Accountable Sports Journalism: Creating a Gateway to Showcase Ethical Codes, Stylebooks, Ombudsmen and Beyond

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Sports journalism has been characterized by a series of ethical deficiencies that have challenged the normative standards of the profession. These widespread questionable practices include the blurring of the frontiers between journalistic genres; the pervasiveness of rumour; sensationalism; the use of warlike language; the inequalities in relation to gender, race and disability and the lack of variation in the news sources employed. All these ethical shortcomings have diminished the credibility of the professionals working in the sports journalism field. To address these ethical shortcomings, sports journalists must gain awareness of their accountability to answer for their practice to society at large. Accountability instruments can play an invaluable role in offering guidance and helping journalists and users monitor and criticize the quality of sports content. Thus far, the majority of studies on accountability have focused on the description of traditional and innovative tools but no study to date has provided a map of the existing instruments in sports journalism. To fill this gap, the objective of this investigation has been to identify and analyse the most relevant accountability instruments in sports journalism. The fieldwork consisted of monitoring the internet during a timeframe of 18 months (October 2015 – March 2017) to locate the most relevant instruments in the field. Once these were identified, the researchers proceeded to examine them using the qualitative content analysis technique. Among the instruments that have been implemented within companies, we highlight the ones produced inside the media (in-house stylebooks promoted by major sports media, recommendations for sports journalists in news agencies and general information outlets, ombudsmen and online chats), and instruments produced outside media companies (external codes, recommendations issued by key stakeholders in the world of sport, the largest publications related to media criticism, as well as several scholars' and citizens' blogs).All these instruments are compiled on the platform "Accountable Sports Journalism".

Keywords: *Accountability, Ethical codes, Quality journalism, Sports Journalism, Stylebooks*

Introduction

Far from traditional consideration as the "little brother" of the profession, sports journalism plays a key role in the new information ecosystem. In a changing landscape characterized by rapid technological innovations, the fierce competition

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between media, the accelerated 24/7 news cycles and the fight for the maximization of audiences (Brock 2013, Schlesinger and Doyle 2015), sports content is a key audience-driver and a pivotal asset for the financial sustainability of media organizations across the board. Beyond this commercial value, it should be borne in mind that sports journalism has great power over and a huge influence and impact on society at large. That being the case, socially responsible sports journalists who are able to distil noise from quality are indispensable and will still be essential in the future. Sports media professionals must gain awareness of their accountability to the public (Harro-Loit 2015) and counteract the widespread deficiencies that have not only challenged the normative standards of the profession but that have also eroded their credibility and status (English 2016). Those include the blurring of the frontiers between comment and facts; boosterism; the pervasiveness of speculation and rumour; the lack of investigative reporting; sensationalism; the use of warlike language; the inequalities in relation to gender, race and disability; or the lack of variation in the sources employed (Hardin et al. 2009, Horky and Stelzner 2013, Oates and Pauly 2007).

Addressing these ethical shortcomings is the only way to mitigate the long-held claims of sports journalism being a 'toy department' (Rowe 2007), that is, a "bastion of easy living, sloppy journalism and 'soft' news" (Boyle 2006: 1). The escalating pressures, the cacophony of competing voices in the current scenario and the orientation towards the market should not deter journalists from pursuing the goal of an ethical treatment of sports that ultimately links to the original public service mission of journalism in democratic societies (Singer 2013).

Accountability is "the process by which media organizations may be expected or obliged to render an account of their activities to their constituents" (Pritchard 2000: 2). As McQuail (2003: 19) highlights, "accountable communication exists where authors (originators, sources, or gatekeepers) take responsibility for the quality and consequences of their publication, orient themselves to audiences and others affected, and respond to their expectations and those of the wider society". Traditional and innovate media accountability instruments (Bertrand 2000) can play an inestimable role in offering guidance and helping journalists and users monitor and criticize the quality of sports content.

