The Secrets of Sports Heroes

The Drama Created by Journalism is One Part of the Making of the Sports Heroes

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The main objects of this study include sports journalism, the way the stories of sporting heroes are told, and the drama of journalism that brings these heroes to the headlines.

Sports journalism is seen here as a part of Finnish culture. At the same time it is an elementary part of the culture of journalism in Finland. The products of journalism, the texts, are the focus of this research. My aim was to study how sports journalism is involved in the making of sports heroes, and how the drama of journalism works to mythologize them.

I see the evolution of the heroes of sports journalism as a result of a very complex cultural system. Culture is the context that gets its expression in religion, in the way good and evil are experienced, in rituals and in the many means of communication. The background to sports is a mixture of these culturally bound expressions. Plentiful evidence exists to document the claim that primitive societies frequently incorporated running, jumping, throwing, wrestling and ball playing in their religious rituals and ceremonies (see Guttman 1978). The modern way of understanding culture is not something fixed, something stable, instead it is always changing and in this it is like a river (Fornäs 1995). As a result the nature of sport has changed a lot during the centuries.

My study builds on the studies and tradition that is described by Carey (1989), whose ritual way of understanding communication indicates that reality is produced, maintained and fixed by means of communication. The idea of early sports journalism was sports promotion. It was in the 1920s that several newspapers hired their first sports journalists in Finland. The history of journalism in Finland dates back to 1776, when the first Finnish newspaper was published. So it took more than one hundred years before sports reports had become important enough that they deserved to be reported. Or should we say, that in the course of one hundred years the skills of high society, writing and reading, had reached the common man. The Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952 were a big boost for Finnish sports journalism. Newspapers hired people who knew something about sports, and they also bought new equipment and printing machines.

As a consequence of its ritualistic background sport has a strong dramatic nature. From my journalistic viewpoint sport is something that is meant to be seen, so there is a tension between the actors (sportsmen) and the spectators. Sport is also full of risks and surprises, goals during the last second or unexpected victories for the underdogs or not-fore-
seen collapses of the champions. This creates the drama of sports. (See Whannel 1992)

The drama of journalism is analogous to the drama of sport. Journalism is designed for the public or the audience. The messages of journalism have a meaning only when they reach the public. This means there must be some kind of tension between news stories and their audience. As the nature of news is surprises, this means that news casts are quite often full of drama. Those people who perform in the middle of these stories are quite often glorified as heroes. And this glorification often happens without notice.

Sports heroes are always seen as representatives of good values. These good values are something that have meaning for the whole society. It is essential that sports heroes have a society, a country or a sports club, that they represent. The status of a sports hero is not something that can be inherited, nor bought. It must be earned. And the more difficult the way to stardom was, the brighter the star shines.

Let us also keep in mind the ritualistic nature of journalism and sports. According to Real (1996, 51) sport, together with media, is a significant power in society. It is more or less a habit to start one’s day by reading a newspaper, and for many people it is more or less a ritual to check the regular sports results.

In this paper I put forward the central themes of my Ph.D. study, the development of sports journalism in Finland, the historical combination of nationalism and sports in Finland, the changing nature of sport in Finland in the 20th century, the heroes of this study in their context, and at the end I conclude what I have found out about the drama of sports journalism and about the sports heroes.

The Central Themes of the Study

One of the central themes of this study was to register the evolution of the heroes, from distance runner Hannes Kolehmainen, who won three Olympic Gold Medals in the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912, to the Swedish icehockey coach Curt Lindström, who coached the Finnish national team to victory in the World Championship tournament in Stockholm in 1995. In what way have the heroes changed? Why did the change take place?

Another central theme was to study the change of the connection between national emotions and the country’s sports heroes. Sport is a good playground for the manifestation of ”sisu”, which is a Finnish word for not giving up, for fighting as an underdog. Sisu has long been part of Finnish identity, but this is not so much the case any more. We have lived through a change in the connection between sports heroes and nationalism. But how did this change happen?

Another central theme was to register the change in the main sports in Finland during this century. From the early decades of the 20th century until the 1980s athletics, or track and field, as well as cross country skiing and wrestling, were the focus of Finnish sports life. But team sports have gained popularity in the last two decades of this century. Why did sports change?

