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**SPORTS AND MEDIA RELATIONS: AN ASSESSMENT BY
SPORTS JOURNALISTS REGARDING PUBLIC RELATIONS
PROFESSIONALS OF PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS
EFFECTIVELY CONTROLLING THE FLOW OF INFORMATION**

by
Jeffrey Joseph O'Connor

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Public Relations & Advertising
College of Communication
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts
at
Rowan University
May 12, 2011

Thesis Chair: Joseph Basso, PhD

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For my friends and family – Thank you for supporting me in all my decisions.

ABSTRACT

Jeffrey Joseph O'Connor
SPORTS AND MEDIA RELATIONS: AN ASSESSMENT BY SPORTS
JOURNALISTS REGARDING PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS OF
PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS EFFECTIVELY CONTROLLING THE FLOW OF
INFORMATION
2009/2010
Dr. Joseph Basso
Master of Arts in Public Relations

The study's primary goal was to determine if beat reporters who covered professional sports teams believed that PR professionals effectively controlled the flow of information to the media. To ascertain this answer, the researcher used in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 members of the media who cover the four main professional sports leagues, namely the NHL, MLB, NBA and MLB. Results show that most beat reporters believe that the PR professionals of the teams they cover effectively control the flow of information.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Journalism and sports have a long history. Reporters write stories using a variety of sources including information they receive from team officials. However, over the years, sports journalism has rapidly changed with the use of investigative reporting. Journalists constantly try to get the inside scoop by speaking to players, coaches, and even other inside sources that may leak information. Two factions complete the symbiotic relationship between journalists and sports organizations. First, a journalist's refusal to reveal the name of a source, and second, the source's ability to give the journalists a scoop from what he or she overhears in the locker room or the front office of a professional sports organization. In this information driven society, it is vital that journalists dig deep to try and reveal breaking news and inside stories.

While journalists try to do their job to cover a team the best they can, the team's public relations director must try to control the information flow. Often times, certain beat reporters may have a good relationship with the public relations director. Those with good relationships may get the inside scoop to a certain extent from the public relations director, because of the constant give and take nature of the business (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall and Taylor 70).

In studying public relations practice in professional sports, it would be helpful to identify which teams help themselves by portraying a good image through the media outlets. Because of the ever-changing environment of social media, news can hit many

different networks quickly, compared to the days of print journalism only. When television and radio became dominant media outlets, breaking news became more available to the public, although stories were often dependent on the time of the broadcast. Most recently, the World Wide Web and social media have created an opportunity to get breaking news and stories to their publics instantly.

The author of this study found several cases where the public relations personnel of a professional sports franchise were unable to control what was disseminated to the local and national media. For example, in 1919, during the World Series between the Chicago White Sox and the Cincinnati Reds, baseball writer Hugh Fullerton III received a tip from a professional gambler that the Reds were a lock to win the series. Fullerton, along with a colleague, carefully watched the series and counted the plays they deemed suspicious. After the series was over, Fullerton wrote a series of articles questioning whether or not gamblers were helping run baseball, and also questioned whether players were involved. One year later, an investigation by baseball condemned eight men on the White Sox who took part in, or at least knew of, the plan to throw the series. The players were banned from baseball for life. This public relations crisis became known as The Black Sox Scandal (historicbaseball.com).

A more recent case in 2009 involved the New York Mets. After being named the Vice President of Development in December 2004, Tony Bernazard persuaded the Mets front office to fire then manager Willie Randolph in the middle of the 2008 season (New York Times). In the summer of 2009, Adam Rubin, a reporter for the New York Daily News, broke a story that Tony Bernazard went into the locker room of the New York Mets' minor league Double A Affiliate, the Binghamton Mets, and caused a scene

following a loss. He removed his shirt and challenged the players in the locker room to a fight. He referred to one of the players with a slang term associated with a woman's anatomy. Rubin also stated that Bernazard went into a profanity-laced tirade at a Mets game at Citi Field because a Diamondbacks' scout was sitting in his seat (New York Daily News).

Mets General Manager Omar Minaya called a news conference late in July to announce the firing of Bernazard. Minaya questioned the accuracy of the reports and actually accused Rubin of having a motive to bury Bernazard, claiming that Rubin lobbied for a position in the Mets organization. Minaya later apologized; he apologized only for using the news conference as a forum to pick a fight with Rubin. In this case, the New York Times claimed that the Mets created further damage since the details were aired live on the local television and radio networks (New York Times). Minaya's accusation that the writer tried to get Bernazard fired because he wanted that position, further damaged the Mets reputation.

Statement of Problem

The role of the media is to report with objectivity with the goal of reaching the broadest audience possible (Kennedy and Moen 13). In today's media environment, most journalists will report with some degree of bias (Kennedy and Moen 13). In sports journalism, their bias could be used to make a name for their newspaper. Such is the case inside the world of sports journalism. Writers could just write about the facts of a sports organization, but when a hot piece of information comes out, they often feel it is their job to try and create a buzz in order to get people to listen.

Public relations personnel inside sports organizations try to control damage that could possibly be printed up in the papers (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58). It is easier to control information flow from the front office, or upper echelon of administration, because most of those employees understand that private matters need to be kept in-house and not made public. However, sometimes the public relations department's biggest challenge is watching what the players say.

It is ever important for the public relations staff to control what seeps into the media's hands. In today's changing job market, and steep drop off of newspaper sales, it is imperative that sports journalists dig deep to grab an inside track to a story. The researcher explored how public relations directors and journalists co-exist in handling stories. Therefore, the researcher conducted a nationwide assessment of sports journalists to determine the effectiveness of techniques used by public relations professionals of professional sports teams in controlling information dissemination and flow.

Purpose of the Study

Public relations is vital to the success and image of any company or business, and certainly the same applies for professional sports teams. Certain teams manage to keep their name away from bad publicity, while others often find ways to find negative publicity. The researcher studied the beat reporter's side of obtaining information and how public relations personnel work with them on a day-to-day basis. Through in-depth analysis, the researcher attempted to see how various sports organization control information flow to their respective sports reporters.

Hypothesis

H1 – Public relations professionals of professional sports teams ineffectively control the dissemination and flow of information.

While some organizations have a clamp on what gets released to the media, it seems most organizations, even if only a few times yearly, have information spread to the public that they hoped to keep silent.

Procedure

This researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 24 professional sports journalists from around the country to determine whether public relations departments of professional sports organizations effectively control the information flow. The researcher interviewed eight sports journalists from the northeast area, eight from the midwest/south area, and eight from the west coast to get a nationwide basis. The questionnaire contained basic questions regarding the process of interacting with public relations professionals, specific examples from their daily lives, as well as how these reporters react given specific circumstances from hypothetical situations.

Definition of Terms

Beat Reporters – A reporter who gets to know all the necessary background and contacts for covering a specific subject area (Bly 66).

Image – The impression gained according to the level of knowledge and understanding of facts about people, products, or situations (Henslow 6).

Media – Organizations that distribute their messages with the purpose of creating and maintaining audiences (Potter 32).

Public Relations – The maintenance of an organization's relations with its various publics (Johnston 4).

Chapter II

Literature Review

Public relations can be defined in many ways, but when looking at it in the field of sports it is best defined as “the way businesses communicate their point of view to the media and to the public” (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58). Others in the field simply deem it to be “getting the right facts to the right people at the right time and in the right way” (Hernandez 119). The practice and profession of public relations is two sided, involving both management and technical skills. Looking at one aspect of it, public relations staffs act as advisers to company officials. On the other side, they work as technicians, using oral, visual, and written language skills (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58).

Public Relations entails “influencing behavior to achieve objectives through the effective management of relationships and communications” (Lawson 45). The main focus of PR is to create a buzz about the organization. The buzz factor includes creating an awareness and demand for a company’s services and innovating new ways to show off features about the business using a media campaign (Lawson 45). Often “the difference between success and failure for a personality, business, or product stems from what we refer to as the buzz factor: whether or not you’re on the radar screen of the curious press and the adoring public” (Laermer xii).

Press coverage is much more powerful than advertisements, which more often than not, get ignored as they roll by. Most people are inclined to believe what a journalist writes, so good PR should always aim for a completely legitimate press (Laermer xiii).

Public relations practitioners are often characterized as “spin doctors” who cover up badly run corporate or public sector schemes. Some companies look at public relations as a luxury that costs too much money. However, if used correctly it can be a very cost effective strategy that allows a company to project itself as a strong, lucrative business. Utilizing public relations allows a company to show its expertise in its area of the market, establish credibility, and develop loyalty with the customers (Lawson 5).

The notion of PR sometimes conjures up images of representatives sending out press releases to reporters, editors and writers. However, Laermer (2003) writes that PR is much more than that. It weaves its way down dozens of avenues. “Media relations, press alerts, trade shows, brand creation, marketing communications, by-line pieces, internal messaging—a PR agency must do all of these jobs superbly” (Laermer 16).

Public relations is vital for any marketing strategy. However, PR differs from advertising in that advertising has full control over the message delivered. Lawson (2006) writes that PR is about doing something newsworthy that you want to communicate with the audience. The media is the one that will be delivering that message. As it goes with journalism, the media that are targeted by PR have no obligation to run the story in any specific form. Also, there is no control over when the story will run. Normally writers will revise the news release or use pertinent information from the release to create news (Lawson 48).

The strategy of public relations includes raising brand awareness among key audiences, communicating the message to these audiences, setting yourself apart from the competition, and positioning yourself as an authoritative voice in the industry with a quality, in-depth understanding of their market (Lawson 46).

Lawson (2006) adds that it all starts with identifying the audience one wants to reach. After that, one must find the best way to get through to the specific demographic. Garnering positive exposure among these audiences is the next step. Then communicating your message and becoming one of the recognized voices among the competition is how to achieve the strategy. The one phase that has to occur in this process is changing the behavior of the audience (Lawson 46).

Relationship with Media

One of the qualities used by PR professionals to distinguish information is an ability to see beyond the day's events and turn them into an angle that will perk up the ears of journalists everywhere. To do this, PR professionals need to be voracious readers, who are able to skim the day's news and spot a trend in its infancy. Laermer (2003) writes that a good PR person can take the same collection of facts as someone else and rapidly see a completely different, more noteworthy event happening (Laermer 28).

Stories hide everywhere in an organization, so the hardest question for the PR firm is to decide which events can be turned into news. According to Laermer (2003) sometimes the best opportunities come in the form of bad news since the media is always drawn to a negative story. The PR's job is to repackage it and then display it with a silver lining (Laermer 81).

A good PR representative will find a compelling reason for the media to listen. Laermer (2003) calls this the right hook to get great press coverage (Laermer 75). Pitching stories to reporters and convincing them to pay attention is something that public

relations professionals do on a regular basis. Laermer (2003) adds that PR is sales in its purest form (Laermer 101-102).

Approaching reporters is a vital first step for public relations directors in developing good relationships. Rarely the media will seek out PR representatives with a story idea, but more often than not the case is that the PR people of an organization will reach out to the media with a concrete story idea. A good PR department will send materials in advance to allow the reporters to familiarize themselves with the information and then an ensuing conversation will be more productive (Lawson 144).

The method in how to contact the media is an important decision for public relations professionals when opting to relay materials. Lawson (2006) states that it is a situational process that involves determining what various journalists prefer. Journalists may prefer a wide range of information reception including e-mail, fax, phone, or even newer technologies like satellite conferences. Another factor is the material's newsworthy value (Lawson 41-42).

When contacting the media via telephone, it is necessary to be ready to talk to a reporter one-on-one regarding a story pitch, possibly send back-up materials, and chat regarding deadlines and content. Charlotte Dunlap, a networking senior editor at Computer Reseller News, believes that being in constant touch is a great way to build a relationship. It is the job of public relations to be as accommodating to the media as possible in hopes of having them produce a positive piece (Lawson 41-42, 49).

When sending out publications to the media, it should be done so that the journalist can receive it with enough lead-time to break the story just before the

publication date. Coordinating the release dates with the journalist can also help the situation move along without problems (Lawson 62).

Lawson (2006) writes that Public Relations professionals should provide detailed and accurate background information to reporters. Also, PR should ask reporters what unfavorable observations they have in hopes of getting better coverage. Offering reporters a chance to call back to check their direct quotes for accuracy is welcomed by journalists. If a story is in-depth and involves special information, public relations directors should offer to review the journalists copy (Lawson 51-52).

Reporters rely on business people and experts for their next story. In order to get front-page coverage above the fold, Laermer (2003) states, “You have to work well with a journalist, treat them properly, and deliver the goods” (Laermer 24). Laermer adds that journalists work in a world of deadlines and a good PR representative should not waste their valuable time (Laermer 25).

The media often do not use publicity materials the way organizations hope. The judgment of the journalist, the policies of the medium, and other events going on will decide what happens to the distributed material. Since public relations staffs cannot control the media, they must do their best to work with the media people in an effective manner (Lawson 41).

Preparation is the best tool. Lawson (2006) believes that before agreeing to a media interview, the organization needs to decide if it is necessary and also what benefit will be achieved. Regardless of the decision, it is imperative that public relations representatives get back to the media and inform them of decisions because the media are often under deadline pressures and need quick responses so they can move on

accordingly. From an organization's standpoint, the best interviews are the ones that are planned and rehearsed beforehand. Getting caught off guard or hesitating could end up affecting the way a potential story is portrayed. Research has shown that the content of interviews makes up only 7 percent of what reporters take into account when writing their stories. The big impact in interviews is with voice quality and voice inflection (38 percent) and in the world of television, looks make up the rest (55 percent). Doing a dry run and brainstorming tough questions will better prepare a spokesperson for the media (Lawson 155-156).

Lawson (2006) observes that when talking to the media everything is on the line; the company's reputation, potential sales of products and services, and general success and failure can depend on the performance in an interview. Arriving early to an interview and blocking out distractions can help an organization portray its message in a calm, smooth way. Most reasons interviews fail are because of attitude, an imbalance of knowledge, and lack of preparation (Lawson 156-157).

Answering questions is another important aspect of public relations. It is the job of PR people to respond to requests of facts, figures, and details in a timely fashion. According to Lawson (2006), if PR professionals fail to help the journalists, they run the risk of not having their story covered as well as hurting the relationship with the media (Lawson 51).

Organizations will have negative stories printed about them, but there is no reason to be overly concerned with them. On average, only 10 percent of a paper's circulation will read one specific story (Lawson 158). Of those who read it, only 10 percent will recall the content (Lawson 158). Even though some awareness is created, it does not

necessarily mean that attitudes change and even if they do, it does not guarantee behavioral change (Lawson 159).

Three other important aspects of media interviews include honesty, sincerity and compassion. It does not mean the PR department needs to mention everything, but the things they do say need to be the truth. Saying that you don't know is not an issue. Lawson (2006) writes that mentioning to the media that you will try to find out as much as possible after the interview will be helpful to the reporters. With those three aspects, along with being accessible and speaking briefly, but concisely, will go a long way in the media recognizing you as a credible person that they will go back to when they are covering a story regarding the organization (Lawson 158-160).

Communication and Delivering the Message

Public relations is a cost effective way to deliver a message. However, it is a time consuming process. Writing news releases, building a relationship with the appropriate media will pay off in exposure and prestige, over the course of time. Public relations takes full force effect when the relationship is built and the story runs. Viewers, listeners, and readers take into account the high interest level the story must be if it is being reported. Also, they take into account the credibility of the medium it is coming through along with the idea that the journalist is reporting the story objectively (Lawson 48-49).

Public relations is heavily influenced by the communication factor. Eighty five percent of organizations practice public relations in a reactive manner (Lawson 55). This means that they only take action when an outside force disturbs the system. They choose to deflect outside forces rather letting them change the organization, possibly for the

better. This makes the two-way communication vital to both the audience and the organization. According to Lawson (2006), the organization wants the audience to be aware of what they are trying to achieve, but the organization must also learn about the concerns of the audience and be ready to adjust behaviors and decisions based off those concerns. Responding and evolving according to these needs and desires is change for the better inside an organization, because they are the people that influence and decide whether or not the company thrives or fails (Lawson 56).

The delivering of the organization's message must be portrayed correctly or else the whole process fails, according to Lawson (2006). A message is only successful when the sender and reader perceive it in the same way. Understanding the message, the audience, and the possible perception of it is the only way to communicate effectively (Lawson 57).

Clear, concise, and well thought out communication observes Lawson (2006) will lessen the possible barriers of misunderstanding and confusion along the path of communication. Any message that is too lengthy, contains errors, or appears disorganized will most likely be misinterpreted. Poor verbal and body language can further cloud the audience's mind. Sometimes too much information, too fast can be a problem. Simple miscommunication can be weeded out by addressing those minor errors (Lawson 59).

Lawson (2006) points out that the communication process begins with the sender, then is followed by the message, the channel, the receiver, and feedback. In this process, the sender must be credible by exhibiting knowledge of the subject, audience, and the context in which the message will be delivered. Tone, method, validity, and style are the

focal point of the message (Lawson 58). Intellectual and emotional components exist as well as allowing organizations to reason and present motivational appeals in hopes of changing minds and actions (Lawson 58). There are different channels the message runs through including meetings, interviews, phone and videoconferences, along with letters, press releases, e-mails, memos and reports. The channels filter the message to the receiver, or the audience (Lawson 58). The audience enters the communication process with their own ideas and emotions that will influence their understanding of the message and their response. This must be considered by the organization before delivery of the message. Finally, probably the most important part of the communication process takes place; the audience provides feedback, be it verbal or non-verbal reactions (Lawson 58-59). Organizations must monitor closely to ensure that the target audience understood their message. Message delivery from sender to receiver is a thorough process that organizations must give serious attention. (Lawson 58-59)

When the target audience has been reached, their response is necessary to the communication process (Lawson 62). The response the organization desires is that the audience becomes a channel through which to pass on the organization's message (Lawson 62). In the process of the two-way relationship between the organization and the audience, the organization wants journalists, for example, to already be predisposed to their values. This will make them less likely to print a story with negative views but it also allows for the journalists to choose the relevant parts of the organization's message and relay it to other media outlets as well as their audiences, furthering to help spread the word (Lawson 62-63).

One of the most effective models of public relations is James E. Grunig's two-way symmetric model (as cited in Lawson 2006). It is a free and equal flow of information between organizations and the target audience. The model involves starting up two-way communication and using feedback to make adjustments to their plans or be satisfied with the knowledge that the audience knows why you are doing what you are doing. Because of the mutual relationship and understanding of each one's position, the model is effective whether the organization changes its position, the audience alters theirs, or if neither wavers from their views according to James E. Grunig. "As long as both communicate well enough to understand the position of the other," says Grunig, an author of over 150 literature pieces regarding the two-way symmetric model (as cited in Lawson 2006).

Reputation and Image

Reputation is when an organization receives continually positive opinion from the public, which they need in order to earn a successful reputation (Fulginiti and Bagin 5). Credibility and reliability defines a successful relationship between a firm and the members of the media and this is built when PR professionals do not exaggerate, equivocate, or misrepresent the facts (Aronson and Spetner iv). A public relations spokesperson speaks on behalf of their organization, just as reporters serve the interest of their employer (Taylor and Olds 10). "The PR professional acts as a link between the client organization and the media providing the facts and details in a timely and accurate fashion adhering to a rigorous ethical code for truth and accuracy" (Aronson and Spetner iv). When a PR professional is helpful and cooperative with a journalist, the journalist is

likely to return the favor by considering the PR representative a reliable source (D'Vari 59). Today, journalists have more stories to write and tighter deadlines looming and as such, they become part of a two-way street with public relations; journalists need angles that they get from PR and PR needs journalistic medias to connect with their target audience (Jackall and Hirota 131). Keeping the media informed of last minute changes and alterations to publicity materials is vital to sustaining a good reputation with the members of the media, which is a huge asset to an organization (Yale 68). However, a reputation can also be a liability since media people know each other well, exchange information, and often relocate to different cities (Yale 68). Because of this, it is very easy for a bad reputation to follow a PR person wherever he or she goes and can make it tough on them to get good media coverage wherever they are (Yale 69).

Crisis management is also vital to the organization's image. However, if the company has already built up a great reputation and has quality relationships with the media, it makes the process a lot less bumpy (Lawson 56). For example, if something goes wrong inside a company with a great reputation, a negative story is probably going to be printed in the newspaper regardless. However, it will probably be a one-day story and it will be laid to rest whereas a company with poor crisis management may suffer at the hands of newspapers for days afterwards which may affect the sales by the company (Lawson 56). Lawson (2006) also states that building up an organization's reputation and being seen as a socially responsible company, will more than likely help the company to get a free pass in a crisis situation. A survey by Business in the Community reported that 86 percent of people have a more positive image of a business when they see that a company is trying to make the world a better place (Lawson 56-57).

Like crisis management, handling controversy helps the organization to be seen in a more positive light. Sometimes controversy is not a bad thing since it allows a large number of people to check in on your organization's view (Yale 362). Being prepared is a must in order to handle controversy in the most efficient manner; by ensuring that the organization has nothing to hide if any controversies could be brewing (Yale 363). If a controversial issue may pop up, public relations directors need to have facts and figures ready for the media as a means of protecting their company (Yale 363). Prepping for difficult media questions as well as consulting the organization's legal team will help to understand what the press is preliminarily saying about the situation, so that the organization can answer their questions or disprove any accusations (Yale 363-364).

Public Relations in Sports

The everyday responsibilities of a public relations director for a professional sports organization entails many duties. One of the primary duties is to maintain the image of the franchise. This has a wide range. A simple daily task may involve setting up an interview or talking to reporters for a few minutes to keep them posted on daily occurrences, however, on a tougher day, it may be opting not to talk about a current sensitive issue or keeping a player away from a nagging reporter (Nichols, Moynahan, Taylor, and Hall 58). The daily task could also involve problems directly outside the organization where the PR director may have to lift the spirits of a journalist who gets beat out on a huge story (Nichols, Moynahan, Taylor, and Hall 58).

The public relations director is a professional who must create a favorable public image of the organization in order to promote individual stars and specific events in order

to boost spectator interest and grab a share of the entertainment dollar (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 64). “Wilcox et al. (1992) note that professional and college sports must be sold like motion pictures, rock concerts, and other forms of entertainment. Consequently, sports information specialists must use the same techniques as other entertainment organizations to build crowds, maintain fan enthusiasm, and attract star athletes” (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 64).

Wenner (1989) states that one of the primary duties also includes disseminating information that attracts media coverage and reaches the public via the media (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 71). PR directors translate the institution’s philosophy and character into story ideas and images that can show the organization in a positive light, while also controlling how much information the media receive and for what purpose (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 71). PR initiates more than half of the news that appears in the print and broadcast media (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 71).

Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor (2002) state that a daily task for a public relations director of a professional sports team is arranging interviews for journalists who are looking for a hot story. While this may seem like a challenge, it is more of an opportunity for the public relations department to help the organization’s cause by subtly suggesting story ideas, dictating the team’s position on a specific and important issue, and further growing a positive relationship with the media (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 57-58).

