
UNIT 4 SPORTS REPORTING

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the different areas of interest for a general reader of sports news,
- state the special qualifications required of a sports writer,
- discuss the techniques of sports writing,
- explain the importance of language,
- explain the procedure of editing sports news and presenting the sports page of a newspaper.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this block on 'Specialized Reporting', we have so far considered 'Court Reporting', 'Legislature Reporting' and 'Science and Technology Reporting'. As a newspaper reporter you will be assigned to a 'beat'. You will then be required to cull news major and minor in that area. For collecting information on your rounds, you will have to develop contacts with different kinds of people, whether they be officials or citizens in non-official positions. You will be called upon to analyse and comment on any event or occurrence in your 'beat'. Thus, you will have to develop special reporting skills and concentrate most of your energies on the given subject.

Sports writing and reporting is as specialized an area as any other. It calls for both technical knowhow and a good writing style. As a sports reporter, you will have to be conversant with the tactics, rules and scoring patterns of various sports and games. You will have to nurture good relations with players and coaches alike. You will also have to be knowledgeable about the lives of top players in the sport or game. These and other points shall be discussed in this unit.

Unit 5 is on 'Developmental Reporting'. Development and related areas occupy a considerable part of the media content in developing countries. The next unit is the last one in Block 2 and of Course 3.

Activity 1

Turn to the sports page of your daily newspaper. Check out the subject matter of every news item to see if it can be categorised under any of the following groups:

- High school/college athletics,
- recreation sports,
- participation sports

Prepare another set of categories of the same news items under the following groups:

- Straight game story;
- Comment/Analysis;
- Column;
- Feature/Article

Is it possible to combine these two sets of categories in the table given below? Consider any three news items for your answer. Let us say that News Item 1 is a six inch single DPS. We have answered the first one here, to illustrate.

Sports News Items	Category of Subject Matter
News Item 1	Straight game story on school Athletics
News Item 2	
News Item 3	
News Item 4	

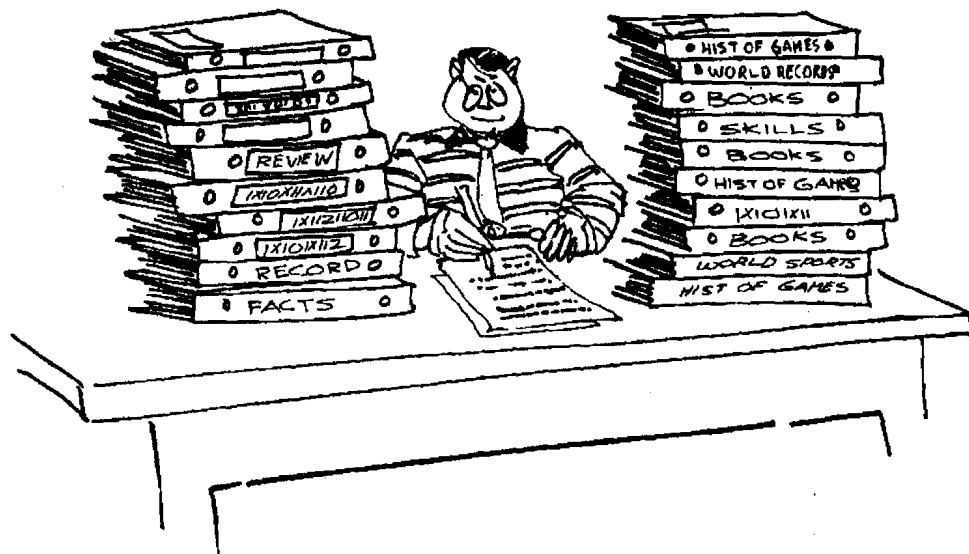
4.2 STRUCTURE OF SPORTS REPORTING

The art of successful sports reporting and writing, and any other specialised work, is the art of fully knowing the various popular games and sports. You must endeavour to write a news item or feature on any game/sport with the objectives of making it appealing to a particular class of readers interested and involved in those games/sports, and to captivate the minds of even those who are not exactly keen or fond of sports.

