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THE PRESSING ISSUES IN TRAINING SPORTS JOURNALISTS

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the forms of sports journalism that have emerged as a result of the specialization of journalism and the transformation of genres in traditional journalism.

KEYWORDS

Specialization process, sports journalism, journalistic education, traditional journalism, online journalism.

INTRODUCTION

Today, sports are observed not only as recreational activities or means of promoting health but also as a propaganda machine aimed at deeply and effectively embedding ideas and perspectives in a global context. Such phenomena are vividly manifested in the implementation of a country's traditions and missions during prestigious championships or competitions. This promotional work is inevitably enhanced by the involvement of journalists, bloggers, and influencers, who are masters of the audiovisual communication

network. Sports journalists play a crucial role as the locomotives of this network, demonstrating an unbiased journalistic perspective while showing neutrality towards any idea or viewpoint—this requires great courage. As specialists covering the sports field, sports journalists must prioritize the trust placed in them above any personal interests. They should take on all necessary responsibilities for the development of the field, approaching their work in a way that sets a professional example for the younger

generation of specialists following in their footsteps. This is the highest expectation placed upon them.

Sports Journalism in the Digital Age

Since the beginning of the current millennium, the circulation and advertising figures for print publications have steadily declined. The rise of online and digital sports journalism has contributed to the downturn of print sports journalism. ESPN, an American cable sports channel owned by ESPN Inc., launched its first website in 1995, marking the beginning of a new era in digital sports journalism.

Three key characteristics that distinguish online media from traditional media are:

1. Interactivity – The ability to engage in rapid, intensive, and two-way communication with the audience.
2. Multimedia – The ability to simultaneously utilize various formats for presenting information, providing readers and journalists with an almost limitless arsenal to effectively convey their creative ideas.
3. Hypertext – The availability of hyperlinks that allow for instant transitions from one text to another and the possibility of creating an infinite text structure.

Due to the specialization of journalism, sports journalism itself is increasingly feeling the need for internal specialization within the field. Depending on

the types and forms of sports, the media outlets, online resources, websites, pages, and blogs that cover them are also undergoing a transformation process. The emergence of such processes is undoubtedly a natural and commendable phenomenon. Once, sports news allocated just a few minutes or seconds at the end of information programs on television and radio was merely entertainment for many, allowing fans to know the statistics of their teams. Today, dedicated sports channels are improving due to the innovations and changes occurring in the field. They are undergoing a process of specialization, organizing continuous broadcasts based on audience demands. These developments necessitate the establishment of qualified specialists in every area, particularly experienced sports journalists specializing in specific fields.

The founder of the Uzbek football commentary school, a dedicated advocate for Uzbek football, a prominent representative of national sports journalism, a republic-level referee, and a holder of the "Shuhrat" medal, Axbor Imomxo'jayev, is approaching his 80th birthday. In an interview with Fazliddin Sattorov, a correspondent for "News Arena," he was asked the following question (News Arena, 2016.):

“In one of your interviews, you mentioned, ‘Today’s journalists are satisfied with narrow specialization. For example, if they specialize in football, they pay little attention to other sports. A sports journalist should be

knowledgeable in all areas of sports. They should be aware of information regarding world championships, Olympic games, and regular competitions.’ How feasible is it to implement this today? Because when we talk about specialization, many people understand it to mean focusing on a specific sport.

While it is possible to have an in-depth understanding of one sport, that doesn’t mean one should be ignorant of others. For example, a fan who knows you might see you on the street and ask, ‘Did you hear that the Sindarovs are world champions in chess?’ If you respond that you are not interested in anything but football, you are indicating your limitations as a journalist. A person should continuously strive to improve their skills. It’s true that knowing all sports is impossible. However, in today’s information age, keeping track of other news will not be in vain.” (Stadion.uz, 2023)

Starting this year, Uzbekistan is introducing for the first time a national and sector-specific specialization system, professional standards for professions and specialties, as well as a tiered education standard and programs. This, in turn, will facilitate the integration of the labor market with the education sector. (Professional education system and international dimensions, 2023)

When this integration is successfully implemented, it will provide a significant boost to the development of

structural activities and will systematize the process of sectoral specialization. This system will eliminate previously ambiguous misunderstandings between workers and employers in the labor market. Employers will clearly know which specialist they are ordering, and workers will understand where they will be working in advance. This is crucial for the faster and more strategic development of the sector.

