Sport Communication

Dr. Gashaw Abeza, Towson University

The sport management research community continued to demonstrate strong interest in sport communication scholarship throughout 2025. During this publication year, research in sport communication appeared predominantly in two communication-focused journals, namely *Communication & Sport* and *International Journal of Sport Communication*. Collectively, these two journals published a substantial body of sport communication research (n = 88 articles). Across this corpus, scholars examined a range of interrelated topic areas, including gender and sport media, sport journalism, activism and politics, mental health and risk communication, social media and digital platforms, mega-events and broadcasting, governance and policy, and emerging sport technologies.

Most of these topic areas have been addressed in previous issues of the *Sport Management Digest*. The 2025 publications extend this work by offering new empirical contexts, methodological approaches, and theoretical lenses. From the full range of topic areas identified across the 2025 corpus, this digest selects three themes for focused synthesis: (1) gender, feminism, and mediated (in)equity; (2) sports journalism, metajournalism, and professional practice; and (3) activism, politics, human rights, and moral legitimacy in sport communication. These themes have been selected because they recur across the 2025 publications in both journals and, taken together, represent a large share of the year's sport communication scholarship. The present issue synthesizes 18 articles organized under these three themes.

Gender, Feminism, and Mediated (In)Equity in Sport Communication. A set of articles published in 2025 examined gender as the primary analytic focus, addressing how gendered power relations are constructed, reinforced, and contested through sport

media, journalism practices, and digital communication platforms. Across these studies, gender is examined through women's sport coverage and visibility, the framing of motherhood and sexuality, and gendered inequalities in sport journalism and broadcasting. Theoretical frameworks referenced across these studies include feminist media theory and related gender-focused perspectives, as well as gender schema theory, where applicable. Specific theoretical or conceptual frameworks adopted in these studies include feminist narrative inquiry, symbolic annihilation, media feminism theory, and the theory of tokenism. Methodologically, the studies employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative methods included feminist narrative inquiry, in-depth interviews, and qualitative content/discourse analysis of media texts and social media content. Quantitative approaches included experimental designs and survey-based studies. Across this body of work, the authors reported several recurring insights: (a) women athletes and women's sport remain vulnerable to marginalization through selective framing and limited recognition; (b) motherhood and sexuality can operate as double binds that shape how audiences evaluate women athletes; (c) gendered exclusions persist within sport journalism and broadcasting cultures; and (d) social media environments can both expand visibility and amplify marginalization through platformed discourse.

Sports Journalism, Metajournalism, and Professional Practice in Transition. A second cluster of articles examined sports journalism and professional practice as the primary focus. These studies analyzed journalist–organization relationships, athlete–media dynamics, metajournalistic boundary work, and the professional identities and working conditions of sports media workers. The research relied predominantly on qualitative methods, employed data collection methods including in-depth interviews, the collection of media stories, and survey research. To analyze the collected data, the studies adopted data analysis methods such as thematic analysis, textual analysis, and critical discourse analysis. Conceptually, the studies drew on metajournalism,

professional identity perspectives, and critical frameworks used to interrogate journalistic routines and norms. The Sport Communication Model (SSCM) and uses and gratifications approach have also been adopted. Collectively, the studies highlight that: (a) professional roles and authority in sports journalism are being renegotiated; (b) access and control remain key sources of tension between journalists and sport organizations; (c) metajournalistic discourse functions as a mechanism for articulating responsibilities and boundaries; and (d) changes in working conditions shape professional identity and career sustainability.

Activism, Politics, Human Rights, and Moral Legitimacy in Sport Communication. A third set of articles examined activism, politics, human rights, and moral legitimacy as the primary analytic focus. These studies analyzed athlete activism and social justice communication, media construction of human rights narratives in mega-events, and the rhetorical and discursive dynamics through which political meaning and legitimacy are negotiated in sport contexts. Methodologically, these studies employed qualitative content or discourse analysis and textual analysis, with some drawing on social movement, critical rhetoric, and postcolonial perspectives to interpret mediated sport politics. Across the theme, the authors report that: (a) athlete activism is contested through media and institutional framing; (b) human rights and political narratives around mega-events are constructed through divergent discursive strategies; and (c) rhetorical framing can shift attention from structural politics toward individualized identity and branding.

Annotated Bibliography

Theme 1: Gender, Feminism, and Mediated (In)Equity

McGannon, K. R., Kulkarni, S., Hladun, W., Bundon, A., & Pegoraro, A. (2025). Exposing a motherhood penalty in sport: A feminist narrative inquiry of media stories of

Canadian athlete mothers' journeys to the 2020 Tokyo Games. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(1), 99-120.

