

The World of Sport Public Relations

Caleigh O'Toole

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University

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Professor. D'Angelo

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Public relations is one of the most diverse career fields imaginable. There are several different specializations. However, the world of sports PR holds a sea of specific career paths. Included in sports PR is sports information, sports promotion, sports marketing. Making the sports specialization unique is the umbrella that encapsulates collegiate and professional organizations, as well as the manufacturers who provide the sporting goods. Each outlet of the sporting world is affected by some specificity of public relations.

Sport information is led by a public relations specialist who works closely within an organization. This profession is designed to allow teams to utilize different public relations strategies to promote their desired campaigns. The job of a sport information employee encompasses everything from gathering statistics to coordinating press conferences (Indeed, 2021). The main objective for those working in this field is to promote their organization and institute high media coverage. Publicists who work as Sports Information Directors, "...employ numerous PR tactics, including developing and maintaining good relationships with sportswriters and on-air personalities. They compile media kits and the accompanying mounds of statistics, write feature articles on players, handle interview requests from the media, provide website content, and occasionally handle player bookings and appearances (Page and Parnell, 2017, 299). Depending on the mass of the organization, there may be more than one Sports Information Director. This grants the team or institution the ability to reach different audiences. A prime example is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) due to the amount the organization represents. Working in the collegiate athletic world is over 3,000 Sports Information Directors (CoSIDA, 2019). These employees represent individual teams as well as the NCAA itself. It is important for large teams and associations to have multiple representatives and publicists so the news being released can be critiqued to fit on both a national and local scale.

Sports information is a key aspect of public relations in sports. It is a niche field that is necessary for athletic organizations to ensure high public success.

Sport Promotion is a specialization within the branch of sports PR, more specifically sports marketing. The idea of a promotional department is to cultivate actions to support a marketing strategy. Promotional campaigns are essential to a successful launch. Promotional ideas can range from commercials to billboards as well as magazine advertisements (Ferrand and McCarthy, 2008, 116). A large contributor to sport promotion PR was the integration of co-brand sponsorships. When more than one company teams up to promote the same product or campaign, it allows for a larger audience to be exposed to what the companies' objectives are.

There is a fine line when attempting to determine the differences between sports promotion and sports marketing. As per Philip Kotler, an American marketing author, sports marketing is defined as, "a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with each other (Kotler et al. (2005)." It is important to acknowledge that in the marketing division of Sports public relations, organizations will utilize the sports institution to sell services and or goods. The two sides of public relations work hand in hand as the promotional side must create innovative ways to expose the product or campaign the marketing team has developed on behalf of the employing institution. A traditional theory used in sports marketing and popularized by Philip Kotler, is the Marketing Mix Theory which includes four elements referred to as the 4P's: products, price, place, and promotion (Alqahtani, 1970). This strategy can be implemented in both the professional organization aspect of sports marketing as well as the marketing of sporting goods. Those working in the sports marketing field will hold a variety of responsibilities. Employees in this sector will create content for product promotion, cultivate brand partnerships,

develop a target public and so much more (Linchpin, 2018). Social media has become one of the leading forces in the sports marketing world. Promoting goods and events through different outlets increases the likelihood of audience interaction. To track if the set objectives are successful for marketing purposes, strategists will follow the six stages of the growth model. Traditional, Experimentation, Integration, Multi-Platform, Multi-channel, and Ecosystem are the steps sports marketing employees will follow to achieve positive social media growth (Holland, 2015, 11). Ranging from marketing a professional institution to sporting good brands, sports marketing requires public relations to hold a presence.

The history of public relations starts at the very beginning of sport creation. Teams would need to acquire players who could bring revenue and audiences to events. To recruit said players, it was necessary for a representative of the organization to promote the success and future objectives of their employer. Dating back to the 1870s, marketing, and public relations were found specifically in sports. The idea of marketing sports organizations was first found in tobacco products. The publicists for the teams would strategically place trading cards of baseball players in cigarette packages. This tactic promoted loyalty to the brand and institution as well as increased revenue. A first look at sport public relations being seen globally was about two decades later in 1894. It was here that the International Olympic Committee began to rely heavily on partners and sponsorships with brands to cultivate the Olympics as it is known today (Ferrand and McCarthy, 2008, 24).

There are many advantages to working in sport PR. Looking firstly at the steadiness of the job. Though the sporting world moves very quickly with many unknowns, there is one foundational piece and it is the concept of popularity in sports. Sporting organizations of all kinds are global. Each of the institutions needs to have publicists to keep up with the demand of

modern media. With this idea in mind, it is found that employees in the public relations sector of an organization have the opportunities to move up in employment (Harris). In addition to the promotional movement speed, more positions seem to find their way into organizations with the increase in social media. As new technology is being developed it is important to have employees with a full understanding of the new concepts work handily with employees with more experience to ensure company success. Having an interest in sports as a whole is a great advantage in itself. By allowing yourself to explore diverse fields, there is a higher chance of job opportunities (Harris, 1965).

