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Mass Media and Professional Sport

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to show the relationship between the mass media and professional sport, with special focus on both the positive and negative impact the mass media might have on the development of sport, complete with changes which the mass media trigger in sport as such. In order to do so, the paper employs a range of theories, including the structural-functional theory, symbolic interactionism and, to a certain extent, the theory of social conflict. Several research methods have been used as well, including the inductive and deductive methods, the idiographic and nomothetic methods and an analysis of publications dealing with the subject.

The links and interrelations between sport and the mass media are many and multi-layered and opinions on them differ greatly. It is not possible to unequivocally decide whether they are good or bad as far as contemporary people and the modern civilisation are concerned. Like most social and cultural phenomena, they certainly can be both. The mass media and sport are two domains which influence each other and each of them has changed because of the other. One could say that nowadays, the mass media and sport form an almost perfect union.

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Introduction

Life in a modern society differs fundamentally from the lives people used to live in traditional communities. Every day, we instinctively, almost mechanically, turn on our television sets and radios and read, or at least leaf through, newspapers and magazines. Such behaviour is considered normal and we cannot really imagine for things to be any different. This is how we obtain information and different kinds of knowledge and little do we know, the process produces needs, ideas, cravings, identifications and dreams of a better life (aesthetic looks, better health, higher social standing, being rich and well-educated, having better cosmetics, an exclusive car, an estate, a wonderful family and a group of close friends). The rapid development of the mass media, closely connected with the information technology revolution, has changed the way people think, produce, consume, buy and sell goods, manage companies and other people, communicate with one another, live, die, fight wars and show love [1]. Almost everything has changed and become new.

We are under the influence of a force which we cannot see or realise and which has a massive effect on our behaviour and attitudes. This force is the symbolic culture, most notably the mass media which have become a constitutive part of our lives [2].

This paper aims to show the relationship between the mass media and sport, with special focus on both the positive and negative impact the mass media have on the development of sport, complete with changes which the mass media trigger in sport as such. In order to do so, the paper employs a range of theories, including the structural-functional theory, symbolic interactionism and, to a certain extent, the theory of social conflict. Each of them covers certain premises, notions and laws, or in other words, makes some fundamental ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions which, taken together, will help solve the research problem outlined above [3, 4]. The theories are endorsed by the likes of Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Georg H. Mead, James H. Cooley, Ralf Dahrendorf, William G. Sumner and others.

In order to explore the research problem outlined above, this paper makes use of a selection of suitable research methods that include the inductive and deductive methods, the idiographic and nomothetic methods and an analysis of publications dealing with the subject [5, 6].

Before the objective of this paper is reached, we shall first discuss what the term mass media means, then study what caused the mass media to emerge and identify the characteristic features of the mass media. Then, relying on findings obtained by researchers who deal with the mass media, the paper will list the positive and then the negative effects which the mass media have on transformations in sport and on sport audiences.

Understanding the Term "Mass Media"

The mass media are a tool used for mass communication, communication on a large scale. The term encompasses the press, cinema, radio and television as well as books, posters, music records and other media which circulate in huge numbers of copies. According to many researchers, information carriers as such and the way in which information is delivered have a stronger effect on those who receive information than the very information which is being communicated. Many also believe that the development of the mass media should serve as a criterion for identifying stages in the history of humankind.

Mass communication, the functioning of the mass media and the consequences thereof are referred to in professional literature as mass culture, a term first used in 1941 by German philosopher and sociologist Max Horkheimer and then, two years later, by American writer and journalist Dwight Macdonald [7, 8].

The emergence of mass society has depended on the development of new technology and new technical tools which are used to deliver information to wide audiences. It is a gradual process which in its initial phase involved the invention of the rotary printing press that resulted in high-circulation press. The world's first sports periodical was published in London in 1791 while Poland published its first sport-related press title, the Lviv-based *PrzewodnikGimnastycznym* magazine, almost a century later [9]. The main drawback of publishing sports news in the press was that the news reached readers with a considerable delay, when one sporting event or another was already over.