In order to answer these questions I decided to study seven athletes and one coach. I studied what had been written about them and in some cases what radio and television said about them. This was a qualitative study, so I decided not to read everything that was reported about these selected heroes, but instead I chose carefully some specific pieces of sports journalism, where the drama of fighting or the drama of winning was vigorously represented. In order to make the right decisions I had to do a lot of reading in the micro film archives in the library of the University of Jyväskylä, in the library of the University of Tampere and in the press library of Helsinki City.

My material consists of 169 articles that were published in Helsingin Sanomat, published in the capital of Finland; in Turun Sanomat, which has a long tradition of strong involvement in sports; Demari, the main newspaper of the social democrats in Finland, and also the predecessors of Demari, that is, Työmies and Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti. A traditional sports weekly Suomen Urheilulehti was also among the research material. The two radio recordings date back to 1948 (Olympic Games in London) and 1960 (Winter Olympic Games in Squaw Valley). The TV-programmes that were analysed included two A-studio (YLE) programmes from 1994, and the third TV-programme was a Suunvuoro programme (MTV3) in 1995.

The heroes whose heroism is studied through the medium of these texts include Olympic champions Hannes Kolehmainen, the runner, Paavo Nurmi, the runner, Tapio Rautavaara, the javelin thrower, Veikko Hakulinen, the skier, Lasse Viren, the runner, and the only female athlete in my sample, Marja-Liisa Hämäläinen (later Kirvesniemi), the skier. Included are also World Champions Keijo Rosberg, the Formula-1 driver, and Curt Lindström, the icehockey coach.
In their typology of Finnish sports publicity Itkonen and Knuuttila (1992) find six phases of publicity and hero-making. The first two phases, 1) the local talents and 2) the champions of arenas, are dealing with the heroes before the time of my study. The heroes in my study fit in the following typologies presented by Itkonen and Knuuttila: 3) The ones who ran Finland onto the World Atlas (Kolehmainen and Nurmi), 4) The fighters of radio (Rautavaara and Hakulinen), 5) The stars of television (Viren, Rosberg and Hämäläinen) and 6) Those who know how to champion the media (Lindström).

Another Finnish researcher (Reinikainen 1991) has divided the 20th century in an analogous way, although his focus is not on the publicity but on the sportslife. He suggests four periods:

1) The rise of national sports (1900-1919)
2) The years of Olympic fever (1920-1940)
3) Uniting the nation and the spirit of the Helsinki 1952 Olympic Games (1945-1960)
4) The years of commercialism, international competition and postmodernism (1960-1988).

As a result of these typologies I decided to name the phases of sports journalism as shown in Table 1. Lasse Viren was the national hero at the same time colour TV came to Finnish households. But in Finland TV did not immediately become such a powerful factor as in America. The reason was that the Finnish Broadcasting Company had a monopoly of sports programming until the end of the 1980s.

But sport did change before the media changed. Finnish sports were mainly male, individual, and Olympic sports until the shocking 1980s, when the old bastion of Finnish sport was turned upside down. Keijo ”Keke” Rosberg won the World title in F-1 in 1982. Thus, Rosberg became the first non-Olympic sportsman to be nominated sportsman of the year in the end of his victory season. As a result, this was the end of the Olympic monopoly in Finnish sports. Two years later, in 1984 Marja-Liisa Hämäläinen became the most successful sportsperson in the Sarajevo Winter Olympic Games. This was finally the breakthrough for Finnish women in sport. This does not mean that there were no women at the top of Finnish sport before Marja-Liisa’s three Olympic Gold Medals in 1984. But the status that Marja-Liisa gained via media was higher than any sportswoman had ever gained in Finland. Because of these trends sports became more and more media bound in the 1980s. At the same time team sports gained increasing respect and popularity.

As a result I have named the years in Finnish sports after the year 1989 as the period of Media sports. The Media is playing an increasingly central role in focusing the attention of the audience. Icehockey was among the first sports to take advantage of the media explosion. The local commercial radio stations started to operate in Finland in 1985. It was a rebirth for Finnish icehockey, as the local radio stations realised that icehockey with its unexpected turns, fierce fights and breathtaking goals is the perfect sport for radio. And when the commercial MTV3 was allowed to transmit direct sports programmes at the change of the decade, icehockey was again one of the first sports to attract a live audience.

