

THE ESPN EFFECT: HOW ESPN HAS TRANSFORMED
LOCAL SPORTSCASTS

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ABSTRACT

Accelerated communication technology has drastically changed the world of sports journalism. Assuredly, the greatest sports media empire has evolved during this time of media transformation. With its overwhelming success, ESPN has challenged all sports media outlets, especially local news sportscasts. Consequently, many local news stations have been forced to make significant format and style changes or to perish at the remotes of cable networks. This thesis labels the phenomenon as the ESPN Effect.

Several methodologies are used to examine the ESPN Effect. Specifically, research of existing literature, survey, and content analyses were completed. The first three of the seven chapters of this thesis chronicles how sports communication has evolved and changed, focusing on communication theories and existing literature. The latter chapters take a statistical approach to examine the ESPN effect. The compilation of the work of scholars and original research supports the overall hypothesis of this thesis: because of ESPN's comprehensive communication approach, local sports news has changed and must continue to change more in terms of content, style and format in order to survive and to compete for sports audiences.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Traditionally, people learned about occurrences and events from local broadcast news resources. Local news not only covered local stories but also provided viewers with national news. As with many communication outlets over the last ten years, the term *instant* has transformed the broadcast industry. Communication technology has made instantaneous news, 24 hours a day, possible. Along with furnishing news in real time, technological advances allow viewers to be interactive. The Internet relays instant information, and satellites provide instant communication from all over the world. Because a platform exists to which communication can be constantly updated and aired, local broadcast news must change if it wishes to remain a top news resource for its clientele, the public.

Perhaps the greatest area to be affected by this transformation is sports broadcasting. Accelerated communication technology has drastically changed the world of sports journalism. With the advent of the Internet and many cable channels, venues where sports journalists can spread their information have grown tremendously. One such venue, ESPN, has greatly impacted sports journalism.

With its overwhelming success, ESPN has challenged all other sports media outlets, especially local news sportscasts. Consequently, many local news stations have

been forced to make significant changes to both format and style or to perish at the remotes of cable networks. This thesis labels this phenomenon the ESPN Effect. While many viewers formerly relied on their local news broadcasts for national sports news, ESPN has stolen much of this audience.¹ Simply, ESPN devotes 100% of its airtime to sports coverage. Local news is typically only aired in three different segments a night for approximately three, five, or seven minutes.² Thus, the medium has faced difficulty competing for sports' audiences.

In the past, sports segments increased news ratings; however, today many news directors struggle with dwindling sportscasts. They have wrestled with ideas on how to improve their segments trying to revive the importance of local sports news. In many cases, news directors have significantly downsized sports reporting from their news broadcasts.³

This thesis will examine the ESPN Effect on local sports segments. It will answer the following questions:

- RQ1: How has sports journalism changed over the last couple of decades?
- RQ2: What does ESPN do differently than other sports media outlets?
- RQ3: Has local news sports coverage changed over the last six years?
- RQ4: Before ESPN, did people watch their local news affiliate for sports information?
- RQ5: Do people enjoy ESPN's coverage style of sports information?

- RQ6: How should local news approach sports?

These research questions will point to a series of propositions expressed in the following hypotheses:

- H1: ESPN's format and style appeals to sports fans.
- H2: ESPN's format and style has changed local news sports journalism.
- H3: More people prefer to watch ESPN than to watch local news affiliate's coverage of sports for sports information.
- H4: A market still exists which demands local sportscasts.
- H5: Because of ESPN, local news should focus more on local sports and less on national stories.

Several methodologies will be used to examine the ESPN Effect. Specifically, research of existing literature, content analyses, and a survey will be completed. This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first half of the thesis records how sports communication has evolved and changed, focusing on theories and literature. The latter chapters take a statistical approach to examine the ESPN effect. The compilation of the work of scholars and original research will help to substantiate the following overall hypothesis: because of ESPN's comprehensive communication approach, local sports news has changed and must continue to change more in terms of content, style and format in order to survive and compete for sports audiences.

This thesis bases its ideas on the transactional theory of communication.⁴ Chapter II will more closely examine the different models of communication and will demonstrate that while Lasswell's model is one that is widely accepted, it exemplifies an older model of communication.⁵ This chapter will argue that the transactional communication model is more appropriate for today's information era. In terms of sports journalism, ESPN's transactional style of communication offers a much more interactive and instantaneous approach to sports, making it a leader in the field. Local sports segments still subscribe to Lasswell's model of one-way communication.

Additionally in Chapter II, the above communication theories will be applied to sports journalism's history. The chapter highlights new technologies are the driving forces behind major benchmarks in sports journalism. The five major advances in sports journalism that will be examined are: radio, television, satellites, cable, and the Internet. Again, this chapter contends that sports journalism's major breakthroughs all occurred due to advancements in technology. The chapter examines how each technological advancement moves further away from Lasswell's theory of communication and closer to a transactional view of communication. Most recently, cable television and the Internet are major technologies that have contributed to significant landmarks in sports journalism.

Chapter III discusses ESPN in depth, examining how and why it has become a major sports media empire. Dissecting the history of ESPN, this chapter argues that ESPN's many outlets and *SportsCenter* have become dominant forces in sports

journalism today. A critique of ESPN is necessary to demonstrate how its unique formatting and style appeal to sports audiences. The chapter closely examines how the network catapulted sports journalism to a new level. Again, this chapter argues that ESPN's successes are due mainly to its ability to follow a more transactional communication model through their cable channel and Internet venues.

After examining ESPN and *SportsCenter*, Chapter IV scrutinizes local sports news. First, a case study of WJLA-TV, an ABC Washington, D.C. affiliate's sports department, will follow the procedures and routines of a daily sports broadcast news segment. In order to look critically at local sports news, it is necessary to examine the procedures and routines the sports department undergoes and to discuss with them the changes they have had to implement over the last decade because of ESPN. In addition to a case study, this chapter also includes a content analysis of the past six years of WJLA's sportscasts. This content analysis examines the changes that have occurred to local sports news. More specifically, it will look at format, style, and content of local sports news.

Chapter V consists of a content analysis comparison. This chapter focuses on two days of *SportsCenter* versus two days of local sports news segments at 5:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 11:00 p.m. It will examine content, style and format in detail. The hypotheses that will be tested are:

H1: Local news spends the same amount of time on local and national news

H2: Local sports news spends more time on local sports news than *SportsCenter* does on local, Washington, D.C. area sports.

H3: *SportsCenter* has different lead stories than local sportscasts

H4: *SportsCenter* uses more full screen graphics and highlight videos per story

H5: Local sports news does not allow for audience participation

Chapter VI reveals results and analysis of a personally distributed survey of sports and opinions regarding ESPN and local sports news. The survey was conducted to test the following hypotheses:

- People who watch more than three games or events a week watch ESPN more than their local sports segments.
- Men want longer sports segments during local news broadcasts.
- People 28 and younger want longer sports segments.
- Younger sports fans prefer ESPN to their local news sports segments for sports news and information.
- Sports fans find ESPN more appealing than their local news sports segments for sports news and information.

Finally, Chapter VII, based on the findings both in terms of statistics and literature, makes conclusions and recommendations for local sports newscasts.

Chapter II

Communication and Sports Journalism

This chapter introduces important concepts, historical background, and criticisms of sports journalism. First, two communication models will be described in order to illustrate the changes that have occurred in the dissemination of communication. Secondly, these theories will be put into the context of sports journalism history. The text demonstrates how sports journalism and mass communication have transformed themselves into the transactional model rather than Lasswell's model of communication. This section also points out how advances in technology, both in distribution and production, were the driving forces behind major changes in sports journalism. The five major advances discussed are radio, television, satellites, cable, and the Internet. Finally, this chapter examines literature critical of the current state of sports journalism, particularly the effects ESPN has had on local sports newscasts.

Communication Theories

In order to dissect sports journalism, communication must first be examined from a theoretical point of view.

In 1948, Harold Lasswell suggested a model of communication, one that is used for many general applications in mass communication. Lasswell's model consists of five elements for message transmission:

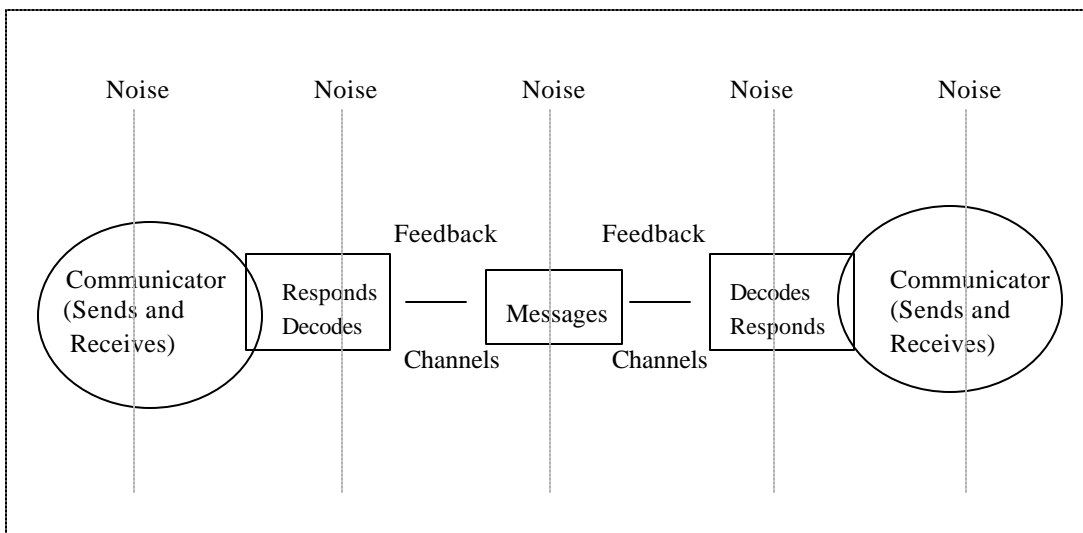
- Who
- Says What
- To Whom
- In Which Medium
- With What Effect

The "Who" refers to who controls the message. The "Says What" becomes the subject of content analysis. The "To Whom" deals with the receiver of the message. The "Medium" is the channel of communication, while the "Effect" is the effect the message has on receivers. Weiner Severin and James W. Tankard state, "Lasswell's model has been criticized because it seems to imply the presence of a communicator and a purposive message. It has also been called oversimplified..."⁶ Severin and Tankard's reference to the model as "oversimplified" does not accurately depict the model's concise and precise depiction of communication at the time the theory emerged. During the time of radio dominance and early stages of television, Lasswell's model accurately described communication; only as technology advanced has his model become inapplicable to today's communication standards.

While Lasswell's model adequately analyzed communication in the early days of radio, television, and newspapers, the advent of the Internet, cable, direct television, etc.

has introduced interactive communication, which has drastically changed the way communication is defined. Today's information era has emphasized the interactive form of communication.

Adler et al. state, "The activity of communicating is best represented by the transactional communication model."⁷ While eliminating the separate sender and receiver entities with both becoming communicators, the transactional model reflects the innovation that allows messages to be sent and received simultaneously. Clearly, today the Internet whirs as many football fans log onto ESPN to cast a vote on a questionable call or to vote on their favorite players. Additionally, the model shows the difficulty in isolating a single discrete act of communication from the events that precede and follow it. The most significant aspect of this model that applies to today's communication is the degree of mutual influence that occurs when communicators interact.⁸



II.I Transactional Communication Model
Source: Adler et al. *Interplay*. 1998.

The Internet and other modern technologies have drastically transformed the world of modern journalism. Lasswell's model reflects a much simpler, linear communication process that still applies to some contexts, such as local sports newscasts. However, the model does not capture the importance of interaction, a key element in communication today. Simply, mass media are no longer linear communication even though local sports news still persists in the linear style of communication. Local sports broadcasts still operate under a Lasswell type model of a message created by an encoder and dissected by a decoder. Obviously, the result stifles interaction. On the other hand, ESPN follows a transactional style that allows audience participation. Commenting and chatting occurs on their website, while written communication appears as constant banner updates on scores and major events. Because ESPN uses both print and broadcast communication to send their messages, audiences can access information easily and readily.

Sports Journalism History from a Technological Perspective

At its inception, sports journalism followed a linear model in the mid-nineteenth century with newspapers and radio. In the post-World War I years, sports writing evolved rapidly.⁹ The dominant flowery, gushy prose of the 1920's and 1930's gradually gave way to a more streamlined style during the World War I era.¹⁰ During the 1950's and 1960's, play-by-play reporting and statistics were incorporated into reports.¹¹ Today,

a balance of the two dominates sports broadcasts; not as flowery as the 20's, yet not as sterile as the 1950's and 1960's.