The key factor determining mass society during its second development phase was the radio, an invention which was free from several downsides of the press. The radio made live reports from sporting events possible. Live broadcasts from sporting events accounted for a considerable part of the air time right from the radio's beginnings in the 1920s [10].

The third phase began with the advent of television which presented far greater opportunities to make news programs attractive. Not only were reports broadcast live on television, but they were also visual. News combining sound and vision instantly became immensely popular and turned television into the dominant mass medium. The first live telecasts from sporting events went on the air in the 1930s. In Poland, sporting events were not broadcast live until around 20 years later. Then, modern technology involving telecommunications satellites turned what until that point had been predominantly local events into worldwide affairs.

The FIFA World Cup in West Germany in 1974, when the Polish team coached by Kazimierz Górski won the historical silver medal, was the first event to be seen on television by over 1 billion people. Twice as many viewers watched the World Cup in the United States twenty years later. The Summer Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 passed the 5 billion mark, which accounts for 75 percent of the global population.

The fourth phase in the development of mass society is connected with the spread of personal computers and the world wide web. This phase extends slightly beyond mass culture, but due to its role and significance in delivering news and reporting sporting events, it would be hard to pass it over.

Researchers who deal with this subject give differing definitions of the mass media in their works. Some researchers highlight the technological side of the mass media and their development, others focus on how content is customised to suit audiences' tastes and still others point out to mass audiences as such. Some researchers remark on how readers, viewers and listeners receive almost identical content coming from very few sources [11, 12, 13].

Researchers on the mass media also identify different reasons behind the emergence of the mass media. Let us now try and gather the reasons and put them in a logical order. The reasons are as follows:

- technological development and new technology led to the invention of modern transmitting devices, used to disseminate information, and of reasonably priced receiving devices which a large part of the public could obtain access to;
- urbanisation turned communities into mass societies which were particularly susceptible to the influence of the mass media;
- mass culture is replacing folk culture which has been on the decline as a result of industrialisation, urbanisation and the economic migration which those trigger;
- the demand for light and unchallenging entertainment provided by the mass media compensated for hours of mundane and physically and mentally exhausting work;
- the desire to occupy free time encouraged vast groups of white and blue collar workers to take advantage of the appeal of the mass media as a form of entertainment;
- widely available education reduced the rate of illiteracy and helped people acquire competences necessary to receive information about the world at large, a world which often differed from the one they were familiar with.

Right from the beginning, mass communication has had its commentators, both advocates and critics. Some of the most noteworthy commentators include exponents of the Frankfurt School along with José Ortega y Gasset, Dwight Macdonald, Edgar Morin, Dominic Strinati, Antonina Kłosowska and Marian Golka. Taking into account certain observations made by these and other researchers who deal with mass communication, we can try and recapitulate some of the basic features of mass communication. They are as follows:

- new technology and technical resources as the prerequisite for mass communication;
- masses of dispersed readers, listeners and viewers;
- universal content which is easy to take in;
- standardised content put together to make sure that the same standards apply to all members of the audience, so that the content is attractive to everybody and addresses the universal need for entertainment and play;

- homogenisation of culture where elements of culture of different complexity and different character are mixed into a “homogenous pulp,” as Macdonald put it, and fed to audiences;
- the absence of cultural autonomy where different cultures overlap and take advantage of one another for their own benefit;
- attractive messages and content designed to address audiences’ ludic and hedonistic needs as well as the craving for drama;
- an altered creative process in which the form and content of a communicated message are not shaped by the tastes of creators, but the tastes and needs of audiences;
- mass communication triggers a projection and identification process where models from the mass media are transplanted into real life and people no longer see the difference between the world of the mass media and their everyday lives.

The First Group Aspects

“For centuries, the favourite form of entertainment for crowds has been to watch athletes compete,” T. Goban-Klas writes. “Near the agora and the amphitheatre, the Romans used to build arenas where people fought for their lives in quasi sport competition. Like the agora and the amphitheatre, the arena and its auditorium formed a unity of time and space for both the competitors and the spectators. It was not until the advent of the mass media that the unity got broken. Illustrated press, the radio and, above all, television transported sport from stadiums to people’s homes around the world. The arena became a global one and the audience grew to enormous proportions” [14, 15].

