

1-1-2011

## Internet sport bloggers: Who are these people and where do they come from?

Edward M. Kian

Joe W. Burden Jr.

Stephanie D. Shaw

Follow this and additional works at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm>

---

### Recommended Citation

Kian, Edward M.; Burden, Joe W. Jr.; and Shaw, Stephanie D. (2011) "Internet sport bloggers: Who are these people and where do they come from?," *Journal of Applied Sport Management*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1.

<https://doi.org/10.7290/jasm037ihy>

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm/vol3/iss1/13>

This article is brought to you freely and openly by Volunteer, Open-access, Library-hosted Journals (VOL Journals), published in partnership with The University of Tennessee (UT) University Libraries. This article has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Applied Sport Management* by an authorized editor. For more information, please visit <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm>.

# Internet sport bloggers: Who are these people and where do they come from?

Edward M. Kian, Joe W. Burden, Jr., & Stephanie D. Shaw

## KEYWORDS:

NCAA wrestling; product assessment; program eliminations; marketing

## ABSTRACT

*Little is known of Internet sport bloggers, who increasingly are becoming important cogs in sport journalism. In this phenomenology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with highly prominent sport bloggers. All were recorded, transcribed, and coded. A total of five dominant themes emerged from the data that focused on the shared experiences and learned attitudes toward Internet sport journalism. Overall, these themes showed sport bloggers were highly educated and very happy with their jobs, had a wide array of past work experiences that often had little to no relation with blogging or sport journalism, consider their jobs too varied to fall under one title, primarily work from home, and rarely attend sporting events they write about.*

Kian, E.M., Burden, Jr., J.W., & Shaw, S.D. (2011). Internet sport bloggers: Who are these people and where do they come from? *Journal of Sport Administration & Supervision* 3(1), 30-43. Published online August, 2011.

**Edward (Ted) M. Kian, Ph.D.**, is an assistant professor and the graduate program coordinator for Sport Leadership and Coaching in the College of Education at the University of Central Florida.

**Joe W. Burden, Jr., Ph.D.** is an assistant professor of Sport and Fitness in the College of Education at the University of Central Florida.

**Stephanie D. Shaw, M.A.**, is a graduate student in the Sport Leadership program at the University of Central Florida.

## Introduction

The Internet has easily surpassed newspapers among dominant media news sources in the United States and is tied with television as the preeminent news source for U.S. citizens under the age 30 (Pew Research, 2008). Nearly half of all U.S. citizens (48%) use the Internet at least an hour per day, with young adults (18-29), individuals who have earned post-graduate college degrees, and adults earning \$75,000 or more spending the most time online (Gallup Research, 2009). One of the most unique aspects of the Internet is blogs, which virtually allow anyone to become some type of journalist/commentator regardless of work experience, training, reporting or writing skills, objectivity, or expertise. The majority of the world's bloggers reside in the U.S. (Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2008; Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005). Compared to the general population, U.S. bloggers tend to be younger (at least 55% under 30), better educated, mostly white, majority male, and urban dwellers (Guadagno et al., 2008; Kaye, 2005; Lenhart & Fox, 2006).

Mainstream sites such Yahoo Sports and ESPN Internet dominate Internet sport traffic numbers (Nielsen Research, 2008). Many of the writers at these mainstream sport sites are former newspaper sport reporters who switched to online in recent years as the newspaper industry began downsizing (Kian & Hardin, 2009; Lapchick, Little, Matthew, & Zahn, 2008). Sport is one of the top three categories of blogging (Schultz & Sheffer, 2007), although sport blogs usually differ in writing style and in content from the more traditional media articles found on mainstream sport Internet sites. Many popular sport blogs originated on non-mainstream sites and are authored by individuals who did not develop sport journalism reputations through notoriety in the newspaper industry (Kian & Hardin, 2009; Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). However, there have been no published research articles focusing on sport bloggers who do not work for newspaper-affiliated Web sites. Therefore, little is known about this growing and increasingly important subset of 21st Century sport journalists.

## Literature Review

### *History of Blogging*

Though there is some disagreement among researchers as to what qualifies as the first known example of a “blog,” Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright (2004) credit Dave Winer with creating the first Internet blog. Winer, though, credits Tim Berners-Lee with creating the first functional blog-type Web site in 1991, roughly 5 years prior to Winer’s creation (Herring et al., 2005). The term “weblog” was coined by Internet writer Jorn Barger in 1997 (Blood, 2000; Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005; Herring et al., 2005). The shorter term “blog” evolved in 1999 (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005).

However, the ascension of blogs into their current prominence did not begin until around 2000, with politics in the United States largely influencing the rapid growth of the blogosphere (Carlson, 2007). Several researchers attributed this rise in part to the introduction of user-friendly blogging software, which first became publicly available in the summer of 1999 (e.g. Blood, 2000; Herring et al., 2005; Lenhart & Fox, 2006). However, the greatest impact on popularity and awareness of blogs may have been due to the high levels of media attention blogs received during the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). An analysis of blogging statistics before and after 2004 supports the notion of 2004 as “the year of the blog” (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005). Johnson and Kaye (2004) estimated there were just 30,000 blogs in 1998, but at least 3 million active blogs by the end of 2003. From April of 2003 to January of 2004, the number of Americans writing a weblog increased to over 14 million (Rainie, 2005). Current estimates of the number of Americans with weblogs are varied. Conservative estimates are in the range of 12 million, whereas more liberal assessments suggest more than 50 million U.S. bloggers (Dawson & Dawson, 2007; Hookway, 2008; Kent, 2008).

### *Characteristics of Blogging*

Blog-based words were added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2003 (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005). In 2004, Merriam Webster designated “blog” the most sought after word of the year (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005), and defined it in its Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition as “a website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer” (Merriam-webster.com, 2008, ¶ 1). This definition has been debated among researchers, as the focus in contemporary discourse has tended to be on blogs which contain no personal journal information (Harp & Tremayne, 2006; Herring et al., 2005b; Herring et al., 2004).

As a still relatively new medium of communication, there exists a variety of alternative definitions and views in terms of what does and does not qualify as a blog. Edelman and Intelliseek (2005) outlined several distinguishing blog characteristics. Blogs typically: (1) are characterized by numerous links to other information; (2) include a calendar or archives of previous entries; (3) maintain a permanent Web address (often called a permalink) for each new entry (referred to as a post); and (4) allow visitors and other users to post comments.