Looking further into the relationship between public relations and the media, Wenner (1989) states that it is a unique bond as both parties are looking for different

benefits from the relationship (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58). The public relations professionals of the teams are out to portray messages that will show the organization in a good light, while at the same time maximizing their exposure in the media (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58). On the other hand, the media is attempting to splice and piece together stories that will appeal not only to their audience, but also to potential advertisers (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 64).

In the grand scheme of the relationship, the public relations staff controls the situation. They provide information and facts to the media that they need or want in order to present their story publicly (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58). However, they choose what information to send out to the reporters, in order to show their organization in the best possible light (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58).

When it comes to the media, some public relations directors believe that any press is good press and that the worst thing that can possibly happen is that the organization be ignored completely (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 63). While this may not be the consensus among public relations staffs, they all believe that the best thing possible is media coverage that consistently puts the organization and its athletes in a positive context (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 63). A successful program, along with effective management from the public relations department, normally results in even more success for the program (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 63).

The media is always interested in negative news since conflict is one of the criteria that elevate the news value of a story (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 70). However, this can be controlled if the sports information director cultivates an open and honest relationship with the members of the media as well as the community and the

relationship is built and thrives on trust and mutual respect (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 69). The sports information specialist understands the competitive media's need for important details to a potentially big story. On the other hand, the journalists understand the constraints that have been put on the sports information specialist to have limitations placed on the release of certain information, although not willingly (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 69). If this is the situation between the media and the public relations department, the public relations staff has done an effective job (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 69).

Also built on trust and respect is the natural give and take nature of the business (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 69). The public relations director may provide a little more information on one story and likewise expects the journalist to follow up on a lukewarm story idea at some point (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 69). On the other side of that, a reporter may expect a public relations director to deliver a useful piece of information for a major breaking story under deadline and competitive pressures (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 69).

Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor (2002) believe that the media and public relations staffs should relate to each other on an ethical level, specifically public relations director never dodging a tough question but instead, learning how to handle the situation (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 70). Even when journalists get the dreaded "no comment" response from public relations directors instead of being provided with information, they will honor and respect the statement. The media understands that the job of sports information specialists is promotion, competing for a share of the entertainment spotlight and audience (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 70).

Organizations rely on their PR specialists to gain the necessary coverage from the media in hopes that the exposure will raise attendance and revenues (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58). The media makes decisions on what to cover based on the sizes of the audience, in order to attract advertisers and also to increase revenue (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58). The PR specialist has to convince the media that a story or event has a widespread appeal to the audience to ensure media coverage that will increase interest from the audience (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58). Those who handle dual roles can raise media exposure and attract more spectators, but it does come with stress and sometimes-negative results (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 58).

Part of the reason for this stress is that the actions in public by any representative of an athletic department or team can influence the public impression of the professional organization, which can also affect the relationship between various constituencies and the organization (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 62). Public relations involve all employees of an organization. For example, a ticket taker can be just as important to a team's image as a player due to the direct interaction with customers. A customer may have a bad experience with an usher, concessions salesman, etc., which is why public relations have to communicate not only with the media, but with customers as well in order to be effective (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 62).

Direct public relations must be used by organizations in order to run an effective program. This can range from one-on-one contact by an individual member with one of the publics, like a public appearance in the community by a coach, athlete, etc (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 63).

Indirect public relations can be categorized as publicity; however, organizations cannot control this aspect of public relations (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 63). Press conferences and news releases or appearances on TV or radio shows along with one-on-one interviews and group question-answer sessions with lots of reporters are all part of indirect public relations (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 63).

The public relations staff may try to bring to light the positive aspect of an athlete or event, however, when it's all said and done, the media are the ones who put the story together and present it to the public (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 62). The media shape the content of the message generated by a news release, a postgame interview, or another branch of indirect public relations (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 62).

Roger Valdiserri (1985), a former associate athletics director at the University of Notre Dame, suggests that a sports information director brief his or her athletes in order to inform them what the media will be seeking in the process of an interview (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 63). Administrators or athletes who are not good at doing interviews may trigger a negative story without knowing it, and it is also possible for this situation to snowball as one negative story may offset a good amount of positive pieces (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 63).

A significant amount of public relations experts believe that major and minor crises should be dealt with honestly and forthrightly, giving out information to the media concerning injuries, roster moves, and other negative issues should be done as soon as possible (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 70). The PR specialist should try to keep

the media from finding out negative news on their own or run the risk of giving the feel that the organization is trying to hide stories (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 70).

Schulte and Dufresne (1994) believe the most successful public relations directors are available, knowledgeable, and credible (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 2002). This means they respond quickly to media inquiries and requests, they know the normal people who cover the team on a daily basis, stories that appeal to them, space limitations, as well as their deadlines, and can also handle conflict and crises smoothly and professionally (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 69).

Looking at the media side of the relationship, early deadlines and late games produce competitive pressures. Life becomes very difficult on the reporter, who needs to deliver a thorough and entertaining story to a large and demanding audience, under the most trying circumstances (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 22). This is where the public relations director plays “an integral role in gathering and delivering the information that shapes the product, that dictates the content of the message and the impressions it leaves with the audience” (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 22).

Sportswriters now have a more difficult time meeting their own deadlines when TV coverage of sporting events starts in primetime, like in the 1996 NCAA Basketball Championship Game that began at 9:22pm EST (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 21). A columnist for the Courier Journal in Louisville, Kentucky once said that he could foresee a day when he would have to complete and file his story before the game concluded and just take a stab at the outcome (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 21).

Wilcox, Ault and Agee (1992) stated that a study by a brewing company in the 1980s found that nearly 70 percent of Americans watch, discuss, or read about sports

daily (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 22). Sports events provide a cultural bond among Americans by giving them something to talk about with family, friends, and co-workers. According to Hunt and Ruben (1993), the more successful the team, the more the collective interest and the greater likelihood of newspaper sales (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 23).

Most electronic and print media receive the main portion of their revenue from advertising, with sale subscriptions coming in next (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 3). Both media's successes are directly derived from their ability to bring a large audience to an advertiser as well as competing for revenue generated by the sport itself (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 3). According to Howard and Crompton (1995), a study deemed the market value of the NHL, MLB, NBA, and NFL to be close to 10 billion dollars (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 3).

Effective public relations can be obtained through organization, planning, consistent communication, and sound crisis management (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 61). Sports public relations requires strong writing, speaking, and visual skills; an even temperament; and a good sense of humor (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 73).

Effective public relations for a sports organization needs cooperation among the administrators, a public relations/sports information staff, coaches, athletes, managers, and program directors, who are all involved in the public relations process, either directly or indirectly (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 61). Educator John Vivian (1995) states there are four essential steps to success in public relations. One is identifying relationships. Second is evaluating the relationships. Third is designing policies to

improve the relationships. Fourth is implementing the policies (as cited in Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 61).

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

Effective public relations practice is vital to organizational success. This applies to professional sports organizations. The better working relationship organizations have with the media, the better their image will reflect to the general public (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor 57-58). However, the researcher hypothesized that public relations departments of professional sports teams are ineffectively controlling the flow of information to the beat reporters who cover the team daily. To test this hypothesis, the researcher conducted personal interviews to obtain an in-depth look at reporters' opinions and observations regarding public relations directors of professional sports organizations. Through personal interviews, the researcher obtained specific cases and examples from the reporters experience covering a professional team.

Through the interview process, the researcher asked 8-10 questions relating to general journalism and public relations practices, occurrences and everyday happenings with public relations departments. The questions regarded how the reporter covered the team during the course of a week, as well as how the reporter handled certain hypothetical situations presented by the researcher.

The researcher also created a mini-quantitative survey to get a basic understanding of how reporters would describe the relationship with the public relations staff of the professional sports organization they cover.

Upon the completion, the researcher's study will yield qualitative data to address the question of public relations directors of professional sports teams effectively controlling the flow of information to reporters.

Sample Selection and Size

To better understand the role of public relations for professional sports teams, the researcher conducted personal in-depth interviews with 24 reporters across the United States who cover a team playing in the National Hockey League, Major League Baseball, National Football League, or the National Basketball Association. The reporters also complete a mini-survey regarding the personal relationship they have with the team. The researcher selected eight reporters from the northeast, eight from the west coast, and eight from the south or midwest region in a non-random fashion.

A non-random (or biased) sample "is the prejudiced selection of the sample and denies each member an equal chance for selection" (Fulginiti and Bagin 70).

A random sample "is the selection of a sample based on the provision that each member of the larger universe or audience has an equal chance to be selected in the sample" (Fulginiti and Bagin 70).

Summary

The in-depth interviews with the reporters provided information on how public relations directors of professional sports teams control the flow of information to the media. The data provided the researcher an in-depth understanding of the journalists everyday dealings with public relations staffs and give strong, specific examples of cases

where they (the journalists) believed public relations directors effectively or ineffectively controlled the information flow to the media.

In Chapter IV, the researcher presents the data received from the study.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with beat writers of professional sports teams around the country, administering eight personal interviews with writers covering west coast teams, eight personal interviews with writers covering midwest and southern teams, and eight personal interviews with writers covering northeast teams.

General Findings

The researcher used in-depth interviews with 24 different beat writers who cover professional sports teams to understand how effectively public relations departments of professional sports teams control the information flow to the writers who cover the team.

The researcher asked the 24 beat writers to describe their working relationship with the PR staff. Of the 24, only one beat writer claimed that he did not have a good working relationship with the PR staff of the team he covers. When describing his relationship, Respondent 1 said, "I've always felt the guy is more of an impediment to my job than a facilitator. To be honest, I haven't spoken to him in three years because I don't think he's going to help me do my job. I think he's going to interfere. That's a choice I've made and it has worked out OK for me." Asked why he chose not to speak with the PR director, Respondent 1 retorted, "He was friendly with a reporter from a competing paper. I felt I couldn't trust him to ask a question so I made the decision that I wasn't going to ask him questions. I was still friendly with him but then I found out he was bad mouthing me to players and things of that nature, trying to undermine me, so I decided it wasn't worth my time to talk to him."

Respondent 1's opinion turned out to be the minority among those interviewed. The remaining 23 respondents believed they had a good working relationship with PR. Respondent 12 has a great working relationship with the team he covers and explains two key factors, "I think honesty is a big reason that it is a good working relationship. If everyone understands where each party is coming from, I think there's a better chance that there will be an understanding. It also requires a track record of the reporter being responsible and fair. If you establish that over time, if you're working with a PR staff that is fair, then I think that will certainly bode well for you in the long run."

Respondent 15 summed up his view of what PR needs to be, "The (team) PR staff is exactly what they're supposed to be – they're the conduit between media and the players." Respondents 21 and 23 both agree that their working relationship is good because there is a mutual understanding between the writer and PR. Respondent 21 said, "The PR folks there really have an understanding of what we're doing and we have an understanding of what they're doing. They're very good about knowing what you need to do, knowing how to try and help you and get you the information you need. Everybody works with them and we knew what they are trying to do also, so it's a good working relationship."

Respondent 23 says the PR person he works with has familiarity with what he does, "Having a former beat writer as the PR director is extremely beneficial because he knows all the different things we have to go through as far as trying to get information. I think for the most part the access and the availability and fielding requests and everything is better than most teams I would say."

For the most part, it appears that the beat writers interviewed have a good working relationship with PR. Some claimed that no relationship is perfect and has its ups and downs with disagreements along the way, but that both sides understand they each have a job to do and that it is very much an effective give-and-take relationship.

The researcher asked the 24 beat writers if they were provided access to coaches and players on a regular basis. All 24 writers believed they were provided access to coaches and players on a regular basis. Seven writers described their access to be what was mandated by league structure along with special requests submitted to PR.

Respondent 19 said, “The clubhouse has to be open for reporters 3 ½ hours before first pitch. So they kind of have to have the clubhouse open as long as players are around or in the area where we are allowed, we can talk to them. After games, if guys are in the shower or something or we’re on deadline and we really need them, it’s the PR staff’s jobs to try and rustle them up for us and make sure we can talk to them.”

Three writers described their access as pretty open. Respondent 15 described his environment as hands off, “They provide need when you need it but they allow you a lot of freedom to cultivate your own relationships, which as a reporter is the way I prefer and I like it. I think they create a platform for me to develop my own relationships with players, coaches, and team executives. If there are some difficult moments, they typically steer you with the right navigation at those times.”

Respondent 11 said the team he covers follows the league’s access rules to a T, “We are supposed to get into a locker room five minutes after a game and five minutes after practice and we are supposed to have at least a half hour available to us with any players that we want. I can think of one, maybe two times where that hasn’t happened,

and generally it's been because of player meeting issues. They do exactly what they need to as described in the Collective Bargaining Agreement.”

Respondent 7 described a specific restriction in terms of access, “The coaches, not very often – there are rules in place that we are supposed to have access to the coordinators, especially once week and we’re also supposed to have assistant coaches as requested. However, that doesn’t always happen. You can make the request, and sometimes it will come back to you that (coach) has said that the assistant coach can do the interview but the assistant coach himself does not want to do the interview and often times the assistant coach will just say “no” because they’re really told what they can and cannot say. You kind of incur (coach’s) wrath if you say something that he doesn’t want you to say. So rather than put yourself in that position, then sometimes they will say no.”

From the interviews, it appears all the beat writers have access to players and coaches on a regular basis that is either great for them to cultivate relationships, or at the very least, enough to get by and do their jobs properly.

The researcher asked the 24 beat writers if they relied on PR for information and what suggestions they would make to PR to improve their information gathering process. 17 writers said they relied on PR for information while 7 said they rarely, if ever, rely on PR for information. These 17 said the things they rely on them for were basic information, statistics, records, or injury updates. Respondent 11 said, “As far as stats or maybe some details of a contract or something that happened in the past, but generally you only use the PR staff to fill in those blanks and save yourself a few minutes of research.”

Respondent 1 claimed he rarely used PR for information because of his knowledge of the subject but thought that it could be a mistake, “When it comes to asking them for ideas, there are some reporters who sometimes seek the help of the PR people. I usually don’t do that. I’ve been covering it for so long. Maybe that’s a fault of mine, maybe I should once in a while. It’s not just one PR person. There’s about four or five of them with the (team). Maybe I should ask them for maybe a story idea or something of that nature.”

Respondent 5 uses unique information from PR during every game he covers, “A lot of us have to file stories with running copy for early deadline. The (team’s) PR staff will have a person in position as the players come off the ice, they’ll have that player talk for 2 or 3 quotes, they’ll quickly transcribe it, and send it up to us in e-mail. Little things like that go a long way in allowing us to our jobs and do it well.”

In addition, the researcher asked the beat writers what suggestions they would make to PR to improve their information gathering process. The most common answer received is that they would like the locker room environment to be more open and relaxed, allowing the players to speak freely without being prepped or watched over. Respondent 7 summed it up as such, “...a little more relaxed with letting players show their personality without them worrying about repercussion, being able to talk to the coaching staff without them worrying about repercussion. They’re grown men. I’m not going to ask them to hand me the playbook for that week. Having it be so difficult to do regular day-to-day things and always seeming like most of the players are reading from the same script, makes things very difficult.”

Like others, Respondent 1 wants to know more interesting stories, tidbits, or anecdotes about players that can add some flavor to a story, “Things have to be a lot more in a specific storyline. Things maybe you wouldn’t know. Maybe if they are playing a certain team, and you know that the player has some type of relationship with somebody else on the team or the coaching staff. There are always tidbits that could really help writers make their stories more interesting. The people that read these stories, they want to read interesting stories about people. Just more interesting tidbits about players. Something from their background, their family ...that would kind of spice up the story a little bit.” Respondent 10 explained two examples where he was lied to (See Appendix) and said his biggest suggestion was just to be truthful or at the very least, say “no comment.”[ou”

From the interviews, it appears most beat writers do rely on PR for some type of information, whether it be a simple fact, detail, or statistic. According to the research done, either most PR people do not offer possible story ideas to writers or if they do, most beat writers will not pursue something PR suggests.

The researcher asked the 24 beat writers if PR people prepped players before interviews and if they thought it was a good practice. Sixteen of the 24 writers believed players were prepped before interviews. Of those 16, 7 writers said it was a good practice and 9 writers said it was not a good practice. Respondent 12 said he was fine with players being given a heads up about what questions they would be asked, but telling players what to say doesn’t really help his writing, “Letting them know a question might come is fine. I actually don’t mind that. You don’t necessarily get an emotional response from the person; you get more of a clear-headed response, which probably

makes for a better quote, so I'm ok with that. When you try to rehearse an answer to a particular question, that probably doesn't work in the reporters favor because they're going to craft it to suit their wishes, which is fine. There's nothing to say they can't do that. It probably doesn't make for a great article."

Respondent 15 said prepping players is vital for a pro sports team, "I'm the conduit between fans and the players. Whenever I have a difficult situation with players, I remind them that I'm just doing my job. I'm not here because I'm fascinatingly interested by the next cliché you utter. I'm here because fans are interested and obviously want to represent the organization well. So I think that's essential, absolutely."

Respondent 2 echoed what the 8 others did; that it limits honest thoughts from the players, "Terrible practice. It limits players from saying what they truly feel and limits them from giving honest answers, simply so they don't supposedly anger their team. Rarely did it ever happen. And if a player is really angry enough to say something that the team wouldn't like, they're going to say it anyway on their own privately. They're not going to say it in front of a PR director."

It appears a majority of pro sports teams do prep their players in some form, whether it be telling them what questions may be coming their way or telling them what they should say. Due to the surprising amount of people that thought it was a good practice, clearly PR directors give players a heads up about what questions may be coming so they can clear their heads and really have a chance to think about what they want to say, rather than shooting an off-the-cuff answer that may hurt the image of the team.

The researcher asked the 24 beat writers to describe an incident that did or could damage the team's reputation. No one type of incident dominated the results but there were three categories into which most of them fell. One category would be an incident involving an isolated player. Respondent 4 recalled a recent incident where a player shot himself with a gun, "Especially a day or two afterwards, when the mayor came out and sort of made it sound like the (team) were part of a big cover up to keep (player) out of prison or whatever he thought they were doing. I think he called them 'bad corporate citizens' at the time. So that was bad. The only thing they could do really was to say they didn't think they were and use the media, and go on the radio and talk to newspaper reporters. Put their side of the story out there. That's probably as bad a situation as it can get. Having a player shoot himself in the middle of the night and then have to deal with those ramifications."

The next category would include trouble with the law as well as physical altercations. Respondent 15 recalls an extremely recent physical altercation; "One of their team executives (name) had a brief physical altercation with their coach (name). I basically reported the story but hadn't written it yet. Another media outlet broke the story. In the course of what I thought was a private, off the record conversation with a fellow reporter that was then broadcast over the air that I had not reported the story yet, so I became the story for 24 hours."

The last category involves organization faults like bad player personnel decisions, reputation of ownership, and lack of effective communication between the organization and the media. Respondent 11 defines the lack of effective communication angle, "They were constantly saying that they weren't going to trade star players, and as it turns out

they probably were trying to trade him. They were trying to bring in other investors to help them with their bottom line while constantly saying they weren't doing that. I think it goes for all team's relationships with reporters, just be honest. I think that any time someone is caught in a lie, it hurts reputations and makes you question things they say in the future. Anytime a team outright lies, I think it can hurt that relationship."

Most beat writers were able to identify a specific incident that they believed damaged the reputation of the team. It was a varied range of incidents, going from lying to a media member to upper management accusing the media of twisting words in interviews. Some of them were quick, "one day and done" stories that hurt the reputation short term and some of them still linger presently due to certain people that are still involved in ownership or operations of the team.

The researcher asked the 24 beat writers how it would affect what they wrote after PR addressed the damaging incident. All the writers said that it really doesn't affect what they write. Respondent 11 says, "It just makes you more skeptical about what certain people will tell you. It was certain individuals within the team that were doing the lying. So now that those people are removed, there's no problem with my relationship with anybody on the team at the moment. It never really affects what you're writing, you might be a little more skeptical of what people say but the bottom line is that you're still trying to do your job to the best of your ability. You're still trying to present the truth for the situation as far as you can tell. You can be skeptical, it's a good thing but you still write what the story is. You don't present things as they're not because you're upset with the team or something. Skepticism is always a little bit of a good thing though."

Respondent 15 sums it up clearly and to the point regarding his/her writing, “My feeling is always with stories, negative or positive, as long as they’re accurate and fair, there can be no beef. If there’s a big story, with damaging consequences or major news story, I have that conversation with people before I print it.”

The beat writers claimed that they don’t have much room for speculation; for the most part, they must stick to the facts. In order to be professional, they can’t hold grudges or take things personally. One writer even said that writing negative stories about a team comes with the job.

The researcher asked the 24 beat writers how they remain objective when writing about the organization. All the writers said they remain objective when writing about the team, but a few did say that it was not easy. Since they spend so much time with the team, Respondent 7 says it’s hard not to root for some guys, “You have to realize that for me personally, I’m a fan of some of the players because I see them on a daily basis. There are some weeks during the season, that I see them more than I see my own family. So you develop relationships with these guys and you’re friendly with them. I might personally root for guys here and there. It’s human nature.”

Some writers said all they have is their integrity, so they must remain objective like Respondent 12, “If your goal is to do a good job and to be good in this profession, then you’ve got to hold onto that objectivity and give it to people straight. That’s all you got is your integrity and your objectivity. Tell the truth, don’t make stuff up and be fair. You have nothing else.”

Respondent 14 always aims to remain objective, but in a certain case can’t because a player he should rip, has an agent who is one of his biggest sources when it

comes to breaking news, “Where there’s a player, that very well deserves to be annihilated on a daily basis, and his agent is one of my biggest sources. It’s very tough for me. I have to walk a very fine line. It’s probably the biggest conflict of interest in my career.”

Respondent 15 has his own personal rule when writing about the players, “There’s far more I know than I put in the newspaper at all times. Unless personal stuff affects professional performance, I consider most personal stuff off limits.”

Some writers have some interest in the team because of the attention their writing will get if the team wins or loses, like Respondent 22, “In keeping it professional as I can, I tend to root for the team I cover to win because it makes my job easier and more interesting. It can be a dreadful experience if they’re not. You want them to at least do well enough to be interesting.”

The beat writers interviewed all claimed to be objective. However, about half said it was hard to be completely objective regarding certain aspects of the organization due to liking certain players or coaches or covering a winning or losing team in order to make their job and their readers interested. But when it came to putting the entire organization in perspective, remaining objective was a must for the writers and said they did that with no problem.

The researcher asked the 24 beat writers if PR effectively managed the team’s reputation. Sixteen of the beat writers claimed that PR did effectively manage the team’s reputation. Three said they somewhat managed the team’s reputation, while three said they did not manage the team’s reputation effectively. Two were deemed not applicable by the researcher. Respondent 10 said they effectively managed reputation due to their

charity stuff they push, “One of things they do is they want to get out the positives and cut back on the negatives. They always push the soup kitchen visits, so-and-so gave so-and-so some sneakers. They put it in your face; you’ve got to put in your coverage. You wouldn’t let them control the message and put it front and center, but you mention it. That’s part of the things they do and that’s their job to do that. Put that stuff in your face so you have no choice but to at least mention it somewhere.”