Even as all sports and games are competitive, so too are the areas of sports writing and reporting. In such a scenario, as a sports reporter you need to structure your story around the reader's interest. You are sure to win readers in larger numbers if you bring the sports page of the newspaper alive with your report of the action on the playing fields. You need to be thorough with your facts and capable of churning out a report under pressure of meeting a deadline. This way you will have an edge over other sports reporters.

4.2.1 How to Begin

If you really want to become a successful sports journalist you should first of all cultivate a habit of keeping notebook and pen with you all the time to record ideas. There are many who suggest that a journalist should have paper and pen at hand even when sleeping. Who knows, you may get an exclusive idea when in bed! Renowned sports journalists are known to have formed the habit of jotting down every idea or scrap of information that comes their way. It is also rewarding to prepare notes on the end-pages of the books you read. Lastly, it is essential to preserve the material that you have collected.



4.2.2 Clippings Collection

As you read your paper or magazine, you should mark those articles and news reports which particularly interest you. Cut them and date those marked articles and file them under the appropriate subject or head. Soon, you will find that you have a ready-made library of your own. You have a plethora of background material from which to write a feature or an article on any subject without any loss of time. Currency, timeliness and accuracy of the report are of paramount importance to sports reporting in daily newspapers.

You will find that from the material so collected you can obtain information about your subject and may be some views of a handful of experts. In addition, you will be able to refer to these clippings for facts and figures that you may quote in your own article or report. Facts are vital to analysis and comment, at any rate.

The simplest way to file press-clippings is to use large, thick envelopes marked "cricket", "football", "hockey", "athletics", etc. Or, you can have an office file to segregate the news clippings in each important discipline. So, start your clipping collection right away.

4.2.3 In Search of Ideas in Sports

You have to develop your own powers of observation. You have to always be on the look out for an idea. Keep an eye open for any interesting; out of-the-ordinary themes that you can write an article about. Anything and everything you see hear and read may provide a useful peg around which to develop your thoughts and ideas. Therefore never consider any material too trivial for a news item. Simply probe it for its news-worthiness so as to reach the sports page of a newspaper. It is part of training to learn to look at life with a journalist's eye. You will then not only be knowledgeable but also will broaden your outlook. You will become acutely sensitive to sights and sounds. You will see people, their movements, their gestures and even events with an altogether different perspective. A good sports journalist has not only to be conversant with important person in sports but also has to be equally proficient with the technicalities of sports.

There are ideas that you come upon in the course of conversation. But looking for ideas will be more rewarding than waiting for them to come to you. You must mix with people and intermingle with them. Who knows, someone totally unknown may provide you with a wonderful idea.

4.2.4 The Ignition Point in Idea-Finding

The ignition point in idea-finding is not automatic, nor does it come readily. Just as you have to make enough effort to churn butter out of milk, you have to devote enough and more time and effort to become proficient in finding an idea. This is no cause to be disheartened. If anything, you should remain on the alert at all times. Be watchful, patient and gather as much experience as you can. Thereafter, you can be sure to locate and identify ideas. As

one writer puts it: "You must be patient. You must also believe that inspiration will come to those who can master their disinclination. The writer's best work is often done when, feeling off-colour, he has had to face himself to write something."

4.2.5 Putting Ideas in Writing

Think and think clearly before you start writing down your thoughts. If you are unsure of what you want to say, you are bound to leave a poor impression on readers. Perhaps, most of them may not understand you. In such an event, the best thing for you to do is to think and write when you are relaxed and at ease. In case you have not formed the habit of clear, constructive thinking, your story will reflect the hotpotch of your thoughts. Clear thinking will help you to write a thought-provoking piece in lucid style. Besides, it generates a flow in your ideas.