Other features cited as separating blogs from other forms of online content include the amalgamation of multiple posts on a single page (Hourihan, 2002), frequent updates (Blood, 2000; Kelleher & Miller, 2006), and reverse-chronological order of posts (Herring et al., 2005; Kelleher & Miller, 2006). The last of these, reverse-chronological-order format, is an inherent feature in the software used to create and maintain blogs, and as such has been heralded as one of the only truly distinct characteristics of weblogs (Blood, 2000; Herring et al., 2005).

Many of the defining attributes cited above may more adequately describe specific types of

blogs, rather than blogs in general. Specifically, scholars debate the extent to which blogs can be characterized by either frequency of updates or presence of external links. Lenhart and Fox (2006) found bloggers do not update their blogs regularly and do not spend much time updating their blogs in any given week. Since their inception, blogs have most often been defined in terms of linking to content elsewhere on the Internet (Blood, 2000; Herring et al., 2005). However, analyses of the blogosphere provide evidence that the vast majority of active blogs provide few external hyperlinks (Harp & Tremayne, 2006; Herring et al., 2005; Herring et al., 2004). Herring et al. (2005) found less than one third of the blogs in their sample contained any links at all.

#### *Internet Sport Journalism*

In general, academic research on Internet sport journalism is in its infancy (Pedersen et al., 2007; Real, 2006). The few published articles in this area centered on four areas. Most examinations focused on gender-related differences in online sport coverage. Mixed results were found when comparing online coverage of male and female athletes versus content from traditional media, and when examining the effects of the sex of writers on Internet content (Butler & Sagas, 2008b; Cooper, 2008; Cunningham, 2003; Kian & Hardin, 2009; Kian, Mondello, & Vincent, 2009; Sagas, Cunningham, Wigley, & Ashley, 2000). A second popular area of research has been the impact of the Internet on newspaper sport writers (Butler & Sagas, 2008a, Schultz & Sheffer, 2007; Wigley & Meirick, 2008). Authors also examined content and demographics of message board posters (Clavio, 2008; Galily, 2008). Finally, there have been several recent academic articles published on Twitter (e.g., Clavio & Kian, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). Obviously, though, there

remains a dearth of research on Internet sport journalism, with limited attention devoted to sport bloggers (Dittmore, Stoldt, & Greenwell, 2008; Sanderson, 2008).

#### *Sport Blogging*

Schultz and Sheffer (2007) studied newspaper sport writers who also blog for their newspapers' Web sites, finding 98% of these bloggers were men. These newspaper sport writers found little value in blogging, even though they believed blogging had profoundly changed the "presentation and distribution" of sport news content (p. 73). However, no published research articles have provided demographic data or narratives from the vast majority of sport bloggers who do not work for newspapers. Nearly all information on this group comes from an unpublished report produced by the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism at Pennsylvania State University (JCCSJ, 2009).

From a survey completed by 214 bloggers representing a variety of sport Internet sites, JCCSJ (2009) revealed demographic characteristics of sport bloggers mirroring previous research on general-focus or political bloggers (Guadagno et al., 2008; Kaye, 2005; Lenhart & Fox, 2006). JCCSJ (2009) found that 9 of 10 sport bloggers are men, many are under 30, the majority graduated from college with 29% having earned graduate degrees, fewer than 1 of 5 earned a degree in journalism or communications, and less than 20% worked as sport journalists for traditional media (including student media) before their blogging careers.

#### **Problem Statement**

Outside of the JCCSJ (2009) report, there is little academic research on the demographics, professional experiences, and the work-related attitudes formed among sport bloggers from non-newspaper affiliated Internet sites (Real, 2006; Schultz & Sheffer, 2007). In other words,

academia knows very little about sport bloggers. One reason for this absence is the anonymity of the Internet, as just under half of the bloggers surveyed by JCCSJ (2009) used aliases instead of their real names. Moreover, no academic research has used in-depth interviews as a method to study bloggers.

## Purpose

Whereas surveys (e.g., Creedon, 1994; Hardin, 2005; Hardin & Whiteside, 2006; Lapchick et al., 2008; Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005) of traditional sport media members have provided most of the demographic data we have on this vocation, actual interviews of prominent sport journalists have provided detailed and rich insight into the attitudes and experiences of sport reporters from more traditional media, such as newspapers and television (e.g., Billings, 2009; Cramer, 1994; Hardin & Shain, 2005a; 2006; Kian, 2007). Thus, an exploratory study providing narratives from prominent Internet sport bloggers is lacking in the literature. This research attempts to fill that void. This phenomenology attempts to find out the professional experiences and work-related attitudes of select sport bloggers, who were deemed highly successful in this vocation but had not developed journalistic reputations through another print medium (e.g., magazines, newspapers).

## Research Questions and Rationale

With this being the first known study attempting to interview a new form of journalists from a relatively new medium, broad research questions were employed rather than hypotheses for this exploratory study.

*RQ1:* What are the educational and professional backgrounds of prominent online sport bloggers?

*RQ2:* What professional experiences do these sport bloggers share?

*RQ3:* What attitudes toward their jobs and vocation have these bloggers developed?

## Methodology

The qualitative inquiry known as phenomenology was used for this exploratory study, because our goal was to uncover some of the common experiences and work-related attitudes of marquee sport bloggers. Phenomenological research focuses on deciphering the meaning of lived experiences for a group of people (Husserl, 1964; Patton, 2002).

### *Sampling Selection*

Identifying prominent sport bloggers is not easy, because what actually constitutes a blogger remains disputed (Harp & Tremayne, 2006; Herring et al., 2005b). A co-author of this study had phone conversations with full-time sport bloggers, sport newspaper reporters, and sport writers (not bloggers) for prominent sport Internet sites (e.g., ESPN Internet, FoxSports.com) in an attempt to determine the most suitable interviewees for this study who also represented different types of sports bloggers (i.e., not all focusing on one sport and not all working for the same outlets). A list of 12 prominent Internet sport bloggers were identified as ideal candidates, because all were recognized in their vocation, and all had predominately developed journalism reputations through their work online. Through industry contacts of the co-author or public e-mail, all 12 were contacted, with 8 agreeing to participate and be quoted on the record. Six of these 8 do not work for mainstream sport sites and the other two did not begin their Internet sport journalism careers working for

mainstream sites. The 8 participants for this study were:

\* A.J. Daulerio – Editor of Deadspin, the most popular sport blog in the world according to Wikio and the most valuable sporting blog with an estimated worth of more than \$16 million, according to dnScoop, a domain and site value tool.

\* Nathaniel Friedman (alias: Bethlehem Shoals) – Founder of the pro basketball blog, FreeDarko.com, formerly a music critic for AOL City Guide, and sport blogger for AOL Fanhouse. Currently a full-time NBA blogger for the Sporting Blog, which is affiliated with SportingNews.com. He also serves as editor of *Freedarko Presents... The Macrophenomenal Pro Basketball Almanac*.