Radio had many limitations. Weak signals could only be heard by a small radius of listeners. Also, because radio could only be heard, it was not the best communication device for very visual sports activities. People wanted to see the action. The first telecast of a major league baseball game occurred on August 26, 1939, and featured only two cameras.¹² During this time, technology drastically affected which sports could obtain airtime.

As technology improved in the 1950's, sports programming began to evolve. More and more people owned television sets. In 1948, less than 200,000 homes had television sets, yet by the end of the 1950's, more than 40 million American households had a television set.¹³ Today, that number approaches more than 100 million.¹⁴

The paucity of technology spawned television formatting very similar to that of radio formatting; again, simplistic one-way, linear communication. In 1951, a crucial technological advancement occurred when a transcontinental cable link was completed, finally joining the entire United States by television transmission. People could look at two live pictures at the same time. As technology improved, television programs moved from the staid and traditional to experimentation with programs such as sports.

The years 1960-1975 mark what Brad Shultz calls the "era of creativity."¹⁵ In 1961, a major innovation occurred with the debut of the "Wide World of Sports" on ABC. Sports programming before this point was usually "no nonsense."¹⁶ Roone

Arledge of ABC did something different. He began putting microphones and cameras in unusual places, for instance the bottom of a diving pool. Similar to ESPN today, he also began airing sports that American viewers had never seen before; ski jumping and lumberjacking. Most of all, he focused on the personalities and the stories behind the events. Roone Arledge states, “in almost any field, human stories are what’s most important.”¹⁷

A decade later, Arledge used that same philosophy to create the sports show, *Monday Night Football*. The show was based on the premise that the audience wanted something different. Through the 1960’s, CBS dominated other networks by emphasizing professional football’s action. Arledge turned fans’ fascination with the game into a show. A final touch of showbiz was the hiring of three men, usually former, popular sports figures themselves, in the broadcast booth. Howard Cossell joined the booth and turned sports broadcasting into a sometimes controversial and egomaniacal venue. Cossell created a show that consisted of attitude and behavior that television had not seen before. These commentators were no longer just reporting, they were entertaining and subjective in their views. “Arledge wanted to combine football and entertainment,” said ABC executive Dennis Lewin.¹⁸ In the 1970’s, there were also more minorities in sports reporting. Most notable, Irv Cross starred on “The NFL Today” pre-game show on CBS. “The NFL Today” also paved the way for women, giving Miss America winner Phyllis George a host job on a national sports program.¹⁹ But, women journalists were given lighter stories allowing the network to promote sex appeal.

Two technological developments helped push television into a new era. Satellite transmission became possible in the 1960's. To the sports world, satellites brought instantaneous live coverage of any events in the world, something that had direct application to sports. The advent of satellite transmission brought the sports journalism world to a transactional model of communication. It opened the door to a myriad of sports programming possibilities, and soon American audiences had access to events from any corner of the globe.

Another major breakthrough was cable television. Cable television began in the 1970's as a means of improving signal quality in places where antennas could not reach. As more people got cable, programmers discovered a new series of profit possibilities. Consumers wanted more choices especially in sports. Pay-per-view combined both satellite and cable, making enormous profits. Another outgrowth of the satellite and cable revolution was the growth of superstations that broadcast sporting events all over the country. The rise of superstations changed the landscape of sports broadcasting once again. "The key is technology and choice."²⁰ Now digital television and direct television promise to deliver even more programming and more viewing options.

In addition to the other advances, wider acceptance and usage of the Internet has extended the staircase to which sports broadcasting can advance. Although not all households maintain real time Internet speed, the service still allows quick access to information for the avid sports fan. Additionally, Internet fosters convergence, permitting users the convenience of the other communication venues in one piece of

technology. Web surfers can connect to newspaper, radio, television, and live satellite/cable feeds at their desktops.

The Current State of ESPN and Local Sportscasts

On the first day of the network's launch in 1979, Lee Leonard, ESPN's first studio host, stated, "What you will see in the next minutes, hours, and days to follow may convince you that you've gone to sports heaven... Right now, you're standing on the edge of tomorrow."²¹ Leonard was correct.

Today, the number of outlets to communicate sports news has grown even more with the Internet and dozens of cable stations. Consequently, local sports news just does not seem able to compete with networks like ESPN. Critics and scholars have different opinions about the state of local sports. Three primary options exist: 1) take sports out of newscasts or diminish its time, 2) include sports information only when it is newsworthy, and 3) localize sports more. One certainty in sports journalism is that ESPN is impacting the industry enormously. As Jim Shea states, "In terms of how sports are now reported and covered, nothing has had a greater impact than ESPN's signature show, *SportsCenter*."²²

In his article, "The King: How ESPN Changes Everything," Shea states, "by virtue of its omnipresence, its audience size, its content, its credibility, its popularity, ESPN is the king of sports television. It has become the most dominant force in the history of sports broadcasting, an interconnected colossus of multimedia synergy, which

now routinely influences and alters the way sports are viewed, covered, and even played.”²³ Although John A. Walsh, executive editor of ESPN says the network does not operate thinking to influence others, he is aware that “the smartest people react to our coverage, because they understand that a part of the makeup of their most intense readership is people who watch our shows.”²⁴

Because ESPN is so successful, the role of local sportscasts is being questioned. Henry Mauldin of Dan Fitzpatrick Associates comments, “Sports is definitely on the back burner at local stations now. The thinking is that if people want sports they go to ESPN, CNN/SI, or Fox. ESPN updates scores twice an hour, plus they have the hour long shows.”²⁵ Ed Arnold, a Los Angeles area sportscaster for 31 years says many news stations have de-emphasized sports on their evening news shows because management assumes “they (viewers) just switch over to ESPN anyway.”²⁶

Local sportscasts simply cannot compete with *SportsCenter*; therefore, producers recommend the segments focus more attention on local angles. Mauldin continues: “what the local stations are doing now is making sports local, local, local. They are also much more feature oriented. I’m not saying the job of local sports anchor is dead, but it’s dying. There is just not that much left for it anymore.”²⁷

Other networks are altering their formats. Although this thesis focuses on broadcast journalism, it is interesting to note that newspaper sports sections are also being influenced by ESPN. Shea comments that newspaper sports sections are now being packaged, focused, and even written differently because of ESPN. Don Skar, sports

editor of *The Boston Globe* states: “More than any other entity, ESPN has changed the way we cover sports. They bring so much to people before and after the event, plus analysis and in-depth stuff. ESPN has also changed the way young readers have been exposed to sports. Highlights are critical to them, and as a result we have something called “Plays of the Game” now. We also do other things in our coverage that maybe we would not have done before, and it is because of ESPN and its influence.”²⁸

Interestingly, Skwar notes local coverage is the main area in which newspapers still maintain a significant advantage: “If five minutes is all you want to spend with the sports news, then ESPN may be where you want to go. They do a great job of providing information to every single person in the United States. But if you really want to know absolutely everything about the Red Sox or the Celtics, you can’t get that from ESPN yet.”²⁹ Although Skwar refers to newspaper, the same principle applies to local sportscasts. Local sportscasts are one of the few outlets that focus on localized sports.

Also, another option Fred Roggin of KNBC created that has prolonged the life of his local broadcast is “using some of the pages of the same playbook” of ESPN.”³⁰ Roggin has inserted lighter, more ESPN-like tactics by adding segments such as “Roggin’s Hereos” and the “Hall of Shame” to his segments. Roggin comments, “To some degree, I think you have to have an entertainment presentation. Now more so than ever before. Because if you don’t have that, then there is truly no reason for anyone to watch you. Because they’ll go to ESPN.”³¹

Hubert Mizell's article "TV Viewers Deserve Longer Sportscasts" describes the changing nature of the role of local sportscasters. He describes how three local news directors from Tampa Bay illustrated the point that "when weather comes on, most of our audience tends to stay tuned. Interest absolutely declines when we get to sports segments. It's extremely difficult to retain women. Our goal is to do stuff that allows as little drop off in viewers as possible."³² In Tampa Bay, local sportscasters "all but surrendered wooing hard-core sports followers, acquiescing to ESPN, CNN/SI and other cable networks wholly dedicated to athletics."³³

Further, Mizell points out that local news stations are profit-oriented organizations that depend on ratings. Because ratings are crucial, producers are scrutinizing local sportscasts. Mizell believes that if other segments such as weather could be reduced and more in-depth sports coverage was allowed, ratings could increase. He notes that oftentimes sportscasters are so rushed and hurried that they omit important stories.

Local sportscasts cannot compete with ESPN in terms of time and analysis. Mizell notes that sportscasters should work harder to be insiders in terms of local sports and to provide something the network cannot. "Even in the few minutes allotted, local TV sports can be far more savvy, timely, and incisive. Wouldn't the audience be receptive to more consistent, authoritative reporters on our state's major college subjects?" asks Mizell.³⁴ Mizell concludes, "with local TV in a sports cut down

mentality, I hope there can be reexamination. Retooling. Be insiders. Take a look at what's being done and what might be done to make it better."³⁵

Mike Penner agrees with other critics that ESPN "has revolutionized the medium."³⁶ He quotes Bob Costas commenting on ESPN: "It's changed everything."³⁷ In his article, "The Four Letter Word that Changed Sports," Penner also interestingly points out how ESPN targets a younger audience: "It's not for us. It's for an 18-year old kid, probably waking up at 11 in the morning, living in his mother's basement with a pizza box on the floor..."³⁸ Again, because ESPN is meant for a younger audience, perhaps local news still has an older demographic which they can target.

Omitting sportscasts from local broadcasts news does not necessarily increase a station's ratings. Recently, WBBM, a CBS Chicago affiliate, experimented with a hard-core news format featuring long, investigative pieces with little sports and weather. In a *U.S. News & World Report* article, Craig Hume, the news director, called it a "noble experiment," but in the end, the format did not produce the ratings necessary for profit. James Pethokoukis states, "Ratings pressure means style wins over substance."³⁹ This station shows that simply reducing sports is not a solution either.

Perhaps one exemplary model for local sportscasters to emulate could be George Michael, the sports anchor for the NBC Washington, D.C. affiliate who dominates the Washington, D.C. sports market. He claims more airtime than any other sportscasters on competing stations. His success led to the nationally syndicated *Sports Machine*, and his local station is currently the top rated local newscast. Michael's success indicates that

what other stations are doing by shortchanging sportscasts may be the wrong move. His witty, straight-from-the-hip, local and national coverage entertains and captures audiences of all ages. His live shots and in-depth analysis of local sports accounts for much of his success. He proves that a dynamic sportscaster can add significantly to a newscast.

While ESPN has affected all sports venues, not one panacea exists to solve all local broadcast needs. The next chapter discusses ESPN's evolution and unique characteristics that make it the number one sports information provider today.

Chapter III

ESPN: The Media Empire

As technological developments created more avenues for programming and provided viewers more choice, the balance of power shifted away from the networks and to the consumer.⁴⁰ This chapter focuses on how ESPN effectively utilized communication outlets and technology to become the largest sports information provider. ESPN's success is due to its use of journalistic style combined with technological advancements.

Bill Rasmussen began the first all sports network known as ESPN (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network) in 1979. In a dilapidated studio in Bristol, Connecticut, Rasmussen's network grew from miniscule and risky to mammoth and steadfast, one of the most watched cable channels today.⁴¹ Rasmussen's media empire epitomizes a rag-to-riches tale.

Rasmussen launched his brainchild on September 7, 1979, as the ESP Network short for "the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network." The network was renamed ESPN by the designer of the company logo who thought it looked better. The flagship network now reaches more than 76 million homes.⁴² Annually, the network televises more than 4,900 original hours of sports programming and features more than

65 sports.⁴³ The programming philosophy remains to present a mix of event programming, special events, series, and news.

After almost going off the air during its first years, by May, 1998, ESPN's *SportsCenter's* 20,000th show landed the sports network ahead of CBS evening news for the most watched newscasts ever.⁴⁴ As *New York Times'* Michael Freeman states, ESPN is "not just an icon in sports journalism but an integral piece of American culture, a daily part of the lives of millions."⁴⁵ ESPN, Inc. is now a multinational, multimedia sports news and entertainment company made up of 43 national and international outlets. Just over the last ten years, 31 of these outlets were launched including their now six domestic and 20 international television networks, the largest sports Internet site, the country's largest sports radio network, a magazine, themed dining and entertainment, and more.⁴⁶ ESPN's media guide states their secret to success as a "passionate relationship" with sports fans.

