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A CHANGING LANDSCAPE: THE STATE OF LOCAL SPORTS TELEVISION
IN PENNSYLVANIA

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis will take a look at the current state of local sports television in Pennsylvania on a market-to-market basis. I will examine the six major sports markets in the state, that being Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York, Wilkes-Barre Scranton, Johnstown-Altoona-State College and Erie, in case study format to gain insight into how local television stations are growing, changing and adapting across the commonwealth. In order to accomplish this task, I spoke to news directors, sports anchors, sports reporters and athletic directors within each market to get their take on the industry and where it is headed.

The questions this thesis will attempt to answer are:

- Is there a transition in the way local sports are being covered at television stations?
- Are online content and social media changing the way sports are being covered?
- Given the current state of local sports television in Pennsylvania, what are stations doing to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of this industry?

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For many American families, it was commonplace to tune in to the local news at night. People are eager to stay informed about their communities and local news accomplishes this very thing. Newspapers were read in the morning and newscasts were watched in the evening. It was routine to cap off the night with a slice of news from the television set and this was prevalent across most demographics and households. This had held true for a long time, but times are changing and the television landscape is shifting. Local television remains a top media source for Americans with almost half saying they still watch regularly, but local television stations in this country have steadily lost viewership numbers with the exception of a small hike in 2011, from 2006-2012, including every key time slot in 2012 (Potter, Matsa, Mitchell).

Figure 1-1. Chart of Local TV News Viewership since 2006

Local TV News Viewing Declines, Particularly Among Young People					
<i>Percentage of Respondents Who Regularly Watch Local News</i>					
	2006	2008	2010	2012	2006-2012 Change
Total	54%	52%	50%	48%	-6
By Age Group:					
18-29	42	36	31	28	-14
30-49	51	51	48	46	-5
50-64	60	60	61	57	-3
65+	65	63	64	63	-2

Source: Pew Research Center News Consumption Survey
 PEW RESEARCH CENTER
 2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

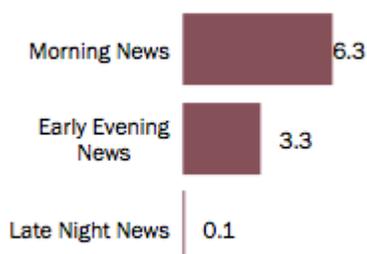
The survey breakdown shown above in Figure (1-1), done by the Pew Research Center, clearly shows that the numbers fluctuate by age group, but that as a whole, “the total audience for all local news programs combined was smaller than the year before.” From 2006 to 2012, the percentage of people surveyed who regularly watch local news dropped from 54% to 48%

(Potter, Matsa, Mitchell). That is a six percentage point drop in seven years. Fortunately, for television executives and news directors everywhere, new Pew Research Center analysis shows that the local TV viewership numbers spiked in all three major time slots in 2013 (5 to 7 a.m.-morning news, 5 to 7 p.m.-early evening news and 11 p.m.-late night news) (Matsa). The graph below in Figure (1-2) illustrates the recovery that local news made last year (% change). For example, morning news viewership climbed over 6% in the past year. It is clear that despite the downward trend in local TV news viewership over the last 6-7 years, some key time slots have recovered in 2013.

Figure 1-2. Graph of the Recovery of Local TV Viewership in 2013

**Local News Viewership
Recovers in Key Time
Slots**

% of Change 2013-2012



Source: Nielsen Media Research, used under license

Note: Numbers represent ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC affiliates.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

These numbers tell us a few things about the state of the industry and later on, I will take a more in-depth look at the Pew survey as well as the different age groups examined in this survey to make some conclusions about what the numbers say about the state of the local

television industry. Even further, I will examine how these national trends compare to the trends evident in Pennsylvania.

Throughout the thesis, I cite and quote the Pew Research Center and the Vocus Media Research Team. Both of these groups have gathered data and released reports involving the state of media. The Pew Research Center is a “nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping American and the world (State of the Media 2014). The center conducts research, polling, and media analysis on a regular basis.

Vocus, Inc. is a “leading provider of cloud-based marketing and public relations software (Vocus) that annually releases a State of the Media report. The team at Vocus examined social media in 2013 to see how journalists across the country are utilizing these mediums in their profession.

Shifting to the sports aspect of local television, during nightly newscasts, the news comes first and after that, the sports. This holds true for the most part, unless something happens in the sports world that day that takes precedent over the rest of the news. If the local high school football team wins a big playoff game or the professional sports team in the area does something noteworthy, this may be reason to bump a bite of sports news up in the newscast. Sports play an interesting role in local television and I see it as this: The sports block during local newscasts is not only a source of information, but a source of entertainment. Matt Maisel, the sports director at WJAC-TV in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, presented an interesting point to me about the role of sports in local television.

“

“I think that local sports are such an important part in a nightly newscast because so much of news these days is negative; it’s crime, it’s murder and I always looked at sports as...we made it through the rough stuff in the first two blocks, the weather doesn’t look that good...it is my job as a sports person to hopefully entertain somebody with highlights...keep it upbeat with fun stuff at the end of the newscast.”

This thought is similar to what I have gathered from other sports directors across the state. Many believe that their work is meant not only to inform, but to entertain. The sports block is the light at the end of the tunnel if the news happens to be overly negative that day and Maisel believes that it is his job to end the newscast on a pleasant note.

In this thesis, I first take a look at the overarching trends and themes that have emerged in the local television industry over the last few years. These trends include the use of “one-man bands” and multimedia journalists in the newsroom, the ebb and flow of staff sizes across the commonwealth and the heightened impact of the big market vs. small market dynamic throughout the state. I will also preface the thesis with an explanation of the Nielsen rankings. It is important to analyze how these rankings work so that it is known how the markets in Pennsylvania are ranked and what these rankings really mean.

I will then go on to discuss the impact social media has had on local television. I devoted a chapter to this topic because digital platforms like Twitter and Facebook have become game-changers in the newsroom. Looking at these overarching themes and trends will then enable me to look at Pennsylvania’s television markets in a national context

Chapter 2

Changing Landscape of Local Television

As I noted earlier, the audience for local television has dwindled over the last few years. Local stations have been impacted by this and they have had to compensate for their losses. Sports departments all over the state have had to adjust and evolve because that is their only option, but like most things in the television business, it fluctuates and differs by market.

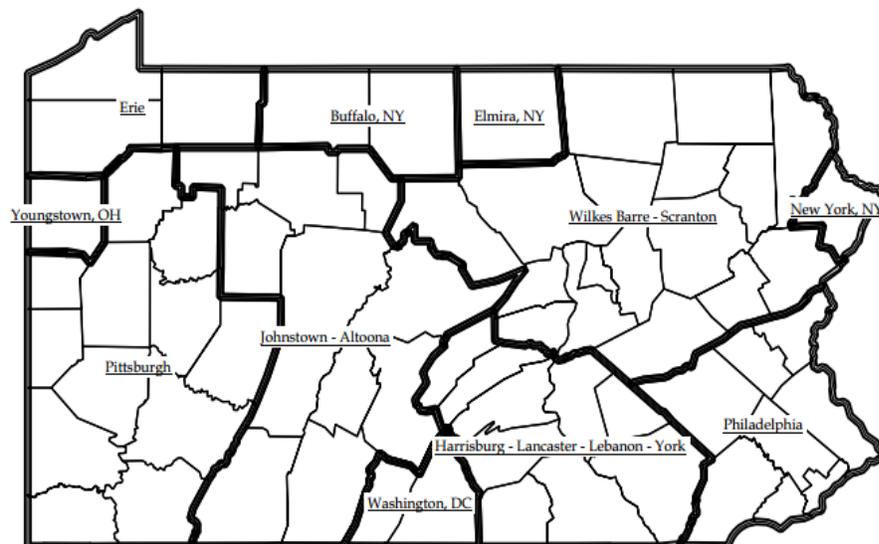
Explanation of Nielsen Rankings

As stated in my abstract, there will be six case studies to answer the questions I posed in the abstract at the beginning of the report, showcasing the six major sports markets in the state of Pennsylvania. The case studies will be organized based on Nielsen's "Local Television Market Universe Estimates (Nielsen)." Nielsen ranked the television markets in the United States based on how many viewing television homes there are in the respective market. For example, New York, New York, ranks first in the Nielsen ratings with 7,461,030 homes in 2014. On the opposite side of the market spectrum, Glendive, Montana, comes in at 210 with 4,260 homes in 2014.

My first case study will be Philadelphia. The City of Brotherly Love ranks fourth with 2,963,500 homes. Nineteen spots behind Philadelphia is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at 23. The Steel City is estimated to have 1,181,540 homes in their viewing market. Up next is the market that consists of Harrisburg, Lancaster, Lebanon and York. This market comes in forty-third with

725,340 homes. At fifty-four is Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. This market consists of 584,870 television homes. Altoona-Johnstown-State College and Erie round out the Pennsylvania sports markets. Altoona-Johnstown-State College ranks 103rd with 291,490 television homes. Although this is one of the smaller markets in Pennsylvania, this viewing area boasts the largest university in the state, Penn State University. Finally, Erie checks in at 149 with 157,250 estimated television homes in 2014. It is also important to note that the DMA in front of the number in the table of contents stands for Designated Market Area. This is the abbreviation Nielsen uses to label the television markets in the United States. I referenced the market ranks for contextual reasons because the size of the viewing audience matters in the local television discussion, but I will refer to the markets by name throughout the thesis. Figure (2-1) below is map of Pennsylvania's Designated Market Areas (DMAs) that was done in 2000 by Nielsen's research team. The markets have shifted slightly since this research was done, but this gives a pretty accurate depiction of how Pennsylvania is organized according to the Nielsen rankings.