\* Brooks Melchior – Founder, CEO, and editor of highly popular sport celebrity gossip/sex site, SportsByBrooks.com. Also shoots photos of female models for SportsByBrooks.com. Formerly a sport radio talk-show host and play-by-play announcer.

\* Alana Nguyen (aliases: Alana G and Miss Gossip) – Director of programming at Yardbarker.com, where she oversees an operation that maintains more blogs of professional athletes than any other Internet site. Originally started her own blog on the Phoenix Suns, and later worked for AOL Fanhouse and Yahoo Sports as both a sport blogger and producer.

\* Aaron Schatz – Founder, CEO, and editor-in-chief for Football Outsiders.com., which regularly publishes statistical-based blogs and analyses for ESPN Internet.

\* Michael David Smith – Full-time sport blogger writing for Pro Football Talk and AOL Fanhouse.

\* Dan Wetzel– National columnist and investigative reporter for Yahoo Sports, the most read sport Web site on the Internet. Previously a columnist for CBS SportsLine and a blogger for Hoopstv.com. One of the only marquee reporters at traditional sport news Web sites who did not previously work full-time in the newspaper industry. Has authored three books and was honored as national sport writer of the year for 2006 by Salon.com

\* Ryan Wilson – Founder of the sporting blog, HeelsSoxSteelers.com, and now a full-time sport blogger for AOL Fanhouse.

Overall, the 8 interviewees included 7 men and 2 minorities (one of whom is female), which is similar to the demographic representation of bloggers and sport bloggers at large (Guadagno et al., 2008; JCCSJ, 2009; Lenhart & Fox, 2006). In addition, all participants were in their 30s at the time of these interviews except for Melchior, who was in his early 40s. Thus, these select bloggers were slightly older on average than most sport bloggers, because the largest group of sport bloggers among the JCCSJ (2009) respondents were in their 20s. However, the extra years of experience may be one reason why these bloggers are deemed highly successful in their industry and why all list blogging/Internet journalism as their full-time vocation.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

A semi-structured, loose interview guide was created to gauge the experiences of sport bloggers and largely designed based on previous research involving interviews with sport media (Hardin & Shain, 2005a; Kian, 2007). All

interviews were conducted via telephone from June–November, 2009, tape-recorded, fully transcribed, and later coded individually by both researchers in the search for dominant themes. A second coder was used for the examination of all articles to add reliability to the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Working individually, both researchers wrote theoretical memos from data prevalent in the coding sheets before comparing their coding results (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The two researchers together then used the constant comparative method to decipher and define key concepts by unifying their supporting data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Turner, 1981). This process was individualistic, subjective, and interpretative. Although one of the co-authors for this project was a former professional sport blogger, both researchers attempted to employ bracketing, meaning they attempted to discard any attitudes formed during previous experiences in sport media and let results emerge from the data. Ornek (2008) noted that bracketing means that a “researcher must approach both the interview and the data to be analyzed open-mindedly without any input from his or her perspectives” (¶ 5).

## Findings

Five dominant themes emerged from our data analysis: (1) Lofty education pedigrees, but no direction; (2) This started out just for fun; (3) Home is where the blogger is; (4) This job is great; (5) Not sure of my title, but I sure wear lots of hats. Each of these themes was prevalent throughout the narratives provided by multiple interviewees, although several exceptions will be noted in theme analyses.

### *Lofty Education Pedigrees, But No Direction*

All 8 of the prominent sport bloggers in this study earned bachelor's degrees, with two of those from Ivy League institutions. Three have post-graduate degrees, one earned two

master's degrees, and another has a law degree. Nguyen arguably had the most impressive academic resume of the group. She graduated Summa Cum Laude with a perfect 4.0 from the University of Pennsylvania, and earned a law degree from Stanford University. However, while at Stanford, Nguyen said she was “bored” with law school and thus started her own blog, [Sunsgossip.blogspot.com](http://Sunsgossip.blogspot.com). Nguyen posted under the aliases Miss Gossip while writing about her beloved Phoenix Suns basketball team.

I never intended to be a lawyer... but blogging came up when I was in law school, so when it was time to graduate I had to decide should I go work at a consulting firm or continue this thing that I really like? I took a shot and continued in this field.

Approximately 4 of the 8 interviewees majored in journalism or communications as undergraduates. Daulerio, Melchior, Nguyen, Schatz, and Smith each worked for student and/or professional media while in college. Thus, these highly successful bloggers were more likely to have majored in journalism/communications and work for campus media than most sport bloggers, because the JCCSJ report (2009) found roughly 1 of 5 sport bloggers worked for campus media or majored in communication/journalism. Nguyen and Schatz, however, worked specifically in radio, whereas Smith did not write about sports while working for the *Daily Illini* student newspaper at the University of Illinois. Furthermore, Wetzel was an aspiring newspaper sport reporter at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, but his primary professional experience came as an intern for the *Chicago Tribune*, where he covered courts and police for the news department.

Thus, none of the interviewees had an easy journey climbing the ranks in sport journalism, and all worked outside of both journalism and sport at some point as adults. All of the interviewees were at least somewhat displeased

with their jobs before their current sport blogging careers, with some citing a desire to work in some capacity related to sports, others simply perceiving the jobs they had pre-sport blogging as dead-end vocations, and two more burned out on higher education. Wetzel dealt blackjack at a casino in Michigan, while doing any kind of freelance sport writing he could find. Daulerio waited tables in 1999 at the Homestead Inn in Horsham, Pennsylvania, while also earning “token” money from covering sports for weekly newspapers. Friedman earned a master’s degree in American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin but stopped pursuing a Ph.D. from the same institution to focus on participating in fantasy basketball and blogging about his favorite sport. “I’m bad at research and hate citations,” Friedman said. “I was extremely undisciplined and lazy then...I was watching a lot of basketball and was bored. It was like a perfect storm of things where I really had nothing else going on.”

#### *This Started Out Just For Fun*

With all of these individuals wondering through various jobs, most broke into online sports journalism inauspiciously with no visions of grandiose. Five of the 8 interviewees started their own blog and all except Melchior said they did so with no monetary incentives in mind. “At first it was just a fun, little stupid blog and I never thought about making money from it,” Nguyen said. Whereas he did not start his own blog, Smith said he picked up football writing as a hobby while spending a year as a teacher at Compton High in California. Blogging became his passion during a short stint writing news articles and doing page layout for the *Grunion Gazette*, a small weekly newspaper in Long Beach, California.

