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THE PATTERNS OF READER AND  
EDITOR INTEREST IN SPORTS NEWS  
AND COVERAGE OF SPORTS NEWS BY A DAILY NEWSPAPER:  
A SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF SPORTS PAGES STAFF  
AND SPORTS NEWS READERS OF THE (LANSING) STATE JOURNAL

By

Elise Christine Bates

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## ABSTRACT

THE PATTERNS OF READER AND  
EDITOR INTEREST IN SPORTS NEWS  
AND COVERAGE OF SPORTS NEWS BY A DAILY NEWSPAPER:  
A SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF SPORT PAGES STAFF  
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The study assessed, through mail survey techniques, the perceived interest and satisfaction sports editors, writers and readers have in the (Lansing) State Journal sports pages and factors which influence sports news coverage in the newspaper.

The findings, reported in descriptive terms, provide data that indicate that State Journal sports readers vary in terms of a demographic profile but that generally, sports readers are also sports enthusiasts or spectators.

It appears that State Journal sports staffers have a good perception of their readers' interest in sports news, but underestimate readers' satisfaction with the sports section. The findings indicate that sports writers interact with certain sports readers more than do sports editors and finally, that there are a number of news room and personal factors influencing sports staffers' sports news judgments.

Elise Christine Bates

The study points out the need for further research with a larger representative sample and more newspapers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Vishwa M. Mishra, who, with my appreciation, proved a very capable and helpful adviser.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

#### INTRODUCTION

Decisions on sports news coverage in U.S. daily newspapers involve several aspects of news judgment. Available space, the number of sports activities, and the different types of available sports events are only a few of the variables involved. The question then arises: Who decides which of these sports to cover, how much space to allot each sport and in what order of importance the sports stories should appear? It can be assumed an editor accepts the responsibility for these decisions.

A second question is then raised: How are these decisions made? It is doubtful specific rules exist for sports page make up, for on no day are the sports pages exactly alike. It follows that perhaps "editors' intuition" serves as the single greatest factor in sports news decisions.

A look at editors' intuition raises yet another question. What is this intuition based upon? The editors' personal feelings are certainly involved, but more importantly, the editor second guesses his or her readers.

Decisions based upon editors' perceptions of what readers want to see are intrinsic to all aspects of newspaper management. Sports editors and their staffs may have based several perceptions of their readers' interests and preferences by interacting with certain readers, by noting the personalities of spectators at actual sports events, or by being avid sports fans themselves. The assumed interaction or contact between sports page staffers and certain sports news readers emerges, then, as a determinant of sports news coverage by newspapers. Consequently, in allotting news space for sports, it is difficult for news staffs to gauge and accurately meet the interests of their readers without adequate interaction with them. Interest is a somewhat nebulous concept but is defined here as the "predisposition to pay attention". Sports news staffs must then determine to what extent readers are predisposed to pay attention to sports news.

Several studies have looked at news staff perceptions of their readers' interest under different categories, such as local, national, international and science news. The studies often found the editors and readers in substantial disagreement over story preferences by the readers. Other relevant studies examine news hole and news judgment policies as well as the activities of editors and publishers of daily newspapers.

It appears, however, that no study similar to the one proposed here has been conducted. Nor are there

available research findings that relate sports news and reader interest in sports news in similar fashion as this study attempts.

Sports reporting and writing are, however, looked at in research articles by Novak<sup>1</sup> and Witteman.<sup>2</sup> In regard to readers' and editors' varying perceptions of newspapers, two studies examined news staff perceptions of reader interest in news as compared with actual reader interest. Both used Q-sort technique to determine story preference.

Starck focused on producer/consumer perceptions of daily newspaper functions. Using Q-sort technique among thirty-nine respondents, Starck concluded that the higher educated news staff members were more aware of their readers' perceptions and that in general, the news staffs and readers perceived the functions of a daily newspaper similarly.<sup>3</sup> Also using Q-sort technique, Atwood studied thirty subscribers and several editors to determine story preferences. His study found that age, education and sex do not appear to be consistently related to story preference type. Specifically, Atwood found the impact of a story was the preferred news element among readers while conflict

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Novak, "The Game's the Thing: A Defense of Sports as a Ritual," Columbia Journalism Review, 15(1976): 33-36.

<sup>2</sup>Paul A. Witteman, "Rite of Spring: Covering Hank Aaron," Columbia Journalism Review, 13(1974): 3-4.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Starck, "Producer/Consumer Perceptions of the Function of the Daily Newspaper," Journalism Quarterly, 51(1974): 670-676.



rated second. Differences among preference types in his study centered on the oddity element of news stories. The prominence of events or persons was not found to be a determinant of story selection among readers.<sup>4</sup>

Greenberg, administering a semantic differential scale on 200 newspaper subscribers, found that editors and readers differ greatly in perceived judgment of both daily and weekly newspapers. The discrepancies led Greenberg to conclude there is not enough effective communication between editors and a segment of their readers.<sup>5</sup> Martin, O'Keefe and Nayman used other techniques, such as interviews with editors and readers and content analysis of a newspaper covering a controversial subject, to study opinion agreement between editors and their readers. Martin et al. found that editors' decisions may be most influenced by their perceptions of the majority opinion in their communities. They found that editors with higher education have higher accuracy in perceiving their readers' opinions.<sup>6</sup>

The nationwide Harris Survey dealt most specifically with the differences between editors and readers in regard

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<sup>4</sup>L. Erwin Atwood, "How Newsmen and Readers Perceive Each Others' Story Preferences," Journalism Quarterly, 47 (1970): 296-302.

<sup>5</sup>Bradley S. Greenberg, "Community Press as Perceived by Its Editors and Readers," Journalism Quarterly, 41(1964): 437-440.

<sup>6</sup>Ralph K. Martin, Garrett J. O'Keefe and Ogus B. Nayman, "Opinion Agreement and Accuracy Between Editors and their Readers," Journalism Quarterly, 49(1972): 460-468.

to sports news interest. The survey found 75 percent of newspaper editors interviewed believed readers have a high interest in sports, while only 35 percent of the public surveyed expressed such an interest. While the survey concluded that staffers overestimated the interest the public has in sports news, it did not identify the variables which might account for the difference.<sup>7</sup>

Several studies do, however, deal with the many and somewhat undetermined variables in editor/reader perceptions of newspapers. Donohew stated the variables involved in news play are many and that some are still uninvestigated.<sup>8</sup>

Studies that indicate variables in news play other than editor or publisher attitude include those by Donohew,<sup>9</sup> Breed,<sup>10</sup> Berelson,<sup>11</sup> Liebes,<sup>12</sup> and Gieber.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, Donohew stated that each of the indicators of publishers'

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<sup>7</sup> Louis Harris, "Harris Survey," Detroit Free Press, January 9, 1978, p. 12-B.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis Donohew, "Newspaper Gatekeepers and Forces in the News Channel," Public Opinion Quarterly, 31(1967): 61-68.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Warren Breed, "Social Control in the News Room: A Functional Analysis," Social Forces, 33(1955): 326-327.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Berelson, "Communication and Public Opinion," in Wilbur Schramm, ed., The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954), p. 343.

<sup>12</sup> Barry H. Liebes, "Decision-Making by Telegraph Editors--AP or UPI?" Journalism Quarterly, 43(1966): 434-442.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Gieber, "Across the Desk: A Study of 16 Telegraph Editors," Journalism Quarterly, 33(1956): 423-432.

attitude, publishers' perception of community opinion and community conditions would be found to be systematically related to each of the measurements of gatekeeper behavior (i.e., news coverage). Liebes, using observation and mail questionnaires, found the variables in news play include policy, personal (editor) idiosyncracies, wire service news budget, story primacy and space limitations. Liebes, like Breed, found that newspaper policy has little influence in news judgment, but that deadlines and news holes do have some affect. To determine why some items are published and others are not, Gieber interviewed editors about demographic data and personal history, assigned duties, inter-personal factors in the news room, perceptions of community and readers and news policies. These are all factors influencing gatekeepers in news judgment decisions.

Sports editors and writers are gatekeepers of sports news because they determine story selection and importance. Gatekeepers may also have several personal interests which influence their news judgment decisions. The following specific questions for editors were included in a study of gatekeepers by White to determine some of the varying influences on gatekeepers: 1) Does the category of news affect your choice of news stories? 2) Do you have any prejudices which might affect your choice of news stories? 3) What is your concept of the audience for whom you select stories and what sort of person do you conceive the average reader to be? 4) Do you have specific tests of subject matter or way

of writing that help you determine the selection of any particular news story?<sup>14</sup> It appears, then, that the proposed study could address itself to similar questions designed to generate data for correspondence between gatekeepers and a newspaper's audiences.

Other influences on the gatekeeper may include a publisher's activity or interest in sports news. In a study of activity of daily newspaper publishers, Bowers asked editors to appraise whether their publishers were active in decisions on content or display of news items all the time, often, occasionally, seldom or never. Bowers found that 1) the closer the geographical proximity of the news event, the more active the publisher, 2) the larger the circulation of the newspaper, the less active the publisher, and 3) publisher activity is highest in areas which involve their personal activities.<sup>15</sup> These conclusions may also have some relevance to the proposed study.

Casey and Copeland used a mail questionnaire in their study of advertising content and news hole policy.<sup>16</sup> While

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<sup>14</sup>David M. White, "The 'Gate Keeper': A Case Study in the Selection of News," Journalism Quarterly, 27(1950): 383-390.

<sup>15</sup>David R. Bowers, "A Report on Activity by Publishers in Directing Newsroom Decisions," Journalism Quarterly, 44(1967): 43-52.

<sup>16</sup>Ralph D. Casey and Thomas H. Copeland Jr., "Current 'News Hole' Policies of Daily Newspapers: A Survey," Journalism Quarterly, 34(1957): 175-186.

their findings may not be directly relevant to this study, they do appear to be useful in formulating its conceptual framework in that advertising and news hole can affect the sports pages as much as editor's intuition. Using a mail questionnaire and content analysis, Drew and Wilhoit found there is a proportionately large display of sports in daily newspapers. Local news was found to constitute 75 percent of the news space (measured by column inches) on an average day and it was found that sports news ranked next with 6 percent of the news space. There is no indication in the study as to why sports rank second to local news in news space, yet have one of the lowest readerships in daily newspapers.<sup>17</sup> This is a large discrepancy and for this reason, sports news was selected as the topic for this study. Sports interest and estimated interest also created the largest difference between readers and editors in the news items listed in the previously mentioned Harris Survey.