Figure 2-1. Map of Designated Market Areas (DMAs) in Pennsylvania



Emergence of “One-Man Bands”

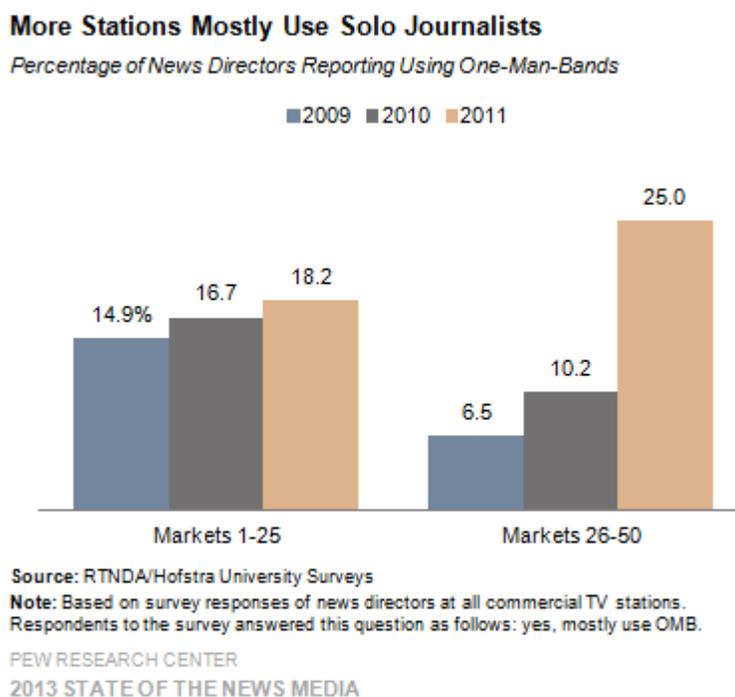
Some stations are doing more with less by way of “one-man bands,” also referred to as multimedia journalists (MMJs). By this, I mean somebody who shoots, edits and writes everything solo. A “one-man band” journalist goes out into the field and gets everything accomplished without the help of others. This differs from a situation in which one person shoots the highlights, while the other person writes and edits the piece for the newscast. The emergence of the “one-man band” has been beneficial to local television, allowing stations to do more with less.

Across all market sizes, an increased number of news directors are hiring solo journalists at their stations. The annual RTDNA/Hofstra survey backs up this notion and shows an upward trend of “one-man bands” in the field (4). In markets (Nielsen) 1-25, which includes Philadelphia (No. 4) and Pittsburgh (No. 23), the percentage of news directors who use solo journalists has jumped from 14.9% in 2009 to 18.2% in 2011. People stationed in both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh say this number has increased even more in 2014.

In markets (Nielsen) 26-50, the numbers are staggering regarding the use of solo journalists. The Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York market (No. 43) falls in this range and the Wilkes-Barre-Scranton market (No. 54) falls just outside of this range. From 2009 to 2011, the percentage of news directors that reported use of “one-man bands” in markets 26-50 has skyrocketed from 6.5% to 25%. To put this in context, one in four stations in this market range (26-50) report that they mostly use “one-man bands (RTDNA).” Per the RTDNA/Hofstra survey, this number is twice as many as the year before (2010). The new research has yet to come out for the last two years, but with that exponential growth in just three years, I have reason to believe that the 25% number has increased in 2014. I have worked in York, Pennsylvania, and I have

spoken to colleagues in Scranton, Pennsylvania, for this thesis, and “one-man bands” are utilized very often in those television markets. Figure (2-2) below illustrates the trends I just mentioned.

Figure 2-2. Graph of "One-Man-Band" Use in Medium-Large Markets



The emergence of solo journalists in the workplace is one byproduct of the changing television industry, but there are other things of note, especially in Pennsylvania. Sports department staffs are increasing and decreasing the number of people working on their sports content. One would think that the sports department at stations like NBC10 in Philadelphia would thrive because of the large market and even larger viewing audience, but recently, they had a big shakeup, becoming one of the few stations in the country to dissolve their sports department.

Staff Shakeups

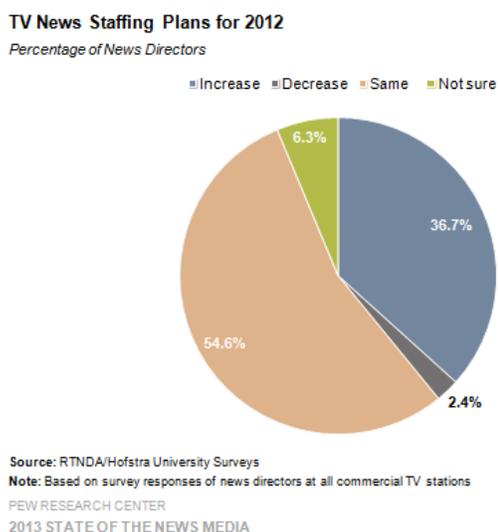
It was announced in mid-November that starting this past January, Comcast SportsNet would be providing the sports reports for NBC10's 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. sportscasts (Fernandez). As a result of this announcement, two of NBC10's sports producers decided to cross over to the news department, sports anchor John Clark moved over to Comcast SportsNet, while still remaining the face of NBC10 sports and one other sports producer lost his job. This change sent waves in the Philadelphia television market, something I will take a look at in the Philadelphia case study.

To offer an example of a staff that recently made a different kind of change, look at WJAC-TV in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. In January, the sports department hired a third anchor, creating the first three-person sports team at that station since 2005. Maisel is the sports director and weekday anchor, while Ashley Chase and Patrick Welter anchor during the weekends. During my interview with Maisel, he noted that yes, it depends on where you are located and your view on the industry, but "it seems the bigger markets are cutting down their departments and smaller markets see the need to have more staff for the sports teams." He added that smaller markets see the need to have more staff because of the heavy emphasis on extensive local sports coverage. If you have more bodies, you can get out and cover more teams in the area.

Markets in Pennsylvania tell us one thing, but nationally, there is a different narrative in regard to staff sizes of television stations. It is important to remember that these numbers consider the staff as a whole, rather than just the sports staff. In terms of this state, the national narrative fits more in line with WJAC-TV. The Pew Research Center, in conjunction with surveys done by RTDNA/Hofstra University, states that in 2011, "after years of having to do more with a lot less, local television newsrooms finally were able to do more with a little more (Potter, Matsa,

Mitchell).” In addition to these promising numbers, more than one third of news directors involved in the survey made the point that they planned on hiring more staff members in 2012. To put this in a market-based context, staff sizes in Markets 1-25 increased, on average, by twenty percent in 2011 (Potter, Matsa, Mitchell). Figure (2-3) takes a look at the statistics I just discussed.

Figure 2-3. TV News Staffing Plans for 2012



Big Market vs. Small Market Dynamic

Every market in the state of Pennsylvania has its similarities and differences, but one of the biggest differences is the commitment to local sports coverage between big markets and small markets. For the purpose of this section, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh are considered large markets and the rest of the markets are considered medium to small.

By analyzing this state on a case study basis, I have realized that the smaller you get in terms of market size, the more hyper-local sports coverage there is. Markets like Erie spend a lot of time covering local high school sports and the minor league teams in the area. Markets like Wilkes-Barre-Scranton broadcast the news to a viewership that deeply cares about the schools in the region. Small markets have the responsibility to make everything local because of the people tuning in to the newscast during the day. This isn't to say that big markets like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh don't care about local sports.

People at stations in these markets have told me that they would love to get around to the different high schools in the area on a more frequent basis, but that professional sports coverage is their primary focus because of their location. Former NBC10 sports producer Dean Michalski told me that "market stations in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, who cover professional teams, devalue sports, while the smaller stations capitalize on their local coverage of high school sports, often dedicating more time to sports." Michalski said that local sports stations in small markets have the flexibility to cover more local sports, while having more time during the news to cover the area's sports teams. Big markets like Philadelphia have less time to cover the sports (2-2:30) and they have to somehow provide news on four large professional teams on a daily basis. For markets like Erie, Sports Director Gary Drapcho told me that they have 4-5 minutes for their 6, 10 and 11 p.m. live show. It is clear that this big vs. small market dynamic affects the way markets cover local sports and how long they have to cover local sports at their respective television stations.

