

LOVING THE SPORT OF WRITING

TIPS FOR SPORTS WRITING

- Corny terminology is the first thing editors will cut out of your copy. Football players are not gridders; basketball players are not cagers. Don't try to be innovative and come up with nifty names for things that aren't considered mainstream.
- Use the word that describes the object. Keep it simple and try not to use slang or cute terms. A football is not a pig-skin. "Nothing but net" and "going to the hoop" are cliché and over used sayings.
- Never compare a sporting event to a war, even in quotes. Never compare a team's failures to a disaster.
- Avoid trite expressions, even when quoted directly. A team won or lost; defeated or was defeated. Avoid verbs such as "whomped, boatraced, pounded, walloped." Same goes for "take 'em one at a time, barnburner, cliffhanger, nailbiter, stomped, clipped and out for blood."
- Understand Jargon. Especially with medical/legal terminology. Look up medical terms such as anterior cruciate ligament and medial collateral ligament. Put it in lay terms.
- Deity. Sports aren't life or death, heaven and hell. Don't over-glorify your subjects.
- A lead of more than 25 words can be made shorter and snappier. Be concise. Make it easy for the reader to know what's going on.
- Avoid beginning a sentence, particularly a lede, with "there are," or "there is." Those words say nothing.
- Be original and develop your own writing style. A writing style takes years to develop, even well beyond your college years. Young writers tend to overwrite everything. Keep your writing simple early in your career and expand your style as you mature as a writer and as a person. The copy desk, and other writers, will love you for it.
- Misreported scores. You would be surprised how often this happens. Do your readers a favour. Look at the scoreboard as the final buzzer sounds and jot it in the corner of the scorebook or notebook.

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Becoming a journalist on the way to eventually living it up in the Caribbean as a millionaire novelist was always the intention in my childhood. Well I'm a journo in the Caribbean so two out of three is not bad - but the riches I'm still working on 30 years after starting out in the United Kingdom. Ah well, there's always the lottery.

The only teachers I really remember with any affection from high school in west London were the English masters. English was the only subject I truly enjoyed and was exceptional at. My essays were read out regularly and being a sports nut I thought I could be a champ as a renowned reporter. I tried various sports including boxing but being small and light with zero punch resistance, soon realised that emulating Muhammad Ali as a world champ would never happen. Anyway, writing about the sweet science was far less painful with a longer career span.

On leaving school, not convinced I had what it took to be a journalist, for some weird reason I trained in civil engineering for a few years and worked as a draughtsman, which paid well but was so tedious I took the plunge and left to be a freelance journo for scraps.

Through working 24/7 I survived the initial years and even got highly paid commissions with national British newspapers, radio and TV. I travelled all over Europe, the Caribbean, America and Africa on assignment. Great times although often stressful and exhausting. Highlights included interviewing Muhammad Ali several times, seeing Mike Tyson fight in Las Vegas, covering the Winter Olympics in Vancouver last year, spending a few days with Barry Sanders when he first joined the Detroit Lions, attending Reggae Sunplash in Montego Bay and covering winter sports in St Moritz,

Switzerland for a TV company. I've met some fantastic people along the way too, which is precious.

Journalists write books more hoping to make money than through love of the process. It is a long, hard, often frustrating journey. My first one, a boxing novel, No Glove No Love, was critically acclaimed, which means most liked it but it did not sell. Sending a copy to the producer of Fight Club did not result in a zillion-dollar movie deal. Then I wrote Elite Forces Handbook of Martial Arts, which sold in several languages and is still in print but only paid a flat modest fee. No royalties. The third one, ghost writing a footballer's life, was another critically acclaimed effort. Still broke!

That was in 2006 when the paper I worked for in London - the Caribbean Times - folded. Jobs for print journalists are decreasing by the day as advertising revenues drop and Internet presence dominates. It was impossible to get work in London, so in desperation, I contacted many newspaper publishers in the Caribbean and eventually landed in the Cayman Islands, thanks to CFP's publisher Brian Uzzell.

Journalists today have to be prepared to adapt to technology and market trend. It's mostly going online. Bad news for print hacks, but at least the emerging ebook and Kindle market is offering aspiring writers opportunities and income, which the traditional publishing route only allowed a few. Maybe that's where I'll make my elusive first million!

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TOP TIP!

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DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES IS 23 OCTOBER 2011

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Caymanian
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Contest is open to students ages 13-17. Essay must be 350-400 words. News video must be 30-60 seconds in length. Terms and conditions apply.