Let us now concentrate on the positive impact which the mass media have on sport. It has to be said, however, that what follows is just a subjective point of view, for what we consider positive may be regarded as negative by others. Below is a synthetic list of positive features and functions of the mass media.

The Mass Media Strengthen Globalisation in Sport

British sociologist Joseph Maguire traces the beginnings of globalisation in sport to the third phase of the sportisation process which involved the establishment of the first sport institutions such as the International Olympic Committee (1894) and the FIFA (1904) and the revival of the Olympic Games (1896) at the turn of the 20th century [16]. Globalisation in sport means that, amongst other things, mass audiences have access to sport broadcasts. The mass media have turned sport into a global phenomenon so that nowadays, there is hardly a place in the world from which sport is totally absent, as evidenced by the fact that the International Olympic Committee is an association of over 200 national committees and major sporting events are seen on television by billions of viewers. This is one of the reasons why the official symbol of the Olympic Games, the five Olympic rings, is the most recognisable symbol on the planet (recognised by three-fourths of the global population). It is more recognisable than the cross, the crescent, the U.S. flag, the EU flag and the flag of the United Nations.

The Mass Media Influence Commercialisation in Sport

The mass media caused audiences of sporting events to grow, which people soon realised created new opportunities for sport to generate profits. Mass audiences craved coverage of sporting events and so broadcasts suddenly became an attractive commodity. The largest and richest broadcast stations started applying for broadcasting rights and prices for the rights soared at an unprecedented rate. American television networks paid \$390,000 to the International Olympic Committee for rights to cover the Olympic Games in Rome in 1960, while by the time of the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000 the price reached \$715 million [17]. The NBC broadcasting giant has paid a considerable \$4.38 billion for rights to show, in the United States, coverage of the Olympic Games held between 2014 and 2020.

Another important source of income in sport are contracts which advertisers sign with athletes and organisers of sporting events. The most powerful and wealthiest corporations, such as Coca-

Cola, IBM, Kodak, Panasonic, Visa, Xerox and Volkswagen, play a key role as sponsors of the Olympic Games. Coca-Cola has the strongest bonds with the Olympic movement, contributing around \$100 million to the organisation of consecutive Olympic Games.

The Mass Media Stimulate Professionalisation of Sport

When mass culture caused audiences of sporting events to grow, sport became both commercialised and professionalised as a result. New professions that emerged in the process include those of a coach, physician, masseur, manager and so on. The amateur movement started being replaced by professional sports and athletes moved on from being amateurs to professionals practicing sports for a profit. Sport contestants became hired workers whose value was determined by the free labour market. The departure from the amateur movement began in the 1960s. At first, American Jack Kramer opened international tennis tournaments to professional players and then, some 20 years later, IAAF president Primo Nebiolo started introducing professional sport to track and field sports, a process as a result of which the word "amateur" was removed from the IAAF's name in 2001 in Edmonton. Thanks to Spanish marquis Juan Antonio Samaranch, the president of the International Olympic Committee, during the Summer Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988 sport fans worldwide were able to marvel at the playing techniques of professional tennis players Steffi Graf from Germany and Stefan Edberg from Sweden. At the Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992, we could all watch in astonishment the perfectionism of the Dream Team from the United States, consisting of the likes of Michael Jordan, Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Charles Barkley and Karl Malone.

The Mass Media Make Sporting Events More Attractive

The mass media trigger changes in sport which make sport a more attractive experience. This is particularly true about television, as it caters to the expectations of immense audiences. Firstly, competitions and tournaments are scheduled to take place during the prime time in countries which are the most important from the commercial point of view. Secondly, television helps shape rules and scenarios of sporting events in a way that makes them even more attractive to spectators. As a result of all these changes: 1) competitions become more dynamic, 2) there are fewer circumstances under which the duration of an event can be extended, 3) restrictions are imposed on timed games, 4) the rules of competitions become clearer, 5) the visual side of sport competition is made more attractive by means of colourful and scanty (in the case of women athletes) outfits, 6) intervals are introduced and used as time for extra attractions and commercials [18,19].