Several researchers studied readers' interest in all news categories and also noted the low percentage of interest in sports. Swanson<sup>18</sup> and Schramm and White,<sup>19</sup> in

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<sup>17</sup> Dan Drew and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, "Newshole Allocation Policies of American Daily Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 53(1976): 434-440.

<sup>18</sup> Charles E. Swanson, "What they Read in 130 Daily Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 32(1955): 411-421.

<sup>19</sup> Wilbur Schramm and David M. White, "Age, Education and Economic Status as Factors in Newspaper Reading," in Schramm, ed. Mass Communications, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1960) p. 438-450.

particular studied readers' interest in sports. Swanson determined that sports comprised nearly 12 percent of the items on various types of pages with only 8 percent of the total readership. In his study, he classified sports as one of the ten least read items in the newspaper. Swanson determined that the physical size of the newspaper, the time of the issue and the size of the circulation do not relate to important differences in readership. However, he did note that the reader intensity of interest is important. Newspaper readers often scan the sports section but do not read any articles in particular.

Schramm and White were able to provide a demographic profile of "sports readers" in terms of age, sex, education and economic status:

Reading of sports news is at its height in people in their twenties, thereafter it tapers off. It increases with economic status, and there is considerable increase between grade school and high school educated groups.

Three times as many men as women may read sports.<sup>20</sup> In another study, Schramm measured the depth of reading or the percentage of a news story which was read. This finding, too, may help in the building of a conceptual framework for this study inasmuch as readers may look at the sports section every day but may not necessarily "read" it.

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<sup>20</sup> Schramm and White, "Age, Education and Economic," p. 440.

In still another study, Schramm identifies sports as "immediate reward news." He found sports news give a reader a vicarious experience which may help the reader identify with winners. Schramm labels it as a "less sophisticated form of behavior,"<sup>21</sup> and noted that, "It is a greater reward to identify oneself with the local team which is equally good."<sup>22</sup>

Nafziger, MacLean and Engstrom also analyzed newspaper readership data.<sup>23</sup> Using frequency distribution charts and factor analysis, they determined that while any percent of readers may dip into sports news, very few of them read more than one or two items. Bogart, in a study of changing news interests, justified some of the interest in newspaper sports news:

Newspapers arouse and reinforce interests which other media help to satisfy. For example, television has stimulated interest in spectator sports, but this only increases the readership of newspaper sports pages.<sup>24</sup>

Evaluating newspapers' effectiveness, Anast concluded that readers primarily interested in non-controversial

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<sup>21</sup>Wilbur Schramm, "The Nature of News," Journalism Quarterly, 26(1949): 264.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>23</sup>Ralph O. Nafziger, Malcolm MacLean Jr., and Warren Engstrom, "Useful Tools for Interpreting Newspaper Readership Data," Journalism Quarterly, 28(1951): 441-456.

<sup>24</sup>Leo Bogart, "Changing News Interests and the News Media," Public Opinion Quarterly, 32(1968): 562.

subjects (i.e., sports) are more favorable in their evaluation of the work of the newspaper than persons with controversial interests. Anast also determined that men are more critical than women and the better educated are more critical than the less educated.<sup>25</sup>

The findings from the various studies cited in the foregoing paper provide background on news judgment and editors' perceptions of reader interest in several news categories in general and sports news in particular. Additionally, the studies reflect some knowledge gaps on sports news judgment and sports news play. This phenomenon alone suggests a need for a systematic study of readers' interest in sports pages of daily newspapers. Of particular concern are the variables which may be involved in editor and reader perceptions of newspaper sports news. The research findings are also useful in developing assumptions about sports news judgment and sports editors' perceptions of their readers.

#### BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS

Therefore, on the basis of the preceding discussion, a set of background assumptions regarding sports news judgment, sports news editors and sports news readers was generated.

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<sup>25</sup>Philip Anast, "Attitude Toward the Press as a Function of Interests," Journalism Quarterly, 38 (1961): 376-380.



First, it was assumed that sports news judgments can be intuition-based phenomena. If there are no "sporting guidelines" to follow, editors may base decisions on which sports to cover and how much to cover them upon personal intuitions about what belongs on the sports pages and in which sports readers are most interested.

It is further assumed that readers' interest is an important element of sports news judgment and that sports editors' perceptions of readers' interest in sports has some relationship with sports news coverage. The decision as to whether a newspaper stresses professional, college or high school sports, for example, is based upon these editors' perceptions of what readers are most interested in.

It was also assumed that sports editors and staffers overestimate the interest newspaper readers have in sports news. Sports staffs may estimate a large number of their newspapers' readers are highly interested in sports news while a fewer number of readers than estimated will report such an interest.

A fourth assumption was that catering to sports news interest might be guided by the reinforcement of interest rather than the creation of interest. The more editors feel their readers are interested in certain types of sports news, such as professional or college, the greater the coverage of those sports will be.

It was assumed that perceived community interest in sports news is related to sports news coverage.

It was also assumed there is not enough interaction, operationally defined here as the contact staffers have with sports readers, between sports editors and a segment of their readers. It is likely sports editors have little or no contact with most sports readers on a day-to-day basis. They do, however, have frequent contact with certain influential readers, defined here as readers who are involved in sports news processes.

It was further assumed that readers with high interest in sports news are individuals with personal involvement in sports activities. Highly interested sports readers are active participants in athletics, are frequent spectators at sporting events or most frequently, view sports events or specials on television.

Another assumption was that deadline and news hole are related to sports news coverage. Stories arriving after deadline will not make the paper and will be considered "old" the next day if they concern unimportant (as defined by the editor) sports stories. When the news hole is small, these same stories are the first to be bumped. When the news hole is larger, these stories and others will appear throughout the sports pages.

It was also assumed that sports editors and sports writers may be athletically inclined or sports oriented. Sports staffers reflect interest in sports either by participating or spectating.

Based upon these assumptions, the central proposition for this study is that newspaper sports page staffers' perceptions of readers' interest in sports news is a necessary component of sports news coverage by the newspapers and that the relationship between the aforesaid variables and sports news coverage is constant and cumulative.

#### RATIONALE

The justification for undertaking this study lies in the fact that no data of significant consequence that points out the processes through which judgment pertaining to newspaper coverage or non-coverage of sports-related news events is available. Other data deal with the varying aspects of news coverage, such as gatekeepers, readers and newspaper policy. But no such comprehensive study has been undertaken or systematically conducted to look specifically at such components of sports news coverage as readers, staffers and policy as they relate to each other.

Furthermore, with the shifting demographic and changing psychographic characteristics of the American people, there is an increasing interest in sports--interest in being both participants and spectators. This increase is further augmented by the available or increasing amount of leisure time found in the United States. It is important, then, to study this social phenomenon in sports and sports news in a way that will determine the relationships involved in the appropriate news coverage.

CHAPTER II  
THE PROBLEM, DEFINITION OF TERMS  
AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem. What is the level of interest the State Journal's sports editors, writers and readers have in sports news and what factors influence coverage of sports news by the newspaper?

Specifically, the study had the following research objectives:

- 1) to delineate State Journal sports readers' interest and satisfaction with the State Journal sports section;
- 2) to explore the sports staffers' perceptions of sports readers' interest and satisfaction with the State Journal sports section;
- 3) to determine the State Journal sports editors' and writers' opinions on the frequency of their interaction with certain influential sports readers in the community;
- 4) to examine demographic and psychographic profiles of State Journal sports news readers and sports news staffers;
- 5) to assess the frequency with which publisher,

community and reader interest as perceived by the staffers, reporter and editor interest, news room policies, news hole and deadlines influence State Journal sports coverage; and

6) to draw some conclusions and generalizations.

#### CONCERNS OF THE STUDY

The study was concerned with the examination of the following problem questions:

1) How often do sports news staffers rely on their personal intuition to make sports news judgment decisions?

2) What is the sports staffers' estimation of reader and community interest in sports news? Do perceived reader and community interest in sports news affect sports news judgments?

3) How often do news room policies, available news hole and deadlines influence sports coverage? How often do perceived reader, community and publisher interest, reporter and editor interest, and category of news influence sports news coverage?

4) Do sports staffers interact with sports readers? How often do sports editors interact with sports readers and how often do sports writers interact with sports readers?

5) Do sports readers reflect satisfaction with their newspaper's sports pages or do they report that the sports pages do not contain the sports news or level of sports writing they would like to see?

6) What are the psychographic and demographic characteristics of sports readers?

7) What are the psychographic and demographic characteristics of State Journal sports staffers?

These are the problem questions this study will attempt to explore.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS

The definition of several technical terms as they are used in this study is offered here.

Certain Influential Sports Readers. This term refers to a segment of the reader population who, either through occupation or interest, is involved in sports news processes.

These readers may be coaches, athletes, or other persons involved in sports, who communicate their interest in sports news frequently.

Community Conditions. This term refers to those conditions which may affect the political, cultural and economic status of the community's residents.

The presence of industry, cultural centers or academic institutions, for example, are such community conditions which might affect or be directly related to the status of the community's residents. These conditions will also affect residents' interest in such areas.

Gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are persons who control

the flow of news through news channels.

This definition is found in the vast literature on gatekeepers in communication research. The literature essentially suggests that gate sections are governed either by impartial rules or gatekeepers. Gatekeepers have to make the initial judgment as to whether a story is important or not. In sports writing, sports editors, copy editors, reporters and readers function as gatekeepers.

Interaction. Interaction is operationally defined as the contact or communication sports staffers have with readers.

News Hole. It is defined as the amount of space available for news stories.

News Judgment. This refers to the decision as to which stories appear in a newspaper.

It is based upon several predetermined criteria, including timeliness, consequence, proximity, prominence and human interest. Editors' perceptions of reader interest, publisher attitude, news hole, or deadlines may also be influences on gatekeepers' news judgments.

Readers' Interest. Interest is defined by Solomon Asch as the predisposition to pay attention.

It is applied here to mean the attention paid to sports news. It is assumed "high intensity" or high interest readers exist. They are the readers who read the sports pages thoroughly. There are also "scanners," or those

readers who may briefly glance at sports headlines and read one or two stories, if any at all.