The time for television competition really started in the 1990s. The commercial MTV3 started its newscasts in 1981. But the competition truly flamed only in 1993, when MTV3 was given a whole channel of its own. Another sign of the growing competition was the start of another commercial channel, Channel Four in 1997. The develop-

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The Development of Sports Journalism in Finland

As I have already said, the sports movement grew up in the late 19th century. One of the signs of the strength of this movement were many small magazines dealing with sporting matters. *Suomen Urheilulehti* (Finnish sportstimes) started in 1898 and it is the oldest still-running sports paper in Finland. The spirit in the writing at the time was to enable the sports movement to get stronger (Arponen 1991, Perko 1991, Päkkäläinen 1991).

The first sports journalists in Finnish newspapers were appointed by *Hufvudstadsbladet* in 1902 and *Helsingin Sanomat* in 1905. The strength of the public enthusiasm for sport was first realised in the editorial offices of *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Turun Sanomat*. For instance, *Turun Sanomat* sponsored Paavo Nurmi and payed his Olympic trip expenses in 1924 (Tommla & Salokangas 1998).

It was only in 1931 when these papers, leading the way in Finland, started a special sports department in *Helsingin Sanomat*. We can also assume that one of the reasons *Helsingin Sanomat* could overtake *Hufvudstadsbladet* and other competitors in the 1920s was the attention paid to sports in the offices of *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Radio amateurs started to operate in many Finnish towns in the beginning of the 1920s, but the important year is 1926, when the Finnish Broadcasting Company started to operate. The first sports programme was the match between Sweden and Finland in athletics in 1927. In 1928 radio was not allowed to transmit their programme from the Olympic trials, but after the games Lauri "Tahko" Pihkala rushed to read the highlights in front of a microphone. The first direct transmission dates back to 1929, when Sulo "Simeoni" Kolkka reported athletics match between Finland and Sweden in Helsinki.

In 1932 the Olympic news were read in Helsinki and they were based on the telegraphed messages sent by the Finnish News Agency. In 1936 six reporters of Finnish Broadcasting Company were sent to report the Olympic Games in Germany. Only The United States of America could come up with such a large radio team (Lyytinen 1996, 104).

Ph.D. Martti Jukola (1900-1952), one of the most outstanding figures in the history of Finnish sports journalism, if not the most outstanding, was the chief reporter in Berlin in 1936, when the Finnish distance runners achieved a triumphant triple victory in the 10000 meter race. Jukola’s report of the race, where the brave Japanese Murakoso was beaten by Salminen and two other Finns, is considered a classic in Finland. The atmosphere created by Jukola on radio was well suited to the drama of the situation. As an Olympian himself (he participated in the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924 as a 400 m hurdler) Martti Jukola could express the feelings of the sportsmen to the radio audience in a very matter-of-fact way.

Jukola was only 29 years of age when he became a doctor in 1930. He was the editor of *Suomen Urheilulehti*, the sports paper, in 1931-1936. He wrote also 19 sports books. In the field of literature Jukola also gained respect as a translator. But the best-known of Jukola’s work is his work as a radio reporter. He worked for the Finnish Broadcasting Company in 1931-1952.

A strong boost for radio sport was the short period in the end of the 1930s, when Helsinki was nominated the host of the 1940 Olympic Games. This was due to the fact that Japan was already involved in the Second World War. The Finnish Broadcasting Company bought new radio broadcasting equipment and trained new radio reporters, but the Olympic fewer in Finland lasted only for a short time.

As we know, the Russian army attacked Finland in 1939. The International Olympic Committee decided to postpone the 1940 Games. The next Olympic Games were arranged only in 1948. And Helsinki became the host only in 1952. This was again a golden moment for sports journalism in Finland. In some cases regional newspapers even used airplanes to get new photographs in time from Helsinki to the edition houses in the country towns.

The effect of radio sports on newspaper journalism was interesting. In the 1920s, at the same time as radio started, newspapers hired more sports journalists and started to use more photographs and on a larger scale. But the start in competition in the news was only one reason for this: Finnish success in the Olympic Games in athletics and wrestling was outstanding in the 1920s and 1930s. And of course the increased use of photographs was a result of better technical capabilities, and not only the result of increased news competition, as in the 1920s radio was not really a threat to the newspapers in any way.

But it was a totally different situation in the 1950s. The newspapers realised that the big names of radio sports, that is, Pekka Tiilikainen and Paavo
Noponen, had quickly become much better known to a large audience than the reporters of newspapers. In reply, the newspapers tried to promote their own journalists and at times the criticism of radio sport was quite heavy. For instance in the Winter Olympic Games in 1960 Veikko Hakulinen anchored the Finnish ski relay team to victory. The Finnish Broadcasting Company had some technical troubles and this piece of news was first heard through Swedish radio. Turun Sanomat, for instance, criticized Finnish radio quite heavily afterwards.

