

# Changing Sports, Changing Media

## *Mass Appeal, the Sports/Media Complex and TV Sports Rights*

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### **Abstract**

Popular sport is attractive. And mediated sport has a mass appeal. Furthermore, the attraction value of sports is increasingly important for the mutual commercialization and development of both sports and the media. This chapter presents an historical analysis of the symbiosis between sports and the media, and seeks to unravel the dynamics in this relationship. Based on this examination, a more recent case on TV sports rights is also analysed. The Norwegian TV rights deal on football from 2005 shows how such rights have the potential to severely threaten long established publicist ideals.

**Key Words:** the sports/media complex, broadcasting history, TV sports rights, sports journalism, publicist ideals

### **Introduction: “But from where?”<sup>1</sup>**

In 1968, former goal keeper for the Norwegian national soccer team, Kjell Kaspersen, published the book *Hot Shot*<sup>2</sup>. One of his arguments was that a professional Norwegian football league was utterly inconceivable. Moreover, he claimed it was implausible because the system lacked the money to support such an idea:

To keep a squad in the professional league, one would have to procure money to pay wages for at least 25 players. And one would have to pay good money to get these lads to give up their day-jobs. It's no use going into the financial details of such a venture – it just won't do any good. In my opinion professional football in Norway is a utopian idea. We are simply too few in this country to fill the stadiums week after week. Moreover, money to keep such a venture going would have to come from outside. *But from where?* (Kaspersen 1968: 117, my emphasis)

This question can now be easily answered: The clubs did not need to fill the stadiums week after week. Instead, the necessary economic resources came from remote sources and on top of match day revenues – from a modern sports/media complex that developed in Norway and the rest of Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, and which achieved its current structure during the 1990s.

Sports and press became mass phenomena during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the two spheres have developed in parallel ever since. As such, there has always existed a mutual relationship between the two. Moreover, today's modern sports/media complex is

the result of new technology and social developments. This system was first and foremost established by way of television's function as a conveyor of exposure and exhibition. In addition, the commercialisation of television and the growing competition for audiences in a new media market played an important role.

The commercialisation of sports and broadcasting has transpired in parallel in Norway as well as in the rest of the world. As such, this process of commercialisation has been a collective transformation. However, despite the many effects of this process on the sports and media fields, the mutuality of this development has been inadequately analysed. As such, the media aspect has been neglected in sports research, and the sports aspect has been neglected in media research. Media research has rather considered sports too popular and officious to be the object of appropriate research (Dahlén & Helland 2002; Boyle 2006). This has happened despite the fact that sports play a central role in the media supply; despite the fact that sports rights are a major factor in the "reformatting" of the broadcasting structure in Norway and elsewhere; and despite the fact that principal publicist ideals are challenged by the commercial struggle for sports rights.

Today, the appeal of sports is so significant that it fuels the changes taking place within central social institutions such as broadcasting and journalism. The great value of sports in fact helps shape media structures and practices – in the same manner as media realities facilitate the reformation of sports themselves. The current changes in sports broadcasting are about to alter the very structure of broadcasting media, as well as its traditional social position.

In addition, sports rights in themselves influence sports news coverage. As such, the constraining nature of sports rights serves to frame what should ideally be independent sports coverage. Sports journalism thereby helps to increase the appeal of sports on television – breaking sports into a new variety of broadcasting formats. This situation conflicts with the professional ideals of news reporting. Sports coverage in the sports/media complex is often used for self-promotion, which in turn helps to increase the value of the product, i.e. the sports rights.

This contribution will focus on the appeal of sports coverage in a historical context. It was in Britain that the relations between sports and the media were first developed. These relations, and how they were later replicated in a Norwegian and Scandinavian context, is used to further analyse the development of sports/media relations. The contribution will further more demonstrate how the dynamics of the sports/media complex in many ways remain unchanged in the historical sense – but also how these dynamics have been dramatically enhanced. The main argument is that because of its substantial attraction value, sports coverage today has great consequences both in terms of media structure and media content.

The recent contract between the Norwegian Football Association and TV 2/Canal Digital concerning the "football product" is used as a case on how sports rights have created new alliances and new structures in the broadcasting field. The agreement is also used to demonstrate how established publicist ideals are dramatically challenged by the broadcaster's and the purveyor of rights' mutual interest in promoting "the football product".

