Local and National Media Framing of a Canadian Cycling Icon

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Introduction
On May 27, 2012 Ryder Hesjedal racing with the Garmin-Barracuda (now Garmin-Sharp) professional cycling team, became the first Canadian to win a Grand Tour cycling race, the 95th edition of the Giro d'Italia. The Tour de France, Giro d'Italia and the Tour of Spain make up the three prestigious Grand Tours of professional bicycling. The Giro d'Italia in particular has a strong relationship with the media having been established in 1909 to promote the Italian newspaper La Gazzetta dello Sport (Maloney, 2012).

Studies on the Grand Tours are largely lacking with notable exceptions including host perceptions (Balduck, Maes, & Buelens, 2011; Berridge, 2012) and cultural representation (Palmer, 2010) of the Tour de France. Despite the previous successes of Alex Strada (first North American to wear the Yellow Jersey) and Steve Bauer (first Canadian road cycling Olympic medal) reviews of the media’s narratives of Canadian cycling celebrities is largely absent from the academic literature. Media discourse analyses of Canadian sport tend to focus on, for example, professional hockey and national identity (Allain, 2011; Jackson, 1994; Mason, 2002).

Sports media (e.g., news articles) record, communicate and frame the events and issues surrounding sport (Altheide, 1996; Entman, 1993; Rowe, 2011; Van Gorp, 2007). The frames transmit information and meaning of the events and issues to the reader through text (including keywords, metaphors, and concepts) and visual images (Entman, 1991). Examining the communication of frames in the mainstream media is especially pertinent where frames can influence public perceptions (Buist & Mason, 2007). Therefore, the research question was “What frames are present in the media’s narratives about Ryder Hesjedal surrounding the 2012 and 2013 Tour de France and Giro d’Italia?”

Methodology
Data collection for this study of framing focused on three online media sources, the Victoria Times Colonist (i.e., Hesjedal’s hometown newspaper), the CBC (Canadian public broadcaster), and the Globe and Mail (national media). Data collection consisted of accessing each newspaper’s website before, during and after each Grand Tour. Systematic searches were also conducted through key words (i.e., Ryder Hesjedal, Giro d’Italia and Tour de France), relevant headlines and associated article links. One author initiated the data collection which was then confirmed by the co-author. To maintain consistency across the publications and avoid article duplication, articles were excluded from the data set if they were not written by an author of that publication. Therefore the following articles were utilized for this paper for the Giro d’Italia 2012 and 2013 from the Victoria Times Colonist (n= 89 & 9), the CBC (n= 11 & 1), the Globe and Mail (n= 17 & 3). And for the 2012 and 2013 Tour de France from the Victoria Times Colonist (n= 26 & 14), and the Globe and Mail (n= 2 & 7).

Qualitatively, the articles were reviewed independently by each author and subjected to inductive line by line coding that allowed the researchers to identify emergent themes (Patton, 2002) that provided insight to the representation of Hesjedal and cycling. Themes were vetted and clarified to create an understanding of cycling within the media. This resulted in four salient frames.

Results
Our findings present four main frames, adversity, Ryder style, uncontrollable circumstances and effects of success, that work collectively to portray cycling, Ryder Hesjedal and resultant outcomes of his achievement. Dominant across the Giro d’Italia and Tour de France was the frame of Adversity capturing the daunting task of competing in these grueling cycling events and setting sights (e.g., goals, expectations). In 2012, the Giro was “billed by organizers as a ‘never before’ [with]...The total ascent for Saturday’s second-last stage [being]...two-thirds of the elevation of Mount Everest” (Ebner, May 25, 2012; Globe & Mail). It was clear following his win at the 2012 Giro d’Italia that...
Ryder Hesjedal and the media had established high expectations (i.e., Setting Sights) going into future events. Hesjedal is quoted as saying, “I had always planned for the Giro-Tour-Olympics this year” (Dheensaw, 2012, June 5; Times Colonist).

Hesjedal’s ability to overcome adversity in working towards such high expectations and his pedigree was captured in the frame Ryder Style. “He won the killer event...through a combination of steely determination, superb mountain-climbing ability and Zen-like calm when he was out of the saddle” (Reguly, 2013, May 3; Globe & Mail). The pedigree behind Hesjedal’s ascent to cycling stardom was a focal point that was brought front and center by many writers who made reference to his childhood school (Belmont), hometown (Victoria) or area where he grew up (Colwood).

Unpredictable Circumstances, the third frame, captures the nuances of cycling which followed Ryder. While competing Ryder suffered a series of unfortunate events, including being “knocked out of the Tour [de France 2012] by a nasty crash July 7 in stage six” (Dheensaw, 2012, July 22; Times Colonist). This was followed by unfortunate events (e.g., crashes) when he was forced to withdraw from the 2013 Giro d’Italia because of illness (Reguly, 2013, May 17; Globe & Mail).

Despite these unpredictable circumstances Ryder Hesjedal and Canadian cycling in general have received fame, accolades, and increased status captured within the final frame, Effect of Success. Knox (2012, June 24; Times Colonist) explained, “The day after his May 27 win, an Italian newspaper carried 14 photos of him. There were 1.3 billion unique Internet searches on his name that month, pretty much the most for anyone not named Bieber.” In addition Ryder’s racing status and successes have influenced local bicycle tourism (Wilson, 2012, June 29; Times Colonist) and a new generation of Canadian cyclists (Ebner, 2012, July 10; Globe & Mail).

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that the media framed the two year period during and post-Giro d’Italia championship through Adversity, Ryder style, Unpredictable Circumstances, and Effect of Success. The media presented professional cycling events as adversity to be overcome and Ryder Hesjedal as having the skill set to succeed which “will only increase the stature of the already popular sport in B.C.” (Hoffman, 2012, June 18; Globe & Mail). For the researcher this study demonstrates the usefulness of research on media framing in the Canadian sport context. For the sport management professional, this study indicates the frames which the media used to describe the sporting events and sporting success. By being cognizant of these frames the professional can chose how to respond (e.g., contribute to or manipulate) to the frames which influence public perception (e.g., Van Gorp, 2007; Entman, 1993). For example, a cycling association might align with event organizers to garner support and celebrate the sport locally and nationally.