Respondent 7 says having their own internal publications helps, “They have their own in house newspaper that comes out weekly during the season. They have their own production group that produces “behind the scenes” stuff, as well as an online daily show. They do try to keep the message on task and to talk about the (team) and the positive things the (team) are doing.”

Several writers also explained that the team’s reputation is based on what happens on the field, like Respondent 17 says, “Winning. That’s just what it is. Plus when they’re winning it’s a better story. If they lose it’s going to be a bad week for me cause the fans are pissed. I’m going to get 1000 entries to my mailbag by Sunday night. If they win, it’s going to be an easy week and I’m only going to get 200 entries. Winning and losing dictates seriously in terms of public relations. Their job is a lot easier when the team is winning and they work really hard, not a lot of money. People’s image of them, is whether they (team) are winning or not. These guys (PR people) bust their ass. Are they winning or losing and I’ll tell whether or not the (team’s) PR staff is doing a good job in managing the team’s image.”

The writers who responded that PR only somewhat effectively handled the team’s reputation believed that they are just following orders, like Respondent 2, “I don’t think

you can put it on the shoulders of the PR department. Everything they do comes from upper management, in the case of the (team), the GM and president (name). It's not really the (team) PR staff that's managing anything. It's really upper management that tells them what to do. In the case of the (team), there is nothing done without permission from above."

Respondent 14 was regarded as "not applicable" because he/she didn't think it was something that can be done, "I think if there are stories out there, there's nothing a PR staff can do. They can throw out their tweets, and their contests, and charities and things like that but I don't think you can turn a bad reputation of a team into a good one or vice versa. I just think PR is liaison between the team and the media and that's just what they got to do and do the best they can. I don't think there's anything they can do to manage it."

For the writers who believed they did not effectively manage the reputation of the team, Respondent 22 talks about how the owner's name defines the team, "They've been to the playoffs 4 times in 6 years and yet he still has a very bad rep around (city) and is an unpopular owner among the fan base. Rightfully so, because of some of the things he's done and the arrogance you see on occasion. The fans pick up on it pretty quickly. The PR staff tries very hard to bend him in a positive light in spite of all those things, almost to the point of shoving it down our throats. To the media's credit we haven't really bought into it and to the fans credit they haven't really bought into it. I think everyone sees this ownership for what it is and presents it that way. I don't think they do because (owner name) still has a very negative image around town."

Two-thirds of the beat writers believed the team they cover effectively managed the team's reputation. As the writers have described throughout, it's a give and take relationship with minor road bumps along the way. No relationship is going to be squeaky clean. But overall, the beat writers felt they did their jobs effectively, but not to the point where media felt restricted to where they couldn't do their job.

Summary

23 of the 24 reporters (95.8 percent) said they had a good working relationship with the PR staff of the team that they cover. The beat writers want access from the public relations department to the team and the public relations department wants their organization to be shown in the best light by the media. For both parties to do their job effectively, a good working relationship is vital.

All 24 beat reporters (100 percent) said they received regular access to coaches and players on a regular basis. 7 reporters (29 percent) specifically said that their access to coaches and players is league mandated, plus any special requests made to PR. 3 reporters (12.5 percent) specifically said that their access to coaches and players was "pretty open."

17 reporters (71 percent) said they relied on PR to provide them with information to complete their stories. This information was more or less supplementary information, such as a statistic or injury update. 7 reporters (29 percent) said they never use PR for information for their stories, or if they do, it is a very rare occasion. When asked what suggestions they would make to public relations to help improve their means of gathering information, they suggested primarily a more "open and relaxed" locker room. After

that, being honest and having little stories and anecdotes about players were things that reporters thought PR could do a better job.

16 of 24 reporters (66.6 percent) believed that players were prepped before interviews. Of those 16, 7 reporters (44 percent) believed it was a good practice. Some said it was vital daily operation for an organization. Others said they understand why they need to do it and that sometimes, giving the players a heads up about what questions are coming, gives them a clear head to answer a question and may actually make for a better quote. 9 reporters (56 percent) believed it was a bad practice, mainly claiming that it denies players to display their honest thoughts and feelings.

All 24 beat reporters were able to describe an actual or hypothetical incident that could damage the team's reputation. It was broken down into three main categories. The first type of incident that was prevalent among the interviews was an isolated, one time incident by one player. The next type of incident was physical altercations as well as players getting in trouble with the law. The third had to do with management decisions like player personnel, ownership reputation, and various disconnects in the line of communications between the organization and the media.

All 24 beat reporters claimed that such incidents would not affect what they write. As part of their jobs, beat writers have little room to speculate. Also, some writers claimed that it doesn't affect what they write, but it makes them dig a little deeper and do some more in-depth reporting, as their skepticism increases.

All 24 beat reporters said they remain objective when writing about the organization. While some said it was difficult, because they take a liking to the players,

most agreed that their integrity is the most important thing they have as a beat writer; that they don't have credibility if they are not objective in their reporting.

16 of the 24 beat reporters (66 percent) said that the PR staff of the team they cover effectively manage the team's reputation. 3 reporters (12.5 percent) say that PR somewhat managed the team's reputation. 3 reporters (12.5 percent) said that the team did not manage the team's reputation effectively and 2 reporters (8 percent) answers were deemed not applicable by the researcher. Those who said the team manages their reputation effectively did so by pushing charity events or whether or not the team wins. Those who claimed "somewhat" is that PR is just following orders from above and they're not totally to blame for the team's reputation. Overall though, it appears a majority of teams have a good reputation among the media who covers them.

Chapter V

Discussion

The researcher analyzed the data against the hypothesis developed before implementation of the study. With respect to hypothesis one, that public relations professionals of professional sports teams ineffectively control the dissemination and flow of information, the data indicated that the researcher should reject the null hypothesis.

Of the 24 beat writers interviewed, 16 (66%) believe that PR effectively manage the team's reputation while only 3 (12.5%) believed that PR did not effectively manage the team's reputation.

All but one writer believed they had a good working relationship with PR. The researcher thought the number of people who did not work well with the PR staff of the team they cover would be a little higher due to some of the PR dustups that can cause some friction between management and media. It appears most media members get along with the public relations representative.

All writers surveyed agreed they had regular access to players and coaches. The researcher was intrigued to see how much access the writers got outside of the league mandated media access. The respondents indicated that most PR representatives were very flexible and accommodating in helping the writers anyway they could to lend a hand to the beat reporters.

A majority of the writers said they did rely on information from PR to complete their stories. They essentially use PR to help fill in the blanks with statistics, injury

updates, etc. When asked what PR could do to improve the way they gather information, the most overwhelming response was to make the locker room atmosphere a little more relaxed and open, which is understandable because all the media wants from players and coaches is their honest opinion and thoughts.

When asking whether or not PR prepped players before interviews, two-thirds of the respondents believed players were prepped. Surprisingly, almost half (of the two-thirds of the respondents) thought it was a good practice. While some of them did not like the practice personally, they understood it and believed it was a good practice. The researcher also learned of two types of prepping. One way of prepping players is to tell them what to say or giving them a general guideline of what they should say to the media. The second way of prepping players is by giving them a heads up of what questions they may be asked or what type of questions may come there way. The media members more universally accept the second way, more so than the first way.

Regarding incidents that may damage a team's reputation, most respondents were able to respond with an actual incident that happened while a select few retorted with a hypothetical situation that could very likely occur. All the writers, however, said that no such incident would alter the way they cover or portray the team in their writing. Respondent 8 summed it up by saying you have no choice but damage control, "If there is a controversial story, what serves their best interest is to not make a 1-day story into a 3 or 4-day story. You can do that by not having a player answer a question, as people will want to talk to the player the next day." By having the organization address the issue as quickly as possible, the damage can be limited and then the reporters will move on.

All reporters said it was vital to remain objective. As beat writers, they have little freedom to speculate and that their credibility is all they have when being judged by their bosses and their readers.

Seeing only the surface of the PR nightmares that are reported in sports everyday by radio, TV, and publications, I now see what more fully goes on daily between a beat reporter and the PR director of the team; that these incidents are the exception to the rule. Respondent 17 said, “I couldn’t do it. These guys bust their ass.” This statement alone is why good working relationships exist between beat writers and PR staffs; they both have a job to do and they both mutually understand and respect the job the other has to do. With all the information gathered, Hypothesis 1 was not supported through research, rather, PR directors of professional sports teams effectively control the information flow to the media.

Future Research

In today’s world, it is necessary to market a brand effectively to maximize profits and reputation has a lot to do with whether or not an organization succeeds. Furthering research on this original study or looking at it from different angles may give a more complete idea of whether or not PR effectively controls the flow of information to team beat writers.

Another researcher may choose to do a census of an entire league. This researcher interviewed 24 different writers amongst four leagues. There are 122 professional sports teams (30 in the National Hockey League, National Basketball Association, and Major League Baseball, while there are 32 in the National Football

League). This researcher has taken a look into less than 25% of the population. Another researcher may choose to interview a writer for every team in the NBA, NHL, NFL, or MLB. This will emit a perspective from every team, in turn giving a picture of how well a certain league controls the flow of information.

Another researcher may want to do is interview the Public Relations Directors of professional sports teams. Much like this researcher did with interviewing beat writers, interview 24 different PR people from around the country amongst the four major professional sports.

Another researcher may explore the college level of athletics. In talking with a beat writer after conducting the interview, he told me a 2nd hand PR horror story at the college level. In talking further, he suggested that doing similar interviews at the college level could be more beneficial than analyzing the professional level of sports.

Conclusions

Despite the PR nightmares that pop up in the sports media world, it is fair to say that the public relations departments do a fairly good job controlling the information flow and keeping the team's image and reputation at a high level. While the situations that go wrong are the ones that are publicized and scrutinized, very few of the good things they do are major news headlines. Those good things are simply considered what they are "supposed to do". One writer summarized PR people in sports, by claiming that they could be doing a great job but that if one negative thing gets out, they can get reamed and reprimanded by management above them. While not all respondents said their team effectively managed its reputation, very few said they did not effectively manage its

reputation. And for the few who said that the team's reputation wasn't managed effectively, some claimed that their bad reputation and image was because the owner has such a bad name around the general area.

From the data, it appears that while most teams do have incidents occur to them that may damage the team's reputation, most of the damage appears to be temporary as to where it doesn't affect the organization long term or it does not affect the way the media portrays the team over a long period of time.

Hypothesis one was not supported because the in-depth interviews conducted via telephone exhibited that 16 out of 24 reporters said they believed that the team they covered effectively managed their reputation.

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Appendix A

In-depth Interview Questions

- 1) In general, how would you describe your working relationship with PR Directors? Please be specific.
- 2) Do PR departments provide you access to players and coaches on a regular basis? Describe specifics.
- 3) Do you rely on Public Relations to provide you with information to complete your story? What specific suggestions would you make to Public Relations to improve your information gathering process?
- 4) In your opinion, do Public Relations Departments prep players before interviews? If so, is this a good practice? Why or why not?
- 5) For the team you cover, define an incident that may damage the team's reputation or an incident that has happened in the past. Can you give an example or two?
- 6) After the incident has been addressed by public relations, how will/did it affect what you write?
- 7) As a reporter, how do you manage remaining objective when writing about the organization?
- 8) In your opinion, do PR departments effectively manage the team's reputation? Please be specific.

Appendix B

Interview Responses

Question 1: In general, how would you describe your working relationship with PR Directors? Please be specific.

Respondent 1: “I don’t get along with the (team) PR guy. I’ve always felt the guy is more of an impediment to my job than a facilitator. To be honest, I haven’t spoken to him in three years because I don’t think he’s going to help me do my job. I think he’s going to interfere. That’s a choice I’ve made and its worked out OK for me. I just need to know what time practice is, what time the players will be available and I can take care of the rest. He was friendly with a reporter from a competing paper. I felt I couldn’t trust him to ask a question so I made the decision that I wasn’t going to ask him questions. I was still friendly with him but then I found out he was bad mouthing me to players and things of that nature, trying to undermine me, so I decided it wasn’t worth my time to talk to him and that’s something I decided about three years ago.”

Respondent 2: “I’d say it’s good, very good. The (team)’s PR situation – you can break it down into two things – personal and professional. They’re greatly different, and I’d say my relationship on both counts is very good.”

Respondent 3: “I think I have a good relationship with (PR director). He’s the main media services person who deals with football. We get along just fine. They have a

corporate PR person, (name). I deal with her a lot less frequently. I would say we have a cordial relationship. I don't speak to her all that often."

Respondent 4: "Excellent I would call it. They're the gateway to everything that happens with the team. They let us know when things are happening and what's going on and help facilitate any interviews we might need. During the season it's not always necessary to do interviews through them. There are other ways to do it. We have locker room access and things like that but during the offseason, they're very helpful. Just the other week, when they drafted the safety from LSU, he was friends with (name) who was already on the team. So I was able to send an email and by that afternoon I was on the phone with (player already on the team) talking about that relationship. The (team) are very professional and very friendly. They understand that a lot of what we do isn't life or death serious stuff and they appreciate that's it not all espionage and things like that. It's a very good relationship."

Respondent 5 – "I think my relationship with them is pretty good. I have a unique perspective. I had known them a little bit when I had done some stuff as an intern and I had met them. When you get to work with them on a daily basis you really get to see how every things works in terms of my interaction with them and how it translates into my interaction with the players and their position as a go between person."

Respondent 6 – “Its pretty cordial. We all get along pretty well. We have our occasional disagreements and I opt to pick my arguments and fights when I need to stand my ground.”

Respondent 7 – “In general, I think its good. Obviously it’s a difficult one because the (team) more than most (pro sport) teams really guard the information, which isn’t necessarily coming from the PR staff. It’s actually a complicated relationship because the PR staff isn’t necessarily the ones who always make the rules that we have to abide by. So they’re kind of the messenger for a lot of the stuff like the ‘yes and the no’. They’re kind of like the messenger for us on what we can and can’t do. Personally I like all of them. Professionally it can get contentious sometimes.”

Respondent 8 – “It’s very good. As a traveling writer, you’re in each other’s company constantly. (Name) is the PR director for the (team). I’ve personally known him for over 10 years. I’ve been on the beat since 2003, when he was the number one assistant to (name), the previous head of the media relations department. The familiarity helps but moreover, they anticipate your needs and it’s a reciprocal relationship. When there are certain things you need outside of the group, if you need the manager for an extra ten minutes or bring a player out that is in an off limits area that you desperately need to talk to since you’re on a deadline, the fact that they understand that you got deadlines and responsibilities to your paper and to get stuff online quickly, it’s a constantly evolving dynamic because there are specific needs for TV, radio, and print and I think they try to

do the best they can because they do have the largest media contingent to have to deal with in (sport).”

Respondent 9 – “It’s very professional. To a large extent, it’s a very collaborative effort. At the same time, there are times when you shouldn’t rely on the PR department and do some digging on your own, which is a big part of the job. I was taught not to get too close to PR departments because we obviously know they have a job to do and we have a job to do. If a journalist gets too cozy with the PR department, you perhaps lose perspective of what’s going on. It’s very cooperative but at the same time, we keep our distance.”

Respondent 10 – “It’s good. When you’re in this position, there are going to be times when you’re on separate sides of an issue or an incident but for the most part I get along with them well. A lot of times they are helpful. There are instances where I feel that maybe they weren’t very forthcoming. It’s almost to be expected nowadays, so I get past it. For the most part I have a fine working relationship with the PR staff of the (team).”

Respondent 11 – “I think we have a great relationship. They are known as one of the better PR staffs in the league. As far as they can, they generally give you as much as help as they can, so I don’t really don’t have many complaints with what the (team) do with their beat writers.”

Respondent 12 – “I think it’s a good working relationship. That takes two willing parties to make it that way and I think we have that. So that’s a good thing. I think honesty is a

big reason that it is a good working relationship. If everyone understands where each party is coming from, I think there's a better chance that there will be an understanding. It also requires a track record of the reporter being responsible and fair. If you establish that over time, if you're working with a PR staff that is fair, then I think that will certainly bode well for you in the long run. It doesn't necessarily mean they are going to give you scoops, doesn't mean anything from that perspective but what it does mean is that they will more often than not give you the benefit of the doubt, in terms of what your objective is and generally the objective is to be fair and to get the truth and do a good job with integrity. If you can establish that, that's one less hurdle that you have to overcome, which is establishing all those things in the first place. If you don't have those things established, you're viewed sometimes in a totally different light and that complicates the relationship."

Respondent 13 – "We talk almost everyday during the season. Mostly they facilitate access that I request. But sometimes it's letting me know practice will be at that time, that kind of thing. But we talk everyday about those kinds of needs. They definitely try to make things easier. There are certain logistics; work room, where I sit during the game, things like that are their responsibility, the people who answer them on game nights who do security for the locker room, things like that, Internet access, the things that you come across in an arena, when there's a problem, they're the people but by in large, the emphasis is on access."

Respondent 14 – “It’s very good. The (team) probably have one of the best PR staffs in the (sport). They totally get what we need. They don’t interfere with us. They understand that we are basically giving them free advertising in the paper everyday. This is one town where obviously the (team) are huge here and they understand our role as far as helping them out.”

Respondent 15 – “My relationship is excellent. I’ve been covering them for a long time. At this point in my career it’s built on complete respect and trust and a very strong familiarity with each other. In the early stages of my relationship, it was equally professional if not as intimate as it is now. The (team) PR staff is exactly what they’re supposed to be – they’re the conduit between media and the players. I’m at the point in my career where I don’t need much PR help. When there are crunch moments even at this stage in my career, the (team) PR staff almost always delivers in those difficult moments.”

Respondent 16 – “Very good...I get along with everyone fine. They understand what I’m trying to do and they are helpful.”

Respondent 17 – “Excellent. Not that it’s always perfect or we always agree. In relation to other teams, they’re near the top of the league. There’s one paper, a second small paper. There’s not regular Radio/TV coverage. I’m the only guy around. We have a good back and forth because they are not inundated. They’re one of the best. They’re PR people... sometimes their job is to hide things. That’s their directive. Covering

(sport), they would prefer if there were no media at all. That's who the PR people's bosses are. Sometimes they do try and mess with me or keep me from something. By in large, it's not like some of the other teams in the (sport)."

Respondent 18 – "I'd say good. It's a little bit of a delicate balance. The PR director that we have now is fairly new to the job. It's just his 2nd year, so it took a year to kind of feel things out. It's a very professional relationship. There's some disagreements. There's some challenges in terms of access, but there's been no major blowups, no major dustups. I would say overall it's a good relationship."

Respondent 19 – "It's pretty good. In (sport) it's a little bit different from the other major sports in that it's an everyday thing. There are games played everyday so we're seeing these people at home games, on the road and everything. You develop a pretty good repore. It's professional, but it's good-natured. We get along pretty well. You can have a conversation with them about non-baseball stuff. They enjoy talking baseball. So from that standpoint, it's a very workable relationship I would say."

Respondent 20 – "It's very good. It's very professional. They give me a lot of input, which I appreciate as far as 'when do you think would be a good time to have a press conference, Do you think we need to have media availability today for practice?' stuff like that. I would describe our relationship as very open. I don't try to hide anything from them as far as stuff I'm working on. I'm pretty open about, 'hey I'm looking into

this or hey I know this and I'm going to publish it.' Just so they don't get blindsided. It's a very good relationship I would say."

Respondent 21 – "I think it's a really good working relationship because the PR folks there really have an understanding of what we're doing and we have an understanding of what they're doing. You only usually run into trouble when people don't really have a background with media. They're very good about knowing what you need to do, knowing how to try and help you and get you the information you need. Everybody works with them and we knew what they are trying to do also, so it's a good working relationship."

Respondent 22: "It's kind of two fold. Basically I have a close friendship with everybody on the staff because I've been covering the team for so long. We have a social relationship away from work and even at work. It's more of a firm social relationship more of the time than it is a working relationship. When it is a working relationship, it is different though. Sometimes we have competing interests. My goal is to get the story. The (team) are a pretty corporate organization and they're pretty guarded with certain info. There are times when it's their job to prevent me from doing my job. We all know that going in. There have been times when we've butted heads, especially with their main guy, who's probably one of my best friends in the entire world. He's the one guy I've probably butted heads with the most too, because sometimes we have competing interests."

Respondent 23: “My relationship is good because one main reason for it, their PR director used to be the beat writer for both the Enquirer and the Post about 20-25 years ago. Having a former beat writer as the PR director is extremely beneficial because he knows all the different things we have to go through as far as trying to get information. He walks a delicate line sometimes to as far as what he can give because he’s a PR guy. I think for the most part the access and the availability and fielding requests and everything is better than most teams I would say.”

Respondent 24: “It’s a love-hate relationship, for sure. In some cases, media-relations folks can make your life easier. They can facilitate things that help you in terms of getting interviews and so forth. But let’s face it, their job no longer is to service the media, as it used to be years ago. It’s to protect the interests of whatever company they work for. And often, that means making sure reporters don’t find out about stuff that’s detrimental to the company. A good media-relations director knows how and when to drop nuggets of information to at least give the illusion that the reporter is getting “inside tips.” But mostly, that doesn’t happen anymore. It’s up to reporters to find other people in the organization, that know more than the PR folks anyway, to be their go-to insiders.”

Question 2: Do PR departments provide you access to players and coaches on a regular basis? Describe specifics.

Respondent 1: “They kind of follow (sport) policy, where after practice the players are supposed to be available for 15-30 minutes. On game days they are available 45 minutes before the game. That’s (sport) policy. It’s a little bit harder at home. In their locker room, there are more places to hide like in the trainer’s room. When they’re on the road, the locker room isn’t as big and they’re sometimes more available than they might be at home.”

Respondent 2: “They do. Usually beat writers get as many cell phone and home numbers for players so a lot of times you don’t have to go through the PR department. On game days there are morning skates where there is access to the players that are participating. Then there’s a league rule that you have to have access to players up to 90 minutes prior to a game. You can request players in the dressing room to come out. It used to be that we had access to dressing rooms. Slowly, that’s stopped around the league and now you request whatever players you want to come out.”

Respondent 3: “During the season, its kind of by day. Monday, (coach name) will speak at noon and usually there is no other player access that day. If you request one of the coordinators, you might be able to talk to him depending on his schedule. Tuesday is usually a day off for everybody. Wednesday, there’s an (coach name) news conference looking ahead to the next game. The quarterback normally has his news conference on

Wednesday. Often, another player, a defensive player, or someone like that. There's open locker room before and after practice. That doesn't mean every player is there, there often in treatments rooms or in meetings or thing like that. It can be tricky to track some of them down. Some of them don't really enjoy talking to us. Others are there everyday and always available. There are fewer than a dozen players who spend a lot of time in the locker room when the media is there. Thursday is a lot like Wednesday, except both coordinators talk. They have press conferences. Then you have practice access. You can actually watch practice on Thursday and Friday and talk to players afterwards. (coach name) talks again on Friday updating the week and injuries and then there's nothing until Sunday when they have the game."