This study examines sport media discourses surrounding elite athlete mothers, focusing on how motherhood and discrimination are socially constructed in sport contexts. Using a feminist narrative inquiry approach, the authors extend existing media research on athlete mothers by interrogating discrimination meanings associated with motherhood in sport. The study analyzes North American sport media stories about two Canadian athletes—boxer Mandy Bujold and basketball player Kim Gaucher, documenting their journeys to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games after experiencing discrimination related to their motherhood status. A thematic narrative analysis of 103 media stories identified three recurring narrative motifs linked to discrimination meanings: last shots, forced to choose, and more than us. The last shots and forced to choose motifs are discussed in relation to a motherhood penalty narrative associated with sexism and discrimination in sport. The more than us motif is discussed as reflecting the athletes' resolution to compete, connecting this narrative to maternal activism and social change. Collectively, the three motifs exposed and challenged maternal discrimination in sport through what the authors describe as a feminist consciousness linked to a neoliberal feminist status quo. The findings highlight the pedagogical potential of sport media stories for raising awareness about athlete maternity rights and structural change, while also emphasizing the need for intersectional feminist reform in relation to athlete parents and post-pandemic recovery.

Rodríguez-de-Dios, I., & González-de-Garay, B. (2024). Motherhood and Sexuality in Women's Football News: Effects on Interest in the Article, Engagement, and Perception of the Player. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *18*(1), 32-46.

This study investigates how a footballer's motherhood status and sexuality shape audience responses to news coverage in women's football. To examine these

influences, the authors conducted a 2 (sexuality) × 2 (motherhood status) between-subjects online experiment (N = 395). The study assessed effects on interest in the news article, engagement with women's football, perceptions of the footballer (expected performance, impression, and perceived commitment), and attitudes toward lesbian athletes. The results indicate that portraying the footballer as a mother increased interest in the article. However, motherhood status had a negative effect only on perceptions of the lesbian footballer, who was expected to show lower performance compared with her counterparts. The authors note that these findings may help journalists and community managers understand the impact and ethical implications of how they present sexuality and maternity in news coverage.

Ayhan, B., & Demir, Y. (2025). Systematic sexism: Women's sports news in a circle of gatekeepers and users on Twitter. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(3), 419-441.

This study examines how women's sports news is presented and circulated on Twitter by conventional and digital sports content producers in Turkey, as well as how users engage with and respond to this content. The research analyzes "how much, where, how, why, and when" women's sports news is shared, alongside "who" the users are and "what" they express in their comments. To address these questions, the authors reviewed a sample of Twitter accounts and tweets posted between June 25 and July 31, 2022. The findings show that only 3.41% (n = 612) of the 17,932 sports news items examined were dedicated to women's sports. The analysis indicates that news gatekeepers used language emphasizing failure, sexism, and personal life, alongside instructive and successful expressions, when presenting women's sports news. In addition, 85.54% (n = 888) of the comments contained references to women's bodies, sexist stereotypes, and negative comparisons. Most comments on women's sports news (n = 1,038) were posted by male users (n = 962). The authors conclude that the

language used in comments on women's sports news on Twitter supports and reinforces patriarchal and dominant structures within sport and sport media.

Boling, K. S., Walsh, J., Petrotta, B., & Stamm, J. (2025). "Perjurers, rapists, and zealots are ending abortion": Sports journalists' symbolic annihilation of women athletes on social media during the national loss of abortion rights. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(2), 321-344.

This study examines how sports journalists used Twitter (now X) to discuss off-field social justice issues, with a specific focus on reactions to the Roe v. Wade decision in the summer of 2022. As athlete activism and social justice movements have gained visibility and legitimacy, the authors situate journalists' social media activity within broader conversations surrounding issues such as the gender pay gap, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo. Using a content analysis approach, the study analyzed 880 tweets posted by sports journalists that referenced Roe v. Wade. The findings contribute to scholarship on sports journalists' opinion expression on social media and to research on the symbolic annihilation of women athletes. The analysis indicates that journalists affiliated with large or elite news organizations were largely absent from the Roe v. Wade discussion on X. In addition, the relationship between media professionals' roles (including editors, reporters, broadcasters, and writers) and the expression of opinion was moderated by their influencer score.

Harris, A., & Bowes, A. (2025). Still the Outsiders? Women in Sport Journalism. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *18*(2), 213-223.

This study investigates the workplace experiences of women sport journalists in the United Kingdom within a profession long characterized as male-dominated. Using interview data from 10 women sport journalists, the research explores how women navigate professional environments in which they are often positioned as outsiders. The

analysis is grounded in Kanter's theory of tokenism to examine how numerical

underrepresentation shapes workplace practices and experiences. The findings indicate

that women working in men's sport encounter workplace conditions that reinforce

outsider status, including harassment, gendered online abuse, and numeric inequality.