Sports Staffers. Sports staffers are those persons, including sports reporters, sports copy editors, and sports editors, who are employed by the newspaper to produce or edit sports news copy.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

The remainder of this study is organized in three additional chapters, followed by a bibliography and appendices.

Chapter III is concerned with the methodological considerations of the study. In it, the setting and design of the study, as well as the method, are included.

Findings of the study are related in Chapter IV. Conclusions and recommendations for future study are found in Chapter V.

A bibliography, including the works cited in this study, as well as additional relevant research studies and certain appendices which include the cover letters, the questionnaires and tabular presentations of the data, can be found at the conclusion of the report.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

#### HYPOTHESES

Based upon the foregoing discussion, the following descriptive hypotheses were formulated for this study:

It is hypothesized that sports news judgments are based frequently upon sports writers' and editors' perceived reader, community and publisher interests in sports news, their own interest and intuition of what is newsworthy, and on such factors as deadlines, news hole and category of news.

It is hypothesized that sports staffers estimate readers' interest in sports news higher than readers report it and that sports writers interact with certain influential sports readers more than do sports editors.

It is also hypothesized that characteristics such as frequent exercise habits, and personal interest or involvement as spectators or participants in athletic activities are likely to be related to the reading of sports news in the State Journal. Also, readers of sports news are more interested in professional and college sports news than high school or city league sports news.

These hypotheses will be descriptively analyzed and discussed. No pretense to testing these hypotheses through various statistical tests of significance will be attempted.

## METHODS

The methods utilized in the execution of the study consisted of techniques of mail survey. Additional data were generated through documentary and analytical techniques of historical method.

A mail survey research method was chosen as a research technique over telephone surveys or person-to-person interviews because the technique makes the inexpensive collection of a large amount of data possible. A mail survey can also be aimed at a large section of the population which is not reachable by telephone (those either not home, having no phone or unlisted numbers) or in person (those either working, not home for large periods of time or too busy for personal interviews.) Research studies by Dillman,<sup>1</sup> Wiseman,<sup>2</sup> Webb,<sup>3</sup> and Hochstim,<sup>4</sup> among others, discuss the advantages

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<sup>1</sup>Don A. Dillman, Mail and Telephone Data Collection Methods, (New York: Wiley Interscience, 1978).

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Wiseman, "Methodological Bias in Public Opinion Surveys," Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(1972): 105-108.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Webb and Harry P. Hatry, Obtaining Citizen Feedback, (Washington, D.C., The Urban Institute, 1973).

<sup>4</sup>Joseph R. Hochstim, "A Critical Comparison of Three Strategies of Collecting Data from Households," Journal of the American Statistical Association, 62(1967): 976-989.

and disadvantages of the various survey methods. It is generally concluded that the three survey methods all have advantages and disadvantages, but with care, all can be equally reliable.

Several advantages to mail surveys have been identified. This type of survey can produce more candid results than other research techniques because of its completion in the privacy of the respondent's home. This can assure anonymity for the respondent. Also, surveys completed in the comfort of the respondents' homes and at the respondents' choice of time will reduce the possible stress an interview creates. Mail surveys are most appropriate in a population sample which is highly motivated and interested in the questionnaire. Because this particular study is aimed at newspaper readers, a mail survey is seen as highly appropriate.

This method of survey does have several limitations, most of which can be overcome to some degree. The greatest disadvantage to mail surveys is the possibility of a low return rate, which may, in turn, reduce its credibility as an unbiased procedure. Without adequate incentives or motivation, surveys may be cast aside by respondents for various reasons. The utility of the questionnaire has stimulated many studies on its drawbacks and areas for improvement.

One potential limitation that affects the return rate in a mail survey can be found when an inaccurate or

incomplete list is used to draw the sample. Carter, in a review of field research,<sup>5</sup> warns that the mobility of persons tends to make for the early obsolescence of such lists. He also warns that responses will come from a somewhat homogenous group, possibly making the sample a biased one. People who respond, Carter found, often differ from non-respondents in certain known characteristics (e.g., economic status, education and sex.) Respondents will likely be the most opinionated and interested in the questionnaire.

Because the mail survey is self-administered, respondents may answer in an uncertain order, possibly skewing the responses by reading the entire questionnaire before answering questions or by skipping from question to question in no apparent order. There is another limitation due to self-administration, the possibility that the questionnaire may be filled out by someone other than the intended respondent. A final drawback to mail surveys is the lack of opportunity for researchers to probe respondents or to obtain in-depth answers.

In this particular survey study, the sample of newspaper readers will be drawn from recent State Journal subscription lists to avoid the potential complication

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<sup>5</sup>Roy E. Carter Jr., "Field Methods in Communication Research," Ralph O. Nafziger and David M. White, eds., Introduction to Mass Communication Research, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958).

caused by obsolete or incomplete lists. It is an added advantage for this survey that the respondents are an already select population--newspaper subscribers. This puts them at a usually higher educated and higher income level and may in turn, assure the respondent's ability and desire to complete the questionnaire and an above average response rate.

Several research studies have been completed with goals to improve the response rates of mail surveys. These studies were helpful in overcoming a low response rate and other possible difficulties in drawing the procedure for this study. Both Dillman<sup>6</sup> and Blumberg et al.<sup>7</sup> found that high response rates to mail surveys are due not to one single procedure, but to the combination of as many desirable features as possible. The researchers stress the importance of questionnaire appearance and format in a mail survey. The preliminary work done on a survey is crucial to a high response rate. Robinson and Agisim<sup>8</sup>

recommend pretesting the survey and then re-examining the questions. Biased questions have to be thrown out or re-worded. The questionnaire must also be simple and easy to

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<sup>6</sup> Don A. Dillman, "Increasing Mail Questionnaire Response in Large Samples of the General Public," Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(1972): 254-257.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert H. Blumberg, Carolyn Fuller and A. Paul Hare, "Response Rates in Postal Surveys," Public Opinion Quarterly, 38(1974): 113-123.

<sup>8</sup> R.A. Robinson and Phillip Agisim, "Making Mail Surveys More Reliable," Journal of Marketing, 15(1951): 415-424.

fill out, meaning it must be designed attractively and concisely. Blumberg et al. found the content of the survey should contain something of interest or intrigue for a high response rate. Also, a short questionnaire is more likely to be returned than a longer one. The color of paper on which the survey is printed may also affect the response rate, researchers found. Both male and female respondents are more likely to return surveys printed on colored paper.

The next step of a mail survey should include contacting respondents with an advance letter. Linsky<sup>9</sup> recommends this procedure as a technique to increase the response rate.

When the questionnaire is ready for mailing, it should be accompanied by a personalized cover letter. For a higher response, Dillman<sup>10</sup> found the cover letter should appear on appropriate letter head stationery and be hand-signed. The letter should appeal to the respondents and stress his or her role and importance in completing the questionnaire. It should mention how the respondent was selected and why the researcher wants the questionnaire returned. Perhaps an argument for social utility and an

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<sup>9</sup>Arnold S. Linsky, "Stimulating Responses to Mailed Questionnaires: A Review," Public Opinion Quarterly, 39(1975): 82-101.

<sup>10</sup>Dillman, "Increasing Mail Questionnaire," pp. 254-257.

appeal to help should be included, Linsky<sup>11</sup> found. He also stressed mentioning sponsoring organizations and titles in the cover letter, as "prestige gets response." To further increase the potential of a high return rate, Dillman<sup>12</sup> found the cover letter should include the researcher's phone number, in case respondents have questions.

Most researchers agree--the questionnaire should also be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped return envelope to help assure a relatively high response rate. Both the envelope containing the questionnaire and the return envelope should be hand-stamped to increase the effect of the personalized approach to help encourage response. Gullahorn and Gullahorn<sup>13</sup> found a hand-stamped return envelope evokes a sense of obligation from the respondent.

All respondents will not reply immediately to a mail survey. To further increase the response rate, survey researchers recommend mailing a reminder postcard after the bulk of the responses have been returned, and then a second cover letter, and second questionnaire with a return self-addressed stamped envelope to non-respondents three weeks after the first questionnaire mailing. No matter how

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<sup>11</sup>Linsky, "Stimulating Responses," pp. 82-101.

<sup>12</sup>Dillman, "Increasing Mail Questionnaire," pp. 254-257.

<sup>13</sup>Jeanne E. and John T. Gullahorn, "An Investigation of the Effects of Three Factors on Response to Mail Questionnaires," Public Opinion Quarterly, 27(1963): 294-296.

well the researcher prepares, packages and delivers the survey, Dillman<sup>14</sup> noted, it is not enough. "Persistence pays off," he wrote.

Procedurally, the writer assured the circulation list of State Journal subscribers from which the sample was randomly drawn was up-to-date and carefully compared to local directories for accuracy in regard to names and addresses. In addition, the writer assured that the questionnaire was so designed and pre-tested as to make it easier for the respondent to fill out in a short time.

Due care was exercised to increase the return rate of the survey by including in the actual survey mailing the questionnaire, a cover letter stressing the importance of the respondents' reply, as well as directions for filling out the survey, and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. Approximately ten days after the initial survey mailing, a second questionnaire and a reminder letter were mailed to those respondents who had not yet replied.

#### SAMPLE

The sample for the study was a multi-staged and stratified probability sample of 300 heads of the household in 300 households of the State Journal's primary, as well as secondary markets.

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<sup>14</sup>Dillman, "Increasing Mail Questionnaire," pp. 254-257.



Procedurally, two representative circulation routes from each of the circulation districts of the primary and secondary markets were randomly selected. These random selections generated thirty-seven sample circulation routes. At the next stage, from these sample routes, 300 households of subscribers of the State Journal were randomly selected from the subscribers' list for the sample routes. The distribution of these subscriber households from the thirty-seven circulation routes was proportionate to the number of households in each of the thirty-seven randomly selected circulation routes.

The respondent in the household was designated as the head of the household, operationally defined as the chief wage earner of the family.

Of the questionnaires mailed to the 300 households, 170 were returned, giving a return rate of nearly 57 percent.

#### QUESTIONNAIRES

The questionnaires were so constructed as to formulate the objective of the study as measurable entities. Procedurally, each hypothesis was tested with appropriately designed questions. The questionnaire also contained the appropriate demographic and psychographic questions.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on randomly selected State Journal subscribers and then re-examined to eliminate vague or confusing questions. Biased questions were reworded. The pre-test for the study yielded a 52

percent response rate.