Thus far, extensive literature has examined established accountability tools such as ethical codes and stylebooks, ombudsmen, letters to the editor media journalism (Malik 2004, Roberts 2012, Starck 2010) as well as innovate instruments such as editorial weblogs, readers' comments, error buttons or media critique on social media (Craft et al. 2015, Eberwein et al. 2011, Fengler et al. 2014, Mauri-Ríos and Ramon-Vegas 2015).

As regards to sports communication, authors such as Horky and Stelzner (2013) have highlighted the contrast between the sports journalism field and the ethical norms and practices that should guide the profession. The authors explored problems such as the dependency on advertising; the difficulty of maintaining a critical distance; the economic and emotional constraints of sports journalists; or the scarce prominence given to issues such as doping. Other literature has examined the ethical attitudes and beliefs of sports journalists, focusing on economic problems (Salwen and Garrison 1998) and how the perceptions of

public service determine sports journalists' attitudes towards accepting gifts or establishing close relationships with sources (Hardin et al. 2009). Wulfemeyer (1985) analysed the *Ethics Guidelines* produced by the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE) and offered guidelines in ten areas (newsgathering methods, privacy, moonlighting, freebies, gambling, special interests, self-interests and involvements, news sources, direct quotes) to promote the accountability of sports journalists. Taylor (1988) advocated: the requirement to be fair, honest and accurate; the avoidance of nationalistic and chauvinistic approaches; training in the ability to report on other issues beyond sport; and nurturing neutrality and honesty. Rojas-Torrijos (2011) even designed a stylebook intended for Pan-American sports reporters. Nevertheless, no study to date has provided a map of the existing instruments in sports journalism. To bridge this gap, this research offers a transnational exploratory overview of the major accountability instruments that have been created in sports journalism and presents an online platform (*Accountable Sports Journalism*) to disseminate the findings among media professionals, citizens and students.

Methodology

The objective of this investigation has been to compile, examine and disseminate the most relevant accountability instruments in sports journalism. The project has been developed in three different stages.

Mapping Media Accountability Instruments in Sports Journalism

The first step was to identify and analyse the most relevant accountability instruments in sports journalism. In this exploratory study, a transnational approach was pursued with the aim of locating the most relevant examples across different media systems and journalism cultures around the world. The fieldwork consisted of monitoring the internet during a timeframe of 18 months (October 2015 – March 2017) to locate the most relevant instruments in the field. Through *snowball sampling* –a chain-referral technique that is mostly conducted within qualitative research frameworks (Brickman Bhutta 2012, Bryman 2016) – the instruments were identified and progressively incorporated into the sample.

Snowball sampling is a valuable research strategy "for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases" (Patton 2002: 237) when there is an "absence of a sampling frame" (Bryman 2016: 415). This non-probabilistic procedure, introduced by Goodman (1961), consists in identifying relevant cases or initiatives that are progressively accumulated and incorporated into the sample (Noy 2008, Tracy 2013). In our research, we chose this technique to build up a consistent and useful dataset of accountability resources which were scattered in many channels and platforms. Drawing upon a small sample of instruments previously identified by academic literature, such as the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE) *Ethics Guidelines* (Wulfemeyer 1985) and the recommendations created by the German association of sports journalists (Horky & Stelzer 2013), we pursued to discover

further media accountability instruments (MAIs) in an effort to build a broader sample. According to Eberwein et al. (2011: 20), MAIs are "any informal institution, both offline and online, performed by both media professionals and media users, which intends to monitor, comment on and criticize journalism and seeks to expose and debate problems of journalism at the individual, media routines, organizational and extra-media levels".

Through the systematic search in academic databases (Web of Science, Scopus, Sage, Taylor & Francis Online, Communication Abstracts, Wiley Online Library, Project MUSE); search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Ask; professional websites such as the Ethical Journalism Network; media directories and lists; and websites from general information and sports media companies in different countries, we gathered a wider range of tools (stylebooks, codes, specific recommendations and blogs) that enhanced the list of existing accountability instruments in the field of sports journalism.

