

Media policies in the era of new media: An analysis of how sport organizations approach bloggers and blogging

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During the 2007 NCAA Super-Regional baseball playoffs, the NCAA 'ejected' a Louisville Courier-Journal writer from the press box and revoked his credentials because he was live-blogging in violation of an NCAA policy which considers the action a live representation and violates NCAA broadcast agreements with CBS and ESPN (Bozich, 2007). The aftershocks of this decision sparked a lively debate among sport organizations and media outlets over what journalists should be allowed to do from a press box. The Oregonian published an editorial on the subject after the NCAA threatened to deny the paper credentials for the College World Series (Bhatia, 2007). Last March 2008, Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban banned a Dallas Morning News reporter from the team's locker room midway through the NBA season. The team's new policy denied access to writers whose 'primary purpose is to blog.' The team denied singling out the reporter and cited locker room space and fairness as reasons for the policy's development (Jacobson, 2008). The NBA quickly intervened, ruling bloggers credentialed from news organizations must be admitted (Arango, 2008). These instances illustrate the challenges facing sport organizations when dealing with media in the new media age. Traditional definitions of what constitutes a news organization are evolving. Sport organizations such as the New York Islanders and the Washington Capitals have issued media credentials to bloggers, many of whom are fans and have no journalistic training. Gillmor (2006) and Gant (2007) have both written extensively about the evolution of media from a traditional definition to one of 'citizen journalism.' Gant, in particular, distinguished between the function of journalism and the profession of journalism. Among his arguments is the notion that a profession denotes licensure and mainstream journalists, as well as advocates of the First Amendment, would not advocate a system where the government decides who is, and who is not, a journalist.

Still, most sport organizations cling to a traditional definition of what constitutes a journalist when they make decisions about who to issue media credentials to. Stoldt, Dittmore, and Branvold (2006) suggest sport organizations clearly articulate credential policies and make them widely available to all media organizations. The purpose of this study is to analyze a variety of sport organizations' policies relating to bloggers and blogging. Specifically, the study will address two questions. First, what types of policies exist pertaining to providing event credentials for bloggers? Second, what types of restrictions do the policies place on credentialed bloggers? The study holds significance for sport management educators and students interested in how sport organizations are responding to the changing media landscape and has implications for both teaching and future research. The investigators secured and analyzed the blog-related policies of a variety of sport organizations. They utilized a convenience sample, gathering policies from organizational contacts and media representatives. The resultant sample included policies from international governing bodies, professional sport leagues, college conferences and individual teams or institutions. The investigators' analysis of credentialing policies focused on eligibility requirements. Their analysis of restrictions on bloggers included how the policies addressed the level of access afforded bloggers, live updates from events in blogs, the use of other forms of media (e.g., photographs) in blogs, use of the sport organization's protected marks in blogs, and advertising in blogs. Data analysis was ongoing at the time of the proposal's submission. However, preliminary analysis produced some noteworthy findings. For instance, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) developed a comprehensive policy regarding blogging at the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games. The policy stipulated the IPC considered blogging 'as a legitimate form of personal expression and not as a form of journalism.' Therefore, bloggers were restricted to producing content about their own personal experiences, as opposed to the experiences of others. The IPC policy also prohibited the inclusion of sound, photographs or moving images in blogs, limited the use of Paralympic marks, and restricted the use of advertising or sponsorships in Paralympic-related blogs. The presentation will include additional information pertaining to the IPC's policy as well as the policies of other sport organizations. Subsequent discussion will address similarities and differences in the various policies and will include commentary regarding the many issues sport managers face when crafting blog-related policies.