

PRO TIPS

for media advisers

Comments from Jack Kennedy

7 Podcasts for the Sports Fan

Every sport needs a good commentator, and these shows offer everything from postgame analysis to historical storytelling.

By Emma Dibdin / Oct. 18, 2019 / The New York Times

Despite big cuts at *Sports Illustrated*

magazine, and local print sports sections being squeezed and poorly edited, sports reporting is enjoying some of its best years. And high schools are steadily adding standalone sports magazines, in-depth online reporting, and sports commentary/blogs. Readers eat it up.

Podcasts are also enjoying their moment and why should sports be left out? Here's a way to involve different voices from different school groups in school media.

Students talk about sports all the time. Tap into the energy!

Working with some

reluctant readers in any of your classes? I see nothing wrong and lots right about encouraging students to actively listen to great reporting and storytelling.

The old saying (and it's a good one) is that "to be a great writer you need to read widely." It's not much of a stretch to add "listen widely" to that advice.

Each of these recommended podcasts contains plenty of background and provocative thinking... enough to produce solid persuasive writing assignments.

Commentary is integral to sports, and some of the best commentary out there now exists in podcast form. Whatever your game or your team, you can find a show — or several — with tailored postgame analysis, while other podcasts offer a deep dive into news stories with implications beyond sports itself, like China's clash with the N.B.A. And since it was true crime that brought podcasting into the mainstream, it's no surprise that there are also plenty of deeply reported audio documentaries exploring the darker side of athleticism, including the death of Aaron Hernandez and the disgraced guru behind Bikram yoga.

Here are seven podcasts about sports that are worth your time, whether you're a die-hard aficionado, a casual World Series watcher or simply a fan of great storytelling.

'30 for 30'

Since its genesis in 2009, ESPN's "30 For 30" series has established itself as the gold standard of modern sports documentaries, and its relatively new audio spinoff is no exception. Much like the original, the podcast shifts nimbly in tone from episode to episode, telling self-contained stories on subjects ranging from the historic Yankees-Red Sox rivalry to the first all-women's expedition to the North Pole. Last year the show ventured into longer-form storytelling with a compelling five-part series about Bikram Choudhury, the hot-yoga guru who developed a cult following in the literal sense and has been accused of wielding his position to manipulate, bully and sexually abuse his followers.

Starter episode: "BIKRAM Part 1: Arrival" [<https://30for30podcasts.com/episodes/bikram-part-1-arrival/>]

Gladiator: Aaron Hernandez and Football Inc.'

One of the most haunting tragedies in modern sports is brought to life in this rigorously reported six-part series from Wondery, [<https://wondery.com/shows/gladiator/>] the network behind the true-crime hits "Dirty John" and "Dr. Death." Two years on from the death of Aaron Hernandez, the N.F.L. star who was convicted of murder and killed himself in prison, The Boston Globe's Spotlight team examines his downfall in the context of the league's corporate machine and the physical risks its players take in the name of glory. Through interviews with Hernandez's former teammates and coach, and extraordinary audio of the phone calls he made from prison, Gladiator explores the thorny subject of C.T.E. — the degenerative brain condition caused by repeated head trauma, from which Hernandez suffered — and the overuse of pain medication in the N.F.L. All the while, the podcast paints a picture of a deeply troubled young man that is addictive without ever being sensationalistic.

Marc Stein's Newsletter

Marc Stein has covered Jordan. He's covered Kobe. And LeBron vs. the Warriors. Go behind the N.B.A.'s curtain with basketball's foremost expert.

Starter episode: “Hail Mary” [<https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/gladiator-aaron-hernandez-football-inc/e/56721960?autoplay=true>]

‘Men in Blazers’

For decades, it looked as though the most popular sport in the world was destined to never catch on in the United States. But now that soccer — particularly the British Premier League — is growing in popularity, it’s hard to imagine a better companion show than this one hosted by two dry-witted British expats who still prefer to call it football. The hosts, Michael Davies and Roger Bennett, gather once a week to discuss the game they’ve long declared “America’s sport of the future.” And while game recaps are the show’s bread and butter, there are also regular interviews with soccer stars like Wayne Rooney and occasional forays into other sports.

Starter episode: “U.S.W.N.T. World Cup Champion Instant Reax” [<https://meninblazers.com/2019/07/07/men-in-blazers-07-07-19-uswnt-world-cup-champion-instant-reax-pod/>]

‘Throwback’

After the United States team’s groundbreaking and much-watched victory at this summer’s World Cup, this Sports Illustrated podcast examined women’s soccer’s long journey to the mainstream. “Throwback,” which began earlier this year, dedicated its first season to the origin story of the national team, featuring the voices of pioneering players like Mia Hamm and Julie Foudy, who vividly describe their experiences leading up to the 1991 Women’s World Cup. Like all the best historical sports stories, this is a gripping and educational listen that speaks directly to the present moment.

Starter episode: “The Tsunami Hitting the Shore” [<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-tsunami-hitting-the-shore-s1-the-womens-world-cup/id1462243735?i=1000437609567>]

‘Crime in Sports’

Even a listener who doesn’t care about the World Series or the Super Bowl will find something to engage with in this irreverent two-hander, which is really a true-crime podcast using sports as its framework. The hosts James Pietragallo and Jimmie Whisman delight in delving into the sins of athletes who’ve committed, or been accused of committing, crimes — particularly “the dumbest ones, the ones who really threw it all away.” And though the duo’s often brutal black humor is an acquired taste, their affable chemistry takes the edge off. “Crime in Sports” sheds light on a lot of bizarre stories you’ve likely never heard, but even when they’re on familiar ground with Tonya Harding or O.J. Simpson, Pietragallo and Whisman find new angles and avoid the well-worn aspects of each subject.

Starter episode: “He Did More Than That — The Historicalness of O.J. Simpson” [<https://podcasts.apple.com/sg/podcast/165-he-did-more-than-that-the-historicalness-of-o-j-simpson/id1082678396?i=1000441884113>]

Here’s a generalization that you should feel free to refute if it does not apply to your newsroom, but most high school media programs are dominated by young women. I mean, the ration has got to be over 3 or 4 females to 1 male.

If we define that as a problem, we need to examine why this is so and then explore options to even things up a bit.

I have seen lots of research on gender differences in reading and writing interest and there are certainly areas in student media (video broadcast is one) where boys more than hold their own.

We can moan about lack of interest among boys in our schools in joining yearbook or newsmagazine or any journalism course, but I suspect that we may just need to be more creative in offering places boys can feel comfortable and even expert.

Sports podcasts (and dedicated sports magazines and streaming sports coverage) seem like a natural magnet for a significant percentage of our male youth.

But don’t stop there. Why not a gaming podcast, or whatever topics you hear guys discussing passionately when they don’t think we are observing?

I am not claiming that girls are not sports fans or gaming fans. Of course they are. But we need to tray SOMETHING, don’t you think?