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Shifting signifier on the sidelines : memory and boundary work in the construction of Joe Paterno

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SHIFTING SIGNIFIER ON THE SIDELINES:
MEMORY AND BOUNDARY WORK IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF JOE PATERNO

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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For Sam, who juggled the world to make this work.

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ABSTRACT

Using myth, media memory, and boundary work as the theoretical underpinnings, this research aims to understand how journalists manipulated meanings assigned to a single subject over a long period of time. The research explores how journalists shaped and reshaped former Penn State University football coach Joe Paterno, and how journalists imprinted evolving cultural values on Paterno. As "what matters" within a culture shifts, the journalistic narrative of authority figures and heroes shifts along with it to reflect new or emerging cultural values.

The research also examined what happens to a profession when it faces severe structural unrest. In this case, disruption to the Paterno narrative was caused by new technologies that increased access to the profession. To accomplish these research goals, the researcher employed qualitative and historical research methods, including archival research, textual analysis of newspaper, magazine, and online articles, and a critical historical analysis that allowed for input from multiple paradigms.

The examination of shifting, long-term journalistic narrative matters because it helps us understand how cultures respond and adapt to gradual changes in values or sudden moments of public trauma. This research also offers journalism professionals insights into how new technologies affect industrial structures.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Joe Paterno coached football at Penn State University for 61 years, including as head coach from 1966 to the night in early November 2011 when he was fired. With Paterno as its main character, this dissertation aims to understand how journalists narrate a single subject over a long period of time. Descriptions of Paterno, who was appreciated by journalists for most of his career, radically changed as America experienced cultural shifts.

From the late 1960s through the 1970s, journalists celebrated Paterno as a radical outsider who could heal college football's corruption. During the 1980s and 1990s, journalists held up Paterno as a champion of conservatism. His values became college football's values. Lastly, when scandal at Penn State University ended his career, a new generation of digital journalists turned Paterno into a symbol of everything wrong with the hero-making tendencies of sports journalism.

Journalists built themes around Paterno over a half-century that reinforced popular public sentiment. They embedded America's cultural values onto Paterno's image so that he came to represent America. When he ultimately betrayed those values, journalists worked quickly to salvage their professional reputations by either repositioning Paterno outside of American culture or by explaining to readers why they should continue to appreciate Paterno's overall body of work. Paterno's firing sent shockwaves through the profession of sports journalism, including helping to legitimize nontraditional news organizations while delegitimizing the work of mainstream journalists.

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INTRODUCTION: THE LURE OF PATERNO

In late summer 1995 I found the one open chair at a large round banquet table inside an airy Chicago hotel ballroom. To my immediate left sat Joe Paterno, who prepared to begin his 30th season as Penn State University's football coach. He and I were players in a made-for-media event known as Big Ten Conference Football Media Days. Over two days, hundreds of sports journalists, myself included, peppered Paterno with questions about his football team, the NCAA, and politics.

With his trademark blend of snark and intellect, Paterno answered each question. My fellow journalists and I delighted as he filled our notebooks with retread content. Beyond formality, there was no reason anymore to ask him questions. Sports journalists did not need Paterno to write about Paterno. He was irrelevant to his own story. After 30 years and more media exposure than any college football coach in history, Paterno the man meant nothing next to Paterno the myth.

Years later, during the final days of his life, Paterno met with one of his numerous biographers. Sick with cancer and humiliated by an on-campus scandal driven by one of his former assistants, he said, "It doesn't matter what people think of me. I've lived my life. I just hope the truth comes out" (Posnanski, 2012, para. 7). That the words "Paterno" and "truth" appeared so close together is ironic. Sports journalists spent a half-century constructing Paterno's image. They have spent the four years since his death reconstructing his place in America's sporting culture. The aim of this dissertation is to deconstruct journalism's role in making the Paterno myth and examine how journalists manipulate meanings of a single mass-mediated

character over a long period of time. This is not a history of Joe Paterno. There are numerous well-written Paterno biographies. This is a history of how Paterno was mass mediated, and it is an analysis of what those mediations say about sports journalism.

