entertainment

The 1960s brought a vast array of changes to the sport-television relationship, especially regarding professional football. New technologies gave producers more ways to broadcast games. Instant replay was the most important new technique, but many other innovations, often implemented by Roone Arledge at ABC, transformed sport into entertainment. With the help of programs like *Wide World of Sports* and special events like the Olympics Games, an emphasis on emotion, characterization, and storytelling replaced the sterile broadcasting of one play after another. A decade of experimentation culminated in 1970 with *Monday Night Football*, which became an instant pop culture hit and has become over the years more like event programming spectacle than football game. There are no longer sports on television; sports are entertainment and have become an integral part of the television schedule.

#### *The NFL's Turning Point*

The national television contract the NFL signed with CBS in 1956 was a great first step, but the league would need more to gain the notoriety it craved. Two events, taking place just over one year apart, would position the NFL to become the darling of sports television as the 1960s unfolded. The first occurred in December 1958 and showed audiences the excitement of the game itself. The NFL Championship game pitted the New York Giants against the Baltimore Colts in what would become known soon after as the Greatest Game Ever Played. Not only was the game itself pulsating with drama (an overtime thriller with multiple lead changes), but the game's place on the TV schedule scooped up the largest

audience possible. The championship took place between Christmas and New Year's, and had no competition from any other games, including the popular college bowl games.<sup>139</sup> Reports vary, but somewhere between 30 and 45 million people saw the game on television.<sup>140</sup> The sudden-death drama made everyone notice the NFL and its potential to grab the nation's attention.

Football had always been better suited for television than baseball, with the larger, darker colored ball and predictable action, but the 1958 Championship received the ratings and word of mouth that made the networks truly take notice of the NFL.<sup>141</sup> Phil Patton sums up the resulting industry attitudes about the NFL:

The excitement of the game...linked pro football inextricably to the huge television audience that had seen it. The sudden-death game gave sudden birth to pro football's respectability and popularity and, in the process, made it clear that the television cable was the umbilical of the sport's success.<sup>142</sup>

Patton's analogy positions television as helping to grow the NFL with its nationally affiliated resources, which isn't wrong. Professional football needed television to catapult the league into widespread popularity, and that's exactly what happened in 1958. Yet once the NFL had

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<sup>139</sup> Wesley Hyatt, *Kicking Off the Week: A History of Monday Night Football on ABC Television, 1970-2005* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 21.

<sup>140</sup> Phil Patton, *Razzle-Dazzle* (Garden City, NY: The Dial Press, 1984), 2 & Frank Gifford and Peter Richmond, *The Glory Game: How the 1958 NFL Championship Changed Football Forever* (New York: Harper, 2008), 95.

<sup>141</sup> Chandler, *Television and National Sport*, 58.

<sup>142</sup> Patton, *Razzle Dazzle*, 4.

its foothold within the network system, the league would dictate its own terms and initiate one of the most important changes to the sport-television relationship.

The NFL's aggressive attitude toward broadcasting was implemented by new commissioner Pete Rozelle. Bert Bell died while attending a game in 1959, and in January of 1960 Rozelle was elected as his successor. Rozelle had worked in public relations for the Los Angeles Rams, and this background gave him an eye for the media. His first decision as commissioner foreshadows all the growth he would bring to the NFL through television. Rozelle moved the league offices from small town Pennsylvania to Manhattan, "insuring the league's product was at least half again as marketable and newsworthy as it had been a year earlier" after the Championship game.<sup>143</sup> The NFL was now right down the street from the network offices, and Rozelle began meeting regularly with "media movers and shakers" like Bill McPhail at CBS.<sup>144</sup>

Rozelle's commitment to pursuing greater NFL coverage on network television was a key factor in the league's rise in popularity. The most important and beneficial change Rozelle made to the sport-television relationship came only one year after he took office. In 1961 the commissioner began lobbying Congress for a law that would allow each team in the NFL to share revenue generated from a national network television contract. Rozelle contended that revenue sharing would give each team an equal amount of money, thus creating competitive balance that would make the NFL more entertaining for viewers. Congress sided with Rozelle and passed the Sports Antitrust Broadcasting Act that year, which would have immediate effects on the rights fee negotiations with the networks.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Harris, *The League*, 13.

<sup>144</sup> Jeff Davis, *Rozelle: Czar of the NFL* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 124.

<sup>145</sup> Harris, 14.



The first year after the Sports Antitrust Broadcasting Act was passed the NFL signed a two-year deal with CBS worth \$4.65 million per year.<sup>146</sup> That money and the structure of the revenue sharing system would guarantee each NFL team a profit.<sup>147</sup> When it was time to renegotiate, CBS shelled out \$14 million per year for the 1964-65 rights. The almost \$10 million jump in two years was instantly validated when the network immediately signed two \$14 million sponsorship deals with Ford and Phillip Morris.<sup>148</sup> The team profits grew as well thanks to the new law and Rozelle's plan, and profits would continue to increase thanks to television with every contract renegotiation. The increasing amount of money exchanged between the networks and the NFL shows how popularity for the sport was growing, and how advertisers valued the types of fans flocking to their television sets. Observers wrote of the \$28 million deal in 1964 as far too high, but the sponsorship deals proved pro football's viability, and the sport-television relationship grew stronger. Rozelle's emphasis on television yielded these results, proving to everyone that pro football could be a hit with network audiences.<sup>149</sup>

Rozelle turned professional football from a spectator-based sport into a corporate-based sport by using television and changing the paradigm for rights fee contracts. The sport-television relationship would never be the same after the Sports Antitrust Broadcasting Act because a league's success wouldn't only be measured in fan support through ticket sales, but with fan support through merchandise sales and attractiveness to advertisers.<sup>150</sup> Rozelle

<sup>146</sup> Tom Bennett, ed., *The NFL's Official Encyclopedic History of Professional Football* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 57.

<sup>147</sup> Davis, *Rozelle*, 130.

<sup>148</sup> Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 347.

<sup>149</sup> Hyatt, *Kicking Off the Week*, 26.

<sup>150</sup> Tom Evens, Petros Iosifidis, and Paul Smith, *The Political Economy of Television Sports Rights* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 17.

changed how television would deal with sport from then on and began a trend of ever increasing rights fees that would make the NFL a billion dollar organization.

*Roone Arledge and the New Look of Sports Television*

Rozelle's contributions to the commercial aspects of football were very important to the NFL's growth, but Roone Arledge's contributions to the broadcasts themselves would transform how the sport was understood by viewers. With new innovations and technologies on the field and on the screen, Arledge helped change football (and eventually other sports) from mimics of the live game to entertainment spectacles. Sports broadcasts became more like other dramatic shows on television and less like a sterilized version of the live fan's perspective. Arledge's philosophy on broadcasting emphasizes the difference between seeing a game and experiencing a game: "bring the fan to the game, not the game to the fan."<sup>151</sup> Seeing the game's action wasn't enough. Fans needed all the different sensory information to truly experience and fully enjoy a game- they needed to be entertained.

Arledge began his experimentation with sports broadcasts using football, but not the NFL. Rozelle's league was tied to CBS, but the commissioner's attitudes about television's benefit to professional football were not his alone. In fact, the revenue sharing plan had already been implemented by another professional football league that was created in 1960. The American Football League (AFL) was created by Lamar Hunt to compete against the NFL as professional football gained popularity after the Giants-Colts Championship game. Hunt implemented the revenue sharing plan immediately after forming and signed a league

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<sup>151</sup> Patton, 61.

wide contract with ABC.<sup>152</sup> The AFL only formed because of the money ensured by ABC, proving just how important television was to the future of professional sports. In fact, the AFL only survived past mid-decade because NBC was so upset over once again being outbid by CBS for the NFL contract in 1964. Starting with the 1965 season, NBC bought the rights to the AFL for \$35 million over five years.<sup>153</sup> This contract would keep the AFL operational, and force the NFL to come to terms with the upstart nuisance. The next year, in 1966, the two leagues agreed to a merger.<sup>154</sup>

When ABC had AFL broadcasts, however, the league was not gaining the same kind of attention as the NFL. AFL broadcasts in the early '60s would cut from the punter kicking the ball directly to the returner without following the ball as it flew in the air. The avoidance of any crowd shots was dubbed "AFL coverage" because the network and league didn't want home audiences to see the empty stadium seats.<sup>155</sup> The AFL's lack of prominence, though, would actually help Arledge find a better way to cover games. Because few people were watching the first few seasons, and because ABC had nothing to lose as the third place network, Arledge had almost free reign to experiment and concoct a new kind of sports broadcast.