In order to make this thesis as in-depth and insightful as possible, I have spent the last three months talking to men and women associated with the sports television industry to get their take on the state of local sports television. I committed a lot of time to these interviews to make sure I got answers to the questions I had. How has the industry changed over the years and what direction is it heading? Will there always be a need for the sports segment in the local newscast

and, if so, how does it need to change to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of television? For people who have worked in the business for quite some time, has their job description changed and how are they dealing with these changes? How has the increased need for social media presence impacted stations across Pennsylvania? These are some of the questions that I have been throwing out in interviews over the last few months. Hopefully, by the end of this thesis, there will have a better sense of not only where local sports television currently stands, but where local sports television is headed. In my case studies, I will address these questions and the themes stated above such as the emergence of “one-man bands” and the size of sports departments across the state. In turn, differences and similarities will start to show between the different sports markets in Pennsylvania.

Chapter 3

Social Media Rises: The Boom of Digital Platforms

The local television industry has grown and evolved in the last decade and, as I have discovered through my interviews, this growth goes hand-in-hand with another facet of media that has made an immediate and sudden impact on stations in Pennsylvania, social media. The boom of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter has not only changed the way we as consumers absorb news on a daily basis, but it has changed the way local television stations deliver news to their consumers. The evolution of social media is a two-way street when it comes to the television industry and its viewership and it has completely changed the game in a matter of years.

The Vocus Media Research Team just released its “State of the Media 2014 Report” and the team found that that social media is bigger and more important than ever to local television stations. As Vocus states it, “traditional media is embracing social media and becoming more technologically dynamic.” Becoming dynamic is important in every walk of life, but especially when it comes to media. The landscape changes very quickly and stations have to ride the wave of change if they don’t want to be left behind.

With dwindling viewership numbers, stations are searching for answers, answers that may be coming in the form of digital media. Going back to the Pew Research Center survey on local TV news viewership that I touched on above, in 2012, only 28% of respondents in the poll ages 18-29 said they watch local news on a regular basis. This number is down from 42% in 2006 (Potter, Matsa, Mitchell). The 14 percentage point change should explain some things about television viewership. The younger generation in this country is turning to digital media sources like Facebook and Twitter for their news source, rather than the traditional news source that is

local television. Diane Mermigas, an independent adjunct professor who specializes in digital media, stated in a contribution to the State of the News Media 2013 report that “television is not the preferred news source in an era of personalized on-demand news (Potter, Matsa, Mitchell).”

By personalized on-demand news, Mermigas is referring to the many blossoming social media outlets used today that provide users with news content, including Twitter. On Twitter, it is up to the user who they “follow.” If the user is a sports fan, they may choose to follow accounts such as ESPN, NBC Sports Network and FOX Sports 1. On a smaller scale, they may choose to follow the accounts of sports information directors (SIDs) at high schools and universities, accounts designed to tweet scores, statistics, updates and information. If the user is a news junkie, they may end up following Fox News, MSNBC and the Huffington Post. By only “following” who they want, users receive personalized on-demand news, as Mermigas pointed out, in their Twitter feed. They only read what they want to read, and most of the time, they receive information on Twitter before the local news has the chance to report it during their morning and nightly newscasts.

Figure 3-1. Graph of News Consumption Across Social Media Outlets

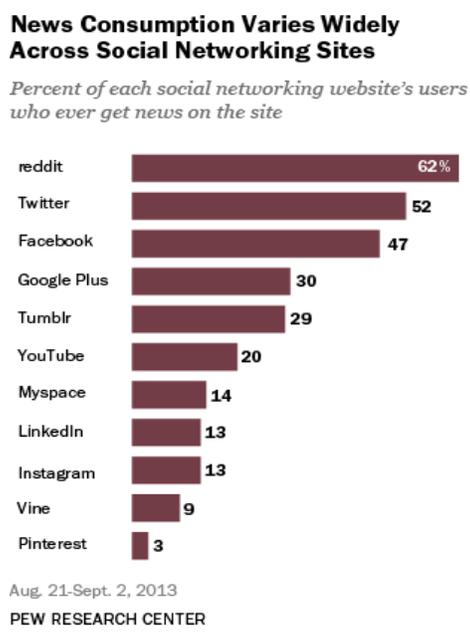


Figure (3-1) above takes a look at the percentage of each outlet's users who use that outlet to gather news. The Pew Research Center shows that Reddit ranks the highest, but that Twitter and Facebook also rank near the top. These two social networking sites are the two sites that local television stations utilize the most. As you can gather, social media is a very effective tool to stay informed as a consumer, and for local television stations, they have looked at this tool as an opportunity to meet the demands of a social media-centric generation.

Interact and Engage

Social media, in a nutshell, has enabled traditional news platforms like local television, to expand their reach through viewership interaction and station promotion. More than ever before,

local TV viewers are able to connect with the television personalities at their local stations. This connection is made not only on a professional level, but on a personal level. Through the power of Twitter, people are able to talk back and forth with sports anchors and reporters about the day's happenings in the sports world. As the Vocus Media Research Team stated, social media is “undeniably changing the way conversations are being held, how topics are being looked at, and bringing to light stories that otherwise would been hard to find or missed completely (Vocus).”

I will discuss how the evolution of social media has impacted stations across Pennsylvania in the individual case studies, but a few people I talked too gave thoughts on social media usage that can be said about the evolution as a whole:

WJAC-TV's Matt Maisel:

“Twitter, when used properly, is one of the greatest tools for news broadcasting and journalism that we have seen in this generation since computers 15-20 years ago.”

Maisel is a big proponent of Twitter, calling it a “game-changer.” He said that Twitter has enabled people like him to interact with viewers on an entirely new level and that because of this outlet, he has been able to get info, videos and highlights out quicker to the masses that follow his work. Figure (3-2) below is a small sampling of Twitter interaction.

Figure 3-2. Example of Anchor Interactions with Followers



Vocus noted that as of 2014, 49 percent of journalists across broadcast, print and online outlets are using social media to connect and interact with their viewers and readers (Vocus). This number is assuredly rising and for good reason. People want scores, highlights and information faster, and people like Maisel are making sure that he meets the demands of his consumers.

The job description for anchors and reporters across the country has grown to include proficiency in social media. News directors want their sports staff to tweet out pictures and scores to keep their viewership in the loop at all times. This is especially important in smaller markets because unless you are in attendance, you won't know the score of sporting events until you check the Twitter feeds of sports anchors or until you watch the nightly sportscast. For most people, waiting to read the morning paper to check scores is a thing of the past. People want news faster than ever before and local televisions have begun to make this happen in part through extensive use of social media outlets.

Ken Brown, sports anchor at WBRE-TV in Scranton, Pennsylvania, told me that since he joined the station in January of 2013, "change" has *defined* his sports department. The most noticeable change in Brown's opinion has come in the way they cover sports through their numerous social media outlets. WBRE recently launched new Twitter and Facebook accounts and said that those mediums have not only become as valuable as the product they are putting on the air, but that they are receiving the same amount of attention. Social media usage in the newsroom used to be *recommended*, but now it is just on the verge of being *required* if local television stations want to keep up with their competition.

Promotion on Digital Platforms

One of the more interesting findings that Vocus unveiled in its 2014 State of the Media Report is that as of this year, 51 percent of journalists across broadcast, print and digital media outlets use social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to promote their stories (Vocus). Along with viewership engagement, promotion of stories and upcoming newscasts has increased significantly and my interview subjects from around the state made this very clear. Promotion is important because promotion increases the chance of heightened viewership. If people see a tweet or Facebook post from a local television station promoting an upcoming story or highlight that piques their interest, they may be inclined to check out the newscast to see what the hype is all about.

Figure 3-3. Example of Newscast Promotion through Twitter



Figure (3-3) above is a perfect example of promotion through social media. This figure is a screen shot of Maisel’s Twitter feed, @Matt_Maisel. Beneath his Twitter bio, that happens to include his email and a link to his personal “Matt Maisel WJAC” Facebook page, you see a tweet posted earlier that day that promotes the night’s newscast. He includes the time of the newscast and what content you can expect if you tune in. It just so happens that on March 24, Maisel will be discussing NFL free agency with a local athlete, the start of Big Ten play for the Penn State baseball team, and the NCAA tournament run by the Penn State Lady Lions. It is a regular practice to promote nightly newscasts through social media and there is a good chance that because of this tweet, some of Maisel’s 2,931 followers will tune in to WJAC at 6:20.

Facebook is also heavily used for story and station promotion and Figure (3-4) below gives you an example of this practice. Many television personalities make it a point to create a professional “TV personality” Facebook page for the purpose of promotion and interaction.

Figure 3-4. Example of Newscast Promotion through Facebook



The example above was posted by Todd Sadowski, sports director at FOX 43 in York, Pennsylvania, back in early February. He was promoting a one-on-one interview that he had with New Orleans Saints wide receiver and Super Bowl Champion Marques Colston. Colston played high school football in the area and Sadowski wanted to promote the upcoming interview to the nearly 1,000 people that “like” his Facebook page. Sadowski includes the time of the interview, so that his viewership knew when to tune in to FOX 43 Sports to catch the interview. Promotion helps to spotlight the work of the anchors and reporters, but it also serves as a “tease factor” as shown in Figure (3-4) above. Local television has dwindling viewership numbers, so if these stations can get more people, especially the younger generation, to tune in to their newscasts by being active on social media, this can only help in aiding some of the pains stations have experienced in the last decade.