The State Journal staffers' questionnaire was pre-tested by the staff of a weekly newspaper and then re-examined. All of the State Journal sports staffers responded to the questionnaire, yielding a return of two editors and three reporters.

The questionnaires were so designed as to be attractive and simple to fill out. They were copied on goldenrod-colored paper to catch the respondent's eye and accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose and the method to use for filling it out. Copies of the questionnaires can be found in Appendix B.

#### PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

All reader and sports staffer questionnaires were coded by this researcher to insure reliability.

Processing and analysis of data were conducted at the Michigan State University computing center.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have been reported under the following rubrics: (1) demographic and psychographic profile of respondents in both the reader sample and the State Journal sports staff sample; (2) news room and personal factors influencing sports staffers' news judgments; (3) sports editors' and writers' interaction with sports readers; (4) estimation of reader interest and satisfaction in sports news by sports staffers; and (5) interest and satisfaction reported by readers in sports news.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Research evidence indicates that age, sex, education, income levels and other psychographic and demographic variables are reliable indicators of reader interest in sports news.

The findings indicate that most of the respondents appear to be middle age or older than expected. For, approximately 39 percent of the respondents reported their age ranged from the 51 years and older age groups. In comparison, less than 1 percent of the respondents were 20 years or younger. However, 26 percent of the respondents

belonged to the age group of 31 to 40 years.

The apparent upward age bias in favor of middle or older age groups of the respondents might be explained in terms of the generally older age group of the heads of the households, changing demographics of the respondents and obvious sampling bias inherent in the subscribers' list of the State Journal, from which the sample was drawn.

As to the sex distribution of the respondents, 65 percent of the respondents are male and 32 percent are female. Approximately 3 percent of the respondents chose not to respond to the item dealing with their sex. Because the questionnaire was mailed to the sample of State Journal subscribers who are frequently the heads of the household, the upward bias in favor of males could be expected. This proportion of males as the heads of the households is generally reliable in the greater Lansing area.

As expected, the findings indicate that the educational level of the respondents is generally high. Almost 49 percent of the respondents reported completing either college degrees, some graduate work or advanced degrees. In comparison, approximately 17 percent of the respondents reported completing some college work, 26 percent reported they are high school graduates and 5 percent reported they had less than a high school education. Nearly 3 percent of the respondents chose not to respond.

The apparent upward bias in educational background of respondents can be explained in terms of highly educated

persons' reliance on newspapers and other print media. Persons with higher levels of education tend to favor daily newspapers as a source of news over news magazines or television. Daily newspapers offer more complete coverage of news stories and can be obtained at the readers' discretion. Similarly, Bogart found that newspapers and other print media arouse and reinforce interests which other media help to satisfy.<sup>1</sup>

Income levels of the respondents varied. The findings indicate that approximately 31 percent of the respondents reported their 1978 family income was more than \$24,000. Approximately 18 percent reported their families in an income level ranging from \$18,000 to \$23,000 while nearly 25 percent of the respondents reported their income ranged from \$9,000 to \$17,999 and 14 percent reported an income of less than \$9,000. An additional 13 percent chose not to respond to the item dealing with income.

Income levels are generally related to education levels. In this particular study, a large number of respondents are over 60 years of age and likely on fixed incomes--which would account for a number of respondents with lower incomes and higher levels of education. Schramm found that a person with more education, more opportunities for wide acquaintance and experience, "even to a certain

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<sup>1</sup>Leo Bogart, "Changing News Interest and the News Media," Public Opinion Quarterly, 32(1968-69): 560-574.

extent, more age," is more likely to be rewarded by reading the newspaper for public affairs and related reading, than a person with less education, experience or age.<sup>2</sup>

The respondents' inclination toward exercise and athletic activity was hypothesized to be related to their sports news interest. A majority, or 62 percent, of the respondents reported they exercise frequently, while 32 percent reported they seldom or never exercise. This seems like a large percentage of exercisers because more than half the respondents reported they were over 41 years of age.

On the other hand, only 44 percent of the respondents reported they participate in athletic events while 55 percent reported they seldom or never participate in athletic events. These findings are reasonable insofar as team or organized athletics are less accessible to persons than are individual sports, especially to older persons. Team sports also call for organization and a greater amount of time. Many may prefer a 30-minute jog around the neighborhood or an hour of tennis before or after work to an evening of softball or basketball.

As expected, 86 percent of the respondents reported they are sports spectators, either on television or live, while only 12 percent reported they seldom or never watch sporting events. The term "armchair athlete" was derived

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<sup>2</sup>Wilbur Schramm, "The Nature of News," Journalism Quarterly, 36(1949): 263.

from this phenomenon. It is strengthened by the television coverage of every major sporting highlight from celebrity competition, college basketball and professional baseball to the networks' game of the week, college football tournaments and the Superbowl.

Schramm identifies a reader's or viewer's preference for sports news as immediate reward news. A viewer "can enjoy a vicarious experience without any of the dangers or stresses involved."<sup>3</sup> Sporting events also serve as social events and home entertainment. Family and friends gathering on football Saturdays, Thanksgiving and New Year's Day to watch football can attest to that. The large percentage of spectators reported in this study may also be a result of this community's interest in local athletics, in particular, several state-ranking Class A high schools and Michigan State University, a Big-10 university.

Findings pertaining to the State Journal staffers' background indicate the five reporters and editors surveyed are male. The staffers range in age from 26 to 60 and have a varied level of sports news experience. Two staffers are between 26 and 30 years old, one is between 31 and 40 years old, another is 41 to 51 years old and the other reported he is between 51 and 60 years old.

One staffer reported he has between one to three years of sports news experience, one reported four to six

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

years of experience and three reported more than eleven years of sports news experience.

Equally varied is the educational background of the staffers. Two reported some college education, one reported he is a college graduate and the other two staffers reported completing some graduate work.

The findings indicate that three staffers, including one editor, are satisfied with their job in the sports department, while two reported they are only somewhat satisfied with their job.

Generalizing about all sports news writers, editors and news rooms on the basis of this study is difficult, due to the small number of respondents. What this researcher will do, however, is present the findings and explain them in terms applying only to the State Journal and the community it serves.

#### NEWSROOM AND PERSONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING SPORTS STAFFERS' SPORTS NEWS JUDGMENTS

Several relevant research studies found that publisher interest is frequently a factor influencing news judgments. All five State Journal staffers reported their publisher is interested in sports news, but only one staffer, an editor, reported that publisher interest is frequently a factor influencing State Journal sports news coverage. The other four reported publisher interest is only occasionally a factor influencing sports news coverage.



These results fail to support Bowers' findings that publisher activity is highest in areas involving the publishers' personal interest.<sup>4</sup> It is important, however, that not one of the staffers reported publisher interest is never a factor influencing sports coverage.

As hypothesized, all five staffers reported that perceived reader and perceived community interest are factors which influence sports news judgments. Specifically, the two editors reported both perceived reader and community interest are factors frequently influencing sports coverage, while all three writers reported they are only occasionally factors.

These results support the findings of Martin et al. that there is some association between the editors' perception of community opinion and news play.<sup>5</sup> In this community in particular, editors and writers may judge community and reader interest, again, by the number of spectators attending sports events. For example, their perceptions of community interest are likely increased by large attendance figures at Michigan State University sports

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<sup>4</sup>David R. Bowers, "A Report on Activity by Publishers in Directing Newsroom Decisions," Journalism Quarterly, 44(1967): 43-52.

<sup>5</sup>Ralph K. Martin, Garrett J. O'Keefe and Oguz B. Nayman, "Opinion Agreement and Accuracy Between Editors and their Readers," Journalism Quarterly, 49(1972): 460-468.

events or at local championship high school athletic competitions.

The findings pertaining to the discrepancy between the editors' and writers' perception of how much influence the two factors have is interesting. If the two editors base their news judgments on perceived reader and community interest often, then, the two factors influence them when assigning stories, writing editorials and editing copy. The writers, however, reported that editors' interest is more frequently a factor influencing the writers' sports news coverage than either perceived reader or community interest.

All five staffers reported editor and writer interest are factors influencing sports news coverage, but two writers reported that editor interest is frequently a factor. The two editors reported editor interest is only occasionally a factor influencing sports news coverage.

These results may illustrate the phenomenon of hierarchical control in the sports news room. The phenomenon explains why the editors rely on perceived community and reader interest more often than their own interest, and how the writers are influenced more by editors, who, ultimately make most of the decisions regarding sports news coverage.

Response to the item regarding sports news room policy as a factor influencing sports coverage varied. One editor reported that sports news room policy is frequently

influential, while the other editor reported policy is seldom influential. The three writers reported policy is occasionally influential. The inconsistency in the staffers' response means that news room policy regarding sports news coverage is just that--inconsistent. Policy that does exist has to be so flexible as to include the seasonal sports changes, increased coverage of local championships and special events. Liebes also found that news room policy has little influence over news coverage. Amount of news coverage to be awarded any special event is determined by other factors, Liebes found, such as the amount of available news hole and deadline.<sup>6</sup>

Both editors and two writers reported that available news hole frequently influences sports news coverage. The third writer reported it is only occasionally a factor. Deadlines influence sports news coverage occasionally, reported four staffers. The fifth, a writer, reported deadline is frequently influential. Several other research studies indicate that deadline and news hole influence all news coverage during all seasons. It is unlikely that even publisher's activity in the news room could influence news coverage by delaying deadlines. Publisher activity could, however, likely affect news hole on certain days.

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<sup>6</sup>Barry H. Liebes, "Decision-Making by Telegraph Editors--AP or UPI?" Journalism Quarterly, 43(1966): 434-442.

The staffers also reported that the specific category of sports news frequently influences sports news coverage. This was expected. It relates to the concept of perceived reader and community interest as a determinant of sports news coverage. That is, sports events which readers are most interested in tend to be those closest to home and those which are most preferred and in turn, those most attended, such as college football or basketball. Intuition was the final influential factor about which the sports staffers were surveyed. All five staffers reported that news judgments are indeed based upon their own intuition of what is newsworthy. This supports the assumption that sports staffers' news judgments are intuition-based as well as data-based phenomena and follows the foregoing discussion concluding that sports news room policies at the State Journal are inconsistent as factors influencing sports news coverage. Therefore, sports staffers must rely not only on their editors' directions when judging sports news, but they must rely also on their own intuition to make other news coverage judgments.