Once the accountability systems were identified, the researchers proceeded to examine each one of those instruments using the qualitative content analysis technique (Bryman 2016). The steps highlighted by Wimmer and Dominick (2000: 141–144) were thoroughly followed. The categories of the analysis included the following: instruments produced inside or outside of media organizations, description of the specifications for and use of the instruments, and evaluation of the mechanisms from the accountability perspective. All the detected experiences were classified and categorized.

An early version of this analysis was presented during the Pre-Conference 'Ethics, Research and Communication: Looking Forward' of the IAMCR (International Association of Media, Communication and Research), that was convened by the IAMCR Ethics of Society and Ethics of Communication Working Group and held at CEU Cardenal Herrera University in Valencia in 22 July 2016. The contribution was appointed as second best scientific presentation. Afterwards, the results of this first part of the research came to light in the article entitled 'Mapping media accountability instruments in sports journalism'. The article was published by *El Profesional de la Información* in a special issue on ethics and communication released in March 2017 (*http://www.elprofesionalde lainformacion.com/contenidos/2017/mar/02.html*).

Figure 1. *Screenshot of the Article Published at El Profesional De La Información*

Source: El Profesional De La Información.

Launching the Platform "Accountable Sports Journalism"

Drawing from the findings of the abovementioned article, researchers created the platform *Accountable Sports Journalism* (http://accountablesportsjournalism. org) to compile the most significant instruments found online and make them readily accessible to media practitioners, scholars and students. On this site, users can find access to the instruments that have been produced inside the media (in-house stylebooks promoted by major sports media, recommendations for sports journalists in news agencies and general information outlets, ombudsmen and online chats) and to tools implemented outside media companies (external codes, recommendations issued by key stakeholders in the world of sport, the largest publications related to media criticism, as well as several scholars' and citizens' blogs). This platform, titled "A gateway to ethics guidelines, stylebooks, ombudsmen and beyond", was launched in April 2017 and was presented as a **dynamic, open and flexible site. New** accountability instruments that emerge in the international context will be progressively incorporated into this toolkit. The platform is also open to by citizens and media professionals, who can collaborate by pointing out further instruments and useful resources on sports content.

Figure 2. *Homepage of Accountable Sports Journalism. Through this Site, Users can easily access the Different Resources Located in the Research*

Source: Accountable Sports Journalism.

Enhancement and Update of the Platform

The initial list of accountability resources on the platform is being enhanced and completed on an on-going basis. After having compiled 25 accountability instruments in April, the platform was updated in a second development stage in July 2017 by adding 17 new relevant tools in the field of sports journalism from a greater number of countries and media systems. Thus, now *Accountable Sports Journalism* brings together a sum of 42 resources stemming from 15 different countries, along with those produced by international organizations.

Figure 3. *New Guidelines Incorporated into the Accountable Sports Journalism Platform Include Material from Different Countries Such as Puerto Rico and Czech Republic*

Source: Accountable Sports Journalism.

Accountable Sports Journalism has been presented as a project during the IACS (International Association for Communication and Sports) 10th Summit in Phoenix, Arizona (March 30 - April 2, 2017), during the IAMCR 2017 in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (16-20 July, 2017) and now in this Congress on Economy, Sports and Media in Hamburg (4-5 September, 2017) and in the annual

conference of the British Institute of Communication Ethics ('Sports journalism: ethical vacuum or ethical minefield?') in 27 October 2017 in London. The content of the platform was discussed with the participants in those specialized conferences, attending from many countries including the United States of America, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, México, Argentina, and beyond. This approach allowed us to control and evaluate the quality of the resources in the platform and ensure their usefulness as accountability instruments in the field. The platform has also been disseminated through the internet and social media. Key stakeholders such as the Ethical Journalism Network (http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/) have shown their interest in collaborating and exchanging further material on this area. Going forward, the aim of the authors is to maximize the transference of knowledge by presenting *Accountable Sports Journalism* across professional associations, media organizations and higher education institutions in different countries.