Your contemporaries in other newspapers probably write on the same subject as you do. You can, therefore, compare your writing with theirs. There is no better way to learn than self-analysis.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Answer the following questions in two sentences each.
b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) What ingredients are usually found in a good sports news report?

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2) List any three peculiarities of the language used in sports writing.

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3) If you hold a player in high esteem, would you reveal it in your sports news reports? Give an explanation for your answer.

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4.3 STYLE IN SPORTS WRITING

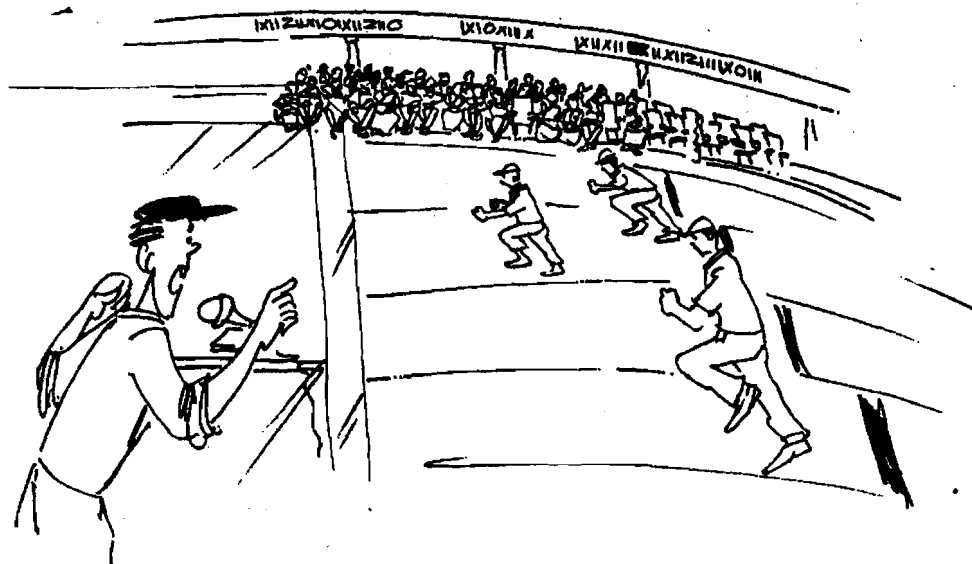
In order to write well, you must develop an easy, conversational style and tone that enables you to gain and hold the attention of the readers. You must learn to write simple sentences and use simple words instead of resorting to high-sounding words. Learn to write in a simple style.

Avoid clichés, jargon and slang words. Hackneyed expressions have no place in good reports. Such phrases as 'it may be recalled', 'it goes without saying', 'last but not the least', etc., reduce the impact of the news item or story.

A.P. Saxena (Pilloo), one of the most respected and successful news editors of the Indian Express, New Delhi, used to advise talented sports reporters to learn to use words that interest people. "It is not wrong to use words which draw the attention of the readers", said Pilloo once, adding: "Words familiar in tennis or table tennis may be used in cricket, if you know the art of using them."

4.3.1 Importance of a Fresh or New Angle

Every sports reporter is faced with the task of discovering a fresh angle to a sporting event. You would probably be up against this kind of difficulty in the beginning of your career as a sports journalist. Think, and think deeply and calmly as to which particular wicket, partnership or catch in a cricket match, or a goal in a hockey or a football match, or gain of crucial point in a game of badminton, table tennis or tennis, saw the event changing course. In short, contemplate on the turning point. Highlight it to prove your point of view. If you take the right and professional approach, you will find that the readers will read your entire report through.



4.3.2 Keep Your Eyes and Ears Open

Howsoever good your writing abilities, your network of contacts or even the sphere of your influence as a sports reporter, you cannot escape the rigours of painstaking research, so necessary for any news item.