Stardom in Sport

Modern societies are fascinated by sport and consequently, the most outstanding (most media-friendly) athletes become mass culture stars. They personify people's ideas of living a happy life in riches, luxury and fame. Sporting celebrities are admired, respected and have a high social standing [20]. It should also be noted that success in life is commonly identified with attractiveness and that is something which advertisers are keen to take advantage of while advertising their goods and services. The media are not only interested in athletes as such, but also their private lives, especially love affairs, sex scandals and large-scale financial operations, many of which are not entirely legal. As for the image of sporting celebrities which the media create, the focus shifts from the competition aspect to sex appeal. This is particularly true about women (beach ball players, tennis players, etc.), but not exclusive to them.

Democratisation of Sport

The mass media help make sport a democratic phenomenon, because virtually everybody regardless of their sex, age, affluence, education and place of residence are able to follow sporting events such as the Olympic Games, world championships in different sports, tennis tournaments and so on. Admittedly, stadiums and other venues are designed to enable as many spectators as possible to get a live and direct experience of sport competition (the largest football stadiums can seat around 100,000 people), but all of that is just a fraction of the number of viewers who can

follow sporting events thanks to the mass media. The democratisation of sport also means that sport fans can follow more than one sporting event at a time, because they are able to choose a specific sport programme which is of interest to them.

Educating Audiences about Sport

Thanks to media coverage of sporting events, the public can learn about regulations which govern a given sport and find out about the rules of competition. Empirical research conducted at the Sociology Unit of the Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw shows that a considerable percentage of adolescents have recently learned the rules of volleyball (a sports discipline which in the past several years has been popular like never before) just by watching volleyball matches shown on television. Many researchers also remark that sport provides ethical education through the principles of fair play. Although this aspect is quite broadly discussed in professional literature, it nevertheless requires further and more thorough empirical research [21].

Filling the Void Left after Folk and National Sports

In this process, sports of local interest are replaced by sport of global proportions [22] which comprises around 40 most popular sports known as stadium-based sports. The mass media lead to global socialisation through sport, which is to say that the same content and values reach different nations, ethnic groups, communities and cultures. The process is an objective one, but opinions on it greatly differ. Researchers who disapprove of the process include Wojciech Lipoński, who strongly criticises the fact that stadium-based sports have been driving folk and regional sports out [23]. Lipoński is particularly critical of the way folk sports started to disappear in Poland after 1945. In *World Sports Encyclopedia* [24], Lipoński describes the multitude and diversity of sports around the world and by doing so, he implicitly points to Poland's neglect in fostering traditional sports.

Strengthening Social Integration

The mass media create connections between social communities which differ from one another. Since the mass media are usually universal and standardised, they unite rather than divide and this is true not only locally, but also globally. While the mass media are a valuable integrative factor, we also need to remember they harbour content which can spark conflicts and lead to disintegration. One example are animosities between supporters of rival teams which can be fuelled by the mass media. An armed conflict inspired by rivalry between two football teams broke out in 1969 between Honduras and El Salvador, two small countries in Central America. An army of 20,000 Salvadoran soldiers attacked the weaker Honduras aiming to completely annex the country. The incident went down in the history of sport and football as the Football War. In contrast, a good example of international integration took place when athletes from South and North Korea, two countries engaged in a permanent conflict, marched side by side during the Olympic Games opening ceremonies in Sydney and Athens.

Alleviating the Sense of Alienation in Everyday Life

Those who use the mass media to follow sport events are in a way transported to another world, a world of relaxation, fun and entertainment after all the hardships, anxiety and frustration that often comes with the work they do on a daily basis. The mass media, broadcasts of interesting sporting events watched in the comfort zone of one's own flat, serve as a remedy to help people release stress, regain balance and regenerate before heading back to work. This is definitely not a way to eliminate alienation processes for good, but it is still important, because at least temporarily it allows people to liberate themselves from thoughts and situations which trigger their sense of alienation.