Participants also described the additional labor required to fact-check, prove

competence, and minimize perceptions of marginality. The study further reports that

concerns about career jeopardy discourage women from raising issues within their

organizations. At the same time, participants noted that the increasing mediatization of

women's sport may signal the emergence of new journalistic cultures with the potential

to foster greater acceptance of women in sport journalism.

Sadri, S. R., Buzzelli, N. R., Payne, J. L., & Billings, A. C. (2025). Navigating

Gender Roles From the Sports Sidelines: Gender Schemas and Industry Expectations of

Female Sideline Reporters. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *18*(2), 233-

243.

This study examines factors influencing news credibility perceptions and the

likelihood of sharing artificial-intelligence (AI)–generated sports news articles. To

address this purpose, the authors conducted a national survey of U.S. adults (N = 355)

using a 3 (authorship: human, ChatGPT, Google Gemini) × 2 (byline: human author, AI)

factorial design. Participants evaluated the credibility of a sports news article and

assessed their likelihood of sharing the article on social media. The findings indicate

that participant predictors of article credibility, source credibility, information accuracy,

and article-sharing likelihood differed significantly based on demographic

characteristics, identity factors, and cognitive heuristics. Authorship (human versus AI)

did not significantly influence perceptions of credibility or sharing likelihood. Across

both human- and AI-authored articles, level of sport fanship significantly influenced

perceived information accuracy and sharing likelihood. In addition, article credibility and

source credibility were significantly influenced by positive attitudes toward AI, suggesting potential shifts in how audiences evaluate and engage with AI-generated sports news content.

Ishengoma, D. J., Munisi, T., & Slater, K. (2025). Discrimination and Deterrents Affecting Female Sports Journalists and Sports Coverage in Tanzania. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *18*(4), 484-494.

This study examines the experiences of women sports journalists in Tanzania within a profession that has traditionally been male dominated. Grounded in media feminism theory, the research explores how female sports journalists perceive sports reporting, identifies the barriers they encounter, and examines the role of editors in supporting women's participation in Tanzanian newsrooms. The study is based on interview data collected from sports editors and female journalists working at 10 media outlets located in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The findings indicate that, although sports editors are making efforts to promote equal opportunities and empowerment for women in sports coverage, negative public perceptions of female sports journalists remain widespread. The study further reports that female sports journalists continue to face challenges when interviewing sources and experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The authors conclude that these barriers continue to limit women's participation and advancement in sports journalism within the Tanzanian media context.

Theme 2: Sports Journalism, Metajournalism, and Professional Practice

Stamm, J., & Boatwright, B. (2025). 'Deteriorating our relationship for no good reason': Collegiate beat writers' perceptions of their PR counterparts. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(2), 218-244.

This study examines the contemporary relationship between sport journalists and media relations personnel within the context of collegiate athletics. The research

focuses on how a relationship historically described as "symbiotic" has become strained as sports information directors (SIDs) and media relations personnel increasingly occupy internal roles aimed at producing content similar to that traditionally created by sports media. Using in-depth interviews with 16 beat writers, the study identifies three salient themes related to beat writers' perceptions of their relationships with SIDs and media relations professionals representing the athletic programs they cover. These themes include frustration over the control of information, misperceptions regarding the value of sports media to the organization, and growing uncertainty about the future of the relationship between beat writers and media relations personnel. The authors state that these findings contribute to both theory and practice within the context of the Strategic Sport Communication Model (SSCM).

Mirer, M. (2025). "The Media Answer": How Athletes Conceptualize Their Relationship to the Press in the Players' Tribune. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(2), 245-265.

This study examines interactions between athletes and journalists as a foundational component of the sports-media system, with particular attention to how these relationships are being renegotiated in the context of social media and athlete-driven storytelling platforms. The research situates the study within a media environment in which athletes increasingly communicate directly with fans outside traditional journalist–athlete interactions, challenging the professional authority of sports journalists and altering long-standing mediated routines in sport. Using textual analysis, the study analyzes 110 stories published on *The Players' Tribune*, an athlete-sourced storytelling platform. The findings reveal mixed perspectives on athlete–press relations. Some narratives highlight the limitations of journalists' knowledge and access, while others explicitly question journalistic practices and decision-making. The study concludes that these athlete-authored messages are significant because they contribute

to shaping audience perceptions of the sporting press among individuals who are likely consumers of sports journalism.