The readers' written comments in spaces provided on the questionnaire indicate that several respondents perceive reporters' intuition as a part of sports news coverage. Several of the respondents, for instance, commented on a particular writer's insight or writing ability.

## SPORTS WRITERS' AND EDITORS' INTERACTION WITH SPORTS READERS

Another important determinant of sports news coverage is the level of interaction, defined here as contact, between sports staffers and certain influential sports readers. Without adequate interaction with readers, it is difficult for news staffers to accurately gauge and meet the interests of their readers.

The findings indicate that all State Journal sports department employes do interact with readers but that the editors tend to estimate employe and reader interaction higher than writers estimate it. One writer reported that employes do interact with readers and commented alongside, "But not enough." This supports the assumption that there is not enough interaction between sports readers and staffers.

Both editors reported that sports writers frequently interact with readers, but the three writers reported that they, as writers, only sometimes interact with readers. Similarly, both editors reported that they, as editors, frequently or sometimes interact with readers, while all three writers reported that, in their opinion, editors rarely interact with readers. The writers' response supports the hypothesis that sports writers interact more with certain readers than do sports editors.

The editors may overestimate employe-reader

interaction to satisfy their own egos. The editors' overestimation could be an honest but unrealistic response reflecting the intentions of communicating more often with readers but the inability to do so because of time constraints. Greenberg, too, found there was not enough effective communication between editors and some segments of their readers.<sup>7</sup>

The writers' response to the interaction item may be a sign of frustration; while wishing they could interact more with readers, it is possible the reporting situation and additional time constraints prevent it. State Journal sports writers spend much of their time summing up city league softball statistics, for example, rewriting wire stories and taking down phoned in reports of local high school sports action. (It is not financially feasible for State Journal sports reporters to cover every local high school's Friday night competition and to have adequate stories written for the Saturday morning edition.)

Interaction with readers can provide a means for staffers to gauge reader interest. Discussion of staffers' response to estimating reader interest follows.

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<sup>7</sup>Bradley S. Greenberg, "Community Press as Perceived by Its Editors and Readers," Journalism Quarterly, 41 (1964): 437-440.

ESTIMATION OF READER INTEREST AND SATISFACTION  
IN SPORTS NEWS BY SPORTS STAFFERS

Sports staffers' estimation of reader interest in sports news is an important indication of the staffers' awareness and concern for their readers' satisfaction and ultimately, their own satisfaction as reporters and editors.

The findings indicate four staffers reported that the community for which they are writing is interested in sports news, while the fifth staffer reported the community is only somewhat interested in sports news. Not surprisingly, all five staffers reported that in their opinion, State Journal readers are interested in sports news.

The Harris Survey<sup>8</sup> found the high estimate of reader interest in sports news to be a nationwide phenomenon among newspaper staffers. The State Journal staffers' estimation is, however, much closer to their readers' reported interest, than the difference between the staffers' estimation and reported reader interest in the Harris Survey.

The State Journal staffers' high estimate of reader and community interest in sports news may be the result of several different factors. Staffers' egos might lead them to a high estimation of reader interest. It

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<sup>8</sup>Louis Harris, "Harris Survey," Detroit Free Press, January 9, 1978, p. 12-B.

seems likely that if the staffers are interested in sports news, they perceive a high number of others to also be interested in sports news.

Another factor influencing the staffers' estimate of interest is that reader interest in sports news in this community peaks during the school year and particularly during championships or playoffs in which local schools or professional teams are participating. Interest may increase in a sport such as high school cross country, as soon as a local school has an outstanding runner and eventually, an outstanding season. "It is a greater reward," Schramm wrote, "to identify oneself with the local team which is winning a championship than with a faraway team equally good."<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note also that this survey was completed in June, 1979. Nearly three months earlier, Michigan State University won the 1979 National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball championship. Even in June, references to the basketball team and its members appeared almost daily in the State Journal. Although Swanson found that time, or season of issue, does not relate to important differences in readership,<sup>10</sup> this researcher believes that interest in sports news during

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<sup>9</sup> Schramm, "Nature of News," p. 265.

<sup>10</sup> Charles E. Swanson, "What they Read in 130 Daily Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 32(1955): 411-421.



that particular season may have been estimated high by staffers and reported high by readers because of the MSU basketball triumph.

The staffers' response to the item about reader satisfaction varied. Two staffers reported that readers are satisfied with the State Journal sports section, while two reported their readers are only somewhat satisfied. The fifth reported he was not sure about reader satisfaction. A communication gap could explain this response in that some of the staffers may not receive an adequate amount of feedback regarding their readers' satisfaction. The varied response to this item may reflect the varied levels of interaction the staffers reported with readers. Those staffers who do interact with readers may receive only negative feedback, which would also taint their perception of reader satisfaction.

The staffers also reported that readers are interested in professional and college sports. Only one staffer, an editor, reported readers are very interested in high school sports, while the four other staffers reported readers are interested or only somewhat interested in high school sports. All five staffers reported readers are interested or somewhat interested in city league sports news and interested or somewhat interested in sports features. The outdoor editor also reported that readers are interested in outdoor news.

The staffers' estimate of reader interest in

these different types of sports news may be based on their interaction with readers and feedback from readers as well as on their personal interest. The outdoor editor's response verifies that. Along with interaction, sports editors and writers use participation or spectator attendance to judge interest. Professional and college sports draw larger audiences than high school or city league sports events and thus, more news coverage.

The accuracy of the staffers' estimation of reader interest will be discussed with readers' reported interest in the following rubric.

#### INTEREST AND SATISFACTION

##### REPORTED BY READERS IN SPORTS NEWS

It was hypothesized that sports writers and editors tend to overestimate the interest all newspaper readers have in sports news. The questionnaires were designed so as to test this hypothesis.

The findings indicate that the State Journal staffers' estimate of reader interest was fairly accurate, for 73 percent of the respondents reported interest in sports news while approximately 24 percent of the respondents reported they have little or no interest in sports news. In addition, approximately 79 percent of the respondents reported they read the State Journal sports section while 12 percent reported they seldom or never read the sports section.

The staffers' high estimate and the readers' reported high interest indicate that the staffers have a good idea of their community's interest in sports news. They appear to be more perceptive of their audience's interest than newspaper staffers nationwide who, in the Harris Survey, estimated 75 percent of their readers are highly interested in sports news. Yet, only 35 percent of the readers in the Harris Survey reported an interest in sports news. This figure makes this community's interest in sports news appear exceptionally high.

Newspaper subscribers tend to fit into a class of people with higher levels of income and education and belong to higher age groups, and quite often, they are male, as previously mentioned. This study found that respondents' participation in exercise or athletic events was also high. Therefore, the overwhelming interest readers expressed in sports news could be a result of the sampling bias found in this study.

Also, the amount of interest expressed by the respondents and the degree to which they read the newspaper were not measured specifically by this survey. Several respondents may have classified themselves as "sports readers," while they may only be "scanners." Reading the sports section may mean to some, reading the headlines and picture cutlines. To others, it may mean memorizing the statistics and imagining every game report in their mind. This phenomenon, too, would account for the high

number of readers who reported interest and reading of sports news.

The staffers were also relatively accurate in their estimation of reader interest in professional, college and high school sports and sports features, although they overestimated reader interest in city league sports news. The findings indicate 64 percent of the sports readers are interested in professional sports news, while 19 percent reported they had little or no interest in professional sports news. Approximately 75 percent of the respondents reported they are interested in college sports news, while 11 percent reported they are only somewhat or not at all interested in college sports news.

A fewer number of respondents (44%) reported they are interested in high school sports news, while 40 percent reported they had little or no interest in high school sports news. Only 18 percent of the respondents reported interest in city league sports news while 61 percent of the respondents reported they are only somewhat or not at all interested in city league sports. Also, 47 percent reported they are interested in sports features, while 28 percent reported they had only somewhat or no interest in sports features.

Reader interest in professional sports news is also seasonal. At the time of this survey, completed in early June, college and high school sports schedules had

ended for the year and professional baseball was several weeks into its season. Schramm wrote that one of the accomplishments of mass communication has been to bring far corners and far away people almost next door. "It becomes relatively easy for thousands of sports fans who have never been in South Bend to feel like alumni of Notre Dame."<sup>11</sup> Likewise, it becomes relatively easy for residents of the Lansing area to identify with almost any professional team, and most likely, the Detroit teams.

The number of respondents interested in college news results from the fact that several members of the community are associated with or attended Michigan State University. Readers' self-identification with the news seems to be an important factor in selection of one item over others, Schramm found.<sup>12</sup> MSU sports events are also attended heavily by community members, which enforces their interest in the reading of sports news.

The key to high school sports interest is also found in participation. Nearly 50 percent of the respondents reported interest in high school sports. As Schramm found, self-identification with the news is an important factor in reading selection. These respondents could be associated with area high schools, parents of

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<sup>11</sup>Schramm, "Nature of News," p. 265.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 267.

high school athletes or ex-high school athletes themselves.

The greatest discrepancy in the staffers' estimation of sports news interest was found in their estimation of reader interest in city league sports. Ed Senyczko, the State Journal sports editor, said the newspaper goes out of its way to satisfy readers with an entire Sunday page devoted to city league bowling during bowling season.<sup>13</sup> He attributed the justification for this practice to certain readers' interests in bowling. It is apparent the staffers may estimate reader interest in city league sports high because of the amount of interaction and feedback they receive from certain readers who are active in such sports.

Interest in sports features is likely determined by the subject matter of the story. Nearly 50 percent of the respondents reported such an interest. Sports features satisfy several needs; they provide some of the trivial facts sports enthusiasts like and they relate personality and real life situations with which readers can identify.