In contrast to the advantages of working in sports PR, there are some negative aspects. As per the high mobility rate among positions within a company, the challenge of working in sports PR is gaining enough experience to obtain a job. As stated in research done by Central Coast Sports College, “the competition for workplace internships in sports is ridiculously competitive, let alone getting paid for your hard work. Be prepared to have a university degree of three to four years... at least a year or two of unpaid internships at a club or organization before any full-time positions become available.” Sports marketing specifically holds many challenges that pose disadvantages to future employees. Finding a way to attract sponsorship for a new product, player or campaign takes long hours and loads of work. When an organization or brand is either a start-up or not gaining as much traction, sports marketing specialists will have to implement public relations tactics to hopefully regain audiences as well as buyers (Coetzee). Publicists who work for a professional team or athlete specifically are at a disadvantage. When working with and on behalf of professional athletes it requires special skill sets that may not be needed in other areas of sports PR. In addition to the basic skills like top communication skills and a face for people, publicists in sports PR must have a sense of urgency when working. Professional athletes

are always at risk for scandal, injury, success, etc. Publicists must be ready to act and think fast. Additionally, social media proficiency, as well as problem-solving skills, are all intertwined. These three skills must be implemented in all athlete-based publicists as it is necessary to inform the player or organization's audience and maintain their employer's reputation (Chorn).

When comparing the field of sports PR to that of other public relations specializations, there are some similar actions. Across all fields, there will be opportunities for communication between an organization and its public. Actions found in public relations as a whole include press releases, product or people campaigns, and much more. Included in the work done specifically in sport public relations, activities may include working more closely with photographers. This is said since sports are already very public and it is the job of public relations specialists to ensure their company is viewed in only a positive light. While this may seem similar to that of other companies, it is important to acknowledge that sport PR is always in public view and must be treated as so. Public relations in sports also have more opportunities to engage with the public. Being that many of the sports organizations are so well known and popular, public relations specialists can work with the sports marketing teams to cultivate activities such as contests, invitational games, and more with fans to boost audience engagement and potential revenue.

Many of the same skills are necessary for all fields of public relations. In a research study done by Shana Meganack, Joshua Smith, and Jeanie P.D. Guidry an analysis was conducted to discover the most needed skills in 1,000 public relations jobs. In their findings, the researchers concluded the most in-demand skills employers are searching for include: Administrative Software proficiency, general communication skills, strategic thinking, organizational skills, and

social/digital media skills (Meganack, Smith, Guidry, 2020). These skills are beneficial to bring into any public relations specialization.

Stated for sports public relations specifically, public presentation skills are one of the most essential characteristics for aspiring employees. Interpersonal skills are also necessary for sport public relations personnel. The sports industry itself is constantly moving at high speed. Whether the job is a team's publicist or a sporting good company campaign manager, employees must be specialized in the act of working well with people and demonstrating high leadership skills as they must organize a multitude of events like press conferences. Finally, the expertise of research proficiency should be brought to the workplace within sports PR. The researchers behind the work sport public relations write, "Such work requires data literacy – the ability to make sense of data and develop accurate and appropriate conclusions based on data. Common sources of useful information may include not only organizational records but also other information such as director resources or subscription-based data from data providers." These skills are needed to succeed in the field of sports PR.

When considering a job in sport public relations, it is important to consider what experience and degrees will be helpful in conjunction with the specific skills. A ground-level internship of any kind will be essential to obtaining a position with an organization. A bachelor's degree in majors such as public relations, marketing, advertising, or communications will be the first step. Having experience with data or sports analytics will help build your knowledge of the field. Finally, a portfolio that showcases the work done within an undergraduate timeframe, as well as the contribution from an internship, will be necessary when applying for a job (Sports). Looking into the future, the margin for growth within the sport PR field is large. As social media become even more prevalent in society, more opportunities for job positions as well as audience

interaction activities will become available. As per the research conducted by The Sports Management Degree Guide, “ Sports PR experts will be in high demand to quickly respond to news developments and keep their athletes looking good. According to the BLS, employment of public relations specialists is expected to grow slightly faster than average by 12 percent, thus creating 27,400 new jobs by the end of 2022.” This is an exciting opportunity for many soon-to-be graduates as research illustrates the growth of sport PR is projected to \$145.3 billion.

After an in-depth analysis of this specialization of public relations, I would be very interested in finding a profession in this field. I have always been very interested in all sports and find the profession fascinating. I find that I would succeed in the profession as I am very outgoing and have a working knowledge of the sports world. I believe I would enjoy the work I would be able to do within the field. I think the idea of working in close contact with organizations and or companies would create an interesting work environment that I would enjoy.

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