User-Generated Content

From what I have gathered from a social media standpoint, local television stations never saw user-generated content as something that would impact their departments. However, they now see this content as something very beneficial. User-generated content can mean a multitude of things; live-tweeting, picture submissions, video submissions or score updates. Live-tweeting is when someone on Twitter tweets scores and statistical information from a sporting event as it unfolds. Yes, reporters live-tweet games all the time, but it is when they don’t that user-generated content comes into play. If a sports anchor is preparing to discuss Friday night football scores on the nightly sportscast and one of his/her reporters couldn’t make one of the games, they can turn to Twitter to find out the score. There is a good chance that athletic directors, parents of the

athletes, band members or students are tweeting the outcome of their school's sporting events. Some of the people I interviewed for this thesis said that this is a practice they use in their newsroom from time to time.

Picture and video submissions from viewers in the market is another byproduct of the social media boom. For stations that extensively cover local high school sports, this has been a huge bonus. If members of the station are unable to make a certain game or event, they tweet out to their followers a request for pictures of the student section, pictures of the action or video clips if something exciting happens. In some instances, people at the events will beat the media to the punch by tweeting scores, pictures and video at the reporters before the request is issued. Even further, stations may reach out for video if a viewer digitally captures something that is worth airing during their newscast. Stations can do this by tweeting at the viewer if the video is passed around on Twitter.

In Winona, Minnesota, earlier this year, a 13-year-old basketball player named Easton Gamoke hit a full-court, game-winning shot in an eighth-grade basketball tournament. One of the spectators in the crowd captured the wild scene on video and as a result, this video went viral. KMSP in Winona aired the clip and even followed up with Easton to do a feature on his storybook moment (Capacio). With a society that is so in-touch with social media and technology comes an intriguing new relationship between viewer and reporter. Reporters help the viewer by providing them with information and viewers, at times, repay the favor by way of user-generated content.

The landscape of local television in this country has changed and the overarching themes that I discussed above bring light to the notion that the television industry is never static. I used comments from journalists and directors in Pennsylvania to demonstrate that many of these national trends and themes hold true in the Keystone State. The following case studies will look

at Pennsylvania's sports markets to show how the stations in these markets compare with stations around the country.

Chapter 4

Market Case Study: Philadelphia DMA #4

Philadelphia is the biggest local television market in the state of Pennsylvania. The City of Brotherly Love is predominantly a pro sports town, boasting the Phillies, Eagles, Flyers and Sixers. According to the 2014 Nielsen estimates, there are 2,963,500 television homes in the market. Philadelphia is the fourth largest television market in the United State, behind only Chicago, Los Angeles and New York.

For this case study, I spoke to both a sports anchor and sports producer that have a lot of television experience in the city. To provide insight on the state of local sports television in Philadelphia, I talked with John Clark, a sports anchor at Comcast SportsNet Philadelphia (CSN Philly) that also has prior work experience with NBC10. I also had the chance to speak with a sports producer in the city by the name of Dean Michalski, who worked at NBC10 for 12 years. Michalski worked with Clark before Comcast SportsNet took over the sports responsibilities of NBC10 earlier this year. This change eliminated Michalski's position.

I discussed the recent changes at NBC10 and CSN Philly in the "Staff Shakeups" subchapter in Chapter 2. As stated in the article on Philly.com, beginning this past January, Comcast SportsNet began to produce and provide the sports coverage for the 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. newscasts on NBC10. CSN Philly is a 24-hour network that broadcasts 76ers, Flyers and Phillies games in addition to traditional sports news programming throughout the day. The article continues by saying that Clark, who joined NBC10 in 2001, will move over to CSN Philly, while still remaining the face of the sports department at NBC10. As noted in the "Staff Shakeups"

subchapter, two sports producers transferred into news jobs and one employee lost his job. That employee happened to be Dean Michalski.

Michalski told me that “local news is an industry struggling to survive in this time when most people rely on other means to get their news of the day.” He made the point that people don’t watch the local news as much because people can get their sports news on their cell phone, iPad or computer at the touch of a button. Clark said that he has less time for sports than in years past because more and more people turn to outlets like ESPN to get their sports news. Clark said that right now, he has just over two minutes to anchor the sports. He said this number has been steadily decreasing over the past decade, citing times of four and even five minutes that he had to work with in prior positions. For comparison, Erie devotes 4-5 minutes to their nightly sportscast. If news directors believe that the sports block is losing its importance, they will cut down on the time and Clark made this clear.

To provide background on the Philadelphia sports market, there are four affiliates in the region: NBC10, CBS3, 6ABC and FOX29. All of the stations have been in a constant battle with CSN Philly to cover every team at once. Over the past few years, NBC10, CBS3 and FOX29 started up something called “Local News Service (LNS).” This service was designed so that the stations could share their photographers to help cover sports. “LNS” would then serve as pool feed for the affiliates in the market to use. Michalski gave the example that one photographer would shoot practice b-roll and post-game sound at the Eagles practice facility and then feed it to all three stations. This allowed affiliates to do more with less and it allowed them to compete with CSN Philly for sports coverage. However, NBC10 recently pulled out of the “LNS” agreement due to its new partnership with Comcast SportsNet. With that being said, most of the stations give about 2 to 2:30 minutes to their sportscasts. Michalski mentioned that two minutes is not a lot of time when you have to fit in coverage of the Flyers, Phillies, Sixers and Eagles.

Philadelphia is one of the two markets in Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh being the other), that primarily focuses on professional sports. By definition, the stations in this market are focusing on local sports, but on a much larger scale. When I spoke to Clark, he told me that he focuses much of his attention on the four major sports teams in the area, but that he includes high school sports and college basketball coverage when he gets the opportunity.

Clark has done a half-hour high school football show on Fridays that looks at the games in the region and this will continue this upcoming season. He said that high school football is not as big in Philadelphia as it used to be, but that it is still pretty popular among viewers. There is an interesting dynamic that I have mentioned throughout this piece that the larger the market, the less “local sports” coverage you get. Michalski said that “market stations in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, who cover professional teams, devalue sports, while the smaller stations capitalize on their local coverage of high school sports, often dedicating more time to sports.”

Michalski said that when he began at NBC10 in 2001, they would cover a lot of high school sports and he spent a lot of time out of the office covering practices around the area. However, as their resources declined and as the length of the sports block shortened, he spent more time in the office editing highlights for the two minutes they had left to cover sports. Dwindling resources has been an issue at Philadelphia local television stations, but NBC10’s partnership with CSN Philly has helped to solve this problem.

CSN Philly has 150 employees and Clark told me that because of the vast resources, they will shoot everything and they will get everything every day. He said that because CSN Philly is an all-sports network, sports is the most important news, so they make sure to commit plenty of resources to covering every major team in the area.

Although NBC10 did not operate with “one-man bands,” they would cut down on costs at times by paying one person to do both the reporting and shooting in the field instead of paying

two people. Clark said that this trend has yet to hit bigger markets on a large scale, but that he has seen this trend develop in smaller markets in Pennsylvania.

Looking at social media and its impact on local sports television in Philadelphia, Clark said that social media has changed the business more than anything. At first, it was the internet that changed the industry, but now it is mediums like Facebook and Twitter that are changing the game. Clark said that it has become common to break sports news on Twitter and Facebook and that everyone knows everything so much faster in the industry because of social media.

Michalski brought up the point that local stations are focusing more and more on their websites and social media use for revenue. If stations can get “hits” for their sites, they can make money through advertisements. He told me that stations promote their websites after every major news story and that they have been using more online polls during their newscasts to draw viewers to their site. Because of social media and the pressure to commit time to websites, NBC10 had to develop a web team five years ago to keep up with this growing trend. It is clear that the boom of social media has even brought changes to the largest television market in Pennsylvania.

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Chapter 5

Market Case Study: Pittsburgh DMA #23

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is the second largest local television market in the state. Nielsen ranks the Steel City No. 23 in the nation with 1,181,540 television homes as of 2014. Pittsburgh is located in western Pennsylvania and the city features three professional sports teams along with high school sports rich in tradition and history.

For this case study, I spoke to Alby Oxenreiter, sports director at WPXI-TV. Channel 11 is an NBC affiliate owned by Cox Enterprises. Oxenreiter has worked in local television in Pittsburgh for 27 years and he has seen the industry change and evolve over the last few decades.

In addition to WPXI-TV (NBC), Pittsburgh has three other local television affiliates under the umbrella of the four big networks. KDKA-TV is the city's CBS affiliate, WTAE-TV is Pittsburgh's ABC affiliate and WPGH-TV is the FOX affiliate.

As with Philadelphia, Pittsburgh has a sports community dominated by professional sports teams. The Steel City has the Pittsburgh Pirates, the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Pittsburgh Steelers. Oxenreiter told me that this sports market is unique in that there is an unparalleled passion that connects the fan base and the sports teams in the city. When the fan base is passionate about their teams, local sports coverage becomes a lot of fun and Oxenreiter said that this tradition and excitement makes his job exciting.