Arledge's guiding principle for producing sportscasts was to give the television viewer a better experience than a live spectator at the game. He saw television as "an improved substitute for the real thing."<sup>156</sup> Most of Arledge's innovations dealt with new ways to use hardware, like directional microphones picking up the clash of pads, end-zone and

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<sup>152</sup> Harris, 14.

<sup>153</sup> Tim Brulia, "A Chronology of Pro Football on Television: Part 1," *The Coffin Corner* 26 (2004), 23.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Patton, 64.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 62.

handheld cameras, and the Goodyear blimp.<sup>157</sup> Broadcast units before this time consisted of only four cameras positioned high up in the stadium, covering the basics of the game without any flair.<sup>158</sup> More coverage under Arledge not only produced a better array of images to broadcast, but led to a new visual style that included isolation shots of individual players and split-screens to show the viewpoints of different players at the same time.

The non-action portions of the broadcast were important for ABC as well. Halftime highlights and analysis, canned interviews with players, and graphics showing player pictures and statistics all helped viewers feel more attached to the game. Enhancing the broadcasts even more were shots of the players on the bench, the crowd (once it grew large enough), and cheerleaders, which allowed viewers to get the full visual experience of the live game from the comfort of their own couches.<sup>159</sup> Also helpful in relaying the visual information of the stadium was the gradual implementation of color programming. By the end of the 1960s, almost all broadcasts were in color, giving viewers a more detailed look at the contrasting uniforms, the advertising, and even the white lines on the green grass.<sup>160</sup> The more intimate look at football came from the implementation of this new technical approach to sports broadcasting, but the more important aspect for ABC was the emphasis on story and drama.<sup>161</sup> No longer were football players indistinguishable from one another, parading around far below the cameras in a large mass. The close-ups, profiles, and interviews gave faces to the players, who became actors more than athletes. ABC's steps to enhance telecasts made football more akin to television's scripted programming, and were the first step in conceiving of pro football as entertainment more than just sport.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>160</sup> Douglas Gomery, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 173

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 64.

The handheld camera, called the minicam by Arledge, was an especially noteworthy technological advancement. The minicam was characterized by a “narrow depth of field and the sense of excitement conveyed by its instability,” the same feelings associated with the burgeoning French New Wave film movement.<sup>162</sup> The point wasn’t to be technically proficient, but to create a certain ambiance around the players more than the action. Emphasis on the emotional impact and human dimension of athletes were always more important than the great plays.<sup>163</sup> Arledge wanted to broadcast close, intimate looks at people, and capturing reaction shots from players on the bench or fans in the crowd was part of that plan.<sup>164</sup> Although the live fans could easily focus on the bench players or fellow spectators, the home audience was privy to the conscious editing decisions being made by producers. The dramatic elements of each play could be enhanced by certain reaction shots, giving the home viewers a more emotional experience during a game than any live fan could hope to receive. Providing an emotional experience is a staple of entertainment, and creating an intimate atmosphere around the players made them more relatable to audiences than ever before. More opportunities arose for fans to emote about the players and the drama of the action rather than the result of the game, which is the heart of sports’ transformation into entertainment.

### *Instant Replay*

ABC set the new standard for sports broadcasts in the 1960s, but the most important innovation of that time was not created at ABC. Instant replay began in 1963 to cement

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>163</sup> Roone Arledge, *Roone* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 51.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 63.

televised sports' visual enhancement over live spectating. Early instant replay was very difficult to accomplish because of the limited capability of videotape at that time.<sup>165</sup> The idea for instant replay had surfaced within the industry, and by 1961 ABC halftime shows were playing slow motion replays of key plays. The instantaneous aspect, though, was made difficult because the plays had to be taped by machines in New York for playback instead of the on-site unit.<sup>166</sup>

A tape machine would therefore need to be transported from New York to a stadium for the production of an instant replay. Tony Verna, the CBS producer responsible for the first true instant replay, did just this in covertly transporting a tape machine from Grand Central Station to Philadelphia where his assigned Army-Navy college football game was being held.<sup>167</sup> The machine he took was made by Ampex, the leading videotape manufacturer at that time. Originally, Ampex envisioned videotape to allow for time-delayed broadcasting, which would ease the difficulty of airing programs in different time zones. The machines were not built for instant replay, which explains why no one had yet figured out how to perform one, and also explains the workaround Verna had to negotiate to produce the first.<sup>168</sup> Having the Ampex machine on-site was the first step, but Verna had to get creative with finding the start of each play on the tape. Rewinding the tape to find the exact starting point would be difficult in the short amount of time between plays, and the "fuzz" on the tape made it even harder to approximate.<sup>169</sup> With the video itself not complying, Verna turned to an unused audio track to mark the start of each play. The tones Verna put onto the audio

<sup>165</sup> Tony Verna, *Instant Replay: The Day That Changed Sports Forever* (Beverly Hills: Creative Book Publishers International, 2008), 3.

<sup>166</sup> Patton, 66.

<sup>167</sup> Verna, *Instant Replay*, 9.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 7.

track corresponded to the offensive teams' movements, and played back at the same speed as the video.<sup>170</sup> After getting the hang of cueing up audio tones (that only the production unit could hear) and rewinding the tape accurately, Verna went live with an instant replay of an Army touchdown, leading announcer Lindsey Nelson to loudly assure viewers that Army had not scored again.<sup>171</sup>

After 1963, instant replay slowly became a staple of sports broadcasting and conditioned television viewers to expect more from the telecast. With the capability of seeing a play again, home fans could focus their attention on the part of the screen containing the key block or blitzing linebacker. Seeing what went wrong or right became easier with a second look, especially with the help of the color commentator. The announcing team's expertise opened the game up to intense dissection and analysis, and home viewers came to expect a better understanding of key plays.<sup>172</sup>

*New York Times* journalist Leonard Shecter penned a 1968 article titled, "Why It's Better to Watch the Game on TV" that highlights the ways instant replay helped viewers experience televised sports differently than ever before. Shecter profiles Arledge and all of the "mindboggling innovations" the producer brought to sports television. One technique Shecter finds particularly "rewarding" is the split-screen, which can show two golfers on different holes putting at the same time, as if against each other.<sup>173</sup> Shecter's noting that live fans can only see one golfer at a time, or can only see part of a ski race at the Olympics, leads

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>172</sup> Patton, 67.

<sup>173</sup> Leonard Shecter, "Why It's Better to Watch the Game on TV," *New York Times*, March 3, 1968, SM32.

the reporter to say “nothing can be more beautiful” than instant replay because of the technique’s ability to pinpoint the important aspects of a key play.<sup>174</sup>

Beyond the benefit of seeing a play that was missed, or better understanding how a play was constructed, instant replay began transforming attitudes about the nature of sports. Football in particular became more balletic when instant replay combined with slow motion, as big collisions became coordinated movements instead of a mess of brute force and tangled bodies. Slow motion had been used in conjunction with sports as far back as 1921 when the *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote about a championship boxing match being recorded sixteen times slower with a special slow motion camera.<sup>175</sup> Videotape made slow motion easier to use, and the device was used often in highlight packages and during halftime shows, and once paired with instant replay would allow for detailed analysis right after a play.<sup>176</sup> Instant replay, then, was able to help “[f]ootball, once an unfathomable jumble on the small screen, acquire... fascination for widening audiences.”<sup>177</sup>

Unfortunately for new fans, the increasing number of television viewers posed a threat to ticket sales, at least in the minds of NFL team owners. Dating back to 1953, pro football had a policy of blacking out the broadcast of home games to the surrounding geographic area, likely forcing any fans interested in seeing the game to buy tickets.<sup>178</sup> Owners continued to revere live fans and the reliable income they generated for years, even with Rozelle’s mindset. Television viewing was so popular, however, that the blackouts only led to “a new social phenomenon” in which fans drove just far enough away to watch the

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, SM98.