Satisfying Audiences' Ambivalent Tastes

The mass media cater to the public's ambivalent tastes by delivering a wide range of different sport-related articles, titles, programmes and so on. On the one hand, news and programmes

about sports such as sailing, tennis, golf, gliding, figure skating and fencing to a large extent match the interests of well-educated, affluent people who live in big cities and hold senior positions in the workplace. On the other hand, however, the mass media address the expectations of people who occupy lower positions in society by showing broadcasts and publishing articles on football, wrestling, weightlifting, cycling and boxing [25]. The mass media are able to satisfy ambivalent desires that pertain to sport thanks to the homogenisation of the desires, that is, by providing sport coverage which varies in content and complexity.

The Second Group of Aspects

The mass media are subject to criticism because many researchers disapprove of mass society. They argue that industrialisation and urbanisation have had a negative impact on social phenomena and processes. Dominic Strinati writes that due to changes triggered by the emergence of mass society, traditional social structures and values which used to unite people have eroded and become unstable. What he means includes the “eradication of agrarian work tied to the land, the destruction of the tightly knit village community, the decline of religion and the secularisation of societies; and they have been associated with the growth of scientific knowledge, the spread of mechanised, monotonous and alienating factory work, the development of large anomic cities populated by anonymous crowds, and the relative absence of moral integration” [26].

The mass media are usually criticised on the following three premises: 1) resentment against the industrial civilisation, 2) nostalgia for the past and all the distinctive features of traditional societies, 3) a certain sense of superiority over the masses and their culture.

Taking into account analyses and diverse theories on the mass media developed by researchers such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse (exponents of the Marxism-inspired Frankfurt School), Dwight Macdonald, Edgar Morin, Antonina Kłoskowska and Marian Golka, let us now try and recapitulate their critical conclusions in the below list.

The Mass Media Are Used as a Political Manipulation Tool

This is the case when, through campaigning and political propaganda, the mass media are used to win over the public, so that the interests of political authorities are satisfied. The mass media have a powerful effect on the public, which makes them of high interest to politicians and political parties, for those who have influence on the media can stay in power for many years, as exemplified by Silvio Berlusconi in Italy. The political (and not just political) impact of the mass media is best illustrated by the saying that “a politician can be killed with a newspaper.” Totalitarian regimes have often used the mass media to pursue their political objectives. Spectacular sporting events have served as an opportunity to shape national sentiments in a way that cause people who identify with their nation to essentially identify with the authorities and political parties that control their country. The most striking example of this were the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. More recently, in communist Poland sport was exploited as a tool to accomplish both domestic and international political goals. Athletic achievements at the Olympic Games were interpreted not only as a sign of physical perfection, but also a testimony to the strength, prosperity and high standing of the nation and country. They were regarded as evidence of the superiority of one political system over another.

The Mass Media Are Used as an Economic Manipulation Tool

The mass media spark all kinds of accumulating desires, cravings and aspirations which can eventually materialise when the public buy certain goods and services. In other words, the mass media stimulate consumerism [27, 28, 29]. The mass media also perform economic manipulation in the area of sport. Advertisements show the advantages of different products which, if owned, promise to enhance the comfort and performance of sport activity and also allow athletes to advance in standings and win prestige in the sport community. Goods and services (both sport-related and not) are frequently advertised with the faces and voices of the most outstanding athletes. For example, Katty Perry, David Beckham and Lionel Messi have lent their image to Adidas products, Victoria and David Beckham advertise perfume from Signature, Andre Agassi is

the face of Gillette products, Adam Malysz advertises Polish Post Office and chocolate by the Goplana company and Justyna Kowalczyk has appeared in commercials for the Polbank bank. The goal of such advertising campaigns is to make audiences feel like there is a connection between a product they own and all that a given great athlete has accomplished. Since the 1930s, advertising fees and sales of rights to broadcasts of competitions have been part and parcel of major sporting events [10]. Marketing strategies which are not uncommon in sport include ambush marketing where different ads are placed next to the logotypes and advertisements of the official sponsors of a given event [30, 31].