The staffers estimate their readers' satisfaction with the sports section lower than they estimate their readers' sports news interest. The findings indicate 71 percent of the respondents reported the sports section is interesting while 12 percent reported it is not at all

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Ed Senyczko, at the State Journal, October 18, 1978.

interesting. Also, approximately 77 percent of the respondents reported the sports section is understandable while only 5 percent reported it is not at all understandable. About 65 percent of the respondents reported length of the sports stories is about right while 11 percent reported the stories are not lengthy at all. Approximately 60 percent of the respondents reported the stories are comprehensive while only 14 percent reported the stories are not at all comprehensive. Also, 57 percent of the respondents reported the sports section is adequate while 17 percent reported it is not at all adequate. Approximately 33 percent of the respondents reported the sports section is very opinionated while 37 percent reported it is about right.

This particular item appeared near the bottom of page two of the questionnaire. Three filter questions preceded it (Do you read the State Journal? Are you interested in sports news? and, Do you read the sports section?) which eliminated several respondents from the percentage rates reported here.

The State Journal has an advantage, of course, in that there is no competitive daily newspaper in this area with which readers can compare local sports coverage. Many residents receive the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit News, which cover Michigan State University sports, but neither newspaper covers Lansing Community College, Lansing high school or city league sports.

The staffers' low estimate of reader interest could be a result of inadequate interaction with readers, negative feedback or the number of complaints the staffers receive regarding sports coverage. The staffers' low estimate may also be ego-oriented--a reflection of their own lack of satisfaction with the sports section.

Of all the sources of sports news, television is preferred almost as much as newspapers by the respondents. Approximately 31 percent of the respondents reported newspapers are their preferred source for sports news, while 30 percent of the respondents prefer television and approximately 26 percent reported both newspapers and television are their preferred sports news source. Only 2 percent of the respondents reported magazines as a preferred source, 1 percent prefer radio and less than 1 percent reported other persons as a preferred source.

In comparison, the respondents reported television is more trustworthy as a source of sports news than newspapers. Approximately 33 percent of the respondents reported television is the most trustworthy source for sports news, while approximately 25 percent reported newspapers are the most trustworthy source. Sixteen percent reported both newspapers and television are trustworthy. Additionally, approximately 8 percent reported magazines as most trustworthy and 4 percent reported radio as most trustworthy.



Previous research studies have indicated that newspapers and other print media arouse and reinforce interests which other media help satisfy. For example, television viewers watch a football or basketball game and then read about the event in the sports section the next day, possibly looking for more details or statistics or maybe, looking for some insights into the event which will explain the outcome. Sports readers are rewarded when they read in the newspaper the next day that their perceptions about the game were right or at least comparable to a sports columnist's.

Television is the favorite source for sports news and events and may be considered more trustworthy for one single reason, "seeing is believing." Sports enthusiasts want to see the action themselves, or on television, rather than read it in a newspaper.

A majority of the respondents offered comments and voiced their approval or disapproval of the sports section in space provided at the end of the questionnaire. One frequent comment served as an indication of just how well the respondents do or don't read the sports section. These respondents expressed their dislike for a particular writer who had an almost daily column and clearly expressed opinions. The respondents didn't indicate in their comments that the reporter had left the State Journal four weeks earlier for a similar position with a Detroit newspaper. Because they indicated the reporter

was still writing for the State Journal, this researcher questions the depth in which the respondents read the newspaper.

Several other respondents regretted that that particular reporter had departed. Some respondents wanted more local coverage and some wanted less localized coverage. Some expressed their dislike of wire stories on the first page of the sports section while other preferred the wire stories to local reporting. Some respondents expressed their personal interests by writing that they wanted more boxing or golf or less outdoor news or bowling.

The comments indicate how each respondent perceives the sports section and the factors influencing news coverage. Several mentioned the editor favorably and made insightful comments about news coverage and writing in general. They appeared to be respondents who sense that the sports pages are written and edited by individuals and are based somewhat on the individuals' own preferences, as hypothesized.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS, GENERALIZATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

#### CONCLUSIONS

The findings, reported here in descriptive terms, provide data about sports readers and staffers of the State Journal sports section. From such data, it appears generally that State Journal sports readers vary in terms of their demographic profile but that sports readers are generally also sports enthusiasts or spectators.

It also appears that the State Journal sports staffers have a good perception of their readers' interest in sports news but underestimate readers' satisfaction with the sports section. The findings indicate that sports writers interact with certain influential sports readers more than do sports editors and finally, that there are a number of news room and personal factors influencing sports staffers' sports news judgments.

The phenomenon of reader and sports staffer interaction as a factor influencing news judgment requires more research and more refined methodology. Because of the lack of study on sports news judgment and sports news play, the

formulation of a middle range theory is represented in this study in the preliminary stages.

#### GENERALIZATIONS

Because of the sampling considerations, it is risky to make generalizations about daily newspaper sports department staffers, factors influencing their news judgments, their perceptions of reader interest and about the readers' interest and inclination toward sports news. The researcher can do little more than speculate about the diverse components of such facets of sports news.

Nevertheless, the researcher is confident her findings have provided some heuristic evidence toward the central proposition that newspaper sports staffers base their sports news judgments on factors other than news room policy, deadlines, or news hole and that personal intuition of what readers want to see, perceived from interaction with certain influential readers, also plays a part in influencing sports news staffers' judgments. Continued research based on a more representative sample is necessary to determine the relationships and degree to which these factors influence news judgments as well as to establish a demographic and psychographic profile of sports news readers and sports news department staffers. Suggestions for the development of similar studies follows.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Any speculation made in this study could be supported by further research utilizing a larger representative sample. Such a sample would provide more reliable data on psychographic and demographic profiles of sports readers. The study could answer the following questions: Are sports readers highly educated, in high income levels, and generally older, or are they persons with some or no college education, middle income and young, or male or female? Is it even possible to establish a clear-cut picture of the daily newspaper sports reader?

Within the framework of these questions, it would be interesting to compare male and female sports participation or spectator habits with their tendency toward sports news interest. Is rate of participation and predilection toward sports news higher or lower in either sex? Additionally, what are the tendencies for upper income or education level or age group respondents toward sports participation and sports news interest? How do they compare to respondents in lower income and education levels and lower age groups?

Such a study should include questions designed to determine the readers' degree of interest in sports news. Are respondents "scanners" or "readers?" This could be determined by surveying respondents about the length of time it takes for them to read the sports section or about how many stories they read within the sports section. This is

likely to decrease the number of respondents who would normally call themselves "sports readers."

On a larger scale, this study could yield more interesting findings if it were conducted simultaneously in two or more cities where certain community conditions could serve as a control. For instance, Lansing area reader interest in all sports news was found to be relatively high. Is it because a Big-10 university is located within it? Respondents reported more interest in college sports news than in either professional or high school sports news. If this study were conducted in Grand Rapids, which has no major college or professional sports teams or in Detroit, which has both college and professional sports teams, would respondents in those two localities differ from Lansing area respondents? The findings of such a survey would indicate the importance of community conditions as they relate to readers' sports news interest.

Again, such a study would lead to the determination of sports news reader profiles and could answer questions such as these: Do sports news readers in a college community differ from sports news readers in a "non-college community?" Do readers' sex, income, age, education or participation in sports activities vary in the two communities?

A similar study, conducted within one city but aimed at two newspapers, would give a clear indication of reader satisfaction and preferences in sports news

writing. For example, in Lansing, readers of the State Journal and the Detroit Free Press could be surveyed about their preferred source for sports news, most trustworthy source, preferred sports writing style and coverage.

Do Lansing sports news readers prefer to read about Michigan State University sports in the Detroit Free Press or in the State Journal? If so, why? The findings of such a study would indicate to State Journal sports department staffers the areas of sports news which need improvement to satisfy their readers and in the long run, to keep readership figures as high as possible.

Further research is also necessary to establish the roles of the sports editors and writers and the extent to which their news judgments are influenced and by what. A questionnaire similar to the one used in this study would be useful. This researcher would recommend, however, that to determine the extent of each influence, a question regarding rank or importance be used. For example, "Rank the following factors from 1 to 4 in order of most influential on sports news coverage to least influential." The response to such a question may give some indication as to whether publisher interest plays a larger role in news judgment than editor interest or vice versa. The findings will also give an indication of how much influence reader and community interest have on sports coverage.

A study establishing the staffers' perceptions of

readers' characteristics would also be interesting and useful. Are State Journal staffers writing for a specific audience? For example, are they writing for an all male, college educated, upper income level audience? If they perceive their audience as a certain type of person they may be missing the boat, and losing several other types of readers.

A "two-newspaper study," one similar to this but conducted in two cities, would also yield interesting findings about the sports staffers, influences on them and their perceptions of readers. For example, would sports staffers of the Grand Rapids Press estimate their readers' interest in sports news as high as State Journal staffers estimate theirs? How would they break down their estimation of reader interest in professional, college or high school sports news? A comparison of the two newspapers' staffers' responses would indicate any differences in sports staffers' perceptions of reader interest while indicating differences in influences on sports news coverage between the two newspapers.



## APPENDIX A

## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM • LINTON HALL

EAST LANSING • MICHIGAN • 48824

Dear Friend:

Your opinion is important for the completion of this study on the sports section of the Lansing State Journal.

Your name was randomly selected by me from a partial list of State Journal subscribers to take part in the survey.

I am a graduate student in journalism at Michigan State University and am completing my thesis on sports writing in the State Journal. The questionnaire is a large part of the thesis.

To complete the survey, simply place a check mark in the appropriate spaces and return the questionnaire in the enclosed stamped envelope. Any additional comments are welcome.

Anonymity is guaranteed. Your answers will not be identifiable and information shared with me will be kept confidential.

Please take a few minutes of your time right now to complete the questionnaire.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Elise C. Bates

## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM · LINTON HALL

EAST LANSING · MICHIGAN · 48824

Dear State Journal staffer:

Your opinion is important for the completion of this study on the sports section of the State Journal.

I am a graduate student in journalism at Michigan State University and am completing my thesis on sports writing in the State Journal. The questionnaire is a large part of the thesis.

The results of this questionnaire will be compared to the results of a similar study given to randomly selected State Journal readers.

To complete the survey, simply place a check mark in the appropriate spaces. Any additional comments are welcome.