## **Sports Appeal and the Media**

The relationship between sports and the media has been the origins of concepts such as the "sports/media complex" (Jhally 1989), the "media/sport production complex" (Maguire 1993), the "media sport cultural complex" (Rowe 1999), and the "sport-media

nexus” (Boyles & Haynes 2000). These notions seem to be inspired by the concept known as the “military-industrial complex” – a terminology used by the former U.S. President Eisenhower in 1960. He wanted to denote a pattern of relations thought to exist between high-ranking industrialists concerned with the manufacture of military technology, and military advisors concerned with making themselves useful to the government.

In analysing this sports/media complex, it is useful to employ the concepts of symbiosis and parasitism. These concepts originate from ancient Greece. “Symbiosis” describes a cohabitation of two different individual entities in which both benefit. Should only one of the individuals benefit from the relationship, it is called parasitism. Sports are a business – so is the mass media. Sports are social institutions – as are news and mass media. There is a historical and symbiotic match between sports- and media institutions. According to David Rowe (1999: 32), both institutions are becoming mutually dependent: “It is little wonder that the relationship between sport and the media (especially in television) is commonly described as the happiest of marriages”.

This symbiosis is evident when we look at how the appeal of sports has made it television’s most important trait in the competition for viewers. Why? The very foundation of the sports/media complex is the universal appeal of sports. This is a fact that has had different effects in different media at different times. Sports as an attraction have contributed to the development of new media markets and to the use of new media technology. Today, fans can receive sms-updates every time their favourite team scores. Technologically speaking, this is a new phenomenon. However, the social communicative role of the mobile phone harkens back to the late 1800s. In those days, English teams brought pigeons to their away-games. This way, patrons of the team’s home pub were updated by pigeon mail – first the names of the starting line-up, then the half-time result, and finally the final score (Murray 1994:30).

### **Early Relations between Football and the Media in Britain**

A specific and symbolic expression of the symbiotic relationship between football and the press in Victorian England transpired in 1863. This year the rotary press with its “endless paper rolls” was introduced. The circulation increased significantly. In the year 1800 the largest circulation in Great Britain was 5 000; in 1850 it was 50 000; and in 1900 it was 750 000. Concurrent with the increase in circulation, there was a decrease in costs (Høyer 1995: 69ff). As such, the newspaper market conditions were dramatically changed, and wider circulations could be produced and distributed to a mass audience. The introduction of the rotary press meant newspapers could fully benefit from its potential as a mass medium in a mass market: The press could now address a mass audience that were literate, and had money and increased leisure time.

In the same year and in the same city as the rotary press was introduced – in London – the Football Association was established. This had an immense importance for football as mass entertainment. The situation at that time was that teams were playing by different sets of rules. As such, the main role of the Association was to standardise the game. A letter to the editor printed in *The Times* in 1863 demonstrates how local rules limited the expansion of football as a game:

I am myself an Ethonian, and the game of football as played by us differs essentially in most respects from that played at Westminster, Rugby, Harrow and most other London clubs. Now, this difference prevents matches being made or played

between either school or club; and furthermore, prevents a player from gaining the credit of playing well anywhere but among his own associates. (Quoted from Tischler 1981: 24)

Through a standardisation of the game, football's potential as mass spectator sport came to its right. Football became a national game, and cup and league arrangements – also for national teams – could be established and further developed.<sup>3</sup> Football as game was professionalised from the mid-1880s, and it quickly developed into a new type of mass entertainment. The standardisation of football, the national expansion and its popularity, gave the game its appeal. Attendance at the English cup finals demonstrates this development: 2000 in 1872; 17 000 in 1888; 69 000 in 1897; and 110 000 in 1901 (Helland 2003: 29). Football had become mass entertainment.

Hence, as the press developed into a mass medium, football simultaneously became mass entertainment in Britain. It was evident as early as 1880 that football sold newspapers. As such, newspapers as well as advertisers reacted accordingly (Murray 1994: 30). Popular interest during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was extensive, and information about the matches was welcomed in pubs across the country. Many pubs kept score of the games on boards displayed for all to see. This informative service was now taken over by the press:

Saturday evening 'specials', often in coloured paper, brought the afternoon's scores to the public in the shortest possible time. Speed meant sales, and before the telephone took over for telegrams and pigeons used to carry the scores. (Murray 1994: 30)

As sports sections started taking up more and more space in newspapers, football started occupying more and more space in the sports sections (Rowe 1999). Football developed into a spectator sport and a media sport at the same time. According to Murray (1994: 29), "Football could now be added to alcohol and religion as one of man's great comforters: in Glasgow the more fanatical could enjoy all three at the same time."