<sup>175</sup> “Slow Motion Camera To Show Every Blow Of Big Title Battle,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 28, 1921, 19.

<sup>176</sup> Patton, 66.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Crepeau, 47.



game in a hotel room.<sup>179</sup> Sports on television were becoming such an integral part to the typical fan's experience that spending money to watch a game outside the home, like a movie or play, was simply another entertainment expenditure. It is notable, too, that these fans did not purchase tickets when a game was blacked out, but would rather watch the game on television, even one away from the comfort of their own home. Sport and television had become inextricably linked.

As fans flocked increasingly to their television sets to see the game from a unique vantage point, and networks began jockeying for more and more sports programming, "major transformations in the signifying material of sport itself" began to change, according to Margaret Morse.<sup>180</sup> Football, for instance, was still being played the same way in 1965 as it was in 1950, but the way audiences were seeing the game had changed dramatically with better television coverage. The game was no longer a distant image seen from the stands or a camera high in the press box, but something up close and personal on the TV screen. Players, especially those not touching the ball like linemen, were no longer an indistinct mass of bodies but were individuals performing a highly specialized act. Furthermore, with the interviews, biographies, and on-screen graphical statistics, television viewers could feel more personally connected with a team's players than ever before. Just like viewers could sympathize with or hate characters on *Bewitched* or *Gunsmoke*, NFL players became characters in a serialized drama that unfolded each Sunday.

Television's technological boundaries forced a more intimate look at football and its players as well. After Arledge's innovations made continuous wide shots from high angles obsolete, the game began undergoing what Morse calls deformation, which involves spatial

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Margaret Morse, "Sport on Television," in *Television: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, Volume 2, ed. Toby Miller (Routledge, 2004), 380.

compression and temporal elongation. With deformation, the way television distorts the game on screen leads to an emphasis on specific points of action and body contact instead of seeing the entire picture. In other words, television inherently changed how the viewer saw the game. But this wasn't necessarily detrimental. The television viewer got much more information about the player with the ball and his surroundings, especially when slow motion replays were shown. Commentator remarks about each play were more informative because of replay, and the home viewer got a better understanding of the sport's intricacies because of the image and expert analysis not seen by the live fan.<sup>181</sup> Put more eloquently by Morse, "the stadium-goer is a participant in ritual, [while] the television viewer looks at a phantasmatic realm never seen in any stadium."<sup>182</sup> Sports became more and more like other shows on television thanks to ABC's coverage and innovations like instant replay. Football, more than any other sport, slowly transformed into entertainment programming through this new visual style, and the networks became even more entrenched in their desire for sports programming.

### *ABC and the Growth of Sports in the 1960s*

Arlidge was able to experiment with new techniques largely because of ABC's long history of perpetual inferiority to CBS and NBC. The gambles would soon pay off, as ABC became known for its stellar sports programming and began rising in the ratings. ABC grew from the shadow of NBC, which was forced to sell its Blue network after a 1943 FCC ruling.<sup>183</sup> A merger with United Paramount Pictures in 1951 brought initial success, as the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 386.

<sup>183</sup> Robert L. Hilliard and Michael C. Keith, ed., *The Broadcast Century and Beyond* (Boston: Focal Press, 2001), 93

deal gave ABC \$25 million to work with, but it wasn't enough to reach the level of resources available to CBS and NBC.<sup>184</sup> ABC executives therefore reached out to Hollywood producers to help differentiate the network's content from its competitors. First up was *Disneyland* in 1954, which attracted bigger advertising sources and was popular enough to expand the ABC affiliate network. A deal with Warner Brothers also turned profitable with 1957's *Maverick* and 1958's *77 Sunset Strip*.<sup>185</sup>

Unfortunately, ABC's Hollywood connection wasn't enough to vault the network into the same ratings numbers as CBS and NBC. In 1962, ABC was still in third place and had fewer affiliates than the other two networks.<sup>186</sup> The next year, Edgar J. Scherick became Vice President of Programming and made decisions leading to ABC's unexpected success at the start of the 1964-65 season. New shows like *Bewitched*, *The Addams Family*, and *Peyton Place* drew in a large number of curious viewers for a few months. However, by the end of the season, ABC found itself back in third place because of its shows' inability to compete with the established comedies elsewhere on the dial.<sup>187</sup>

The late '60s witnessed legal troubles at ABC in addition to poor ratings. ABC lost \$20 million in legal fees in 1968 because of an attempt by Howard Hughes to take over the network. The reclusive billionaire's inability to appear in public and file documents ultimately derailed the proposal, but the process of defending against Hughes was still a blow to ABC.<sup>188</sup> The lack of success from the programming may have hurt even more, though.

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<sup>184</sup> Gomery, *A History of Broadcasting*, 176

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 178

<sup>186</sup> Hyatt, 13.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 16.

*Bewitched* was the only ABC show in the top 20 for the 1967-68 season (it was 11<sup>th</sup>), and only two shows made the top 20 for the '69-70 season.<sup>189</sup>

Within this context of network inferiority arose the opportunity for ABC Sports to succeed. Along with the visual experimentation of the AFL broadcasts, Arledge started *Wide World of Sports* in 1961 to showcase sporting events from around the world with which many American viewers were not familiar. ABC's exclusive coverage in the early years of World Cup soccer and the Tour de France helped attract viewers, but *Wide World's* focus on the emotional impact of sports was the foundation of success leading to over thirty years of content. The important shots weren't the outstanding physical feats themselves, but the "tiny moments of texture" that showcased the human dimension of sports, like the way Arnold Palmer hitched up his pants before hitting a golf ball.<sup>190</sup> Arledge's emphasis on creating stories, as opposed to simply relaying the sport as plainly as possible like other network broadcasts, connected sports to other dramatic content. The sports programming on ABC increasingly aligned with scripted programming, and the two became closely linked facets of entertainment television.

The Olympic Games also gave ABC a chance to showcase the network's ability to generate drama through global sporting competition. The Olympics went from cultural afterthought to prestige event television during the 1960s thanks to ABC's coverage. The explosion of sports rights fee battles among the networks after the Sports Antitrust Broadcasting Act included the Olympics, and ABC used the Games to enhance its persona as the premier sports network. The increasing popularity of the Olympics also ties back to the similarities between news and sports, and their relationship to nationalism.

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>190</sup> Arledge, *Roone*, 51.

After CBS garnered poor ratings for the 1960 winter and summer Games, ABC stepped in to grab the 1964 winter Games in Innsbruck, Austria. With three years of *Wide World* under its belt, ABC knew how to make unknown athletes and lesser-known sports appealing to American audiences. Even though only one American won a gold medal, the focus on top American athletes rather than the Games as a whole attracted more viewers than in 1960.<sup>191</sup> The turning point for Olympic popularity was the 1968 summer Games in Mexico City. ABC staffers tracked down each athlete from every country and produced “stories of personal hardship” that could be used during the broadcasts if an athlete became relevant.<sup>192</sup> Once in Mexico City, ABC produced 44 hours of coverage, surpassing “anything television had attempted until that time.”<sup>193</sup> Richard O. Davies, in talking about these Games, writes, “the sophisticated coverage that ABC provided in 1968 turned the Olympics into a major entertainment event.”<sup>194</sup> The techniques and innovations first used for football and *Wide World* made the Olympics more interesting for viewers, thus leading to better ratings and more interested advertisers.

