

JOUR 441: SPORTS REPORTING

Spring 2008

Thursdays 2 to 4:40 p.m. (except for live event coverage, as noted below)

ASC 330

Instructor: Bill Shaikin

COURSE GOALS

1. Provide students with training, experience and feedback in the basics of sports journalism. By the end of the term, interested students should be ready for a significant beat at the school newspaper or an entry-level position at a community newspaper.
2. Study and discuss prominent issues in college athletics, launching students on projects in the form of enterprise stories.
3. Introduce students to career opportunities in sports journalism, including new media, and related fields.

READING

Steve Wilstein, *Associated Press Sports Writing Handbook*

Glenn Stout and David Maraniss, editors, *The Best American Sports Writing 2007*

Reading assignments will be announced in class. Students are expected to read sports writing from a variety of newspapers, magazines and websites.

GRADES

- 10% Attendance and class participation
- 10% USC tennis game story
- 10% Los Angeles Kings hockey game story
- 15% USC baseball game story
- 15% Feature story
- 20% Enterprise story
- 20% Quiz and final examination

DEADLINES

In journalism, you simply cannot miss a deadline. All late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for each day late (an A would become a B if one day late, a D if three days late). If you let me know in advance that an extremely rare and unavoidable circumstance will force you to turn in a late assignment.

LIVE EVENT COVERAGE

In sports reporting, there is no skill more fundamental than producing quality coverage of a game on deadline. Unfortunately, live athletic events seldom take place on Thursday afternoons. We will have three classes at live events, in lieu of regular classes. The first is on a Thursday afternoon. Please clear your schedule NOW to make sure you will be at the other two events: Los Angeles

Kings vs. Phoenix Coyotes at Staples Center on Thursday, March 27 at 7 p.m.; USC vs. Cal (baseball) at Dedeaux Field on Saturday, April 12 at 1:30 p.m.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own; in journalism, this includes appropriating the reporting of another without clear attribution. The following is the Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the university catalog: "Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to the school's policy."

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Any students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The office is located in the Student Union, room 301, and the phone number is (213) 740-0776.

INTERNSHIPS

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the available semester points for this course.

INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY

I'm the national baseball writer for the Los Angeles Times. I have worked for the Times for a decade, covering the Angels during their 2002 World Series championship season as well as such events as the 2006 Turin Olympics, the game in which Barry Bonds broke Hank Aaron's all-time home run record and the trial in which the city of Anaheim sued the Angels over their name change. Before joining the Times, I worked at the Orange County Register, Riverside Press-Enterprise and Contra Costa Times. I graduated from UC Berkeley and would like to see Cal in the Rose Bowl just once during my lifetime.

The following schedule is subject to change, particularly with regard to the availability of guest speakers.

WEEK 1/Jan. 17

*Course introduction

- *Student introductions, and an exercise in the importance of detail and in eliciting interesting information
- *The sports journalist, in popular culture and in reality
- *Discussion: What do you read? Where do you read it? Who do you read?
- *We'll pick a game everyone should watch within the next week so we can write a game story next week.

WEEK 2/Jan. 24

- *Guest speaker: Tim Tessalone, USC sports information director
- *How do we prepare to cover an event? Where do we find the information?
- *Logistics of covering a game: How do you get a credential? What time should you get there? Where do you sit? What kind of information will you get? What kind of notes should you take? How do you interview players and coaches after the game?
- *Discussion: Basic game coverage. What is AP sports style, and why write a story that way?
- *Exercise: Write your own game story in AP style.
- *Discussion: Student game stories. Then we'll discuss actual stories from the event—the first, most basic story, the “optional” follow-up story and the stories from the local papers.
- *Preparation for next week's live event coverage.

WEEK 3/Jan. 31

USC vs. Pepperdine women's tennis match at Marks Stadium
Class time 1:15 p.m. sharp at Marks Stadium, match starts at 1:30 p.m.

- *Discussion: What's an angle, and what's yours? How can we use preparation to determine a possible angle ahead of time? How can we put a game story into context?
- *Cover USC sporting event, on deadline.

(PLEASE NOTE: We will meet at the stadium, not in class. Also, please note this time is a bit earlier than our usual class time.)

