



MALMÖ HÖGSKOLA

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ISSN 1652-7224 ::: Published 23 September 2009

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A growing body of research within the field of sport studies concerns itself with the audiences of sports, the *raison d'être* for large parts of the sporting community and a prerequisite for the kind of large-scale sporting events that is emblematic of modern-day commercialized sports. The sport audience phenomenon covers a wide variation in degrees of devotion to a sport, or a single athlete, or a team, ranging from the casual live sports spectator who'd rather just read about it in the paper or watch it on television, via the faithful fan who follows, and supports, his team through thick and thin, to the sports maniac, for whom, in the words of James R. Walker, sports no longer offers just an escape from the tedium of everyday life, but an up to the minute life of its own. Walker, a professor of Mass Communication at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, IL, has read a book about sports fanatics and the media, *Sports Mania: Essays on Fandom and the Media in the 21st Century*, edited by Lawrence W. Hugenberg, Paul M. Haridakis och Adam C. Earnhardt (McFarland), and we're proud to publish his review. Notwithstanding a number of critical remarks, not least on points of methodology, and his overall judgment that the collection reads more like a special issue of a journal than an integrated volume shaped by editorial intent, professor Walker concludes that the book offers a substantial contribution to our understanding of the relationship between sports media and their audiences..

Sports media fanaticism revealed

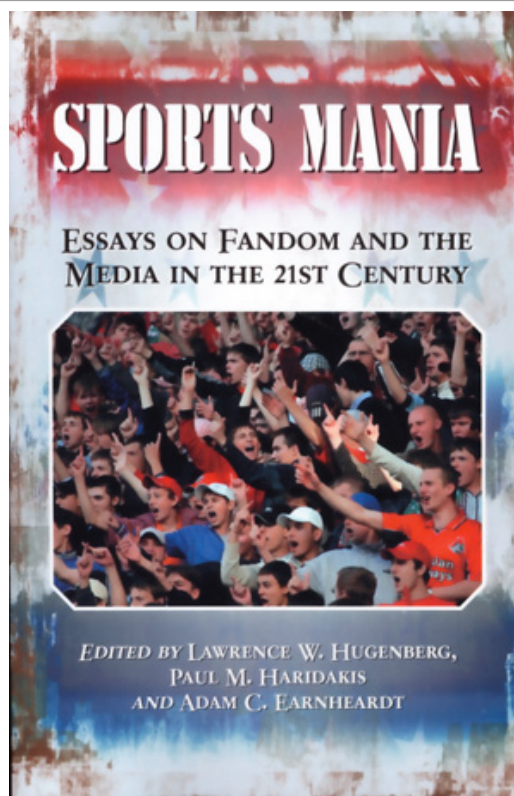
James R. Walker

Dept. of Communication, Saint Xavier University, Chicago, IL

Lawrence W. Hugenberg, Paul M. Haridakis & Adam C. Earnhardt (red)
Sports Mania: Essays on Fandom and the Media in the 21st Century
287 sidor, hft.
Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2008
ISBN 978-0-7864-3726-9

Sports Mania: Essays on Fandom and the Media in the 21st Century offers readers a wide range of essays examining the experience of sport in a variety of mediated contexts. "Fanatics" and mere "spectators" engage their teams, both real and fantasy, through broadcast media, cable/satellite transmission, video games, Internet sites, and cell phones. As new communication technologies and applications evolve, they are immediately applied to enhancing the fan experience, strengthening the bond between consumer and sport. The post-modern sports maniac is in perpetual contact with the larger sports world, his/her favor sports and teams, and the fantasy teams that he/she manages. For the true fanatic, sports no longer offers just an escape from the tedium of everyday life, but an up to the minute life of its own.

The essays presented in *Sports Mania* look at specific sports (NFL, NBA, NCAA football and basketball, World Cup Football, NASCAR), specific media (television, Internet), and both real and unreal events (*Madden Football*, fantasy sports games). Communication experiences are both one-way (television) and highly interactive (sports blogs, video games, fantasy games), and they occur in both isolated and group settings. Such breadth of scope is major virtue of this essay collection. Readers with an



interest in most any sports media topic will find new contributions to their passion. Students and novice researchers can access current literature reviews to fuel their own inquiries. As such, the book is a valuable reference volume for any committed scholar of sport or media.