The blurring of sports and news came in 1968 with Tommie Smith and John Carlos’ Black Power salute and at the Olympics in 1972 when terrorists held Israeli athletes hostage in Munich. However, the growth of the Olympics in the 1960s was tied to news more-so through Cold War politics. In the late 1950s, social and moral anxieties within the U.S. manifested into fear of the Soviet military and its threat on the American way of life. These anxieties spun into a call for television to be educational and provide a “serious engagement

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Davies, 265.

<sup>193</sup> Powers, 207.

<sup>194</sup> Davies, 265.

with public affairs.”<sup>195</sup> Most of the news documentaries produced by the networks in the early ‘60s were somehow related to the Cold War and “the international challenge posed by Communism,” among them “Showdown in the Congo,” “Remarkable Comrades,” and “The Rise of Khrushchev.”<sup>196</sup>

The Olympics became a rallying cry for nationalism at a time when the country was united against a common enemy. The news documentaries sought to inform the public about that enemy, while the Olympics coverage sought to show Americans defeating the Soviets in athletic competition to prove democracy’s superiority. The medal count between the two nations became an easy scoreboard to reference every four years.<sup>197</sup> Fear of the Soviets helped reimagine television news and led the Olympics into national prominence, tying news and sports together as solutions to the communist problem by way of the television.

### *Monday Night Football*

The changes made by ABC to evolve sports broadcasts into entertainment culminated in the pop culture phenomenon of *Monday Night Football (MNF)* in 1970. *MNF* was created as a television show that happened to deal with professional football, and proved that primetime sports could succeed with high ratings as long as the show was entertaining. Arledge took the Olympic broadcasts very seriously, but the NFL was never far from his mind. After becoming President of ABC Sports in 1968, he vigorously pursued Rozelle’s scheduling idea: a weekly primetime game. Rozelle’s push for a primetime NFL game began in 1966, and there were sporadic instances up until 1970. CBS and NBC each took a chance

<sup>195</sup> Curtin, “NBC News Documentary,” 176.

<sup>196</sup> Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland*, 3.

<sup>197</sup> Davies, 258.

on primetime football telecasts, but low ratings kept each network from embracing the concept fully.<sup>198</sup> In his memoir, Arledge explains the early primetime games' failures were a result of CBS and NBC thinking they could simply transport the Sunday NFL broadcasting style to the week-night programming block. Not only was the visual style increasingly outdated compared to ABC's brand, but the competition was completely different in primetime. Sundays were geared toward football because the schedule lacked anything else, but week-nights had actual programs that attracted large audiences. Arledge explains how "[e]verything was different [in primetime]: audience habits, expectations, program content, choices. You turned on your set at night wanting to be entertained. If you weren't, the channel got switched."<sup>199</sup> Unlike its competition, ABC was poised to succeed in primetime sports with its track record of visual innovation, emphasis on the home viewer, and focus on the human element.

While the network's sports content was ready for primetime, ABC's third place stagnation made Rozelle wary of the network's ability to succeed. So derided was ABC in the late '60s that a joke circulated among various media personnel: How do you end the Vietnam War? Put it on ABC, it'll be cancelled in thirteen weeks.<sup>200</sup> Arledge put eight months of work into convincing Rozelle and network executives that ABC could handle primetime pro football. Although Rozelle appeared convinced, the network's stigma as a content killer led the commissioner to give CBS and NBC the right of first refusal. Luckily for ABC, both networks passed. Rozelle was fixated on Monday night, and CBS had more than enough content with its hit lineup of *Here's Lucy*, *Mayberry RFD*, and *The Doris Day Show*, all of which were in the top 25. NBC looked initially like a viable option, but *Laugh-In*

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 101.

was the number one Monday show on TV, and gave the network its best Monday numbers in a decade.<sup>201</sup> Moreover, *The Tonight Show* was NBC's biggest advertising earner, and Johnny Carson was vehemently against the possibility of his show being pushed back if the game went long.<sup>202</sup> ABC signed a three-year, \$25.5 million deal to start broadcasting primetime games on Monday starting in 1970.<sup>203</sup>

Heading into the 1970 fall season, the trade press didn't see ABC's *Monday Night Football* as groundbreaking. First of all, the network was in the midst of heavy turnover from the year before, as nine shows had been cancelled and eleven new ones were on the schedule.<sup>204</sup> While outlining the asking price for advertising space, *Advertising Age* described *Monday Night Football* as an "innovative but risky venture," with success hinging on the female audience.<sup>205</sup> *TV Guide* also saw ABC as having taken a gamble, and derided the programming decision to start *MNF* at 9 PM EST because working viewers on the east coast would have to go to bed before the game finished, and west coast viewers would be stuck in traffic for their 6 PM start time.<sup>206</sup> *Variety* discussed ABC's strong push to get to number two in the ratings, detailing the network's expected nightly wins to come on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Monday is mentioned as a toss-up night, with the author writing, "ABC is admittedly without guidelines on what to expect" for ratings, as *Monday Night Football* could be either a "ratings bonanza" or "a low share puller with good selling angles."<sup>207</sup> Although the public was made aware of the technical changes being made to the primetime telecast, like in a *Variety* profile about the increased number of cameras and the

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<sup>201</sup> Hyatt, 29.

<sup>202</sup> Arledge, 103.

<sup>203</sup> Hyatt, 30.

<sup>204</sup> Maureen Christopher, "TV Users Wary About Fall Lineup," *Advertising Age*, March 2, 1970, 1.

<sup>205</sup> James P. Forkan, "Football Prices Keep Rising," *Advertising Age*, August 10, 1970, 3.

<sup>206</sup> Melvin Durslag, "Pro Football Tackles Doris Day, Carol Burnett and The Movies," *TV Guide*, September 19, 1970, 14.

<sup>207</sup> Bob Knight, "Rationale For ABC Fall Sked," *Variety*, March 4, 1970, 35.



new approach to coverage, there is no indication that many people thought this iteration of primetime pro football would wildly succeed where the former attempts had failed.<sup>208</sup>

Call it a surprise, then, when *Monday Night Football* grabbed a 35 share for the opener, and helped ABC get to number 2 ahead of NBC by season's end.<sup>209</sup> *MNF* ended the season with a 31 share, placing it modestly in the top 40 behind such other new shows as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *The Partridge Family*. The promise for *MNF* came in the demographics, as the show placed second in all masculine breakouts and was in the top 10 for the 18-34 age range after its first week.<sup>210</sup> 1970 was exactly the time when demographics were increasingly seen as a vital part of programming decisions, making *MNF* even more intriguing to advertisers, and therefore the networks. *MNF* helped ABC gain the trust of more affiliates, a necessary part of challenging CBS and NBC.<sup>211</sup> Looking at the asking price for advertising space over the course of the '70s depicts the great success of *MNF*. ABC asked for \$65,000 per minute before the first broadcast in 1970, which jumped to \$124,000 per minute in 1976, and up to \$230,000 per minute by the end of the decade.<sup>212</sup> By 1978, ABC was in first place, and an article written by the network's president published in *Variety* cites ABC programming, including sports, as "the most innovative...in the history of television."<sup>213</sup>

The television industry's growing emphasis on demographics shaped the time when *MNF* premiered. As the 1960s unfolded, youth culture began to take hold in all aspects of society, and the networks learned to capitalize on themes of social unrest to appeal to the

<sup>208</sup> "ABC Giving Deluxe Coverage to Primetime Grid With 9-Camera Set-up," *Variety*, August 19, 1970, 32.

<sup>209</sup> Hyatt, 44.

<sup>210</sup> "ABC, CBS on Top in New Season, Nielson Shows," *Advertising Age*, October 12, 1970, 71 & Bob Knight, "ABC-TV at Fighting Weight," *Variety*, September 9, 1970, 31 & Forkan, "Football Prices," 84.