Respondent 4: "Yes, when requested. Obviously, not everybody is accommodating. As long as you make a realistic demand, then they'll meet it. They're very helpfully during the season. The players are obligated to be in the locker room and to speak several times a week to the media. If they're not there, then we come down on the PR staff. Then it's up to the PR staff to get those players out into the locker room and get them to talk to us."

Respondent 5: "Yes, you can request players through them. They're always willing to find the player you're looking for. If that player is getting dressed or getting medical treatment, they'll make sure that player is available to you when they come out. And with the coach, the PR staff is always willing to make sure he's available at a time that's convenient for us and works with our schedule in terms of when we're meeting with players. For instance, the PR staff will never bring out the coach, while even one of us is

in the middle of a conversation with a player. They always make sure that were always able to get everything we need.”

Respondent 6: “Yes, the (sport) mandates that players are available and accessible to us a certain time, so many days a week and for the most part they are very cooperative that way. They can’t guarantee you’re going to get any one player in the locker room, which is where we get football players. If you have somebody that you really need to talk to, you generally have to set it up a day ahead of time. They have a rule that says if you want to talk to an assistant coach, you have to let them know a day ahead of time and let them know what your are going to ask.”

Respondent 7: “The players, yes. The coaches, not very often. There are (sport) rules in place that we are supposed to have access to the coordinators, especially once week and we’re also supposed to have assistant coaches as requested. However, that doesn’t always happen. You can make the request, and sometimes it will come back to you that (coach) has said that the assistant coach can do the interview but the assistant coach himself does not want to do the interview and often times the assistant coach will just say no because they’re really told what they can and cannot say. You kind of incur (coach’s) wrath if you say something that he doesn’t want you to say. So rather than put yourself in that position, then sometimes they will say no.”

Respondent 8: “By virtue of being a member of the (sport) Writers Association, the access you have is granted through that. The clubhouse opens 3 ½ hours before each

game. When you're getting players, or coaches, or a manager, these are largely things you do on your own. The things they organize...the manager usually speaks at a certain time before the game. That's usually a function of the PR department, setting up that time. For the reason of just organizing the day better and helping you do your job, at least you'll know a specific time you're going to get the manager and the information you need to kick start your day. The reporting you do in the clubhouse with the players, that's a function of your own. The only time you need their help is if a player you're looking for that you can't find or is in off limits area and you desperately need to talk to, they can help facilitate that. If there are any special requests, if you need the manager an extra 10 minutes after the group session or something long those lines. You need to sit down with someone for an extended period; they can help you facilitate that. The other things are largely a function of your own reporting."

Respondent 9: "Yes, absolutely. The (team) aren't in as much pressure from the media as other teams, especially east coast teams. The access is a little more relaxed, more open. Usually you can grab a player anytime you want. They have a scheduled time for the manager to speak to the media before and after the game. You also develop through personal connections and trust, your own ways of communicating with players if you don't have access to them right away, such as having their cell phone numbers or their email addresses."

Respondent 10: "You would always like more. For instance, with the (team), I never got to see one practice this year. I don't know who's doing that, whether it's the PR staff or

the folks above them. A lot of times even the coach might set up those types of policies and the PR staffs just enforce them. But as far as the players, you see them almost everyday. You walk into an open locker room for game days. After practices you walk into their practice facility, and you can basically walk to any player and talk to them if you want to. It's the player's decision if they want to be interviewed that day or not. Usually the players are pretty polite. When they have somewhere to go or are in a hurry, they'll say, 'Look I'll catch you later' or something like that. But yes, you have access to the players and coaches. You talk to the coach all the time, literally all the time."

Respondent 11: "They provide access as laid out within the rules of the CBA. We are supposed to get into a locker room five minutes after a game and five minutes after practice and we are supposed to have at least a half hour available to us with any players that we want. I can think of one, maybe two times where that hasn't happened, and generally it's been because of player meeting issues. They do exactly what they need to as described in the Collective Bargaining Agreement."

Respondent 12: "Yes I would say so. In the (sport), there's some mandated availabilities that has to be done. Beyond that, we do have some opportunities that go above and beyond what's required. They've done a good job of facilitating one on one interviews when possible, not all the time, but when possible or in the interest of the team. But that's not something we're guaranteed. They do a pretty good job arranging such interviews, so that's a good thing. They'll generally consider any special request you make in terms of interviews, availabilities, photographs or things of that nature.

Nothing's automatic, but I think you do get a fair shake in terms of them giving it consideration. They clearly have to say no sometimes, but you probably get more consideration in that respect than we would from other (sport) teams."

Respondent 13: "Yes...most of it is by (sport) rule. You try to do as much as you can as far as customary availability time. There are times when I need things beyond that where I just want things. For instance, I have some stories that either I'm planning ahead and therefore won't be running immediately or to use any day when there is no practice or availability. Therefore, I don't want the interviews I might be doing to also be available to other media. I ask to set something up separate from the availability and from the group so that I can keep it for a later date and they help with that too."

Respondent 14: "Yes, its really unbelievable here. Even though this is a (sport) hot bed, this is not a huge media town. They are able to really supply us access like you can't get in any other big city. The one thing that we did really well is personality pieces on players at (name of paper). If I need to sit down with a player, whether it's (name of player) or (name of player), we can get them out of the rink. I've done stories from their homes or gone to lunch with a player. They set all that up if we need it, mostly during training camp or after the season. The (sport) is better than any sport in an access point of view. They totally get it that this is a media driven sport, that they need us. There's very few players that you can't get on the phone within 24 hours for any team in the league. That's just the way the (sport) seems to be compared to every other sport out there. As far as access it's the best I've ever seen, they don't hide anything from us.

They don't hide players from us, anything we need, whether it's calling players up on the phone, calling the general manager on the phone, calling the coach on the phone, getting players before and after games, they give it to us. It's one big reason why they get such a plethora of press in this town. We don't pull any punches but when it comes to getting us players and what we need they're right on board with us."

Respondent 15: "Yes, the nice thing about them is that it is a very professional organization. It's really sink or swim. They provide need when you need it but they allow you a lot of freedom to cultivate your own relationships, which as a reporter is the way I prefer and I like it. I think they create a platform for me to develop my own relationships with players, coaches, and team executives. If there are some difficult moments, they typically steer you with the right navigation at those times."

Respondent 16: "In (sport) it's different than some of the other sports. The clubhouse is open from 3:30 to within an hour of game time everyday. You're pretty much free to approach anyone you want. Most guys in (sport) will give you their cell phone numbers, so it's not difficult to get a hold of people. There are sometimes I can't, when they are very helpful. On deadline after a game, I won't be able to find a player I'm looking for and they'll go and try and see if they can get him. There are some places where the media doesn't have access to. They've helped out a lot in the way."

Respondent 17: "They're one of the best in the league for that. I know some of that is the product of the small market. If there were ten of us, it would be different. There's

one or two or three of us on a daily basis during the season. When I hear horror stories from beat writers around the league, I always just have to say, 'Hey guys, I'm not going to include the (team) in this.' The PFWA want to complain or whatever, I just say, 'Hey, I feel you, and I support you but look that doesn't happen to me.' It's not perfect all the time, but I accept that as them doing their job. If you talk to another guy here who covers the (team) for the AP, his relationship is somewhat different. He would have some legitimate gripes because he's a (expletive). And the (team) have punished him. Then he would have some gripes that he doesn't really have anything to complain about. If you want something to complain about go to Oakland, New York, or Philadelphia. Not so much New York or Philadelphia, they have their strengths, but Oakland is the worst there will ever be. I do know that a lot of other teams writers have completely different stories than I do. This guy who hates the (team) and thinks their PR department is the worst in the league, it just makes me laugh because he's never been anywhere else."

Respondent 18: "Yes and no...the players are generally available during the open locker room sessions. If we are having trouble getting a guy, they'll kind of help beat the bushes and make sure the guy comes out from the training room or wherever he is, so when we can get a crack at him. The coaching policy has changed over the past couple years. It used to be that we could get the assistants upon request. Now they are basically off limits. Only in special circumstances can we talk to say the linebackers coach or the offensive line coach. The coordinators we get once a week during scheduled press conferences but beyond that, you can't just get them on a day-to-day basis."

Respondent 19: “Yea they do. The clubhouse has to be open for reporters 3 ½ hours before first pitch. It closes during BP. Then it reopens again until an hour before 1st pitch. So they kind of have to have the clubhouse open as long as players are around or in the area where we are allowed, we can talk to them. So yes, they do allow access. After games if guys are in the shower or something or we’re on deadline and we really need them, it’s the PR staff’s jobs to try and rustle them up for us and make sure we can talk to them. I try to gather numbers on my own. The PR staff for the A’s as a general policy don’t give out players personal phone numbers. If we are able to track them down on our own it’s not like they try to stop us from calling them.”

Respondent 20: “Yea, but if I’m doing my job right I don’t need them to do that. I have the phone numbers for all the players and coaches. Obviously we have the required media access after practice everyday. About the only people I have to go through them, is to get the owner or the team president who doesn’t release his cell phone. They are the only people who I have to go to through the PR staff to get an interview.”

Respondent 21: “They do. They do a very good job with that. We usually have access to players after every practice and also after morning skates on days of games we can talk to them. If for some reason you can’t find a player, they’ll try and run them down for you. Players in general, especially with (sport) as opposed to some of the other sports, are very media friendly. PR is certainly there to help with anything you need as far as tracking them down.”

Respondent 22: “(Sport) mandates that. The clubhouse is open to the media 3 ½ hours prior to game time. Up until 1 hour prior to game time. That whole 2 ½ isn’t open, because they’re on the field for BP. Sometimes they’ll close the clubhouse for a team meeting. Other times they’ll break off into private rooms for team meetings, so even though we’re allowed in there, there’s really no one in there for us to talk to. In reality, we get about an hour of access before the game. On the road it’s 1 solid hour and at home it’s split into 30 minutes before and after BP.”

Respondent 23: “Yes. I’m lucky here in the fact that I can get my assistants and coordinators generally almost anytime that I need them. The assistants are very open to what they are able to provide me at times.”

Respondent 24: “Many (sport) teams don’t provide this basic service as well as they should. I’m fortunate in that I work with an organization that has players, coaches and executives who understand that I have a job to do. Access to key personnel is not a problem. But part of this is because the reporter does a good job of getting cell-phone numbers or other contacts for key people.”

Question 3. Do you rely on Public Relations to provide you with information to complete your story? What specific suggestions would you make to Public Relations to improve your information gathering process?

Respondent 1: “I’m not really writing off of a press release. You kind of know the subject matter pretty well and you don’t need them. Now if there’s an injury and they’re going to give you an update, then they’re obviously helping you with the story so to speak. When it comes to asking them for ideas, there are some reporters who sometimes seek the help of the PR people. I usually don’t do that. I’ve been covering it for so long. Maybe that’s a fault of mine, maybe I should once in a while. It’s not just one PR person. There’s about four or five of them with the (team). Maybe I should ask them for maybe a story idea or something of that nature. With the (team) it’s a little bit different, for the beat writers we know what we are going to write on a daily basis. One of the writers might say, ‘I need to talk to (player), can you make sure he waits here?’ They’ll help in that nature but not necessarily with actual information where you look at and say, ‘Wow, I didn’t know that.’ It’s infrequent, it does happen, but it’s infrequent.”

“Things have to be a lot more in a specific storyline. When it comes to players, you’re looking for interesting tidbits or anecdotes about players. Things maybe you wouldn’t know. Maybe if they are playing a certain team, and you know that the player has some type of relationship with somebody else on the team or the coaching staff. There’s always tidbits that could really help writers make their stories more interesting. We are covering people for a living. The people that read these stories, they want to read

interesting stories about people. To me, it's not always the stats and thing like that.

There's obviously a place for that. Just more interesting tidbits about players. Something from their background, their family ...that would kind of spice up the story a little bit."

Respondent 2: "Very rarely. As a matter of fact, less than ever before. The league itself has really taken a step backwards in that every team used to print a media guide with all types of information. PR directors used to be available, for example after a goaltender gets a shutout, they'd be there to provide information the last time he had a shutout, this is career shutout whatever. That really doesn't happen anymore. PR directors are really not involved in that so much. As far as the guides from around the league, most teams have stopped printing them. They've handed out a DVD to the beat writers with all the information that was in the guide and league record book. Most traveling writers find that it's too slow. When you want to look something up, you need to quickly and it's too slow to pop a DVD into your laptop. The league itself and teams have taken a major step backwards as far as helping writers to write stories."

"I'd like to go back to having media guides printed. There are a few teams where it's almost a joke. They've cut down their pregame notes down to a few pages, and for player biographies it says, 'See page 83 on this player'. We don't have a page 83 for that player. There is no page 83. We've gotten to the point where it's almost laughable. I'd like to see it go back to printing more substantial notes and media guides."

Respondent 3: “Sure. Lets say they drafted (player) and I need to talk to (player 2) who went to Michigan before him, they would have to set that up with (player 2) for me in most cases. I’d be dependent upon them for that. If I’m covering practice, I might not need them too much. They facilitate all the news conferences and availabilities. They decide when the locker room is open. So I’m certainly using their services in almost every story that I do. They might not need to do anything explicitly to help me on some days. But I’m certainly working within their parameters all the time”.

“I wish the league and the (team) were a little less uptight about things and you could interact more casually with coaches and players. Speak to people in a hallway or coming off the field or if you had a question, give them a call.... that’s kind of discouraged. The access is very formalized in the (sport), very much unlike the (sport) which I used to cover. I would rather have more spontaneous off the cuff access, which tends to make things a little less adversarial.”

Respondent 4: “PR is the spokesperson for the team. If it’s something that the (team) need to express how they feel about a certain situation, the team spokesman is a great way to go. Things like the new stadium, the schedule, or just to get a feel where the team is at in terms of different situations, they are obviously very helpful. During games and during the week, you’re not looking for that overview point of view from the team, so that’s not as common in those situations.”

“I understand it’s a compromise, but I’d like to see the players more available and in particular I’d like to see the coaches more available, the assistant coaches,. We get to speak to the position coaches about three or four times a year. These are the ones that are in the trenches with these guys all the time. They’re very knowledgeable and it would help us even if it was off the record stuff to be able to talk to these position coaches to get an idea of what’s going on and what the goals are of each position; who’s meeting them and who’s not and to be able to write smarter stories that are more accurate and more intelligent than we do, even though I think they’re accurate and intelligent to begin with.”

Respondent 5: “Of course. Sometimes they’re the “go” between us as the reporters and the upper management in terms of releasing info about injuries. They do different game notes, releases, and statistical releases that they are always willing to pass on. If they find an obscure stat, they’ll send it. Something like that that may help our stories. In terms of comparing them to other staffs around the league, they are always willing to go the extra mile. For instance, a lot of us have to file stories with running copy for early deadline. The (team’s) PR staff will have a person in position as the players come off the ice, they’ll have that player talk for 2 or 3 quotes, they’ll quickly transcribe it, and send it up to us in e-mail. Little things like that go a long way in allowing us to our jobs and do it well.”

“In terms of my relationship wit the (team), they’re really good. If there’s a player that had a bad game, a lot of times with other teams the PR person won’t hound the player and they’ll say that person isn’t available. With the (team), they can’t force them to come

out but they do a really good job of asking a player to come out in a situation that's tough. They never shy from anything like that."

Respondent 6: "Certain information, yes; specific info such as statistical stuff, anything that is fairly well known or something in the records. Injury information is extremely sensitive and no one will divulge that unless it comes from the coach."

"I've been doing this since 1979, and it's changed dramatically since that time. There are always restrictions on player's availabilities, but back when I started with the (team), they would give you the players home phone numbers incase you really needed to get them. That's obviously no longer the case. What I've found is that the more stakes rise on the field, the more the team attempts to control flow of info off the field. Because of the 24-hour cycle of news, there is always news coming out. But your access to respond to that news is a little bit more limited than it used to be. If I had one recommendation or request, it would be to go back to the old days which is impossible of course."

Respondent 7: "Basic information yes, but no more than that. A lot of times just basic facts, when it pertains to a player, if they signed a player, they will provide a press release. Often times they will provide the player himself via conference call. If it's during the season, we'll have a chance talk to him during the season. They are really not at all forthcoming with information."

“It’s hard because this is the only team I know. I know the rules and standards. Its really (coach), he does not want any info to get out. He’d really rather that the media were not there at all. On my end, a lot of things would have to change with this particular team in terms of being a little more relaxed with letting players show their personality without them worrying about repercussion, being able to talk to the coaching staff without them worrying about repercussion. They’re grown men. I’m not going to ask them to hand me the playbook for that week. Having it be so difficult to do regular day to day things and always seeming like most of the players are reading from the same script, makes things very difficult.”

Respondent 8: “They put out a daily note sheet. All 30 clubs provide every reporter with several pages of notes with the latest info; statistics provided by (sport) through the Elias Sports Bureau which every PR department prints out, lineups, that’s just a normal function everyday. The (team) give their beat writers a minor league pack everyday, that has stats of minor league players in their system so you can follow them. That’s very helpful. Today they called up (player) from Scranton, and the minor league stat pack has what he’s done, the box scores, so it’s very helpful when you want to keep track of these guys cause some of these guys will be up and a lot of the guys you saw in spring training who were sent down to A, AA, or AAA you can follow them pretty closely without having to go online and hunt through them, because the stats are right there. So that’s a very helpful thing they do.”

“We do that a lot. They’re much more receptive lately, the last few years in anticipating your needs and wanting to make it convenient for all parties. Spring training, usually the manager meets with us before road games at the site where we are going. We suggested it was easier for group to get him before we left. We made that suggestion to the PR department and they come through for us. You’re constantly working with them on little things like that, that just logistically sort out your day a little better.”

Respondent 9: “The thing about PR is they can be a great help when it comes out to finding stats, coming up with good nuggets of info, but if we’re talking about stories – not really. What you see is what you’re going to write and that’s what you’re there for. You’re supposed to be the eyes and the ears of the reader and put everything into context. I think that the product that the PR department puts out is meant to be an aid but its not meant to dictate or help you complete a story. When they give you a stat, that’s helpful because some fans may find that interesting but no, I try not to seek too much help from them to do stories, because I rely mostly on what I see, whom I talk to, and what’s going on.”

“I come from covering soccer where the PR is not as developed professionally as what you see in major sports. Overall they do a pretty good job of what they have to do.”

Respondent 10: “Oh yes definitely. When I saw my email this morning, the (team) sent out a PR release that (player) had successful ankle surgery this morning. They provide

injury updates, fill in details on stuff that goes on, that kind of stuff. Typically they are helpful.”

“Be truthful. I understand that they are gatekeepers and they don’t want everything out there, but if a media outlet catches hold of something and they ask PR, be truthful and don’t lie. Either say no comment or tell the truth. That’s the main thing I would say. 80 percent of the time, I find the PR staff helpful. Most of my peers consider it the best PR staff in the league. They were nominated among five staffs for best in the league. When you’re doing the stuff we do, they will work in your interest. Back in the early part of the season, (player) suffered a mysterious injury because it didn’t happen in a game. They kept saying it was day to day but he missed 26 games. A week in, I was able to find out he had a ruptured disc. When I find out, I go to PR. They say, “I hadn’t heard that. Got to check with doctors and we’ll get back to you.” I didn’t have it solid enough, where I would put it in the paper. The very next day at practice, the (team) release press release that he has a ruptured disc. I asked about it on a Friday, I come to find out a few days later that the whole organization knew days before Friday, so I was lied to. They hadn’t checked with the doctors yet, but I thought I should have been done the courtesy because I was the only media member there. I talked that up about what to do in the future with information like that. Another time, a source told me the (team) had hired (company) to look over books and assess value of the team. I asked someone in PR. they told me, ‘No, that’s not true. We’re looking into it, but they are among several brokered firms that may be doing it, so you’re off base there.’ From my bad experience with the back injury, I don’t trust these guys. So after a couple days, I finally got to someone I could ask that

would know. Asked them, ‘Oh yes. We hired (company) about a week ago, I thought they were going to put out a press release out on this.’ So instead of going to PR, I went ahead wrote the story, put it up on the website, then called the PR staff. I got back to the PR guy and he says, ‘At least you didn’t hear it from me.’ Then he fills in all the blanks. The other paper in town wrote a story saying mine was wrong and went on to say the exact same thing that I was told, that they were looking at other firms. And I know exactly where he got that from, the (team) PR staff. That stuff though, is just two incidents, most of the time they are fine. They’re very helpful in telling me stuff that no one else knew. It’s a tricky relationship. When they get into stuff that they think is sensitive, they can get a little squirrely. But a lot of times, they’ve been very helpful to me. I would never want to be listed as slamming them, because I like those folks. But you always got to remember who they are and who they work for.”

Respondent 11: “As far as stats or maybe some details of a contract or something that happened in the past, but generally you only use the PR staff to fill in those blanks and save yourself a few minutes of research. But as far as getting or doing a story, the nuts and bolts of that they’re not involved.”

“They wouldn’t really help me. If I’m asking them for info, it’s stats or what’s the name of a player’s kid or something like that. The PR guys really don’t get involved with the writing of the stories per say. That really is myself and the subject of the story. The PR guys are great with what they do but they’re more there to fill in the blanks. There’s not much I would recommend except to be available to us when we do have a question. Even

ideas are few and far between, it's not a collaborative effort. I'm doing my job and maybe I need some background stuff that they can gather easily, and that's when they come into play."

Respondent 12: "I would say it's supplemental information. As a reporter, you're taught to rely on no one but yourself. You can use a number of resources – articles, media guides, or just common knowledge. Generally when you're talking about specific facts you generally want to rely on what you've learned through your reporting. There are times when you can't do that. If there's something that's announced through the PR staff, then that's generally going to be the basis for your story. In that respect, a personnel move or a trade. At that point, what you hope to do is an even more complete story through your own reporting, talking to people and drawing upon your own resources and sources. But yes, you rely on PR for info in a supplemental capacity, but not primary"

"One thing is to judge every member of the media in their own right. If a particular reporter is asking for some type of access or interview, that you aren't necessarily inclined to bring it. I think the first thing you have to do is take a look at that person and their track record of doing right by your organization and an honest job. Then you have a pretty good understanding of what the aim is of the story. That should be something considered in making the decision. If it's someone you have past experience with as part of your core media, and they typically try and do right by you, then I think you should give that more thought than maybe somebody who you can't say those things about.