One of the most significant reasons ESPN's popularity exhibited such rapid growth was because its format allowed viewers to watch local, national, and international sporting events in their entirety. Normally, local television networks aired only highlights of lengthy sports venues, devoting greater time to local teams. In 1979, ESPN, then known as ESP, was a single cable television network reaching 1.4 million homes in the United States.⁴⁷ ESPN began airing sporting events in 1979 with its first NHL game. Over the next three years, it televised 23 NCAA Basketball Tournament games, NBA games, and NASCAR races. It was 1982 when ESPN became the first network to

televised every round of a PGA Tour Event. By 1983, ESPN began distributing programming internationally and became the largest cable network reaching 28.5 million homes.⁴⁸

Media leaders quickly recognized the significance of ESPN networking. In 1984, ABC purchased 15% of ESPN. Also in 1984, ESPN introduced the popular 28/58, half hourly updates. This now familiar and expected banner highlight was a previously unconsidered innovation. Viewers could constantly turn to ESPN for continual updates on favorite sporting events. Additionally, viewers would not have to switch the channel to see the scores of other games. Roger Werner succeeded Bill Grimes as President and CEO of ESPN and began a 48-game college football schedule. This landmark year also saw the 10,000th *SportsCenter* program.

The 1990's witnessed greater diversification and continued growth in the ESPN empire. In 1992, ESPN launched its radio network featuring 18 hours of sports news and information six days a week. The year 1993 saw the first ESPY Awards and even bigger, the introduction of ESPN2, more sports more of the time. The addition of a second channel further expanded the coverage allowing previously unnoticed sports international exposure and also allowing more in-depth features. The addition dedicated entire shows to single sports: "NHL 2Night," "NFL 2Night," "R.P.M. 2Night," and others.

In another pivotal year, 1996, the FCC approved the merger of Capital/Cities/ABC, Inc. and The Walt Disney Company, thus expanding the ESPN empire. Leonard Shapiro, writer for *The Washington Post* states, "When Disney bought

the whole Cap Cities package in 1995, they said they thought the franchise was ESPN. ABC was almost an afterthought. They felt the great growth potential was ESPN.”⁴⁹ In another article, Shapiro argues, “The consensus is that ESPN is particularly appealing to Disney because of the opportunities it presents to market dually compatible sports and family-oriented entertainment programming around the world.”⁵⁰

Also in 1996, ESPN debuted “Bottom Line2,” featuring continuous scores and news. The ability to provide continual scores and news attracted curious sports fans and avid sports junkies alike. The christening of ESPNEWS took sports to a whole new level featuring real time news, press conferences, pre- and post game reporting, and up-to-the-minute breaking news headlines. No other media outlet provided the exhaustive sports coverage ESPN was able to provide.

Even when the public believed ESPN could expand no more, it did. In 1997, ESPN acquired the Classic Sports Network, now ESPN Classic and also began Internet ventures. 1998 marked the debut of *ESPN The Magazine*, a hard copy of the empire’s best for the sports addict. ESPN created this publication as competition for the giant *Sports Illustrated*, thus taking on a whole new competitor in the communications world. It seemed no context was safe from the intrusion of ESPN when it opened its flagship restaurant, the ESPN Zone, in Baltimore in 1998. Today, there are eight locations nationwide.

By 1998, when *SportsCenter* aired its 20,000th show, it seemed to onlookers that anything was possible for the media giant. In terms of domestic television alone, their

channels included ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNNews, ESPN Classic, ESPN Extra, and ESPN Now. Yet, in 1999, ESPN unveiled *SportsCentury*, an extensive series reviewing the greatest sporting events, athletes and coaches over the past 100 years.

Today, ESPN's all encompassing portfolio of multimedia outlets remains impressive. According to cable operator executives, the network is the number one in association with high impact programming.⁵¹ They are number one in most-viewed programs by far with 12 most viewed cable programs in 1998 and 20 of the top 25.⁵² Also, their "Sunday Night Football" show is the number one rated cable series for 12 straight seasons.⁵³ In terms of advertising, cable operator executives rate ESPN number one in ability to generate premium-advertising rates.⁵⁴ With this allure, ESPN beat out other networks by 17%.⁵⁵ Additionally, ESPN is number one as a generator of local advertising sales revenue among all networks, bringing in about 20 percent of all local advertising sales revenue and 42 percent more local advertising sales revenue than its nearest competitor.⁵⁶ Viewers rate ESPN their top personal favorite cable TV network, their top cable entertainment network in terms of enjoyment, the top network for growth in household delivery, and the top watched cable network in out-of home locations.⁵⁷ Finally, it is the number one network among all men and the top most watched ad-supported cable network.⁵⁸ George Will of *Newsweek* stated, "If someone surreptitiously took everything but ESPN from my cable television package, it might be months before I noticed."⁵⁹

Although ESPN encompasses a vast number of multimedia outlets, *SportsCenter* accounts for ESPN's major success. Every week, 12 million households tune in to a live episode of *SportsCenter*.⁶⁰ It has a daily aggregate audience of 4.3 million households, more than five times the audience of its closest two cable competitors combined.⁶¹

ESPN has earned more than 29 sports Emmy awards, 28 cable Ace awards and 43 other various awards.⁶² In addition, ESPN established many sports standards that have impacted all of sports journalism. ESPN introduced the 1st & 10, the now commonplace computer generated first down line that debuted on NFL in 1998. The ingenious idea behind 28/58 began what is now expected on-screen news and scores updates every half-hour (on the 28th and 58th minutes of the hour). The cut-in format, continuous on-screen scoreboard, and bat track, a two-dimensional animation of hitter's swing and bat speed, can also be attributed to ESPN innovation. Additionally, ESPN featured and popularized many events that were never aired such as NCAA tournament early rounds, America's Cup, NFL Draft, X Games sporting events, and golf matches.

ESPN's most coveted program, *SportsCenter*, launched early in the inception of the media giant on September 9, 1979: *SportsCenter* has come to define the ESPN network's personality and has provided the nucleus for ESPN's other sports news services."⁶³ More than 50 sports news based ESPN entities comprise the Family Tree such as *Outside The Lines*, *NFL Sunday/Monday Countdown*, *Prime Time*, the entire ESPN2 2Night series, and ESPNNews. The entire sports industry utilizes the resources of ESPN, Inc. for their reporting. Each week, 12 million households tune in to a live

episode of *SportsCenter*, and over the course of a quarter, 40 million homes, over half of all ESPN subscribers, have watched.⁶⁴ A third of ESPN subscribers tuned in to live *SportsCenter* telecasts in the fourth quarter of 1998.⁶⁵ The average audience for the 11:00 p.m. edition was up by eight percent in 1998.⁶⁶ It spawned the addition of a live 1:00 a.m. showing in April, 1999. The result has been a 15 percent increase in ESPN's household audience for that time period.⁶⁷

ESPN has been the most influential sports entertainment provider. It has significantly altered the way local sports news is produced and delivered. In order to acquire its powerful position, ESPN tackled and conquered every communications avenue.

SportsCenter

Steve Bornstein, the CEO of ESPN, mainly responsible for the company's growth, states that "Of all ESPN's accomplishments... he remains proudest of *SportsCenter*, the foundation of the company's success and vaunted status in the psyche of American sports fans."⁶⁸ Although ESPN has many outlets to disperse sports information, the show *SportsCenter* is the network's signature show. Each week, 12 million households tune into a live episode of *SportsCenter*, and over the course of a quarter, 40.6 million homes, over half of all ESPN subscribers, have watched the show. Additionally, one third of ESPN subscribers tuned into live *SportsCenter* telecasts in the fourth quarter of 1998 and that number has only increased today. As Jim Shea states, "In terms of how sports are now reported and covered, nothing has had aggregated impact

than ESPN's signature show, *SportsCenter*.”⁶⁹ According to ESPN's media guide, the show is the center of the network: “The daily gathering place for the sports community, *SportsCenter* has come to define the ESPN network's personality, and has provided the nucleus for ESPN's other sports news services.”⁷⁰

SportsCenter was launched when the network began in September of 1979. Originally the show was only thirty minutes, but today it airs for an hour several times a day counting reruns. Airing at both 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m., *SportsCenter* has grown to attract a 24-hour a day audience of 5.5 million.

In terms of formatting and style, a typical one hour *SportsCenter* program provides an average of 95 insert graphics and 14 animation elements, more than 1.3 graphics a minute.⁷¹ Approximately 10,000 highlights are shown every year on *SportsCenter*.⁷² ESPN executive editor John A. Walsh, who came to ESPN in 1988, created the show's present format. In 1988, Walsh changed the format of *SportsCenter* to reflect the styles of newspapers. Instead of running the stories by sports or leagues, Walsh decided to format the show in terms of importance. He aired the important stories first, regardless of which sport it was. Walsh states, “I don't think I had an overriding philosophy when I came here. I was a sports fan and I wanted to see what a sports fan would want to see.”⁷³

In Chapter V, a content analysis of *SportsCenter* is compared to the results of a content analysis of a local news broadcast to highlight the magnitude of *SportsCenter*'s appeal. The next chapter focuses on traditional ways local sports news segments have

been produced and describes the way one Washington, D.C. ABC affiliate produces the news. Additionally, a content analysis of the last six years will describe the impact the media giant ESPN has had on local sports news segments.

Chapter IV

Local Sports News

Since sports news broadcasting is undergoing such vast transformation, it is necessary to explain and to analyze the creation and content of segments in the past and today. In order to understand more fully a local sports news department, I worked in the sports department of WJLA-TV, ABC-7 in Washington D.C for a period of six months to examine their procedures, routines, and stories. Additionally, I completed a content analysis of WJLA to examine the changes in format, style, and content over the last six years.

Case Study of WJLA-TV, Local Sports Department

On a typical day, Washington, DC's ABC Channel 7 News is comprised of news, weather, and sports. Weekday sports segments broadcast at 5:00 p.m. for four minutes, 6:00 p.m. for three minutes, and 11:00 p.m. for three minutes. On weekends, sports segments air during the 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. news for four minutes. Although there are only eight to ten minutes of sports a day during the news, preparation to broadcast those news segments takes days and often weeks, especially when organizing interviews and live shots. Primarily, the sports department is comprised of seven people, each contributing a significant aspect of the show.

The Sports Department:

Rene Knott, sports director and anchor for all the weekday shows, has been at the station for ten years. Known for being down to earth in his style, Knott combines humor and knowledge of sports in his broadcasts. “I’m laid back. I try to make my shows fun while providing a people’s perspective,” Knott said. While it seems Knott’s input is sought throughout the department, his primary responsibilities consist of writing stories, making packages, interviewing, and anchoring. Knott enjoys doing live shots and one-on-one interviews with players. Having been a college football player and loving the sport, Knott enjoys football season the most. Whether he is at Redskins Park or at MCI Center doing a live shot, Knott is always prepared and ready to air because of the people back at the station.

Alex Parker, the on-air producer and Knott’s sidekick, selects which highlights and stories will air. Parker spends hours looking at feeds and games and prioritizing the most important stories on a given day. Because the entire station is a team, Parker acts as a liaison between his department and the other departments.

Executive producer Rich Daniel coordinates shoots and schedules for the day a week before. The schedule is set, but any extraordinary event, such as a sudden NBA press conference with Michael Jordan, becomes a priority. In addition to coordinating packages, shoots, and live shots, Daniel also field produces and interviews for packages. Daniel searches newspapers, the Internet, his Rolodex, etc. to see if anything interesting

and newsworthy is occurring in the sports world. Daniel has been at the station since 1983.

Also a veteran of 19 years at the station, Mike Springirth plays a critical role in the development of packages and other news stories. He is the man with the camera. Called a “photographer,” Springirth shoots outside events, such as press conferences, interviews, games, and live shots. Springirth has done everything from anchoring to reporting, but chose to be photographer because he has control. “Producers can’t go out. I control how I want a piece to look,” Springirth said. His favorite sporting events to shoot are football games. Additionally, because he chooses what he shoots, his shots provide different angles and spotlight different actions which can be used for features.

Joe Hansard is the sport’s department’s editor for the weekday sportscasts. Hansard has been at the station for 19 years where he edits highlights and feature packages. When Knott and/or Toland provide written scripts for packages, Hansard provides the visual graphics and video to go along with the text. Editing requires creativity, precision, and patience. When asked why he became an editor, he stated, “For the creativity involved and the hot girls I meet.”