<sup>211</sup> Fred Pierce, "How ABC Got to the Top," *Variety*, January 4, 1978, 116.

growing number of young people watching television. As explained by Aniko Bodroghkozy, hippie culture was co-opted in primetime for the baby boomers coming of age during a time of “protest, rebellion, experimentation, and discord on the nation’s streets and campuses.”<sup>214</sup> Network programming needed to be relevant to be popular, so more youth-centered shows began to crop up. William S. Paley describes this turnover in talking about CBS’ rural comedies that were very popular but with the wrong demographic: “[The rural comedies] were attracting an older age group of the population to CBS, while other communication media were beginning to describe the rise of a new youth movement in America, especially in the cities.”<sup>215</sup>

Other kinds of specialized programming were finding their way onto the network schedule. Just as football found success on Sundays, Saturday mornings became profitable as toy makers began sponsoring animated films for children year round instead of seasonally.<sup>216</sup> Weekday morning and afternoon serials also found profit in a slight change by airing thirty minute rather than fifteen-minute programs. Late night success with Johnny Carson, and morning hits like *Today* showed that “almost all hours shared in the rising affluence” of demographics<sup>217</sup>. *MNF* shared in this affluence and made Monday nights must-see fare for particular male demographics, thus attracting more advertisers and giving ABC wider profit margins.

Professional football, with its male demographics, was transformed from a sporting event to an entertainment spectacle on par with television’s traditional programming because of *Monday Night Football*. In terms of cultural significance, NFL games and television

<sup>214</sup> Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>215</sup> William S. Paley, *As It Happened* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1979), 256.

<sup>216</sup> Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*, 348.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, 350.

became increasingly related after 1970. *TV Guide* pictured the *MNF* announcing team on its cover in August 1971, indirectly likening the sportscasters to Lucille Ball or the cast of *All in the Family* (both were also covers in 1971). Moreover, starting in 1974 *TV Guide* began producing “Pro Football Forecast” editorials as a primer to the upcoming NFL season, which graced the cover each year for the rest of the decade. Compare this to the annual “Fall TV preview” the magazine put out, and the similarities between pro football and television grow closer.<sup>218</sup>

Furthermore, a 1980 article in *TV Guide* detailing *MNF*’s rise calls professional football (not just the primetime program itself) “a form of entertainment.”<sup>219</sup> This distinct labeling highlights how *MNF* changed the way audiences saw pro football, grouping the on-the-field drama as entertainment in the same way as drama played out in a police precinct or courtroom on fictional shows. Had Roone Arledge read that particular issue of *TV Guide*, the producer would have surely smiled at the way his vision for *MNF* became reality. In his memoir, Arledge recounts how he wanted to turn “popular sport into a primetime event,” thus changing sport from a weekend leisurely viewing activity into can’t-miss, must-see fare.<sup>220</sup> The distinction between sport and entertainment also speaks to audience expectations. Sports were for men, but primetime was an opportunity to grab the attention of different viewers, including women and children, and widen the fan-base.

Beyond his goal of making *MNF* event programming, Arledge also had the intention of turning the broadcasting “booth into a stage set, where an engrossing and possibly funny, and certainly controversial drama might play out between the players.”<sup>221</sup> The vision of

<sup>218</sup> “The Cover Archive,” <http://www.tvguidemagazine.com/archive/suboffer/page/gallery>.

<sup>219</sup> Melvin Durslag, “How Monday Night Carried the Day,” *TV Guide*, August 30, 1980, 24.

<sup>220</sup> Arledge, 101.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

theatricality would certainly set *MNF* apart from sports broadcasts of the past when ABC introduced a third announcer. The dynamic of conversation and, more importantly, the way audience members interpreted the game, changed. Banter between the announcers became normal on *MNF*, allowing viewers to react to the personalities in addition to the sporting action. The announcers became characters viewers could love or hate, with mail sent to ABC proving to the network the primetime experiment worked. Howard Cosell especially resonated with audiences, and became an outright celebrity who wouldn't be ignored and forced people to watch him.<sup>222</sup> While the technical/visual innovations during the 1960s began to highlight the inherent drama within sports, *MNF*'s announcing trio was the spark that made primetime pro football a can't-miss entertainment spectacle akin to the highly rated fictional programming across the TV schedule.

Evidence of *MNF*'s entertainment power came during the broadcast of a 38-0 rout during the show's first season. Although the game was far from exciting, *MNF* grabbed its biggest audience of the year and even beat a Johnny Carson special. The show had become bigger than the game.<sup>223</sup> Professional football had become a spectacle, and *MNF* created an aura of entertaining drama surrounding the sport and the personalities on screen. Both ABC and the NFL had long journeys to number one American network and sport, respectively, but their partnership created a cultural touchstone still regarded as weekly event programming.

Arledge's impact on the success of sports broadcasting in the 1960s is significant, but other factors helped set the stage for his ideas to flourish. The Sports Antitrust Broadcasting Act, coming at the time right when Arledge began his experimentation, helped immensely. A football game with no competition was extremely attractive to advertisers, especially when a

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 115.

company could get exposure while a rival got none.<sup>224</sup> This exclusivity and the “cost per viewing household,” which measures the effectiveness with which a message is finding the desired audience, gave advertisers a reason to pay much more than before, in turn making sports broadcasts more profitable.<sup>225</sup> Moreover, the magazine style of advertising allowed multiple sponsors to underwrite a sports broadcast, leading to more potential money.<sup>226</sup>

Of course, sports were also cheap to produce and became profitable. By the 1968-69 season, sports were contributing almost \$180 million in gross revenue to the networks.<sup>227</sup> With the bottom line mentality prevalent in television to the extent that network executives were receiving stock options at fixed prices, the programs generating profit were the ones to stay on the schedule.<sup>228</sup> Had sports not been able to make money, all of Arledge’s innovations would have likely been excised from broadcasts to cut costs. The rising interest in demographics among network brass and advertising money allowed the industry to embrace sports wholeheartedly as the 1970s dawned.

A confluence of factors within the television industry led to sports emerging from the 1960s as entertainment spectacle rather than mere athletic spectatorship. Experimentation and innovation at ABC led to a new way of viewing sports that emphasized drama and characterization. Instant replay especially ushered in a new era of the sport-television relationship, giving viewers at home a unique and more nuanced look at the game made possible by advances in communications technology. *Monday Night Football* transcended the typical sports broadcast to become a television show that happened to be about the NFL.

<sup>224</sup> Ira Horowitz, “Market Entrenchment and the Sports Broadcasting Act,” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 21 (1978): 416.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>226</sup> J. Fred McDonald, *One Nation Under Television* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 141.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>228</sup> Barnouw, 263.

Fans watched games en masse because of the innovations, advertisers spent piles of money to reach those fans, and the networks' identities grew ever more entwined with professional sports leagues. Sport and television became reliant upon one another during the 1960s, and solidified a symbiotic relationship that still holds today.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Implications of the Sport-Television Relationship

The symbiotic nature of the sport-television relationship has not been readily accepted by all. Contrarian views exist, both from the time of change in the '60s and later, that espouse the negative influence television has had on sport and fandom. Some of these critics dislike television's connotations of mass culture, and use sport as a subject with which to cast aspersions on the medium. Others use nostalgia to evoke feelings of a mythic past when sport was supposedly pure and untouched by the commercialization of television. Either way, these critics are misguided in their attempts to denigrate the sport-television relationship, which has helped sport become more entertaining for viewers and fans, the exact people needed to keep both sport and television alive.

This chapter discusses the ways in which television and its cultural connotations have impacted perceptions of sport. Television's relationships with commercialization, low-brow culture, and domesticity are analyzed to better understand the criticisms made against sport during and after the 1960s. Sport's transformation into entertainment was more than aesthetic; it changed the way people thought about sport. Games were no longer only the byproduct of athletic performance, but an interconnected system of players, owners, producers, network executives, advertisers, and fans. The implications of knowing about this interconnected system shaped the future of the criticism and praise of sports television.