Results

42 accountability instruments have been located online and uploaded into the platform through the research process. Those have been classified, as we said before, into two categories: the instruments produced within media organizations and those created outside of them.

Instruments Produced Inside Media Companies or Media Groups

Stylebooks and Guidelines Promoted by Major Sports Media

One of the fundamental accountability instruments is in-house stylebooks (also known as company editorial guidelines), which establish an implicit contract between journalists and citizens. Therefore, they are a crucial component in promoting news quality. As Fengler et al. (2014: 100) highlight, "among the traditional instruments, in-house and professional codes of ethics, as well as journalism education, are the mechanisms with the highest relevance for journalistic performance".

Only a few specialized media outlets in the field of sports journalism have in-house stylebooks: sport daily newspapers *Mundo Deportivo* (1995) and *Marca* (2013) in Spain, Lance in *Brazil* (2008) or the nowadays monthly magazine *El Gráfico* (2000) in Argentina (Rojas-Torrijos, 2011). One of the scarce sports outlets that has adapted its stylebook to the new environment is the digital native *Bleacher Report* (http://bleacherreport.com/pages/styleguide). As its creators point out, it is a "new resource for a new era: a document designed to keep pace with 24/7 news and to-the-minute information". This online stylebook provides guidance on online newswriting and includes a dictionary with more than 300 references about the world of sport.

Another American outlet concerned with accountability is *ESPN*, which has published its *Editorial Guidelines for Standards & Practices* (2010) (http://edge-

cache.deadspin.com/deadspin/editorial.pdf). As their authors note, the purpose for their editorial guidelines "is the protection of *ESPN*'s journalistic credibility across all platforms". And they add: "the focus is on guidelines that, if violated, could alter the perception of our objectivity among readers, viewers and listeners". This instrument is not focused on the use of language but rather on ethical topics and professional practices. So it tackles the following issues: transparency, commentary, general reporting and editing, sourcing, attribution, civil suits, criminal activity, corrections, media criticism, social networking, outside activity, political advocacy, presidential elections and advertising.

Grantland, a sports and culture website created by the journalist Bill Simmons in 2011 and discontinued operations in 2015, elaborated several terminological glossaries on sports like tennis, wrestling, basketball, American football or baseball (http://grantland.com/tags/grantland-dictionary/).

Recommendations for Sports Coverage Proposed by Agencies and General Information Outlets

News agencies and general information outlets worldwide have also proposed recommendations for sports journalists. In Europe, the *Reuters Sports Style Guide* (http://handbook.reuters.com/index.php?title=Sports_Style_Guide) is one of the key documents available. This guide offers insights into the coverage and vocabulary of six sports with a long tradition in the United Kingdom (cricket, golf, motor racing, football, tennis and winter sports). In Spain, some public broadcasting corporations have specific sections devoted to sports in their in-house handbooks: *RTVE*, Spanish public broadcasting corporation (http://manualdeestilo. rtve.es/); *CCMA*, the Catalan Corporation of Audiovisual Media (http://www.cc ma.cat/llibredestil/), and *Canal Sur*, the radio and TV corporation in Andalusia (Allas and Díaz Salgado 2004). In complying with their remit as PSBs, these institutions stress the importance of disseminating the positive values associated with sport.

Moving on to North America, the *Ethical Journalism Handbook* from *The New York Times* (2004: 40) outlines three rules (131-333) addressed to the sports desk. More precisely, it mentions that journalists should avoid gambling on sports events and serving as scorers and that they should not "accept tickets, travel expenses, meals, gifts or any other benefit from teams or promoters". Further references to conflicts of interest are included in documents issued by US media companies such as *Los Angeles Times* (http://latimesblogs.latimes. com/readers/ 2011/02/la-times-ethics-guidelines.html) or *Minnesota Public Radio* (http://www. mpr.org/about/news_ethics). As far as sports coverage is concerned, *Los Angeles Times*, like many other news organizations, does not allow its sportswriters to participate in voting for any award or poll so as not to create possibilities for conflicts of interest, nor attend sporting events purely for private enjoyment by using their affiliation with *The Times* to gain access or to avoid paying.

