



SPORT and Television: A Love Affair?

Television cameras focus on a team huddle at the beginning of a basketball game.

Sociologist John Goldlust has suggested that the coming together of sport and television was a “match made in heaven.” Some studies of this relationship show that in the early days it was something of a one-sided affair. For example, in their study *Sports for Sale*, David A. Klatell and Norman Marcus discuss the way television changed how, when, and where sports are played.

Today, Klatell and Marcus note, television time-outs are common in many professional sports. As often as not, the television producer rather than the coach calls these time-outs. Similarly, in professional football, the two-minute warning serves the needs of television advertisers, not coaches. Basketball also has bowed to the needs of television. Both professional and college basketball have a shot-clock rule that requires teams on offense to take a shot before a set time elapses. This rule is designed to keep the game moving for television audiences. Tennis, too, has changed to accommodate television coverage. Yellow balls have replaced white balls, because the yellow is easier to see on television.

The needs of television programming have influenced sports scheduling. Games on the West Coast often are delayed until 6 p.m. to accommodate viewers in the East. Similarly, football games scheduled to kick-off at 1 p.m. sometimes are delayed until 4 p.m. to enable television networks to attract larger audiences. In many cases the ticket holders do not learn of the scheduling changes until a few days before the game.

Even the distribution of professional teams has been affected by television. More often than not, teams are located in cities that have “television potential.” In some cases concerns over television coverage have lured teams away from cities with loyal fans to new cities with higher viewer appeal. Television also has been the driving force behind team expansion. More teams mean more television coverage.

Perhaps the biggest change that television has produced in sports is the way Americans watch sporting events. According to Klatell and Marcus, the instant replays, slow-motion and close-up shots, in-depth interviews and commentaries, and nonstop action characteristic of television coverage of sports have made sporting fans lose faith in their ability to interpret games unassisted. As a result,

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Explore topics on sport and the mass media.



CHAPTER 14

SPORT AND THE MASS MEDIA

Klatell and Marcus note, fans often bring portable television sets to live games. In many stadiums and sporting facilities, giant replay screens are provided so that spectators in the stands can still enjoy the television experience.

How did television gain such a strong hold over sports? The answer is money. The money teams could earn from television rights and from advertisers far exceeds the money they could earn through ticket sales. The “match made in heaven” was, perhaps, really nothing more than a marriage of financial convenience.

Klatell and Marcus carried out their study in the late 1980s, when the major networks controlled the visual media. Since that time, however, the visual media have changed enormously. The introduction of cable channels such as ESPN has turned sports viewing from a weekend and occasional weeknight event into a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week preoccupation. At the same time, the development of the computer and the Internet changed the way sports-related news and entertainment are delivered to fans.

These changes, in part, have enabled sports teams to become their own media companies. Some teams have their own cable channel, radio station, print publications, and Web sites with video. Obviously, the connection between sports and television still exists. However, sports appears to be exerting a little more power in the relationship than it did in the past.

What do you think?

1. What brought about a change in the relationship between sports and television after the 1980s?
2. Do you think the relationship between sports and television has been of benefit to sports? Why or why not?

Chapter at a Glance

SECTION 1: Sport as a Social Institution

- In sociological terms sport involves games that are won or lost on the basis of physical skills and are played according to specific rules.
- Sport as a social institution is distinguished by characteristics such as secularization, equality, specialization, rationalization, bureaucratization, and quantification.

SECTION 2: Perspectives and Issues in American Sport

- The three sociological perspectives differ in how they view sport's impact on society. Functionalists concentrate on how sport helps to maintain stability in society. Conflict theorists are interested in the relationship between sport and social inequality. Interactionists focus on how sport influences everyday social behavior.
- Sports sociologists focus on issues such as the role of race, the role of gender, and deviant behavior in sport.

SECTION 3: Mass Media as a Social Institution

- The institutionalization of mass media has been driven by a series of intellectual and technological innovations, including writing and paper, the printing press, radio, television, and the computer.
- Americans are able to obtain information from a wide variety of media. These media can be grouped into four categories: print, audio, visual, and online.

SECTION 4: Perspectives and Issues in Mass Media

- The three sociological perspectives differ in the way they view mass media. Functionalists focus on the ways mass media help to preserve social stability. Conflict theorists focus on how mass media reinforce the existing social order. Interactionists look at the impact of mass media on social interaction.
- Sociologists are interested in the power of the media and the way mass media affects children and civic and social life.