More info is better than less; you get more of a picture. When there's holes in the information, assumptions start to be made and they don't go your way. In the course of writing, you subconsciously assume things due to a lack of complete information. So the more the better, it will help give a more complete story which will often work in the organization's favor. But that's kind of a specific thing for me. Its one thing I would like to see all staffs do on a regular basis. Don't dismiss something out of hand because you don't normally do that. Judge things on a case by case basis, when possible."

Respondent 13: "At home games, they're very good with looking up data, records, or trends. They're one of the best in the league in providing that kind of thing. It really doesn't help very much, but it's good for relationship. 'What's the most assists they've had in a game since November 14th? That's a season high for points in the 2nd quarter.' They're good about doing it both ways. 'That's the fewest assists they've had in a game all season.' That information saves me the time it takes to do the data research on deadline and at the same time is very helpful. Sometimes it's stuff I might not have got, probably wouldn't have. They're good at that, not every team is the same – some are very good and some don't even do both and they're very good at it."

"The league rules on where we sit in the media have changed in recent years. Our seats are nowhere near as good and the game coverage is not the same many nights as it could be with better vantage points. That's an on going struggle throughout the league. Even though when I ask, I get it. The more I could do away from the pack of media, the better. I like to be able to do my own work."

Respondent 14: “Only from a statistical point of view. That’s the other thing. If they are on a losing streak or there’s bad stuff going on or players are in a slump, they gave us that information pretty much solicited. They do a great job getting us stats midgame. We’re in a market here where every story needs to be filed the second the game is over and they do an incredible job of just getting us information during the game. So that’s the only time I rely on them for stats, it’s usually only on game nights and it’s when they give us cool little tidbits about what’s going on in the game, whether it’s positive or negative. As far as off day stories or if I’m working on a negative or breaking story, I pretty much do all my own research and interviews.”

“No, I don’t know if the (team) are just kind of anomaly out there. From a (team) point of view, they do a tremendous job. I would say they are probably better than most out there. From a league point of view, that’s an important thing to understand that generally all beat writers now are on unbelievable deadlines during the game because the intensity of getting newspapers printed and on doorsteps very early in the morning. We’re always on deadline. Most beat writers have to file their stories when the game’s over. I do think that some PR staffs can do a much better job of getting us information on a timely basis on the night of a game.”

Respondent 15: “Probably not on a daily basis anymore. I’ve been covering them off and on for 14 years so at this point I’m fairly self-sufficient. If there’s something I need or I’m on deadline and there’s a crunch moment, I can basically lean on them or rely on

them and they'll come through with info that I need or access that I need or direction that I need. The main PR guy for them, is a guy I can pull aside if there's something big or troubling perplexing me and run it past him and give me good off the record direction as to how to handle it."

"The (league) is not a unique animal, but it's an intensive beat. I know all the PR staffs. The best staffs provide you with statistical info on deadline throughout the pace of the game. I think that's a very neat and distinguished element from certain staffs. I personally find that very helpful."

Respondent 16: "In (sport), they put out 4 pages of legal pad sized notes a day, 8 all together. The one thing they've done this year, they make them available online. The (team) in particular, they do pretty good with providing you statistical things and streaks. They just had a situation where they pitched two complete game shutouts in a row. The (team) were very good about getting the access to where that stood historically and the last time it happened and that kind of thing. I think they rely on Elias Sports Bureau for that. They're very quick to try to get those things and provide them to us.

"I think the (team) have a really good PR staff. I don't have any major complaints. Nothing really comes to mind. The one thing with covering (sport) is that it's very media business now. We're doing blogs, twitter, and this kind of thing. I think urgency is just really paramount and the (team) understand that pretty well."

Respondent 17: “Very little. They’re very helpful when I need them. I’ve got a good relationship with those guys. I’ve been on the beat for 6 years. I’ve got phone numbers. I know their agents. I have relationships with players. I’ve more often than not set up my own stuff, which sometimes rubs PR the wrong way but we got a good relationship and that’s just how it is. I very rarely rely on the PR staff.”

“Just to remember that, while I respect their need for secrecy on some stuff, why it is that their players, their coaches, and to an extent, even them are paid so much. I think PR people in the (league) are probably the most underpaid in the league. There’s a reason everybody is famous and makes a lot of money and we had a lot to do with it. When I do need to approve something with PR for a story I say, ‘Fight your instinct to say no, hear me out, sleep on it and let’s talk tomorrow.’ I know their first instinct is going to be to say no. I got a call from the GM last week and it was pretty funny and a little bit of a story. The PR guy was pissed. I said to him, ‘You’re job would be a lot easier if no one ever talked to me.’ Every PR guy’s job is to put out fires. We are a little counter to each other; I give him headaches. For the PR people, (expletive) runs down hill. If a player or coach says something or information gets out and PR didn’t have anything to do with it, who do you think the owner, the GM or the head coach gets mad at? They’re mad at PR. ‘How did this happen, why didn’t you control this?’ That’s why I respect their PR guy and what he’s instilled in his staff for the most part. I don’t know. If I was him and if I was getting yelled at, I might shut things off a little more.”

Respondent 18: “Yes...in that they produce a weekly game release with lots of stats, facts, figures, and historically tidbits. They’re very useful and I use them all the time.”

“The (league) monitors a lot closer in terms of access and interviews. Sometimes they have a PR person to stand guard during interviews. Maybe not a 1 on 1, but certainly a group interview when its 4 or 5 guys surrounding the same guy. The PR person will monitor the interview and if it goes off course and it gets into controversial territory they’ll say, ‘OK guys, he’s gotta go to meetings.’ It’s clearly a bluff to get the interview over with. I think they should trust their guys enough to let them talk and answer the questions. It’s very frustrating when you have someone monitoring and babysitting an interview.”

Respondent 19: “Very much so. Everyday they have a pretty extensive list of game notes. Its stats for every player, team, trends. Everyday I flip through those a little bit. They’re definitely helpful especially filling in little gaps when you’re writing your story at night after a game so I rely on those a lot. A few times, there’ll be some mistakes in there, not often. The (team) are pretty good. They’re pretty thorough. But every now and then, there’ll be some inaccuracies and a writer will point them out or I’ll point them out to somebody. Sometimes we’ll find out about it the next day after we’ve reported something inaccurate and then you have to go back. Sometimes you have to double check the facts on your own, go to a website or something and make sure something’s right but in general, they provide a lot of information and 90 percent of the time it’s very accurate.”

“In general, try to remember there a middle man to try and help us connect to these athletes. They’re supposed to help us get in touch. Some PR people will act as if they’re a barrier or another line of defense with the organization. Sometimes they’re tied a little bit too closely to the organization. They feel like they need to protect people from being accessible to the media. As long as they understand what we’re trying to do and that it’s best to help us complete our stories. Whatever they can do to help that, that’s the best way to go about the business and I think most of them realize that.”

Respondent 20: “Usually only stats are the thing that I lean on them for, particularly if it involves archives. I call their historian a lot and have him look back at a play-by-play for a game in 1972 or something like that. They have access to the Elias Sports Bureau, which our newspaper doesn’t. It’s a paid service. So I’ll call them and have them run a question by Elias like, ‘When was the last time a (team name) had 30 points and 15 rebounds in a game?’ They’ll do that for me and give me that stat. So mainly stats stuff, I lean on them.”

“I would say mainly to be aware of reporters deadlines. The league has become such of a TV market, that they’re only concerned about the TV broadcasts, which keep getting later and later. The print guys have these early deadlines and specifically for the draft.

Previously they would have the GM, coach, and owner at the team’s practice facility where they do the draft. Then they would have them drive half an hour to the arena where all the reporters were. That half hour was very valuable to us, it was just dead

time, when we needed to start writing and getting quotes from these guys but they're sitting here driving. I made that suggestion to them or made them aware of that problem. Now starting last year, they just have the media down at the teams practice facility, so it eliminates that 30-minute drive. So that's another example of how I feel like we have a good, open relationship where I can tell them, "Hey, this isn't working for us, can you switch that?" And they could fix that very easily just by housing us where they were making the draft picks."

Respondent 21: "Sure. Sometimes you need that information. You need to have an idea of what times practices are. They have to alert everybody because sometimes that changes. Sometimes you might need contract information if you don't have that yourself, or if it's historical things of that nature. So they definitely are there to help you with information in your stories."

"Sometimes I think PR people tend to want to protect their clients. Sometimes if they deem a question is asked a certain way or want some information, that might raise a red flag for them and it might lead them to think there's a negative story or something like that. For the most part, they'll get you the info you need. Let the person go with it as far as whatever types of story. They want to control how it comes out, but that's not possible with media members because we usually go in having an idea of what we want to write, how we want to write it. We need help getting info from the team so we can make a case for something or write an angle a certain way. For the most part, they are very helpful about getting information, very helpful."

Respondent 22: “Not very often, once in a while you do. Usually the GM or the front office first and you’re redirected to PR. They’ll give it to them. They’re the disseminator to everyone all at the same time. The beat writers are trying to stoop each other all the time. Sometimes I think PR prefers everybody get it at the same time, where you get back into that competing interests thing again.”

“Not really. Even though they try to control the info, they do a good job of not getting in the way. We’re not going to just take what they dole out. We’re going to dig for things and they don’t get in the way even if they’re not particularly happy with it. I don’t think there’s a whole lot to do differently. Their obligation is to the team and players and to protect them from us. I’d like it if the (team) were more writer friendly and more geared towards our need but I understand they’re a corporate operation and their owners expects them to be protective of him, certain info, and the front office expects it too. It is what it is. It’s not something that’s going to change so I don’t like to waste a whole lot of time making suggestions.”

Respondent 23: “Rarely. There may be some times especially with player numbers because the former beat writer here did not give me his player list as far as numbers where sometimes if I need to get a player or something, I have to call PR so the player can get back to me. But generally, 9 times out of 10, the player does get back to me. I think my situation is different here because the market size and the fact that I’m almost

similar to Atlanta and Jacksonville to where there's only one paper that staffs the team day in and day out."

"Not really. For a two man PR staff, there about as strapped as they can be in order to get information and get it out on a timely level. I guess if I had to make one suggestion it would be to maybe hire a 3rd PR person. Because two PR people and an intern for an (team of specified sport), considering that the 2nd PR person for home games, has to handle logistics as far as credentialing and security list and everything that week, you're generally down to 1 and a half PR people."

Respondent 24: "PR people will provide certain information, and it's almost never negative to the company. My only suggestion would be to make it relevant and absolutely, positively make sure it's accurate."

Question 4: In your opinion, do Public Relations Departments prep players before interviews? If so, is this a good practice? Why or why not?

Respondent 1: The (team), they definitely do. It's a good thing from a standpoint that they're trying to protect their own interests. They're not really looking to protect the players so much. But I think the player, if he's being smart, should want to come across as somewhat spontaneous, somewhat interesting. To me, I always use (player) as an example. When he came to the (team), he was basically public enemy #1 in terms of professional sports for what he had done, in terms of choking his coach. He came to (city of team), and for one, he was available. Two, he was for the most part always in a good mood, very informative and engaging. He kind of won the media over. He kind of used the media to sell himself. The image of him through the media was terrible. But in (city of team), the so called media capital of the world, he kind of changed perceptions about him, which I thought was pretty interesting."

Respondent 2: "Not after games. But they definitely do prior to interviews on non-game days. What's happened over the past few years, when a player does conduct an interview, the PR director or one of his associates will stand close by to make sure that the players don't say anything that the team doesn't want them to say. It's almost a case of intimidation for that player. Players that have been around for a while, it doesn't seem to bother them; they say what they want to say. For a young player that comes in, they could be intimidated into not answering questions simply because the PR director is standing nearby."

“Terrible practice. It limits players from saying what they truly feel and limits them from giving honest answers, simply so they don’t supposedly anger their team. Rarely did it ever happen. And if a player is really angry enough to say something that the team wouldn’t like, they’re going to say it anyway on their own privately. They’re not going to say it in front of a PR director. Its definitely a negative step.”

Respondent 3: “Yes, they absolutely do. That’s probably a good thing. I would certainly do that if I were them. Yea, I’m sure they do that.”

“Given the amount of scrutiny the (team) are under and the way things can get blown up, they probably need to do that. From my perspective I don’t care whether they do it or not. From their perspective, I think it’s certainly something they need to do. (Player), the guy they drafted in the 2nd round, got a lot of questions in his news conference about being the player who was drafted with the pick they got for (former player). Obviously it behooved them and you could tell that they had spoken with him about what to say about this. It’s common sense, that you would do something like that.”

Respondent 4: “Oh yes, definitely, I know they do. I’ve been in locker rooms where a PR representative has pulled a player aside and said ‘This is what they’re going to ask you about.’ We’ll come into a locker room sometimes, and the players know they’re going to be asked certain questions and they’re ready for it. They’re certainly not under any obligation to follow a script or anything like that, but I think it helps to have your

answers in mind and have your thoughts straight before you start talking into someone's microphone or notebook. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. Where it gets a little tricky, is in a situation where there's no thinking, honesty. Reciting off index cards what a coach told someone to say is probably fraudulent. These guys are giving quotes and it's not what they think or feel, so that's a little difficult. But to have somebody coached up and say, 'Think about what you want to say about this topic, they're going to ask you about that' or even to just refine some public speaking details – how to answer a question, how to give details, and how to answer a question without giving away next week's game plan is also important."

"I don't have a problem with it. The better prepared a player is, the better answers he's going to give. So I don't have a problem with it. If I come in and blindside a guy with a question, he's going to say he doesn't know. Then nobody wins. I've told the PR person that I was writing a certain story with a certain angle, and I was going to have to ask a question of a coach or player, and just to give them a heads up so they could put their thoughts together. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

Respondent 5: "No. They really don't. If anything the players know the situation they're walking into. If there's a questionable play or hit or a scenario that could involve possible discipline, there's been instances where a player makes a mistake and wants to hide from it. With the culture that surrounds (sport), more than any other, players are coaxed by teammates to come out and speak up for what happened and not hide behind the curtain, which I think is really important today in pro sports."

Respondent 6: “No question. We just had a mini camp, and at least two times when I finished interviewing players, one of the PR people immediately pulled the player aside and was given instructions to these rookies. In one case of an injured player, there were a total of 5 PR people surrounding the small group who were interviewing the player, because of the great sensitivity they have to injury information.”

“I prefer not to. I prefer them to give me an honest answer. That day has come and gone. We have to accept that there are some players who are not going to give us honest answers and they’re just going to give us coach speak. And then there are some players who on occasion, if it’s a situation if they feel strongly enough, will speak to that even if it means they get a lecture from the coach. There aren’t many, but there are a few. You get information a lot of different ways. You have to have contacts, sources, sources within the team, and players that trust you and are willing to talk to you. But you have to protect them too. So you can’t give a unilateral protection in the locker room, because you’d never be able to quote anybody. You’d never be able to say anything. It has to be done in a somewhat orchestrated way. You have to know what you really want and how important that information is that you’re trying to get. If it’s really important, then you go to great lengths. If it’s not as important, you’re willing to take something off the record or you’re willing to take what the teams has to say if that’s the best you can do. You can only do so much with the current situation, and players are being paid by the team. They’re going to listen to the team because 99.9 percent of them don’t want to

have to deal with feedback from the team because they gave up some kind of info that the coach didn't want out."

Respondent 7: "Yes, very much so. We had conference calls with most of their draft picks and they all basically said the same thing at one point. We know they've been prepped before they do a conference call. Inside the locker room as well, the players know what they should and should not say. It stems even to family members. (Player) has gotten flack before if his father said something to the media. (Player) will get flack like, 'Why can't his father keep his mouth shut?'. It's kind of ridiculous actually.

"No, I don't think so. Emphasize that you use common sense. You don't want guys saying outlandish things or things that are potentially going to be a black mark in these times where everything is 24-hour news cycle and things spread so quickly and every little thing sometimes can get blown up. I'm not saying they should all stand in the middle of the locker room, pound their chests and say 'We're going to go 16-0 this year' because that's just silly. Preventing players from talking about something that doesn't really pertain to the team is completely over the top to me. A player's personal story should be up to him, not to the team. If I was asking a player to open up his playbook to me, then certainly that's not right. Of if I'm trying to incite somebody into saying something racial or politically or against their religion, obviously you don't want guys saying things like that. Basically, trying to get guys all on the same script, all say the same few points. My thing is, I'm just a reporter, I'm not trying to cure cancer, I'm not

trying to solve world hunger. I cover a football team, people read, people want information on their football team.”

Respondent 8: “I don’t think so. I can’t say this with any authority, but I’m sure there are instances where there is a controversy or hot button issue that someone might be given some talking points. It was pretty well known the last few years that in the case of (player), he has limited the times where he speaks with us or he didn’t speak as long or deeply that he had in the past because he’s found that his game is served better when he’s talking less. So he essentially talks when he has to now. It happened again with the (player from other team) issue. He was short and sweet and didn’t add any fuel to a fire that could have been a lengthy story if (player) came back and commented. I don’t know if that’s a function of PR. You will often see (PR director) standing with (player) in certain pre or post games situations and you don’t find that in many instances with other players because it’s a way to limit what he says. The PR guy can step in and say that’s enough. You don’t necessarily like it but it’s more a function of what the player wants or need in that particular instance. In that case, it’s just an example of PR being there for the player and subtly limiting what comes out of the player. It’s not an ideal situation, but it’s better than not getting him at all.”

“It fits the individual player. As a general rule, you don’t like any limitations on any access or the press’s ability to delve more deeply into a particular subject. You don’t like any limitations but the PR department has to deal with the players as much as the media. It’s a difficult job because you have to strike a balance between serving the media’s

interests and having the players shown in the best light possible. That's not always the case. When things happen on the field, there'll be stories, negative stories, things that happen on or off the diamond that people want to talk about that don't necessarily show the players in a shining light. They can't run away from these things but it's the press's job to delve into these stories and its PR's job to make these players available to talk whenever something controversial comes up. What you get after that, who knows. In that sense, you can walk a very delicate tightrope when you have a position like that. You have to make sure the players are speaking to the press but at the end of the day, PR directors always wants to have his players show in the best light possible. If there is a controversial story, what serves their best interest is to not make a 1-day story into a 3 or 4-day story. You can do that by not having a player answer a question, as people will want to talk to the player the next day. That's why our access and getting information from a player as soon as possible is always the best policy."

Respondent 9: "In some instances they do. If they don't, perhaps the manager does. Often times, one player will say a certain thing and then another player will say the exact same thing. You know it has to come from somewhere else. When you're interviewing a player, the PR person is standing close to you listening to what the athlete is saying and perhaps making a face when perhaps he said something he shouldn't have. That's part of the job they have to do."

"I don't think it's a good practice to be honest. But at the same time, I understand it. I don't like to tell people how to do their job. I understand that the job of a PR department

is different from mine. At the end of the day, if you put yourself in their shoes, they're trying to product a product, image, and a brand name. They have to do whatever it takes to do it. From my perspective it's not, because you lose the trust. You know that someone else coached a certain player. What good is that interview if what you're getting is not what the player feels or thinks, but what he has been told he needs to say?"

Respondent 10: "Not really. In the (league), not at all. Most of that happens at the college level."

Respondent 11: "Sometimes they'll ask what the subject is. In that context, they could prep him and say what I'm asking about. You do so much stuff on a day-to-day basis with the players outside the view of the PR department that I think those instances are few and far between. You walk in after a game or practice; you go to talk to whoever's available. So there's not much prep time that a PR guy could give them, so I would say that probably doesn't happen very often, in hockey anyway."

"It's a good practice as far as the team as concerned but it probably doesn't work very well as far as me doing my job. I don't mind telling a PR guy if I'm making a formal request to talk to a player what the subject is going to be because there's not many big secrets. I just don't think there's enough time overall in the day-to-day workings of a reporter-athlete relationship where there can be a whole lot of preparation or telling someone what to say. I don't think its that huge of a problem as far as I'm concerned with my dealings with the (team)."

Respondent 12: “When there’s something sensitive going on that’s floating around, yes absolutely. I don’t have a problem with it. If I were in their shoes, I would do the same thing. It allows the athlete or coach to not be caught flat-footed. I would never want to be in that situation if I were them. I think it makes good sense to do that. Do you get a less honest answer? Yes, sometimes you probably do. I would never expect them to not do that. That’s part of the role of a PR staffer – inform us in the media while also keeping the principles abreast of what’s going on so that they can talk about them from an educated standpoint. I don’t have any doubt that it happens. I wouldn’t expect it to change necessarily. It’s just part of the business I think.”

“I think there are two different levels. There’s making somebody aware that they will be probably asked about something or will be asked about something. Or taking it a step further – if they ask you this, here’s what you should say. Both of those happen on a pretty regular basis. Letting them know a question might come is fine. I actually don’t mind that. You don’t necessarily get an emotional response from the person; you get more of a clear-headed response, which probably makes for a better quote, so I’m ok with that. When you try to rehearse and answer to a particular question, that probably doesn’t work in the reporters’ favor because they’re going to craft it to suit their wishes, which is fine. There’s nothing to say they can’t do that. It probably doesn’t make for a great article. It’s ok. I totally understand and accept it, that it’s a part of the business. There are some cases in which it’s probably a good idea.”

Respondent 13: “They do in unusual circumstances, a controversy or something sensitive where they’ll let them know this is what kind of questions you can expect. The thing we have learned over the years is the vast majority of players in those situations will completely ignore whatever guidance there given. It doesn’t come up that often so it’s not much of a sample. But it seems to be a case a majority of the time, that when it’s a sensitive subject but they feel the need to give some preparation, the player ignores whatever advice he gets.”

“I wouldn’t want them doing it regularly. But since it’s such an unusual thing and there’s such a small sample, I can’t use the term practice. Recently there was a guy who had a DUI case in the summertime, so he didn’t get that much prep work there, but if it was during the season you know he’d have given them preparation. These are the questions you can expect and so on. But when does that happen, every few years? I do interviews two or three times a day, every day. So one interview every year, it’s a small sample. It doesn’t count as a practice. They don’t have time and the players don’t have interest in getting advice that often. There are times where there are situations where they try and maybe give them something and they get completely ignored. The players are professionals. It doesn’t come up enough for it to be described as any type of practice.”

Respondent 14: “Good public relations people do. When I covered (team), the PR guys would give the coach a list of obvious questions we would ask in a postgame so he could get ready. I think there are times when something negative is going on. We had an instance this year, (player) was being scratched every night and just wanted to annihilate

the coach. One day he was scratched and we all asked for him the next day. He had clearly been prepped by the PR staff, telling him to do himself a favor here, be smart and hold back punches on the coach or it could create bigger problems for you. I do think that's part of the role of a PR staff, is to let the coach and players know that this might be coming today so be prepared."

"I don't like it because I want guys to talk off the cuff. But if I was working for a PR staff or if I was VP of communications, if there was some sort of controversy going on, they at the very least need to know the questions are coming. I don't think it's a great idea to sit there and give players answers to give. I don't think that's smart; it's an injustice. We haven't had any major incidents here that have required the PR staff to go and give them questions or things like that. Good PR staffs though let the coaches know that this might be coming in the postgame."