Greg Toland is the newest addition to the sports department. Called the “weekend guy,” Toland is the weekend anchor and weekday sports reporter three times a week. Toland writes his own scripts when he anchors and travels to different locations for reporting. Often, his reports are used to make feature packages. During the past year,

Toland has traveled to places such as the Final Four, Pittsburgh for the NHL playoffs, Camden Yards, and North Carolina after the death of Dale Earnhart.

Keith Abernethy and James Hillan are primarily producers but also fill in for other positions. Abernethy produces the weekend show and weekday nights sometimes while editing a few times a week. Hillan also produces some night and weekend shows but primarily writes articles for wjla.com. Abernethy enjoys editing over producing because, "It pays more, and there is less stress." His favorite news time of the year is spring because golf, hockey, basketball, baseball, and the Redskins' preseason are occurring.

A Day in the Sports Department

The sports department begins operations early in the morning. Alex Parker researches important topics of the day or interesting stories in newspapers, radio, Internet, and the CNN and Newsone Sports feeds. The feeds come in throughout the day and provide highlights of all sports events on a given day.

Rich Daniel has already prepared for a shoot for the day, which could change if Parker or anyone finds a more "new" or more important story. Rene Knott and Mike Springirth discuss with Daniel and Parker the day's events and schedule. Greg Toland will also go on shoots, but Knott will go to the more important ones.

Knott and Springirth go to a site, and Springirth will start shooting the area to get a sense of atmosphere. People typically recognize Knott and direct him to whom he is looking for because Daniel has made all the contacts. Knott does his interviews while

Springirth shoots. After the interview, Springirth will shoot players practicing or coaches' cut aways so that Hansard, the editor, has graphics and video to use for the packages.

After a shoot, both return to the station where Hansard and Parker are already busily editing highlights. Parker has chosen his highlights and stories and submits them into the rundowns, the list of proposed stories and airtimes. He sends the graphic's department a message of which graphics he wants used during the show. He contacts the news department and on-air producer to see if the day's other news is heavy or light, which could diminish sports time. While local sports' teams get precedence, extraordinary or special events such as playoff games get coverage.

Springirth and Hansard begin editing the package from the tape just recorded at the shoot. Knott goes to the computer, organizes and writes up the package. He gives a copy to the editors and then goes to the recording booth to record the audio speech for the package. Then, Springirth and Hansard both edit the piece while Knott begins writing the show with the highlights provided by Parker. Everything is submitted into the computer for the teleprompter for Knott's segment, and the news director knows what Parker has chosen for the day. Highlight tapes are taken to the control room.

While everyone is running around busily, Knott and Parker go upstairs where Knott heads into the studio and Parker to the control room. Parker quickly hands the news producer and director scripts. When the news anchor directs a comment or question to Knott, Knott begins his tease, and Parker cues in the tease video. After a commercial

break, Knott begins reading his script and the timer begins. This time is variable depending on how much time news consumed. Breaking news or longer packages during news time can take away sports time. Parker cues all video and reminds Knott on his earphone how much time remains.

Similar steps are taken for each of the 6:00 and 11:00 p.m. shows except for packages usually aired only on the 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. shows.

Content Analysis

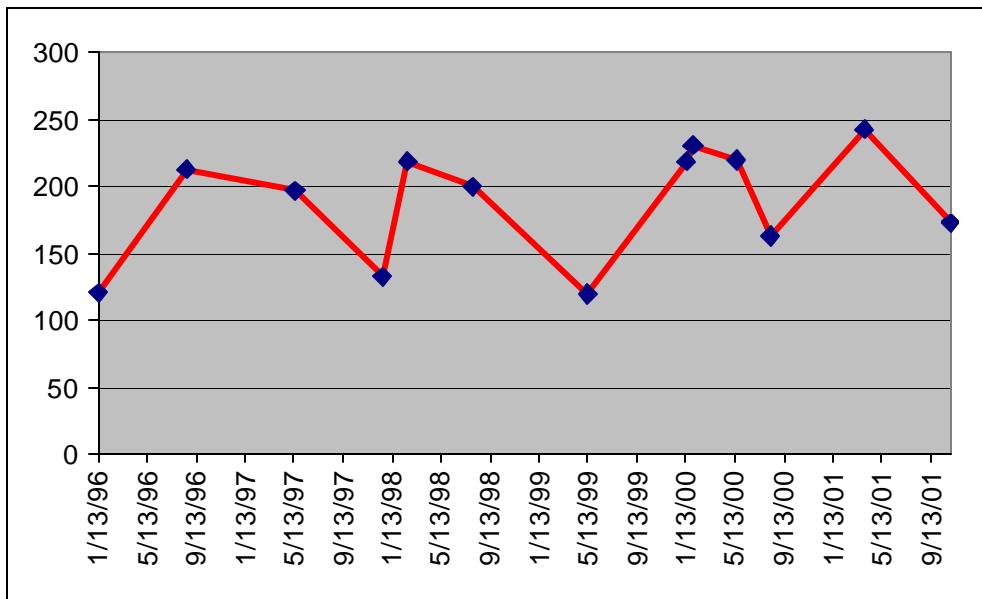
As the Internet and cable channels increased in popularity, local sports made changes to format, style, and content. In order to test this hypothesis, a content analysis was completed of the sportscasts of WJLA-TV for the last six years. Random dates were selected for the content analysis: 01/15/96, 08/1/896, 05/16/97, 12/18/97, 02/19/98, 07/30/98, 05/13/99, 01/13/00, 01/30/00, 05/16/00, 08/10/00, 03/30/01, 10/30/01.

In 1996, highlights dominated sportscasts. Rene Knott had regular segments such as “Knott’s Landing” and “Sports Shorts” which included exciting highlights of the day or emphasized special stories. The January 15, 1996, 5:00 p.m. show had “Sports Shorts” segments which included stories from football, golf, and tennis. Today, none of these segments exists. Instead, the station has made a change towards more feature packages, especially more human-interest sports stories. Rich Daniel, Executive Producer of WJLA Sports, states, “Because technology has become advanced, we’re able to go to more places locally now. While there were live shots in 1996, today, there are approximately

two live shots a week, and the sports reporter travels much more.” Interestingly, the content analysis shows that there are less live interviews with dominant sports figures than there were in the past. Today, most interview segments are pre-taped. Also, as time progressed, flashy animation, rambunctious music, and crazy highlights have diminished into more newsy features about local sports.

Overall, segment time varies over the last six years. As little as two minutes to as much as four minutes are allotted. Alex Parker, Producer, states that “time varies according to news. If there is a lot of breaking news, then sports time gets shortened.” This is apparent over the years, as there is no consistent pattern.

Illustration IV.1 Segment Length (y-axis = seconds, x-axis = time)



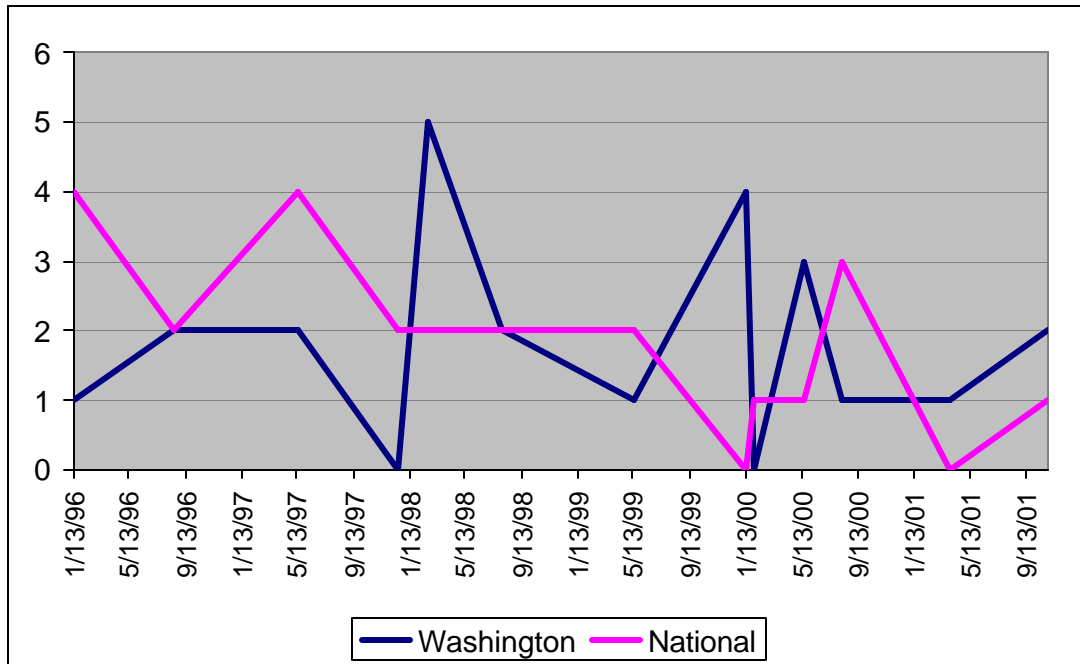
Although a pattern does not exist in actual sports segments time, how the sports time is used has changed. While in the past, more time or equal time was given to other teams and players around the nation, today more time is allotted to local teams. On 05/16/97, 35 seconds were dedicated to Washington, D.C. sports while one minute and 48 seconds was given to nationwide sports. On 03/21/02, the entire sportscast was devoted to Washington, D.C. local sports.

Table IV.1 Length of Time For Washington, D.C. Related Sports News

	Washington Sports News	Other Sports News
05/16/97	0:35	1:48
03/21/02	4:30	0:00

In terms of the actual number of Washington, D.C. and nationwide sports stories, the following graph indicates the changes in numbers.

Illustration IV.2 Number of Local Sports Stories vs. National Sports Stories



The chart suggests that in 1996, there was more nationwide coverage of sports stories.

Over time, there has been a general increase in local/Washington, D.C. sports, except when a major sporting story occurs. For example, January 30, 2000, had only the Super Bowl story even though the Redskins were not in the Super Bowl.

The content of the lead stories is also an indication that WJLA is more focused on local sports. The following chart signifies types of lead stories.

Table IV.2 Lead Stories

LEAD STORIES	
01/13/96 5 p.m.	University of Maryland Basketball Team prepares to play Clemson
08/18/96 6 p.m.	Orioles in playoff contention
05/16/97 11 p.m.	Miami Heat's win over New York Knicks
12/18/97 5 p.m.	Michael Jordan versus Kobe Bryant (Jordan playing for Chicago)
02/19/98 11 p.m.	University of Maryland Loses to Wake Forest
07/30/98 6 p.m.	Redskins Preview
05/13/99 5 p.m.	Rene Knott learns to wrestle at Bone Breakers
01/13/00 11 p.m.	Michael Jordan possibly buying into the Wizards
01/30/00 11 p.m.	St. Louis Rams win Super Bowl
05/16/00 5 p.m.	Construction at Redskins Park
08/10/00 11 p.m.	Stephen Davis Practices after being injured
03/30/01 5 p.m.	University of Maryland Basketball Team practices for Final Four
10/30/01 11 p.m.	Jordan's first game back to the NBA

The chart shows how over the last two years, all lead stories of the sportscasts examined for the content analysis were local/Washington stories. Also interestingly, no women's sports were top stories. The content analysis indicates how major sports news outside of Washington also can be the top lead story. Although local stations should report more local sports, oftentimes, major sporting news should take the top spot.

As seen in the lead stories chart, football, basketball, and baseball dominate sports news. They are not only the top stories, but also the most frequently used stories in sportscasts. Football dominates the market. All aspects of Redskins football are given attention, including the draft, traded players, and minicamp. Parker also notes that since Jordan has joined the Wizards, basketball has been given more attention. Also in terms of basketball, more in-depth stories air on the University of Maryland and Georgetown University basketball news than the Wizards news. The following chart exemplifies the number of stories per sport in the sportscasts over the six years.