Television journalism has underlined the entertaining function of sports journalism (see Whannel 1992). Newspapers with their large photographs cannot compete with live broadcasts in this field. The same goes for radio: the format of television has become the standard of sportsjournalism. This means that while television takes the main role as an entertainer, radio and newspapers do still have a lot to do as providers of news and background information.

The Changing Face of Sport in Finland in the 20th Century

The world has changed dramatically during the 20th century, and simultaneously the world of sport has changed. Entirely new dimensions emerged in the world of sport in the 1980's. Individual sports were replaced team sports, Olympic sports were replaced by commercial sports, especially motor sport. The world of masculine sport had to make room for female sports. The world of effort had to agree to make way for the visual world. The role of television in this development is quite central.

The old favourites of the Finnish people, athletics, wrestling and skiing, are now challenged by team events and totally new events. Keijo Rosberg, the F-1 World Champion in 1982 paved the way for new thinking in Finnish sport. The status of female sport was guaranteed after the victories of Marja-Liisa Hämäläinen in Sarajevo in 1984. And the success of team sports was highlighted in 1995, when Finland won the world title in ice hockey and the footballer Jari Litmanen of Ajax Amsterdam was voted Sportsman of the Year in Finland, the first team player ever to win this distinction.

The change that can be witnessed in skiing is a very good example of the new demands of modern media sports. In fact, one part of the change is due to sports people, and the other part is due to the media. There are at least seven areas of change that skiing has lived through in quite a short time.

These changes have modernized the image of skiing, and many of them have been made with the demands of television in mind:

1) The equipment. Skis were made of wood until the dramatic breakthrough of fiber glass skis in the 1970’s. Another area where technology advanced was timekeeping. In 1976 the Finnish ski giant Juha lost the Olympic Gold Medal by just 0,01 seconds to his Swedish rival, Thomas Wassberg in a 15 km competition.

2) The clothing. As a result of more accurate timekeeping, skiing suits became more streamlined. And as a result of the growing television interest the colouring of skiing suits became more fashionable.

3) The style. In cross country skiing the new invention of the late 1970’s was the so-called Siitonen-schritt, skating style, that was to revolutionize the whole cross-country skiing in the 1980’s. This new style was faster than the traditional style, and for the television viewer it offered more to see. The monotonous movement of the body of the traditional style was changed to the dynamic skating movement. As a consequence the visual quality of skiing improved. An even more dramatic change took place in ski jumping in the end of the 1980’s. A Swedish ski jumper, Jan Boklöv, developed a strange new style; opening his legs in the air. At that time this was against the rules, and it was considered quite ugly. But this was a way of flying further, and the International Skiing Federation decided to change the rules. As a result, within 1-2 years everybody was training with the new V-style. For the spectator this new style gave more to see: longer jumps and dramatic movement in the air: the opening of the skis. Compared to the old stiff way of flying, this was revolutionary.

4) Celebration. The invention of team events within skijumping and combined skiing has brought celebration and hugging to the tv-audience. Authentic joy and cheering expressed by team mates creates an atmosphere of celebration which is transmitted to the tv-audience as well.

5) The number of events. The number of events has increased. In 1984 there were for the first time as many Olympic Gold Medals on offer for female cross country skiers as for male skiers. In 2001 the programme of the World Championships in skiing consists, for the first time, of sprint events.
6) The duration of the competitions. As a result of the increasing number of events, in 1988 the Winter Olympic Games expanded so that for the first time they lasted 16 days, as long as the Summer Olympic Games. As a consequence television can present Olympic programmes over three weekends. This means more sports telecasts during prime time.

7) The duration of the season. In skijumping the World Cup consists of 30-32 competitions. These are during the winter time. In addition there are the 5-7 World Cup competitions for summer season. More competitions means more television time, and as a result more money for the organizers. And this also means more prize money for the competitors. Correspondingly, in ice hockey the competitive season has expanded so that the Finnish major league starts in mid-September and ends at the end of August. And then the season continues with the World Championship tournament; ending only in May. For the ice hockey fan, the season continues until June, when the NHL-league comes to a climax.

Television has helped skiing in at least seven ways to acquire a modernized image. These points also apply to other sports that meet the standards of television:

1) Television wants the fan to be entertained. The more entertaining the sport, the higher the popularity among the television audience.