I’d sit there when I was supposed to be writing the paper and just write all my thoughts on the NFL and send it out as an e-mail to 5 or 10 friends.

Then, sometimes friends would forward those e-mails to their friends. Eventually one guy who had his own sports blog said ‘hey, do you mind if I copy this onto my blog;’ and it never really occurred for me to ask him to pay me. I did that for a couple of years before I decided to pursue this.

All of the interviewees cited boredom as one of their reasons for leaving their previous vocations and pursuing sport writing. This was especially true for Wilson of AOL Fanhouse, who earned a pair of master’s degrees from the University of Arizona and Carnegie Mellon University before landing a full-time job in the White House in 2003. Wilson, however, found time to start his own sporting blog while working for 4 years in the White House Office of Management and Budget. Wilson was the only interviewee who did no professional writing or student journalism before beginning an online sport blogging career, which eventually evolved into his full-time profession.

I had just gotten out of graduate school and I had a real job for the first time. But I didn’t know what to do with myself after 5:00 (p.m.), because when you’re in graduate school, your hours are whatever you make your hours. I wasn’t used to being somewhere for 8 or 9 hours a day and then being done... So I decided to set up a blog (HeelsSoxSteelers.com) to write about my three favorite teams (University of North Carolina men’s basketball, Boston Red Sox, and Pittsburgh Steelers).

#### *Home Is Where the Blogger Is*

Six of the 8 interviewees work almost entirely from their homes including Daulerio and Melchior, each of whom have double-digit employees under their direction. “I have 14 full-time employees not counting myself

and we're the largest independently owned general sports Web site on the Internet," said Melchior, who runs a multi-million dollar Web site out of a small apartment he rents in Venice Beach, California. "Everything's from home and everything's remote with all my guys." Nguyen, a manager at Yardbarker.com, works in a small office, although she did work entirely from home when she was a blogger. Among the participants in this study, 7 of the 8 said they watch, read, and write about sport from home, rarely attending games. Friedman said he views a minimum of one National Basketball Association (NBA) game per night during the season and often up to three in a day thanks to his digital recorder. Schatz also makes liberal use of his DVR, regularly doing statistical analyses on at least three NFL games per day. He has parlayed his statistical expertise on FootballOutsiders.com into freelance consulting work for several NFL franchises. However, even that consulting work is done from his Massachusetts home. Smith also watches every NFL game. Likewise, Wilson writes entirely from home, but he has extra incentive to stay in his household, because he cares for his infant son each weekday while his wife works as a teacher.

I sit on my couch and watch television and write about what I see. I talk to my buddies and they're shaking their heads about what I get to do. To be able to do this full time and to spend time with my son is perfect. To have a yard, and a house, and all that stuff to go along with this job truly is a dream. The direct benefits are writing about sports and the indirect benefits allow me to be home with my family.

The primary exception to the "couch potato" tag that could be applied to the bloggers interviewed is Wetzel, who travels for work more than 100 days per year, attending most major sporting events in the U.S. and

occasionally in the world. Of course, this could be because Wetzel's job duties are more in line with traditional reporters than the others, because Wetzel is the only one who works for a mainstream Internet sport site.

### *This Job Is Great*

All 8 interviewees expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their current jobs. When Schatz was asked about long-term career plans, he responded, "This (his current job) sounds good to me. I have no complaints whatsoever." Nguyen added, "I like that it's a cool job as compared to the other things that I could be doing like law, or management consulting, or something that I would not get to hang out on sports blogs all day." Whereas none of those interviewed said they were wealthy, all claimed to be content to quite happy with their annual salaries. Schatz said he earns more than \$100,000 gross and less than \$100,000 net. In discussing her annual income, Nguyen said, "I'm actually doing better than most of my classmates from (Stanford) law school." Melchior is among the highest gross earners of this group, but his take-home pay is considerably lower. "I pour almost all the money I make back into the Web site," Melchior said.

In addition to enjoying their jobs and earning salaries they were satisfied with, all interviewees said they have freedom to write on virtually whatever they choose, with three specifically citing this as the best part of their jobs without being probed on that question. "Oh, I am very, very satisfied with my job," said Daulerio, who manages Deadspin predominately from his apartment in the heart of Manhattan, New York City. "97% of sport journalists would love to be in my position. We have a lot more freedom and a lot more reach than most. And I make a good living."

Whereas many traditional workers would no doubt be envious of these bloggers getting to

work predominately from home, many sport fans would consider Wetzel's job a fantasy life despite his hectic travel schedule. He regularly attends and writes about the Super Bowl, key NFL playoff games, the World Series, the National Basketball Association (NBA) Finals, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's basketball Final Four, the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) college football national championship, the Olympic Games, and the Masters golf tournament. For the most part, Wetzel now chooses which events he covers and topics for his sports columns at Yahoo after not being able to land an entry-level newspaper sport position earlier in his career even after he continuously was the first to report major sport news.

Once you start working for the Internet, you could not get into a newspaper, even at the bottom of the barrel. I broke news, wrote books, and it didn't matter. I would say, 'you need sport news.' But they couldn't get past that you were not a guy running a message board. It's not media to them. I would say '2 million people have read this story; I'll show you. Are you aware of these things called computers?' It is a constant battle that will never end. Now I have the best job in the country. I don't even think of newspapers as my competition. My competition is online. I always thought the Internet had that potential, but I wasn't sure I would get a job like this... I am very happy with my job now and want to continue to make Yahoo the No. 1 place on the Internet.

*Not Sure of My Title, But I Sure Wear Lots of Hats*

Part of the reason that all of those interviewed for this research project are successful is their collective versatility. Few in media fit that

description better than Melchior, who has the longest and most varied sport journalism career of the interviewees. Knowing he wanted a career in sport media as a youth, Melchior started working as a freelance clerk for his hometown *Kansas City Star* newspaper at 16, typing in box scores for high school football games. He later became the sport editor for both the student newspaper and student radio station at the University of Georgia. Melchior's various jobs in his 16 full-time years in sport radio included co-hosting a college football show with Kirk Herbstreit in Columbus, Ohio, co-hosting a national sport talk show for Fox Sports Radio, and having the distinction of being the only Kansas City native to ever serve as the Kansas City Royals' regular radio play-by-play announcer. Melchior, however, said he was never fully happy in any of these jobs, feeling they under-utilized his talents.