The three professional sports teams in Pittsburgh dominate the sports conversation around the market and this is usually reflected in the sports content that the stations produce. However, Oxenreiter said that he has never forgotten his viewership's interest in local high school sports. High school football is a staple in western Pennsylvania and Oxenreiter believes

that the Friday night lights tradition in Pittsburgh is unmatched anywhere in the country. He added that the tradition of high school football in this city is so strong that it is up there with the professional sports teams. Looking at the National Football League (NFL), some of the best players to ever play in the league have come from high schools in western Pennsylvania. To name a few, Johnny Unitas, Jim Kelly and George Blanda all played high school football in the Steel City. The tradition is rich when it comes to high school football in Pittsburgh and stations like WPXI-TV have committed time to covering these teams on a regular basis.

WPXI has a Friday night football show that they produce called “Skylights.” This is the station’s opportunity to highlight the great traditions and rivalries around the region. This show includes highlights from 10-15 games and they typically feature a band of the week and a player of the week. This show lasts about 15 minutes during the 11 p.m. newscast and it is designed to capture the passion for the game that emanates from the local fan bases.

WPXI-TV has varied programming throughout the week, but most of their sports programming has set times and segment lengths. Typically, sports will appear in the first 15 minutes of the 5 p.m. news and the first 15 minutes of the 5:30 p.m. news. Some of this air time may come from live hits from the studio or remote locations around the market. During the 6, 10 and 11 p.m. news, the sports block will last anywhere from 2:30-3 minutes.

As with every market in Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh has been impacted by the rise of social media. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become an integral part of the day-to-day operations at local stations in the Steel City and Oxenreiter said that the infusion of social media has been one of the biggest changes he has experienced in his 27 years in the city.

Oxenreiter told me that when he started his career in local television, his job entailed going to games, compiling his reports for television and then capping off the night by anchoring the sportscast. Now, his job is a 24/7 commitment because of social media. Sports happen around the clock and viewers want the news as soon as it breaks. To offer an example, Oxenreiter

brought up the Pittsburgh Steelers and what happens when news breaks with this team. If the Steelers make a trade or sign a free agent, this becomes a big deal. On social media platforms like Twitter, it is Oxenreiter's job to tweet out the news and then interact with his viewers. He said that he will engage with the fans, hear what they are talking about and then offer his opinions on the matter. This interaction could happen at any hour of the day and stations in the area have to be ready to break the news when it develops.

To capitalize on the rise of social media, WPXI has produced a social media-driven show on Sunday nights at 11:35 p.m. called "The Final Word." This show, a joint venture between WPXI and the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, is designed to include Pittsburgh sports fans and viewers in the media conversation. The panel that leads this show includes Mark Madden, radio host for 105.9 the X in Pittsburgh, Dejan Kovacevic and Alan Robinson of the Tribune-Review, and Alby Oxenreiter and Bill Phillips of WPXI-TV. Phillips is the weekend sports anchor who works with Oxenreiter.

Each week, the panel will throw out topics and questions to the viewers. They can then respond to the questions by tweeting a response with an official Twitter hashtag (#) that the panel will announce or they can respond to the question on "The Final Word's" Facebook page. The viewers can also send 20-second videos with their responses to the Facebook page. An example of a question that the panel recently posed to the viewers can be seen below in Figure (5-1).

Figure 5-1. Example of "The Final Word" Panel Question



During the Sunday night show, the panel will discuss the questions and include the responses from the viewers. Social media drives this show and this show is all about interacting with the fans that are passionate about sports in Pittsburgh. Oxenreiter said that local sports used to only be about the highlights. Now, local sports is about interacting with the viewers to see what they have to say in addition to the highlights from the games.

Oxenreiter told me that he has valued his time covering local sports in Pittsburgh because the city values the sports teams competing in the area. Also, he said that WPXI-TV values the sports content in the newscast. Oxenreiter said that the station not only values the sports, but they understand the passion of the fans and the history of sports in Pittsburgh. This region is rich in history and championships and he said that it has been very satisfying to bring everything together as the sports anchor in the Steel City.

Chapter 6

Market Case Study: Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York DMA #43

The market consisting of Harrisburg, Lancaster, Lebanon and York checks in at 43 on the 2014 Nielsen rankings. This year's estimates state that this television viewing area consists of 725,340 television homes (Nielsen). This market is unique to me because I grew up in this market and I interned at a station in this market. For this case study, I spoke to three individuals that know the area very well; Todd Sadowski, sports director at FOX 43 (WPMT-TV), David Silverstein, news director at FOX-43 and Marty Trimmer, athletic director for Central York High School.

Todd Sadowski has been at FOX 43 in York, Pennsylvania since February of 2000. His other local landing spots include Allentown, PA and Baltimore, Maryland. David Silverstein has worked in television news for more than 20 years and has worked in markets such as Miami, Tampa, Columbus and Denver. Marty Trimmer has been the athletic director at Central York High School for nearly thirteen years. He started his stint as AD in August of 2001.

FOX 43 is, of course, the FOX affiliate in this market. There are three other television stations in the market that compete for viewership; WHTM-TV (ABC 27), WGAL-TV (NBC 8) and WHP (CBS 21). Their coverage goals are fairly similar, according to Todd. This market includes three minor league baseball teams; the Harrisburg Senators (Double-A affiliate of Washington Nationals), the Lancaster Barnstormers and the York Revolution (both members of the Freedom Division of the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball.) Stations in this market are also responsible for coverage of more than 90 high schools, and colleges, including Penn State University. Due to this market's proximity to professional sports cities and due to the eclectic

viewership, the stations in this area have to spend time covering the professional sports teams from Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Baltimore. The emphasis at these stations is local sports coverage, but professional sports have their moment in time when something newsworthy occurs in those cities. For example, if the Pittsburgh Steelers or Philadelphia Eagles make a playoff push, there is a good chance you will see coverage of the playoff runs in the sportscasts.

At FOX 43 in York, Pennsylvania, the sports block receives 2:30 during FOX43 news at 5 p.m. and 3:30 during FOX43 news at 10 p.m. For high school football, they have a 30 minute live pregame show on Fridays from 6-6:30 p.m. and a highlight show from 10:45-11:00 p.m.

One of FOX 43's taglines is "More local news than any other local news station." They are confident in the approach that local news sells and that they exist for the purpose of local news. In Sadowski's words, "We exist to provide local sports for our viewers. If we do national stuff that they [viewers] can get elsewhere, we would be quickly extinct." He added that "We are fortunate in PA and fortunate in this area that our viewers really place emphasis on local sports." Sadowski and Silverstein both support the notion that because their viewers crave local sports coverage, it is their job as a station to reflect this in their product. Silverstein told me that "in order to survive, it is important to find those stories that transcend sports and interest non-sports fans." He believes that yes, it is important to quench the local sports thirst of their viewers, but that it is also vital to bring new viewers in by making the sports content relate to sports and non-sports fans.

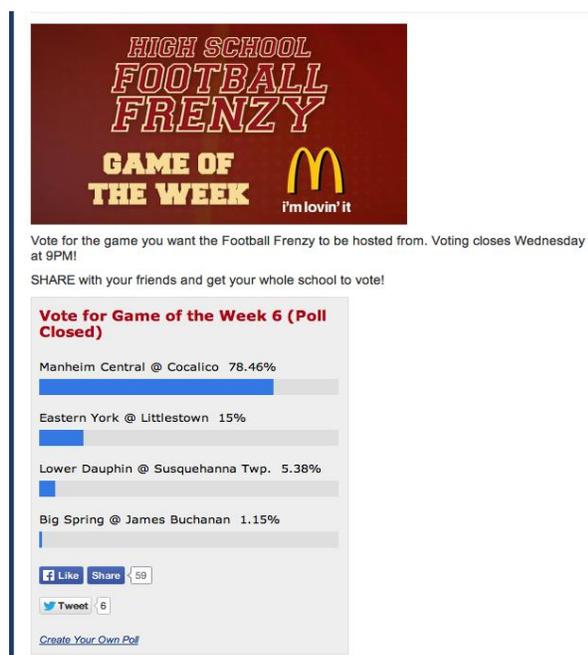
In an industry where local sports seems to be dwindling in the overall scope of local television, it is important to make the local sports coverage that you do have superb. It is about finding different ways to engage viewers and FOX 43 has been able to do just this. This responsibility lies on the shoulders of FOX 43's two full-time sports employees (Todd Sadowski and sports anchor/reporter Bill Toth) and it is up to them to shoot their own stuff (with some help from freelancers and photographers) for the sportscast.

When it comes to engaging viewers, FOX 43 has turned to social media and the power of having an interactive website. Sadowski believes that “there is nothing that energizes a community quite like local sports does” and to energize the viewership in this market, FOX 43 turned to extensive Friday night football coverage.

FOX 43 started something at their station called “High School Football Frenzy.” This is an all-day event on Fridays that exclusively features high school football. The event is designed to capture the excitement of game day and game night, fueled by live reports from pep rallies, pre-game celebrations, etc. At 6:00 on Fridays, FOX 43 does a live, 30-minute show at a particular venue that aims to mirror what you would see on ESPN’s “College Gameday.” The event showcases the atmosphere, the band, the cheerleaders and it all culminates in a highlight show at the end of the night.

It is up to the viewers to decide (vote) where the High School Football Frenzy Game of the Week is located. On FOX 43’s website, they post an interactive poll at the beginning of the week that features four different football games. Figure (6-1) below is an example of this poll.