2) Television adds cameras. In order to entertain the television audience the number of television cameras has increased in sports competitions. This gives the opportunity to show more.

3) Television tries to show the true sporting atmosphere by means of careful planning. Placing the cameras in the right places makes it easier to avoid "dead" moments in the telecast.

4) Television tries to show the celebration and the best performances live. In many instances the starting times and even the place where the competition is held is decided taking into account the demands of television.

5) Television tries to show the drama. The competition must be planned so that the most dramatic action is available for the television cameras.

6) The Television spectator lives in luxury due to slow motion. The invention of slow motion is helping to elevate sports heroes to a mythological level (Hietala 1989).

7) Replaying the highlights underlines the meaning of the sports achievements. The television spectator sees the highlights of the competitions many times in the course of one day through replays. They can be included in news casts, or just in special sports programmes with a summing-up of the day’s events.

The Media now plays a more central role in the competition between different sports than ever. Already in the 1970s, the sports federations were seeking to involve more young athletes, and school-age people in their activities. But in the 1990’s the modern sports federations most carefully consider what kind of media strategies they should employ.

Sport and Nationalism in Finland

Finland was part of the Russian empire in 1912, when the Olympic Games were staged in Stockholm. This was a time when Russia wanted to put an end to all the privileges that the Finnish people had in their country. This is known as the second Russianizing period in Finnish history. The Russians had a special Russianizing program in Finland (Nygård & Kallio 1987, 577). During this period, the dream of gaining independence grew in Finland. In the opening ceremonies the Russian team leaders denied the Finnish team the right to a flag of their own, although this was just the flag of Helsinki Gymnasts. This is the background against which we must study the effect of the three Olympic Gold Medals that Hannes Kolehmainen won in Stockholm. His successes were reported in detail in the Finnish press, and the national feeling got stronger and stronger so that in 1917 Finland declared independence. The significance of Kolehmainen’s victories in this process should not be underestimated.

The Finnish civil war divided the nation in 1918, and there was quite a lot of unrest in Finland during the 1920s. This ended in 1932, when some of the rightwing fanatics tried a coup-d’état. This did not work out, but soon after this there arose a new topic: it was announced on the news that the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) was planning to declare Paavo Nurmi a professional. In the Finnish papers this was seen as a Swedish attack, a result of Swedish jealousy because Paavo Nurmi, the world’s best athlete at that time, was a Finn. Emotional writing blamed the Swedes, and the question of whether Nurmi had broken the rules or not was never asked in Finland. In a way this onesided reporting of the Nurmi case
can be seen as an outlet for the blocked emotions in Finnish internal politics. Protecting Nurmi was the right thing to do for all Finns.

Tapio Rautavaara was the only Finnish athlete to win an Olympic Gold in the London Games in 1948. In the 1930s Finland had been one of the leading nations in world athletics equalled only by the USA and Germany in Olympic success. So Rautavaara’s Olympic Gold was just a weak reminder of the glory days. But it was also an important connection to those good old times, at a moment of heavy war indemnity to the Soviet Union and heavy reconstruction work after the war.

We can also argue that the Olympic Gold Medals won by the skier Veikko Hakulinen (4x10 km) in 1960 and the long-distance runner Lasse Viren in 1972 were part of the nation-building process. We can say that the spirit in all these victories 1912-1972 was to promote national unification. At least the meaning of these victories has been interpreted in this way.

The connection between sport, sports journalism and nationalism was shown in 1970, when the radio reporter Paavo Noponen, the one with blue-and-white-tone, was not allowed to travel to the World Championships in skiing in Tatra. Noponen’s superiors thought that he had too much nationalism in his reports. (Salokangas 1996)

More evidence of the strong connection of nationalism and sports can be found in the reaction of the Finns after Paavo Nurmi was declared a professional in 1932. The common understanding in Finland was that the world beater Nurmi had done nothing wrong, but the problem was in the jealousy of the Swedes. As a result, the sporting connection between Finland and Sweden declined, and the traditional match between Finland and Sweden was cancelled for several years.

We can conclude that sport was one part of the making of the nation during the process of gaining independence and in the early decades of independence. The earnest and serious touch of nationalism lasted until the 1970’s, raising sport onto a holy podium, as if it were a religion of the state. Being a sportsman was something like having a national mission, and thus sportsmen could not be criticized. The change took place gradually at the end of the 1970’s. In the 1980’s the old bastion of amateurism was shaken by commercialism, in such a way that sport and nationalism became separated.

