

Bringing your critical news lens to sports editing (examples with explainers)

Steve Bien-Aime, Penn State University

Amy Goldstein, ESPN

Lori Shontz, University of Oregon

Thought transitions

Original: The Bruins had been playing well since the trade deadline, going 5-0-2 but went 0-3 on their recent California road trip, losing to the Sharks, Ducks and Kings.

Revised: The Bruins had been playing well since the trade deadline, going 5-0-2, **but they went** 0-3 on their recent California road trip, losing to the Sharks, Ducks and Kings.

Clunky language

Sabathia had just turned 31 years old, and **there had been fears among his employers** about how his size **might manifest itself** on his body parts, particularly his knee.

Sabathia had just turned 31 years old, and the Yankees worried about how pressure from his 300-pound body might lead to knee and other injuries.

- Currently ranks as the NBA's youngest coach at 37 → is the NBA's youngest coach at 37
- Made a decision to → decided
- 8 p.m. Wednesday night → 8 p.m. Wednesday
- Came to a conclusion → ended; brings an end to → ends
- Are posited as contributors → are thought to contribute
- Just prior to the start of the season → just before the season
- This skill is still an area that needs addressing → this skill still needs to be addressed (or ___ still must address this skill)
- He's a quarterback who has proven → he has proved
- There's a chance that ___ possibly could → ___ could
- In the month of February → in February
- In the state of Missouri → in Missouri (as long as it can't be confused with the school)
- The quarterback position → quarterback

Teams change names

- St. Louis Rams → Los Angeles Rams (2016)
- Florida Marlins → Miami Marlins (2014)
- California Angels → Anaheim Angels → Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim → Los Angeles Angels
- Tampa Bay Devil Rays → Tampa Bay Rays (2008)
- Charlotte/New Orleans/Oklahoma City: Hornets/Bobcats/Pelicans

Athletes say weird things

“You have to go back and look at the film. But I can tell you this: It's my fault. I don't care whether you give me a **watermelon whole**, I should be able to put that one through.”

--Blair Walsh, Vikings kicker



Brace Hemmelgam

Explainer: Story said “watermelon whole” (large watermelon); caption said “watermelon hole” (a hole that a watermelon could fit through). But the actual phrase said was “watermelon hold” – a slippery grip around a metaphorical watermelon used rather than a football. If you aren’t sure, ask the writer! They’ll probably guide you, and perhaps they chatted with others in the press box before coming up with their option.

Numbers might be wrong ...

Harry Swayne played football at Rutgers University for four years before a 14-year NFL career from 1987 to 2001.

(Careers have inclusive years – if Swayne played from 1987 to 2001, it'd be 15 years. Or he might've played 14 years from, say, 1988 to 2001.)

Or missing ...

The Raiders have the league's most promising young pass-rusher, Khalil Mack, who leads the league in sacks.

(Ask: How many sacks? ... At that time, he had 14 sacks. And make sure that the age is elsewhere in the story because it says “young.”)

Or misleading

- Giancarlo Stanton hit far fewer homers (24) in 2015 than he did during his 2014 MVP campaign.

(Stanton was injured for much of 2015.)

- The NFL has replaced at least 20 of its officials in the past two offseasons, according to vice president of officiating Dean Blandino. On a roster of 119 officials leaguewide, that represents a 17 percent turnover rate -- **the highest over a two-year period in recent memory.**

(You should ask: How far back does “in recent memory” go? All stats should have a start date and end date for comparison purposes.)

Injuries: Learn your body parts

- Roger Federer **suffered a knee injury** preparing a bath for his twin daughters the day after the loss, which required the first surgery of his career.

(Which knee is it? In this case, you could say “injured his left knee” – note that you don’t need “suffered.”)

- With that injury, what happens is your **abductor** group or your groin muscles either strain or tear, and then you get some pulling away of the abdominal muscles.

(There are adductors and abductors. The abductors support your abs; the adductors are your groin muscles.)

Editorializing/delayed ledes

INDIANAPOLIS -- Tom Coughlin **always** joked that his wife wouldn't want him around after he was done coaching. **Apparently, this has turned out to be true, and he's taking it out on his successor.**

(Ask: Is “always” true? Is the lede too speculative? Yes; there’s nothing in the story that suggests that Coughlin’s wife wants him out of the house, and his mere presence around the Giants after his departure from the team doesn’t mean that he’s taking anything out on his successor, Ben McAdoo.)

Watching the NFL is a wildly popular experience, proven by massive ratings and undeterred by constant interruptions.

Commercial breaks. Replay reviews. And, of course, penalties.

There's nothing like the appearance of that yellow "flag" icon on the bottom of the screen to make the home viewer wince, and if it seems as if it's been popping up so far this season more than ever, well, it has.

In 48 games over the first three weeks, according to STATS research, 878 penalties have been called. That's an average of 18.3 per game, up from 17.1 per game during the first three weeks of 2014. Over the same span in 2013, the number was 14.8 per game. More flags typically don't mean more fun for fans, coaches or players around the league.