Anonymity is guaranteed. Your answers will not be identifiable and information shared with me will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Elise C. Bates

## APPENDIX B

## Lansing State Journal Reader Survey

1. Some subscribers of the State Journal read it quite often while others never get a chance to read it. How frequently do you read the State Journal?  
 1. ☐ frequently 2. ☐ occasionally 3. ☐ seldom 4. ☐ never  
 [IF YOU DO NOT READ OR RECEIVE THE STATE JOURNAL, TURN DIRECTLY TO QUESTION 16.]
2. How much of the State Journal do you read on any average day?  
 1. ☐ all of it 2. ☐ most of it 3. ☐ about half  
 4. ☐ skim lightly 5. ☐ hardly any
3. How often do you participate in vigorous exercise?  
 1. ☐ frequently 2. ☐ occasionally 3. ☐ seldom 4. ☐ never
4. How often do you participate in athletic events?  
 1. ☐ frequently 2. ☐ occasionally 3. ☐ seldom 4. ☐ never
5. How often do you watch sporting events in person or on television?  
 1. ☐ frequently 2. ☐ occasionally 3. ☐ seldom 4. ☐ never
6. How interested are you in sports news?  
 1. ☐ very interested 2. ☐ interested 3. ☐ not sure  
 4. ☐ somewhat interested 5. ☐ not at all interested  
 [IF YOU HAVE NO INTEREST IN SPORTS NEWS OR ARE NOT SURE OF YOUR INTEREST, TURN DIRECTLY TO QUESTION 16.]
7. If you are interested in sports news, which of the following sources for sports news do you prefer?  
 1. ☐ newspapers 2. ☐ television 3. ☐ radio 4. ☐ magazines  
 5. ☐ other persons 6. ☐ other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
8. Which of the following sources of sports news do you find most trustworthy?  
 1. ☐ newspapers 2. ☐ television 3. ☐ radio 4. ☐ magazines  
 5. ☐ other persons 6. ☐ other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_

9. How frequently do you read the sports section in the State Journal?

1. \_\_frequently 2. \_\_occasionally 3. \_\_seldom 4. \_\_never

[IF YOU DO NOT READ THE SPORTS SECTION OF THE STATE JOURNAL, TURN DIRECTLY TO QUESTION 16.]

10. How much of the State Journal sports section do you read on any average day?

1. \_\_all of it 2. \_\_most of it 3. \_\_about half

4. \_\_skim lightly 5. \_\_hardly any

11. How much sports news does the State Journal give you?

1. \_\_nearly all 2. \_\_very little 3. \_\_don't know

12. How much interest do you have in the following types of sports news?

	very interested	interested	somewhat interested	no interest
professional sports				
college sports				
high school sports				
city league sports				
sports features				
other (SPECIFY)				

13. Now I would like you to indicate how you feel about the reading matter in the sports section of the State Journal.

	very right	about right	not at all	don't know
How INTERESTING is the sports section?				
How UNDERSTANDABLE is the sports section?				
How LENGTHY are the stories?				
How COMPREHENSIVE are the stories?				
How OPINIONATED is the sports section?				
How ADEQUATE is the sports coverage?				

14. What one aspect do you like BEST about the sports section of the State Journal?
- 
15. What one aspect do you like LEAST about the sports section of the State Journal?
- 
16. How many years of schooling did you complete?
- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> nine or less         | 4. <input type="checkbox"/> some college       | 7. <input type="checkbox"/> M.A. completed  |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> some high school     | 5. <input type="checkbox"/> college graduate   | 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Ph.D. completed |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> high school graduate | 6. <input type="checkbox"/> some graduate work |   |
17. Would you please indicate which of the following age groups corresponds to your age?
- |  |                                   |                                   |   |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> 20 or less | 3. <input type="checkbox"/> 26-30 | 5. <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 | 7. <input type="checkbox"/> over 60 years |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> 21-25      | 4. <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 | 6. <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 |   |
18. Would you please indicate your family's income group for 1978 before taxes?
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> less than \$3,000 | 5. <input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 - 17,999   |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> \$3,000 - 5,999   | 6. <input type="checkbox"/> \$18,000 - 20,999   |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> \$6,000 - 8,999   | 7. <input type="checkbox"/> \$21,000 - 23,000   |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> \$9,000 - 14,999  | 8. <input type="checkbox"/> \$24,000 - and over |
19. What is your sex?
1. ☐ male    2. ☐ female
20. Would you like to add any comments or suggestions regarding the sports section of the State Journal?
- 
- 
- 

COULD YOU PLEASE CHECK IF YOU MISSED ANY QUESTIONS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

## State Journal Sports Staff Questionnaire

1. Are you employed with the State Journal as a  
1. ☐ reporter    2. ☐ editor    3. ☐ other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
2. For how many years have you been employed in the sports department of the State Journal?  
1. ☐ less than one year    2. ☐ 1 to 3 years    3. ☐ 4 to 6 years  
4. ☐ 7 to 10 years    5. ☐ 11 years or more    6. ☐ other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many years total experience do you have working with sports news?  
1. ☐ less than one year    2. ☐ 1 to 3 years    3. ☐ 4 to 6 years  
4. ☐ 7 to 10 years    5. ☐ 11 years or more    6. ☐ other (SPECIFY) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Some communities are very interested in sports news while others have no interest at all. In your opinion, what level of interest does the community for which you are writing have in sports news?  
1. ☐ very interested    2. ☐ interested    3. ☐ not sure  
4. ☐ somewhat interested    5. ☐ not at all interested
5. Some State Journal readers are very interested in sports news while others have no interest at all. In your opinion, what level of interest do State Journal readers have in sports news?  
1. ☐ very interested    2. ☐ interested    3. ☐ not sure  
4. ☐ somewhat interested    5. ☐ not at all interested
6. In your opinion, do the employes in the State Journal sports department interact with sports readers?  
1. ☐ yes    2. ☐ no    3. ☐ don't know  
(IF THE EMPLOYES DO NOT INTERACT WITH READERS, TURN DIRECTLY TO QUESTION 9.)
7. In your opinion, how frequently do State Journal sports writers interact with sports readers?  
1. ☐ frequently    2. ☐ sometimes    3. ☐ rarely    4. ☐ never
8. In your opinion, how frequently do State Journal sports editors interact with sports readers?  
1. ☐ frequently    2. ☐ sometimes    3. ☐ rarely    4. ☐ never



9. The following four categories represent different characteristics of sports readers. In your opinion, who are readers of State Journal sports in terms of these characteristics?

## AGE:

1. \_\_\_ 20 or less    3. \_\_\_ 26-30    5. \_\_\_ 41-50    7. \_\_\_ over 60 years  
2. \_\_\_ 21-25    4. \_\_\_ 31-40    6. \_\_\_ 51-60

## EDUCATION: (years of schooling)

1. \_\_\_ nine or less    4. \_\_\_ some college    7. \_\_\_ M.A. completed  
2. \_\_\_ some high school    5. \_\_\_ college graduate    8. \_\_\_ Ph.D. completed  
3. \_\_\_ high school graduate    6. \_\_\_ some graduate work

## INCOME:

1. \_\_\_ less than \$3,000    5. \_\_\_ \$15,000 - 17,999  
2. \_\_\_ \$3,000 - 5,999    6. \_\_\_ \$18,000 - 20,999  
3. \_\_\_ \$6,000 - 8,999    7. \_\_\_ \$21,000 - 23,000  
4. \_\_\_ \$9,000 - 14,999    8. \_\_\_ \$24,000 - and over

## SEX:

1. \_\_\_ male    2. \_\_\_ female

10. In your opinion, how interested are State Journal sports readers in the following types of sports news?

	very interested	interested	somewhat interested	not at all interested
professional sports				
college sports				
high school sports				
city league sports				
sports features				
other (SPECIFY)				

11. In your opinion, how interested is your publisher in sports news?

1. \_\_\_ very interested    2. \_\_\_ interested    3. \_\_\_ not sure  
4. \_\_\_ somewhat interested    5. \_\_\_ not at all interested

12. In your opinion, how often do the following factors influence State Journal sports coverage?

	frequently	occasionally	seldom	never
perceived reader interest				
perceived community interest				
perceived publisher interest				
reporter interest				
editor interest				
news room policies				
available news hole				
deadlines				
category of news (such as level, proximity or particular sport)				

13. In your opinion, how frequently are State Journal sports writers and editors news judgment decisions based upon their own intuition of what is newsworthy rather than on specific sports news room guidelines or policies?
1. ☐ frequently 2. ☐ sometimes 3. ☐ rarely 4. ☐ never
14. In your opinion, how satisfied are State Journal readers with the sports section of the newspaper?
1. ☐ highly satisfied 2. ☐ satisfied 3. ☐ not sure  
4. ☐ somewhat satisfied 5. ☐ not at all satisfied
15. How frequently do you participate in vigorous exercise?
1. ☐ frequently 2. ☐ sometimes 3. ☐ rarely 4. ☐ never
16. How frequently do you participate in athletic events?
1. ☐ frequently 2. ☐ sometimes 3. ☐ rarely 4. ☐ never
17. How satisfied are you with your job in the sports department?
1. ☐ highly satisfied 2. ☐ satisfied 3. ☐ not sure  
4. ☐ somewhat satisfied 5. ☐ not at all satisfied
18. How frequently do you watch sports on television or in person?
1. ☐ frequently 2. ☐ sometimes 3. ☐ rarely 4. ☐ never
19. How many years of schooling did you complete?
- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> nine or less         | 4. <input type="checkbox"/> some college       | 7. <input type="checkbox"/> M.A. completed  |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> some high school     | 5. <input type="checkbox"/> college graduate   | 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Ph.D. completed |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> high school graduate | 6. <input type="checkbox"/> some graduate work |   |
20. Would you please indicate which of the following age groups corresponds to your age?
- |  |                                   |                                   |   |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> 20 or less | 3. <input type="checkbox"/> 26-30 | 5. <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 | 7. <input type="checkbox"/> over 60 years |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> 21-25      | 4. <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 | 6. <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 |   |
21. What is your sex?
1. ☐ male 2. ☐ female
22. Would you like to add any comments or suggestions regarding the sports section of the State Journal?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

COULD YOU PLEASE CHECK IF YOU MISSED ANY QUESTIONS. THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

## APPENDIX C

TABLE 1

Q.1. Some subscribers of the State Journal read it quite often while others never get a chance to read it. How frequently do you read the State Journal?

Response	Number	Percent
frequently	151	88.8
occasionally	14	8.2
seldom	2	1.2
never	1	.6
no response <sup>1</sup>	2	1.2
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 2

Q.2. How much of the State Journal do you read on any average day?