Television has been one of the main money-makers of sport since the 1970’s. The growth of the Olympic Games is based on TV-money. One of the reasons money came to play a growing role in sport was the fact that the athletes of the Eastern Block were allowed total concentration on sport, and yet they were treated as non-professionals. In Finland they created a system of stipendiums in order to bring athletes to the same level as their Eastern competitors. This was the start of total training. This also started the process of professionalization. The end of amateurism can be dated in Finland somewhere in the 1980’s, when money was finally openly paid in the Grand Prix circuit of athletics. In Finland motor sports gained respect especially after Keijo Rosberg’s World Championship title in 1982. At the same time the ideal of amateurism little by little died.

As a consequence of the loss of meaning of nationalism, attendance at the traditional matches between national teams in athletics dropped dramatically. The only match that has survived somehow is the match between Finland and Sweden. But even this Finnkampen has had trouble with falling audience figures.

The question of the connection of nationalism and sport continues to be most interesting. The national celebrations huge in 1995 when the Finnish team won the World championship title in ice hockey. The World Championship Title of Formula-1 driver Mika Häkkinen in 1998 has also created strong national emotions in Finnish people. This is despite the fact that Häkkinen drives for McLaren, not for Finland.

We can argue that the feeling of globalization created by the media can result in a kind of alienation among citizens. This makes us wonder whether, in our alienated electronic age, people have an unconscious need to feel that they belong to a community.

The Context and the Change in Sports Heroes

The Meaning-making process is always connected to its context. Meanings are bound to a certain culture, and meanings are never fixed. (Lehtonen 1996) Sports journalists, different media, the field of sports, the time and phase of culture and society are functions that affect the meanings the sports heroes have.

Sports journalists have certain presuppositions that affect their attitudes. They have at least unconscious hierarchies in their minds concerning the way how different fields of sport, and different achievements, should be evaluated. For instance, male performances are usually more highly valued than female performances. One explanation for this
is the fact that sports journalists are more often male than female themselves. Another factor that explains the valuations made by sports journalists is their journalistic experience. And yet another explanation is the extent of education: there are an increasing number of sports journalists with academic status nowadays. The higher the level of education, the broader the mind, and as a consequence the broader the acceptance of new phenomena and events within sports.

Altheide & Snow (1991) argue that prior to the television era, print and radio carried sporting events to fans in a fairly matter-of-fact manner without affecting the way the game was played, or viewed by the fan. Even these media provided a degree of hype, glorifying the sports hero and exalting the ideal of fair play and rivalry, but they had very little impact on the economics of sports, and they made no effort to create a large audience. Basically, print and radio served the fan (Altheide & Snow 1991, 217). I would slightly disagree here with the American view of Altheide & Snow, because in Finland the rise of newspapers and the victory of competitive individual sports over the non-competitive gymnastics tradition took place simultaneously in the late 19th century and in the early 20th century. Competitive sport, with all its records and winners offered much more news material for local newspapers than did gymnastics. In fact the earliest news reports on running also had minor comments of the style of the competitors, as the rules did not emphasize effort alone but style as well. In the same manner it can be argued that the nationalistic radio commentaries by the legendary Pekka Tiilikainen and Paavo Noponen had a lot to do with the celebration of skiing and skijumping heroes before the final breakthrough of television culture.

We can argue, then, that the media play an important role in creating idols and heroes. Russell (1993) reports that even before Second World War in North America, earlier categories such as religious figures and representatives of the “serious arts” were largely supplanted by sports stars and personalities from radio and television. Thus, entertainment figures and sports heroes have emerged as visible categories providing models for youngsters. The shift in choices speaks volumes of the impact of the mass media.