Respondent 15: "Yea, I think for the most part absolutely. I know there's been a big emphasis on that from the league perspective too. I also know league PR people very well, because I've been covering the league very well. They have media training for all the players in the league, so it comes from both a league perspective and a team perspective. I'm not saying it's on a daily training basis, but it's certainly a point of emphasis during preseason. They have a meeting at one point in the preseason with the players and that's done throughout the league. That comes on the heels of the league PR staff getting involved and trying to educate players on what reporters needs are and what

some of the scenarios are that they might face with some of their daily media responsibilities.”

“I think its essential. Anytime I have a difficult situation with a player, all I try and tell them, ‘This is a little off the cuff but I don’t give a rats ass what you think.’ But fans think. Fans care. I’m the conduit between fans and the players. Whenever I have a difficult situation with players, I remind them that I’m just doing my job. I’m not here because I’m fascinatingly interested by the next cliché you utter. I’m here because fans are interested and obviously want to represent the organization well. So I think that’s essential, absolutely.”

Respondent 16: “Not on a daily basis. Day to day, I don’t think they do. The (team) PR guy speaks to the players each spring training to give them the ground rules and tell them who they’re dealing with, in a general way. If that happens, I don’t know about it but I’m 99 percent sure on a daily basis that they don’t. By in large, (sport) players are very used to it. They deal with it pretty much their whole career. The access between (sport) and (comparative sport) is night and day. In (comparative sport), it’s 4 or 5 hours a week. In (sport), it’s 4 or 5 hours a day.”

Respondent 17: “Oh yea, which is why a good beat writer will try and go around the PR staff whenever possible. It depends on the player. There are players that I know no matter what, won’t listen and say stupid stuff anyway. Absolutely, and sometimes it’s in the PR staff’s best interest to do that for the team and other times they’re just being

paranoid. There are media members you have to be careful of. In all walks people have agendas. Generally, in the (sport), they can't control the players. They'll try and stop them and say that's enough to a player surrounded by 4 or 5 guys talking about his latest arrest or something the team doesn't want publicized. Generally the player totally ignores him and keeps talking. It's different in college. But these guys are their own men for the most part."

"In some instances, it absolutely is. In some instances, it just doesn't matter. Just like in all walks of life, not every (sport) player had a 3.8 GPA. The PR staff can help them out if they listen. I wish there were a better word than PR. Their job in many ways is to protect their players and to mold the message the team would like to get out. This is a pretty laid back market so you're going to get different answers. I can get my head coach on the phone, anytime I want. I don't know about New York and the 9 guys that cover the (east coast team). I have a different job than those covering the NY and Philly teams."

Respondent 18: "Yea, I definitely think they do. And some of that I think to an extent is OK. A lot of these fresh-faced rookies have never faced the media hoard. They know that some of the questions might be sensitive and they might orient them before somebody puts his foot in his mouth and creates a national stir. I don't begrudge them for trying to make sure it goes OK for the player. But babysitting the thing and calling an end to the interview, like the other day (player for another team). This guy has been in

the league for five years now. He should be able to take care of himself. He had a watcher there himself, dismissing the controversial questions.”

“I think prepping them is a good practice. I think at some point they have to stand on their own. If was a player, I wouldn’t want someone minding me. Maybe for a rookie or a younger player, but without fail in a group interview with the (team), they’ve got somebody there. There’s never not somebody watching it and that surprises me.”

Respondent 19: “That’s a good question and its something I’m not completely sure how much that goes on. I think that’s most likely to happen before a formal press conference, like when a new player or a free agent is signed or a guy is traded to the (team) and there’s a big media gathering. Before a player gets up on a podium, a PR person will brief him a little bit about how many reporters he can expect, the tone of the questions, or in general what the atmosphere is like when a media core asks their question. Maybe what kind of questions might be asked so they might know how to answer it. I think in a formal setting when there’s going to be a lot of reporters and a lot of TV cameras I think it’s probably the time when PR people prep the guys the most.”

“It depends on what you’re telling them. If you’re asking them about a touchy subject, it’s OK for a PR person to say, ‘Hey keep in mind what you say is going to be read by 1,000s of people. Be careful what you say.’ If it’s a sensitive topic having to do with something outside of (sport) and we just want a (sport) player’s opinion on it, I think its ok for a PR person to let them know what their responsibility is. When it comes to just a

regular interview, I don't think a PR person needs to do that. I definitely don't want them to do that. When I talk to a player, I want them to be honest and genuine with their words and be sincere. That's what makes the best interviews because readers just want the honest story from an athlete. I don't want any kind of filter being put up before they talk to me."

Respondent 20: "Yea, I know they do and it's frustrating. The players, the GM, the president. And I know that because I was interviewing the President last February and right there on his desk was talking points. They forecasted what type of questions I'd ask and they were clearly outlined there in bold. If he asks about this, answer this way. Some players have told me they're not to answer that question. So stuff like that is frustrating in that you want your subjects to be speaking from the heart and the truth, not speaking a company line."

"No, I think it's terrible. But I also understand where they're coming from. They're trying to control a brand and their product and they want that product to be represented in a certain way. All of us would like transparency and a realness to everybody and everything. As journalists, that's what we're seeking for is this transparency. It's tough when you have an entity trying to sway that or spin it."

Respondent 21: "I don't think so. I would imagine every year, and they'd be silly as any organization would be, to not have a refresher course about how to talk to the media and how to present themselves, things they can say and not say. I would be shocked if any

professional franchise, college, even high school nowadays didn't do that. But no I don't think so. I think most of those players have been playing hockey since they were young on elite teams. They're pretty used to media interviews. But I'm sure once in a while it happens but I certainly don't think it happens with the (team)."

Respondent 22: "Not before each individual interview. They have a big meeting in spring training every year about who we all are, what our tendencies are, who they can trust, who they can't trust, who they have to be careful with and not careful with, don't go off the record, tell them anything they don't want on the record. They also have a minor league program. It's a school that teaches them how to deal with the media. It's all designed to make sure that nobody gives up any info, that the organization doesn't want out. When a player is cut or comes off DL, and has to go to minors, they don't announce who that player is until the clubhouse is closed an hour before game time so that we can't talk to that player. And he doesn't get a chance to pop off and say anything inflammatory against the organization. That's another thing they've been doing here lately."

Respondent 23: "I don't think PR does. I would say in my situation with my team, (coach) may more prep the players than the PR. I think there's times when PR might just give a heads up to a person that a) this question may be coming or something, but you've got a lot of players here who are very opinionated and not afraid of repercussions or not trying to be politically correct at times. It's basically almost self policing. But I know of a case a week ago, when (player) signed. By design of both the team and PR, he would give a statement and he would talk to reporters a week later. I've seen that happen with

other teams to that they want to do a gradual roll out with the player. There's times when maybe with a controversial player or something, I wouldn't suggest that because you have him available a week later. You're already getting backlash for a signing or a certain decision if you're extending the process instead of just getting it all done now. I don't think it's a good practice. If you know you're going to get backlash for a bad move why do a gradual roll out? Just roll the guy out. Generally with some of them, we just want to get their side of what happened and everything and generally we leave them alone. Where in this case, if he decides to talk a week or two later, he signed, its done with, everybody's moved on, but all of the sudden it just gets back to the surface. To me it's just an added distraction."

Respondent 24: "Of course they prep people before interviews. That's what they do. They are supposed to anticipate the hard questions so that the key personnel aren't blindsided. It doesn't matter whether this is a good practice or not (and it's not), it's going to continue. It would be nice if every person being interviewed could be ready with off-the-cuff comments on any question. But this is not the case in our business."

Question 5: For the team you cover, define an incident that may damage the team's reputation or an incident that has happened in the past. Can you give an example or two?

Respondent 1: "The (team) have had a bunch of things happen. (Player) was arrested last year for speeding, which is never a good thing. They had a sexual harassment lawsuit. An employee brought it against (name), who at the time was the head coach and the president of the team. The president and (player 2) got into a fight on the plane. (Player 2) left the team and kind of went AWOL for the day."

Respondent 2: "I don't know if it damages the team's reputation. A lot of people think athletes don't owe the public, the fans, or the news media anything beyond what happens on the ice (or the field). I don't think I can recall any incidents that actually damaged the reputation of the team. But over the course of many years, the (team) have become known as a team that doesn't cooperate with the media. I've heard one of the reasons why the (team) don't get on national TV quite a lot is that they don't cooperate with television for a lot of postgame and during the game interviews. A lot of times now in the (league), you'll have a color commentator that stands between the benches. The (team) are against that. And a lot of times they'll interview people on the benches or immediately after periods end, and apparently the (team) haven't been cooperative with that. Whether or not that's true, I can't really say. I've heard that's part of the reason why they aren't on national TV more and I guess you could view that as damaging a team's reputation."

Respondent 3: “The whole business with (player) in 2005. A lot of negative stuff came out of that. It was a series of incidents over several months, culminating with him being dismissed from the team. From a PR standpoint, when they first opened the new stadium, they did a lot of things. They initially weren’t going to let people bring hoagies into the stadium. There was a huge outcry on talk radio about this and they ended up revising the policy eventually. Management came off as high handed and trying to squeeze every last penny out of the fan in that particular incident. Those kinds of things have dogged that organization over the years.”

Respondent 4: “The (player) situation didn’t do them any favors. Especially a day or two afterwards, when the mayor came out and sort of made it sound like the (team) were part of a big cover up to keep (player) out of prison or whatever he thought they were doing. I think he called them ‘bad corporate citizens’ at the time. So that was bad. The only thing they could do really was to say they didn’t think they were and use the media, and go on the radio and talk to newspaper reporters. Put their side of the story out there. That’s probably as bad a situation as it can get. Having a player shoot himself in the middle of the night and then have to deal with those ramifications.”

Respondent 5: “The (player) feud he had with management and some of the reporters in this town. That’s probably what defines their relationship with the media more than anything. The (team) have always done a really good job to get what they need.”

Respondent 6: “I’m fortunate in that this is a very well run organization. It’s a first class organization. They try not to lie. They try not to deceive. They do spin, like everyone does. It’s the degree to which they are willing to go to get their point across. (Player), a tackle with the (team), has kind of been on the trading block in the offseason. I’m not sure if it’s valid or not. Whether they were trying to send a message and allow that to get out that he could be available, whether that was a message they were trying to send to him or whether they truly were considering trade offers for him, I’m not certain. That still has to play out. If he gets traded, then obviously they were willing to trade him. My feeling and first thought was that the (team) despite source contributions that he was available, is that they didn’t want to trade him if they didn’t have to but if they got the right price they would. They have used that situation to try and motivate the player. That is what every (sport) team does. It does create a divide with the locker room sometimes, if other players think the team has mistreated a player. That can be a problem. I don’t know the extent, that situation is playing out, so I can’t conclude what is going on there yet but we’re watching it and we will know before the start of the season I expect.”

Respondent 7: “Spygate will go on forever. That issue will go on forever, in minds of fans of other teams. ‘They only won because of that, or they’re losing because of karma getting back at them’ because of that episode that happened three years ago.”

Respondent 8: “With the (player) steroid situation, I think that was more of a player damaging his own reputation. I think the team takes some of the hit because they’re the team employing him. In the case with (player’s) steroid situation, at the least the (team)

could say it didn't happen on their watch. It was with the (former employer of player). It was something they had to deal with it, and they probably dealt with it as best as they could and as upfront as they could by having that press tent conference in spring training. They did the same thing with (player 2)."

Respondent 9: "When the team isn't completely open with injuries. They weren't forthcoming with the injuries and the extent of them. The time that the player would be out, they would try to cover it up so that the opposing team wouldn't find out until a day before. I understand all teams try to do that but at the same time when you're the PR department and you're trying to do that and you're trying to stonewall a reporter, at the end of the day it doesn't look good on the team because the truth is going to come out no matter what. That's when the team looks like they're lying or trying to cover something up and fans pick up on this. Fans are smart. The people who read, watch, and go cheer at the stadium, they seem to be able to pick up on what's going on. That to me in itself is a PR nightmare, when the fans start losing trust in the team."

Respondent 10: "The only real character problem the pistons have had since I've been covering them would be (player) when he was here last year. Rumors of casino visits...towards the end of the season, I would hear some stuff from people about how drunk he would be. Some people said he was a great guy. I never got a firm grasp on it but I didn't pursue it with a lot of vigor. Another paper reported that he was banned from MGM and Motor City Casino. The woman who covered the casino for the paper said it wasn't true. Our casino reporter was talking to the PR person, and said the story was

bothering him and said it wasn't true. The truth, he wasn't banned. The only character issue I had, was with him. Drinking, being sued at a bar for a fight, that's the stuff that embarrasses an organization. They did a very good job of saying, "that's just (player), that doesn't have anything to do with us." He never got targeted from crime or anything either. But it was just stuff that he was doing, that would probably would reflect poorly on an organization if you took a closer time to look at it."

Respondent 11: "You can look at the last couple years with the ownership. They were constantly saying that they weren't going to trade star players, and as it turns out they probably were trying to trade him. They were trying to bring in other investors to help them with their bottom line while constantly saying they weren't doing that. I think it goes for all team's relationships with reporters, just be honest. I think that any time someone is caught in a lie, it hurts reputations and makes you question things they say in the future. Anytime a team outright lies, I think it can hurt that relationship."

Respondent 12: "Last year, this team during the course of the season let go both of its coordinators; the offensive coordinator before the regular season and the defensive coordinator in early November. It looks like you have a front office and a head coach that doesn't know what they're doing and made some really bad decisions. There's really no way to spin that. It's going to look that way to most people probably. That can certainly damage the reputation of the organization when you have some one who the organization has put in a position of power and the perception is that there not on top of things. That's not a good thing at all. Also, and this one is still going on, the owners, the

(name) family, who also own (soccer team) in England, they've come under a lot of heat over there because of their spending habits but that is now really becoming a factor over here. They haven't spent a ton of money in free agency on this team and that may not mean necessarily anything. You can draw conclusions from it but it's hard to make any kind of factual statement about it. The point is this; it's morphed into a situation where a big portion of the fan base thinks that this teams troubles are really of a financial variety. There is a lot of evidence that I can point to that shows you why they haven't been very good the last couple years. It's an easy one to hold onto. I think a lot of fans take that lack of spending to mean that ownership doesn't care about the team. And I hear that on a constant basis and I think that is certainly not something you should not want your fan base to believe because it sort of takes away from the unity with your fans. I think they've lost a little bit of that. And you have that happen a lot of times when a team goes through a rough patch. I would say that's definitely something that hasn't helped the clubs reputation. True or not, ((soccer team)) probably has a lot of debt, but they make a lot of money as well) I really don't believe that that is the cause of their perceived financial difficulties. It just isn't the case. But it doesn't matter. That's the perception and it's not a good one at all."

Respondent 13: "Once it gets to a legal matter, it's no longer media relations area. You go through the courts and the police. You go more directly to the player. Sometimes you just wait for the availability that the league requires anyway. It doesn't involve media relations very directly, for a legal matter. But obviously that would damage the reputation of the team most directly. There's been a couple arrests over the decade.

About two years ago, a guard named (player) was arrested for a DUI. He was acquitted. I went through his lawyer to get access to him. I called him on his own cell phone. I didn't use media relations that much. He ended up being acquitted. He's a very cooperative guy, so I talked to him directly. In fact, some media in (city of team) missed when he spoke, so he did it again for them too. But during the case, it could have been damaging to the reputation."

Respondent 14: "What's damaged the reputation the most is the end of the last management regime. There hasn't been any big arrests, any big news off the ice. (Player) was once in a bar fight. There have been a couple DUIs and things like that. As far as real negative press, two that come to mind. At the end of the last regime, I was just hammering them on a daily basis and there was nothing anyone could do inside the organization until they were fired. They just kind of lost their way for a while. Now the new regime is really paying the price for that; they've inherited a ton of problems. From a negativity point of view inside this city, they were pretty much getting hammered on a daily basis and just had to deal with it. The other big incident that was just the worst press possible was at the trade deadline three years ago, every other team in the division made vast improvements and the (team) go out and trade for (player), who at that point had been suspended 8 or 9 times in his career and was coming off the longest suspension in (league) history. It was completely the opposite of what the (team) needed. And for an organization that is very family friendly, they lost their way and traded for a guy who was on the front page of the newspaper the next day was a picture of him standing over a bloodied guy that he hit over the head with a stick. It was just a stupid trade and they got

hammered for it for pretty much 2 straight weeks. Those would probably be the two biggest incidents, but nothing really off the ice.”

Respondent 15: “The (team) had one this season and I was fairly intimately involved in it from a public standpoint, which is a never good place for a reporter to be. One of their team executives (name) had a brief physical altercation with their coach (name). I basically reported the story but hadn’t written it yet. Another media outlet broke the story. In the course of what I thought was a private, off the record conversation with a fellow reporter that was then broadcast over the air that I had not reported the story yet, so I became the story for 24 hours. A physical altercation with a team executive and a coach is a fairly big story and not the most beneficial thing for an organization to have happen to it. So that story was eventually reported by another media outlet and then the Tribune followed up on that story, because I had basically done the reporting and had not written it yet. I was an unwilling participant for 24 hour media turn in the spotlight myself. But that’s an example of a damaging story for an organization I’ve dealt with.”

Respondent 16: “The (team) haven’t had a lot of stuff. The last arrest was a DUI on opening day maybe 5 years ago. So they haven’t had to deal with a lot of stuff. They had a drug suspension this year with a player who was on the DL and wasn’t with the team at the time. Nothing really other than that.”

Respondent 17: “They’ve always been pretty forthcoming. When (player) tested positive for steroids, it got out, he was going to be suspended. I can’t think of a time

where they said this person was not going to talk. They encourage the players to at least say something. They might try to mold the message. They do operate under 'it's better to say something, than nothing'. They've got a lot of stadium issues here which I don't deal with. I can't think of the team itself, where it would damage them. Players get in trouble with the law is about the only thing. And the PR staff does a good job encouraging the guys to talk. (Player) had press conference and a lawyer, but the (team) facilitated it and made him available."

Respondent 18: "I covered the end of the (player) era. There was something between the (player 2) and the coach (name), because (coach) was openly questioning the severity of (player 2's) injury, saying it's not that bad he can play through it. (Player 2) said 'look my shoulders killing me, I'm not the same.' It became this big dustup because a player's not supposed to say I'm hurt or use excuses, but the coach had threw him under the bus saying he's fine physically healthy and embarrassed him. He was playing so badly they're had to be a reason why. The PR director ended up choosing sides. He went and looked up old (player 2) quotes in which he said I'm healthy. He took those selected quotes and sent them out to some beat writers. It was an embarrassing thing; they couldn't get their story straight. The PR person got in the middle of it and it was embarrassing. The PR director, the reason they monitor all these things and the reason they don't let us talk to assistant coaches, is they want their message to be unified. They don't want to show any disharmony within the organization. This was a situation where disharmony was there for everyone to see."

Respondent 19: “In general, a lot of stories get written. I know the one the (team) are sensitive about is that the GM (name) kind of controls things a lot, controls the manager decisions, player personnel decisions. He’s more hands-on than a lot of other GMs are. This is nothing new. That’s been written for the past several years. It’s something (name) tries to dispel. In general, if they were able to not have people write that, that’s one thing they don’t want out there. The possible move to San Jose, that’s big in the news right now. They’re not happy in Oakland. There’s a big general thought that there not even trying to attract fans to Oakland, that they want to drive down attendance just so they have more reason to prove this is why we should move to San Jose, ‘we cant make money in Oakland.’ A lot of people are writing that in the press right now. The owner’s not happy about it. The PR staff tries to reverse that a little bit. That’s definitely something they don’t want to be written. It doesn’t reflect well on them. But that viewpoint gets written. The (team) have come out and tried to deny it. The owner has denied it. He’s said we definitely want people in the stands. More than anything, especially right now, that’s probably the thing that’s most damaging to them whenever that appears in the press.”

Respondent 20: “The previous PR staff got dismissed in 2006. They instituted a practice where the PR staff would record every interview. So if you did one with a player, they would have a representative from their staff there in on the interview, and recording it as well. It was awkward. At one point I had an interview with the team president (name), and the head PR guy was in on the interview, recorded it as well. They did a transcript of the interview and put it on their website, except at one point they misquoted me. I had to

re-listen to the tape, they stood by their interpretation and I stood by mine. We got an independent person to listen to it and the independent person said I was right, he did not say what you guys said. So that ended up being an embarrassing thing for them cause they were contending that the media was twisting words and taking things out of context, so that's why they instituted that policy. So they go and end up doing it and misquoting me, so it was pretty funny."

Respondent 21: "I don't think I've found an incident with them where maybe they were lying or trying to hold back info or something like that. I haven't found that with the (team). If you were lied to about information; one thing with (sport) teams, is that their info they give about injuries is very limited. So a broken finger is an upper body injury. A torn Achilles tendon is a lower body injury. That's just the way it is in (sport). No team is different from that. But if you were ever lied to, if you were onto something and somebody steered you the wrong way and lied to you as far as giving you the info or steering you in the other direction, that would obviously damage credibility or reputation. The (team) do a great job with that. They have people there in the press box who assist you during the game with information and updates on goals and records and things of that nature. They always have people at practices. They're available by cell phone and email and they get back to you right away. I haven't found an incident with them that would lead you to have your perception of the team colored by a specific incident. But if that were to happen, I think lying about something would be that but I haven't found that with the (team)."

Respondent 22: “They did have an incident this spring by accident because of a lack of communication. A player was designated for assignment to clear a roster spot. The media found out about it before the player found out. That’s totally against the norm. The player is always told before the media. And we’re sensitive to that. It’s only fair to the player that he knows what his fate is before anyone else does. We were told this player was being DFA’d and released, before the player was, totally by accident. We didn’t know he hadn’t been told. We all wrote it and put it on our website as quickly as we could not knowing he hadn’t been told. Once we were done, we went to find him for a comment and he was on the field working out with the team. It was strange. We found out he wasn’t told and that’s why he was working out. That’s the most recent flub on the part of the (team), but that wasn’t major. It was accidental. File that under the headline of “stuff happens”.

Respondent 23: “The first episode of ‘Hard Knocks’, especially around here, kind of did more harm than good because the in the last 15 minutes, it showed (name) taking on a role with the team. It kind of was the 800 lb gorilla in the room that people were hoping he didn’t have as active a role with the team anymore than people thought he did. In the last 15 minutes, it brought a certain backlash from the public because (name) was trying to make certain personnel decisions that the fans and a few of us thought maybe he shouldn’t be able to make. But it’s also in the process of the first episode of ‘Hard Knocks’, that HBO is trying to whittle down 200 hours of film into a one hour episode. But also I do give (sport) Films a certain amount of credit for that, because while (sport)

Films most times is the league's PR arm, it did give a look at the organization from top to bottom."

