

TRAVIS VOGAN

ESPN

THE MAKING OF A
SPORTS MEDIA EMPIRE



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ESPN
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INTRODUCTION

An ESPN Culture

We believe that the appetite for sports in this country is insatiable.

—Bill Rasmussen, ESPN cofounder¹

ESPN has turned sports into a utility. What ESPN did was to make it possible to turn on your TV and have sports come out, just like turning on your faucet and have water come out.

—Robert Thompson, Syracuse University Center for the Study of Popular Television²

Shortly after ESPN's September 7, 1979, launch, the *Washington Post's* Jane Leavy asked the new outlet's president, Chet Simmons, how he thought the public would respond to an all-sports cable TV network. "I guess we'll have to have a battery of divorce lawyers standing by to handle all the cases," Simmons quipped. "Did you ever think that a television network would be named as a co-respondent in a divorce action?"³ Three years later, a woman in Austin, Texas, actually did name ESPN in her divorce suit. She claimed it ruined her marriage by offering her apparently addicted husband too much sports coverage.⁴

In 1998 ESPN set up a satellite receiver in Antarctica for eight total viewers. The move transformed it into the only cable outlet that provides service to every continent on Earth. In the process, it made the network's self-given title as "The Worldwide Leader in Sports" (also adopted in 1998) seem slightly less audacious. As then ESPN chair Steve Bornstein remarked, "The sun never sets on the ESPN empire."⁵

On January 26, 2000, Alisha and Chad Blondeel of Newaygo, Michigan, named their newborn son Espen—a tribute to Chad's favorite TV channel.

Though the first, Espen Blondeel was not the last of ESPN's honorary progeny. As part of its twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in 2004, ESPN included a segment that featured eleven young Espens (several of which spelled the name Espn). The name is now registered on *Babynames.com*. As silly as it may be to name a child Espn, it is almost unimaginable that an infant would be christened HGTV, VH1, or Comedy Central. This is because these parents named their children not after a cable network, but after a brand, a set of cultural meanings that exceed the institution they represent and serve as a recognizable marker of identity and community.

In 2006 ESPN unveiled Mobile ESPN, a cellular phone that also provided on-demand sports content anywhere its customers roamed.⁶ A promotion for the gadget featured *SportsCenter* anchor Trey Wingo claiming—in the popular news program's signature smart-aleck tone—that inventions like the wheel and electricity pale in comparison to the space-age product. He then asks an implied audience of straight men to “imagine if you will a world where you could follow Game 3 of the World Series and get credit for sitting through your girlfriend's cousin's wedding” and promises the innovation will ensure that “life will never get in the way of your sports again.” Mobile ESPN proved a spectacular failure and was off the market within a year. This costly experiment, however, illustrates ESPN's monumental ambition and even conceit. With Mobile ESPN, the media outlet not only strove for ubiquity, but also attempted to serve as a sort of utility—a branded circuit through which customers passed any time they checked scores, ordered a pizza, or called a friend. “We wanted a total sports ecosystem,” said Mobile ESPN senior vice president Manish Jha of the goals that informed the eventually aborted product's creation.⁷

What could be more popular than ESPN? Not much, according to two 2014 *Forbes* reports that named it the world's most valuable media property and the second most valuable sports brand after Nike.⁸ ESPN is popular in two principal ways, both of which illuminate its significance and uses. First of all, ESPN is pervasive. Second, it is utterly ordinary. Sports media—in part because of their ordinariness—are traditionally considered to be less thoughtful and refined than other genres. Though the sports page has long driven newspaper sales, it is known throughout the industry as a “toy department” that is not held to the same journalistic standards as “real” news. This attitude is similar in sports television, which is often critiqued for claiming to report on organizations that TV outlets pay handsomely for the rights to carry games. Moreover, the beer-guzzling, pot-bellied male sports television viewer—Al Bundy, Homer Simpson, and the like—has become a popular symbol of idle masculinity. In these representations, sports TV is a mundane excuse to avoid thinking (along

with spouses, kids, and jobs) rather than a site that provokes thought. Sports media have a reputation for not providing much in the way of credibility, complexity, or edification. Those who consume sports media have a reputation for not demanding these qualities.