Hull, K. (2025). Loved it, miss it, would never go back: Why US local television sports broadcasters are leaving the industry. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(2), 303-320.

This study examines factors contributing to sports broadcasters' decisions to leave local television news stations. The research is situated within the context of declining job satisfaction and increased employee burnout in U.S. newsrooms, noting that sports departments have experienced similar challenges, including high turnover. To address the study's purpose, the authors conducted a survey of sports broadcasters who had left positions at television stations to pursue employment outside of broadcasting. The findings indicate that former sportscasters felt overworked and underpaid and frequently attributed their dissatisfaction to newsroom management. The study highlights organizational and managerial factors as central influences on career exit among local television sports broadcasters.

Küpper, L. M. (2025). Representatives, Reflection, Roles, and Responsibilities: The Metajournalistic Discourse on the Press Boycott of Naomi Osaka. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(2), 345-366.

This study examines metajournalism, defined in communication science as the public discussion of journalism, within the context of sports journalism. Noting that reflexive reporting in sports journalism has received limited scholarly attention, the research focuses on the metajournalistic discourse that emerged after tennis player Naomi Osaka announced her decision to skip press conferences during the 2021 French Open to raise awareness of psychological pressures faced by elite athletes. Using qualitative content analysis, the study analyzes 102 online articles published across quality, tabloid, and sports media outlets. The findings indicate minimal self-criticism within the discourse, with journalists primarily attributing responsibility for

mental health concerns to the competitive sports system rather than to journalistic practice. Differences in both the quality and quantity of reporting were observed across media genres. Across all genres, Osaka's own representation occupied a significant portion of coverage, and media outlets tended to present arguments from non-media representatives—particularly those from the tennis world—rather than articulating their own positions. The study contributes to understanding how roles and responsibilities in sports journalism are publicly negotiated.

Peña, V., & Bock, M. A. (2025). Questioning sports journalists: Stereotypes, work routines, and color-blind racism in sports press conferences. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(2), 285-302.

This study investigates the origins of stereotypes in sports media and how these stereotypes influence journalistic practice—an area that has received limited scholarly attention. The research focuses on sports journalists' work routines, their perceptions of stereotypes in sports, and the relationship between these routines and the reproduction of stereotypes in sports media coverage, particularly in college sports contexts. The authors conducted a critical discourse analysis of in-depth interviews with 13 sports journalists from across the United States. The findings show that journalists are sometimes aware of the presence of stereotypes but tend to downplay their own role in perpetuating them. The analysis also indicates that journalists frequently engage in color-blind rhetoric when discussing stereotypes in sports media coverage. In addition, participants described job-related constraints that may limit their ability to build rapport with athletes, which could increase the likelihood that stereotypes are reproduced. The authors emphasize the need for further scholarly inquiry into sports press conferences and the relationship between journalistic practice and ideology, particularly in relation to race.

Oelrichs, I., & Ludwig, M. (2024). All the Same? Expectations and Evaluations of Sports Journalistic and Sports Organizations' Instagram Channels by Young Adults. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *18*(1), 81-93.

This study examines how young adults perceive sports journalistic channels and sports organizations' channels on Instagram, focusing on whether these two sources are evaluated as interchangeable. The research is situated within the context of social media as a primary information source for young adults and addresses concerns that journalistic outlets may lose relevance if their content is not clearly differentiated from that of sports organizations. Grounded in the uses and gratifications approach and models for conceptualizing journalistic quality, the study investigates (a) what gratifications young adults seek from and obtain through sports journalistic and sports organizations' Instagram channels, and (b) whether their assessments of these two types of channels differ. To address these objectives, the authors conducted a survey with 687 participants in Germany. The findings indicate that sports journalistic and sports organizations' channels are perceived in largely similar ways. The study highlights the implication that sports journalism may need to further differentiate its content and practices to maintain relevance in social media environments.

Theme 3: Activism, Politics, Human Rights, and Moral Legitimacy

Ferguson, T., Frederick, E., Brown, L., Kluch, Y., Hancock, M., & Siegfried, N. (2025). "I Was in a Position to Enact Change:" College Athletes' Use of Social Media for Racial and Social Justice. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(4), 686-712.

This study examines Division I college athletes' engagement in athlete activism within higher education, with particular attention to how social media functions as a platform for racial and social justice advocacy. Situated within the context of increasing societal activism, the research focuses on athlete activism through the lenses of self-authorship and self-presentation on social media. The study builds on existing research

that highlights the importance of social media in athlete activism, including issues related to access barriers, advocacy efforts, and resistance to inequality. Using an exploratory study design, the authors investigate how college athletes' processes of self-authorship and self-presentation relate to their engagement in social media–based activism. The findings identify three overarching themes: social media as an activist tool, empowerment, and social media as a starting point for advocacy. The study suggests that these insights may help college sports administrators facilitate dialogue, better understand the strategic use of social media in athlete activism, and recognize college athletes' desire for greater involvement in creating meaningful change within their communities. The authors conclude that the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of college athletes' roles in social discourse and racial and social justice initiatives.