Therefore, you must keep your ears and eyes on the alert. Sometimes, even an innocuous meeting or drab cocktail party may provide a clue, or a lead for a sensational exclusive story, known as a 'scoop' in the newspaper world.

We illustrate here the importance of remaining ever alert, by quoting from an instance, in the personal experience of this author.

The occasion was the Indian community's get-together in Auckland in New Zealand, during the Commonwealth Games in 1990. In one corner of the hall, someone was whispering that an Indian weightlifter had tested positive. Your reporter immediately made inquiries from different sources. To mention just two sources, one was the Indian Government delegate, V.K. Malhotra and the other was the Director-General of Sports Authority of India (SAI) D.K. Chatterjee. In a short while, it was confirmed that Subrata Paul was the erring weightlifter. The reporter filed the story to the Press Trust of India (PTI), first by telex message, and then on telephone.

Needless to say, it became a world scoop which the Reuter too picked up from the PTI same night.

4.3.3 The Professional Approach

Your piece or report must be thorough in all aspect of the match. You must write for the people who were not lucky enough to be present at the site of the match. If your reader

happens to have followed the score or watched the match on the electronic media, then your report will be read for the analysis, expression and the points you highlight. When you write a sports report, you must first consider which point you would like to highlight in your lead. Your report will be original only when you lend a fresh perspective on the sporting event.

Remember that in your work you should not be satisfied with the second-best. You must give your best to the report that you have written. If you develop this kind of attitude, you will find that you will neither let yourself down, nor will you let down your editor.

4.3.4 Writing to Length

The most important aspect of sports journalism is precis-writing. The more precise you are, the more you will impress your readers. It being the jet age, readers are generally very busy. They do not have the time to read lengthy and vague news items, and instead are attracted toward crisp copy.

You have to possess enough knowledge and literally, have information at your finger tips in order to write sports news. You also have to give just the right amount of information in your article or feature, so that it reads well and at the same time meets the approved length. This is an integral part of the technique of professional sports journalism. It would help if you could be informed about the extent of space allotted to your news story. Accordingly, you could fit in your ideas. It is better for you to revise your own copy thoroughly before you submit it at the sports desk. This way could turn in a report that is near-perfect.

Space is allotted on the basis of relative importance of the news topics. A local school match has to be necessarily dismissed in one paragraph, unless of course there is a special reason and some extra-ordinary circumstances warrant detailed coverage. Similarly, a Cricket Test match or a Davis Cup match or Olympic events, have to be covered in detail because of tremendous reader-interest and also significance of the events. Emphasis should, however, always be on crisp writing rather than lengthy, boring copy.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Write short answers of three sentences each for the following questions.
b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) Apart from sports jargon, what would you avoid in a sports report for a daily newspaper?

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- 2) If one has collected a lot of information on some sports event, what criteria would decide the amount of information to mention in the actual report?

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Activity 2

What image comes to mind when you think about sports? It could quite well be of men and women straining their muscles and mind to outclass others enrolled in the competition. Look at the sports page in your daily newspaper and quantitatively compare the number of news items that report sports events held for men, those held for women and the meets/matches meant for members of either sex.

Specific Report/Sporting Level	Reports on Matches Played by Men	Reports on Matches Played by Women	Reports on Meets Wherein there are both Men and Women Players
College-Level			
Regional			
National			
International			

Now, answer the following questions with the help of the table you have just filled.

- a) Which category of reports is the highest in number?

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- b) Quantitatively, what is the descending order of the three categories of reports?

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4.4 HOW TO REPORT AND WRITE THE SPORTS NEWS

When you report sports events and issues, you must know how to find the news and write the report. Most importantly, you must get along with people of varying natures. You must also know the politics of your news medium.

The most important thing is that a reporter wanting to make a mark in the profession must inspire confidence. You should, therefore, know landmarks in the history of the game, its rules, terms and top ranking players of the sport you cover. The background information and achievements of players should be on your finger tips. In addition, you must know the coaches, managers, officials and office-bearers of various prominent clubs and associations. You will then be able to secure or extract some information from them when you need to substantiate your report.