So, how can this "original symbiosis" between sports and media be explained? In order to answer this question we must, according to Rowe (1999: 13), look at the great changes that have transformed the lives of a large portion of the world's population: "the rise of capitalism and the industrialism in general and the advent of mass consumption and the commodification of leisure time in particular." It is this relationship that even today "configures" the association between sports and the media.

### **Sports Attraction and "New Media" in Norway**

As was the case in Great Britain, the relationship between sports and the media in Norway was established during the course of the 1800s. Nonetheless, the real expansion of football's popularity only occurred around the turn of the century. Winter sports were still the dominant sport in Norway at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, a particularly interesting case establishing the symbiosis between sports and media in Norway took place in 1920. The specific appeal of sports forestalled the potential of the radio as social medium, as Norwegian speed skater Oscar Mathisen met the American skater Bobby McLean at Frogner Stadium in Kristiania<sup>4</sup>. This was five years before the launch of public radio in Norway.

Norway had only gained independence from Sweden 15 years earlier, and Mathisen was Norway's first great sports hero. He won the battle with McLean – conquering the American in the 500, 1 500 and 10 000 meter races. More importantly from a media perspective, this weekend in February 1920 substantially anticipated the radio as mass medium. The stadium was already sold out – yet more people wanted to follow Mathisen's battle against McLean. Former (sports) journalist and film maker Arne Skouen (1996:52) describes how a crowd in the city centre of Norway's capitol was immediately informed about the ongoing events:

The solution became the first technical transmission from one place to another – a genius solution, yet unknown in Scandinavia. I witnessed this event with my father, outside Tostrupgården. I was six and a half years old. On the third floor, a man was perched on a window sill with his fur coat on, because it was very cold. He had a phone to his ear while taking notes on a pad. He then dropped the phone, grabbed a large megaphone and yelled though it with his equally large voice. The square below him was packed with people, and it was equally packed at Eidsvoll's Square and all the way down to Parliament Street.

Technically speaking, this was not the transmission of radio waves. However, the combination of telephone, a large voice and an acoustic megaphone yelling informed – almost “live” – messages to a mass audience concerning an event they were not themselves witnessing. The event forestalled the radio as social medium.

Today, the carrier pigeons are redundant, and truly committed fans may receive sms-messages with information about developments in their team's current match on their mobile phones. The most appealing sporting events are transmitted live on radio, television, mobile phone and through the Internet.

## **Sports, Appeal and TV Exposure**

Sports programming was a significant feature when television was introduced to the general audience. In 1936, certain parts of the Summer Olympics could be seen on television in about 30 public areas in Berlin. In June 1937 approximately 2000 Londoners could watch a tennis match transmitted from Wimbledon, and in 1938, the first international football fixture – between England and Scotland – was aired on British television (Reimer 2002: 26). However, television technology was a limited resource at the time, and broadcasting was defined more as a medium for information than for entertainment. Furthermore, sports in general – and football in particular – was still a spectator sport whose economic revenue was based on stadium attendance. As such, football organisations in Britain as well as in Scandinavia were reluctant to allow for the live broadcasting of their matches. The British television channels BBC and Independent Television (ITV) had been in direct competition with each other since 1954. Nevertheless, exclusive rights to sports events were contested only to a limited extent. According to Murray (1994: 73), BBC and ITV in those days had an informal gentlemen's agreement when it came to the live broadcasting of football games.

During the 1970s and 1980s however, a new and modern broadcasting industry developed that was based on audience appeal *and* the exposure of commercial messages. This was the case both in Norway, Great Britain and other Western European countries. Television development through the 1970s and 1980s went through two stages, of which the first included the introduction of sponsorship into sports broadcasting. As it were,

in Britain sponsorships had been connected with the sport since its early days in Britain, "...with manufacturers' signs on stands and stand roofs. Makers' names on balls, advertisements in the press, club programme and year books, players selling the names to this or that newspaper column or commercial product" (Murray 1994: 275). But television had yet to prove its real potential for sponsorship and brand exposure.