Conversely, other news organizations such as the *Columbia Missourian* (2009) focus its in-house handbook on providing guidance on sports language. In a similar vein to Associated Press ("Sports guidelines and style") (AP, 2016), this

stylebook has a section devoted to sports coverage ("Sports Style"), where some recommendations on writing (first references of team names, avoidance of clichés and other basics) are provided.

Online Ombudsmen

The role of ombudsmen is nearly non-existent in sports media outlets. The exception can be found in *ESPN*'s public editor, a pioneering post created in 2005 to ensure that the content of the network complies with its *Editorial Guidelines*. The public editor (http://espn.go.com/blog/ombudsman) fosters transparency and helps fans understand *ESPN*'s journalistic culture and the editorial criteria behind the content. He writes a monthly column on the website, reflecting on core aspects such as the loosening of standards with the treatment of *ESPN* Body Issue photographs, the use of sponsored content, the criteria employed by the company to select their anchors or the debates about conflict of interest. He also maintains an open forum so that users can send him questions, complaints and suggestions via email or social media about the news and the programming of the network. Afterwards, the Public Editor gives an answer to those complaints and suggestions on the website, fostering a two-way dialogue with the audiences.

Since November 2015, the public editor has been Jim Brady, former sports editor at *The Washington Post*. Previously, the post was occupied by George Solomon (2005-07), Le Anne Schreiber (2007-2008), Don Ohlmeyer (2009-2010), The Poynter Institute (2011-2012) and Robert Lipsyte (2013-2014). *ESPN* indicates that the ombudsman can be appointed for a maximum of 18 months. The existence of the *ESPN* Public Editor contrasts the situation in other major US news organizations, where this position is disappearing. *The New York Times* got rid of it in 2017 while *The Washington Post* eliminated the figure in 2013. Besides them, several other local outlets have recently decided not to hire a reader representative.

Online Chats

Online chats, which help foster live interaction between readers, editorial teams and experts, have expanded in recent years and have proved to be powerful tools for accountability purposes (Fengler et al. 2014, Mauri-Ríos and Ramon-Vegas 2015). *ESPN*'s programme Sportsnation has promoted live chats since 2008. All the live conversations can be retrieved at any time from *ESPN*'s website (http://espn.go.com/sportsnation/chat/archive). Three illuminating examples reveal the usefulness of these chats for discussing about editorial criteria and handling errors. First, *ESPN* football reporter Mike Reiss answered readers' questions about journalism ethics, reflecting on why sometimes it is required to grant anonymity to sources, provided that they are "close enough to the story to really know the truth and complete context of the truth". Second, *ESPN* SEC blogger Edward Aschoff responded to users' concerns about how he does balance school loyalty with journalistic integrity, stating that he does not root for anyone when covering football. Third, a chat with blogger Andrea Adelson allowed her to acknowledge two factual mistakes in her reporting. Given that nowadays credibility is

constructed between journalists and audiences (Vultee 2010), this cultivation of a two-way conversation about standards and quality of sports content should be assessed very positively.

Instruments Produced Outside Media Companies or Groups

Specialized Codes in Sports Journalism

The range of external codes devoted exclusively to sports journalism is fairly limited. The most recognized document is probably the *Ethics Guidelines* promoted by the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE). The code (http://apsportseditors. org/apse-ethics-guidelines/), created in 1974 and revised in 1991, is built around seven cornerstones that urge journalists to safeguard professional independence, verify information, be attentive to sources and avoid gender and race discrimination.

