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Dick Schaap: Covering a Contest Called Life, An Essay

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I. INTRODUCTION

In an interview conducted in the Summer of 2002, *Sports Illustrated's* Rick Reilly challenged Chicago Cubs' slugger Sammy Sosa to take a drug test for steroids.¹ Sosa, who had invited the challenge by saying he would be the first in line to be tested if the players' association agreed to testing, was furious—and profane.² He lashed out at Reilly, said he was tricked, and that Reilly had betrayed him.³ Did Reilly break a promise to Sosa? No one other than Sosa or Reilly knows. However, their confrontation was far from unusual in the increasingly hostile climate that defines athlete-media relations.

At the World Series in 1999, Pete Rose was honored as one of the “players of the century.” NBC's Jim Gray used the occasion to question

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1. Rick Reilly, *Excuse Me for Asking*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, July 8, 2002, at 94.
2. *Id.*
3. *Id.*

Rose about gambling on baseball.⁴ Gray wanted to know if Rose was ready to admit that he bet on the game that had been his life. Rose, who was banned from baseball for life in 1989 for gambling, tried to deflect the questions, but Gray was persistent. Rose told Gray, "I'm surprised you're bombarding me like this . . . on a great night, great occasion, great ovation."⁵

The public reaction to Gray's line of questioning was overwhelmingly negative.⁶ To quell the controversy, he was forced to make an on-air apology later in the World Series.⁷

In 1993, as the New York Mets, who were expected to challenge for the pennant, were suffering through a season in which they would eventually lose 103 of their 162 games—the worst record in the major leagues that year—outfielder Bobby Bonilla threatened reporter Bob Klapisch in the Mets' clubhouse.⁸ Bonilla told Klapisch, who had frequently criticized Bonilla in his stories, that he would, "show him the Bronx," then knocked away a microphone that had been recording the confrontation.⁹

Bonilla's colorful outburst illustrated the lack of respect between the media and the Mets. So did an incident of July 4, 1993, again in the Mets' clubhouse, when former Cy Young Award-winning pitcher Bret Saberhagen squirted bleach on several reporters and cameramen.¹⁰ It was not a playful prank.

Detroit Tigers' pitcher Jack Morris once famously dumped a bucket of cold water on the head of Detroit Free Press columnist Mitch Albom. Outfielder Deion Sanders once did the same to baseball announcer Tim McCarver, a former major league catcher. Outfielder Dave Kingman once

4. Richard Sandomir, *Gray Interrogates Rose at an Inappropriate Time*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 25, 1999, at D8.

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.*

7. Richard Sandomir, *Interviewer of Rose is Snubbed by Curtis*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 27, 1999, at D3 (stating the apology was made on October 26, 1999 during NBC's pre-game show).

8. George Vecsey, *Can Bonilla Get Along in New York?* N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 16, 1993, at B9 (noting Bob Klapisch, of *The New York Daily News*, was the co-author of a book titled *The Worst Team Money Could Buy*, which chronicled the struggling New York Mets franchise).

9. *Id.*

10. Malcolm Moran, *On Rainy Day, Saberhagen Pitches a Fit*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 7, 1993, at B31 (noting Saberhagen originally denied participating in the incident, but a team investigation proved otherwise and led to disciplinary action against the pitcher).

boxed up a dead rat and sent it to a reporter in the Oakland Coliseum press box.¹¹

These examples are culled from only baseball. However, in football, basketball, and to a lesser extent in hockey, there have been hundreds of similar confrontations. Essentially, today's athletes do not get along very well with the men and women who cover them. The relationship is, above all else, adversarial. This is not to say that every clubhouse and locker room is a minefield for reporters. Incidents like those mentioned above are still relatively rare. Most athletes tolerate the media. Most reporters are fair. However, the climate has undoubtedly changed.

II. THAT WAS THEN . . .

It was a very different world in 1956, when my father, the sports journalist Dick Schaap, graduated from Columbia University's School of Journalism. The Golden Age of Sports, the Roaring Twenties, were long over, but the romance had not died. The Brooklyn Dodgers were the world champions. The Dodgers' Duke Snider patrolled center field at Ebbets Field, while Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays were playing the same position for the Yankees and Giants, respectively, in the same city.