During the 1970s and 1980s the football sponsorship market developed rapidly. Umbro's production of the Liverpool Football Club uniforms is a case in point. Umbro had supplied Liverpool with uniforms since 1933. However, the Umbro logo did not make its appearance on the Liverpool shirt until 1971. Three years later, in 1974, the Football Association allowed teams to wear the logos of their various other sponsors. However, it was only in 1983 that the collective pressures from sponsors and television channels – as well as the broadcasting agreements' potential for greater earnings – persuaded English clubs to transmit matches live (Whannel 1992:80). Television thus became a channel for the direct presentation of the football league and commercial advertising.

### **The Trinity of Football, Sponsorship and Broadcasting**

Developments in Norway and in Scandinavia as a whole transpired in parallel to that of the British situation. In 1971, the Norwegian Football Association (NFF) allowed provisional advertising on the back of shirts. At the time, the only live broadcast football match in Norway was the cup final. Because the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (the NRK) had strict rules against advertising on television, the NRK and the NFF agreed that players should not wear shirts with advertising during the cup finals. This rule was however resisted within the clubs, who were keen not to alienate this potentially steady source of income. During the General Assembly in 1971, the clubs decided they would not comply with the NRK's demands. The NRK did broadcast the cup finals both in 1971 and 1972; however in 1979 the public service channel again decided not to transmit the cup final if the sponsorship logos were not removed from players' uniforms. At the same time, the NRK appealed to the Football Association and to the cup finalists to do everything in their power to ensure the match would be broadcast. Consequently, the cup finalist sponsors agreed to drop the shirt logos. As such, the sponsors would rather the match be broadcast without their exposure than have the teams play with advertisement on their shirts and not be broadcast. The NRK's demands and principles had thus prevailed.

The victory was however short-lived. The following year, the NRK's fight against shirt logos was lost. The NRK and the Football Association signed a new broadcasting agreement in 1980, and the NRK had to yield on the issue of shirt advertisement (Reinertsen 2001: 50ff). With this resignation, the trinity of football, sponsorship and broadcasting was decisively established in Norway.

The so-called "tippekamp" – English League matches aired live on Swedish, Danish and Norwegian television – were also essential in the establishment of this trinity. When English football began its live broadcasting during the Norwegian winter season of 1969, Scandinavian businesses soon saw the potential for commercial exposure. Accordingly, commercial industry began to purchase advertising space in the televised matches from English football clubs. As a counter-measure, the NRK refrained from announcing their scheduled matches until a day or two beforehand. This was clearly a strategy in a conflict in which football arenas were transformed into show grounds for

commercial exposure. In a portrait of two Norwegian football players the situation is described in the following way:

At the time, the broadcasting of English football matches was surrounded with secrecy and mystique so that Danish chocolate producers, breweries and other manufacturers would not have time to put up their advertisements before the match started. [...] At the time, the broadcasting of advertisement was illegal, so newspapers had desk journalists manually erasing logos from the players' shirts before printing them (Fænn & Myklebust 1999: 68).

## **Commercialisation of Television and the Competition for TV Sports Rights**

While the first stage of the modernisation of the sports/media complex transformed television into a channel for commercial exposure, the second stage established a new competitive marketplace and principles of competition between television channels. Indications of this change became evident with the launch of the Astra satellite in February 1989, and the inauguration of British satellite television the same year. Subsequently, when BSkyB ventured into football that year, it created a situation in which ITV and the BBC were forced into individual rivalry. For the clubs themselves, as well as the football organisations, BSkyB's arrival on the scene was most welcome. According to Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes (2004: 28f), BSkyB's involvement entailed a new set of economic, technological and cultural circumstances that had a critical impact on the relationship between sports and broadcasting.

A similar situation occurred in the Norwegian broadcasting landscape. Since 1960, the NRK had been the only national broadcaster. From the late 1980s however, it received competition from the newly established television channels TV3 and TV Norge. In addition, the commercial public service channel TV 2 was launched in 1992. TV 2 is based on a combination of entertainment, news and sports and – in contrast to the NRK – included daily sports programming from the beginning. As TV 2 and the NRK became rivals in the fight for audiences and sponsorship revenue, the retail of rights and sponsors meant Norwegian football doubled its income. Football historians Matti Goksøyr and Finn Olstad comment that:

The 1990s were a golden age for Norwegian football, both financially and for the sport itself. Football had reached paradise without knowing so. A situation in which one could bet on and win with two horses at the same time, has placed Norwegian and international football in a historically unique position. One achieved both sponsorship revenue and television revenue (Goksøyr & Olstad 2002: 355).