Figure 6-1. Example of High School Football Frenzy Poll



Viewers vote on the game of their choice and by Wednesday at 9 p.m., whoever has the most votes is the frenzy game of the week. This announcement is made Wednesday nights during the sports block. Todd said that this has been an incredible success and that his viewers enjoy being a part of FOX 43's coverage of high school football. Across the region, other local television stations have implemented similar segments. ABC 27 does "High School Sports Live" every week, WGAL does "Football Friday" and CBS 21 does "First Score Friday," a show that recaps the high school football action from that night.

In addition to High School Football Frenzy, FOX 43 does a "Sports Spotlight" on a pretty regular basis. Sadowski or Toth will ask viewers via Facebook or Twitter to send photos of their kids playing sports. They will pick a few of these photos to feature on social media platforms and the nightly sportscast. It is the station's way of covering events and teams that may not normally get coverage. They have found that this sports spotlight has enabled them to grab viewers and keep them on board down the road. One example of this involves Marty Trimmer, athletic

director at Central York High School. He said that he tries to promote his athletes as often as possible to the media and that this sports spotlight gives him an outlet to do so. Central York's competition cheer squad made states this past year and he contacted various media outlets to do a story on the squad. Stations may not have room in their regularly-scheduled newscasts to feature these teams, but features like "Sports Spotlight" at FOX 43 allow for the possibility of lesser-covered teams to be featured on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

This thesis examines the state of local sports television and Sadowski believes that local sports television is still really strong, especially in Pennsylvania. He does, however, believe that in order to keep local sports TV alive and well, "more affiliates will end up doing more local sports than they currently do because it is the best way to reach out to the community." Sadowski has always advocated to do more local sports coverage rather than to do less because his viewership craves it. As he put it, there isn't a 24/7 outlet that covers local sports in his market, so "as long as our viewers value local sports, which I think is not going to stop, then there is a place for us."

Chapter 7

Market Case Study: Wilkes-Barre-Scranton DMA #54

The Wilkes-Barre-Scranton market, situated in the northeastern part of Pennsylvania, checks in as the fourth largest local television market in the state behind Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York. Nielsen ranks the market at 54 with 584,870 television homes (Nielsen). This number increased by nearly 4,000 viewing homes in the past year, an estimate that demonstrates the growth in this area of Pennsylvania. For this case study, I spoke to Ken Brown, a sports anchor at WBRE-TV Eyewitness Sports in Scranton.

WBRE-TV, an NBC affiliate, is unique in that it provides the news and sports for three of the four affiliates in the market (NBC, CBS and FOX). In January of 1998, Nexstar Broadcasting acquired WBRE (NBC). Later that year, Nexstar began a shared services agreement with WYOU-TV (CBS), which was owned by Mission Broadcasting (Nexstar). Nexstar is a much bigger organization and it significantly upgraded the operations at both WBRE and WYOU. This shared services agreement set the groundwork for future station growth. Based off of Nexstar's website, it is a very popular trend for groups like Nexstar to own more than one station in various markets. The services agreement explains why WBRE-TV provides the sports content for both NBC and CBS. Nexstar acquired WBRE, an NBC affiliate, and made it the affiliate in the market responsible for providing content to the other affiliates. As for FOX, WBRE-TV has a contract with FOX to provide news and sports for WOLF ("FOX 56") in Scranton.

They have four total sportscasts during the night across the networks, to go along with two pre-recorded segments that air in the mornings. Since they provide content for three of the big four networks, their main competition is WNEP-TV (ABC), the one station in the market not

affiliated with NBC, CBS or FOX. There are some smaller news stations situated throughout the Wilkes-Barre-Scranton region, but those stations do not have the broadcast range of the stations I just mentioned. Brown brought up in our interview that WBRE, in addition to WNEP, is always in competition with newspapers and radio stations in their DMA. According to Brown, “social media and the web are huge tools for us and any news outlets taking advantage of those mediums can be considered our competition.” He is the first person I have talked to that referenced competition with media outlets other than local television stations.

Wilkes-Barre-Scranton, like Johnstown-Altoona-State College and Erie, is focused primarily on local sports coverage. Due to the market’s lack of immediate proximity to big cities, it wouldn’t make much sense to cover Philadelphia’s or New York’s professional sports teams. The market does, however, feature a few minor league sports teams. The stations in this DMA cover two minor league baseball teams (Scranton Wilkes-Barre RailRiders, Triple-A affiliate of the New York Yankees, and the Lehigh Valley IronPigs, Triple-A affiliate of the Philadelphia Phillies), as well as a minor league hockey team (Wilkes-Barre Scranton Penguins, an AHL affiliate of the Pittsburgh Penguins). The sports departments in the area also focus their efforts on the local colleges such as Wilkes College, King’s College, Bloomsburg, East Stroudsburg, Misericordia, Penn State Wilkes-Barre and Lackawanna College. Brown noted that WBRE stays away from teams outside of the market unless there is a local connection to those teams.

It goes without saying that in addition to the aforementioned sports programs and colleges, WBRE-TV extensively covers the local high schools in the area. They cover 90-100 high school teams, depending on the season because some of those schools don’t have football teams. Similar to WJAC-TV in Johnstown, WBRE employs three full-time employees in the sports department, plus part-time assistance at their Williamsport Bureau. Unlike Channel 6, one of those three full-time employees is a sports photographer. Ken Brown sits in the main desk, anchoring the sportscasts during the week. AJ Donatoni is their weekend sports anchor and he

reports during the week. WBRE's photographer supplements and adds to the work of both Brown and Donatoni to complete the daily sports coverage up in Wilkes-Barre-Scranton.

WBRE-TV has sportscasts in four different shows throughout the evening. At 5 p.m. on NBC, the sports block has two minutes. At 6 p.m. on NBC/CBS, the sports block has 3:15. At 10 p.m. on FOX and at 11 p.m. on NBC/CBS, the sports block has 3:30. WBRE also pre-records two 90 second segments to air in the mornings throughout the market. In comparison to other smaller markets like Erie and Johnstown, these segment lengths are pretty standard.

Getting into the thick of things up in northeastern Pennsylvania, Brown believes that there will always be a need for local television, no matter the size of the market. However, he did mention that there is a definite pattern of change in the industry. He and his staff are finding ways to do more with less by way of the "one-man band." Sound familiar? This trend is recognized nationally and the data from the Pew Research Center surveys support the notion that the use of "one-man bands" will only continue to rise.

At WBRE-TV, they are doing something at their station that is becoming a standard practice around the country. They are making sure that they hire and employ individuals in the newsroom who are polished in both reporting and shooting. The main sports anchor and the weekend anchor are both held by multimedia journalists (MMJs), giving the sports department two extra shooters without actually hiring two extra shooters. MMJs, by definition, are journalists proficient in both journalism and multi-media. They can write and tell the story, but they can also shoot the story and get footage for the story without the help of an assistant. Instead of sending one photographer and one reporter out to a site, the director can just send the reporter to do both jobs, while the photographer heads elsewhere to gather additional footage. Staffing is always a concern and this is well-documented, giving the emergence of the "one-man band" and MMJ added importance to local television stations in Pennsylvania.

I mentioned before that “change” has defined WBRE-TV and Brown made this very clear. One of the biggest changes at “Eyewitness News” has come in the station’s use of social media. They recently launched new Twitter and Facebook accounts within the year. They have done their best to set their station apart from the competition by posting sports blogs, video blogs and other web-exclusive content. I was unable to see if WBRE-TV is rated first in the market, but their main competition, WNEP-TV (ABC), does not have a sports Facebook page and WBRE Sports’ Twitter page has more followers than WNEP Sports. This may be one indication that WBRE-TV is doing well on the social media front compared to their competitors.

In Scranton, WBRE-TV’s use of social media has enabled their sports department to expand their reach and coverage. Figure (7-1) on the next page is a look at “Eyewitness Sports” and what they have done with their Facebook page. As you can see from the screen shot, this page has over 3,600 “likes,” a nice number to supplement the 27, 239 people that “like” the “Eyewitness News” Facebook page. For a comparison, WTAJ-TV in Johnstown has 872 “likes” on their “WTAJ Sports” Facebook page. In regard to WBRE-TV’s social media usage, Brown made the point that the content they produce for social media outlets has become just as valuable as the on-air content they produce. This should tell you how vital mediums like Facebook and Twitter have become to local television stations like WBRE.

Figure 7-1. "Eyewitness Sports" Facebook Page



From speaking to various stations across the state, I found that social media is all about being unique. If stations can stand out from other affiliates in their market by providing unique content that nobody else has, there is a good chance that they can gain followers and more importantly, viewers. An example of unique content can be found below in Figure (7-2). At “Eyewitness Sports,” they do something called “Sports Web Extra” that is posted to their Facebook page just about every night. In a nutshell, this exclusive piece of web content is a video blog (“vlog”) that discusses important, noteworthy sports news from around the area. In this particular video blog, Ken Brown discusses some local basketball teams that are making waves in the region. He also thanks the high school basketball teams that opened their gyms to media coverage this season. It is a very simple concept and these videos can be used to discuss content that the anchors were unable to squeeze in during their nightly sportscasts.

