

Sports is news

Navigating a blurred line

About me



My name is Justin Pelletier... I am currently the Deputy Regional Sports Editor for McClatchy-Southeast, based in Raleigh, North Carolina.

I spent the first 20 years of my career in New England, first at the Sun Journal in Lewiston, Maine, and then at the Boston Herald.



Sports is news is sports



No editor would let this headline pass, and it wouldn't win any awards, but it is most definitely accurate.

Many old-school journalists would refer to sports as the "toy department." I bristle at that, for a few reasons. But the biggest reason? The numbers (at least pre-pandemic) didn't back it up.

In many locations prior to the pandemic, sports was among the departmental leaders in the "pageview" and "subscription conversion" metrics in many newsrooms, regardless of size.

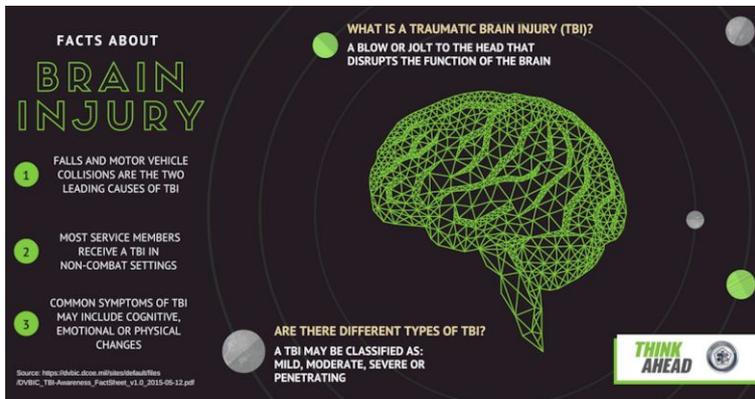
Sports' great gamble



Sports Gambling is big business, and more and more states are getting on board with making it legal. When we conceived this series at the Herald, Massachusetts was wrestling (still is) with making it legal. Mike Silverman was fantastic, speaking to legislators, gaming industry execs and, yes, sports industry execs..

<https://www.bostonherald.com/tag/sports-great-gamble-series/>

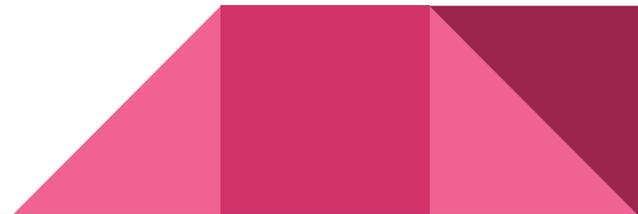
Head Games



Note: Not the SJ's graphic. Used for illustrative purposes only

<https://www.sunjournal.com/2012/12/30/head-games-schools-face-strengthened-concussion-guidelines/>

In December 2012, we at the Sun Journal explored the emerging research on head injuries in sports. Beyond speaking with coaches and athletes, the best sources are those who know best. We spoke with some of the foremost researchers in the field on concussions and their long-term ramifications, while localizing it with multiple stories.



Public information



Ethan Hyman, N&O Photo

One of the bigger possibilities for sports/news crossover exists in college sports, especially when a public institution of higher learning is involved, because any FOIA laws apply to the sports programs as much as they do to the business office. With recent NIL legislation, athletes are able to turn a profit and maintain college eligibility, but at public schools, that has to be tracked.

Public information



Additionally, coaches salaries, across all sports, must be made available. It's different with private schools, of course, but if you're in an area with public colleges, this is all fair game, and makes for some amazing utility data journalism.

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/college/article240847081.html>



Investigation

Scott Frost got a bigger football roster. But did Nebraska shortchange women's sports to do it?