The basis for the “football product” – as the commercial sports-, sponsorship- and media-product we know today – had been created. It is the exposure of commercial messages in itself that provides added value to the “sports product”, and which renders the media the key element in the sports/media complex. This complex also “works” on behalf of the broadcaster. TV 2's Sports Editor Bjørn Taalesen explains how when talking about the final of the Handball World Cup in Norway in 1999:

No-one noticed this, but when matches go into extra time in the Handball World Cup, there is not supposed to be a break between the two extra halves. However,

there was a break because, in actuality, TV 2 decided when the second extra half was to commence – because we wanted to squeeze in a few commercials between the two halves. But we did this so smoothly that people didn't notice. No-one noticed this during the final, but we gave the official a small monitor so he would know when to give the go-ahead to start the second extra half – after the commercials. But nothing was ruined because of this.” (Quoted in Helland 2003: 76f)

This brief and improvised commercial break earned TV 2 approximately € 100 000.

The “sports product” holds a central position in the sports/media complex because of its mass appeal; because of its exposure of commercial messages; and because of the nature of television rights. Later, this has had implications for the development of Norwegian broadcasting on a broad basis, and has also challenged the publicist venture of broadcasting.

### **Football's Mass Appeal and the Norwegian Broadcasting Structure**

How sports rights challenge established broadcasting structures and publicist ideals becomes apparent when looking at the newly created agreement concerning the broadcasting of Norwegian football. This agreement further more provides insight into how the Football Association attempted to account for their need for exposure.

There are four different sets of actors involved in the Norwegian competition for sports rights. Firstly, there are the public broadcasters, the NRK and TV 2. The NRK is financed by a general license fee, and TV 2 is financed by advertising revenue. Both channels are first and foremost distributed through the terrestrial network; however they are also transmitted by cable networks, satellite systems and to some extent through the Internet. The NRK is broadcast by the two major satellite companies Canal Digital and Viasat, while TV 2 is broadcast solely by Canal Digital. Secondly, there are the private commercial broadcasters without a public licence – channels such as TV 3 and TV Norge. These are financed by advertising, have a more limited terrestrial dissemination, and are aired either by Viasat (TV 3) or Canal Digital (TV Norge) (Helland & Solberg 2007). Thirdly, there are the entertainment channels – distributed through satellite and cable networks and based on films and sports events – such as Canal + (by Canal Digital), and TV 1000 (by Viasat). Fourthly, there are the satellite network owners, i.e. the Norwegian telecommunications company Telenor and the investment company SBS (Helland & Solberg 2007).

In June 2005, the rights to domestically broadcast Norwegian football matches through television, mobile phones and the Internet for the next 3-4 years was auctioned off by the Norwegian Football Association. The rights were acquired by the commercial public service broadcaster TV 2 and the satellite distributor Canal Digital – owned by Telenor – for the sum of NOK 1 billion (€127 million). They were won in competition with – among others – the NRK and Viasat. The price did not include production costs related to matches, which had to be covered by TV 2 and Telenor.

It was an astonishing price, and it represented a 300-400 per cent increase compared to the previous agreement (Helland & Solberg 2007). The primary interested parties were, however, the public service broadcasters who are competing against each other as well as the other commercial actors in the television market. Furthermore, the two main opposing satellite distributors – Canal Digital and Viasat – were both keen to obtain football rights that would aid them in their effort to dominate the Norwegian

satellite television market. Because of this situation, the two public service broadcasters both unexpectedly entered into strategic and financial alliances with one of the two competing satellite distributors.

TV 2's Sports Editor, Bjørn Taalesen (2006) has published his own book which offers an insider's perspective on the processes involved in the channel's procurement of the "football agreement". He emphasises the importance of the agreement in terms of the future Norwegian television market:

It was no-longer merely a matter of how much money Norwegian football was worth. It was a struggle for the future of the Nordic television market. Norwegian football had merely become the arena in which the battle was to be won. In the jackpot lay the opportunity to dominate the future Norwegian digital television market. Football had become the means to secure this strategic position and to establish the basis for the development of the pay-per-view market everyone knows is coming (Taalesen 2006: 97).

Taalesen's analysis reveals why sports rights are so expensive: Because of the importance of securing a future position in the television market, it would be difficult to abandon such a deal from a strategic point of view.