Table IV.3 Types of Stories By Sport

Types of Stories						
	Football	Basketball	Baseball	Golf	Hockey	Other
01/13/96 5 p.m.	1	2		1	1	1
08/18/96 6 p.m.			4			

05/16/97 11 p.m.		1	1	1	1	1
12/18/97 5 p.m.		1				
02/19/98 11 p.m.	2	4				1
07/30/98 6 p.m.	2		2			
05/13/99 5 p.m.		1	1			1
01/13/00 11 p.m.	2	1			1	
01/30/00 11 p.m.	1	1			1	
05/16/00 5 p.m.	1	1				2
08/10/00 11 p.m.	2		1	1		
03/30/01 5 p.m.		1				
10/30/01 11 p.m.			2		1	

In general, the dates indicate that during the seasons a sport is played, there is more coverage of that sport. For example, during football season, football news dominates. But what has changed is the number of different levels of a sport. Although professional sports dominate in the number of stories, there is a general increase in the number of non-professional sports.

Table IV.4 Number of Stories By Sport Level

Number of Stories (Professional, College, High School, Other)					
	Professional	College	High School	Other	Total
01/13/96 5 p.m.	5	1			6
08/18/96 6 p.m.	4				4
05/16/97 11 p.m.	6				6
12/18/97 5 p.m.	1				1
02/19/98 11 p.m.	4	1	1	2	8
07/30/98 6 p.m.	3				3
05/13/99 5 p.m.	4			1	5
01/13/00 11 p.m.	5				5
01/30/00 11 p.m.	3				3
05/16/00 5 p.m.			1	3	4
08/10/00 11 p.m.	5			2	7
03/30/01 5 p.m.		1		1	2

10/30/01 11 p.m.	3				3
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Interestingly, “other” stories have been increasing. Story types such as little league games, adult softball stories, recreational sports, training camps, etc. have been increasing. Again, a pattern of more human-interest stories in terms of sports is on the rise. Also, possibly because Washington, D.C. colleges and universities did not excel except in basketball and sometimes football, college basketball and football were predominantly the only collegiate sports given attention. Perhaps due to the University of Maryland’s dominance in basketball and football, more college stories are given attention. Additionally, more features are included, especially about different aspects of local sports. Not apparent on the chart, is the increase in high school athletics. For the last ten years, a high school athlete is chosen as the high school athlete of the week. A package focusing on that student’s success on and off the playing field is featured once a week. In addition to high school athletes of the week, regional championships are given attention.

This chapter has identified the trends of WJLA’s sportscasts over the last six years. The next chapter pays close attention to WJLA’s sportscasts today and compares them to ESPN.

Chapter V

ESPN vs. WJLA: Content Analyses Comparison

In order to judge what local news does and can do to increase its sports audience, a content analysis comparison of SportsCenter and WJLA's sportscasts was conducted. Two days were selected for the content analysis: Thursday, March 21, 2002, and Sunday, March 24, 2002. Thursday and Sunday were chosen because typically Sunday is a busy sports day, and Thursday was randomly selected. Also, due to "March Madness" and the Maryland Terrapins, a local team, advancing to the final four, Thursday was chosen because Maryland was not playing, and Sunday was chosen because Maryland was playing. *SportsCenter's* 11:00 p.m. show and WJLA's 5:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 11:00 p.m. Thursday shows were examined as well as WJLA's Sunday 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. segments (no 5:00 p.m. show on weekends).

In terms of program length, *SportsCenter's* one-hour show has approximately 40 minutes of content excluding commercials. Sports news segment time on WJLA ranges from three to five minutes. Exact times for the two dates are as follows:

Table V.1 Programming Length

TIME		
Thurs., 03/21/02	<i>SportsCenter</i>	43 minutes, 36 seconds
	WJLA 5 p.m.	4 minutes, 40 seconds
	WJLA 6 p.m.	3 minutes, 40 seconds
	WJLA 11 p.m.	3 minutes, 25 seconds
Sun., 03/24/02	<i>SportsCenter</i>	41 minutes, 45 seconds
	WJLA 6 p.m.	4 minutes, 45 seconds
	WJLA 11 p.m.	4 minutes, 43 seconds

WJLA’s time fluctuates in its show because breaking news and other news stories take precedence. On the other hand, because ESPN is all sports news, its time remains consistent. The starting time for WJLA also changes due to other news stories. Sports is the final segment which typically airs five to seven minutes before the ending time of the newscast. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what time the sports segment begins, which may discourage some viewers due to its inconsistency. *SportsCenter* begins promptly at 11:00 p.m., providing viewers consistency and reliability. Finally, because *SportsCenter* has an enormous amount of show time, it is able to broadcast many stories unable to be seen elsewhere.

In addition to total time, *SportsCenter* formats its show unexpectedly in terms of time. For the Sunday night show, time was allocated in the following manner:

Table V.2 *SportsCenter's* Length of Time per Block

TIME Per Block	
Thursday, 03/21/02: <i>SportsCenter</i>	
1 st Block	12:18 (mins: secs)
2 nd Block	07:49
3 rd Block	05:34
4 th Block	02:52
5 th Block	3:22
6 th Block	06:39
7 th Block	02:51
8 th Block	00:30

Unlike other shows, *SportsCenter* devotes an entire 12 minutes to its first block, discussing the most important stories of the day. Executive Producer, John Walsh, states that *SportsCenter* is in a newspaper format, discussing stories in terms of importance. As seen in chart above, excluding the 6th block, which was a feature package, block times for

the most part diminished as the show progressed. WJLA's total time for sports is typically equivalent to one of *SportsCenter's* shorter blocks.

SportsCenter is also unique in the way it formats its story type. Again, following newspaper techniques, the show is not formatted by story or genre but by newsworthiness. The criteria behind *SportsCenter's* newsworthiness seem to be to provide the most significant news to the most number of people. Although the show is not categorized by sport, *SportsCenter* effectively makes transitions from story to story. The show also includes a very wide range of sports. The following were some of the stories on Thursday, March 21.

Table V.3 Types of Stories Broadcasted on *SportsCenter*

Types of Stories	
Sunday, 03/24/02: <i>SportsCenter</i>	
Level/Sport	Story
NCAA Basketball	Duke Loses to Indiana
NHL/Other	Death of Cecil at Hockey game
NBA	San Antonio vs. Dallas
PGA	Tiger Woods at TPC
NCAA	Nolan Richardson and racism issue
MLB	Pedro Martinez comeback
NHL	Washington vs. Toronto

MLB/Other	Caminiti cocaine arrest
NCAA Wrestling	Cael Sanderson

Interestingly, out of 25 hard stories, 14 of the stories were professional sports stories, and 11 were collegiate, with no high school stories. Also, while ESPN is known to expand its definition of sports with some of its programming, *SportsCenter* focused primarily on the popular sports during the spring: basketball, hockey, baseball, and golf.

Another indicator of the difference between WJLA and ESPN is ESPN's first block compared to WJLA's entire sportscast. Because top stories are included first on both, it is interesting to see the differences in which top story was chosen and to see the stories that followed. The following chart indicates the top stories and the time given to each story on Sunday, March 23, the day Maryland advanced to the final four.

Table V.4 First Block, Top Stories of WJLA and *SportsCenter*

FIRST BLOCK, TOP STORIES	
Story/Time (mins:secs)	
WJLA	<i>SportsCenter</i>
Maryland Wins / 3:59	Maryland Wins / 0:36
Oregon vs. Kansas / 0:11	Oregon vs. Kansas / 3:46

Wizards vs Raptors / 0:19	Analysis on Kansas vs. Oregon / 8:18
Capitals vs. Penguins / 0:10	NBA news / 0:55
	Lakers vs. Kings / 1:16
Total Time / 4:43	Total Time / 12:18

Both ESPN and WJLA had Maryland's win at the top of the show, indicating that it was the top story of the day. Perhaps because University of Maryland was expected to win, ESPN chose to spend over 11 minutes on the Oregon, Kansas game instead of allotting some of that time to the Maryland game. WJLA spent approximately 4 minutes on the Maryland game and only 11 seconds on the Oregon vs. Kansas game. This indicates that if Washington, D.C. fans wanted to see Maryland coverage, WJLA would have been the better choice. WJLA also had Rene Knott at the location reporting on the story.

Also interesting about the comparison of the first block is how ESPN juxtaposes quick stories, which only include highlights, stats, and scores, and in-depth analysis of stories that have more importance in the sports world. As noted in the chart, WJLA's top stories revolved around local teams, while ESPN reported national news. Of the 4 minutes, 43 seconds available to the segment, local teams dominated 4 minutes 32 seconds. This chart also shows how *SportsCenter* chose all basketball stories for their first block while WJLA included one hockey game. This indicates the differences in philosophies of the two stations. For WJLA, proximity takes precedence over perhaps

popularity. Or, local teams are more important than other teams, except in cases where it is major national news.

The first block shows how WJLA focuses on Washington, D.C. sports. The chart below indicates how many and what types of Washington, D.C. stories ESPN covered compared to WJLA.

Table V.5 Washington, D.C. Stories Broadcasted on WJLA and *SportsCenter*

WASHINGTON, D.C. STORIES			
Thursday, March 21, 2002			
WJLA (5, 6, and 11 combined)		<i>SportsCenter</i>	
Syracuse Live Shot for Maryland Pre-game	3:24	Wizards lose to Jazz	1:25
Michael Jordan, Wizards vs. Denver	0:54	Capitals defeat Maple Leafs	0:48
Maryland vs. Kentucky pre-game	1:41		
Wizards vs. Denver	1:00		
Wilson High School baseball player	0:37		
Maryland vs. Kentucky interviews	0:38		
Wizards lose to Jazz	0:29		
Capitals defeat Maple Leafs	0:22		
Tyson/Lewis fight	0:09		
Total Time	9:14	Total Time	2:13

This chart indicates that WJLA spends four times more time on Washington, D.C. sports on this day. Additionally, ESPN had no pre-game interviews or fan reactions for the upcoming Maryland game. While Maryland news dominated the WJLA sportscast, which included a live shot, ESPN chose to run NBA and NHL news. Clearly, if a Maryland fan wanted to see news about the upcoming Maryland game, WJLA would have provided much more information and insight.

Another edge WJLA has on local sports is its ability to have live shots. Rich Daniel, executive producer of WJLA sports, notes there is a live shot approximately twice a week, with many more stories and packages created outside of the studio. ESPN very seldom has live shots from Washington, D.C. Additionally, due to proximity, WJLA is able to do more local features and sports stories that have more human-interest aspects to them. Also, WJLA is able to get more in-depth player information about local athletes. Washington, D.C. locals are able to find out more personal information about their players that ESPN does not provide. This indicates that local sportscasts still have an enormous advantage in some aspects of sports broadcasting.

In terms of style and formatting, ESPN seems to have many more resources. One stylistic aspect of ESPN is its use of full screen graphics. Statistics and trends are important aspects of sports and the best way to show these statistics and trends is by full screen graphics. Numbers are hard to keep track of when being spoken about. ESPN provides a graphic of a synopsis of a sporting event. For example, for the Duke vs. Indiana game, ESPN had two full screen graphics. ESPN uses one particular graphic for

many of its stories providing the score, the team's records, player statistics, game statistics, trends, and streaks. This repeated format breed familiarity with fans. For PGA and NASCAR events, ESPN presents a leader board while WJLA only seldom does. WJLA provided very little graphics.

Table V.6 Full Screen Graphics

FULL SCREEN GRAPHICS	
Thursday, March 21, 2002	
WJLA (5,6,and 11 combined)	ESPN
1	22
Sunday, March 24, 2002	
1	17

ESPN also uses graphics as a tool to provide interesting and quick facts about the day's events. Throughout the sportscast, a lower banner is constantly updating scores and news of the day. Additionally, *SportsCenter* includes runners at the bottom of the screen to give information, such as fantasy baseball pitcher selections. Information such as fantasy league scores are not of importance to everyone so written banners at the bottom of the screen are an effective technique for providing that information to those who want to see and allowing those who do not to simply ignore it.

The banners also constantly remind audiences of the website, ESPN.com. Also, producers further market the site by providing a question of the day which audiences can answer on their website allowing interaction and two-way communication. During broadcasts, audiences can also vote on their favorite play of the game or player, and *SportsCenter* will announce the winner later on in the broadcast, once again, allowing two-way communication. An added bonus of the website is that it adds a dimension to already comprehensive sports coverage while also providing brand name recognition. Perhaps because WJLA's sports department and the website team do not share resources, broadcasts very seldom allow interaction and does not reference the sports link on the WJLA.com site.

Another major difference between WJLA's sportscast and ESPN's is the way both approach a story. In many of the WJLA stories, a game summary was given with highlights provided. Highlights dominated in the sportscast, while the anchor would explain the action. On the other hand, ESPN utilizes highlights to explain how a game was won or lost. For example, rebounding was the key factor in a loss in an NBA game; therefore, instead of showing all dunks and slams, *SportsCenter* highlighted the poor rebounding. *Sportscenter* provides analysis with highlights as examples rather than having highlights lead with little analysis. Also, both WJLA's anchors and ESPN's anchor used witty talk and some slang to emphasize a great highlight, a practice now popular in sports broadcasting.