#### *Criticism from the 1960s*

Some journalists of the 1960s weren't swayed by the claims of the home viewer's superiority over the live fan, which were a result of television's low cultural status at the

time. Lawrence Laurent, writing for the *Washington Post* in 1967, describes a situation in which his friends wanted to watch highlights of a Washington Redskins game after the late newscast even after attending the game earlier that afternoon. Laurent laments the power television has over his friends, conditioning them to watch highlights even after seeing (in his opinion) the better version of the game. He argues that television makes its viewers dumber, saying “the marvelous electronic effect of televised sport may well produce a new kind of spectator- one who simply cannot understand sports competition unless he is supplied with all of the TV-developed visual aids.”<sup>229</sup> Smugness pervades Laurent’s words as he takes aim at the medium more than the content. According to perspectives like Laurent’s, it was the medium that was ruining sports spectatorship, not specific innovations like instant replay.

Sport’s evolution into entertainment sullied spectatorship for many critics, especially because television was disparaged as low culture. Television was heralded in the post-war years as an important social agent for its ability to bring the nation together with live programs through “the culmination of decades of technological effort” that used theater, movies, and radio as stepping stones.<sup>230</sup> However, television’s reliance on advertisers associated the medium with commercialization and mass culture. Therefore, while sports were increasing in number on the small screen, “the dominant view of television was as a waste of time at best, and possibly also a source of serious and widespread social problems.”<sup>231</sup> The idea that television was dumbing down the populace was prevalent at the time, as observers like Laurent began to blame television for harming children (it led to obesity, violent behavior, lower grades in school, etc.) and turning politically active citizens

<sup>229</sup> Lawrence Laurent, “Football’s TV-Trained Fans,” *The Washington Post*, November 14, 1967, C8.

<sup>230</sup> Newman, *Video Revolutions*, 10.

<sup>231</sup> Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimizing Television* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.



into lethargic homebodies glued to the screen.<sup>232</sup> Football's growing presence on television only made it a bigger target for backlash among concerned intellectuals bemoaning the mass culture of the commercialized "boob tube."

William Johnson's "TV Made it All a New Game," which ran in *Sports Illustrated* in 1969, echoes these same sentiments. Johnson begins the article by saying, "a decade of television has created more changes in sport- and the interests of its fans- than anything in the history of play."<sup>233</sup> However, instead of praising television's power to bring professional football to more people than ever before and do so with techniques unimaginable ten years prior, Johnson talks about the multitudes of people watching the Super Bowl as if it were something to be ashamed of. He denigrates those watching televised football by listing the places in which the game is watched with unsavory descriptors: "in darkened parlors, behind drawn sun-porch blinds, beneath lightless bulbs in kitchen ceilings, [and] in a million dim basements with knotty pine nailed over cement blocks."<sup>234</sup> Johnson thinks watching football on television is something to be hidden from others, concealed like a drug problem. Indeed, Johnson likens the Super Bowl viewers to addicts in saying, "[t]he country sat, and the multitude was as one, oblivious to the afternoon beyond."<sup>235</sup> Also present in this statement is an underlying attack on mass culture, which Johnson sees as having a narcotizing effect on most people. Indeed, Johnson mentions the "mass of America" seeing their football on television more often than at the stadium, describing the experience as "insulated, isolated, miniaturized, in the gloom of a darkened room, essential plug in essential socket, electric

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>233</sup> William Johnson, "TV Made it All a New Game," *Sports Illustrated*, December 22, 1969, <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1083192/1/index.htm>.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

window aglow.”<sup>236</sup> This last sentiment could describe any type of program being watched on television, not just football, which clearly demarcates Johnson as being against the medium more than the sports content itself.

Laurent and Johnson clearly take issue with sports television’s new visual style because it embraces the tropes of entertainment programming that are seen as a negative influence on society. In their opinion, the mass culture associated with television has corrupted sports broadcasts and, in turn, the viewers. Johnson’s descriptions of fans entranced by the television screen especially point to the medium exerting its will on the masses. However, the technologically determinist bent of these arguments detracts from their credibility. As Raymond Williams writes, technological determinism is the view that the creation of new technologies establishes “the conditions for social changes and progress.”<sup>237</sup> In other words, new technology changes how the world works in a particular way, and the people using the technology have no agency and can only react to the changes. In this scenario, television is created for mass broadcasting, entrenches itself into homes across the country, and seemingly hypnotizes the public into watching hours of programming. But television cannot change people’s lives without the people themselves deciding how to use the technology. Laurent and Johnson are taking away the viewer’s power to decide what to watch and for how long. In the context of sports, they don’t mention the way television allows some fans to watch games they would otherwise be unable to see. As sport grew more visually descriptive, more detractors surfaced in the press to deride television’s influence on spectatorship. However, these critics don’t point out the negative influence of specific innovations, like instant replay, that contributed to sport’s transformation into entertainment

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television* (New York: Routledge, 1974), 5.

programming. The stronger and more popular the sport-television relationship grew, the more often critics included sport in their vendetta against low-brow television and its purported negative effects. These critics, though, are ultimately undermined by their technologically determinist point of view.

### *Criticism from the 1980s*

Criticism of the sport-television relationship would change focus as time passed. During the 1960s, critics were reacting to vast changes in visual style and a prolific increase in coverage in a short period of time. By the 1980s, sport-as-entertainment had been established for some time, prompting arguments to target different facets of broadcasts. Moreover, the societal impact of the developments of the 1970s, namely second-wave feminism, would also lead to more forms of criticism of the sport-television relationship during this time.

Criticism from the 1980s pivoted from that of Laurent and Johnson by targeting the medium's negative effects on sport rather than the spectators. A prime example of this criticism comes from Benjamin G. Rader and his book *In Its Own Image*, written in 1984. Rader compares sport before and after the mid-1960s, declaring the non-televised and primitively televised games as more pure forms of athletic competition. His division of time lines up almost identically to my own, although with a vastly different attitude about the effects of the '60s on sports television. Rader writes that, "[u]ntil the perfection of color television, slow motion, and replay shots in the 1960s, team sports could not be easily conveyed on the small screen" and, "[u]ntil the 1960s, sports had constituted a small portion

of the network budgets and program time.”<sup>238</sup> Both of these statements are key to my arguments about the amazing growth of the sport-television relationship during this time, but Rader uses them to lament the changes to sport after the mid-‘60s. Our arguments overlap, but our perspectives are drastically different, allowing me to strengthen my argument by refuting his.

Rader is convinced that sport before the mid-1960s was better, as evidenced by his argument that “authenticity of the sporting experiences has been contaminated” by the push to grab viewers and make money.<sup>239</sup> Rader’s notion of authenticity is entwined with what he calls the “traditional sporting experience” of the past. He writes that television “ultimately trivialized and diluted the traditional sporting experience” with too many games, and too much hype, extra attention, and sensationalism.<sup>240</sup> Essentially, the transformation of sport into entertainment is taken as television’s negative influence on sport. Although Rader never fully defines the traditional sporting experience, there are four components that he writes about. First is authenticity, which Rader references quite often but doesn’t care to adequately explain. He says things like the “authenticity of the sporting experience has been contaminated” by profit-seeking owners and networks, and “the drama of the sporting contest, unlike other forms of entertainment, is authentic.”<sup>241</sup> Characteristics marking other shows as inauthentic are not mentioned, but Rader is joining the ranks of Laurent and Johnson by denigrating television as a medium. The closest Rader gets to explaining his vision of authenticity is found in his discussion of baseball, which to him has “no ambiguities, no greed, no artifice” and “echoes an older America, a leisurely paced past of

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<sup>238</sup> Rader, *In Its Own Image*, 4.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 5 & 9.

farms and small towns.”<sup>242</sup> This idyllic vision of sport is pure nostalgia for a time closer to Rader’s childhood. The authenticity he yearns for is likely referencing the way baseball seemed to him as a kid, which became increasingly romanticized by the time he wrote his book.