However, this agreement entails more than mere economic costs. There are several other essential issues incorporated into the contract. A confidential NFF document stipulates specific demands on the part of the owner:

- To produce at least 220 matches per season
- To produce at least 20 "football magazine"-style programmes per season
- To make use of studio design elements provided by the NFF
- To broadcast a 10-second "profile programme" (a segment advertising the "football product") at the beginning of each programme
- To advertise all broadcast matches: 15 second segments, five times a day for the three preceding days before each match
- To call leagues and cups by their sponsor names
- The NFF determines where players are to be interviewed (sponsor exposure)
- The NFF determines which matches are to be broadcast

The requirements stipulated in the agreement are both extensive and detailed. It is furthermore specific in terms of the responsibilities involved in broadcasting Norwegian football.<sup>5</sup> The three main aspects of the deal are as follows: Firstly, it is specific regarding the aspect of *the production*: TV 2/Telenor is responsible for producing matches and sports programming. However, the NFF in many ways "formats" this coverage through instructions regarding how many matches and programmes are to be produced, and which league and cup matches are to be broadcast live. As such, this public service broadcaster is in many ways converted into the NFF's own "production and broadcasting apparatus". Secondly, it specifies aspects regarding *commercial exposure*: The agreement contains obligations that render TV 2/Telenor an instrument of commercial exposure for the NFF and its commercial partners. When the NFF requires TV 2 to call leagues by their sponsored names, and further more require interviews with players to be conducted in front of a sponsored wall, these are measures that are part of the NFF's

brand building strategy for itself and its partners. Thirdly, there is the aspect regarding *advertisement and promotion*: The terms outlined above concerning the promotion of football matches and the incorporation of “profile programming”, renders TV 2/Telenor a channel for the advertising of the “football product” itself, which they share with the NFF.

A broadcaster with exclusive rights of this kind – with its strict regulations regarding the channel’s broadcasting activities – easily becomes a tool in the production, exposure and public relations strategy of both the NFF and the owner channel. Because of football’s mass appeal, and because of the fierce competition to procure these rights, the owner is induced to “format” the football product according to the business strategies of the NFF. As such, strong external and internal pressures are put on the publicist role of the broadcaster.

### **The Appeal of Football and “Editorial Sports Rights Advertisement”**

The mass appeal of mediated football poses challenges for established media structures and practices alike. The four groups of contestants mentioned above all have different approaches to the ideals embedded in the role of the publicist. The first group – the public service broadcasters the NRK and TV 2 – have traditionally had rather strong obligations towards publicist ideals. Both feature regular news programming and both produce their own sports news. In the second group – the private commercial channels without public service obligations – TV 3 does not feature sports news programming, while TV Norge does. However, TV Norge’s sports programming are relatively low-cost productions. The third group of broadcasters – the entertainment channels – carries no publicist traditions in terms of news and current affairs programming in the broad sense. The fourth group of broadcasters – the satellite distribution companies – is not actors in this area.

The tender document outlining the football agreement challenges long-established publicist ideals. This is a problematic aspect which was commented upon by the NRK’s Sports Editor during the bid:

My main impression of this tender document is that this deal will undermine our editorial freedom and threaten important principles that have been established over the years. In our opinion, there are many reasons for being critical towards many sections in this document” (The NRK 2005).

TV 2’s Sports Editor had the following reflections on the same issue:

It was not only football matches that were for sale here. For a price one could also sell out the established ethical principles of the press. Page after page revealed tendencies towards the fact that television’s chief editors no longer controlled the editorial content of the football product (Taalesen 2006: 77).

This is evidence of an emerging trend in which sports rights purveyors place demands on procurers that turn broadcasters into propaganda channels for sports organisations. Before the Euro 2000 championship, UEFA demanded that rights holders – including TV 2 – would broadcast UEFA propaganda in the form of television programmes called “UEFA Stories” prior to the tournament. The International Olympic Committee has pursued similar strategies.

When a broadcaster obtains exclusive rights to football matches, the football organisation and its sponsors are not the only ones eager to build “the football product”. The broadcaster itself, and in particular its sports department, will assume strategic measures to increase the appeal of the sport – in order that the investment may be defended. Once exclusive rights have been obtained, a natural interest amasses within the broadcaster to utilise rights to their full extent – and cover the sport comprehensively. TV 2’s Sports Editor Bjørn Taalesen, on the channel’s Norwegian rights to the English Premier League:

When a television channel like ours owns rights like these, the focus will not only be on broadcasting the matches, but the whole news process will in itself be affected by it. When we owned the rights, a Norwegian player in Premier League in England could not move a muscle without us doing a report on it. After we lost the rights, news values changed and our attention to English football is much weaker. Now we only report what we think is necessary (Research interview).