Figure 7-2. Example of Web-Exclusive Content



WBRE-TV is very active on Facebook based on Figures (7-1 & 7-2), but they are also active on Twitter. “Eyewitness Sports” has a Twitter feed (@WBRE_Sports) that has 541 followers and the station as a whole has a Twitter feed (@WBRETV) that has nearly 6,500 followers. By being active on social media, the station can expand their reach to a good number of people. That is something that will pique the interest of any television executive willing to listen.

It can’t be stressed enough that local television is changing every day and this thesis is designed to illustrate those changes and how those changes are impacting stations in Pennsylvania. However, some things stay the same and Ken Brown brought up the point that no matter what, to keep local sports alive, there must be a true focus on high school and local college sports. He added that “there is no better place to look for a great story than with a local sports program.” Great storytelling from the sports department makes the sports side of things a necessity to the station. It has been widely noted that sports departments are losing traction in

some markets, so if the sports departments can become an absolute necessity to the station as a whole, they will be in a good spot moving forward.

Chapter 8

Market Case Study: Johnstown-Altoona-State College DMA #103

This market case study is unique because I am writing this study from State College and most of my television experiences have involved this region of the state. I talked to three different people to get insight and perspective on this market. For starters, I spoke to Sports Director Matt Maisel and News Director Jim Platzer at WJAC-TV. Channel6 Sports is an NBC affiliate, with offices located in both State College and Johnstown. Geographically, Altoona falls between the two cities, making it convenient to have offices on both sides of their coverage area. In addition to the two men I spoke to at Channel 6, I spoke to Charles Gojmerac, athletic director at Central High School in Martinsburg, PA. WJAC covers the Scarlet Dragons from time to time and I spoke to Gojmerac about his interactions with Channel6 and his thoughts on local television coverage in the area.

Nielsen estimates that as the 103rd largest market in the United States, Johnstown-Altoona-State College reaches 291,490 television homes (Nielsen). Although this number increased by more than 3,000 from 2013 to 2014, the market fell one spot in the Nielsen rankings just behind Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. To offer some information about this market, there are four local television stations that compete for the ratings. Along with WJAC-TV (NBC), there are WTAJ-TV (CBS), WATM-TV (ABC) and WWCP-TV (FOX). WTAJ and WJAC are the two highest-rated stations in the market. WJAC and WWCP have their home bases in Johnstown, whereas WTAJ and WATM have their home bases in Altoona.

WJAC has its hands full when it comes to sports coverage in this market. For starters, the station is responsible for coverage of Penn State University, the largest university in the state. Big Ten athletics are a big deal in this area and 6 Sports spends a lot of time covering the Nittany Lions. The station also covers Pittsburgh University and St. Francis University. Other than the

colleges and universities in the region, 6 Sports covers the three professional sports teams from Pittsburgh (Steelers, Pirates and Penguins), two minor league baseball teams (Altoona Curve and the State College Spikes), one minor league hockey team (Johnstown Tomahawks) and approximately 70-80 high schools spread across the region.

I brought it up earlier, but for the first time since 2005, WJAC has a three-person sports team. Maisel told me that as a sports director in a smaller market, he felt the need to hire an extra person because of their heavy emphasis on local sports. They cover enough teams and schools in the area that an extra body was needed. It is important to note that all three members of this team work as “one-man bands.” They, for the most part, shoot, edit and write their pieces on an individual basis, maximizing the number of places the staff can be on any given night.

Maisel made it a point in my interview with him that high school and college sports play a large role in their operation and that professional teams are secondary when it comes to coverage because they have to first take care of their home base. He said that Penn State football is their biggest coverage, followed by high school football. After those two entities, it comes down to the three professional teams from Pittsburgh and other high school material.

Maisel then made an intriguing point that when you look at bigger markets like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, there is “less of an emphasis on local sports because the size of the city lends itself to having more news.” The amount of news and weather cuts into the allotted time for sports and because these markets primarily cover professional sports teams, there is virtually nothing done with high school sports and small colleges. Both John Clark and Dean Michalski told me that NBC10 in Philadelphia has a shorter sports block because news directors argue, with support from consultants and ratings, that people don’t tune in to the newscast for sports anymore.

According to Maisel, that in itself is the state of local sports television in this state. The bigger you get, the more you see local sports coverage dwindle; whereas with smaller markets

like Johnstown-Altoona-State College, it is more important to cover local teams and events because the community is heavily invested in what is going on around them. Jim Platzer, news director at WJAC-TV, believes the state of local sports television in his market is strong because of Channel 6's commitment to covering local sports. He states that his station focuses on content that viewers can't get from cable and/or the internet. Platzer referenced research that found that viewers change the channel if they see local television rehash national highlights and scores. People want original content when they watch local television and Platzer said that his station is transitioning to focus more on the "story behind the score" rather than just the highlights (Platzer). There is a big push to do more features on the coaches and athletes represented in each market to stay away from sportscasts that primarily focus on just highlights and scores. Anchors and reporters don't have a lot of time at the end of the newscast to present the sports, but for people like Platzer, they push their sports department to fit both highlights and features into the sports block at night.

At WJAC, they have two sportscasts every night that occur at the end of the newscast. For the 6 p.m. news, the sports block has 2:40 and for the 11 p.m. news, the sports block has 4:10. Collectively, 6 Sports has 6:50 per night to present the sports coverage of the day to their viewership. They have upwards of 23 hours to convey the rest of the information they couldn't fit into the sportscast. Part of this coverage occurs by way of social media.

WJAC-TV, along with its three-person sports team, is very active on both Facebook and Twitter. Maisel, along with Ashley Chase and Patrick Welter, tweets anywhere from 5-20 times a day about both local sports and professional sports. Collectively, the sports team boasts over 5,000 Twitter followers. The station's twitter feed, @WJACTV, has nearly 8,000 Twitter followers. For this team of professionals, they see social media, in part, as an opportunity to promote their stories and television work to thousands of people. They also use this opportunity

to engage and interact with their viewership. Looking at Pennsylvania as a whole, WJAC sticks out as a prime example of a station that maximizes its potential when it comes to social media.

Channel 6 Sports has consistently demonstrated its commitment to covering local sports and from speaking to athletic directors in the market, they are thankful. Central High School's Athletic Director, Charles Gojmerac, has a good relationship with the stations in the Johnstown-Altoona-State College market. Gojmerac told me that although most stations only cover his school one or two times a year, he is appreciative of their intent to highlight the high schools in the area. Market #103 is a region rich in tight-knit sports communities and by extensively covering the local teams in the area, stations are getting intriguing and riveting local sports content that may be lost in larger television markets.

Like the two markets I discussed above (Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York and Wilkes-Barre-Scranton), Johnstown-Altoona-State College is all about local sports coverage. Covering the local colleges and high schools in the area is what keeps their sports engines running.

Chapter 9

Market Case Study: Erie DMA #149

Erie, Pennsylvania is a city located in northwestern Pennsylvania. This local television market is the smallest market in the state, checking in at 149 in the Nielsen rankings. According to Nielsen, there are 157, 250 television homes in this region as of 2014. To give some perspective on this market, there is a 134,000 home difference between Erie and Johnstown-Altoona-State College. Erie is the smallest market in the state by a wide margin, but it is still considered a strong sports market in this country.

For this case study, I spoke to two sports anchors at two different television stations in the market. For starters, I talked to Gary Drapcho, sports director at WSEE-TV. Drapcho has been working at WSEE for over 25 years and is heavily invested in the Erie sports community. He has had the chance to cover Stanley Cup Finals, World Series, Super Bowls, U.S. Open Golf Tournaments and local high school and college teams in the area. In addition to his work in Erie, Drapcho has worked in Johnstown at WTAJ-TV.

After speaking with Drapcho, I spoke to Craig Smylie, sports director at WJET. Smylie started his career in Lima, Ohio, before joining the WJET family in August 2007 as the weekend sports anchor and weekday sports reporter. They have both been imbedded in the Erie sports community for a significant amount of time.

Erie is a unique market in that there are only two ownership groups. One group owns the CBS, NBC and CW affiliates, including Drapcho's station, WSEE-TV (CBS). The other ownership group owns the FOX and ABC affiliates, including Smylie's station, WJET (ABC). In years past, there used to be an ownership group for each entity. Based on the websites for each

station and based on the information I gathered from both Drapcho and Smylie, WJET (Channel 24) and FOX 66 are considered one staff and WSEE (CBS)/WICU (NBC) are considered one staff. This falls in line with the ownership groups and this change in ownership impacts both of their jobs. For Drapcho, he said at any given time, he could be seen on any of the various entities in the market. The same goes for Smylie at WJET. Drapcho mentioned that this change is the biggest change he has noticed during his stint in Erie. He also mentioned that there is a lot of sharing of information between the stations owned by the same company. This allows staff members at these stations to feature more content on their nightly sportscasts because they can cover as many events as possible realizing that the other stations will pick up the other events. The anchors and reporters will then share all of the content with their sister stations, thus enhancing the quality and quantity of local sports coverage at their stations.

At WSEE-TV, there is a sportscast at 6, 10 and 11 p.m. every day. They also tape morning and noon sportscasts. Drapcho also tapes a half-hour show each week that airs on Sundays. For live shows, WSEE commits 4-5 minutes to sports. The taped shows get 2-3 minutes.