Rocky Marciano was the heavyweight champion of the world, Archie Moore was the light heavyweight champion, and Ray Robinson was the middleweight champion. Everyone knew who they were and what titles they held. The National Football League, at thirty, was still in its media infancy; two years later, the Giants-Colts overtime championship game at Yankee Stadium would lift the sport into maturity. Bill Russell was preparing to play for the United States Olympic team in Melbourne, and Wilt Chamberlain was still a student at the University of Kansas. In hockey, Maurice Richard of the Montreal Canadiens and Gordie Howe of the Detroit Red Wings were the dominant figures in their six-team league. Vince Lombardi was still an assistant coach on the staff of the New York Giants. Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson were fading, and Arnold Palmer was just beginning to assert himself on the PGA Tour. Sports were far from pure, but they were still covered as a diversion, not as big business.

It was this world that my father entered in 1956, straight out of journalism school, as a reporter at *Newsweek*. His colleagues included

11. See, e.g., *High 5: What are the Top 5 Baseball Announcer Controversies of All Time?* N.Y. DAILY NEWS, Sept. 22, 2002, at 3 (determining the McCarver and Sanders fights were number one on the list).

Roger Kahn, who would eventually write *The Boys of Summer*,¹² the definitive book on the Brooklyn Dodgers of the 1950s; and John Lardner, the gifted son of the gifted sports and short story writer, Ring Lardner.

Before my father had even joined *Newsweek*, Kahn took him to dinner with his hero, the Dodgers' Jackie Robinson. That was the culture then. Reporters, even the greenest among them, broke bread with the biggest stars in sports. There was, for the most part, mutual respect and an understanding on the part of the athletes that the writers had a job to do. In the 1920s, every writer who traveled with the New York Yankees knew that Babe Ruth was a gluttonous womanizer and whoremonger.¹³ No one wrote a word to that effect. Now, every indiscretion is considered fair game, and athletes do not like it at all.

My father's relationships with the athletes he covered were rarely acrimonious. Unlike so many of his colleagues, he fundamentally liked athletes, and, in turn, they liked him. In terms of developing trusting relationships, my father also had a distinct advantage over most of his colleagues. He never regularly covered sports for a newspaper. He never had a beat. If he had, he would have been compelled to be critical, and at times to be confrontational. That is the nature of beat writing and column writing. When a relief pitcher blows a lead, or a manager loses control of his team, it is the newspaper reporter's obligation to poke, prod and probe—to dissect failure.

My father was never obligated to deal with athletes when they were down. As a national reporter for magazines and television, he could focus on the subjects and the people he liked, and whose company he enjoyed. There were rare instances when he would have to deal with a difficult person, but for the most part, he could choose his topics and deal with those athletes who were his friends, or at least friendly.

As a general city-side columnist at the *New York Herald Tribune* and its successor, the *World Journal Tribune*, my father could not be so discerning. He dealt with all the criminals, scoundrels, and politicians who helped run New York in the mid-1960s, and he did not deal with them kindly.

In *The Paper*,¹⁴ the award-winning history of the *Herald Tribune*, Richard Kluger wrote:

12. ROGER KAHN, *THE BOYS OF SUMMER* (Perennial Classics 2000) (1971).

13. See, e.g., ROBERT W. CREAMER, *BABE, THE LEGEND COMES TO LIFE* 21 (Penguin Books 1983) (1974).

14. RICHARD KLUGER, *THE PAPER* (Vintage 1986).

In 1965, [Herald Tribune publisher Jock] Whitney ordered the editors to kill a column by Dick Schaap, who by then had forsaken the city-editorship to write heavily ironic commentary for the split page on the connivances and blunderings of the power elite. Schaap's offending column, noting how Governor [Nelson] Rockefeller's former allies had abandoned him wholesale in the wake of his matrimonial misadventures, was intended as a comment on the fickleness of politics, but Whitney, missing the point or not wanting to make it at the expense of his friend Nelson, said, "Why beat a dead horse?" But when Schaap later deftly needled Mayor John V. Lindsay, the great white hope of New York Republicans, whom the Tribune had given strong editorial backing—and Whitney and [Herald Tribune president Walter] Thayer had supported financially as well—in the mayoral campaign, he was never censored.¹⁵

One of my father's favorite subjects was Robert Moses, the czar of New York's parks and roadways. In *The Power Broker*,¹⁶ Robert Caro's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Moses, Caro wrote:

Dick Schaap wrote a whole—hilarious—column on the impossibility of reaching [Moses] on the phone, and when he visited [Generalissimo Francisco] Franco wrote: "Moses' mission to Madrid is another indication of his keen public relations sense. Franco is practically an American folk hero. His firm democratic stance cannot be questioned. No one could be more deserving of the World's Fair's Gold Medal, unless, of course, it is Robert Moses himself."¹⁷

My father's relative gentleness as a sports writer can be attributed in large part to his experiences in hard news. It was difficult for him to muster real indignation about sports after having covered the Watts riots and the civil rights movement—which is not to say that he wrote about sports as if they were somehow pure. However, for the most part, when he covered sports, he tended to make friends, not enemies.

15. *Id.* at 694.

16. ROBERT CARO, *THE POWER BROKER: ROBERT MOSES AND THE FALL OF NEW YORK* (1974).

17. *Id.* at 1108–09.

The best friend he made through sports was Jerry Kramer, with whom he would co-write four books and nearly a quarter-million words.¹⁸ In 1967, my father decided to collaborate on an insider's look at the National Football League with Kramer, the Packers' all-pro right guard. The book would be a diary of Kramer's 1967 season, as he and his teammates defended the NFL championship they won in Super Bowl I, which was their fourth title in six years.¹⁹

Their timing was perfect. In the conference championship game, the immortal Ice Bowl, the Packers defeated the Dallas Cowboys and Kramer made the crucial play, the block that allowed Bart Starr to score a touchdown on a quarterback sneak with thirteen seconds remaining. In his autobiography, *Flashing Before My Eyes*,²⁰ my father recalled the aftermath of the block:

In the locker room after the game, Kramer, enjoying his unfamiliar role as hero, stood before the television cameras while CBS ran and reran and reran the slow-motion pictures of Starr's touchdown, and Kramer's block. Millions of Americans came to know Jerry Kramer's name for the first time from one crisp, timely block. "Thank God for instant replay," Kramer said, and we had our title: *Instant Replay: The Green Bay Diary of Jerry Kramer*.²¹

My father met Kramer in the early 1960s, when he was writing his second book on Paul Hornung the Packers' star halfback. He thought Kramer was bright and literate, the perfect collaborator. The Packers not only won the 1967 NFL championship, they also won Super Bowl II, 33-14, against the Oakland Raiders, the champions of the American Football League. That is where the book ends.

III. FINDING THE ATHLETE'S VOICE

Soon after its publication in the Fall of 1968, *Instant Replay*²² became the best-selling sports book ever. Better than any previous sports book, or

18. See, e.g., JERRY KRAMER & DICK SCHAAP, *INSTANT REPLAY* (1968) [hereinafter *INSTANT REPLAY*]; JERRY KRAMER & DICK SCHAAP, *DISTANT REPLAY* (1985) [hereinafter *DISTANT REPLAY*].

19. *INSTANT REPLAY*, *supra* note 18.

20. DICK SCHAAP, *FLASHING BEFORE MY EYES: 50 YEARS OF HEADLINES, DEADLINES AND PUNCHLINES* (2001).

21. *Id.* at 147-48.

22. *INSTANT REPLAY*, *supra* note 18.

any since, it captured the peculiar milieu of the locker room, the combination of machismo and male bonding rituals that rule the locker room.

I sat in front of my locker, and I talked and talked and talked. I talked about the mistakes we made during the first half. I talked about the spirit of our team. I talked about Lombardi. . . . I told anecdotes and I told my opinion of just about everything, and after a while I noticed that most of my teammates were dressed and were starting to leave the locker room. I was still in my uniform, still perched in front of my locker, I really didn't want to get up. I wanted to keep my uniform on as long as I possibly could.²³

Instant Replay was an unvarnished look inside the world of the NFL, to a point. It was not an expose, or salacious, nor even mildly off-color. Unlike *Ball Four*,²⁴ the groundbreaking baseball diary Leonard Schechter and Jim Bouton published in 1969, *Instant Replay* did not tell tales out of school. *Ball Four* debunked. *Instant Replay* glorified. Each was honest in its own way.