“If culture,” notes sports media scholar David Rowe, “is the ‘stuff’ of everyday life—the frame through which we experience, interpret, mold, and represent everything that surrounds us—then sport occupies an uncommonly prominent position within it.” By extension, if “media,” as Robert W. McChesney claims, “made sport,” then sports media play a key role in culture.⁹ The aesthetic, economic, industrial, and political contexts that inform sport’s and mass media’s long-standing symbiosis shape sport’s cultural meanings and uses. No institution has, or has ever had, a more influential role in this popular milieu than ESPN. We blame our failed relationships on it, name our children after it, and can access it anytime and anywhere—even in Antarctica. If you go to an ESPN Zone restaurant and order enough ESPYs—a cocktail named after ESPN’s annual awards show—you can get drunk on ESPN. In short, we live in an ESPN culture.

Raymond Williams cites *culture* as one of the English language’s most complex terms. Most generally, it is “the signifying system through which . . . a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored.” But it is also the “work and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity”—what nineteenth-century poet and literary critic Matthew Arnold called “the best that has been thought and said.”¹⁰ Culture, in this second sense, composes the objects and undertakings that make people and institutions *cultured*.

While sports media are inarguably part of culture, they are not stereotypically cultured. However, over the course of its history, ESPN has strategically engaged practices considered more sophisticated than run-of-the-mill sports media—an effort that intensified after the Walt Disney Company’s 1996 acquisition of ESPN and the cable network’s resultant transformation into a synergy-driven and multiplatform corporate subconglomerate. ESPN began to produce documentaries, publish books, create fictional series, curate film festivals, sponsor literary writing awards, and employ Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists. These activities construct what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls “symbolic capital,” or contextual value that gives certain objects, practices, people, and institutions greater prestige than others. This book examines ESPN’s unlikely development of symbolic capital and probes the ends that inform this effort. It considers and critiques how ESPN’s cultural ambitions aid its larger attempts to build authority within and beyond sports media. In the process, it explains how these brand-driven activities illuminate and expand sports media’s meanings while asserting ESPN’s centrality to this environment.

ESPN's multiplatform efforts to cultivate sophistication illustrate how contemporary media convergence, in Henry Jenkins's words, "alters the relationships between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences."¹¹ Along these lines, ESPN exploits common attitudes that give meaning to the media it uses and the content they deliver. Media ethnographer Ilana Gershon terms these attitudes media ideologies, or "sets of beliefs about communicative technologies with which users and designers explain perceived media structure and meaning."¹² Gershon argues that media's social meanings are relational: attitudes about one medium shape perspectives on others. ESPN's expansion into different media capitalizes on their relative value. For example, its forays into film use the medium's stereotypical status as more artful than television and the Internet to brand its TV and online content as exceptional. ESPN also exploits media genres' ideologically constituted value. For instance, it frequently produces and programs documentary content, a variety of TV that discourses surrounding the medium—what we might call generic ideologies—suggest is extraordinarily enriching. Like its reliance on film's popular meaning, it uses documentary's relative symbolic capital to cultivate respectability that is rare in sports media. In addition to engaging these high-toned media practices, ESPN builds alliances with other powerful symbols—from canonical filmmakers to independent book publishers—that signal refinement. By the time ESPN began these efforts, it had already established itself as a multifaceted culture, a framework through which sport is known, experienced, and represented that, in former company president George Bodenheimer's words, endeavored to "deliver a fully branded experience at every consumer touch point."¹³ These activities work to inflect this ESPN culture with culture.

Beyond cultivating sophistication, Bourdieu claims symbolic capital is "economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a credit which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees economic profits."¹⁴ Though it often markets them as such, ESPN's ambitions to create prestige are not motivated by disinterested aesthetic goals. They instead drive a shrewd effort to distinguish ESPN from other sports media outlets, compete for market share, expand its demographic reach, promote its content, and even cut costs.

Importantly, these engagements do not affect an elitist style that derides or dismisses popular forms—far from it. Rather, they cultivate a middlebrow sensibility that satisfies audiences seeking more urbane content without alienating those who simply want to know what is happening in the world of sports.¹⁵ ESPN, in fact, unrelentingly tests how far its brand will extend in virtually any direction that might lead to revenue or positive exposure. As part of its twenty-

fifth anniversary, for example, the media outlet licensed a series of McDonald's Happy Meal toys, commemorative cans of Bud Light, and its own Gatorade flavor. The following year, it signed a fifteen-year, \$850 million contract that allowed the sports video game company EA Sports to use its brand.¹⁶ Though not always as visible as the beer cans and video games that bear its name, ESPN's more stereotypically refined offerings help to build the branded authority that compels companies like EA Sports to pay such enormous prices to commingle with the Worldwide Leader.