The content analysis displays how WJLA is locally and ESPN is nationally oriented. ESPN does cover local stories in depth, but only when it is a significant sporting event. Even in those cases, local sportscasts still are able to provide sizable information. But ESPN is gigantic. It is an hour-long show that has much more time and resources. The greatest advantage also is that they have an hour-long show everyday as well as news throughout the day, which provides sports fans convenience and consistency. Audiences know they can rely on ESPN. They do not have to wait or drive home quickly to make the 5:00 p.m. sportscast. Finally, ESPN also has an omnipresence, which makes teams and cities feel superior if their team gets significant coverage on *SportsCenter*. It seems almost an honor to a sports team or player if they are given a large time frame on *SportsCenter*.

The final chapter makes predictions and recommendations based on the findings of the previous chapters.

Chapter VI

Survey Results: Public Opinion Regarding Sports Journalism

The previous chapters of this thesis examine the field of sports journalism past and present. In order to achieve a more comprehensive view of sports journalism, this chapter delves into the world of sports journalism production, and what the public seeks in terms of sports through survey results and examinations. As already noted, sports fans today have many more options and choices when it comes to the dispersion of sports news and information. It seems as though men and women may have different opinions in terms of sports, while younger viewers who have grown up with ESPN define sports journalism under a different criteria than older sports fans who relied on more traditional outlets for sports news.

This chapter takes a statistical approach to examining the demographics of the viewers of ESPN and attempts to explain the effects ESPN has had on sports journalism and local news sportscasts. A paper and pencil questionnaire was administered personally with a team of trained assistants at four college basketball games and five sports bars in the Washington, D.C. area. The survey represents a convenience sample of sports fans. All statistical outputs are calculated with the statistical software SPSS. The two main research questions this chapter answers are:

1. Do sports fans want longer sports segments during news programs?

2. Do sports fans prefer ESPN to their local news sportscast for sports news and information?

The following hypotheses will be tested with the survey results:

- Hypothesis 1: There is a positive correlation between the number of sporting games/events per week watched and the amount of time a person watches ESPN per week.

Null Hypothesis: There is a negative correlation between the number of sporting games/events per week watched and the amount of time a person watches ESPN per week.

- Hypothesis 2: Men want longer sports segments during local news broadcasts.

Null Hypothesis: Women want longer sports segments during local news broadcasts.

- Hypothesis 3: People 28 and younger want longer sports segments.

Null Hypothesis: People over the age of 28 want longer sports segments.

- Hypothesis 4: Younger sports fans prefer ESPN to their local news sports segments for sports news and information.

Null Hypothesis: Older fans prefer ESPN to their local news sports segments for sports news and information.

- Hypothesis 5: Sports fans find ESPN more appealing (in terms of statistical analysis, both national and local highlights, and entertainment) than their local news sports segments for sports news and information.

Null Hypothesis: Sports fans do not find ESPN more appealing than their local news sportscast for sports news and information.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive correlation between the number of sporting games/events per week watched and the amount of time a person watches ESPN per week.

Null Hypothesis: There is a negative correlation between the number of sporting games/events per week watched and the amount of time a person watches ESPN per week.

ESPN is seen as a network designed for the serious sports fan. This hypothesis tests to see if a correlation exists between the number of sporting games/events per week watched and the amount of time a person watches ESPN per week. A regression analysis will be completed with the following two questions from the survey:

Q1. Do you watch professional sporting events on television?

- 1 Never
- 2 1 or 2 Games or Matches A Week
- 3 3 or 4 Games or Matches A Week
- 4 5 Games or Matches or More

Q3. Do you watch ESPN?

1. NEVER
2. LESS than 5 times a YEAR
3. Once a Month
4. Once a WEEK
5. More than once a WEEK but not everyday

6. EVERYDAY

Findings and Analysis:

In general, frequency tests show that 92.2% of survey respondents watch at least one game/event per week. Of the respondents, 7.8% responded that they never watch sporting events, 44.3% of respondents watched one or two games per week, 24.3% watched three or four games per week, and 23.5% watched five or more a week. Responses skew more towards watching a greater number of games per week, which is to be expected for sports fans. A frequency test of the amount of time a person watches ESPN is also skewed. 52.1% of respondents watched ESPN at least once a week with 24.3% watching everyday. Only 5.2% responded that they never watched ESPN. There were no missing values for both questions.

Initially, a crosstabulation shows that a correlation may exist between the two variables. The crosstab illustrates a general trend that as the number of games watched increases, the amount of ESPN watched increases. Respondents that answered that they never watched sporting events also responded that they do not watch ESPN. On the other hand, the crosstab shows that the majority of people who watch three or more games a week generally watch ESPN more often. To see if a correlation exists and to test the strength of it, a regression analysis was completed.

For the regression analysis, the number of games watched per week is the dependent variable while the amount of ESPN watched is the independent variable. The regression equation calculated to be:

$$\text{ESPN} = .817 + .430 (\# \text{ of games}) + e$$

A y-intercept of .817 and a slope of (standard coefficient) .430 indicate that as the number of games increases (dependent variable), the amount of ESPN watched increases (independent variable). The standard coefficient illustrates that the variables have a moderately strong positive relationship. The regression analysis rejects the null hypothesis, thus supporting the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between the number of sporting games/events per week watched and the amount of time a person watches ESPN per week. It is statistically significant (.000).

Conclusions:

Hypothesis 1 was supported by the regression analysis. The test showed that a positive relationship exists between the number of sporting games watched and the amount of ESPN watched a statistical significance of .000. Furthermore, the relationship can be seen as moderately strong with a slope of (standard coefficient) .430. A positive number also shows that the relationship is also positive. According to survey results, ESPN attracts sports fans. The survey indicates the more sporting events and games a person watches, the more they tune into ESPN.

Hypothesis 2: Men want longer sports segments during local news broadcasts.

Null Hypothesis: Women want longer sports segments during local news broadcasts.

Hypothesis 3: People 28 and younger want longer sports segments.

Null Hypothesis: People over the age of 28 want longer sports segments.

Survey question Q7 and its possible answers (nominal level, dichotomy) will be examined to test the hypothesis. The numbers next to the answer choices are the coded numerics used for statistical purposes.

Q7. Do you believe that local news programming should include longer sports segments?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 I Don't Know/No Opinion

While Q7 is the dependent variable, age and gender will be used as independent variables. Frequency tests and crosstabulations with the chi square test will be completed to test the hypothesis.

Findings and Analysis:

Frequencies and crosstabs with the dependent variable longer segments (longseg) and independent variables gender and age were calculated.

Out of 115 respondents, 58.3% were men and 41.7% were women, with no missing values. Age ranged from below 18 to 51 and above. More closely, 7% of

respondents were below 18, 58.3% were 18-28, 16.5% were 29-39, 13.9% were 40-50, and 4.3% were 51 and above.

Survey results show that 55 respondents (47.8%) indicated that they would like to see longer sports segments during news broadcasts, while 52 (45.2%) said that they would not like to see longer sportscasts. Eight respondents (7%) responded “9,” that they did not know or did not have an opinion. Responses marked “9” were coded as missing values.

The crosstabulation of gender indicates that women and men feel differently about increasing the segment time of sportscasts. The crosstab illustrates that 38 men responded that they would like to see longer segments, and 25 responded that they would not like to see longer segments. Within solely the male survey population tested, 60.3% answered “yes” to longer segments while 39.7% answered “no.” Women respondents had an opposite opinion in that only 17 wanted to see longer segments, and 27 did not want to see longer segments. For women percentage wise, 38.6% wanted longer segments while interestingly 61.4% did not want longer segments. Overall, men comprised 69.1% of the respondents that answered “yes,” they wanted longer segments. 7% of all respondents did not have an opinion.

Comparing the sex of respondents, Pearson’s chi-square was .027. Because the Pearson’s chi-square is below .05, it is statistically significant. There is a real relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

In addition to gender, age should also be examined. A crosstab of the youngest age group reveals that out of respondents below 18, 62.5% of them wanted longer segments. In the 18-29 category, 56.7% wanted longer segments, and 43.3% did not want longer segments. 31.6% of 29-39 year olds said that they want longer segments during their local news compared to 68.4% saying that they did not. 46.7% of 40-50 year olds said “yes,” they wanted longer segments compared to 53.3% that said “no,” they did not want longer segments. 60% of 51 year olds and above want longer segments; 40% do not.

Almost half of the respondents are in the 18-28 range. Data generated by this age group revealed a total of 61.8% of the total number of yes’s, while 50% of the total number of no’s. When recoding and breaking down the age groups into ‘28 and below’ and ‘above 28’ (collapsing groups one and two and collapsing three, four and five), interestingly, 70.9% of those that answered “yes” were in the ‘28 and below’ category. For the ‘above 28’ group, only 29.1% answered “yes.” (Appendix indicates age value “1” as ‘28 and below’ and value “2” as ‘above 28.’) Within their respective age categories, 57.4% of the ‘28 and below’ category responded “yes” and 42.6% responded “no.” Category 2 (above 28) had the opposite results with more “no” responses (59%) than “yes” responses (41%).

Comparing age groups, the Pearson’s chi-square was above .05 with a figure of .363. This number indicates no real relationship between age and the desire to have

longer sports segments. The Pearson's chi-square of the collapsed age groups and longer segments is .104. Although it is above .05, it does approach statistical significance.

Conclusions:

Hypothesis 2 stating that men want longer sports segments was supported by collected data; thus the null hypothesis can be rejected. As a whole, the crosstab showed that more men wanted to see longer sports segments. Men comprised 69.1% that responded favorably for longer segments. Out of solely the male survey population, there were still more who wanted to see longer segments. Women had the opposite opinion. More women did not want to see longer sports segments. Only 38.6% of women wanted longer segments while 61.4% did not want longer segments. According to survey results, more men than women favor longer sports segments on local news broadcasts.

Additionally, hypothesis 3 pertaining to respondents 28 years of age and below was also supported by collected data. The null hypothesis can be rejected because the below 29 age categories comprised 70.9% of the total number of "yes" responses. For the above 28 categories, only 29.1% of respondents answered yes. These results strongly support the hypothesis.

Finally, a regression analysis specifies whether age or gender is the stronger indicator in supporting the hypothesis. The regression equation is:

$$\text{Longseg} = 1.705 + .368\text{GENDER} - .087\text{AGE} + e$$

The regression analysis signifies that gender has a stronger impact on the hypothesis relating to longer sports segments during local news broadcasts. Although age is an

important indicator of the hypothesis, the analysis suggests that there is a weaker relationship between age and longseg (-.087) in comparison to gender and longseg (.368).

Hypothesis 4: Younger sports fans prefer ESPN to their local news sports segments for sports news and information.

Null Hypothesis: Older fans prefer ESPN to their local news sports segments for sports news and information.

To test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was completed for four questions that pertain to the hypothesis. The criteria that will be examined to show preference are statistics, general highlights, local highlights, and entertainment. All possible answers are in the form of ordinal level data.

Q10. Do you prefer ESPN's **statistics** on sports teams and players than your local sports newscast?

1	2	3	4	5	9
Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q11. For **all sports teams**, do you believe ESPN has better **highlights** than your local sports newscast?

1	2	3	4	5	9
Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q12. Do you think ESPN has better **highlights** for your **local teams** than your local sports newscast?

1	2	3	4	5	9
Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q13. In terms of **entertainment**, do you prefer ESPN to your local newscasts?

1	2	3	4	5	9
Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Findings and Analysis:

Frequency tests indicate that as a whole, the results do not generate data that falls on a normal curve. For all questions, most answers are heavily skewed to one side. For answers to questions regarding statistics, general highlights, and entertainment, there are a significant number of answers in the three to five ranges. For Q12, local team highlights, most answers are in the one to three range.

Because results seem skewed to one direction, a crosstabulation of the four components and age was deemed necessary to examine possible correlations. A crosstabulation indeed demonstrates that age and results are connected. It seems as though for most questions, as age decreases, the more ESPN is favored. In other words, the younger populace prefers ESPN to local news coverage.

To test this relationship, a regression analysis was completed. For each question, the overall hypothesis is that as age decreases (independent variable), each dependent variable result increases (negative standard coefficient). The higher the dependent variable, the more they favor ESPN in terms of statistics, highlights, local team highlights, and entertainment.