The success of *Instant Replay* made my father the collaborator of choice for America's best athletes. His subsequent collaborators included New York Jets' quarterback Joe Namath,²⁵ New York Mets' pitcher Tom Seaver;²⁶ New York Knicks' forward Dave DeBusschere;²⁷ pro golfer Frank Beard;²⁸ all-time home run king Hank Aaron;²⁹ pro football Hall of Famer Joe Montana;³⁰ two-sport sensation Bo Jackson;³¹ New York Giants' quarterback Phil Simms;³² and tennis coach Nick Bollettieri.³³

In the early seventies, when my father wrote books with Namath, Seaver, Kramer, DeBusschere, and Beard, the money generated by a literary success was still enticing for athletes. Even the most highly compensated

23. *Id.* at 281 (Jerry Kramer speaking of his experience after a big game).

24. JIM BOUTON, *BALL FOUR* (1970).

25. JOE NAMATH & DICK SCHAAP, *I CAN'T WAIT UNTIL TOMORROW . . . 'CAUSE I GET BETTER-LOOKING EVERY DAY* (1969).

26. TOM SEAVER & DICK SCHAAP, *THE PERFECT GAME: TOM SEAVER & THE METS* (1970).

27. DAVE DEBUSCHERE, *THE OPEN MAN: A CHAMPIONSHIP DIARY* (1970).

28. FRANK BEARD, *PRO: FRANK BEARD ON THE GOLF TOUR* (1970).

29. HANK AARON & DICK SCHAAP, *HOME RUN: MY LIFE IN PICTURES* (1999).

30. JOE MONTANA & DICK SCHAAP, *MONTANA* (1999).

31. BO JACKSON & DICK SCHAAP, *BO KNOWS BO* (1990).

32. PHIL SIMMS & DICK SCHAAP, *SIMMS TO MCCONKEY: BLOOD, SWEAT, AND GATORADE* (1988).

33. NICK BOLLETTIERI & DICK SCHAAP, *MY ACES, MY FAULTS* (1997).

athletes could still really use the money from a successful literary venture. Kramer, for instance, made far more money from *Instant Replay* than he did playing for the Packers. Therefore, my father could pick and choose those athletes with whom he wished to work.

My father's first post-*Instant Replay* collaboration was with Namath, who allowed my father to have a lot of vicarious fun. Namath was the biggest star in sports in 1969, when together they wrote, *I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow . . . 'Cause I Get Better Looking Every Day*.³⁴ The book chronicled the Jets' 1968 season, which they capped by winning Super Bowl III against the heavily favored Baltimore Colts. It also documented, gently, Namath's swinging lifestyle, with off-hand references to booze and broads, in the vernacular of the book.

The book perfectly captured Namath's swagger, as evidenced in these few paragraphs about Super Bowl III.

The only thing that really upset me all day was that, after the game was over and we'd won, 16-7, we didn't have any champagne in our locker room. That was just plain ridiculous. [Jets coach] Weeb [Ewbank] and Milt Woodard, the president of the American Football League, said that it wouldn't look right on television for us to be drinking, that it'd be bad for our image, bad for the sport, a bad influence on children. They were acting childish themselves. It was pure hypocrisy, and hypocrisy hurts our image a lot more than a couple of glasses of champagne. We were the champions, man, the best in the world, and we had Cokes and Gatorade to drink. The whole thing left a bad taste in my mouth. I washed it out later with Johnnie Walker.

I had some night. I stayed up till the sun rose the next day. Hell, I'd been getting too much sleep all week, anyway. We were on top of the world. Number one. We were number one. Sometimes for no reason at all, I just broke out laughing. I felt so good. On television that night, I watched the replay of the game. Some people were already saying that if we played the Colts again on another day, the result would be different. I watched the game on TV and saw how conservatively I'd played, how I went for field goals instead of touchdowns, and I guess I had to agree with those people. On another day, we would have beat Baltimore worse.³⁵

34. See NAMATH & SCHAAP, *supra* note 25.

35. NAMATH & SCHAAP, *supra* note 25, at 69.

They were very different: Namath, the glamorous quarterback and ultimate bachelor, and Kramer, the anonymous, gritty lineman and family man. But my father captured each of their voices perfectly. Reading *Instant Replay* and *I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow*, you can hear Kramer and Namath, not my father, which is the ultimate tribute to him as a collaborator.