WEEK 4/FEB. 7

- *Discussion: Student game stories.
- *Case study: Women's sports vs. men's sports, including differences in coverage, resources, attendance and funding (with an emphasis on federal Title IX legislation).
- *Discussion: How do we identify issues and sources in reporting?
- *Enterprise stories: What are they? How do they differ from news stories? What makes a solid enterprise story?
- *Information sources: NCAA data bases, California Public Records Act, Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act, federal tax filings for non-profit institutions.

WEEK 5/FEB. 14: INTERVIEWING AND FEATURE WRITING

- *Guest speaker: Bill Plaschke, Los Angeles Times
- *What makes a good feature story? How do you find it? How do you write it?
- *How do sports interviews differ from others? What is Tommy Lasorda's opinion of Dave Kingman's performance?
- *Discussion: How do you conduct interviews on deadline and in a pack? How can we overcome our anxiety? How do we prepare for an in-depth interview? How can we take notes and pay attention to the interview subject at the same time? How do we elicit the most interesting information? How can we approach sensitive subjects?

WEEK 6/FEB. 21

*Discussion: Student presentations on issues in college sports.

*Discussion, approval and assignment of enterprise stories, with focus on college sports and optional focus on USC football.

WEEK 7/FEB. 28

Focus on USC football for enterprise stories. Details and guest speaker TBA.

WEEK 8/MAR. 6

TBA – this will be a week to work on your enterprise stories.

WEEK 9/MAR. 13

*Discussion, approval and assignment of feature stories.

*Discussion: What is the difference between news stories and game stories? What is appropriate to ask? How do we get information people do not wish to share?

*Hypothetical case studies: USC fires coach or drops sport. What information do you need? Who are your sources? How do you get past “no comment?”

*Simulated press conference

WEEK 10/MAR. 27

*Enterprise stories due.

Los Angeles Kings vs. Phoenix Coyotes at Staples Center

Class time **6:30 p.m. SHARP at Staples Center**, game time 7:30 p.m.

*Tour of media facilities at Staples Center

*Guest Speaker: Kings vice president of communications Mike Altieri or senior director of communications Jeff Moeller, on relations between teams and journalists in professional sports and career opportunities in sports management and public relations

*Cover NHL game, on deadline.

WEEK 11/APR. 3: SPORTS BUSINESS

*Discussion: Student game stories.

*Guest Speakers: David Carter, executive director, USC Sports Business Institute; Jeff Fellenzer, president, Innovative Sports Management

*Follow the money! What do sports reporters need to know about business, and how do they find out?

*Discussion: How did the rise of fantasy leagues help turn sports writers into business writers? What does “tonight’s attendance” mean, and why does that matter? Why isn’t the NFL in L.A.? Why didn’t Alex Rodriguez’s old contract pay off for the Texas Rangers, and why did Scott Boras suggest Rodriguez could pay for himself in his new contract?

*Career opportunities in sports management, and the sudden rise of master’s programs

WEEK 12 – NOTE DATE CHANGE – APR. 12

There will be no class Thu. Apr. 10. Instead, we’ll meet Sat. Apr. 12.

USC vs. Cal baseball game at Dedeaux Field

Class time **1:15 p.m. sharp**, game time 1:30 p.m.

*Cover USC sporting event, on deadline

*Feature stories due.

WEEK 13/APR. 17: NEW MEDIA, NEW SPORTS

*Guest Speakers: Laylan Connelly, Orange County Register; Jon Weisman, Dodger Thoughts; Scott Wolf, Los Angeles Daily News

*Discussion: How do we determine what sports to cover? How has the Internet changed everything, in ways we have seen and ways we have yet to see? How has the Internet turned fans into columnists? How do blogs serve diehard fans in ways newspapers cannot? What might the sports page look like in 2025?

*Career opportunities in new sports and new media

WEEK 14/APR. 24

*Quiz.

*Discussion of feature stories.

*Discussion of enterprise stories.

*Course review and student feedback

WEEK 15/MAY 1

*Final examination: In class, live deadline writing. We'll have the final one week early since the exam week allots two hours for final and you'll need more time to complete the assignment.