Respondent 24: "A certain player missed a game because he had gone out on a bender the night before and was incapable of playing the next day. The team said he was suffering from a stomach illness and was hooked up to an IV. Technically, that was true. But several people told me he was completely trashed the night before. I supplied nothing more than the company line in the next day's paper, but it wasn't long before I wrote the true story. Even though this was a player that later was traded and was not particularly well-liked in the organization, they tried to cover it up."

Question 6: After the incident has been addressed by public relations, how will/did it affect what you write?

Respondent 1: "If a reporter's doing his job, then you have to write the facts. Would you maybe give them the benefit of the doubt, if the player has kind of been good to you? Would you ease up with your language? I think it's human nature to kind of be that way. But in the case of (player 2), he was such a jerk and basically an (expletive), why should he get the benefit of the doubt? It's a tough job for PR people. The case in point of that is somebody like Tiger Woods and how PR people are trying to obviously spin things their way. With the (team), they are obviously going to do that. I think the good ones can accomplish something. In the back of your mind, you're thinking I want to maintain a good relationship with the team because maybe if I help them out with something like this, not that you're not going to write the story, but maybe it's the language you use. Maybe it won't be as harsh and I think that's something they'll remember, you hope that they will."

Respondent 2: "It shouldn't affect what you write. The only thing it would really hurt is if you have some information and you can't get someone to back it up and confirm. That would hurt. Or if something has happened at an event, and you need the opinion of the player involved to explain exactly what happened, and that person is not available. It doesn't hurt me as much as it does the person that wants to read about it and hear something. If they weren't aware of it at all or if they watched the game on television

and really want to find out what was behind all that, if you don't have access to that player it hurts the reader or the viewer."

Respondent 3: "It didn't affect me too much. As a professional, you can't hold a grudge or punish people for not doing what you think is the best thing to do. My job is still to tell the fans what's going on to the best of my ability. From a PR standpoint, I kind of knew that the PR people would not have approached that issue differently they wouldn't have done it the way management decided to do it. If you're around the (team) very long, you figure out that the PR department doesn't run the team. They're kind of left to clean up messes and smooth things out with the public perhaps after other people perhaps step wrong."

Respondent 4: "I'll certainly give their side of the story but there not going to set the tone for the article. It's not going to be a complete transcript of what the team wants out there. I think there's a responsibility for journalists to cut through the 'BS' and the PR speak and the spin especially in situations like the (player) situation. Obviously he was in the wrong and a lot of mistakes were made that night, those have to be addressed as well. There's also things on less serious notes, like draft picks. Sometimes teams make questionable picks and of course they'll come out and say this is the guy we wanted all along and he's great and he's fantastic and we love him. That's not always the case. Sometimes that's just the spin they're putting on it and its up to the journalist to weed through that and come to some sort of logical conclusion."

Respondent 5: “I’ve never ran across that in anything I’ve covered. Even if the club is in a weird situation or the team is in a weird situation, the PR staff, their job isn’t to direct how my story is written, they don’t even try to throw hints or suggestions. They just bring the player out and let them speak for themselves, they don’t even say a word. They’re just busy getting the next player. Even when you have a question about something, they’ll pass your question along if you can’t get to the person that you need directly. They won’t try to muddy the water or make it harder for what you’re looking for. You may get a ‘no’ every now and then but I’d rather get a ‘no’ to a question that I’m asking than be cut off by a PR person that stops me from getting to the person I’m looking for.”

Respondent 6: “Well it affects it only to the degree that if we have strong enough source info or first hand info, we will quote what the team representative says, but it will not change what we write. If we feel comfortable in the info we have, we will run it, even if it makes the team mad. In 2000, (name) had a conversation where I wanted to know his contractual status. I was under the impression he was in the final year of his contract. I asked him and he didn’t want to tell me. After talking at length, he finally admitted he had signed an extension. I said I’m going to write this. He argued with me that that was privileged info, that I shouldn’t write it and he promised it to someone else. I said I’m sorry, this is very important, this is my job, this is my beat, you’re the key figure in putting the team together, I’m writing it. (Name) was upset with me for a quite awhile after that. He didn’t want to share certain information at some points, because of that. To this day, I don’t think it was because of that instance, but it was because he decided he

wasn't going to be as forthcoming. (Name) is much more secretive with his passing out information."

Respondent 7: "I don't think it really did. I'm a reporter, not a columnist, so generally I have to stick to the facts of the story. I can't editorialize or put my feelings into the discussion. I think that it changed only because the team closed ranks even further after that and made it even more difficult for us to do our jobs. It's frustrating, you do your best not to let that color your coverage of the team."

Respondent 8: "That was a player's situation, like any other team that had players show up on the Mitchell Report that were caught in that steroid web. Obviously the (team) have a lot of stars, big stars are going to get big attention, so I think they dealt with it the best way they could which was to have the press conferences as quickly as possible. But even then, it's not just the PR department's call. First, it's the player's call. The player has an agent, and the player probably has more than his agent speaking to him. If you're (player), there are several people you're consulting because you're a brand name. But once they make the decision that they're going to talk, then that's where the PR staff goes into action. Then they arrange where it's going to be, how the questions will come at him, how long it will go, how we're going to credential it. That all then becomes a part of what the PR department does. The first responsibility in those situations is always with the player."

Respondent 9: “It’s one of those things where you can’t take it personally. That said, if the team is not forthcoming with something and you know they’re holding info, or they’re trying to blur the facts, then it’s your job as a journalist in my opinion, to put it out in the open and call them out if need be because it’s something that if they keep doing, the fans will pick up on it and the team will lose the trust of the fans. Once they lose the trust of the fans, what is there to hold onto? Once they lose the trust of the reporters and journalists, I don’t see how that can be of benefit to the team.”

Respondent 10: “It doesn’t affect me at all. Towards the end of the season, two players missed a team flight. The PR staff didn’t volunteer this information. But they both went on Twitter and were mad about something. It wasn’t the fact that they were very late. They tweeted and everyone starts looking around seeing what happened. Once you ask the (team) about it, they were very forthcoming in telling you everything that was going on. ‘Yup they missed the plan, yada yada,...’ That’s an instance where they were very helpful. Once you found it, they confirmed everything for you. I don’t know if that hurts the team’s image, but it hurts the player’s image more than the team’s.”

Respondent 11: “It doesn’t affect what you write, it just makes you more skeptical about what certain people will tell you. The people that were involved in that, are no longer with the team so you don’t have to worry about it as much because it wasn’t a team wide systematic thing; it was certain individuals within the team that were doing the lying. So now that those people are removed, there’s no problem with my relationship with anybody on the team at the moment. It never really affects what you’re writing, you

might be a little more skeptical of what people say but the bottom line is that you're still trying to do your job to the best of your ability. You're still trying to present the truth for the situation as far as you can tell. So I don't think it changes it as far as that goes. You can be skeptical, it's a good thing but you still write what the story is. You don't present things as they're not because you're upset with the team or something. Skepticism is always a little bit of a good thing though."

Respondent 12: "Particularly something like that, where I don't have a whole lot of info to go on. You can look at some circumstantial info. Short of them opening their checkbook to me, you don't have a lot of info to go on. You can say here's what they spent, here's what they did, here's what other teams did. That doesn't necessarily answer the question. What you get from the organization is the only concrete stuff you can report. Last month we had interview with ownership, which is rare, but they spoke at length about this perception. They presented some factual evidence that it's not true and that's very helpful because it's all we've had to go on. When your talking finances, books are closed. You're not going to get access to that. Other than circumstantial evidence, the only hard and fast stuff you can report is what you're told by the team. In that case, it's extremely helpful and we always appreciate any info they're willing to give us on a story where we're not able to bring people much else."

Respondent 13: "You write the news. You write what happened. It doesn't impact the next story. Especially in a case where a guy got acquitted, it's not like its future

references to him you'd bring up '(player), who in February was acquitted of this charge', unless it's somehow related to a feature about him."

Respondent 14: "It doesn't affect me. I don't pull punches. I tell it like it is. I was in bad with management so what did I have to lose? They never rubbed my back and gave me info that all of a sudden I was risking losing by the fact I was hammering them. It didn't affect me one-way or the other. That's one thing for beat reporters, as opposed to columnists, talk radio, or TV people, we show up every single day. This is my 16th season. You learn very early on in your career that if you're going to be scared to show up the next day, this is the wrong business for you. That's the one thing about this league. With being a beat writer, you have to write negative things sometimes. I tell players, 'You got to take good with bad.' I tell managers that too. 'When you're playing great, I'm going to write great things about you. When you're not, I'm going to do the same.' It didn't affect me in any way."

Respondent 15: "It didn't affect me at all. My feeling always with stories, negative or positive, as long as they're accurate and fair, there can be no beef. If there's a big story, with damaging consequences or major news story, I have that conversation with people before I print it. "This needs to be reported. Here are the reasons why." And as long as you're accurate and fair, there can be no beef. I've never had any negative consequences for any story I've written in my 14 years in covering the (team) via either team management or team PR, unless I've overstepped my boundaries with something I've written, which has been very few examples."

Respondent 16: “Really in no way. I don’t think they make much of an effort to spin anything, anyway, very often or at all pretty much. PR guys might point out something to me. With this thing with the drug suspension their statement was that they support (sport’s) policy on drug testing but they’re not big on trying to get out there and sell their message in anyway.”

Respondent 17: “Not at all. I pride myself. I’ll air a player out for doing certain things or the PR guy. But it won’t change the way I cover it. I know people do, and I hope I never do because I’m mad at someone, be a little more harsh on them or something. Maybe inadvertently, if I’m not given info, the article may come across as speculation, which I would label as. It is always better to say something, than nothing. The story is going to come across with both sides if people talk. It is going to affect way I write the story, not like I’m going into it with a better attitude or something but it is because I may build around a quote or that person is at least defending themselves or saying something. Whereas, (player) had not spoken, all that would have been out there was the conjecture. It will affect the story. I’ve thought of this before, ‘I finally got these guys to talk and this story turned out better for them than had they not talked’ because maybe I had something in mind that I was going to have to write. It’s all I had. Then they talked and I still had all I had and I’m not saying that I believe everything they told me, but I at least had to put in what they said. If someone admits guilt or something like that, I don’t want to say going lighter on them, but they did what they did and took responsibility. There’s a player who made a bonehead mistake in a playoff game and he has yet to address it. If

I was the PR person, I would have told him to talk about it. Now he's getting ripped and will forever, because he won't talk about it. People here hate him. They want him gone. A part of it is how he's acted since, not just that he did it. He would be thought of differently if he came out and said, 'Mea culpa, I blew it on that play.' And that's how I always feel. All these players, not all, a huge percentage of these players now have their own PR people. It's unbelievable. They work counter a lot of times. The team PR people are in odds with the player PR people, because they have to justify their existence and make it that they're controlling the player's schedule and agenda and giving the message. The teams pulling him this way and they're often at odds. I think its silly, I think they're wasting their money. They're not that big and there's not that much media demand on them."

Respondent 18: "Based on how PR handled it, their role was non existent. It was coach vs QB. That in it of itself was such a big story that PR kind of played a non-role. The PR guy tried to spin it in the coach's favor, but nobody paid attention to it."

Respondent 19: "It doesn't affect it very much. Every story I write, I try to be balanced and provide the most complete info I can. If I think they're not trying to attract fans, I would point out the things that would point to that. But I would go to the (team), one of their PR people or preferably their owner or president if I can get an interview with him, and ask for their side of the story. The way the (team) would try to spin anything or the way they would try to prevent anything from being in the press, wouldn't affect the way I do my job. It might make it a little tougher at times. It wouldn't affect what I write. I

would just try to provide the most fair story, give both sides of the story. As long as I'm doing that, I feel pretty good about what I'm doing and I can stand behind what I'm writing."

Respondent 20: "I never did write about it, it was more of a blog item. I didn't want to draw too much attention to it because I didn't want it to become a story. But I certainly made note of it in a blog post and I left it at that. Bottom line, you got to report the truth."

Respondent 21: "You try to let things not affect you. For example, you get no comments from someone. Then maybe you don't want to talk to that person that much anymore if they don't provide good color or interesting things in your story. Now if someone lied to you, I would say that you need to continue to be professional in your job and then if it calls, the organization needs to be ripped for lying about it or if it's just something that stays between you and the team, and then perhaps you don't trust as much what they say anymore. In general, you have to be professional and do your job without making something like that color your perception."

Respondent 22: "Not at all...if we're professional about it, it won't. There's one beat who intended to blow them up over that. The rest of us chose not to because we have to work with these people in the front office. They're very valuable to us as sources. We didn't feel the need to throw anyone under the bus or put them in hot water. The (team) are a corporate organization and when someone screws up in a way that causes something

like that to happen, they tend to be slapped down very hard. We really didn't want that to happen either. If you're a professional about it, you don't let stuff affect how you write. You just present it the way you present any other news story."

Respondent 23: "It doesn't really affect what I write. There have been a couple times this year when he emails me and said that he wishes we would've taken a different angle or something in a story to where the team might have not thought it was that important. There was a case last year before a road game in Minnesota, which because they still don't have a practice bubble, they ended up busing 50 miles roundtrip to Mason, to practice at an indoor soccer complex. The fact that the team doesn't have a bubble, the players have accepted that. There are still many times where you think "cheap" and "same old (team)". Busing 50 miles round trip to a practice bubble certainly is one of those times. It's an important game and they're taking two hours out of their day to bus up somewhere and we made it the front-page story. The team thought we should have focused on part of the game or a matchup instead of that. It does affect game prep and everything and the fact that in the past (coach) and (player) have brought it up and campaigned to get an indoor practice facility there, their comments at this time last year was more acceptance of what they had to deal with and it won't change. That respect did make some news and the fact that the team next day was not happy and there was a couple e-mails. We got to think what's the best story out there and that certainly for that day was. There are times where PR will give their two cents and ask why you did something. There's times when I give my two cents to them and ask why they went that way. It's a lot of give and take and I think both sides realize they have a job to do."

Respondent 24: “It really won’t affect what I write. My responsibility is to my newspaper and my readers.”

Question 7: As a reporter, how do you manage remaining objective when writing about the organization?

Respondent 1: “You’re required to do that, that’s one. Number two, it’s not easy, because the (team) hasn’t been too good to the media. I get the feeling that when you have the chance to maybe lay the hammer down on them, if you do it in a fair way; I think you can get away with it. But when they do something well, you try to point that out as often as you can. But it works both ways. There are some writers that cover teams that turn a blind eye to every bad thing that happens. I think when people think of objectivity, they think it means you’re being negative. But there are some people that go overboard in terms of being positive.”

Respondent 2: “That’s an interesting question because half the people that criticize me believe that I’m not objective, that I’m either for the organization or can’t stand the organization. Some people think I’m completely against the (team), other people think that I won’t say anything bad against the (team). It’s actually exactly in the middle somewhere. I really have no rooting interest whatsoever with the (team). I think the longer you cover a team or a sport, the easier it is to stay objective because you’re dealing with these people as business partners. You have to do your job, you’re not there as a fan. Therefore, it really is a case of it’s not difficult at all especially when you’ve been doing it for a while. And I guess the best way to explain that is there’s an old saying that you never want to meet your idol and there’s a lot of truth to that. When you meet a lot of these players, there really not any different than anyone else. A lot of them are even

worse, so it's very easy to stay objective. You judge them on themselves, it has nothing to do with the team and I don't find that to be a problem."

Respondent 3: "It's very difficult and I'm not sure that's really possible. What you try to be is fair. Bottom line is I can try to be objective, but the better the team does the better play my stories get. The more attention I get. It's just more fun to cover a good team than a bad team so it's very hard to be completely objective but you had to keep in mind that I don't really know everything and that my job is to put things out there. I do form conclusions but I don't close off viewpoints other than my own. I try to present materials to fans in such a way that they see both sides of the story if there's a dispute over a contract or something like that. I try to make sure that the player's side and the team's side are coherently explained. The same with covering a game, if my take is that (coach) is an idiot and I exclude all evidence that doesn't point to that conclusion, I'm not really doing my job. If I cover a game, and (coach) really screws something up, I certainly have to present what happened, what people had to say, and that things didn't go very well. You don't have to tell people your conclusion; I think you let them make up their mind to some extent. You have a responsibility to try to sort through the relevant information and give them the facts that they need."

"A lot of people don't do that (present both sides). It's a real problem in our business. If you become a guy who only looks at the player's point of view, and is always very sympathetic to the player, then agents and players will come to you and use you as a sympathetic ear to get their issues out in the open because they know that you'll present

this in a way that's sympathetic for them and the same goes for management. But if you try to play it down the middle, you're nobody's buddy and it kind of hurts you in the long run. You have to have integrity because you're really working for the reader, but you definitely miss out on stories because there are a lot of people in this business who work one side of the street or the other."

Respondent 4: "It's pretty easy. You just talk about what's in front of you. I lost track of how to root for teams a long time ago, it's just something you do. I don't root for anybody to win or lose or anything. I root for myself to get my story in on deadline. That's all."

Respondent 5: "That's a really interesting question because we have this debate all the time in terms of being a sports fan. I grew up in (city of team) and I played (sport) all my life so obviously as a kid I grew up watching the (team). They were my team. Once you get into a situation in journalism, you need to get the facts out there and sometimes that means going against what the team is trying to promote. Today's news is a perfect instance. I found out through different sources that (player) is suffering from a head injury but the flyers wouldn't divulge that information. (Name of GM) wouldn't confirm it on the record. In terms of remaining objective, I need to have that news out there even if it's detrimental to the team or anything like that. That's the honest way to view this job and sometimes that involves upsetting people and pissing people off sometimes. That's what you need to do in order to have your readers and some of the other news media gathering organizations know that that's the way you're going to have your coverage."

You're not going to take what your told all the time as gospel, if you pretended like that was the truth you wouldn't be looking at things objectively."

Respondent 6: "It's easy. It's my job. It's my integrity. The worst thing you can be called as a sportswriter covering a team is a homer. I've never been called that thankfully. I never will be called that. You have to do the job. If you do it correctly, honestly, and not try to screw the team, if you are an objective, impartial person writing about the team, they will respect that and you will get along fine. Some of them, particularly players, don't always understand that. Certain players will come up to you in the locker room even today and say, 'Look out here comes, watch what you say.' It's only because of previous discussions where we've had to touch on sensitive things. And I will do my job whatever the cost. Last year, a couple of linemen went to the PR staff and told them we wouldn't talk to me anymore. I said fine but if I have a question, I'm going up to them and going to ask them the question. However, they want to respond, that's their prerogative. But I will ask the question. I'm not intimidated. I won't back into a corner because they say they don't want to talk to me. And they understand that. Most players get the fact that this is my job. It's their job and they have to respond to the media to some degree, how much is their prerogative. It's my job to ask hard questions. It's my job to get information. We have to have a meeting ground. Out of 50 some players, 40 players I'm on good terms with in the sense, that I can go up to them and talk at any point. The other 15 or 20, the situation has to be right."

Respondent 7: “Because I know what I’m supposed to do, it makes it easier I think that they’ve been a successful team for most of the time I’ve covered them. This is the fifth year full time, parts of seven years now. For most of that time, they’ve been fairly successful. There’s not really a lot of negative stuff to write about. There’s also the danger of getting caught up the other way and becoming a fan of the team. You have to realize that for me personally, I’m a fan of some of the players because I see them on a daily basis. There are some weeks during the season, that I see them more than I see my own family. So you develop relationships with these guys and you’re friendly with them. I might personally root for guys here and there. It’s human nature. I cover the team. If they do well, I write they’re doing well. If they’re doing poorly, write that they’re doing poorly. That’s what my job description calls for, so you just try to stick to that as best you can.”

Respondent 8: “It’s the job. Your responsibility is first and foremost to the newspaper. In that instance, you have to write your best story everyday. The dynamic is unique because you’re with these players, coaches, and manager from the first day of spring training until the last day of the season. You spend more time in this dynamic then with your own family. But you’re not part of their family. Obviously that line is always there and it has to be or you couldn’t do your job correctly if you didn’t. It’s not just a fine line. It’s a pretty bold line. At the end of the day, you’re loyal to your paper and the things you have to do to get the best story everyday. The access that you have is essential to your job. That’s why we’re there in the clubhouse in the afternoon at 3:30 for a 7:05 game because it helps to know these players in that setting and in the off limits area and

talk to them and have some idle chatter and get to know them because it helps frame your stories. You can get ideas, color things in a way that brings other things into focus that you normally wouldn't if you were just there for the games and that's it. The access is a privilege. It's a way to get to know the players but you and they know that there's that line there, that you're loyal to your paper, they're loyal to their team, and you're objective and purpose there everyday is to write the best story you can. It's a very unique dynamic especially in (sport) because you get to know these people very well during the season, if you're doing your job right, this is the way you can add color to your story, especially a feature story that you normally wouldn't get if you didn't have that access."

Respondent 9: "That's a hard question. Probably because that's the way we were taught to be. At the end of the day, objectivity is the name of the game. You have to remain objective. You can't take things personally. You can't make it a personal vendetta against anybody. You have to see things for what they are and call things for what they are and move on. Maybe next time, a similar situation is going to arrive and the team is going to handle it the proper way, and then you obviously call it like it is and if they did it the right way and they're being honest with you, then that's good. That's the way you would expect teams to behave always. I realized that's not always the case. Otherwise, we wouldn't need journalists to cover sports teams. We could just have the PR department write press releases for us and obviously that's not going to be the case anytime soon."

Respondent 10: “That is something that’s hard to do. The way you talk to guys, you can’t help but like certain guys and hope they do well. At the end of the day, you realize there winning or losing has no bearing on you. I like (player), hes professional, funny, engaging. You like (player 2), when he says something, it’s profound. You find yourself saying, ‘Make the shot (player).’ Them losing, I don’t feel bad. When the Steelers lose, I feel bad. When the University of Alabama loses, I feel really bad. It’s tough though. It’s something I used to laugh at, reporters who used to become homers. But I can see how it can happen. You like the people involved. It’s one of those things you got to guard against. Me and the coach have a great relationship. I have to fight not liking him too much. When I’m writing, I look and see if sounds ‘homerish’ and make myself sound critical of him. Even though I like him a lot. You have to think about it, am I liking him too much? It may make me unfair, but I’d rather do that then be considered a homer by your reading public.”

Respondent 11: “It’s not even a question. That’s how you’re supposed to do it. If you did it any other way, you wouldn’t be doing your job correctly. Always remain objective. It can be difficult if you’ve been with a team a long time. I’ve covered the (team) for 10 years. You do get to know people a bit more than just on a business level. You’re never really friends but you develop relationships. But I think everyone is professional enough to know where that line is. If something happens where it’s a difficult situation, where you might have to write something that may be hard for somebody to read or understand, you still do your job. So I don’t think maintaining objectivity for me has ever been a question or something I’ve ever had to deal with.”