My father not only captured the voices of his co-authors, but their personalities as well—their strengths, weaknesses and fears. With Dave DeBuschere, my father wrote *The Open Man*,³⁶ the story of the New York Knicks' first championship in 1970. The Knicks' coach, Red Holzman, liked to say “[l]ook for the open man,” and the title of the book was a play on those words. More than most sports biographies, it revealed its subject honestly and poignantly. Again, my father and his subject are describing what it feels like to have just won a championship:

I ran down the corridor toward our locker room, past the tangle of cables and lights and television cameras, cradling the basketball. I didn't know what I was going to do with it. All I knew was that the ball represented everything we'd worked for since September, everything I'd worked for, really, since I first started playing basketball.³⁷

Debuschere then described how he felt a few hours later: “I [laid] down and tried to sleep, but I couldn't. My heart started pounding, louder than I'd ever heard it before. For more than an hour, I lay and listened to my heart, thumping so hard, my T-shirt was palpitating.”³⁸

In his foreword to *Sport*, a collection of my father's writings, Breslin wrote, “[s]o typical of Schaap, he ends a story of victory with DeBuschere lying in bed, chest pounding, frightened that he [was] having a heart attack.”³⁹ Even as my father was pumping out book after book, his friendships with the athletes he profiled flourished. Somehow, he gave both the athletes and the readers who bought his books what they wanted. It has to do with fairness as well as skill. He showed the readers a world they had never seen before, but he did not sensationalize. He rarely, if ever, took cheap shots, and he rarely, if ever, told a juicy story at the expense of someone else. There was, however, an edge to his prose, and an honesty that endeared his writing to his subjects, the critics and the public.

36. DEBUSCHERE, *supra* note 27.

37. *Id.* at 263.

38. *Id.* at 265.

39. DICK SCHAAP, *SPORT X* (1975).

As a ghostwriter for thirty years, my father worked with many of the biggest names in sports. He was disappointed that Muhammad Ali chose someone else to co-author his autobiography, but he understood. Ali was, in effect, required to collaborate with a member of the Nation of Islam. There were only a few other subjects who declined my father's advances, Frank Sinatra and Joe DiMaggio, and they declined everyone's request.

My father knew Sinatra fairly well. Sinatra was, my father told me, the only person he let call him "Dickie." My father wrote a column for the *Herald Tribune* about a literary party Sinatra attended. He loved the last line: "The frugging at the Gate wasn't the same after Sinatra left. It must have been like that at the Mermaid after Shakespeare left."⁴⁰ DiMaggio my father knew better. My father reflected on their relationship in his autobiography:

In later years, as I got to know him better, I tried to persuade DiMaggio to allow me to collaborate with him, as I had with other athletes, on an autobiography. He declined, of course, fiercely guarding his privacy, but once, when we both happened to be eating breakfast in a Marriott hotel near Fisherman's Wharf in his hometown of San Francisco, he teased me, saying, "I'm almost ready." And then he smiled, and I smiled, both of us knowing he would never be ready to share the intimate details of his baseball career or his equally sensational marriage—to Marilyn Monroe. From then on, whenever I saw him, once or twice a year, I'd ask, "Are you ready now?" and we'd both smile.⁴¹

Everyone with whom my father wrote a book was a superstar, except Tom Waddell. My father got to know Waddell as he was dying of AIDS in 1987, profiling the one-time Olympic decathlete for *20/20* and *Sports Illustrated*. Though they knew each other only briefly, my father and Waddell became very close. My father saw in Waddell—a college football and gymnastics star, an Olympic decathlete, an Army paratrooper, a successful physician, and the founder of the Gay Games—the versatility and courage that he had always admired.

My father, like most men of his generation, or of any generation, was at least somewhat homophobic, which he admitted in several stories he wrote about his relationship with Waddell. He often said that by getting to know Waddell, who was about as macho as a gay man could be, he overcame his

40. *Id.* at 274.

41. SCHAAP, *supra* note 20, at 14–15.

homophobia. As Waddell lay dying, he and my father decided that my father would tell his story, in autobiographical form, posthumously. It would turn out to be a Herculean task, of Odyssean length. He spent nine years, on and off, writing it.