ESPN Culture in Context

This is an exciting time for the study of sports media—a topic long neglected in academe partly because of its low cultural associations that is now gaining currency in the humanities and social sciences. Most scholarship on sports media unsurprisingly focuses on event coverage and popular news programs.¹⁷ This work typically points out and critiques sports media representations' ideological implications and tendency to reinforce dominant hegemonies. But commercial sports media never merely depict sport. They also, for instance, help media outlets to build brands, promote content, and vie for sponsors, clients, and customers. These factors impact the shape sports media representations take and, consequently, are vital to understanding the meaning they make.

Extant scholarship and commentary on ESPN seldom consider the intersecting economic, industrial, institutional, historical, and cultural contexts that inform the content it produces.¹⁸ Journalistic accounts, such as Michael Freeman's *ESPN: An Uncensored History* and James Andrew Miller and Tom Shales's best-selling *Those Guys Have All the Fun: Inside the World of ESPN*, provide behind-the-scenes glimpses that outline and expose the company's history, policies, and practices. While they deliver instructive critiques and entertaining historical tidbits—particularly through their interviews with industry professionals—these popular accounts often privilege recounting ESPN's interoffice scandals and its executives' corporate war stories over explaining the company's place in and impact on sports media and popular culture.

This scholarly and journalistic work can consequently benefit from humanistic media studies, which tends carefully to the contexts that inform media's creation and circulation. "Production practices," Amanda Lotz reminds, "inordinately affect the stories, images, and ideas" that media create and sell. But "stories, images, and audience interpretation," Lynn Spigel adds, "are never strictly ruled by the logic of the market."¹⁹ Media, these scholars indicate, are produced, distributed, and consumed through a sometimes slippery matrix

of cultural and commercial forces. They can therefore be properly understood only when considered in relation to these interweaving circumstances. Accordingly, this study considers how ESPN engages a range of practices beyond event coverage and news to construct distinction in sports media and popular culture. It traces the media outlet's development into the so-called Worldwide Leader in Sports and considers how its efforts to establish and maintain this status build on, reconfigure, and enforce contemporary sports media's significance and uses. More broadly, it uses ESPN as a lens through which to consider how contemporary media industries fashion cultural value and to explore the industrial, institutional, commercial, and political purposes this painstakingly manufactured meaning serves over time and in different milieu.

To situate ESPN within the contexts that inform its practices, the chapters that follow consider the company's products across platforms, the discourses and marketing it generates, and commentary on the organization. They do so through considering a combination of texts, popular and trade discourses, archived material, and interviews with ESPN employees and other relevant sports media professionals. The interviews enliven the textual, discursive, and archival research while bringing to light new information and perspectives. The texts, popular and trade commentary, and archival sources corroborate, expand on, and contextualize the interviews, which sometimes reflect individuals' selective memories and self-interests more so than ESPN's actual history and practices.

Chapter 1 offers a brief history of ESPN that outlines its growth from the obscure cable TV upstart Entertainment and Sports Programming Network into a pervasive, corporate-funded media entity. It focuses on ESPN's efforts to establish a visible, credible, and fashionable brand leading up to 1998—the point when the increasingly diversified and persistently self-aggrandizing media outlet nicknamed itself the Worldwide Leader in Sports and undertook the prestige-driven array of activities that compose this book's principal focus.

In September 1998, ESPN unveiled *SportsCentury*, a multiplatform media event that centered on a series of documentary profiles that counted down the twentieth century's top-fifty North American athletes. Beyond chronicling sport history, ESPN used the *SportsCentury* documentaries to brand itself as a public historian. Shortly after its initial run, *SportsCentury* expanded into the ESPN subsidiary channel ESPN Classic's featured prime-time series. While the rebooted series maintained *SportsCentury*'s style and ostensible commitment to recounting sport's heritage, it was primarily used to promote ESPN's other content. Moreover, *SportsCentury*'s development complemented ESPN's larger effort to acquire historical footage and, in the process, to build and govern an archive of sport's visual history. Chapter 2 uses *SportsCentury* to explain how ESPN brands itself

as a reliable historiographer, asserts its centrality to sport history, and attempts to control the production of visual narratives about sport's past.