- Omaha World-Herald

Natrona County School District refuses to release any details of 'extreme bullying'

- Casper (Wyoming) Star Tribune

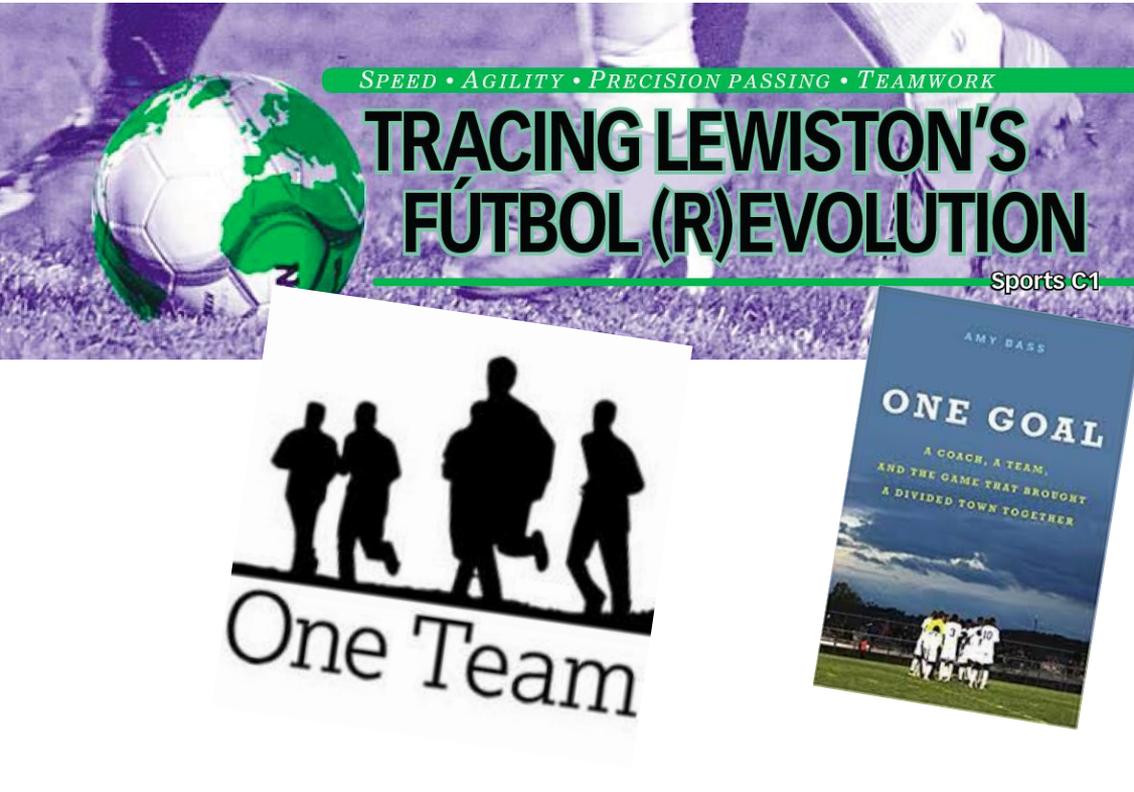
COMING TO A HEAD: Inside high school football helmet safety for Guilford and Rockingham county programs

- News & Record, Greensboro, NC

Each year the Associated Press Sports Editors honors the top sports journalism in the country. One of the categories is “Investigative,” and we open that to all circulation sizes. Good investigative sports journalism can happen anywhere. Each example at left was a Top-10 national award winner.



Social and cultural change



When is a soccer team more than a soccer team? When the members are from nearly 10 different countries. Kevin Mills broke down cultural barriers with this story, and since it has been part of a film, and a book.

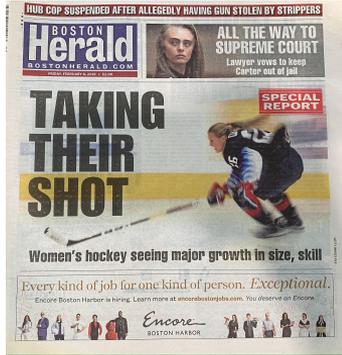
Social and cultural change



“Stick to Sports” doesn’t cut it anymore. The lines are constantly blurred. At the Herald, we explored gender equity in hockey. More recently at the N&O, we reported extensively on abuse allegations within the NWSL.

Links to crossover material

Some inspiration and possible story ideas, based on past work:



20 Years of APSE award-winning writing