The Football Writers Association of America (FWAA) provides recommendations in four areas: the search for truth, minimizing harm, professional independence and accountability (http://www.sportswriters.net/fwaa/about/ethics. html). The ethical code of the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada (AJAC) also considers the avoidance of any conflict of interest a cornerstone (http://www.ajac.ca/web/about/ethics.asp). The American Auto Racing Writers & Broadcasters Association (AARWBA), dedicated to the coverage of motor sports, has also its own code. *The White Paper* (http://www. aarwba.org/aarwbawp.htm), created in 1981 and revised in 2006, compiles 72 guidelines in seven sections: ethical recommendations for journalists and for promoters and competitors in understanding the functions and needs of the media; facilities and special needs and considerations of the broadcast media; information services pre-race, during the race and post-event, post-race interview area; or special issues concerning photographers.

In the European context, we should highlight the *Italian Media and Sports Code* (http://ethicnet.uta.fi/italy/media_and_sports_code). Drawing from the notion of the social transcendence of sport, this code is organized in six chapters that advocate for justice, dignity and the citizens' right to receive information. Moreover, the eight guidelines promoted in 2010 by the German association of sports journalists, the *Verband Deutscher Sportjournalisten* (VDS), are noteworthy (http://www.sportjournalist.de/Ueber_uns/Leitlinien/). These recommendations emphasize the public function of sports journalism and advocate for non-discrimination. The VDS also highlights the importance of maintaining independence, respecting individuals' privacy and ensuring accuracy (Horky and Stelzer 2013).

Other specialized codes produced in Europe stem from Eastern countries: Serbian Sports Journalists Association (USNS) *Code and Sport Journalists' Club Ethics* (http://www.usns.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Kodeks-sportskih-novina ra-Srbije.pdf) and *Moral Code* (Czech Republic) (http://www.ksn.cz/o-ksn/eticky-a-moralni-kodex). Both are short texts focused on professional ethical standards

like safeguard of independence, discipline of verification and due diligence in the use of sources.

Besides, there are some relevant ethical codes in the field of sports in Latin America: *Sports Journalists Association Ethics Code* (Puerto Rico) (http://www. wallice.com/apdpur/reglamento.html), *FAPED Ethics Code* from the Argentinian Federation of Sports Journalists (https://web.archive.org/web/20160328143342/ http://faped.org/estatutos.html) and *Manual de Conduta Ética* da Associaçao Brasiliense de Cronistas Desportivos (ABCD) (Brazil) (http://abcdesportes.com. br/abcd/manual-de-conduta-etica-da-abcd/). The most exotic example comes from Africa: Cameroon Association of Sports Journalists (CASJ) Code.

In 2014, the International Sports Press Association (AIPS) approved its *Code of Professional Conduct*, supervised by the veteran American sports broadcaster Jimmy Magee. The code, available in English, French and Spanish (http://www. aipsmedia.com/acopcs/AIPS_CODE_OF_PROFESSIONAL_CONDUCT_STAN DARDS.pdf), provides 13 guiding principles, including the need to be knowled-geable about the law, work with honesty and integrity, provide information about potential conflicts of interest, correct errors and avoid publishing false information. In addition, professionals are reminded about their duty to update their knowledge.

General Codes of Media Ethics

In addition to specialized codes in sports, professionals can consult the website *Accountable Journalism* (http://accountablejournalism.org/) created by the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri. The site contains more than 400 general and specialized deontological codes from around the world and is the largest resource of its kind. This database can be sorted by keywords or by using the advanced search. Codes can be selected by type of organization, topic, region, year created or updated and country.

Some organizations and professional associations developed general codes in which the field of sports journalism must be included like any other beat. Thus, UNESCO approved in 1983 the *International Principles of Professional Ethics* (http://ethicnet.uta.fi/international/international_principles_of_professional_ethics _in_journalism), a set of ten fundamentals prepared as an international common ground to be promoted autonomously by each professional organization and as a source of inspiration for national and regional codes of ethics. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) adopted its *Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists* (http://www.ifj.org/about-ifj/ifj-code-of-principles/) in 1954. The text, amended in 1986, "is proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information in describing events".