As a further illustration, sports presenter Davy Wathne explains how basketball coverage in TV 2’s sports programming has become increasingly problematic for him after TV 2 became a sponsor of the national basket league:

The worst thing I do as a sports presenter is to introduce an insignificant report on an insignificant change of an insignificant manager in an insignificant club in such an insignificant national sport as basketball (Research interview 2006).

Bjørn Taalesen goes on to comment on TV 2’s position as main sponsor of the NFF:

We are the largest sponsor of Norwegian football in terms of revenue for the Norwegian Football Association. This means that we are in a position to determine the degree to which general sponsors receive on-air publicity. Commercial sports sponsors will often measure their contract according to on-air exposure, and thereby be able to document the value of their sponsorship. It goes without saying that a TV-company that occupies the position of “largest sponsor” retains a rather unique opportunity to substantiate the value of its contract. The more Norwegian football there is on TV, the bigger the commercial value. This is not a bad outlook from a marketing perspective! (Helland 2006: 11)

Not all the requirements in the tender document were honoured, and the final agreement between TV 2/Telenor and the NFF is not publicly known (Ytre-Arne 2006; Ytre-Arne & Helland 2007). Nevertheless, the fact that certain elements within the contract are clearly in violation with essential publicist ideals is beyond doubt. The obligations placed on the broadcaster by the NFF and other powerful rights holders concerned with exposure, violated basic principles of publicist activities. From an international perspective, journalists ideally operate according to specific codes of ethics. These ideals may not always be adhered to; however it is the formulation, the institutionalisation and the social awareness of these ideals that enable journalists to represent the journalistic institution. In a national perspective, the journalistic adherence to these codes constitutes the very legitimisation of the public broadcasting licence fee.

The football agreement clearly threatens publicist ideals, both formally and informally. The two most vital directives pertaining to journalist and publicist endeavours in the press and broadcasting are the Code of Ethics and the Code of Advertisement. The Code of Ethics explicitly states that the news media “cannot yield to any pressure from

anybody who might want to prevent open debates, the flow of information, free access to sources, and open debate on any matter of importance to society as a whole” (Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press, § 1.3). The Code also states that “each editorial desk and each employee must guard their own integrity and credibility in order to be free to act independently of any persons or groups who – for ideological, economic or other reasons – might want to exercise an influence over editorial matters” (Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press, § 2.2). § 2.6 states: “Reject any attempt to break down the clear distinction between advertisement and editorial copy”. The same regulations also state: “Never promise editorial favours in return for advertisements. The material should be published as a result of editorial considerations” (§ 2.7). The Norwegian Broadcasting Act is equally clear on this aspect. It explicitly states that, “The broadcaster shall not broadcast items containing surreptitious advertising” (§ 3.3). According to the Broadcasting Act,

“Surreptitious advertising” means the verbal or visual presentation in programmes of a product manufacturer’s or a service provider’s products, services, trademark or business, where the presentation intentionally serves advertising purposes and the audience is liable to be misled about the nature of the presentation (§ 1.1).

Key words in both regulation and law are integrity, independence, and influence. Ideally, journalists – including sports journalists – editors and broadcasters should operate with integrity and independence from organisations and activities they may have to relate to in the editorial process. The NFF’s attempted arrangement with the football broadcasters is therefore in clear conflict with the ideals and legal regulations referred here. It not only represents an attempt to break down the distinction between advertisement and editorial copy – it also represents an attempt to win editorial favour in return for exclusive media rights. This arrangement fails to safeguard publication according to editorial rules. Journalistic coverage of one’s own sports rights – which is in the interest of the sports organisation and broadcaster alike – and which can be characterised as editorial advertisement – may be labelled *editorial sports rights advertisement*.

The “exposure game” concerning football as content reveals a rather paradoxical situation. On the one hand TV 2/Telenor is a very powerful constellation in terms of media interest. On the other hand, exclusive media rights entail compliance with strict regulations in terms of the actual football coverage. These obligations and regulations may seem both unreasonable and unconventional. Nevertheless, sports rights holders have a long tradition for actively using the medium itself to develop both image and “product”.

Today, the football pitch is more than just a stadium. The pitch is also an important arena for mass media in their struggle for market segments in which to sell their own products (pay-TV); to sell viewers to advertisers (advertisement-TV); and to maintain ratings (public service broadcasting/commercial broadcasting).