LeJeune, H. J., & Workneh, T. W. (2025). The construction of human rights narratives in the 2022 World Cup: A critical examination of US and Qatari news coverage. *Communication & Sport*, *13*(3), 484-510.

This study examines tensions in the representation of human rights discourses surrounding the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Drawing primarily from postcolonial approaches, the research investigates how human rights narratives were constructed and deployed by two leading publications representing different viewpoints: The New York Times (United States) and the Gulf Times (Qatar). The study focuses on how each outlet represented and portrayed Qatari cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts in relation to the tournament. Using qualitative content analysis, the study analyzes coverage from the two publications to identify patterns in narrative construction. The findings indicate that The New York Times emphasized the exotic "Otherness" of Qatar and framed the country as lacking legitimacy to host the World Cup. In contrast, the Gulf Times displayed what the authors describe as a paradoxical stance characterized

by both resistance to and a desire for Western validation. Overall, the analysis reveals an ambivalent relationship between Western and Qatari perspectives on human rights, situated within a historical context of colonialism and reflective of an ongoing, reciprocal dialogue between English-language publications.

Ali, A. E., & Ross, M. (2025). "Criminals" and "Killjoys": An Exploratory News Media Mapping of the Environment-Security Politics at the Olympics. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *18*(3), 320-329.

This study examines news media coverage of the relationship between the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) environmental initiatives and the expansion of security and surveillance surrounding the Olympic Games. Situating the analysis within critiques of the IOC's environmental turn, the research addresses how environmental and security approaches—often treated as separate—may operate synergistically to serve the interests of the IOC and its partners while marginalizing environmental activists. To address this objective, the study maps news media coverage from the Sydney 2000 Summer Games through the lead-up to the Paris 2024 Games. The analysis explores connections between environmental discourse and Olympic-related security and surveillance, as well as what this coverage reveals about relationships among the IOC, host cities and nations, corporate sponsors, construction firms, and environmental activists. The findings indicate that environmental and security strategies align in ways that protect institutional and commercial interests, supported by extensive surveillance infrastructures that suppress activism. Media portrayals frequently characterize environmental activists as criminals, killjoys, or oppositional to Olympism, contributing to the marginalization of alternative environmental perspectives.

Butterworth, M. L. (2025). Eileen Gu, Global Politics, and the Rhetoric of Athlete Branding. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *18*(3), 290-299.

This study examines the public representation and rhetorical positioning of freestyle skier Eileen Gu during the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. Focusing on Gu's decision to compete for China and the scrutiny surrounding her identity, the research explores how her athletic success, public persona, and stated aspirations to inspire young girls and promote unity through sport were articulated amid competing claims over national and cultural affiliation. The analysis considers Gu's use of language associated with social justice advocacy and evaluates how these rhetorical choices function within contemporary sport discourse. The study argues that, although Gu's messaging may appear aligned with recent trends in athlete activism, her emphasis on visibility and representation avoids overt political engagement. These rhetorical strategies are described as effective for personal branding but limited in political substance. The authors suggest that Gu's case offers insight into what they characterize as a postactivist moment in sport, occurring alongside the philosophical aims of the Olympic Movement.

Wallace, B. T. (2025). Sport, Social Movements, and New Media: Digital Sporting Pedagogy in Kaepernick's Know Your Rights Camp. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, *18*(3), 380-389.

This study examines how social movements and alternative or activist media initiatives mobilize sport within digital messaging to frame social critique, reach broader digital publics, and solicit resources for counterhegemonic action. The research focuses on how sport is strategically used within digital media to support social movements and highlights both the opportunities and challenges of adapting Gramscian and Freirean models of critical pedagogy to contemporary digital environments. Using textual analysis, the study analyzes two digital documents produced by Colin Kaepernick's Know Your Rights Camp. Through this analysis, the author identifies what is described as the emergence of a digital sporting pedagogy,

defined as the strategic use of sport for political conscientization across digital media. The study positions Know Your Rights Camp as a case study of a progressive articulation of sport that contrasts with increasingly conservative and corporatized forms of sports media. The author concludes by advocating for a "bottom-up" approach to sport communication, emphasizing how everyday people and communities construct and assign meaning to sport at the grassroots level.