Sports news includes college sports at the amateur level and professional sports. The latter category includes regional national and international sports in the form of meets/matches. For instance, a meet in athletics, swimming, gymnastics, weightlifting or wrestling.

The readers are interested in the prospects of the individual players and of the team as on the day of the match, and also all possible information about the event and finally, a post-mortem of the contest. You will be able to do justice to your copy once you do your home work, that is, once you study the background material, assess strong and weak areas of each individual or team and, most important, state in simple terms, the technicalities of the game.

You must be aware of factors which have a direct or indirect bearing on the contest from coaches and managers to regulations. You have to know the part played by these factors so that you are able to portray the correct picture while writing your piece. The more you study the scenario the more likely it is that you will gather information and the better will be your copy.

Good sportswriting is good newswriting. Sports news reporting is slightly different from general reporting because a sports reporter enjoys greater freedom of self-expression. Such freedom includes the use of superlatives. Even among sports reporters, this freedom is generally given to those who are experienced and knowledgeable. All the same, one should

rely on accurate and objective writing, stressing simplicity and clarity while avoiding unfamiliar terminology.

Avoid writing vague reports. They are useless and leave no impression on the readers. Your reports must provide details on the fitness of players, points of play, individual performance, tactics and strategies adopted in the contest and crowd reaction. To be a successful, sports reporter one has to cultivate one's power of observation and describe vividly what one sees.

When writing about stars and professional players, choose your words with care. You must have documentary evidence before you comment about their (mis) deeds on and off the ground. Play safe, always. The profession is quite hazardous. Do not make your task more arduous by making indiscreet comments.

4.4.1 Need for Specialization

The arena of sporting activities is indeed a vast one. You may not be proficient in every game and discipline. Nevertheless as a sports reporter, you have to know something about every sport: at least the salient features, norms, rules and regulations. Further, you have to specialise in one or two disciplines, say a combination of any turn of the following areas: cricket, hockey, football, tennis, badminton, table tennis, athletics, diving, gymnastics or swimming. Please note that this list is not exhaustive. Much depends upon your interest and inclination. A sports reporter deficient in qualifications and ability may outplay a rival by sheer knowledge and dedication. While taking training to be a sports journalist, you may realise that you possess an inherent capacity to report one particular sport or game more competently than any other branch of sports. For instance, if you are conversant with the rules of a game as thoroughly as a player would be, then you can write a report on a match with great ease and finesse.

Specialization, however, comes much later in one's career graph. Initially, the cub reporter must build a reputation of being capable of meeting regular changes in editorial needs. Therefore, you must train yourself to write on a variety of topics. At the same time, you must also specialize in style that is both refreshingly different and illuminating to the general reader. To succeed in this, all that is required is accuracy of reportage and an original style of writing.

4.4.2 Facts for the Advance Story or News Item

An assortment of facts may be available from your own library of news clippings; still, you have to depend upon the concerned officials, coaches and managers to get details for an advance copy. The better your relations with officials, the more information you will get from them. In the face of a defeat, an official may yet be willing to speak to you provided the two of you enjoy a good equation. In a winning moment, doubtless any one who is someone, would like to be quoted! Notice how important it is for your job that you maintain cordial relations with everyone around you. Sport, particularly international sport, is no longer a matter of coordination of limbs. It is essentially being played at the mental level. The temperament and psychology of the players are equally, if not more important than technique and skill. Some teams or individuals succumb under pressure, while some rise to the occasion in the face of intense competition. This is the most vital aspect of sports and you have to study it before penning down the reason for a loss or win.

Finally, a sports reporter has to exercise tact and perhaps persistence when seeking information from officials. You have to study the situation well before you ask questions of, say, the coach or the manager. All the information you gather in this fashion will actually provide you with copy enough for your advance report.