Rader’s idolization of small-town American sport makes up the second component of his “traditional sporting experience.” Local sports brought communities together for real bonding, but television led the way to “increased privatization of leisure [and] resulted in a decline in attendance at most sporting events and thus a curtailment of the direct involvement of fans in the drama of sports.”<sup>243</sup> Privatization was also due to the mass migration to the suburbs during the 1950s, where families spent more time outdoors by themselves rather than commute to the city for a shared experience with others.<sup>244</sup> Although Rader sounds like he is targeting the happiness of familial bonding as detrimental to live sport, he is really discussing the concern that leisure time, especially the use of television therein, has increasingly isolated individuals from their communities. Robert D. Putnam writes about this concern and the way television has seemingly suppressed community activism and civic involvement. He writes that as television has become more prevalent in the home, less people have become involved with community groups and social issues.<sup>245</sup> Moreover, he writes that “because of the psychological impact of the medium itself,” dependence on television for entertainment is the single most consistent predictor of civic disengagement.<sup>246</sup> Without obstacles to civic involvement like television, Putnam believes community problems are easier to solve,

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>245</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 228.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 242 & 231.

business and social transactions cost less, and communities “become more tolerant, less cynical, and more empathetic to the misfortunes of others.”<sup>247</sup>

However, Putnam falls into the same trap as other critics by denigrating the medium rather than analyzing the content. Jeffrey P. Jones discusses politics and television by looking at satirical shows like *Real Time with Bill Maher* and *The Daily Show*, and the ways political activism has adapted to television. Community interaction may be declining in the traditional sense, but entertainment should not be chastised altogether. These new political shows have fervent followings because they embrace entertainment, and in doing so provide new ways of thinking about politics that traditional news coverage does not approach.<sup>248</sup> Changing how civic engagement rears itself in society is not always detrimental. Indeed, Jones writes that “the contemporary processes of citizenship formation and maintenance is changing” to include people’s relationship with pop culture.<sup>249</sup> Community group membership has probably declined for a number of reasons including television, but blaming the medium, especially without thinking of the content, is problematic. Sport can represent a type of civic participation as well, whether through fan voting for MLB’s All-Star Game and the NFL’s Pro Bowl, or volunteering to coach Little League. Also, the expansion of league franchises to new cities, or stadium upgrades for current teams, is heavily rooted in local politics and the allocation of taxpayer money. Furthermore, affiliation with particular a team can bind fans together within a local geographic area. Collectively cheering for a sports franchise can bring neighbors together in a way partisan politics may never achieve. This is especially true during competition among countries, like the World Cup, when even those normally uninterested in soccer will fervently root for the United States out of a patriotic obligation.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 288.

<sup>248</sup> Jeffrey P. Jones, *Entertaining Politics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 9.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 9.

Change is inevitable with the creation of new media, and decrying those media for making changes, whether to civic participation or sport, is short-sighted.

The third part of Rader's "traditional sporting experience" is its masculinity. For Rader, sons and fathers were blissful in the stadium seats witnessing the greatness of male athletic prowess on the field. He sees suburbia as having "fractured...all-male relationships" because men were staying home with their wives to watch television rather than go out on the town with the boys.<sup>250</sup> Here Rader evokes the gendered sentiment that the television, being part of the domestic sphere, is inherently feminine. This gendering of television became prominent just before sport was transformed into entertainment. Lynn Spigel looks at 1950s women's magazines that "invested an enormous amount of cultural capital in the ability to form a family and live out a set of highly structured gender and generational roles."<sup>251</sup> Television was a key part of the push for strict gender roles, and was marketed to women as a device to bring the family together. With connotations of family in the magazines and the daytime soaps aimed at housewives, television began to be coded as feminine.<sup>252</sup> Moreover, an established marketing link between femininity and commercialism, dating back to the days of radio, is also present here. Before television became widely accepted in American homes, trade and popular press debated about the prospects of the medium using two imagined consumers, "the hobbyist and the homemaker."<sup>253</sup> These archetypes were also present in discourse about radio, and marketers and programmers shifted radio's target audience from the amateur men and boys to housewives. Success soon followed, and "it was precisely commercial radio's ability to provide background accompaniment for women

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<sup>250</sup> Rader, 34.

<sup>251</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>253</sup> William Boddy, "The Amateur, the Housewife, and the Salesroom Floor," in *Television: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies Vol. 1* (London: Routledge, 2003), 88.

working in the home during the day that was hailed by industry leaders as the defining feature of American radio and key to its profitability.”<sup>254</sup> Discourse about television and its place in the home in the ‘50s followed suit, and established the medium and women as domestic servants, thus tying the two together in the cultural consciousness. For Rader, the positioning of sport on television strips it of its power and authenticity. When sport is viewed on television, in the home, it enters the feminized realm and is removed from the camaraderie of men experiencing sport together, in a public space.

Lastly, Rader bemoans the loss of the sports hero. He claims “[b]y destroying the distance between the fan and the athlete, by displaying competing (i.e. non-sports) images of athletes, and by encouraging the athletes to assume self-indulgent personas, television reduced the ability of sports to elevate athletes into heroes.”<sup>255</sup> An explanation about why athletes need to be made into heroes is not brought up, which is significant in its absence. Rader apparently feels that hero worship is a natural part of sport, but it goes deeper than that. Multiple times throughout his book, Rader praises baseball journalists for keeping the players’ private lives from reaching the fans. Even though some players were racist, debaucherous womanizers, the journalists kept a shroud of secrecy around off-the-field behavior. Rader sees himself as a modern version of these writers, at least tangentially, and his belief in hero worship ties his work to the past he longs to resurrect. He blames the loss of heroes on the changing political and social climate of the 1960s, which reinforces his desire for a return to a time when journalists wanted to protect the personal lives of athletes. He argues that, “in seeking the elusive goal of self-fulfillment, the players abandoned earlier roles and images” of “endurance, sacrifice, and courage,” with television promoting

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Rader, 5.



selfishness to a mass audience.<sup>256</sup> Individualism and agency are discouraged so athletes can appear as loyal, noble and, most importantly, authentic as they did when the writers had the power to shape public perception.

Nostalgia plays a big role in Rader's arguments and, considering the time period in which he wrote, should be analyzed further. During the Reagan years in the 1980s, cultural conservatives began pushing for a return to traditional values as a backlash to the liberal activism of the '60s and '70s. These conservatives tried "to restore a mythic post World War II golden age" by using imagery and "nostalgia for a simpler, more innocent time."<sup>257</sup> Rader is doing exactly this in his criticism of televised sport. He paints the time before television as simpler and mythic, especially with his emphasis on the athlete as hero. However, his nostalgia "obscure[s] the conflict, violence, and intolerance...of a past in which vivid gender role conformity and structured racial segregation were locked firmly into place."<sup>258</sup> Rader describes sport before television as pristine, but leaves out the lack of opportunity for people of color and women to participate. His omission of the U.S.'s past social problems regarding race and gender is problematic because it essentially rewrites history to fit a specific narrative. Rader makes white patriarchy seem "natural, authentic or inevitable, and...this tends to reinforce dominant social relations."<sup>259</sup> By excluding any mention of baseball's color barrier or the lack of opportunity for women to play, Rader is implying that white men are the best and most deserving athletes. This line of thinking is certainly not original to Rader, but it still supports patriarchal hegemony and its harmful cultural implications.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>257</sup> Nathan and McDonald, "Yearning for Yesteryear," 384.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 382.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 383.