For Q10, the hypothesis is that as age decreases, the preference for ESPN increases (dependent variable increases). The regression equation is:

$$\text{stat} = 4.319 - .208\text{AGE} + e$$

With a y-intercept of 4.319 and a slope of (standard coefficient) -.208, a lower number for age, yields a higher result for y (favor ESPN for statistics). The relationship is moderate, but it is negative. Hence, as age decreases, the preference for ESPN's statistics increases. This result rejects the null hypothesis, which supports the original hypothesis for this question. It is close to being statistically significant (.070).

In terms of highlights, the hypothesis states that as age decreases, the preference for ESPN for general highlights of all sports teams increases (dependent variable increases). The null hypothesis is that the younger the viewer, the more they prefer ESPN for sports in general (lower values for dv). The regression equation is:

$$\text{general} = 4.246 - .07877\text{AGE} + e$$

A y-intercept of 4.246 and a slope (standard coefficient) of -.07877 demonstrate that the lower the result for age (younger age), the higher value for y (favor ESPN for highlights in general for all teams). The relationship is weak, but it is negative because of the negative slope. Hence, for general highlights, the younger the age, the more preference for ESPN's highlights. This rejects the null hypothesis and supports the hypothesis. It is not statistically significant (.415).

For local team highlights, the hypothesis states that as age decreases, the preference for ESPN's local sports teams highlights increases (dependent variable

increases). The null hypothesis is that the older the viewer, the more preference for ESPN for highlights. The regression equation is:

$$\text{lclsport} = 3.544 - .304\text{AGE} + e.$$

With a y-intercept of 3.544 and a slope (standard coefficient) of -.304, a lower number for age yields a lower result for y (favoring ESPN for highlights for local teams). The relationship is moderate, but it is negative. Hence, for local team highlights, still the younger the age, the more the preference ESPN local team highlights. This rejects the null hypothesis and supports the hypothesis. It is statistically significant (.024).

Finally, when looking at age and entertainment, the hypothesis is that as age decreases, the preference for ESPN entertainment (dependent variable increases). The null hypothesis is that the older the viewer, the more he/she prefers ESPN for entertainment. The regression equation is:

$$\text{entain} = 4.601 - .288\text{AGE} + e.$$

With a y-intercept of 4.601 and a slope (standard coefficient) of -.288, the lower the number for age produces a higher result for y (favoring ESPN for entertainment). The relationship is moderate and negative; therefore, for entertainment, the younger the age, the greater the preference for ESPN entertainment. This rejects the null hypothesis and supports the hypothesis. The results are statistically significant (.011).

Conclusions:

The frequencies, crosstabulations, and regression analysis for the four questions support the hypothesis that younger sports fans prefer ESPN to their local news sports

segments for sports news and information. Therefore, the null hypothesis that older fans prefer ESPN for sports news and information than their local news sports segments can be rejected. For the four questions, the investigation of the dependent variables with age as the independent variable calculates a negative slope (standard coefficient), indicating that as age decreases, the more ESPN is favored overall. These regression analyses display how younger viewers watch ESPN because it provides a more comprehensive and engaging reporting style (better statistics, better highlights, better local highlights, and entertainment).

Hypothesis 5: Sports fans find ESPN more appealing (in terms of statistics, highlights both national and local, and entertainment) than their local news sportscast for sports news and information.

Null Hypothesis: Sports fans do not find ESPN more appealing than their local news sportscast for sports news and information.

Upon testing hypothesis 4, it was apparent that the four questions comprised an overall question regarding sports coverage today: is ESPN more appealing to sports fans? To test hypothesis 5, a scale can be constructed with the four variables: statistics, local team highlights, general highlights, and entertainment. A scale is appropriate for this hypothesis because all four variables pertain to the overall question of whether ESPN is more appealing than local news sports. The term “appealing” can be better defined by studying the combination of the four variables. The reliability analysis reveals that alpha

is .7822 which is greater than .07, making it a reliable index. Syntax for the index is included in the appendix.

The scale ranges from four to twenty. For each of the four questions, the lowest possible answer is one, therefore scaling the four questions, the lowest possible rating is 4 ($1+1+1+1=4$), signifying that news is favored for sports information. The highest number for each question is five making 20 ($5+5+5+5=20$) the highest scaled rating, signifying that ESPN is favored. Missing values were omitted from the scale.

The scale clearly indicates that ESPN appeals much more to survey respondents than their local news coverage sports segment does. Out of 90 respondents, 72 scored 12 or above on the scale. Also, there were no results less than 8 while more than 10% of respondents highly favored ESPN for all categories. Data revealed by the scale overwhelmingly support the hypothesis that ESPN is more appealing across the board when considering highlights in general, highlights of local sports, statistics, and entertainment.

Conclusion:

The final hypothesis that sports fans find ESPN more appealing than their local news sportscast for sports news and information is supported by scaling the four elements: statistics, highlights, local team highlights, and entertainment. We can reject the null hypothesis that sports fans do not find ESPN more appealing than their local news sportscast for sports news and information. Less than 18% of respondents scored below 12 indicating that the majority of respondents preferred ESPN. Over 10% of

respondents scored 20 answering 5 (Highly favoring ESPN) for all four questions. There was no score of 4, answering 1 (Highly favoring news) to all four questions. There were also no scores of 5, 6, or 7. Overall, the hypothesis was strongly supported.

Through this survey, many viewing habits were discovered. Although ESPN is more favored for sports news and information, the survey also displays that an audience exists for local sports news segments. It is also apparent that changes have been made and more changes need to be made if the medium wants to survive, especially with ESPN and other newer media outlets expanding. The next and final chapter of this thesis takes these survey results and analyses in addition to all of the previous chapters and makes final predictions and recommendations for local sports newscast.

Chapter VII

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the way athletes approach the media to the way sports news is dispersed, ESPN has transformed the sports world. This thesis has focused primarily on ESPN's influence on sports segments during local news. The overall hypothesis tested is that because of ESPN, local sports news has changed and must continue to change even more drastically in order to compete and to survive in this new era of sports journalism. ESPN's domination in sports broadcasting has made local news reexamine its role. Simply, local sport segment's three or four minutes of sports news cannot compete with ESPN's 24 hours a day sports broadcasting.

Chapter I proposed five primary hypotheses:

- H1: ESPN's format and style appeals to sports fans.
- H2: ESPN's format and style has changed local news sports journalism.
- H3: More people prefer to watch ESPN than to watch local news affiliate's coverage of sports for sports information
- H4: A market still exists which demands local sportscasts.
- H5: Because of ESPN, local news should focus more on local sports and less on national stories.

Each chapter in this thesis addresses one of the five hypotheses. Chapter II discusses two communication theories in order to exemplify how communication has changed with technological advancements such as cable networks and the Internet. Laswell's model of communication, while exemplary during its time of inception in 1948, simply does not accurately depict today's interactive and continuous style of communication.

Communication is no longer linear. Technology has moved communication towards a more transaction model, where communication occurs continuously and simultaneously between two communicators. Chapter II also pinpoints five major technological advancements that have driven sports journalism and communication towards this transactional model. Major developments in sports journalism transpired due to technological advancements of radio, television, satellites, cable and Internet. Sports journalism today has been influenced by each progression. Currently, ESPN dominates each one of these fields making it the leader in sports broadcasting. The end of Chapter II examines literature pertinent to sports broadcasting, primarily ESPN and its impact on sports journalism. Again, literature points to three solutions: omit sportscasts from local news, focus solely on local sports, or continue to mix local and national sports.

To examine Hypothesis #1, that ESPN's format and style appeals to sports fans, Chapter III scrutinizes ESPN to determine how and why it has become a sports media empire. ESPN's history points to a number of landmarks that have helped achieve its success. First, it was the premier cable operation to broadcast sports 24 hours a day. It broadcasts many sports events that had never been seen on television previously,

including early rounds of NCAA basketball, golf, and tennis. This gained the attention of sports fans that were able to watch sports everyday. Also because it was the first all sports network, it was able to create brand recognition. As its audience grew, its resources began to expand.

Slowly, ESPN ventured into different communication venues providing the ability to hone a more transactional model of communication. First, it expanded its programming to different cable channels, which now include channels such as ESPNNews, ESPN 2, ESPN Classic. These channels also contain programming that provides in-depth analysis of particular sports such as *NHL 2Night*, *NFL 2Night*, and others. These programs render a national look at all teams, allowing avid sports fans a holistic viewpoint on a particular team of interest. As the years progressed, ESPN further expanded into a magazine and now the number one sports website, ESPN.com. Brand recognition grew more with sports bars and logo-bearing sportswear. Today, viewers rate ESPN as their top personal favorite cable TV network, their top cable entertainment network in terms of enjoyment, the top network for growth in household delivery, and the top watched cable network in out-of home locations.⁷⁴

ESPN's success has impacted local sports segments, which were previously the major sources of sports news. Chapter IV begins with a case study of WJLA's sports department, a Washington, D.C. affiliate of ABC. This case study shows the procedures and philosophies of today's local sports departments. The case study demonstrates how sports departments run on a very limited number of resources; the department is made of

no more than ten people. Primarily, one producer must find the day's most important news, while one executive producer plans live shots. The anchor plays an enormous role in local sportscasts. The anchor must not only write his own scripts but also be able offer a unique delivery of the segment. Often live shots are included in a sportscast in order to provide local interest.

Chapter IV also tests Hypothesis #2, that ESPN's format and style has changed local news sports journalism, with a content analysis of WJLA's sportscasts from 1996 to 2002. The content analysis supports the hypothesis demonstrating changes in WJLA's sportscast as the years progressed. Producer Alex Parker exclaims that most of the changes occurred because of an increase in sports information outlets. The content analysis further shows how segment length has always fluctuated between two minutes and five minutes, but over time, more time has been dedicated to local sports. While national news used to dominate sports segments, today, entire sportscasts are often all local sports news. Additionally, dates selected for the content analysis also support the local importance claim by having all lead stories in the last two years as local sports stories. Sportscasts have become not only more locally focused, but also more diverse on the level of sports. As opposed to the coverage of only professional sports teams, more high school stories and "other" sports stories have increased. The content analysis shows how WJLA has changed towards being more locally focused, even if it means diverting attention from professional sports.

Some local sports departments are attempting to compete with ESPN. In order to demonstrate how enormous ESPN is compared to local sports, Chapter V gives the results of a content analysis of two days of *SportsCenter* vs. WJLA's sportscasts. Additionally, the content analysis shows the areas in which local sportscasts have an advantage of over ESPN. By exploring the differences, Hypothesis #4 (a market still exists which demands local sportscasts) was tested in the examination of the following five sub-hypotheses:

H1: Local news spends the same amount of time on local and national news

H2: Local sports news spends more time on local sports news than *SportsCenter* does on local, Washington area sports.

H3: *SportsCenter* has different lead stories than local sportscasts

H4: *SportsCenter* uses more full screen graphics and highlight videos per story

H5: Local Sports News does not allow for audience participation

The content analysis shows how *SportsCenter* devoted over 40 minutes of news during its shows while WJLA's sportscasts ran for approximately four minutes. For the two days examined, the content fails to support Hypothesis #1 (Local news spends the same amount of time on local and national news). While a sportscast six years ago spent a large portion of time on national news, today, that time is reserved. Local news does not spend the same amount of time on local and national news. Local stories now take

precedent. For example, on Sunday, March 24, 2002, WJLA spent four minutes and 32 seconds on local sports and 11 seconds on other sports news.

Hypothesis #2 (Local sports news spends more time on local sports news than ESPN does on local, Washington area sports) was supported by the data. On Thursday, March 21, 2002, WJLA spent a total of nine minutes and 14 seconds on Washington, D.C. sports related news, while *SportsCenter* devoted only 2 minutes 13 seconds. Despite the hour-long show, *SportsCenter* failed to provide any in-depth Washington, D.C. related news.

Interestingly on Thursday, March 21, 2002, both *SportsCenter* and WJLA had Duke's loss in the Elite Eight of the NCAA basketball tournament as top stories. On Sunday, March 24, 2002, *SportsCenter* and WJLA had Maryland advancing to the final four as their top stories thus failing to support Hypothesis #3: *SportsCenter* has different lead stories than local sportscasts. Perhaps both stations had the same lead stories on both days due to the popularity of the NCAA basketball tournament. WJLA broadcasted the stories due to its proximity to the University of Maryland and the team's chances of winning the national championship. Although *SportsCenter*'s lead story was Maryland's win, the first block only contained 36 seconds worth of news. *SportsCenter*'s main focus was on the Oregon versus Kansas game devoting over 11 minutes to the game in the first block. In terms of time, WJLA spent close to four minutes on Maryland's win and only 11 seconds on the Oregon versus Kansas game. Therefore, although both stations had the same lead story, focus was on two different games.