For Smylie at WJET, the biggest change he has seen in his six-plus years in Erie is the state of the job market. He told me that the state of local television is significantly different than when he started at WJET back in 2007. Smylie mentioned that the job market is tighter and that there is a lot of turnover, but that some of those people are not always rehired.

Erie is a bustling sports market and the stations in the market have the responsibility of covering 40 high schools, as well as local colleges and minor league teams. For starters, they cover both the Erie Seawolves (Double-A baseball affiliate of the Detroit Tigers) and the Erie Otters, a junior ice hockey team that plays in the Ontario Hockey League. They also cover both Penn State University and the University of Pittsburgh. Penn State coverage is huge in this market, as is with most markets in the state. Drapcho did mention that he may throw in

professional sports highlights (i.e. Penguins) during his nightly sportscast, but that it is usually too redundant to play these highlights because his viewers can get access to this information on other outlets like ESPN and satellite television. Information is readily accessible because of satellite television, ESPN and social media, so both Drapcho and Smylie told me that in order to be unique as a local television station, they have to focus their coverage on the local athletes and coaches that are making headlines in their viewing market. If you want exclusive stories on teams and individuals in the area, you have to tune in to WJET and WSEE on a daily basis.

I cited a study earlier in this thesis (Figure 2-2) regarding “one-man bands” that shows that more and more news directors are hiring people at their stations who can do everything by themselves out in the field. This cuts down on the number of people you need at the station, thus cutting down on costs. Stations in Erie align with the national consensus that “one-man bands” are becoming the “norm.” Drapcho said that his station primarily uses MMJs/”one-man bands” and that everyone in sports shoots their own stuff. He added that this is vital to their station because at any given night, they have to be in so many different places at once. WSEE-TV has a three-person sports department, but all three members shoot their own footage.

Drapcho brought up an interesting point in my conversation with him that sharing information and content with sister stations is important, but that it also important to build relationships with colleges and media outlets in Pennsylvania because they produce content as well. It has become a common practice for universities and colleges to provide stations with video and highlights from their athletic events. Penn State, for example, will email links to press conferences, video of spring practice, post-game sound and things of this nature. Because of this content-sharing operation, people like Drapcho and Smylie don’t have to be at regional events all of the time. They can focus their efforts on local coverage and when a regional story becomes important, they can access the video with a click of a mouse.

Social media has changed the game in this state and it has impacted Erie as well. Both Smylie and Drapcho told me that social media has made local television a completely different world. According to Drapcho, “social media is like the heartbeat of the station. It is what keeps stations alive and out there in the public.” At WSEE, Drapcho said that their website is a very big tool. The management there makes sure that reporters, anchors and photographers are constantly putting up pictures and videos on the site. The website is used as an informative tool, but he added that it is a promotional tool as well. Reporters and anchors have the ability to promote not only their station, but their work. Drapcho interviewed former Penn State assistant coach Jay Paterno in March and he was able to promote this interview via his Twitter and Facebook page. Without social media, people would not see the interview unless they were already tuned in to the sportscast. Smylie shared similar thoughts about the boom of social media platforms and added that it used to be that everyone would use their websites to break news. However, he has noticed that some stations use Facebook and Twitter before they use their website to get news and information out to their consumers. As Smylie said, social media has made local television a completely different world and the industry has changed because of social media.

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Chapter 10

Conclusions

Over the past five months, I have been in constant contact with anchors, reporters, sports directors, news directors and athletic directors from across the state of Pennsylvania to get their take on the state of local sports television in Pennsylvania. These conversations were a combination of emails, phone calls, text messages and in-person encounters. Through their input and through my analysis of trends and market data, I have been able to answer all of the questions I posed in the abstract about the state of local sports television in Pennsylvania.

The first question I asked was “Is there a transition in the way local sports are being covered at television stations?” There is a very clear transition in the way local sports are being covered and the type of transition has varied across the state. In the smaller to middle-sized markets in Pennsylvania (Erie, Wilkes-Barre-Scranton, Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York and Johnstown-Altoona-State College), stations are utilizing more “one-man-band” journalists to produce sports content. The Philadelphia and Pittsburgh markets have seen this trend start to develop, but in no way is it as commonplace as it is in the smaller markets.

By sending one person (reporter) out to do a job that usually takes two people (reporter and photographer), stations are able to do more with less. They can then send that extra body out to cover additional events, increasing the amount of coverage on the nightly sportscast. However, there is a flip side to the emergence of the “one-man band” journalist. If stations cut photographers or producers that were previously employed, reporters and the remaining photographers have no choice but to shoot, edit and produce everything by themselves out in the field. The Pew Research Center found out that as of 2011, 18.2% of news directors in markets 1-

25 are using “one-man-bands.” In markets 26-50, 25% of news directors are using “one-man-bands.” This number is up from 6.5% in 2009 and my interview subjects made it a point that this number will continue to rise.

Some other transitions have taken place due to shakeups in the size of sports department staffs. At WJAC-TV in Johnstown, they have added a third person to their sports team for the first time since 2005 and they all primarily operate as “one-man bands.” Because they cover 70-80 high schools, three professional sports teams and numerous minor league teams, they felt the need to hire another reporter because of their hyper emphasis on local sports coverage. With a third reporter, they can expand their reach over the market by covering more teams and events.

The other side of this spectrum is Philadelphia and in some cases, Pittsburgh. The community is heavily invested in sports, but there is less of an emphasis on sports coverage in these markets. Some news directors in Philly believe that their viewership does not look at local television as a source of sports news anymore and because of this, the allotted time for the sports block has decreased, on average, from 3-3:30 minutes to 2-2:30 minutes. People can get scores and highlights from sources like ESPN and in a market like Philadelphia that features four professional teams, there is no need to watch local television for Phillies, Sixers, Eagles and Flyers highlights. Smaller markets still focus on local high schools and colleges because stations in this market realize that they are the primary source for news on high school teams, coaches and athletes.

There is a dynamic that has developed between smaller and larger markets and it demonstrates the transition in local sports coverage in Pennsylvania. The bigger you get, the more you see local sports coverage dwindle. The smaller you get, you see the heavier emphasis on local sports coverage. This transition has impacted the day-to-day operations of local television stations in this state and this trend will undoubtedly continue in the coming years.

The second question I asked in my abstract was “Are online content and social media changing the way sports are being covered?” The one phrase that continued to pop up during my interviews was that the infusion of social media in local television has been a game-changer. Stations are committing a significant amount of time to being active on platforms like Facebook and Twitter and some stations like NBC10 in Philadelphia have developed web teams to manage social media and website content.

Ken Brown, sports director at WBRE-TV in Scranton, made the point that the content they produce for social media outlets has become just as valuable as the on-air content they produce because people have turned to social media for on-demand news and information. This is a dramatic change from the way things worked five years ago. Social media had just started to gain traction at that point, but the boom had yet to occur.

Anchors and reporters across the state are now interacting and engaging with their viewership by way of social media. Discussions have started on Twitter and Facebook between reporter and viewer and because of this, stations like WPXI-TV in Pittsburgh have started social media-driven shows that include viewer perspective on hot-button issues and topics in the sports community. According to Alby Oxenreiter at WPXI, sports coverage now includes what the viewers and fans think in addition to the highlights and sports features.

Local television stations are also using social media platforms as a promotional tool. Reporters can use Twitter to inform their viewers about what they can expect to see on upcoming sportscasts. They can also use social media as a tool to promote stories that they worked on by posting links to highlights and features. Social media has revamped the way local television stations cover sports and my interview subjects are convinced that social media use will only continue to rise.

The third and final question I asked was “Given the current state of local sports television in Pennsylvania, what are stations doing to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of this

industry?” As I stated earlier in my conclusions, some stations are using “one-man bands” to do more with less, certain markets are increasing or decreasing the amount of time allotted to the sports block each day, and most stations in Pennsylvania are using the power of social media to adapt to the changes in the media landscape.

By looking at all six case studies in this thesis, it is clear that the changes happening in local sports television are shaping the future of local sports television. The industry is vastly different from five years ago and I am confident that five years down the road, it will look even more different. The industry has never been static and it is important that local television stations in Pennsylvania continue to take change in stride

Looking ahead, if these trends continue, how will stations continue to adapt? Will television markets like Philadelphia continue to cut the allotted time for sports in their nightly newscasts? How will social media continue to evolve and develop as a tool for reporters and anchors? In the next ten years, will the use of “one-man-band” journalists be commonplace, no matter the size of the market? All of these questions are on the table and it will only be a matter of time before these questions can be answered.

It all depends on the market, but for some, the state of local sports television in Pennsylvania is strong. Todd Sadowski, sports director at FOX 43 in York, Pennsylvania, said that the industry is in good shape, but that in order to keep local sports alive and well, “more affiliates will end up doing more local sports than they currently do because it is the best way to reach out to the community.” For Sadowski, “as long as our viewers value local sports, which I think is not going to stop, then there is a place for us.”

There is no doubt that local television stations in Pennsylvania will continue to face problems and obstacles down the road. However, people like Sadowski give me reason to believe that local sports television will continue to have its place and purpose in this state.

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