In 1996 *Sports Illustrated* and CNN—both of which are owned by Disney rival Time Warner—collaborated to launch the sports-news cable TV channel CNN/SI. Partly in response to this threat, ESPN premiered *ESPN the Magazine* in 1998. It marketed the magazine as a youthful contrast to *Sports Illustrated* that borrows from ESPN's televisual style. ESPN turned to the Internet—a technological milieu traditionally reputed to produce lower-quality content than print—to establish a connection to more stereotypically serious sports-writing. In 2000 *ESPN.com* formed *Page 2*, an offshoot designed to provide culturally aware opinion and analysis. It crafted a respectable identity for the website by hiring a roster of prominent print journalists that included David Halberstam, Hunter S. Thompson, and Ralph Wiley. In addition to these recognizable authors, *Page 2* hired up-and-coming Web-based writers, most notably blogger Bill Simmons, whose populist and conversational style was native to and designed for the Internet. While many of *Page 2*'s writers lacked Halberstam's, Thompson's, and Wiley's stature, ESPN situated the website's content as exceptional by suggesting it grows out of the print tradition they represent. Chapter 3 considers how ESPN used *ESPN the Magazine* and *Page 2* to establish a symbolically and economically valuable relationship to print that spans multiple platforms.

In 2001 ESPN formed the subsidiary ESPN Original Entertainment (EOE), which produced a variety of content that included reality programs, talk shows, feature-length docudramas, and scripted series. It principally engaged these new genres to expand its viewership beyond adult male sports fans, enrich established customers' connection to its brand, and publicize its other programming. Additionally, these ESPN Original Entertainment productions—specifically the docudramas and scripted series—routinely emphasized ESPN's and its corporate sibling ABC's significance to American sport history. They built realism, for instance, by integrating archived ESPN and ABC footage and including the companies' trademarks and personalities. Chapter 4 examines how ESPN Original Entertainment's productions engaged new generic horizons in ways that reinforce the media outlet's import.

In 2007 ESPN teamed with New York City's Tribeca Film Festival to establish the Tribeca/ESPN Sport Film Festival. The following year, ESPN launched ESPN Films, which specializes in feature-length documentary films. ESPN Films' most ambitious and aggressively publicized project thus far is *30 for 30* (2009–10), a series of thirty documentaries made by thirty commissioned filmmakers to celebrate ESPN's thirtieth anniversary. Spearheaded by Bill Simmons,

the series covered a range of topics on sport's history since 1979 and recruited a diverse roster of celebrated directors. ESPN markets *30 for 30* through emphasizing three primary qualities that distinguish the series, and, by extension, ESPN, from other sports media: the use of documentary, the productions' status as films that offer cinematic experiences, and the filmmakers' position as prominent artists. Moreover, ESPN Films extended *30 for 30* after its initial run into a permanent series of documentaries and launched several offshoots. Chapter 5 examines how ESPN Films expands on *SportsCentury's* use of the documentary genre, *Page 2's* conscription of respected authors, and ESPN Original Entertainment's long-form productions to situate ESPN as part of cinema culture.

Perhaps even more surprising than its partnership with Tribeca, ESPN joined the PEN American Center in 2010 to create the PEN/ESPN Literary Sports Writing Award for an outstanding nonfiction book about sports. The following year, Bill Simmons leveraged his rising celebrity to create the sports and popular culture website *Grantland.com*. Taking inspiration from magazines like *GQ* and mimicking the strategy by which *30 for 30* created a refined image, the website specializes in long-form journalism, boasts a roster of noteworthy writers and editors who established their renown in print, and is named after the canonical sportswriter Grantland Rice. Moreover, *Grantland* teamed with the independent publisher McSweeney's to produce *Grantland Quarterly*, a collection of the website's best works repackaged as hardcover books. Complementing *Page 2's* adventurous content and extending ESPN's strategic partnership with PEN, *Grantland* and *Grantland Quarterly* use print's cultural meanings to situate ESPN's online content as literary. *Grantland* eventually morphed into a boutique multimedia hub that hosts a variety of complementary content. Chapter 6 examines how ESPN uses *Grantland* to create a multiplatform sub-network devoted entirely to building cachet.