When it was finally published, he told the *San Francisco Examiner* he never had a book “mean so much to me. This was the first person I’d collaborated with that I couldn’t call up and ask what happened next. We only worked in the last year of his life and Tom’s memory was beginning to go in the end.”⁴²

Describing his inability to finish the project, my father told the *Examiner*:

I wanted this book to be so good. I wanted it to live up to him. With all the famous people I’ve written with—Joe Namath, Joe Montana, Bo Jackson, Billy Crystal—there was never any pressure from any of them to get it done. But with Tom, who was dead, I felt somehow he was looking over my shoulder and if I didn’t do it perfectly, somehow if he wasn’t going to punish me, I was going to punish myself.⁴³

Gay Olympian,⁴⁴ as the book was called, was a critical, but not commercial, success. My father, however, never regretted the effort he put into writing it. Waddell was my father’s first gay co-author and he wanted to further expand his horizons. It bothered my father, who had championed civil rights and black athletes throughout his career, that he had never co-authored a book with a black athlete. He was close to Jim Brown, Muhammad Ali, Willis Reed, and Wilt Chamberlain—to name but a few of the prominent black athletes who were his friends—but he had never partnered with any of them.

In the late 1980s, he finally found a black athlete with whom he would co-author an autobiography.

[My] relationship with Bo Jackson is special. Bo is special. In the *SportsCentury* poll for the athlete of the twentieth century, I voted Bo number one, just ahead of Jim Brown and Wilt Chamberlain, well ahead of Michael Jordan and Babe Ruth, an opinion shared by

42. Cynthia Robins, *Gay Games Champion Tom Waddell’s Courageous Story Took Perseverance to Tell*, S.F. EXAMINER, July 30, 1996, at C1.

43. *Id.*

44. TOM WADDELL & DICK SCHAAP, *GAY OLYMPIAN: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF DR. TOM WADDELL* (1996).

none of the other forty-seven voters. But for pure athleticism, which was supposed to be the *SportsCentury* gauge, for sheer speed, strength, and agility, Bo was the best I ever saw.⁴⁵

My father would go on to write another autobiography—this one relatively brief, to accompany some beautiful photographs—with another black athlete from Alabama, Hank Aaron. It begins:

I am in awe of the great home-run hitters, the ones who are no longer with us. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, for one. Jackie Robinson, for another. Forget about Babe Ruth and Roger Maris. Forget about Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa and Ken Griffey Jr. Forget about Hank Aaron. King and Robinson. They're the real home-run hitters.⁴⁶

Just as my father captured the voice of Jerry Kramer—the WASP from Idaho—and Joe Namath—the Catholic from western Pennsylvania—and Tom Waddell—the gay San Franciscan—he found Bo Jackson and Hank Aaron's voices, too.

IV. BIG MONEY CHANGES EVERYTHING

There are several primary reasons the climate has changed. First and foremost: money. Big money has changed everything. Before the advent of free agency in the mid-1970s, sports were covered primarily as recreation and athletes' salaries were, for the most part, deemed immaterial. With rare exception, sports stars were tremendously underpaid because there was no free market bidding for their services. Reporters knew just how poorly management treated players and were generally sympathetic. It was difficult to criticize a struggling athlete when you knew he was not being justly compensated in the first place. Now, when the average salary for a major league player is more than \$2,000,000 per year, fans and reporters expect more. Athletes are expected to play to the level of their paychecks.

Money is also a factor in the sense that athletes and the people who cover them are no longer in the same class of wealth. Reporters and athletes once spent much of their time together. Hall of Fame first baseman Lou Gehrig's best friend was not a fellow player, but a reporter; the same for pitcher Don Larsen and countless others. Until the 1970s, it was quite

45. SCHAAP, *supra* note 20, at 280.

46. AARON & SCHAAP, *supra* note 29, at 4.

common for some reporters, especially columnists, to be more highly compensated than the athletes they covered. Now, the twelfth man who sits at the end of the bench for a National Basketball Association team makes more money in a single season than most reporters will make in twenty years on the beat. Reporters and athletes rarely see each other after the game because the reporters, literally, cannot afford to frequent the same establishments. Also, it is not easy for the wealthy athlete to relate to the middle-class journalist. Their lives are completely different.

With the infusion of big money into our games, sports are covered as a business. Labor strife is, in baseball at least, a constant. Newspapers report every player's salary. The negotiations between leagues and networks to determine rights fees are avidly covered. The sports business beat is among the most coveted in major newspaper sports sections. The games are so often secondary to the economics.

Money has also isolated the athlete-millionaires from average fans. The fans, who pay the enormous salaries by purchasing \$50 baseball seats and \$200 hockey seats and \$8 beers, are now less reverent and more demanding. Their point of view is reflected in the media.