Strengthening Passive Attitudes in Audiences

As such, passive reception of sport cannot be regarded as a drawback of the mass media, because in many cases, this form of taking part in sport can be beneficial when, for example, it helps people regenerate. What the mass media can be regarded as guilty of is that huge amounts of information taken in for hours on end lead to illusory and fruitless existence. Firstly, this state of affairs can restrict other kinds of contact within a culture and secondly, by immersing in a virtual reality people put all their activity on hold. The mass media may also cause sport activity to decline. For many years, there has been an ongoing debate as to whether the popularity of individual sports prompts more people to practice the sports. In this regard, there is no simple cause-and-effect relationship. Broad media coverage of a given sport may, of course, encourage active involvement in the sport, but without appropriate, complementary organisational measures and other programmes, the surge of interest in the sport will turn out to be only momentary and incidental, failing to strengthen the positive trend. Instead of feeling encouraged to practice a sport, wide audiences often feel the opposite when confronted with the excellence of athletes involved in spectator sports. Viewers of a sporting event feel discouraged from trying any form of activity when they are made aware of the wide gap that separates them from athletes in terms of bodily perfection and mastering sports equipment [32].

Desensitising Audiences

The public are constantly exposed to all kinds of bad and electrifying news. The mass media make audiences accustomed to tragedy, suffering, homicide, violence, disasters, terror and eeriness and thus dull human sensitivity and conscience and, in a sense, lead to moral relativism. Such is the possible effect of watching broadcasts of major boxing and mixed martial arts events. Boxing matches and the like are often gory affairs which cater to viewers' most primitive instincts and at the same time, they make brutality, blood and pain look ordinary. Media coverage of such events also encourages treating human beings like objects. It creates the belief that in order to meet viewers' expectations (i.e. in order to make money), jeopardising human health is worthwhile, even if that can sometimes mean somebody's permanent disability, if not death.

Decline of Introspection and Independent Thinking

People who live lives aimed at taking in insubstantial, lightweight and conformist content are likely to gradually lose the ability to look deep into themselves, think independently and exercise their intellect. A life embedded in the structure of a sporting event may detract viewers from real life which requires them to constantly think and make rational and correct choices.

Distorting the Perception of Reality

Nobody can tell for sure what is real and what is pretended reality, because reality is presented creatively and selectively. The mass media show invented reality and at the same time, they alter the real proportions of things. This is also what happens during broadcasts of sporting events when the producers pick the most exciting moments of, for example, track and field competitions, run instant replays from time to time and skip sections which are considered less significant. Highlights of boxing matches are reduced to the very moment when the defeated fighter takes the knockout blow and falls. Hooligans and their antics occupy a disproportionate amount of space in sports columns and magazines compared to the attention they really deserve. Readers and viewers get

the impression that this is what football and sport in general are like. Suddenly, it becomes unimportant that at the same time, hundreds of other football pitches and sports venues are hosting all kinds of competitions and a lot of good happens there, enabling athletes and sport fans alike to spend fun and quality time. What comes first is sensation and the opportunity to show some deviation.

Broken Ties with Time and Space

“Some form of cultural diffusion was always taking place and certain models of behaviour and products of culture were always transplanted from one user community to another. Mass culture has intensified the process to proportions unheard of so far. This is bound with a number of phenomena where local cultures and subcultures become less hermetic and exploited, people and cultures are robbed of their roots, the awareness of where they came from and, frequently, their identity. There is a sense of alienation connected with this ‘de-territorialisation of culture’ and, because the context of time is lost, social memory undergoes destruction” [12]. Mass culture turns sporting events into shows where the unity of time and place is disrupted. Instead of the venue where a sporting event is taking place, viewers, listeners and readers are in a different location and usually follow the event from their homes, frequently located thousands of kilometres away. Sporting events are often covered with delay which in the case of the press is inevitable or else stems from organisational reasons, as is the case with television. “If the global media society has an arena of its own the way even the smallest Roman cities had theirs, then it is a virtual arena which is created both at stadiums and pitches and on television networks’ editing tables” [12, 33].