Finally, the Society of Professional Journalists in the United States has got its own *Code of Ethics* (https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp), a text written 1973 and revised several times, the last of them in 2014. As creators say, this is "a statement of abiding principles supported by additional explanations and position papers that address changing journalistic practices" or a guide rather than a set of rules, "that encourages all who engage in journalism to take responsibility for the information

they provide". The text is divided into four sections ('Seek Truth and Report It', 'Minimize Harm', 'Act Independently' and 'Be Accountable and Transparent'). It has also been translated into other seven languages: Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Arabic, Persian and Portuguese.

<u>Recommendations for Sports Journalists Issued by Key Stakeholders</u>

Recommendations issued by key stakeholders in the world of sport should be also taken into account by sports journalists. Among those suggestions, two relevant ones are accessible online: *Code of Sports Ethics* (Council of Europe 1992) and the *Charte d'etique et de déontologie du sport Français* (CNOSF 2012). Both emphasize media's responsibility to promote fair play and set a positive example to children and young people. Moreover, the *Code of Sports Ethics*, devised by the Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth (2015), includes a section on recommendations with regard to objectivity, truth and privacy.

On the platform *Accountable Sports Journalism* there are also three essential documents that address the way disability sport should be treated by media. The International Paralympic Committee (2014) created an 18-page document entitled *Guide to reporting on persons with an impairment.* This easy-to-use guide provides journalists with general rules and a list of preferred terminology and incorrect terms. The British Paralympic Association (2012) published *Guide to Reporting on Paralympic Sport*, a 5-page guide to help professionals use appropriate language (http://paralympics.org.uk/uploads/documents/ParalympicsGB_Guide_to_Reporti ng_on_Paralympic_Sport.pdf). Regarding intellectual disability, the Special Olympics (2014) *Style guide* is available to professionals. In Britain, the charity Living Sport, works to promote the safety and welfare of children and young people engaged in sporting activities across England and has published a set of guidelines for clubs and organizations, sport coaches and leaders, parents as well as young people (http://www.livingsport.co.uk/safe-sport/).

<u>Other External Recommendations</u>

Additional recommendations are promoted by institutions that promote the appropriate use of language, such as Fundación del Español Urgente, created in 2005 by the news agency EFE and the bank BBVA with the support of the Real Spanish Academy (RAE). In 2013, Fundéu created a specific section on the language of football, entitled "Liga BBVA del Español Urgente" (http://www.fun deu.es/especiales/liga-del-espanol-urgente/). Also in Spain, recommendations for the whole sports community to avoid misconducts and risky behaviours and for media to promote self-regulation and values through sports coverage are included in *Violence in Sport* (http://www.consejoaudiovisualdeandalucia.es/sites/default/ files/recomendaciones/Recomendaciones_2009_01_Violencia%20deporte.pdf), a document jointly agreed in 2009 by the Andalusian Audiovisual Council and the regional Federation of Sports Journalists (FPDA).

Media Observatories and Specialized Publications in Media Criticism

Although there are no media watch observatories exclusively devoted to sports journalism, the largest publications related to media criticism around the world examine the good and bad practices of sports media. To illustrate, *Columbia Journalism Review* raised a public debate about anonymous sourcing in NBA trade scoops (Biasotti 2016) or the Poynter Institute provided resources for reporters who cover LGBT athletes (Klinger 2014).

In Latin America, *Ética Segura*, a site created by Fundación para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano in Colombia, regularly promotes debates about ethical issues in the sports field on the web (http://www.fnpi.org/es/keywords/prensa-de portiva) and on Twitter and archives the most relevant messages in Storify (https://storify.com/EticaSegura). Before the Rio 2016 Olympics, it also disseminated a set of guidelines to promote ethical sports coverage, written by Xavier Ramon (http://eticasegura.fnpi.org/2016/07/26/decalogo-una-cobertura-deportiva-responsable).