(Can we get to the point, please? Cut the first two grafs.)

DOVER, Del. -- For the Jimmie Johnson **haters**, they **have** to feel they had a little bit of the **last laugh** Friday afternoon.

Johnson, who has his fair share of those who root against him partly because of his six Cup championships and also because of the history of his crew chief Chad Knaus being in the **NASCAR doghouse**, qualified 14th for the FedEx 400 at Dover International Speedway.

(Ask: Who's the story really about? Are the so-called "haters" important? Why ***must*** they feel they got the last laugh, and what does that even mean? What's the NASCAR doghouse, and is Knaus really in it? Suggested revision on next slide ...)

DOVER, Del. -- Jimmie Johnson qualified 14th for the FedEx 400 at Dover International Speedway on Friday, meaning that Hendrick Motorsports' appealing of a penalty issued earlier in the week might have backfired.

NASCAR announced Wednesday that Johnson's team would be last to pick its pit stall instead of picking based on its qualifying finish. The team delayed implementation of the penalty by appealing NASCAR's ruling, a result of back-to-back weeks of minor infractions. Because he qualified worse than sixth, he won't get one of the six preferred pit stalls near an opening for the race Sunday.

Johnson's team, led by crew chief Chad Knaus, has a history of flouting NASCAR rules.

Phrasing!

- Fair or not -- and I personally feel Phil Kessel probably **ate** too much blame for what has gone wrong with the Leafs -- the new regime in Toronto wants to build a foundation that's about work ethic and culture, and having your highest-paid player **show up to camp out of shape** last year just isn't something the Leafs' brass was going to live with again.

(Kessel's weight has been criticized by coaches, management, etc. around the league. Even if there's truth to that assessment, don't make fat jokes.)

More phrasing

- The missed tackles were odd. There were too many of them, leading to Chiefs players **streaking down the sideline.**



Get the offense correct

Former Oklahoma wide receiver Trey Metoyer has been sentenced to eight years of probation following **accusations** he exposed himself to women.

Cleveland County District Attorney Greg Mashburn's office says Metoyer was convicted of indecent exposure after entering a blind plea, meaning he didn't strike a deal with prosecutors.

(If he was convicted, it's not merely an accusation. Say "convictions.")

Consider the source

“You’re the commissioner of this league and you're supposed to make sure everything is being played on an even playing field,” Terrell Suggs said. “I definitely don't think he's doing a good job, and **I don't think he should be making \$10 million a year.** That's just my personal opinion.”

(Major league athletes probably aren't a good source for finding out how much money their commissioner makes. In this case, add something like: Goodell actually made \$29.49 million last year, according to the league's tax return.)

A little more context, please (again)

Ricardo Teixeira, Jose Maria Marin, Marco Polo Del Nero ... these are the guys who've run the Brazilian Football Association since the 1980s. Each one has had **major legal issues**, and each **was forced to resign in infamy**. Brazil, simply put, deserves better. A lot better.

(Writers may be quick to overgeneralize soccer scandals. Make sure they don't by adding more information. If this is for a website, it's as simple as adding a link.)

Unintended racism

We're comparing a couple of rare **creatures**, but Dez Bryant is a member of the same special **species** as Calvin Johnson.

Quick fix:

We're comparing a couple of rare **offensive talents**, but Dez Bryant is a member of the same special **wide receiving corps** as Calvin Johnson.

Sexism in a quote? Still sexist!

Draymond Green analogized such teams to "a bitter female."

"You ever dealt with a bitter female that's just scorned? God. That's rough," he said. "When you're dealing with a bitter female that's scorned, that's one of the worst things in the world. And God, that's bad."

(This quote is irrelevant to a story about the Warriors-Clippers rivalry. It could be relevant in a story about, for example, how NBA players don't treat women respectfully. But this isn't that.)

Bad timing

- “Real Madrid’s offense was a train wreck.” – right after, say, the 2013 train crash in Spain
- “Zlatan Ibrahimovic bombed out in Paris Saint-Germain’s Ligue 1 fixture against Lyon.”
- “Mets up early after big offensive onslaught” – on Memorial Day
- Other battle/war imagery
- Weather (comparing an offense to an earthquake)

Final thoughts

- Look at players' positions to make sure they're right.
- Check for overwriting. Check for clichés.
- Make scoutspeak English.
- If a story references another story, make sure that the day/date of the previous event is correct (or even in the story).
- If you don't know what an abbreviation is, it's possible that others don't, either: Spell out IAAF, IOC, etc.

(More) final thoughts

- Year/season: Some seasons span two calendar years (such as college basketball, NBA, NHL).
Confusing: The 2016 College Football Playoff championship will be in 2017.
- Check Twitter to be in the know when something happens, but confirm elsewhere.
Fake Twitter accounts are prevalent and persistent.

Avoid this!