My father wrote an essay in 1992 for the seventy-fifth anniversary edition of *Forbes*.⁴⁷ Reflecting on the changing nature of big-time sports in America, he wrote:

The stakes are so high now. The *average* major league baseball player earns more than a million dollars a year. Losing pitchers and feeble hitters, men with stunningly modest statistics, demand much more. Steve Greenberg, the deputy commissioner of baseball, used to be an agent, negotiating players' contracts. He once told his father, Hank Greenberg, the Hall of Famer, who was the first ballplayer to earn \$100,000 in a season, that he was representing a certain player. "What should I ask for?" Steve said. "He hit .238."

"Ask for a uniform," Hank said.

Steve shook his head. "Dad," he said, "you just don't understand baseball any more."

Nobody understands baseball any more. No one relates to the salaries, not even the players themselves. They earn so much more than they ever dreamed of.⁴⁸

47. Dick Schaap, *So Much of the Joy Is Gone*, FORBES, Sept. 14, 1992, at 86.

48. *Id.*

V. THE ATHLETE-REPORTER GAP

The sports media and athletes have grown apart for other reasons, too. Sports journalism was, until fairly recently, more trade than profession. Its ranks were filled primarily by men who were once copyboys and educated primarily on the job. They were hard men, who spent their lives on the road. Alcohol was a constant. Certainly, there were exceptions. Grantland Rice, a Vanderbilt graduate, and Red Smith, a Notre Dame graduate, were probably the most widely read and respected sports columnists ever. However, today's sports writers are much more likely to be sons and daughters of college graduates than the contemporaries of Rice and Smith. They are much more likely to have attended Ivy League schools. Virtually all of them have degrees in communications or journalism. They have so little in common with athletes who are largely unscarred by higher education and were raised poor, in single-parent households.

Race and ethnicity are also factors contributing to the widening divide between athletes and reporters. The vast majority of professional football and basketball players are black.⁴⁹ The vast majority of the men and women who cover them are white. In baseball, forty percent of the players speak English as a second language, if at all. None of this has brought players and reporters closer.

Then there is the Watergate/Vietnam phenomenon. All journalism changed with Watergate and the war in Vietnam. Virtually all reporters, and most Americans, became more cynical and more suspicious of public figures. If the President was a crook, then no one was trustworthy. It was not good enough any more to take people at their word. The presumption now is that we are being spun—by politicians, by movie stars, by athletes—and the reporter's job is to expose the lies and distortions. We no longer expect the media to treat star athletes gently; we expect the truth, which athletes quite frequently prefer not to have revealed. In fact, when Jim Bouton wrote *Ball Four*,⁵⁰ his warts and all groundbreaking account of life

49. For example, of the fifteen players on the 2002–2003 Miami Heat roster, thirteen were black. The other two players were from New Zealand (Sean Marks) and the Republic of Georgia (Vladimir Stepania). On the three-time defending world champion Los Angeles Lakers, eleven of the thirteen players were black. Again, one of the non-black players was foreign-born, Stanislav Medvedenko, from the Ukraine. In the NFL, the 2002 Super Bowl Champion New England Patriots fielded thirty-nine black players and twenty white players in the 2002–2003 season. On the extended roster for the Miami Dolphins, forty-four players were black while twenty-two players were white.

50. BOUTON, *supra* note 24.

as a major league pitcher in the 1960s, he was shunned. In many baseball circles, he still is shunned.

Today's fans find it difficult to warm to players who are transient—Braves and Rams who next year are just as likely to be Rangers and Colts. Today's reporters cannot, for the same reason, build long-term relationships with those they cover.

Remember this, too: Until the advent of cable television, very few games—other than NFL games—were on national television. Athletes who craved celebrity needed writers to publicize them. Now, with virtually every game they play televised and with all their outstanding plays featured in highlights on national shows such as ESPN's *SportsCenter*, the athletes do not need the reporters. In fact, they have little to gain and much to lose by accommodating the media.

VI. CONCLUSION

My father captured the voices and spirits of many. He found their voices because he cared about them. Jimmy Breslin put it best in his foreword to *Sport*: “The sport Dick Schaap always has covered is the contest called living.”⁵¹

51. SCHAAP, *supra* note 39, at ix.