Scholars' and Citizens' Blogs

Researchers also point out that other innovative instruments such as scholars' and citizens' blogs also promote reflection on news quality. In Spain, we highlight *La Buena Prensa* (http://labuenaprensa.blogspot.com.es/), and *Periodismo Deportivo de Calidad* (http://periodismodeportivodecalidad.blogspot.com.es/). In The United States, two key examples should be considered: the blogs from the National Sports Journalism Center at Indiana University (http://sportsjourna lism.org/) and the Center for Journalism Ethics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (http://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/). The latter provides students and citizens with many materials and resources about journalism.

Conclusions

This research has contributed to the field of sports and communication by engaging with the scholarly and professional debate surrounding ethics and accountability in sports journalism. Beyond particular newsroom cultures (Boyle and Haynes 2009), it is true that journalists are affected by a myriad of interwoven factors and constraints that make it difficult for them to produce work that entirely abides by the recommendations established in the major ethical guidelines of the profession. Those include the increasing tension between quality of information and the orientation towards market forces; the progressive tabloidization process on the wider journalistic culture; or the impact of the celebrity culture on the world of sport. Overall, there is still a long way to go to eliminate fully the "toy department" label and enhance the credibility and status of the professionals working in the field. That being said, the reinforcement of media accountability systems created both within and outside media companies is a vital opportunity for harvesting the traditional values of journalistic practice.

The range of accountability instruments presented here and disseminated through the *Accountable Sports Journalism* platform can serve as a 'moral compass', that is, a valuable toolkit for professionals across the board. These assets can help practitioners increase their self-awareness of the ethical constraints and practices embedded in journalistic routines. Most importantly, they can ultimately point journalists in the right direction with regard to language and the highest of standards of reporting. To illustrate, these resources can help reporters and decision makers to make better linguistic choices; avoid thinking in stereotypical terms; enhance their sporting culture; or search for a broader range of news sources to build their stories, to list a few. Despite that certain resources available are rooted in particular media outlets and specific journalistic cultures around the world; they can be very useful to media professionals based in other contexts.

In addition to that, the resources presented here can be enlightening to citizens. As experts have highlighted, the public is an essential agent for holding the media accountable (Christians 1988). Therefore, raising the awareness of the usefulness of accountability instruments can contribute to helping audiences to become active and conscientious consumers so that they can carry out a critical assessment of the quality of sports content published by media organizations.

Going forward, researchers suggest that media organizations and external agents (institutions, professional associations and academia) from around the world should work harder to create additional recommendations. Current documents should be enhanced with further guidelines that address key challenges that have emerged in the new 24/7 digital environment, including the verification and fact checking of content from social media sites and blogs; the continuous adaptation and updating of material posted to maintain accuracy and integrity; the clash between real-interest stories and populist click-based ones; or the handling of mistakes and complaints (Zion and Craig 2015). In addition, other innovative accountability instruments that have not been detected in the field of sports journalism, such as editorial videos, open news lists, online broadcasting of newsrooms' meetings or error buttons should also be encouraged given the beneficial impact that these instruments could have on journalistic practice.

As scholars, we should remain particularly attentive to this area. First, subsequent research must monitor and thoroughly examine the emergence of new accountability systems in the international context. Further tools detected will be progressively incorporated into the *Accountable Sports Journalism* platform to maximize their online visibility. Second, ethnographic research could be very helpful to gain additional insight and assess the impact of those instruments among citizens, sports media professionals and decision-makers. Third, drawing on the findings of this research and the existing accountability instruments highlighted, our next stage will be to propose a new specialized code, which will take into account both the general standards of the profession and the singularities in this field. This dynamic code, which will combine up-to-date recommendations with helpful study cases around the world, will be distributed online. By creating and delivering these guidelines, this research can further contribute to fighting against some of the major constraints that still prevail in the sports communication field.

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