In 2012 ESPN partnered with the PBS documentary series *Frontline* to produce *League of Denial: The NFL's Concussion Crisis*. The documentary, based on ESPN investigative journalists Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru's book of the same title, interrogated the NFL's failure to adequately protect its players from concussions' health risks and exposed the league's efforts to discredit research that discovered links between concussions and brain damage. ESPN's alliance with a credible documentary series like *Frontline* extended *SportsCentury* and ESPN Films' documentary practices as well as ESPN's collaborations with Tribeca, PEN, and McSweeney's. ESPN, however, removed its brand from the documentary shortly before its fall 2013 premiere. Although ESPN claimed it separated its brand from the project for editorial reasons, critics charged that

the NFL—ESPN’s most valued client—pressured the media outlet to do so. I end this book by using ESPN’s involvement with *League of Denial* to explain how the organization balances its cultural ambitions and institutional priorities and to explain how these priorities shift in response to changes in the sports media ecology.

During his tenure at ESPN, Steve Bornstein reportedly displayed a framed quote in his office that read: “Kill the ones that will eat us. Eat the ones we kill.” ESPN, as Bornstein’s interior decor indicates, stops at nothing (except perhaps offending the NFL) to control every potentially profitable revenue stream that flows through the sports media landscape. This corporate mission is fueled in part by ESPN’s wide-ranging efforts to build sophistication. These practices compose an important strain in ESPN’s institutional DNA that showcases how sports media’s cultural status is built and illuminates the motives that inform this process.

It would take an enormous book to discuss ESPN’s entire history, the full range of its practices, and the many forces that influence them. This is not that book. There are numerous important factors that this project’s scope will allow me to consider only in brief. I focus, for instance, almost entirely on ESPN’s work for the U.S. market, and I do not provide detailed analyses of its event coverage and news programs. Additionally, while I take into account critical and industrial responses to ESPN, I pay little attention to how everyday audiences—the so-called sports junkies to which ESPN so attentively caters—receive it and put it to use. Despite these limitations, this study does show how ESPN’s efforts to build refinement augment its global activities, event coverage, and news programming. Moreover, my focus on ESPN’s institutional operations—and its brand management in particular—demonstrates how the company urges consumers to understand it. While this may be the first academic book on ESPN, it surely will not be the last. It leaves much for those who may wish to examine further the Worldwide Leader’s history and practices and will hopefully prove useful as they proceed.

From the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network to ESPN

ESPN may become the biggest thing in TV sports since *Monday Night Football* and night-time World Series games.

—William O. Johnson, *Sports Illustrated*¹

Like hamburgers and French fries, [ESPN] is one of the emblems of America.

—Tom Knott, *Washington Times*²

On Memorial Day weekend 1978, Bill Rasmussen, the exuberant forty-five-year-old director of communications for the World Hockey Association's (WHA) Hartford Whalers, received word that his employment was terminated. This did not come as much of a surprise—or even a disappointment, really—to the former entrepreneur and broadcaster who had bounced around the New England sports media scene since selling his interests in an advertising service business to join Amherst, Massachusetts's WTTT radio in 1962. The Whalers, like most franchises in the upstart WHA, were in financial trouble and desperately needed to free up some capital.

Despite his firing, Rasmussen kept an already scheduled appointment with Ed Eagan, an Aetna Insurance agent by day who was producing a TV show on Connecticut-area sports for cable distribution on the side with Bob Beyus, a telecommunications contractor who kept an office at Plainville, Connecticut's

United Cable and owned production equipment. Eagan initially contacted Rasmussen to gauge the Whalers' interest in the program, for which he and Beyus had thus far made only a pilot on hot-air balloons. Rasmussen figured he might use the meeting to workshop some ideas regarding his next professional move. He brought along his twenty-two-year-old son, Scott, who was still working as the Whalers' public address announcer, to help out. While chatting about Eagan and Beyus's program—an idea both Bill and Scott thought had legs—the possibility of a subscription cable channel devoted entirely to Connecticut-area sports arose. Though none of the meeting's attendees had any experience creating a cable network, they considered it a possibility worth exploring. For the interim, they settled on the name Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, or ESP Network for short. They liked the double entendre and assumed any shifts to their idea would likely still fall within the entertainment and sports categories.