The social situation may provide a basis for the emergence of heroes in the field of sport or in other areas. In 1995 Finland won the World Championship title in icehockey. It was the first major title in team sports for a Finnish team. The celebrations were huge and lasted for several weeks. The festivities cannot be explained without taking into account the social situation in Finland. The period of depression was just about coming to its end. Another, even stronger explanation for the festivities, can be found in the fact that Finland joined the European Union in the beginning of 1995. This was after a very traumatic political fight between the anti-EU and pro-EU-activists. The national referendum in 1994 divided the country, and almost half of the people were against joining the Union. One of the fears was losing independence in a political game, the same independence that our fathers and grandfathers had earned with their blood. In some places joining the EU was saluted with flags at the half mast – as a sign of death. But in May 1995, when the Finnish national team won the World title and television showed all those Finnish flags among the cheering audience, the folks back in their homes and restaurants could easily get into the same festive spirit they could sense through television. One part of the carnivalesque atmosphere in Finland was the cheering of the victory of the Finnish national team, another part was cheering the relief of staying alive as a nation although Finland had been for several months part of this huge European Union. And yet another part of the carnival was relief of the ending of the period of depression, and maybe there was also some relief at having survived the years of cold war and other hard times as the neighbour of the Soviet Union. Deep in their unconscious the Finnish people felt they had really good causes for celebration, and the World Championship victory was just the visible reason for the carnival.

Up until the 1970’s sports heroes played a central role in the nation-building process, and in the creation of the national image. But in the 1990’s sports heroes are used in image making and for the promotion of international corporations.

It still seems to be the case, that people ask for national heroes. These heroes can present a healing choice in hard times or times of national crisis. A sports hero can also function as a symbol of time. Sports heroes can symbolize economic growth. Or they can act as symbols of the process of internationalization of the whole society.

We can conclude that the changes undergone by sports heroes in Finland is an ongoing process. We have moved from the period of the stars of individual sports, who played a central role in the nation-building process, to the period of commercial sports stars and heroes. We know that the prices paid in some team sports for certain super-stars rose sky-high in the 1980’s. And today we can talk
about media sports and media-made sports heroes. The Media can make new stars in one second, and drop them even faster.

**Sports Journalism Drama as one Part of the Creation of Sports Heroes**

Sports journalism drama is created in three main ways. First, expectations and especially, high hopes are an elementary part of the creation of drama. Second, underlining the meaning of of the achievement is another elementary part of drama. Third, confrontations and situations where two persons oppose each other are involved for the creation of drama.

Journalism drama acquires more flavour if something totally unexpected happens. For instance, doping cases became scandals if the sportsman who has tried to cheat is among the top athletes in a sport that is loved by the media.

An elementary part of the making of sports heroes is the provision of background information. Sports journalists need to know historical facts, and they need to know the statistics, in order to be able to write heroic stories. But the stories alone do not make stars. The personal characteristics of sportsmen is one element that is required when we study the birth of heroes. We can talk about charisma, which is a result of an ability to do something extraordinary. And then we must keep in mind the importance of family members, girlfriends and relatives: the media has to find new material all the time in the story of its heroes.

In conclusion we can say that television is today the central medium. So much so, that television sport is a new form of sport. Something that has been shown on television is something that must be commented on in newspapers and in the evening papers. This is especially true in the consideration of sports heroes.

**Note**

1. The sportsmen (their media representations) that are involved in my study include:
   - *Hannes Kolehmainen*, three Olympic gold medals in long distance running in 1912. The runner who "ran Finland onto the map of the world". Kolehmainen crowned his career in 1920 with his Olympic marathon victory.
   - *Paavo Nurmi*, the king of distance runners, who was declared a professional just before the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Thus the successor of Kolehmainen was never given a chance to crown his brilliant career in the way Kolehmainen had done. In his career Nurmi won 9 Olympic gold medals and 3 silver medals. He broke 31 world records.
   - *Tapio Rautavaara*, the Olympic winner in javelin throwing in the London Olympic Games 1948. He was also a popular singer and a film star in Finland.
   - *Veikko Hakulinen*, the greatest of the Finnish cross country skiers. He was the anchor who with his excellent effort raised the Finnish team to Olympic gold in the 4x10 km relay in Squaw Valley in 1960.
   - *Lasse Viren*, the runner who brought Finland back to the top in long distance running in Münich in 1972. In spite his falling in the 10 000 meter race, he was able
to beat the world record. He won gold medals in the 5 000 and 10 000 meters in both the 1972 and the 1976 Games.

• Keijo “Keke” Rosberg, Formula 1 World Champion in 1982, who gave rise to speculation about the true nature of sport. Is F1 driving really sport? The dollars and the amount of publicity generated showed what the answer was.

• Marja-Liisa Hämäläinen (later Kirvesniemi), the cross country skier, who became the most successful sports(wo)man in the Sarajevo Winter Olympics in 1984. She won 3 individual gold medals in Sarajevo.

• Curt Lindström, the Swedish ice hockey coach of the Finnish World Championship team in 1995, who became very popular in Finland.

References

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