4.4.3 Covering the Game

You must learn to take notes systematically. Remember all the important incidents and happenings including the major moves or strategies that had a bearing on the outcome. Watch the match dispassionately and without getting unduly excited.

When you write your copy, tell the story immediately. This is the first rule in sports writing. Avoid showing off your vocabulary, style or terminology. Do not inject colour and drama unless the situation demands such a report. If the match is dull and drab, say so. Report the action of the sport or game in as much detail as the word limit permits.

While there is no rigid formula for a sports reporter, there are some conventional rules about the structure of the sports story. These are listed below:

- **Lead:** who won where, when, why and how.
- **Major details:** star players, breaks and weather, if necessary.
- **Minor details:** other players, other plays and the behaviour/description of spectators.
- **Other details:** statistics, line-ups and substitutions.

Generally, the summary lead is a crisp statement of the score and important details which you wish to highlight, say, the injuries, or the strategies, or the turning point of the match, etc. The lead, in effect, is a soft lead. It is written in the usual newswriting style and never in the chronological pattern.

It will be worthwhile for you to study the trends in the particular sporting event and develop contacts with different courses to get inside information. Hard facts are more important than rich language and colourful expression. With facts at hand, you can score over other sports writers and reports. The use of simple language and original expression suits the style of sportswriting.

The major story is subsequently continued as short news items. The follow-up is usually written at leisure, incorporating analysis and comment. You may even update the information given in the earlier report. Nonetheless, there are instances when the first report itself has to include analysis. Be prepared to face this test of writing your report under pressure of meeting a deadline.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Answer the following questions in three sentences each.

ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

- 1) List five points that you think must be included in the coverage of any game.

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- 2) What are the news values highlighted in any sports news story?

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4.5 SPORTS FEATURES AND COLUMNS

Apart from day to day reporting you may be called upon to write human interest stories, features and columns once you gain more experience and competence. It is said that "society is founded on hero-worship." Glorification and adulation of sports heroes — amateur and professional — occurs because of the increase in public interest and public following. But while writing sports features and columns, you have to exercise moderation in praise and also in criticism. You must display responsibility in all your writings and you must bear in mind the laws of the press. Your 100 brilliant pieces will be nullified with one lost court case. Exercise care and a balanced attitude in your writings, particularly when you are highlighting the negative trait of the personality of a player, or an important office-bearer of a sports body, national or international.

4.6 SUB-EDITING COPY FOR THE SPORTS PAGE

In some newspapers in India, a sports reporter is also required to work at the sports desk. This work involves subbing (or sub-editing) of the copy in addition to reporting on the 'beat'. Of sub-editors, it is said: "It's just a matter of fitting words to facts. The snugger the fit, the better the story. An efficient and competent sub-editor dresses up facts, marshals them and lets them march."

While every reporter has to develop a flair for writing, the 'sub' has to undergo training in the varied areas of editing, giving headlines and keeping them within certain space allocations, so as to prevent oversight.

Except for one or two newspapers in the country, all other papers have their own sports department which, apart from being autonomous, handles reporting, subbing and page-making. Generally, it is a five or seven member sports journalists team that reports the games, edits the stories, and makes the pages.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Answer the following questions in about four sentences.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) Is the structure of the lead of a sports news item any different from that of a general news item?

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- 2) What three qualities would you specifically need to be a sports reporter?

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4.7 SPORTS PAGE MAKE-UP

The principles of page making are the same, be it for the sports page or any other page. On the strength of the significance of the news, a sub-editor draws up the dummy, makes enough provision for photographs so that the page comes alive with action-filled pictures instead of looking dull and drab. A good and lively photograph makes the page throb with life.

Check Your Progress 5

Note: i) Answer the following questions in about two sentences each.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) What are the special characteristics of a sports page in a daily newspaper? Mention any two.

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- 2) What does the reader expect from a sports feature or column?

