Summary

Sports Journalism develops the reporting skills learned in years one and two and applies them to match previews, reports and analysis, sports features and interviews, and the fast-developing new forms of sports journalism online. It also considers the role of sport in the wider news agenda, and how coverage has followed sport’s evolution from a hobby into one of the world’s biggest entertainment industries.

During this module you will learn how to adapt your note-taking and writing skills to produce fast, accurate and eloquent sports journalism often within mere minutes of a final whistle. You will develop understanding of the sports news agenda and the demands of the sports desk, produce “runners” and considered analysis of matches, identify valid feature ideas and plan ahead for timely and revealing interviews.

You will also consider the role of PR in sports journalism and the criticism that sports journalism now exists only to build hype for expensive subscription-based sports channels. You will question whether there is an appetite for challenging investigative journalism on the back pages, or whether journalists play it safe to avoid souring relationships with sports associations, clubs, and players. That will include looking at contemporary examples of sport scandals and scoops, appearing at the front and back end of national and local newspapers.

This module also prepares you for the NCTJ Sports Journalism optional module, which will be sat during your third year. The NCTJ syllabus focusses on football, rugby and cricket reporting - although the module will consider a much broader range of sports.

All students are expected to attend lectures, workshops and seminars each week.

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Draft timetable

Autumn

Week | Summary
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1 | Introduction & writing previews
2 | Sports PR & controlling access
3 | Match reports 1: The runner
4 | Match reports 2: Analysis
5 | Match reports 3: Longer matches
6 | Writing week
7 | Interviews & features
8 | Investigative sports journalism
9 | Features workshops
10 | Online sports journalism
11 | Future of sport journalism
12 | Writing week

Teaching methods

This module is taught with a combination of lectures, seminars and workshops.

Monday sessions will generally be used to introduce and discuss new topics, while the Friday session will be used to put ideas into practice.

Practical exercises will occasionally be based on recorded matches viewed either online or on TV. Other exercises may be based on material supplied on paper, to replicate the large amount of submitted reports and press releases received by sports desks. There may be opportunities to travel to sports matches during the course, which will fall outside of the normal teaching hours. Any such opportunities will be optional, but beneficial.

The module is not designed to teach the basics of how sports are played. Sports journalists are expected to be sports enthusiasts. It is expected that you will watch sport and read widely about it before, during, and after the module. As with all journalism, the best way to learn is to do it for yourself. Support and guidance will be available for any original journalism projects. The more you do, the better you will become.
Assessment

Match report
Proposed final date: Friday, November 8

- A considered report of a real sports game played in the week of Saturday, November 2, to Friday, November 8.

- The game must be agreed with Rob in advance. You will have 48 hours after the game to produce a 1,000 word report which must include some original quotes and reaction.

- The report will be submitted through the CfJ website.

Exam
Three hour paper

- Tests understanding of sports news agenda and context in an essay question, knowledge of sports authorities, and ability to pitch interview and feature ideas.

3,000 word feature
Due: Friday, December 20

- A long-form piece of original journalism with a strong hook, based on fresh research and interviews. It can be on the topic of your choice, but it must be agreed in advance with Rob. It must have a clear link to the contemporary sports news agenda (i.e. something that would be published by a newspaper/magazine during 2013/14).

- Good features take time to compile - be ready to pitch feature ideas early.
**Marking**

Sports writing is marked according to the criteria set by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ).

Feature-writing uses an adapted marking scheme to reward the skills needed to identify and develop an original news angle, conduct interviews, work ethically, safely and within the law.

For general sports reporting:

**Content and accuracy**

All facts should be explained clearly within the story and all names, ages and other important details should be accurate.

Any inaccuracy or omission that affects the reader’s understanding or alters the meaning of the story will be penalised.

In the case of errors that would require an apology or correction, no more than 49% of the total mark will be awarded.

**Intro, structure and language**

The story should have a strong angle that will capture the reader’s attention, and other key facts should be presented in a logical, coherent order. Priority must be given to the key details of the story.

Running copy should be structured so that each take can be easily processed and stitched together by subs.

Stories with a top line that suffers from poor grammar or a weak choice of angle will be penalised. Stories with a structure that makes key details unclear or which lack coherence will also be penalised. This includes poor spelling, poor punctuation and clumsy sentence construction.

**Quotes**

Marks will be awarded for accurate and effective use of direct and indirect speech. Failure to attribute quotes properly will be penalised. Inaccuracies which alter the meaning of a quote or would require a correction or apology will lead to a maximum of 49% of the total mark being awarded.

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**Module aims and objectives**

i. Understand the cultural, historical and social context within which sports journalism has developed since the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

ii. Apply key reporting processes, principles and skills learned in reporting modules to the particular demands of sports journalism in print and online.

iii. Understand the regulatory and funding framework of sports in the UK.

iv. Understand the extent to which sports journalists hold sports bodies to account.

v. Understand the impact that increasing commercialisation has had on major sports and on the way sports are reported.

vi. Be able to use online tools to produce instant minute-by-minute updates of live sports events, followed by detailed match reports within minutes of the final whistle.

vii. Read widely within the genre of sports journalism and understand the difference between news, commentary, analysis and features in that context.

viii. Learn the practical skills necessary to pass the NCTJ exam in Sports Journalism as part of the professional diploma.
Marking continued

For features:

Journalism skills
Key details must have been collected thoroughly, including the names and ages of interviewees.
Features should have a strong, relevant, timely hook. The use of case studies to make issue-based stories more compelling will be rewarded.
Any inaccuracy or omission that affects the reader’s understanding, alters the meaning of the story or slants the story unfairly will be penalised.
Errors that would require an apology or correction will lead to a maximum of 49% of the total mark being awarded.

Overall content
The story should have a strong and clear relevance to the news agenda, either by reacting to current events or setting the agenda in a relevant area. The feature must be original and must tell a compelling story. The narrative should be compelling and structured coherently and logically.

Quality of sources
Facts, opinions and reaction should be from authoritative sources, and avoid the use of predictable contacts. Information should be clearly attributed and the use of direct and indirect speech should be appropriate and effective.

Style and fluency
The feature should have a strong, engaging and vivid writing style particularly in the opening paragraphs, which must be designed to grab the reader and force them to keep reading. There should be clear thought about how the feature progresses to a satisfying conclusion. Poor intros and unclear structure will be penalised.

Grammar
Stories must be written in clear, good English. Hard news stories should be in the past tense, using active sentences and vivid language. Features must be written in a style and tone appropriate to the content. Stories must be punctuated correctly.
National Council for the Training of Journalists

NCTJ Sports journalism
The exam will be sat during the third year, either at the end of the autumn term or during the spring term. Dates of exams will be confirmed by Rob in advance. As usual, you must book your seat with Anastasia and pay the exam fee a month before the test.

NCTJ Portfolio
It is expected that you will complete your NCTJ portfolio at the beginning of the third year. You should not rely on being able to use stories produced in this module for the portfolio. You can, however, produce your own portfolio of sports material to attach to your CV for job applications.

Reading list

On how to report sport


Some notable writers
David Conn, *Richer Than God*, Quercus, 2013

Plus a broad selection of newspapers, supplements, magazines and sports news websites throughout the year.