

ACCOUNTABLE SPORTS JOURNALISM

GUIDELINES FOR COVERING SPORTS RESPONSIBLY

PREFACE

This specialised code is presented as a decalogue comprising the most frequent ethical issues that are addressed in the codes available on the platform [Accountable Sports Journalism](#), as well as crucial dilemmas that sports journalism faces today. This dynamic tool will be permanently updated to point journalists in the right direction with regard to language and the highest reporting standards.

DECALOGUE

1. Public function and right to sports information

Sports journalists should report on all areas of sport. As an essential part of their public-service approach, they should not only concentrate on mainstream disciplines but also give exposure to underrepresented sports that generate news and have a large number of practitioners. This can help to broaden the coverage and expand citizens' sporting culture. Media professionals should not report on the private lives of sportspeople unless the information is relevant to understanding the athletes' performance.

2. Conflict of interest

Sports journalists should avoid taking part in activities that lie outside of their professional realm or in employment that may create conflict of interest. This includes working in the field of public relations (PR) and as advisors for a sports person, club or federation, and writing for a team or league publication. Editors and reporters cannot be sources who are assigned to themselves. Behaving professionally entails remaining loyal to the news organisation for which one works.

3. Hospitality from sources and independence

Sports journalists should reject invitations and gifts from teams or promoters that could call them into question and instrumentalise them as reporters acting as independent eyewitnesses. Likewise, they should not use their position as journalists to obtain free tickets for any sports event from sources other than those which customarily make passes or tickets available when a performance has a clear bearing on the journalist's job.

4. Newsgathering and impartiality

Sports journalists should avoid developing a close relationship with sports sources and maintain a critical distance, by seeking and using a varied and representative number of arguments and facts on any issue, and presenting them appropriately without bias towards their audiences. They should also avoid misconducts such as boosterism and nationalistic or chauvinistic approaches. Impartiality entails being professional, rather than behaving like fans.

5. Factual reporting

Sports journalists are committed to truthful and factual reporting. They should establish a clear distinction between facts and their personal opinions about them, as well as between news and advertising or sponsored content. Reinforcing methods of verification is essential to the fight against fake news, the pervasiveness of speculation and rumour in sports content, and to discarding sensationalism and trivialisation in news reporting.

6. Journalistic quality and use of language

Sports journalists are committed to journalistic quality and must therefore rely on a correct use of language as their main working tool by which to enhance their stories. Acquiring a vast vocabulary and developing the ability to use suitable words and phrases in referring to any sportsperson are valuable assets towards improving content quality within the field.

7. Promotion of positive sports values

Sports journalists should contribute to the promotion of positive values, such as fair play, non-discrimination, and international peace and understanding, through their coverage of sports events among citizens, with special attention for youth and children.

8. Violence in sports

Sports journalists must avoid using warlike language, as well as disseminating expressions and images that emphasise or legitimate any form of violence towards individuals or groups of people within or outside sports venues. Sport is not a substitute for war. Thus, journalists must minimise confrontational narratives and warlike imagery.

9. Gender perspective

To counteract the long-standing underrepresentation of sportswomen, sports journalists should work with greater dedication to promote equality in their reporting by giving female athletes more exposure when their results deserve it. More women should be incorporated as expert sources into the news agenda. Sexist comments and stereotypes should be avoided when referring to them.

10. Sports beyond sports

Sports journalists should go beyond the dramatic action on the field and raise public awareness about relevant contexts that exist behind the play. Sports should be thoroughly explained from their social, financial, cultural and political dimensions.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

This text is not intended to be read in isolation. Sports journalists should also observe the general principles of trustfulness, fairness, social responsibility, and respect for the universal values and diversity of cultures that are included in the baseline codes of the profession. These codes of reference are the UNESCO's *International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism*, the International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) *Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists* and further documents available on <https://accountablejournalism.org/ethics-codes>. Beyond these general and specific codes, as well as their organisations' in-house guidelines, sports journalists must seek ethical guidance from within themselves, by placing emphasis on their individual conscience, as John C. Merrill states.