Respondent 12: “It’s part of who you are as a reporter, you’re first responsibility is to your readers, or your viewers, or listeners. Once you have that in perspective, it’s pretty easy. To do a good job, you have to have passion. And if you want to be good at it, then you have to be objective. There’s no other way. You just don’t bring a lot to the table if you lose your objectivity and I think that’s going to be obvious. If your goal is to do a good job and to be good in this profession, then you’ve got to hold onto that objectivity and give it to people straight. That’s all you got is your integrity and your objectivity. Tell the truth, don’t make stuff up and be fair. You have nothing else. In some other professions, maybe you can be a better architect than the next guy. You’re a better designer than the next guy but you’re not necessarily a person of character. That doesn’t matter as much. In this business, those things matter because it’s all you have. It’s your body of work – your character, your objectivity, and your fairness. If its important to you, you wont really struggle with that at all but you’ll also manage to be pretty fair.”

Respondent 13: “Mostly you just cover the news, what happened. You just write the news. You don’t have much freedom. You just have to do your job.”

Respondent 14: “It is tough. I have a problem going on here where there’s a player, that very well deserves to be annihilated on a daily basis, and his agent is one of my biggest sources. It’s very tough for me. I have to walk a very fine line. It’s probably the biggest conflict of interest in my career. I really feel like I need to hammer this guy and it’s very tough for me to do that. On a general basis from an objectivity point of view, you can

ask anyone in this town, I am 100 percent tell it like it is, totally objective. There are players on the team that I'm tight with, but if they turn the puck over for a big goal, I write it. That's just the way this job is. I can tell you I'm definitely not a homer but I definitely don't just overly trash the team for no reason. It is what is sometimes. This new GM who I've known for a long time, he completely gets our role. He knows that at the end of the year I had to be extremely negative. They've missed the playoffs for two straight seasons, three out of the last five. It's unacceptable and it needed to be written."

Respondent 15: "The example I just brought up is a classic example of that decision. It is a fascinating line you walk as a beat writer. I was going to report the story eventually. I just had kind of given somebody in the reporting process the assurance that I would not do so until a certain time because I knew a certain chain of events that was happening that as a beat writer would probably be beneficial for me to wait until those series of events played out. All journalists reach gray areas, especially beat writers that are around an organization and know people intimately. I'm not saying the decision I made is always 100 percent accurate decision. It's the one I knew was the right decision for me at the time. All journalists reach those decisions and weigh the consequences and make decisions accordingly. It is a fine line we walk. I can tell you my personal philosophy. There's far more I know than I put in the newspaper at all times. Unless personal stuff affects professional performance, I consider most personal stuff off limits. That's just my own personal rule as a beat writer covering an organization."

Respondent 16: "It's pretty easy. The one thing I do is I keep my distance from players. I don't socialize with them. I'm not friends with any of them. When I talk to them, it's almost always about a story. It's in the line of work. I'm cordial, I'll say hello but I'm not involved in a lot of conversations that don't have to do with my job. There's some guys who like to talk to reporters about stuff like that. If they engage me in a conversation, I won't shun them or anything. But I do think you need to keep a little bit of arms length in that way, because there usually comes a time when you have to write something about a player he doesn't like. It often just has to do with performance, it's nothing personal. The other thing I think that's important for beat writers, you have to be visible. If you've written something about somebody, you can't hide from them. Not confront them, but be there if they have a problem with it and then hopefully they deal with it professionally. I just had a deal with a guy who didn't deal with it professionally. It kind of made a little bit of a scene in the clubhouse, but that's part of the deal. You write a lot about these guys and occasionally you're going to write something they don't like and you just have to stand up to them. It was about (player), one of their better players, he didn't run out a ball, he didn't run hard on a ball that was dropped. He ended up with a double that could have been a triple. We wrote about it. (Manager name) actually called him out on it saying he should have been on 3rd. It was significant because he would have scored and they end up losing the game by one run. So we asked (manager) about it and he said he should have been on 3rd. The next day, (player) wasn't available. He left by the time we got in the clubhouse. I don't think he was ducking us, but I didn't have a chance to talk to him. So the next day, I went up to him and mentioned it to him and he got belligerent. He wasn't screaming but he was saying some

stupid things. It was in front of some of the players and they didn't really take his side or anything. This year that's the only time I've had to deal with it. I had to deal with it in the past. Players won't like what you write sometimes. Most players will take you aside and do it quietly, but this was kind of out in front of people. It wasn't a huge deal, but its going to happen from time to time."

Respondent 17: "I don't really care about it that much, its just (sport). I work very hard and it is important to me. I'm not a fan, I'm a fan of watching. I'm not a (team) fan. I get slammed by a significant portion of the fans that would bet their lives that I'm a homer. Then I also get slammed by a group just as big, that are convinced that I hate the (team). So I know I'm doing a good job. It is truly hilarious. That's probably an adage you've heard before. If they're split, there you go. If no one's getting mad at you, then you're not doing your job. As much as I like these guys, I get pretty tired of them. So it's pretty easy to retain my objectivity."

Respondent 18: "It's easier than you think. We've been detached so long from the fan mind set, that writing about something objectively in terms of wins, losses, and officials, and all that stuff doesn't really get in the way. You end up liking and not liking certain guys. Certainly that's probably affected me in ways I cant detect. (Coach name) was the coach here, I didn't like him very much. If you went back and look at the stories, I would hope it wouldn't show."

Respondent 19: “It’s funny, it’s just something I’ve been able to condition myself to do. I actually grew up a (comparative team) fan, so its not like I grew up a life long (team) fan even though I live closer to (city of team). For whatever reason, I cheered for the (comparative team) growing up. Its not like I have a deep down love affair with the (team). But if I was covering the (comparative team), I would be the same way, I’d be objective too. When I’m in the stands watching the game as a fan, I just have a different mentality than when I’m in the press box covering a team. I don’t feel fan loyalty. You’re up there writing, you’re on deadline most of the time. You kind of don’t care whether your team wins or loses, you’re just kinds cheering for your story more than your cheering for your team. If there losing after 6 or 7 innings, and I have to start my story and I’m going to write the story that the (team) lost today, it’s better for me and better for my work if they don’t come back in the ninth inning and win the game because then I have to scrap my whole story, re-write, and its just a mad rush and everything. So there’s challenges in my job that prevent me from really taking a rooting interest in a team. It’s a job to do. It’s more fun to cover a winning team than a losing team, but I don’t take that home with me if they lose a game.”

Respondent 20: “It’s my job. I’ve got no other choice. I have to write what’s true or else I have no credibility. I’m not doing anybody a service. I’m not there to make friends with the team. I’m there just to report. This PR staff now understands that and they know that they can’t control everything that is written. If it’s bad news, it’s on the people who created the bad news, not on the person who’s reporting it.”

Respondent 21: “I think it’s pretty easy these days unless you grew up a fan of a team and you find it hard to be objective. Sometimes people can become close to an organization and everybody likes to see the team their covering do well because it’s easier to talk to players, coaches, general managers, and owners when everybody is happy and things are going well. When things aren’t going well, it may make your job more difficult. There could be more drama, interesting things to cover. If you’re in this business, most people are pretty professional. It’s pretty easy to not get caught up and to remain unbiased. That’s our jobs really.”

Respondent 22: “It’s almost impossible. When you cover (sport) it’s a completely different beat than any other sport. I started in (sport) in 1995. It’s totally different. Journalism 101 kind of goes out the window. You just can’t maintain that wall between you and the people you’re covering when you’re around them every single day for 7 ½ months. You have to be human and develop some kind of working relationship with these people. That’s the biggest difference. In keeping it professional as I can, I tend to root for the team I cover to win because it makes my job easier and more interesting. It can be a dreadful experience if they’re not. You want them to at least do well enough to be interesting. Now you don’t want them to go to the World Series because that just prolongs your work year. You want them to do well enough to be interesting and if they make the playoffs, that helps too. I think that makes your job more interesting and exciting, and more people are reading you too.”

Respondent 23: “My role as the beat writer is to not to be the homer or the fan, but also not to be overly critical. My role is in the middle. I’m supposed to be the analyst, besides breaking news and events of the day, on why they made moves, why do they make sense, and why are they doing this and what’s next. I think with the advent of the Internet and the blogs and everything, the world of the newspaper beat writer is changed because by the time people pick up the newspaper the next day they’ve known for about 18 hours what has happened. It’s up to the newspaper beat writer now to say “Why did it happen and what does it mean?” I know in my role I use the blog and the Internet to report the news to say what happened and then I got to spin it forward for print and say why, how, and what is this going to affect. We’re almost like AP guys now. For the web thing you’re saying what happened. For your optional and down the line, you got to do the why and what it means for the future.”

Respondent 24: “You can’t bullshit people, least of all readers and certainly not athletes, who know when they have done a good job and when they have slacked off. Just tell the truth in the paper. That usually doesn’t get you in trouble.”

Question 8: In your opinion, do PR departments effectively manage the team's reputation? Please be specific.

Respondent 1: "I think they contribute to it. I can say that they're in charge of the reputation and image of the team. One thing about a team is winning and losing. The (comparative team) are a beloved team out here in (city of comparative team). When you're around the team, the writers are always bad mouthing the players, they're not cooperating. (Player) is a pain in the ass, this and that. But I still think the perception is they're winning. That has a lot to do with it. People love winning teams. I don't know if the PR people play that much of a role, they do play a role but I still think winning and losing is the great deciding factor. When some teams have things happen off the field, but because they're winning, they're seen as a loveable, out of control team. This day and age, it's different with the Internet. You can't slip up. It can hurt the brand. It hurts the image of the team though no doubt if a player screws up, people want to see a guy get up and have to answer questions that might make him a little uncomfortable. If a guy doesn't, it's only going to hurt him."

Respondent 2: "I think they do to a degree. But I don't think you can put it on the shoulders of the PR department. Everything they do comes from upper management, in the case of the (team), the GM and president (name). It's not really the (team) PR staff that's managing anything. It's really upper management that tells them what to do. In the case of the (team), there is nothing done without permission from above. Yes, not always positive. It's been managed the way they would like to be viewed. They've done

a good job doing what they feel is right but I think their reputation has been hurt by their PR. They're not really viewed as a fan friendly, media friendly organization. That's not the fault of PR. They would love to be more cooperative and make players and everyone more available but upper management has really fought this for many years. When the team built the new arena in Newark, we were hopeful that things might change. Being on their own, they could build media rooms for postgame interviews with coaches. They could make it much easier on both the players and the media, but they've actually made it much tougher. We have a very poor area; a tiny area where you're stuck with TV and other writers and there's no way really to get players 1 on 1. It's a terrible atmosphere for interviews, pregame. What was intended to be a postgame coaches press conference room, is a room where they just store equipment for the arena. The coach just comes into the eating room after the games and we talk to him in there. When you're covering a game, very often you'd like to get to both lockerrooms. That was possible at the Meadowlands because the lockerrooms were right down the hall from each other. That's possible at the new arena, but the (team) don't let the media go in through the front door of the dressing room, therefore it is virtually impossible to do both dressing rooms after a game at the Prudential Center simply because of logistics. It's too far to get to one dressing room to the other. There's no doubt in my mind that that's done somewhat intentional."

Respondent 3: "In the (team's) sense, I think they have their work cut out for them. (Names of owners) over the years have been very difficult to present in a way that (natives of the city) are going to be sympathetic to. I don't think that's the PR

department's fault, that's just the way those guys are. (Coach), the same. I think the PR department does a good job and there always looking for things they can do to try and bridge the gap, so that reporters will understand the organization's point of view better. I don't have any problems with the way they do their job, I just wish a lot of rules were different but that's not the PR departments fault."

Respondent 4: "Yea very much so. They do a very good job of putting forward what it means to be the (team) or what their ideal of being the (team) is as one of the oldest franchises in the league, it comes with a certain amount of responsibility and clout that they use that when they need to and they rely on it. They're known throughout the league as being a classy franchise. That starts at the top with the ownership so when things like (player) happens, you can look to a person like (owner name) for a comment and know you're going to get an honest and thoughtful answer from him. Whereas another owner, you might not really trust what you're hearing."

Respondent 5: "Yea I think they do a pretty good job in that they're always pushing positive stories. They're really upfront and out there about their charity and community involvement. They're always doing the most they can to have their players and brand promoted in a positive way. In a lot of ways, that comes back to being on time and quick with different things. There always fast to send out an email with a press release or a little stat, even in the summer when things are quiet, to keep their team and brand in the news. To always have some interesting information out there to keep their fan base hungry and keep the market going."

Respondent 6: “They try very hard. That starts at the top though. All of this is kind of set in order by the owner (name) and it filters down. Everybody understands that the brand is the big thing these days. They have to protect the brand. They want to make sure that they are represented in the most positive light. My first year, (player) was accused of a double murder in Atlanta and they wind up going to the Super bowl. They had to manage that situation by controlling how much access we had to (player name). The first press conference after he had admitted that he was less than honest with the police but was exonerated from any guilt in the slaying. They had one press conference; it was massively attended. You got to ask so many questions. I got to ask maybe two or three. That was the only time we got to talk to (player) about that subject. That was managing the situation. They thought it was fair. They thought it was the way it had to be done so (player) wouldn’t be hounded to death. To an extent, I can appreciate that. I would like to have had more questions answered. When I came away from that press conference, I was not pleased that we had so few questions answered. But that was the plan. That was the strategy. (Player) wasn’t coached up by the team, but by his lawyers. He knew what to say, what he couldn’t say. It was extremely managed. As managed as anything I’ve ever seen in all my time covering the (league).”

Respondent 7: “Yes, I think so. I think they do a good job of controlling the message. They have their own in house newspaper that comes out weekly during the season. They have their own production group that produces “behind the scenes” stuff, as well as an

online daily show. They do try to keep the message on task and to talk about the (team) and the positive things the (team) are doing.”

Respondent 8: “They’re such a powerful brand and they do their own advertising, their own network. They do things on their own that accomplishes that. The “Hope Week” thing they do, it’s a nice thing they do. The just started last year to sort of highlight certain charities or causes or people that might not ordinarily get any press attention. They try to direct the press to that and it made for some very nice stories last year, not only in print but in TV and magazines. But I think every club tries to do that. They’re very conscious of being seen as a charitable organization and they are. They have people who do these things on their own with their own causes like (player 1), (Player 2), and (Player 3) from a large roster who do good things. That shows them in a positive light and often makes for good stories. So in that sense, it’s a subtle way of directing positive press. But if it’s for a good cause, that’s one way of directing positive press.”

Respondent 9: “I think to a large degree they help do it. They really can’t control everything that’s going on. The most visible part of a team is players and athletes. At the end of the day, whatever they do on and off the field is going to dictate what the reputation is.”

Respondent 10: “I would say yes. One of things they do is they want to get out the positives and cut back on the negatives. They always push the soup kitchen visits, so and so, gave so and so some sneakers. They put it in your face; you’ve got to put in your

coverage. You wouldn't let them control the message and put it front and center, but you mention it. I guess (player) doesn't have to give away 100 sneakers but he does. He doesn't have to donate one of his cars to help Michigan hungry, but he does. That's part of the things they do and that's their job to do that. Put that stuff in your face so you have no choice but to at least mention it somewhere."

Respondent 11: "Yes. I deal with the (team) mostly. I don't have anything bad to say about how they do their jobs. Their job is to try and portray their team in the best light they can. I do think they do that but at the same time, I don't think they get in the way of me doing what I need to do. I think we've developed a pretty good give and take as to what each of us understands the others role is."

Respondent 12: "I think that's part of what they do, sure. They try to get the right message out. Some do it more overtly than others. Some are a little more laid back with it. But yes, part of their function is to mold an image. That's important. Whether it's a (sport) team or a fortune 500 company. That's important. People need to like the organization if they're going to spend their money watching that team on Sunday or buying your product or whatever it might be. So I think that's a function of a PR department. I think you have to do it with some level of honesty. You can't do it with lying to people. There are ways to do it. You highlight things that accomplish that; players who work in the community, players who are unique in someway. I think those are the types of messages you want to get across and you want to stress those more than others. They should engage in that. The (team) probably fall in the middle. They don't

necessarily do it overtly but they do a decent enough job, if there's a good story out there. That works for both parties. I got nothing against doing a great story about a guy who is a success story in some way. I have nothing against that. That works for everybody. From that perspective we get a good bit of that. We have a GM who in combination with the PR department has been proactive in trying to give us background on stories. Is he maybe trying to shape stories? To some extent, perhaps. But it certainly helps everyone involved, the team and the reporter, to have that background and in the process, the team gets the benefit of giving its perspective, which is going to help the team. I understand that. So for those reasons, I would say yes, they do make a pretty decent effort to manage the reputation."

Respondent 13: "I think they'd like to. It doesn't come up that much on the professional level. More what you're doing is you're trying to provide access to get more coverage. That's the idea for media relations. There's very little marketing you can do. For the most part, they deal with a beat reporter like myself. There's no spin. You can spin all you want, it's a joke. No one would even try. Instead you provide access or deny it, but you don't try and market. There's too many games. The facts are there. It would be a wasted effort. It's just not how it's done."

Respondent 14: "This team does have it good here. People just love (sport). I don't think there's a way for PR staff to manage a reputation. I think if there are stories out there, there's nothing a PR staff can do. They can throw out their tweets, and their contests, and charities and things like that but I don't think you can turn a bad reputation

of a team into a good one, or vice versa. I just think PR is liaison between the team and the media and that's just what they got to do and do the best they can. I don't think there's anything they can do to "manage" it."

Respondent 15: "I can tell you that's one area where I give the (team's) staff a lot of credit. I think that if they air on a side, they'll protect the organization, but they're very understanding of the job's media and reporters have to do. I think they're very realistic when tough stories have to be written and very fair to reporters when tough stories have to be written. They're very empowering in terms of freedom in letting you do your job. They only step in if a) you crossed the line or b) you need guidance or direction in a tough spot, I give them a lot of credit in that regard."

Respondent 16: "I would say no. In fairness to them, I don't think they set out to. I think they let it speak for itself. They have a history of not having a lot of off the field things. They haven't had success on the field and I don't think they try to hide that. I think they would like it to be better. They don't walk around telling us we tried hard or came close. They know the fact that they haven't won is going to reflect on how fans look at the club. I think they kind of let the record stand for itself. The one thing they'll do from time to time is that they'll point out what they're trying to do and let us know the resources they've put into trying to win but other than that they let the record stand for itself."

Respondent 17: “Yes. There are people who would disagree with me. You know what shapes a team’s reputation more than anything? Winning. That’s just what it is. Especially now with all the feedback, a big part of my job is communicating with fans. I do a mailbag, emails, chats, speaking things, radio. My job has become so much communication with the fans. That’s one reason I’ll root for ‘em. Plus when they’re winning it’s a better story. If they lose it’s going to be a bad week, for me cause the fans are pissed. I’m going to get 1000 entries to my mailbag by Sunday night. If they win, it’s going to be an easy week. And I’m only going to get 200 entries. Winning and losing dictates seriously, in terms of public relations. Their job is a lot easier when the team is winning and they work really hard, not a lot of money. Their reward is to be doing a job they love in athletics and when the team wins. Yes, they do a good job of managing the team’s reputation. The owner’s family does a lot of stuff. Hundreds of thousands of dollars they give to San Diego schools every year. But people’s image of them, is whether the (team) are winning or not. They do a fantastic job of publicizing what the players, coaches, and owners are doing. Statistics as well. I’m sorry though, if they win on Sunday or not, that’s it. Don’t take that as me putting these guys down. I couldn’t do it. Sorry. I work my ass off, but I also get more than two weeks off a year. These guys bust their ass. Are they winning or losing and I’ll tell whether or not the (team’s) PR staff is doing a good job in managing the team’s image.”

Respondent 18: “I would say yes. But I also wonder what would happen if they weren’t there at all. There’s a PR director there a few years ago that actively tried to spin things in the organization. Most PR people do it so subtly that you can’t read it. But this guy

was a political spin-master. I don't think that had any effect. You don't see anyone lobbying as hard as this guy did. Columnists and writers are going to write what they're going to write. The PR spin would be hard to detect if you look at the beat coverage."

Respondent 19: "I think they do. It's just the one PR department on the (sport) side is all I deal with. I think they do a pretty good job handling the entire team. When people are going to write stories, there's only so much a PR staff can do to limit that. I think they do a pretty good job. They do all they can to uphold the team's reputation in general. I think they do a fairly good job, yes."

Respondent 20: "Yes, as best they can. I still think it's up to the subjects though. They have the best control over what their image is or how they're viewed. The players, coaches, and management, their actions are the ones that tell the story. The PR staff can only do so much. But yes, I think the PR staff does as good a job as they can."

Respondent 21: "Oh yea. They definitely try and do a good job of that. I think the team's reputation is good but if you're talking about their play on the ice, this year they made the playoffs but for nine years before that, they didn't. I think its kind of hard to protect or do a great job when there's such a playoff drought and you've had coaching and GM changes, so that might be a little bit difficult. But I think they do a good job marketing their brand and effectively communicating their message. For the most part, I can't remember one scandal or anything off hand so I would say they do a pretty effective job."

Respondent 22: “They attempt to. It’s hard to say they do a good job. Since (owner name) bought the team in 2004, they’ve been to the playoffs 4 times in 6 years and yet he still has a very bad rep around (city) and is an unpopular owner among the fan base. Rightfully so, because of some of the things he’s done and the arrogance you see on occasion. The fans pick up on it pretty quickly. The PR staff tries very hard to bend him in a positive light in spite of all those things, almost to the point of shoving it down our throats. To the media’s credit we haven’t really bought into it and to the fans credit they haven’t really bought into it. I think everyone sees this ownership for what it is and presents it that way. Yea, I don’t think they effectively manage it. At times they do but all in all, I don’t think they do because (owner name) still has a very negative image around town.”

Respondent 23: “I think they do a good job of it in terms of effectively managing it. To the national media, they do a good job of getting the message across. To the local media and fans, at times because of the reputation of this franchise, it’s a lot harder to do because of the owner and the track record of losing. I would imagine it’s the same in Pittsburgh with the Pirates and Kansas City with the Royals, and everything else where you have woeful franchises. Nationally, the outlook might be a little bit rosier but local it’s very dire.”

Respondent 24: “They try, but in sports, media-relations people are getting younger and younger and, often, more females are doing the job. Getting players to handle media responsibilities no longer is a key element. Instead of “hey, player x, you have to do this

interview,” it’s “hey, player x, can you please do this?” This is not an indictment on our female flaks. There are some great ones in the business, like (name) at Phoenix and (name) in Portland. I just think a lot of them have forgotten that most beat writers want the team to do well because of one simple fact: it helps sell newspapers. If they work with beat writers a little more effectively, I think they’d be surprised how well the two-way street can work. Reporters are human. If we get some help in breaking a story or two, we’re sometimes not as quick to jump on the negative stories that inevitably happen, or at least can write them in a softer tone. This sort of give-and-take seems lost in today’s world.”