After an introductory chapter, the book is divided into five sections focusing on sports media content, the sports fan, fan identification, fan motives, and fan-produced content. The sports media content section looks at television advertising, news media reports, and sportscaster commentary, while audience studies using both quantitative and qualitative methods dominate the other sections. In general, the sections provide a useful organizational frame, although clearly some essays straddle more than one section. For example the essay by Wann and Grieve, “The Coping Strategies of Highly Identified Sports Fans,” could easily slide into the fan identification rather than the sports fan section. While the sections are introduced by the editors in the initial chapter, this reader would welcome a brief preview of coming attractions at the start of each new section. Even more welcomed would a concluding chapter be, a summary that gleans the major findings from the diverse essays in the book. This summary would help identify the major themes emerging from these studies of sports fans and shape the direction of future scholarship. The editors could also eliminate redundant information (e.g., multiple versions of the principles of uses & gratifications, or Kenneth Burke’s analysis of the role of identification in persuasion) by referring the reader to previous chapters that contain this material. As it stands, the book reads more like a special edition of journal with stand alone articles rather than an integrated volume shaped by editorial intent.


Sports Mania is particularly strong in its explorations of how fans are increasingly using new media to create new relationships with other fans via sports blogs, taking partial ownership of their sports through the creation of fantasy sports teams, or following sports on the web. These newer expressions of sports mania reflect the blurring of the worlds of leisure, where fandom use to reside, and work. Evidence of this new “Wide World of Work” emerges each March when the Internet in the U.S. slows to a crawl as millions of fans view webcasts of the early rounds of the NCCA Basketball Tournament while “working.” Chapters exploring various online message boards, fantasy football, and the *Madden Football* game all make substantial contributions to our understanding of the new meaning of fanship and the growing power of sport to both entertain and sell.

Sports Mania also offers multiple approaches to studying the sports fan, with equal contributions from both quantitative and critical research traditions. Although most essays are methodologically sound, there are some notable exceptions. One content analysis employed the authors as coders in violation of common research practice; authors presumably have a theoretical position and therefore are not good candidates for neutral observation of media content. Two studies employed very small respondent samples (55 and 18 respectively), and several others rely exclusively on university students for respondents. While arguments can be made for both small and non-representative samples, the generalizability of quantitative results is much greater if the samples are both generous and representative of a diversity of sports consumers. Some of the quantitative studies are also directed at answering general research questions (What are the motives people have for watching televised sports?; What is the relationship between demographic factors and motives for playing fantasy sports?; What motives are associated with playing fantasy sports?) rather than evaluating hypotheses emerging from prior theory and research. However, the extensive literature cited by contributors suggests that the study of sports fans has moved beyond the exploratory stage. Quantitative researchers, as a rule, should be testing hypotheses, rather than addressing general research questions.

” *The fact that one of the authors of the essay is employed in the marketing department of an NFL team, according to the volume, raises concerns about the potentially self serving nature of this analysis.*

In general, the critical essays are more theoretically rich, drawing more broadly from cultural studies, rhetorical analysis, and social theory. However, one essay – “Patriots and Saints: How the NFL Helped America Cope with Terrorists and Natural Disasters” – seems extravagant in its assessment of the NFL’s contribution to national healing after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. and Hurricane Katrina. The NFL certainly made a positive contribution, but so did other sports, not to mention hundreds of other commercial and non-commercial entities. The fact that one of the authors of the essay is employed in the marketing department of an NFL team, according to the volume, raises concerns about the potentially self serving nature of this analysis.

While there may be a few limitations in individual studies, the cumulative positive impact of the essays in the book is substantial. *Sports Mania: Essays on Fandom and the Media in the 21st Century* will be a much cited volume in future scholarship. It is an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between sports media and their audiences.

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