Negative Impact on Children

The mass media have a negative impact on children mainly because children spend a lot of time watching television. There is a considerable body of research on the effect which television has on children and the findings show that so-called “TV children” lack enthusiasm, are slow learners, are easily bored and apathetic, have poor relations with other children, cannot play and show neither initiative, creativity nor will to act. They get stimulated by consumerism, manifested as a desire to possess objects such as clothes, toys, candy and so on. Children who watch a lot of television on a regular basis live in a false and fabricated world, which happens at the expense of living as part of a family, talking to other family members and doing things together. Primary socialisation within a family sometimes gets replaced by socialisation through television, where brutality and violence are in abundance. Children who spend a lot of time watching televised sporting events may lack time to actively practice sports and be unwilling to do it in the first place, short of ideas as to how to become involved in sport. There is little comfort in knowing that some children and adolescents have exchanged television for computers, narrowing their lives down to one-on-one interaction with the computer [34, 35].

Conclusion

Unbeknownst to many of us, the mass media have penetrated almost all aspects of the lives of contemporary people. One could say that the mass media are now integral with our lives and play an extremely important part in them. Not only are we a passive audience of the mass media, but the mass media influence the decisions we make and the way we behave.

The links and interrelations between sport and the mass media are many and multi-layered and opinions on them differ greatly, which the above analyses sought to demonstrate. The fundamental question is what the overall assessment of this relationship is. Without giving a straightforward answer, let us consider if this important social and cultural phenomenon can be deemed magnificent and perfect or whether it can be harshly criticised and disapproved of. Is it possible to say that there are only good sides to the mass media or on the contrary, that the mass media are something unnecessary and harmful? There is no easy answer nor can there be one, because the mass media have many faces.

The mass media emerged as a result of specific objective social and historical circumstances and as such, they need to be taken for granted. They definitely constitute a response to the many different

needs of people who live in modern societies. Consequently, it is not possible to unequivocally decide whether the mass media are good or bad as far as contemporary people and the modern civilisation are concerned. Like most social and cultural phenomena, they can certainly be both.

The mass media can dramatically enhance the appeal of a show and make a sporting event a more powerful experience by means of instant replays, different camera angles, shots of the audience, footage of competing athletes shown from different cameras and viewing angles and highlights of the most dramatic moments. A lot depends on the creative skills possessed by directors, commentators, reporters, cameramen and television editors. Without a doubt, the mass media also ensure that sporting events are widely accessible. Still, the mass media are far more than just a means of transmitting reports from sporting events, as they also create these. The mass media evidently affect the way a sporting event is perceived, enabling sport fans and others to follow sporting events in solitude, at home, far away from real-life sports venues and thus unable to take part in the shared experience of sport competition and admiration for athletic perfection. Aided by modern technology (large spaces made to appear flat, altered geometry of stadiums, other venues and competitions, instant replays, highlights), the mass media change the character of sporting events to make them resemble theatrical performances.

The depiction of a sporting event in the mass media is detached from what happens in real life at a stadium. Sporting events appear more attractive and exciting, even though at the same time, the shared experience and the sense of togetherness are not there. It also has to be noted that a large percentage of sport fans enjoy media coverage of a sporting event better than direct participation in the event as audience members at a stadium, a sports hall or a swimming pool. This is particularly true about television. Furthermore, the mass media are not interested in strengthening values traditionally attributed to sport, such as sportsmanship, kindness, good, justice, respect for opponents and competition for the sake of plain enjoyment. Instead, they seek sensation, depicting sport competition as a quest for success at all costs and as a war. Most importantly, the mass media are on a never-ending quest for ratings and the big money that goes with it.

The mass media and sport are two domains which have an effect on each other and each of them changes because of the other. One could go as far as to say that despite all the shortcomings shown above, they form an almost perfect union these days. The union is so attractive that it draws marketing, big business and huge funds into its life [36, 37]. This aspect, while extremely important, was only given slight attention in this paper.

The mass media, including television, radio and the press, have turned sport into a global phenomenon, which is particularly true about the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. Television stations air broadcasts of sporting events in prime time and sport itself has its rules modified and changed to make sure that mass audiences are even more attracted to it.

The union is doing just fine and both partners benefit from it a lot. Spectators, in turn, expect even better sporting shows to bring them stronger excitement with gripping aesthetic and carnivalesque qualities.

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