Consequently, publicist ideals and sports journalism are certainly under pressure. Davis Rowe has described the situation thus:

Sports journalists [...] are caught in a particularly difficult bind because of the different, sometimes contradictory professional demands made on them; they are expected, often at the same time, to be objective reporters, critical investigators, apologists for sports and teams, representatives of fans, and, not unusually, to have performed in sport at elite levels (David Rowe, 1999: 37).

Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s maintained that “the medium is the message”. This statement may be reformulated in regards to television sports rights: “The medium is the exposure”. It is the appeal – and the possible exposure of advertisement and sponsorships, added to the increased interest in media content – which gives football its added value. In this situation, strong economic dynamics are combined with fundamental business strategies. As such, mass appeal combined with a central position in the media complex ensures sports contribute to further changes in media structures and media practices.

## Conclusions

During a pre-match press conference in the 1990s, the former manager of the Norwegian national team for men – Egil “Drillo” Olsen – was asked what his biggest worry was. The journalist was obviously concerned with the upcoming match and the condition of an injured player. Olsen answered: “What worries me most is that market liberalism is accelerating so fast in Europe” (Olsen et al 1997: 157ff).

If there is one area in which market liberalism has become increasingly evident during the last years, it is in sports and broadcasting, and – in particular – in the two combined. Market liberalism has had extensive implications for essential social institutions such as broadcasting and journalism, and has furthermore been closely linked to the development of the mass appeal of media-covered sports in general – and football in particular.

This increase in popularity has entailed great success for the mediated “football product”. It is a product which is very easy to sell, and it is furthermore a product to which a range of different actors wish to be associated. According to Rowe (1999), the media is both an economic and cultural driving force in this development. The media itself supplies most of the capital that in turn creates and disseminates information and images. This in turn produces an ascending spiral – constantly generating more capital and more sports events.

As such, sports journalism has become an integral part of popular culture. Ever since sports found its way into newspapers, broadcasting, and onto the Internet, sports have had a very popular share in the media content. Because of the mass appeal of sports, sports journalism is often conceived of as having a role within the news institution that is different from other journalistic forms. It often seems sports journalism’s position within the field is constituted by the appeal of sports *per se*. Sports journalists are today’s Brothers Grimm – constructing our modern fairytales, collecting medals on behalf of fans and the nation, and creating antagonist *scapegoats*.

In the end, the contest for sports rights concerns viewers, licence fees and profits – played out by powerful actors within the media landscape. It is also a competition for ensuring the new commercial platforms can offer the most appealing content; for securing television distribution; and for controlling and maximising commercial exposure. Sports are the driving force of this struggle (Helland 2006). Of all the various sports branches, football is the most vital, in Norway as it is in many other countries. Accordingly there is a strong symbiosis between sports and the media.

It is evident that broadcasters with publicist ideals have themselves become part of the modern sports/media complex (see also Brandsås & Odden 1997, Helland & Ytre-Arne 2007). As such, media organisations have a strong commercial interest in the condition of this reality. Journalistic ideals place the news media as independent watchdogs

of social institutions. As we have seen, however, this ideal can be violated in the name of mass appeal, and through the effect of the sports/media complex. Sports coverage is normally reserved for the broadcaster's sports division. Furthermore, the sports division operates in accordance with the broadcaster's sports rights. This association is in danger of converting sports coverage into a sophisticated form of editorial advertising, where the branding of sports associations as well as the broadcaster itself may easily become the dominant objective.

Historically, the ties between sports and the media have always been both strong and prevalent – and particularly in football, where the popularity of the game has constituted a premise for the symbiosis between sports and the media. However, this relationship holds two strong paradoxes: Firstly, that the media institution is such a powerful instrument for exposure, yet at the same time too weak to safeguard journalistic and publicist ideals; and secondly that the strongest area of commercial interest – i.e. sports coverage – has the weakest critical journalistic methodology. As such, these strong paradoxes threaten the social role of broadcasting and journalism.

## Notes

1. Thanks to Helle Sjøvaag for language consultancy
2. Norwegian: *I skuddet*
3. The first unofficial international fixture between England and Scotland was played in 1870, while the first official international between the two national teams took place in 1872. That same year, the first cup final of the Football Association was played. The initiative to establish "The Football League" was taken in 1888 (Helland 2003)
4. Today: Oslo
5. I got access to the document when a journalist contacted me, gave me the document, and asked for reactions from me as a media researcher.

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