Journalists' coverage of Paterno holds two appeals as a research subject. First, Paterno had a long career. He joined Penn State's staff as an assistant coach in 1950 and became its head coach in 1966. He remained head coach until November 2011. Forty-five years for a football coach at a Division I school remains an all-time record. Second, Paterno was interesting. He led his profession morally, strategically, politically, and in on-field victories. Politicians invoked his name to bolster their clout. Paterno nominated one United States president and publicly argued with another. He spearheaded academic reform that decimated generations of Black American college athletes. He was such a good quote that sports journalists often abandoned their own prose to make room for more of his (Sheeley, 1982). Journalists first saw Paterno as college football's savior, then its protector. And when journalists discovered Paterno knew for years that Jerry Sandusky, his longtime assistant coach, sexually assaulted children and remained at-large, they turned on Paterno in a desperate act to save face and refocus their professional conversations.

On November 9, 2011, the Penn State University Board of Trustees fired Joe Paterno. Live news coverage of the firing showed Penn State students rioting, alumni crying, and local and national media members aghast. For a half-century sports journalists used the hero myth to transform Paterno into a shifting signifier:

cultural objects that possess adaptable meanings (Barry, 2009). The mass-mediated Paterno assumed evolved meanings of the "idealized coach," a culturally transcendent public figure infused with collective memory and narratives of unimpeachable morality. In the weeks and months that followed Paterno's firing, nontraditional, digital-only journalists mobilized past coverage of Paterno to perform boundary work against the professional practices and "mealy-mouthed nonsense" of traditional sports journalism (Scocca, 2012).

Sports journalists combined collective memory with mythological narratives to grant Paterno unprecedented levels of influence—even posthumously. Paterno became a shifting signifier of such cultural weight that it led to obstruction of the American legal system (Wetzel, 2013). To some sports journalists, Paterno represented an "idealized coach." To others, Paterno encapsulated college football tradition and history. To others still, he embodied the ugliness of old sports journalism, a relic of the hero myth so long cultivated by the profession.

Purpose of the study

I am most interested in how journalists deploy myth to create and sustain cultural narratives of authority. I also am interested in how these functions collaborated in the 70-year mass-mediated life of Joe Paterno. This study will lead to better understanding of how journalists "herocraft" (Roessner, 2014) sports figures as well as engage in professional boundary work in cases of myth disruption—visible public actions and events that disrupt mythology and shatter cultural understanding.

Two eras of Paterno's tenure most effectively reflect sports journalism's infatuation with the hero myth. The first coincided with the presidency of Richard Nixon. Most of the themes that followed Paterno throughout his career first appeared during this period. Two publicized events make this era especially useful. First, Paterno publicly turned down two contract offers from National League Football teams to remain at Penn State, where he earned far less income. Second, Paterno engaged in a public feud with the Nixon administration that coincided with Nixon's march toward disgrace.

The second era of Paterno's tenure useful to the herocrafting portion of this study occurred mostly during the Ronald Reagan administration, timed with formative moments of America's modern social conservative movement. Three events gave sports journalists opportunities to heroize Paterno during this period. First, Paterno's teams won National Championships during the 1982 and 1986 seasons. Second, he earned *Sports Illustrated*'s coveted "Sportsman of the Year" title in 1986. The accompanying article, written by Rick Reilly, became a foundational work of herocrafting used to build future Paterno stories. Thirdly, his Penn State football team defeated the University of Miami in the 1987 Orange Bowl. Miami was racially coded as an "urban" university. Many sports journalists targeted the program for outlandish behavior that ran contrary to the narrated wholesomeness of college football. Gambling oddsmakers favored Miami, but Penn State won. Sports journalists said Paterno won one of the most-watched college football games of all-time "the right way."