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4.8 TIPS FOR THE WOULD-BE SPORTS REPORTER

Before we begin to summarize, here is a list of do's and don'ts. These tips will surely help the cub sports reporter:



- Study the rules of the game in question.
- Study their history.
- Be on the mailing lists of bodies that govern sports.
- Cultivate friendly relations with officials of various clubs and associations.
- If you wish to specialise in reporting a particular sport, you must first acquaint yourself with every aspect of the sport/game.
- At the beginning of every sporting season, interview well-known sports personalities in their respective field and enquire about their plan and programme for the forthcoming season.
- Read the journals pertaining to your particular sport.
- If you are not working on a computer, typewrite on one side of the sheet and use black ribbon.
- Double or triple space the lines so as to edit the copy easily.
- Leave enough space at the top, bottom and either sides of the page.
- Number and identify all sheets.
- Do not write more than one story on a page.
- Prepare copies in duplicate or triplicate.
- Put your name in the upper left, corner below the slug.
- End each page on a paragraph. Write 'more' at the end of each page except the last one.
- Try not to have confrontation with players and officials. You are paid to write, not to have arguments with stars and officials during or after the match.
- Players are an excitable lot. They are tolerable when they are successful, but they are difficult when they are passing through a lean patch. Leave from alone.
- Do not strain your relations with a sub. He/she is your colleague. On occasions, she/he may have destroyed your copy but on many days she/he has rendered your copy readable

and lively. You must develop a healthy relationship with him/her just as a player must respect the sentiments of the umpire.

- There is no sports reporter who does not err. Accept the lapse instead of trying to defend the indefensible.
- Do not view things with a jaundiced eye. Have a positive outlook and think constructive.

4.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have studied the specific features of sports news reports and, briefly, about sports page presentation in a daily newspaper. We have discussed the structure, style and content of sport's news reports. In addition, the significance of finding ideas and the expression of those ideas in original, descriptive terms has also been elaborated upon.

We have mentioned the importance of reporting every sports event from a fresh angle. There is also a need to specialize in specific sports/games and be knowledgeable about their rules, top-ranking players and major events. A sports reporter must be adept at interviewing coaches, managers, players and officials, and asking the right questions. One has to remain alert at all times and keep scouting around for information that may make sports news.

4.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) A summary of all the section and thrill of play; certain tidbits of information are added for extra punch. Facts, turning points in the match, views of players and coaches, statistics and analysis.
- 2) War references like 'kill' are avoided. Sports jargon itself finds mention only on a low key. The report is written for the general reader rather than for one well-versed in the rules of the game.
- 3) It is not to put any player on a pedestal. Just report without sounding reverential or irreverential. In any case, a straight news report is no place to be commenting.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) One would avoid cliché's and flowery phrases.
- 2) Available space, reader, interest, importance of contest.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The final score and how it was reached, answers to the questions posed by the 5 Ws and 1H, names of players, crucial moments of the game, key players and their tactics, crowd size, comparable statistics, injuries met if any, quotes from post-match interview.
- 2) Prominence of the sports event; Progress say in terms of statistics i.e., records set and broken; Human Interest e.g. stampede in a crowd of sports fans; Consequence e.g. winning the match at the regional level and qualifying for playing in the nationals.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) No, the head structure is essentially the same. The basic questions of 5 Ws and 1H will have to be answered. However, the emotional aspect is highlighted in a sports lead more often than in a general news lead. The score may be even placed in the second paragraph sometimes. The chronological order of events is strictly avoided in sports reporting. Sports leads are generally soft news leads.
- 2) A sports reporter ought to write in simple language that can be understood by the general readers. For instance, the interpretation of statistics and 'records' is required because more numbers do not hold value for those readers who are not avid sports fans.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) There are a generous number of photographs and the writing style generally incorporates descriptive expressions. Softness leads are another feature of a sports pages.
- 2) Readers would look specifically for comment and analysis and the general views of the reporter or columnist.