There's no one on earth that has done all of the different things that I've done in the sports media that has as much perspective and the contacts and writing ability I have. I was born to do a Web site. I'm a pretty good writer. I'm a pretty good photographer. I'm above average at a lot of things; but I'm not great at anything. But when you put all those together, I am great at running a Web site. ...The goal is to make SportsByBrooks to sport celebrity media the equivalent to what you think about Bloomberg for financial. I want to be more of a publisher entrepreneur than anything. There are not a lot of Brooks' out there. Others have tried to copy me, but no one can do what I do.

That versatility is why none of the 8 interviewees wanted to be limited to just one title. Wetzel considers himself a columnist, investigative reporter, and author. Wilson prefers blogger but also calls himself a writer.

Friedman prefers blogger, author, and writer. Schatz dubs himself a statistical analyst, columnist, and CEO, but says he does everything with the exception of HTML coding or film breakdown for his Web site. Smith embraces both blogger and reporter, saying the line between the two is indistinguishable for quality Internet journalists. "I think I am a journalist who uses a blog platform for most of my articles," Smith said.

### Discussion and Conclusion

As the Internet has seemingly emerged as the medium of the future for sport reporting, it is integral to know the dispositions of this new era of journalists. Despite an unpredictable future for online sport journalism, the continuous decline of both the newspaper and magazine industry seemingly has the Internet entrenched as the dominant U.S. print news medium, particularly amongst younger adults (Pew Research, 2008). Cohen (2009) noted a shift in writing styles exhibited by new media sport journalists compared to traditional reporters, as well as an increased importance of audience interaction. However, little is yet known about the professional experiences and backgrounds of online sport media members (Kian & Hardin, 2009; Real, 2006; Schultz & Sheffer, 2007) and virtually all available academic data on Internet sport bloggers came from the JCCSJ (2009) research study.

This exploratory study employed semi-structured interviews to uncover the narratives of prominent online sport bloggers/online sport writers related to their overall experiences in the profession. Results mirrored several of the findings in the JCCSJ (2009) report, as well as general academic research on bloggers (e.g., Guadagno et al., 2008; Herring et al., 2005). The participants in this study were well-educated, relatively young, and 6 of the 8 reside in major U.S. cities: Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Moreover, like the majority of respondents in the JCCSJ (2009) survey, all interviewees in this study believed they play an essential role in the general field of sport journalism. However, a higher percentage of these prominent online bloggers had previous professional sport media experience before blogging and/or majored in college in a related field (e.g., communications, journalism) than the respondents in the JCCSJ (2009) report. Whereas the JCCSJ (2009) report did not differentiate between prominent and mostly unknown bloggers, or those working full-time, part-time, or blogging for free, the experiences of these interviewees indicate that prominent, full-time sport bloggers may be more likely to have some type of journalism background before blogging than the majority of sport bloggers, most of whom do not blog fulltime.

Whereas there is no available data on the salaries of Internet sport bloggers or even Internet sport journalists for mainstream sites, all 8 participants in this study said they were pleased with their annual income. This contrasted with research on traditional sport media members, a majority of whom were not satisfied with their earnings (Hardin & Shain, 2005b; Kian, 2007; Miloch et al., 2005). Of course, we purposely interviewed full-time sport bloggers at the top of their profession and their salaries are not indicative of most employed in the sport blogosphere (JCCSJ, 2009). Moreover, all 8 participants expressed a high-degree of satisfaction with their current jobs, which again differed from research on more traditional print sport writers (Hardin & Shain, 2005b; Kian, 2007). There were significant disagreements amongst this group on the appropriate titles (e.g., analyst, blogger, columnist, reporter, etc.) for new-age online sport journalists. However, all noted they performed multiple duties beyond just blogging/writing in their jobs. The views of the majority of those interviewed in this study

mirror findings in the JCCSJ (2009) report, where 85% of the surveyed bloggers believe their craft is a form of sport journalism. This is in direct contrast to the views of traditional newspaper sport reporters, the majority of whom do not believe blogging should be equated with journalism, even though most top newspapers now require some of their writers to maintain a blog on that newspaper's Web site (Schultz & Sheffer, 2007; Teeling, 2006). Overall, there were considerably more similarities than differences amongst the interviewees related to their experiences with the recent phenomenon of Internet sport blogging.

### Limitations

Results from this exploratory study should not be generalized to the sport blogosphere. Only 8 sport bloggers were interviewed and all reside in the U.S. Moreover, all are prominent and full-time bloggers/Internet sport journalists. In contrast, the majority of sport bloggers on the Internet do so for free or as part-time employment (JCCSJ, 2009).

### Suggestions for Further Research

Studies from multiple areas of online sport journalism are needed, particularly because so many people now use the Internet as their primary news source (Pew Research, 2008). These studies could examine content within specific Web sites on different sports, or analyze content from multiple Internet sites on either one sport or a variety of sports. Content comparisons for such areas as gender, nationality, and race could be made between mainstream Internet sport sites (e.g., ESPN, Yahoo Sports, etc.) and blogs, such as Deadspin. In addition, research is needed on popular subscription sport sites, such as the many college fan sites offered by Rivals.com and Scout.com. Moreover, there is little research on

sport message board content or actual message board users. It would also be beneficial to find out more about who actually produces the content, because most online bloggers do not have pictures of themselves attached to their commentary and just under half of sport bloggers use aliases (JCCSJ, 2009). Even after this study and the JCCSJ (2009) report, little is still known about sport bloggers. Thus, additional research is needed just to differentiate between the various types of online sport journalists and bloggers. Finally, future studies are needed on the work settings, routines, and journalistic standards (or lack thereof) for online sport journalists and bloggers.

### References

- Billings, A.C. (2009). Conveying the Olympic message: NBC producer and sportscaster interviews regarding the role of identity. *Journal of Sports Media*, 4(1), 1-24.
- Blood, R. (2000, September 7). Weblogs: A history and perspective. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from [http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog\\_history.html](http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html)
- Brown, M.T. (2003). An analysis of online marketing in the sport industry: User activity, communication objectives, and perceived benefits. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 12(1), 48-55.
- Butler, B., & Sagas, M. (2008a). Making room in the lineup: Newspaper Web sites face growing competition for sports fans' attention. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1(1), 17-25.
- Butler, B., & Sagas, M. (2008b). Media coverage of high school sport teams: A national study of team websites. *International Journal of Sport Management*, 9(2), 193-205.
- Carlson, M. (2007). Blogs and journalistic authority: The role of blogs in US Election Day 2004 coverage. *Journalism Studies* 8(2), 264-279.
- Clavio, G. (2008). Demographic and usage profiles of users of college sports message boards. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1(4), 434-443.
- Clavio, G. & Kian, E.M. (2010). Uses and gratifications of a retired female athlete's Twitter followers. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(4), 485-500.