Qualification, also referred to as specialization in the international education market, encompasses the set of requirements and responsibilities imposed by the employer on the employee (whether a hired worker, job applicant, or participant in the selection for vacant positions). Qualification embodies the responsibility of the employee's work activities, professional experience, skills, and motivation. The qualification requirements set by the employer for specialists and employees must be reflected in professional education standards. Otherwise, the continuity between education and production, the qualifications of graduates, and employer expectations will be lost. (Education, 2023) In this regard, if the offerings do not align with the demand, the expected results will not be achieved. There are several educational institutions around the world that specialize in preparing journalists and sports journalists, contributing to the development of sports journalism as a distinct field today. Below are some countries with educational institutions specifically training specialists in this area:

In the Russian Federation, more than 20 universities are preparing sports journalists, including the Faculty of Journalism at M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, the undergraduate program in "Sports Journalism and Media Relations" at Moscow State Pedagogical University, and the Faculty of Sports Journalism at Saint Petersburg State University. Additionally, in the United States, there are 46 educational institutions specializing in journalism and sports journalism. (Journalism, 2023) In European countries, there are currently 593 educational institutions that prepare journalists and sports journalists. All of these institutions admit applicants throughout the year, directing trained specialists for the development of the field. (Journalism Coursers, 2023) In the aforementioned countries, there are several higher education institutions specializing in the field of sports journalism, and the specialists they train are actively working with a professional approach, ranging from sports websites on the internet to small sports pages on social media. In neighboring Kazakhstan, sports journalism has not yet reached the level of development seen in our country. However, it is gaining attention as a new field. Sports journalism is not only a new specialty at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University but also represents a fresh area of focus for the entire country. Now is the right time to introduce this direction, as sports are developing in the country, which, in turn, is creating a demand for sports journalists. (News, 2023) Today, journalism and its

branch of sports journalism are taught as a profession in approximately 700-800 higher education institutions worldwide. We have taken notice of how this process is being carried out in our country and have subjected it to analysis. Currently, journalistic practice stands at a crossroads of significant changes. The advancement of the internet and digital technologies, along with the globalization of the information age and information technologies, is driving the development of mass communication. As a result, new sectors have emerged, such as online journalism, blogging, citizen journalism, media design, and social media marketing, along with new forms of activity. There is a transformation of genres within traditional journalism. Both the processes of universalization and specialization are observed in the work of journalists. All these processes necessitate a fundamental renewal of journalistic education and the introduction of innovative educational models that meet contemporary demands. (Dadaxonov, (2019).)

The University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan, recognized as the leading higher education institution for training sports journalists, graduated its first 13 students in the field of sports journalism during the 2021–2022 academic year. (In the 2022–2023 academic year, the Uzbekistan State Institute of Physical Education and Sport allocated 2 budgetary places and 4 contract-based spots for the "Sports Journalist" master's program, totaling 6

quotas; however, there were no enrollments in this field for that academic year.) This marked the beginning of a national base of highly educated specialists in Uzbekistan's sports journalism history. Notably, we can observe that graduates of this program have achieved a 100% employment rate.

During our research, we were interested in the subsequent activities of these graduates and investigated the fields in which they are engaged. Four of the graduates are working as photographers, reporters, and journalists for CA (<https://championat.asia>), the Central Asia football news website with the largest audience among Uzbekistan's sports websites. Three graduates are employed as first-class editors and reporters at the "SPORT" television and radio channel. Two graduates work as reporters for the "O'zbekiston24" television channel, one as a reporter for the "Daryo" internet publication, one as a host at "Oriyat-dono" radio, one as the editor-in-chief of the "Payariq hayoti" newspaper, and one holds the position of head of the press service at the Nishon district administration in Qashqadaryo region.

From this analysis, it is evident that 11 out of 13 graduates are actively working as sports journalists in their specialized field. From the analysis, it is evident that only four out of the eleven graduates are specifically working at sports websites. This indicates that a total of 30.7% of graduates from the sports

journalism program at the University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan are employed at online sports sites, while the remaining 72.3% are working in other sectors. In the 2022–2023 academic year, an additional 27 students are expected to graduate from the sports journalism program, which will significantly contribute to the development of sports journalism in the country. Currently, the university has 136 students enrolled in daytime education for sports specialization, 25 in evening education, and 25 in part-time education. Additionally, there are 6 students in the master's program and another 6 in the sports commentator specialization. In total, over the next three years, 198 specialists with higher education in sports journalism will enter the workforce, becoming true owners of the field and initiating a new phase in the development of sports journalism in Uzbekistan.

During this phase, we can also observe the process of specialization in various sports on sports websites. We hope that the process that begins today will generate significant resonance in the coming three years.

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