Shortly after its first gathering, the invigorated group arranged a meeting for Connecticut-area cable operators in United Cable's conference room to drum up interest (see appendix A). They even parked a rented state-of-the-art production truck near United Cable's entrance to let the visiting operators know that ESP aimed to provide top-of-the-line productions. The presentation was sparsely attended, and those who did show thought the idea of a sports channel to be foolhardy and did not believe the inexperienced speculators possessed the know-how to pull it off. Moreover, the ESP group quickly realized that its plan would be far more expensive than anticipated because the regional cable providers received their content from several multiple-system operators (MSOs) instead of a single centralized source into which ESP could easily tap. All was not completely lost, however. United Cable vice president Jim Doby recommended that the group consider satellite distribution, a relatively new model that provided networks greater geographic range than terrestrial cable.

Though by no means a success, the meeting was encouraging enough to compel the entrepreneurs to rent a spare office at United Cable to set up a temporary base of operations while they researched the project's feasibility and solicited investors. They then staged a press conference, which yielded just four attendees from thirty-five invitations, where they unveiled their plan: ESP would be a cable network focusing on the University of Connecticut and other area sports. It would cost subscribers \$18 and run approximately five hours daily during the nine-month school year. Beyus exited the group shortly after. "He thought we were crazy and left," Rasmussen chuckled thirty-five years later. Beyus, however, asserts that Eagan and the Rasmussens exploited his financial and technological resources to keep the nascent project afloat. He claims to have left only because

his partners were “conning” him.³ Interpersonal discord aside, the ESP quartet became a trio just a little more than a month after forming.

Still undaunted, Eagan and the Rasmussens forked over the \$91 fee to incorporate ESP one week later. The business license listed Eagan, whose attorney drew up the paperwork, as the company’s president, with Bill and Scott as vice presidents. With Doby’s assistance, the group scheduled a meeting with RCA’s Al Parinello, who was in charge of marketing and selling transponder space on the company’s SATCOM 1 satellite. Parinello was having a surprisingly difficult time renting the transponder’s channels, as satellite distribution was still uncommon in the United States. After Parinello explained RCA’s rates for five hours per evening (which amounted to \$1,250 per day), the group realized it would be less expensive to rent space for twenty-four hours a day, a service for which RCA charged \$35,000 monthly. They couldn’t afford either deal, recalls Scott Rasmussen, so they figured they might as well reserve space for twenty-four hours.⁴ The only catch was that their lease required a five-year commitment and would carry a termination fee. RCA—which rented its transponder space on a first-come, first-served basis—did not require payment for ninety days after the satellite’s first use. The grace period provided a necessary buffer for the ESP group to get its financial act together. Furthermore, the transponder rights gave ESP a way to entice investors, or at least to prove it was slightly more than an idea. In fact, the rights became far more valuable after a front-page *Wall Street Journal* article trumpeting satellite cable as the wave of the future prompted corporate communication outlets to gobble up the rest of RCA’s available slots.⁵

In his memoir about ESPN’s development, Bill Rasmussen suggests the transponder rights set in motion “a series of events that no scriptwriter worth his salt could concoct.” In doing so, the charismatic businessman reinforces a storybook, ex nihilo creation myth for ESPN that situates him and his colleagues as the prescient visionaries who conceptualized the revolutionary—and now commonplace—practice of twenty-four-hour sports TV. Though certainly innovative, their idea was not as groundbreaking as Rasmussen—an infamous yarn spinner whose tales most commentators have reproduced without scrutiny—suggests. By the late 1970s, sports television was at an all-time high in the United States. The previous two decades saw ABC Sports redefine sports TV’s aesthetic ambitions and demographic reach with the “up close and personal” approach Boone Arledge developed that informed *Wide World of Sports* (1961–98) and *Monday Night Football* (1970–present). Moreover, syndicated programs such as *NFL Game of the Week* (1965–86, 2003–9) and *This Week in Baseball* (1977–98, 2000–2011) appeared outside of the weekend and evening time slots to which sports content was traditionally confined. Sport

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