- Cohen, N. (2009). Writing a sports column far from print, and the game. *NYTimes.com*. Retrieved April 7, 2010 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/16/business/media/16simmons.html>
- Cooper, C.G. (2008). NCAA website coverage: An analysis of similar sport team gender coverage on athletic department's home Web pages. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sports*, 1(2), 227-241.
- Cramer, J.A. (1994). Conversations with women sports journalists. In P.J. Creedon (Ed.), *Women, media and sport: Challenging gender values* (pp. 159-179). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creedon, P.J. (1994). Women in toyland: A look at women in American newspaper sports journalism. In P.J. Creedon (Ed.), *Women, media and sport: Challenging gender values* (pp. 67-107). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cunningham, G.B. (2003). Media coverage of women's sport: A new look at an old problem. *Physical Educator*, 60(2), 43-50.
- Dawson, T., & Dawson, R. (2007, October). Effective marketing with blogs. *EventDV*, 20(10), 26-32.
- Dittmore, S.W., Stoldt, G.C., & Greenwell, T.C. (2008). Use of an organizational weblog in relationship building: The case of a Major League Baseball team. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1(3), 384-397.
- Edelman and Intelliseek Research. (2005). Trust "Media": How real people are finally being heard. Retrieved April 15, 2009, from [http://www.edelman.com/image/insights/content/ISwp\\_TrustMedia\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.edelman.com/image/insights/content/ISwp_TrustMedia_FINAL.pdf)
- Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I., & Shaw, L.L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Galily, Y. (2008). The (re) shaping of the Israeli sport media: The case of Talkback. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1(3), 273-285.
- Gallup (2009, January 2). Nearly half of all Americans are frequent Internet users. Retrieved July 29, 2009, from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113638/nearly-half-americans-frequent-internet-users.aspx>
- Glasser, B.G., & Strauss, F. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Guadagno, R.E., Okdie, B.M., & Eno, C.A. (2008). Who blogs? Personality predictors of blogging. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(5), 1993-2004.
- Hardin, M. (2005). Stopped at the gate: Women's sports, 'reader interest,' and decision-making by editors. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(1), 62-77.
- Hardin, M., & Shain, S. (2005a). Female sports journalists: Are we there yet? 'No'. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 26(4), 22-35.
- Hardin, M., & Shain, S. (2005b). Strength in numbers? The experiences and attitudes of women in sports media careers. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(4), 804-819.
- Hardin, M., & Shain, S. (2006). "Feeling much smaller than you know you are": The fragmented professional identity of female sports journalists. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 23(4), 332-338.
- Hardin, M., & Whiteside, E. (2006). Fewer women, minorities work in sports departments. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 27(2), 38-51.
- Harp, D., & Tremayne, M. (2006). The gendered blogosphere: Examining inequality using network and feminist theory. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83(2), 247-265.
- Herring, S.C., Kouper, I., Scheidt, L.A., & Wright, E.J. (2004). Women and children last: The discursive construction on weblogs. Retrieved July 21, 2008, from <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/>
- Herring, S.C., Scheidt, L.A., Bonus, S., & Wright, E. (2005b). Weblogs as a bridging genre. *Information Technology & People*, 18(2), 142-171.
- Hookway, N. (2008). Entering the blogosphere: Some strategies for using blogs in social research. *Qualitative Research*, 8(1), 91-113.
- Hourihan, M. (2002, June 13). What we're doing when we blog. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/javascript/2002/06/13/megnut.html>
- Husserl, E. (1964). *The idea of phenomenology*. (Translated by W. P. Alston & G. Nakhnikian). Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, Netherlands.
- Johnson, T.J., & Kaye, B.K. (2004). Wag the blog: How reliance on traditional media and the internet influence credibility perceptions of weblogs among blog users. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(3), 622-643.
- Jones, D. (2004). Half the story? Olympic women on ABC news online. Media International Austral-Incorporating Culture & Policy, 15. Retrieved April 27, 2008, from EBSCOhost Web site: <http://epnet.com>

- Kassing, J.W. & Sanderson, J. (2010). Fan-athlete interaction and Twitter tweeting through the Giro: A case study. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(1), 113-128.
- Kaye, B.K. (2005). It's a blog, blog, blog, blog world. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 13(2), 73-95.
- Kelleher, T., & Miller, B.M. (2006). Organizational blogs and the human voice: Relational strategies and relational outcomes. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communications*, 11(2), article 1.
- Kent, M.K. (2008). Critical analysis of blogging in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 34(1), 32-40.
- Kian, E.M. (2007). Gender in sports writing by the print media: An exploratory examination of writers' experiences and attitudes. *The SMART Journal*, 4(1), 5-26.
- Kian, E.M., & Hardin, M. (2009). Framing of sport coverage based on the sex of sports writers: Female journalists counter the traditional gendering of media content. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2(2), 185-204.
- Kian, E.M., Mondello, M., & Vincent, J. (2009). ESPN – The women's sports network? A content analysis of Internet coverage of March Madness. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(3), 477-495.
- Kian, E.M., Vincent, J., & Mondello, M. (2008). Masculine hegemonic hoops: An Analysis of media coverage of March Madness. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(2), 223-242.
- Lapchick, R., Little, E., Matthew, R., & Zahn, J. (2008). The 2008 racial and gender report card of the Associated Press Sports Editors. Retrieved April 24, 2009, from University of Central Florida, Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport Web site: [http://www.bus.ucf.edu/sport/public/downloads/2008\\_\\_APSE\\_RGRC\\_Press\\_Release%5B1%5D.pdf](http://www.bus.ucf.edu/sport/public/downloads/2008__APSE_RGRC_Press_Release%5B1%5D.pdf)
- Lenhart, A., & Fox, S. (2006, July 19). Bloggers: A portrait of the internet's new storytellers. Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP%20Bloggers%20Report%20july%2019%202006.pdf>
- Merriam-Webster (2008). Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blog>
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miloch, K.S., Pedersen, P.M., Smucker, M.K., & Whisenant, W.A. (2005). The current state of women print journalists: An analysis of the status and careers of females in newspapers sports departments. *Public Organization*, 5(3), 219-232.
- Nielsen Research (2008, October 3). Web traffic to U.S. sports sites grew in August. Retrieved August 1, 2009, from [http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online\\_mobile/web-traffic-to-us-sports-sites-spiked-in-august/](http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/web-traffic-to-us-sports-sites-spiked-in-august/)
- Ornek, F. (2008). An overview of a theoretical framework of phenomenography in qualitative education research: An example from physics education research. *Asia-Pacific Forum on Science Learning and Teaching*, 9(2), Article 11.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pedersen, P.M., Miloch, K.S., & Laucella, P.C. (2007). *Strategic Sport Communication*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Pegoraro, A. (2010). Look who's talking—Athletes on Twitter: A case study. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(4), 501-514.
- Pennsylvania State University, University Park, John Curley Center for Sports Journalism. (2009, July). From outside the press box: The identities, attitudes, and values of sports bloggers. Retrieved September 10, 2009, from <http://comm.psu.edu/about/centers/john-curley-center-for-sports-journalism/blogsreport.pdf>
- Pew Internet & American Life Project (2008, December 23). Internet overtakes newspapers as news outlet. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1066/internet-overtakes-newspapers-as-news-source>
- Rainie, L. (2005, January 2). The state of blogging. Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved July 8, 2008 from [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_blogging\\_data.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_blogging_data.pdf)
- Real, M. (2006). Sports online: The newest player in mediasport. In A. A. Raney & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Handbook of Sports and Media* (pp. 171-184). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sagas, M., Cunningham, G.B., Wigley, B.J., & Ashley, F.B. (2000). Internet coverage of university softball and baseball web sites: The inequity continues. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17(2), 198-205.
- Sanderson, J. (2008). The blog is serving its purpose: Self-presentation strategies on 38pitches.com. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(4), 912-936.