Hypothesis #4 (ESPN uses more full screen graphics and highlight videos per story) was also supported by the data. On Thursday, March 21, 2002, WJLA used one full screen graphic while *SportsCenter* used 22. On Sunday, March 24, 2002, WJLA used one full screen graphic and ESPN used 17. ESPN's use of full screen graphics provides viewers with important statistical notes that provide more in-depth analysis. Also, because numbers are easily understood through written words than spoken words, sports fans can more easily comprehend the statistical analysis.

In addition to full screen graphics, *SportsCenter* also allows for more audience participation through Q&A with viewers on their website, fantasy league rankings, and constant reference to their website. Mimicking a transactional model of communication, *SportsCenter* constantly involves its viewers and uses many tools to allow the audience to act as communicators as well. For example, when a question is asked during the show, answers can be given through ESPN.com website. By answering the questions through their website and having those answers tallied and reported back, viewers are actively participating in the flow of communication. WJLA does not have the full screen resources or audience participation component. WJLA adheres to Lasswell's model of communication of linear communication and supports Hypothesis #5: local sports news does not allow for audience participation.

While the content analysis examines the actual shows, Chapter VI, reveals public opinion results of a survey about ESPN versus local sportscasts. In order to imagine the

scope of ESPN's influence on the public, this chapter tested the following sub-hypotheses:

H1: A positive correlation exists between the number of sporting games/events per week watched and the amount of time a person watches ESPN per week.

H2: Men want longer sports segments during local news broadcasts.

H3: People 28 and younger want longer sports segments.

H4: Younger sports fans prefer ESPN to their local news sports segments for sports news and information.

H5: Sports fans find ESPN more appealing than their local news sports segments for sports news and information.

The survey shows a positive correlation between the number of sporting games/events per week watched and the amount of time a person watches ESPN per week. This is supported by a regression analysis. The relationship can be seen as a moderately strong with a positive slope (standard coefficient) of .430. The survey indicates the more sporting events and games a person watches, the more they tune into ESPN.

The hypothesis stating that men want longer sports segments was also supported by survey results. As a whole, a crosstabulation supported the claim that more men wanted to see longer sports segments. Men comprised 69.1% that responded favorably for longer segments. Women differed in their responses. More women did not want to

see longer sports segments. Only 38.6% of women wanted longer segments while 61.4% did not want longer segments. Therefore, according to survey results, more men than women favor longer sports segments on local news broadcasts.

Additionally, the data supported the hypothesis pertaining to longer sportscasts and respondents 28 years of age and below. The null hypothesis can be rejected because the below 29 age categories comprised 70.9% of the total number of “yes” responses. For the above 28 categories, only 29.1% of respondents answered “yes.”

The frequencies, crosstabulations, and regression analysis support the hypothesis that younger sports fans prefer ESPN to their local news sports segments for sports news and information. For the four questions pertaining to this hypothesis, investigation of the dependent variables with age as the independent variable, calculates a negative slope, indicating that as age decreases, the more ESPN is favored overall. These regression analyses display how younger viewers watch ESPN because it provides a more comprehensive and engaging reporting style (better statistics, better highlights, better local highlights, and more entertainment).

The final hypothesis that sports fans find ESPN more appealing than their local news sportscast for sports news and information is supported by scaling the four elements: statistics, highlights, local team highlights, and entertainment. The scale ranged from 4 (highly favoring local news) to 20 (highly favoring ESPN). Less than 18% of respondents scored below 12 indicating that the majority of respondents preferred ESPN. Over 10% of respondents scored 20 answering 5 (highly favoring ESPN) for all

four questions. There was no score of 4, answering 1 (Highly favoring news) to all four questions. There were also no scores of 5, 6, or 7. Overall, the hypothesis is strongly supported.

Recommendations:

After close scrutiny of ESPN and local sportscasts, it seems as though local sportscast should not try to compete with ESPN but should instead try to provide news that the network cannot. Simply, showing highlights is SportsCenter's forte and many people do not want to wait around for the local sportscast. In many cases, this may mean redefining the role of local sportscasts and targeting a different audience. The following are recommendations for local sportscasts:

- Focus on local teams at different levels (professional, collegiate, high school, other) and different sports
- Target audiences 35 years and above, who may not be accustomed to ESPN's style and do not enjoy or understand ESPN's hip commentary.
- Include a woman anchor/reporter, especially one that can provide insight on women's sports
- Feature more stories on women teams and athletes of all different levels
- Include "plays of the day" but group them into only a minute special package that airs daily
- Maintain less story telling of highlights and more in-depth analysis

- Feature more character pieces on players of all sporting levels
- Analyze game strategies instead of simply showing highlights
- Highlight human interest sports stories, especially ones that impact the community
- Provide more full screen graphics that show significant statistics
- Include lower third banners with the latest scores and results during sportscasts

Although ESPN is already an enormous sports media empire, it is expanding every year, which jeopardizes traditional sports venues such as local sportscasts even more. If local sportscasts are to remain in competition for sports fans, changes must be made. Based on the data collected in this study, local news organizations should reexamine their philosophies and strategies if they hope to compete for today's sports news market. In order for local news to hit the ball out of the park, they must change the dimensions of their field.

End Notes

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¹⁵ Shultz.

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²¹ Penner 4.

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Appendix A

Survey of Opinions Regarding ESPN and Sports Broadcast Journalism

Please Answer All Questions. Thank you for your time.

Q1. Do you watch professional sporting events on television?

- 1 Never
- 2 1 or 2 Games or Matches A Week
- 3 3 or 4 Games or Matches A Week
- 4 5 Games or Matches or More

Q2. Where do you go to get **MOST** of your sports news and information?

- | | |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Television | 5 Other_____ |
| 2 Newspaper | 9 I Don't Know/No Opinion |
| 3 Magazines | |
| 4 Internet | |

Q3. Do you watch ESPN?

- 1 NEVER
- 2 LESS than 5 times a YEAR
- 3 Once a Month
- 4 Once a WEEK
- 5 More than once a WEEK but not everyday
- 6 EVERYDAY

Q4. Do you watch your local news sports segments to get sports information and news?

- 1 NEVER
- 2 LESS than 5 times a YEAR
- 3 Once a Month
- 4 One or More times a WEEK
- 5 More than once a WEEK but not everyday
- 6 EVERYDAY

Q5. Do you belong to a fantasy league?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 I Don't Know/No Opinion

Q6. Do you prefer a more fun, comical style of sports journalism?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 I Don't Know/No Opinion

Q7. Do you believe local news should have longer sports segments?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 I Don't Know/No Opinion

Q8. If you were searching for your **LOCAL SPORTS TEAM** news, would you prefer ESPN or your local sportscast?

- 1 ESPN
- 2 Local News Sportscast
- 3 Neither
- 9 I Don't Know/No Opinion

Q9. Do you feel as though the number of outlets to receive sports information has grown over the last 5 years?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 I Don't Know/No Opinion

Q10. Do you prefer ESPN's **statistics** on sports teams and players than your local sports newscast's?

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|-----------|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| Never
(Favor News) | | Sometimes | | Always
(Favor ESPN) | I Don't Know/
No Opinion |

Q11. In **general**, do you believe ESPN has better highlights than your local sports newscast?

1	2	3	4	5	9
Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q12. For **local sports teams**, do you believe ESPN has better highlights than your local sports newscast?

1	2	3	4	5	9
Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q13. In terms of **entertainment**, do you prefer ESPN to your local sports newscast?

1	2	3	4	5	9
Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q14. Before ESPN, did you watch your local newscast to get sports information?

1	2	3	4	5	9
Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q15. How do you feel about the following statement?

I frequently watch ESPN to see the instant scores and news banners on the bottom of the screen.

1	2	3	4	5	9
Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q16. How do you feel about the following statement?

I watch my local sports newscast because I am already watching the news. I do not purposely watch my local news sportscast.

1	2	3	4	5	9
Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q17. How do you feel about the following statement?

ESPN has more sports information that appeals to me than my local sports newscast.

1	2	3	4	5	9
Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree	I Don't Know/ No Opinion

Q18. Are you male or female?

- 1 Male
- 2 Female

Q19. What is your age?

- 1 Below 18
- 2 18-28
- 3 29-39
- 4 40-50
- 5 51 and Above

Q20. What is the last grade or degree you completed in school?

- 1 Below High School
- 2 High School Graduate or Equivalent
- 3 College Graduate (B.A., B.S., or Equivalent)
- 4 Graduate Level or Above (Ph.D, Master's Degree, Law or Medical School, or Equivalent)
- 5 Other

Q21. How do you feel sports journalism has changed over the years?

Q22. Do you think ESPN is popular amongst sports fans? If so, why?

Appendix B

Survey Results (Frequencies)

Q1. Do you watch professional sporting events on television?

Never	1 or 2 games	3 or 4 games	5 or more games
7.8%	44.3%	24.3%	23.5%

Q2. Where do you go to get **MOST** of your sports news and information?

Television	Newspaper	Magazines	Internet	Other	No Opinion
62.6%	17.4%	.9%	11.3%	7%	.9%

Q3. Do you watch ESPN?

Never	Less than 5 times a year	Once a Month	Once a week	More than Once a week but not everyday	Everyday
5.2%	13%	12.2%	17.4%	27.8%	24.3%

Q4. Do you watch your local news sports segments to get sports information and news?

Never	Less than 5 times a year	Once a Month	Once a week	More than Once a week but not everyday	Everyday
7%	15.7%	11.3%	25.2%	23.5%	17.4%

Q5. Do you belong to a fantasy league?

Yes	No	No Opinion
16.5%	82.6%	.9%

Q6. Do you prefer a more fun, comical style of sports journalism?

Yes	No	No Opinion
61.7%	21.7%	16.5%

Q7. Do you believe local news should have longer sports segments?

Yes	No	No Opinion
47.8%	45.2%	7%

Q8. If you were searching for your **LOCAL SPORTS TEAM** news, would you prefer ESPN or your local sportscast?

ESPN	Local News Sportscast	Neither	No Opinion
33.9%	56.5%	3.5%	6.1%

Q9. Do you feel as though the number of outlets to receive sports information has grown over the last 5 years?

Yes	No	No Opinion
81.7%	7.8%	10.4%

Q10. Do you prefer ESPN's **statistics** on sports teams and players than your local sports newscast's?

Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	No Opinion
0%	7%	29.6%	15.7%	27.8%	20%

Q11. In **general**, do you believe ESPN has better highlights than your local sports newscast?

Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	No Opinion
0%	4.3%	26.1%	23.5%	39.1%	7%

Q12. For **local sports teams**, do you believe ESPN has better highlights than your local sports newscast?

Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	No Opinion
13.9%	33.9%	23.5%	2.6%	19.1%	7%

Q13. In terms of **entertainment**, do you prefer ESPN to your local sports newscast?

Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	No Opinion
3.5%	7%	22.6%	21.7%	35.7%	9.6%

Q14. Before ESPN, did you watch your local newscast to get sports information?

Never (Favor News)		Sometimes		Always (Favor ESPN)	No Opinion
9.6%	7.8%	21.7%	19.1%	33%	2.6%

Q15. How do you feel about the following statement?

I frequently watch ESPN to see the instant scores and news banners on the bottom of the screen.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion
15.7%	14.8%	19.1%	17.4%	31.3%	1.7%

Q16. How do you feel about the following statement?

I watch my local sports newscast because I am already watching the news. I do not purposely watch my local news sportscast.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion
11.3%	13.9%	19.1%	19.1%	32.2%	4.3%

Q17. How do you feel about the following statement?

ESPN has more sports information that appeals to me than my local sports newscast.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion
4.3%	5.2%	23.5%	27%	35.7%	4.3%

Q18. Are you male or female?

Male	Female
58.3%	41.7%

Q19. What is your age?

Below 18	18-28	29-39	40-50	51 and Above
7%	58.3%	16.5%	13.9%	4.3%

Q20. What is the last grade or degree you completed in school?

Below High School	High School	College	Graduate or Above	Other
6.1%	19.1%	39.1%	33.9%	1.7%

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