Rader's specific argument that sport is a male domain and that television kept men from bonding is also rooted in the conservatism of his time, and speaks to larger implications of television as feminine. Second wave feminism and a tough economy challenged male authority during the 1970s, so Reagan-era conservatism attempted to reclaim masculinity. Baseball was a bastion of masculinity, and its long history offered a natural link to the past. The nostalgia for pre-televised baseball "provided a social and psychological retreat for those middle-class male baby boomers searching for more authoritarian and presumably 'authentic' images of (white) masculinity grounded in the patriarchal past."<sup>260</sup> The new visual style of the sport-television relationship after 1960 is only problematic to Rader because it drastically changed from when he grew up. White masculinity can no longer be the natural lens through which to see the world, even with sport. Believing that television is unimportant because of its gendered place in the domestic sphere is outdated and blatantly sexist. Rader's bemoaning of the new style of sports television because it resembles entertainment is disparaging television by pointing at its gendered connotations, and in doing so, tries to reclaim white masculinity as the natural apex of athleticism in the face of social change like Title IX. Television did not corrupt sport and male bonding; the activism and upheaval of the '60s and '70s brought greater understanding of the need for a more diverse sporting culture.

### *Sport as Business*

Essential to Rader's attitudes about the sport-television relationship, within his nostalgia, is that television changed sport into a business. The idea that sport before television was played only for the love of the game is a nice sentiment, but one that doesn't

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 385.

fit with the history of economically minded professional leagues. Team owners, once professional leagues became established, were concerned primarily with the economics of the game, not the disposition of their players. Garry Whannel argues that television, “[l]ed to the undermining of 19<sup>th</sup> century benevolent paternalist and voluntary sport governance by new entrepreneurial sport agencies, and forced sport governing bodies to transform themselves to accommodate the primacy of television, commercialization, and commodification.”<sup>261</sup>

Whannel erroneously believes that, until television arrived, sport was only about recreation and friendly athletic competition. Again, once professionalized, sport was about profit like any other business. Television exposed the economic side of sport with rights fee negotiations and the large influx of money from those deals. Sport became big business and, to critics like Rader and Whannel, just another cog in the consumer capitalism machine. The trappings of capitalism had always been part of professional sport, though, making these critics yearn for an innocent time that never existed.

The previously mentioned Baseball-Radio War of the 1930s is a prime example of sport’s ties with business. Owners wanted radio to stay out of baseball so they could continue making money from ticket sales. Those like Jacob Ruppert didn’t care about what was best for the fans or even the players, but only about the team’s bottom line. Evidence of owners as profit-minded exists going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the apparent bastion of benevolent paternalism. Glen Moore, writing about baseball and newspapers, relays a story about owners meeting in 1876 to discuss “how they could sever baseball’s links with its fraternal past and turn the game into a business from which they could profit.”<sup>262</sup> This meeting ended with the creation of the National League (the direct precursor of MLB), which would act as a “cartel”

<sup>261</sup> Garry Whannel, “Television and the Transformation of Sport,” 2.

<sup>262</sup> Glen Moore, “Ideology on the Sports Page: Newspapers, Baseball, and Ideological Conflict in the Gilded Age,” *Journal of Sport History* 23 (1996): 228.

that employed players for each team.<sup>263</sup> Television clearly did not change owners into pawns in its game of commercialization; capitalism took care of that on its own.

More recent sources also discuss the business side of sport and praise television for its contributions to sport. Writing in 1958, Robert Creamer declares baseball a business, not just a sport. He continues, saying baseball is “a business whose product, called entertainment, is eagerly purchased by thousands daily.”<sup>264</sup> Even before the innovative changes of the 1960s people were clued into the fact that sports teams and leagues seek to make money, and that sport is a type of, and not distinct from, entertainment. Edgerton and Ostroff also elicit this sentiment, writing, “sport is and always has been part of the entertainment business.”<sup>265</sup> Even though they wrote this at the same time as Rader, they understood the reality of the sport-television relationship. On some broadcasts, “[d]rama, conflict, pathos, and humor are emphasized, often overshadowing the athletic performance.”<sup>266</sup> Rader would criticize this practice for taking agency away from the players to meaninglessly dazzle audiences, but producers attempt to heighten the drama with editing or background information to make the game more engrossing. Trying to keep sport from having more intense stories by separating it from television and entertainment ignores the appeal and power of storytelling, something that has been part of human interaction for millennia. Sports tell stories on their own, but television can enhance those stories with techniques like instant replay and relay them to large numbers of people, and that is why the sport-television relationship works so well.

### *Conclusion*

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 275. Robert Creamer, “The Unbalanced Truth,” *Sports Illustrated*, April 15, 1958 <http://www.si.com/vault/1958/04/14/668673/the-unbarnacled-truth>.

<sup>265</sup> Edgerton and Ostroff, “Sports Telecasting,” 279.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 275.

My research in this thesis is not without its limitations. First, my use of ABC as the prime catalyst for change in sports television during the 1960s is supported by many scholarly sources, but an analysis of the contributions of NBC and CBS would help gain even greater clarity on this topic. Moreover, the extended use of Roone Arledge as the main agent of change at ABC diminishes the effect of the larger industrial and economic factors that cannot be attributed to one man. Second, my research could have been guided by more primary sources. The secondary sources are helpful for understanding what happened, but more primary research would have allowed me to see milestones not as end results, but as an organic succession of events. Third, my analysis relies heavily on football and baseball to the exclusion of other sports. Although I believe the emphasis on those two sports is warranted considering their impact on sports television before and during the time period I analyze, the inclusion of other sports and expansion of the Olympics discussion would have provided greater detail on the subject. Fourth, the industry focus of my analysis kept me from dissecting the content and actual changes of sports broadcasts in the 1960s. Contrasting a football broadcast from 1960 and an episode of *Monday Night Football* could have provided greater insight into the transformation of sport into entertainment. In the same vein, interviewing sports fans that lived through the '60s could have also proved useful in fleshing out how the visual changes impacted the people to which the producers were catering. Lastly, the discussion of athletes that rose to celebrity status during the '60s, like Joe Namath, would have helped better define the type of entertainment sport became, and would have allowed for more in depth analysis of Rader's topic of sports heroes.

Future research on this topic can build on any of these limitations, as well as pivot this thesis in a new direction. One could clearly build on my work on the 1960s to discuss sport's place during the rise of cable television and the creation of the FOX network. A study of defunct sports leagues could build on my analysis of the AFL, using the topic of television rights to structure a discussion about the political economy of the sport-television relationship. A closer look at demographics could also be done using sport, advertisers, and network schedulers as a framework of analysis. The history of NFL Films did not make it into this thesis, but discussing the contributions of that service would help contextualize the transformation of football into entertainment. Furthermore, one could use textual analysis to look at a succession of World Series or Super Bowl broadcasts to map the evolution of sport's new visual style during marquee sporting events that catered to larger audiences than regular games.

The influence of television profoundly impacted the attitudes about the NFL and MLB. The NFL embraced the medium, in turn making more money with rights fees and becoming more commercial. MLB continued to let each team negotiate contracts independently even after the NFL proved that collective bargaining was highly successful. The local history of MLB could not be excised and the nationally focused NFL grew immensely more popular. Even today, baseball, with its long season, feels more like a local attraction that communities leisurely access during the summer, while football games feels more like event programming that can capture any fan's attention. Critics like Rader want to protect baseball from television, but the sport is still inherently local, at least compared to the NFL. The two leagues started on diverging paths in their relationships with television during the 1960s, and the decisions taken at that time have affected attitudes about each sport ever

since. The influence of television combined with historical precedent has led to fans feeling differently about the NFL and MLB.

Sport provides television with lots of profitable content that anchors schedules throughout the year. Television provides sport with opportunities to reach millions of viewers that may buy tickets or merchandise for the rest of their lives. The symbiotic nature of the sport-television relationship has been working since the 1960s, when televised sport became much more visually interesting to watch. The transformation of sport into entertainment spectacle gained more attention and more viewers, helping to grow professional leagues and provide even more opportunities for athletes to play and fans to watch. Commercialization was inevitable for sport because of its ties to media and the nature of American economic culture, and pinning for a time before sports broadcasts ignores the inherent business side of sport that existed at least as far back as the Industrial Revolution. Television has not corrupted sport. We, the fans and viewers, have overwhelmingly approved of sport's place on television, and made it into something that entertains us nearly every day of the year.

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