- Schultz, B., & Sheffer, M.L. (2007). Sports journalists who blog cling to traditional values. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 28(4), 62–76.
- Sheffer, M.L., & Schultz, B. (2010). Paradigm shift or passing fad? Twitter and sports journalism. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(4), 472-484.
- Teeling, E. (2006, August 1). The use of the Internet by America's newspapers. The Bivings Report. Retrieved September 1, 2009, from <http://www.bivingsreport.com/2006/the-use-of-the-internet-by-america%E2%80%99s-newspapers/>
- Turner, B.A. (1981). Some practical aspects of qualitative data analysis: One way of organizing the cognitive processes associated with the generation of grounded theory. *Quantity and Quality*, 15(3), 225-247.
- Wigley, S., & Meirick, P.C. (2008). Interactive media and sports journalists: The impact of interactive media on sports journalists. *Journal of Sports Media*, 3(1), 1-25.

For a whitepaper summary of this article, visit:  
<http://www.jsasonline.org/home/v3n1/whitepaper/Kian-Shaw-wp.pdf>

# Journal of Sport Administration & Supervision

---

**RESEARCH THAT MATTERS!**

## **INTERNET SPORT BLOGGERS: WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE AND WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?**

Edward (Ted) M. Kian and  
Stephanie D. Shaw  
University of Central Florida

Dr. Edward (Ted) M. Kian  
Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences  
Office: (407) 823-4631  
Fax: (407) 823-3859  
ekian@mail.ucf.edu

### **PURPOSE**

This phenomenology attempts to uncover narratives on the backgrounds, professional experiences, and work-related attitudes formed among highly successful, fulltime sport bloggers,

### **RESEARCH IMPORTANCE**

The Internet has easily surpassed newspapers among dominant media news sources in the United States and is tied with television as the preeminent news source for U.S. citizens under the age 30. However, little is known about Internet sport journalism and sport bloggers, who increasingly are becoming important cogs in sport journalism. An exploratory study providing narratives from prominent Internet sport bloggers is lacking in the literature and this research attempts to fill that void by interviewing some of the top sport bloggers in the country, all of whom are deemed highly successful in this vocation, but none of whom developed their national journalistic notoriety through another print medium (e.g., magazines, newspapers).

### **INTENDED AUDIENCE AND STAKEHOLDER GROUP**

This article would likely be useful to most employees in sport media, professional sport, college sport, sport marketing, and sport public relations, all of whom could potentially have their organizations, athletes, or even themselves greatly affected by these new-age sport bloggers, who collectively little is known about.

### **ISSUES**

Nearly half of all U.S. citizens (48%) use the Internet at least an hour per day, with young adults (18-29), individuals who have earned post-graduate college degrees, and the highly affluent (annually earn \$75,000 or more) spending the most time online (Gallup Research, 2009). One of the most unique aspects of the Internet is blogs, which virtually allow anyone to become some type of journalist/commentator regardless of work experience, training, reporting or writing skills, objectivity, or expertise. The majority of the world's bloggers reside in the U.S.

However, mainstream sites such as Yahoo Sports and ESPN Internet dominate Internet sport traffic numbers (Nielsen Research, 2008). Many of the writers at these mainstream sport sites are former and well-known newspaper sport reporters who switched to online in recent years as the newspaper industry began downsizing. Sport blogs, however, usually differ in writing style and in content from the more traditional media articles found on mainstream

sport Internet sites. Many popular sport blogs originated on non-mainstream sites and are authored by individuals who did not develop sport journalism reputations through notoriety in the newspaper industry. Thus, they did not necessarily follow the typical career paths of newspaper, magazine, and television sport journalists. However, there have been no published research articles interviewing sport bloggers who do not work for newspaper-affiliated Web sites. Therefore, little is known about this growing and increasingly important subset of 21st Century sport journalists.

## **METHODOLOGY AND POPULATION**

The qualitative inquiry known as phenomenology was used for this exploratory study, since our goal was to uncover some of the common experiences and work-related attitudes of marquee sport bloggers. A co-author of this study had phone conversations with full-time sport bloggers, sport newspaper reporters, and sport writers (not bloggers) for prominent sport Internet sites (e.g., ESPN Internet, FoxSports.com) in an attempt to determine the most suitable interviewees for this study who also represented different types of sports bloggers (i.e., not all focusing on one sport and not all working for the same outlets). A list of 12 prominent Internet sport bloggers were identified as ideal candidates and contacted, with eight agreeing to participate and be quoted on the record: (1) A.J. Daulerio, editor of Deadspin, the most popular sport blog in the world; (2) Nathaniel Friedman, who writes under the aliases of Bethlehem Shoals, is the founder of FreeDarko.com, and has been a fulltime blogger for AOL Fanhouse and the Sporting Blog, which is affiliated with SportingNews.com; (3) Brooks Melchior, founder, CEO, and editor of the sport celebrity gossip/sex site SportsByBrooks.com; (4) Alana Nguyen, who writes under the aliases Alana G and Miss Gossip, serves as director of programming at Yardbarker.com, where she oversees an operation that maintains more blogs of professional athletes than any other Internet site; (5) Aaron Schatz, founder, CEO, and editor-in-chief for Football Outsiders.com., which regularly publishes statistical-based blogs and analyses for ESPN Internet; (6) Michael David Smith, a full-time sport blogger writing for Pro Football Talk and AOL Fanhouse; (7) Dan Wetzel, the national columnist and an investigative reporter for Yahoo Sports, the most read sport Web site on the Internet; and (8) Ryan Wilson, founder of the sporting blog, HeelsSoxSteelers.com, and now a full-time sport blogger for AOL Fanhouse. All interviews were conducted via telephone, tape-recorded, fully transcribed, and later coded individually by both researchers in the search for dominant themes. A second coder was used for the examination of all articles to add reliability to the analysis.