Response	Number	Percent
all of it	37	21.8
most of it	76	44.7
about half	38	22.4
skim lightly	15	8.8
hardly any	1	.6
no response	3	1.8
Total	170	100.0

<sup>1</sup>This category also includes those respondents who do not read or receive the State Journal, those who are not interested in sports news and those who do not read the sports section.

TABLE 3

Q.3. How often do you participate in vigorous exercise?

Response	Number	Percent
frequently	38	22.4
occasionally	71	41.8
seldom	43	25.3
never	15	8.8
no response	3	1.8
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 4

Q.4. How often do you participate in athletic events?

Response	Number	Percent
frequently	21	12.4
occasionally	53	31.2
seldom	42	24.7
never	51	30.0
no response	3	1.8
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 5

Q.5. How often do you watch sporting events in person or on television?

Response	Number	Percent
frequently	90	52.9
occasionally	56	32.9
seldom	16	9.4
never	5	2.9
no response	3	1.8
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 6

Q.6. How interested are you in sports news?

Response	Number	Percent
very interested	61	35.9
interested	63	37.1
not sure	2	1.2
somewhat interested	33	19.4
not at all interested	8	4.7
no response	3	1.8
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 7

Q.7. If you are interested in sports news, which of the following sources for sports news do you prefer?

Response	Number	Percent
newspapers	53	31.2
television	51	30.0
radio	2	1.2
magazines	4	2.4
other persons	1	.6
other	2	1.2
newspapers and television	44	25.8
no response	13	7.6
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 8

Q.8. Which of the following sources of sports news do you find most trustworthy?

Response	Number	Percent
newspapers	43	25.2
television	56	32.9
radio	6	3.5
magazines	14	8.2
other persons	0	0.0
other	5	2.9
newspapers and television	27	15.8
no response	19	11.5
Total	170	100.0





TABLE 9

Q.9. How frequently do you read the sports section in the State Journal?

Response	Number	Percent
frequently	106	62.4
occasionally	28	16.5
seldom	17	10.0
never	4	2.4
no response	15	8.7
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 10

Q.10. How much of the State Journal sports section do you read on any average day?

Response	Number	Percent
all of it	31	18.2
most of it	54	31.8
about half	17	10.0
skim lightly	42	24.7
hardly any	10	5.9
no response	16	9.4
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 11

Q.11. How much sports news does the State Journal give you?

Response	Number	Percent
nearly all	91	53.5
very little	38	22.4
don't know	21	12.4
no response	20	11.7
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 12

Q.12. How much interest do you have in the following types of sports news?

## Professional

Response	Number	Percent
very interested	46	27.1
interested	67	39.4
somewhat interested	28	16.5
no interest	5	2.9
no response	24	17.1
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 13

## College

Response	Number	Percent
very interested	74	43.5
interested	54	31.8
somewhat interested	16	9.4
no interest	3	1.8
no response	23	13.5
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 14

## High School

Response	Number	Percent
very interested	29	17.1
interested	45	26.5
somewhat interested	50	29.4
no interest	18	10.6
no response	28	16.5
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 15

## City League

Response	Number	Percent
very interested	10	5.9
interested	21	12.4
somewhat interested	40	23.5
no interest	64	37.6
no response	35	20.6
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 16

## Sports Features

Response	Number	Percent
very interested	24	14.1
interested	56	32.9
somewhat interested	40	23.5
no interest	8	4.7
no response	42	24.8
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 17

Q.13. Now I would like you to indicate how you feel about the reading matter in the sports section of the State Journal.

How INTERESTING is the sports section?

Response	Number	Percent
very	12	7.1
about right	109	64.1
not at all	20	11.8
don't know	10	5.9
no response	19	11.1
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 18

How UNDERSTANDABLE is the sports section?

Response	Number	Percent
very	25	14.7
about right	107	62.9
not at all	8	4.7
don't know	10	5.9
no response	20	11.8
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 19

How LENGTHY are the stories?

Response	Number	Percent
very	3	1.8
about right	110	64.7
not at all	18	10.6
don't know	15	8.8
no response	24	14.1
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 20

How COMPREHENSIVE are the stories?

Response	Number	Percent
very	8	4.7
about right	94	55.3
not at all	23	13.5
don't know	22	12.9
no response	23	13.6
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 21

How OPINIONATED is the sports section?

Response	Number	Percent
very	56	32.9
about right	63	37.1
not at all	3	1.8
don't know	27	15.9
no response	21	12.5
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 22

How ADEQUATE is the sports section?

Response	Number	Percent
very	10	5.9
about right	87	51.2
not at all	28	16.5
don't know	21	12.4
no response	24	14.0
Total	170	100.0



TABLE 23

Q.16. How many years of schooling did you complete?

Response	Number	Percent
nine or less	4	2.4
some high school	5	2.9
high school grad	44	25.9
some college	29	17.1
college graduate	39	22.9
some grad work	16	9.4
M.A. completed	18	10.6
Ph.D. completed	10	5.9
no response	5	2.9
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 24

Q.17. Would you please indicate which of the following age groups corresponds to your age?

Response	Number	Percent
20 or less	1	.6
21-25	26	15.3
26-30	18	10.6
31-40	22	12.9
41-50	31	18.2
51-60	31	18.2
over 60 years	36	21.2
no response	5	2.9
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 25

Q.18. Would you please indicate your family's income group for 1978 before taxes?

Response	Number	Percent
less than \$3,000	6	3.5
\$3,000-5,999	5	2.9
\$6,000-8,999	12	7.1
\$9,000-14,999	26	15.3
\$15,000-17,999	16	9.4
\$18,000-20,999	21	12.4
\$21,000-23,999	9	5.3
\$24,000 and over	53	31.2
no response	22	12.9
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 26

Q.19. What is your sex?

Response	Number	Percent
male	111	65.3
female	54	31.8
no response	5	2.9
Total	170	100.0

TABLE 27

Q.1. Are you employed with the State Journal as a:

Response	Number
reporter	3
editor	2
Total	5

TABLE 28

Q.2. For how many years have you been employed in the sports department of the State Journal?

Response	Editors	Reporters
less than 1 year	0	1
1 to 3 years	1	0
11 years or more	1	2
Total	2	3

TABLE 29

Q.3. How many years total experience do you have working with sports news?

Response	Editors	Reporters
1 to 3 years	0	1
4 to 6 years	1	0
11 years or more	1	2
Total	2	3

TABLE 30

Q.4. Some communities are very interested in sports news while others have no interest at all. In your opinion, what level of interest does the community for which you are writing have in sports news?

Response	Editors	Reporters
very interested	1	2
interested	1	0
somewhat interested	0	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 31

Q.5. Some State Journal readers are very interested in sports news while others have no interest at all. In your opinion, what level of interest do State Journal readers have in sports news?

Response	Editors	Reporters
very interested	1	2
interested	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 32

Q.6. In your opinion, do the employees in the State Journal sports department interact with sports readers?

Response	Editors	Reporters
yes	2	3
Total	2	3

TABLE 33

Q.7. In your opinion, how frequently do State Journal sports writers interact with sports readers?

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	2	0
sometimes	0	3
Total	2	3

TABLE 34

Q.8. In your opinion, how frequently do State Journal sports editors interact with sports readers?

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	1	0
sometimes	1	0
rarely	0	3
Total	2	3

TABLE 35

Q.9. In your opinion, how interested are State Journal sports readers in the following types of sports news?

## Professional

Response	Editors	Reporters
very interested	1	2
interested	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 36

## College

Response	Editors	Reporters
very interested	1	2
interested	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 37

## High School

Response	Editors	Reporters
very interested	1	0
interested	0	2
somewhat interested	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 38  
City League

Response	Editors	Reporters
interested	1	1
somewhat interested	1	2
Total	2	3

TABLE 39  
Sports Features

Response	Editors	Reporters
interested	2	2
somewhat interested	0	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 40

Q.11. In your opinion, how interested is your publisher in sports news?

Response	Editors	Reporters
very interested	1	1
interested	1	2
Total	2	3



TABLE 41

Q.12. In your opinion, how often do the following factors influence State Journal sports coverage?

## Perceived reader interest

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	2	0
occasionally	0	3
Total	2	3

TABLE 42

## Perceived community interest

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	2	0
occasionally	0	3
Total	2	3

TABLE 43

## Perceived publisher interest

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	1	0
occasionally	0	2
seldom	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 44

## Reporter interest

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	1	2
occasionally	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 45

## Editor interest

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	0	2
occasionally	2	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 46

## News room policies

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	1	0
occasionally	0	3
seldom	1	0
Total	2	3

TABLE 47

## Available news hole

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	2	2
occasionally	0	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 48

## Deadlines

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	0	1
occasionally	2	2
Total	2	3

TABLE 49

## Category of news

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	1	2
occasionally	1	0
Total	2	2

TABLE 50

Q.13. In your opinion, how frequently are State Journal sports writers and editors news judgment decisions based upon their own intuition of what is newsworthy rather than on specific sports news room guidelines or policies?

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	2	2
sometimes	0	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 51

Q.14. In your opinion, how satisfied are State Journal readers with the sports section of the newspaper?

Response	Editors	Reporters
satisfied	1	1
not sure	1	0
somewhat satisfied	0	2
Total	2	3

TABLE 52

Q.15. How frequently do you participate in vigorous exercise?

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	0	2
sometimes	1	1
rarely	1	0
Total	2	3

TABLE 53

Q.16. How frequently do you participate in athletic events?

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	0	2
sometimes	1	0
rarely	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 54

Q.17. How satisfied are you with your job in the sports department?

Response	Editors	Reporters
highly satisfied	1	1
satisfied	0	1
somewhat satisfied	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 55

Q.18. How frequently do you watch sports on television or in person?

Response	Editors	Reporters
frequently	0	2
sometimes	2	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 56

Q.19. How many years of schooling did you complete?

Response	Editors	Reporters
some college	1	1
college graduate	0	1
some grad work	1	1
Total	2	3

TABLE 57

Q.20. Would you please indicate which of the following age groups corresponds to your age?

Response	Editors	Reporters
26-30	1	1
31-40	0	1
41-50	0	1
51-60	1	0
Total	2	3

TABLE 58

Q.21. What is your sex?

Response	Editors	Reporters
male	2	3
female	0	0
Total	2	3

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