## **SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

Five dominant themes emerged from our data analysis: (1) Lofty education pedigrees, but no direction; (2) This started out just for fun; (3) Home is where the blogger is; (4) This job is great; (5) Not sure of my title, but I sure wear lots of hats.

All eight of the prominent sport bloggers in this study earned bachelor's degrees, with two of those from Ivy League institutions. Three have post-graduate degrees, one earned two master's degrees, and another has a law degree. Nguyen arguably had the most impressive academic resume of the group. She graduated Summa Cum Laude with a perfect 4.0 from the University of Pennsylvania, and earned a law degree from Stanford University. Approximately four of the eight interviewees majored in journalism or communications as undergraduates, although two were not involved in sport journalism. None of the interviewees had an easy journey climbing the ranks in sport journalism, and all worked outside of both journalism and sport at some point as adults.

Five of the eight interviewees started their own blog and all except Melchior said they did so with no monetary incentives in mind. All of the interviewees cited boredom for leaving their previous vocations and pursuing sport writing. This was especially true for Wilson of AOL Fanhouse, who earned a pair of master's degrees from the University of Arizona and Carnegie Mellon University before landing a full-time job in the White House in 2003. Wilson, however, still found time to start his own sporting blog while working for 4 years in the White House Office of Management and Budget. Wilson was the only interviewee who did no professional writing or student journalism before beginning an online sport blogging career, which eventually evolved into his full-time profession. Six of the eight interviewees work almost entirely from their homes including Daulerio and Melchior, each of whom have double-digit employees under their direction. Among the participants in this study, seven of the eight said they

watch, read, and write about sport from home, rarely attending games. Friedman said he views a minimum of one National Basketball Association game per night during the season and often up to three in day thanks to his digital recorder. Schatz also makes liberal use of his DVR, regularly doing statistical analyses on at least three National Football League games per day.

All eight interviewees expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their current jobs. While none of those interviewed said they were wealthy, all claimed to be content to quite happy with their annual salaries. Schatz said he earns more than \$100,000 gross and less than \$100,000 net. In discussing her annual income, Nguyen said, "I'm actually doing better than most of my classmates from (Stanford) law school." In addition to enjoying their jobs and earning a decent salary, all interviewees said they have freedom to write on virtually whatever they choose, with three specifically citing this as the best part of their jobs without being probed on that question.

While many traditional workers would no doubt be envious of these bloggers getting to work predominately from home, many sport fans would consider Wetzel's job a fantasy life despite his hectic travel schedule. He regularly attends and writes about the Super Bowl, key NFL playoff games, the World Series, the National Basketball Association (NBA) Finals, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's basketball Final Four, the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) college football national championship, the Olympic Games, and the Masters golf tournament. For the most part, Wetzel now chooses which events he covers and topics for his sports columns at Yahoo after not being able to land an entry-level newspaper sport position earlier in his career even after he continuously was the first to report major sport news.

Part of the reason that all of those interviewed for this research project are successful is their collective versatility. That versatility is why none of the eight interviewees wanted to be stigmatized with just one title. Wetzel considers himself a columnist, investigative reporter, and author. Wilson prefers blogger but also calls himself a writer. Friedman prefers blogger, author, and writer. Schatz dubs himself a statistical analyst, columnist, and CEO, but says he does everything with the exception of HTML coding or film breakdown for his Web site. Smith embraces both blogger and reporter, saying the line between the two is indistinguishable for quality Internet journalists.

## **ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Results mirrored several of the findings in the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism (JCCSJ, 2009) report, as well as general academic research on bloggers. The participants in this study were well-educated, relatively young, and six of the eight reside in major U.S. cities: Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle. Moreover, like the majority of respondents in the JCCSJ (2009) survey, all interviewees in this study believed they play an essential role in the general field of sport journalism. However, a higher percentage of these prominent online bloggers had previous professional sport media experience before blogging and/or majored in college in a related field (e.g., communications, journalism) than the respondents in the JCCSJ (2009) report. Moreover, the JCCSJ (2009) report did not differentiate between prominent and mostly unknown bloggers, or those working full-time, part-time, or blogging for free. Thus, the experiences of these interviewees indicate that prominent, full-time sport bloggers may be more likely to have some type of journalism background before blogging than the majority of sport bloggers, most of whom do not blog fulltime.

All of the interviewees said they were at least somewhat displeased with their jobs before their current sport blogging careers. Wetzel dealt blackjack at a casino in Michigan, while doing any kind of freelance sport writing he could find. Daulerio waited tables in 1999 at the Homestead Inn in Horsham, Pennsylvania, while also earning "token" money from covering sports for weekly newspapers. Friedman earned a master's degree in American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin but stopped pursuing a Ph.D. from the same institution to focus on participating in fantasy basketball and blogging about his favorite sport.

While there is no available data on the salaries of Internet sport bloggers or even Internet sport journalists for mainstream sites, all eight interviewees said they were pleased with their annual income. This contrasted with research on traditional sport media members, a majority of whom were not satisfied with their earnings. Moreover, all eight participants expressed a high-degree of satisfaction with their current jobs, which again differed from research on more traditional print sport writers. There were significant disagreements amongst this group on the appropriate titles (e.g., analyst, blogger, columnist, reporter, etc.) for new-age online sport journalists. However, all

noted they performed multiple duties beyond just blogging/writing in their jobs. Overall, there were considerably more similarities than differences amongst the interviewees related to their experiences with the recent phenomenon of Internet sport blogging or online sport journalism.

Results from this exploratory study should not be generalized to the sport blogosphere. Only 8 sport bloggers were interviewed and all reside in the U.S. Moreover, all are prominent and full-time bloggers/Internet sport journalists. In contrast, the majority of sport bloggers on the Internet do so for free or as part-time employment (JCCSJ, 2009). However, this exploratory study provides insight to the background and experiences of these new-age journalists, whose voices are increasingly becoming more powerful in the sport media spectrum with the increasing popularity of Web sites like Deadspin and AOL Fanhouse.