Paterno and the 'idealized coach'

Harford Powel's glowing 1926 biography of Walter Camp, the anointed "Father of Football," was indicative of the era's sports journalists. Camp, whose ingenuity and influence shaped football into the form played today, collaborated with journalists to create college football's "All-America" team and leaked stories for personal gain—and they loved him for it ("The statesman of," 1925). So began the myth of the "idealized coach." Before Camp, financially compensated college coaches were viewed negatively. Their presence suggested that a college valued success at any cost. Camp changed the perception. In the 90 years since Camp's death, sports journalists have attached two dominant themes to the "idealized coach:" first, they are stewards of American ideals; second, they are father figures.

The first dominant theme driven by journalists is that football coaches, through the teaching of young men, are stewards of American ideals. Former Alabama coach Paul "Bear" Bryant wrote in his 1974 autobiography, "I doubt there are any geniuses coaching football, but if you were to ask me if football is a coach's game, I'd have to say it is. And always was." Following Bryant's death in 1983, U.S. President Ronald Reagan awarded the coach the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Reagan called Bryant a "true American hero" and "patriotic to the core" (American Presidency Project). Football grew from a moment in time when America's identity and corporate spirit felt challenged (Oriard, 1993, pp. 44-45). The game became a symbol of American preservation, with coaches in a leadership role and journalists in their pockets.

Joe Paterno serves as the common thread that runs through this dissertation connecting research to concepts. He epitomized the second dominant theme of the idealized coach: the coach as moralistic father figure. After reporters revealed that Paterno did little to stop Jerry Sandusky's attacks on children, journalist J. Bryan Lowder criticized Paterno for failing to live up to his reputation as a "father-figure" (Lowder, 2011).

For nearly a half-century, journalists made Paterno more than an "idealized coach." As his career progressed, they made him *the* idealized coach. Until the Sandusky scandal, Paterno was unimpeachable, college football's all-time winningest coach who went by the endearing nickname "JoePa." Wrote the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s Frank Fitzpatrick:

> … what Paterno had after all these years was an aura. The Nittany Lions' coach had accumulated so much agreeable history that it glowed like a halo above a head that was at long last graying. The past insulated him from criticism. It guaranteed him control. It preceded him like a path of palm fronds in visiting cities and made him an icon in his adopted state. It earned him fame, fortune, power, and respect (Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 4).

When Penn State's Board of Trustees fired Paterno, it inflicted myth disruption upon the "idealized coach" narrative wove and reinforced by sports journalists for nearly a century. In the case of Paterno, myth disruption revealed sports journalists as enablers and caretakers of the Paterno legacy—and their own. Sports journalists responded by engaging in boundary performance, invoking media memory even while facing boundary disputes from their new, digital-only colleagues.

CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUALIZING MEMORY, BOUNDARY WORK, AND MYTH

Sports journalists used Joe Paterno to express the best of American culture and, in doing so, affirmed and adjusted parameters of their own profession. When Paterno turned down an offer to coach the New England Patriots in 1973, John Flynn of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* attributed Paterno's decision to college sport's superiority over professional sport. It was "the opportunity to work with young people and influence their lives," wrote Flynn (para. 4), even though Paterno gave another interview that explained he thought his family would be happier staying at Penn State.

Sports journalists predetermine storylines (Sanneh, 2011, para. 36). Television networks draw on collective memory to decide months in advance which college football games to broadcast. Ohio State versus Michigan and the University of Southern California versus UCLA earn top billing because their historical value generates corporate benefits, often regardless of how successful the teams are. The rise of a digitally based, alternative sports media turned these professional realities into public discourse. When ESPN struggled to cover breaking news, *SB Nation* blogger T. Kyle King wrote:

> And in the college football journalism world, certainty matters too. As early as the spring, storylines are developed and plans are set in motion. … The key is that they decide upon the story ahead of time, so when something comes up that doesn't fit the parameters of that story, they don't know what to do (King, 2007, para. 31-32).

This section reviews three areas of scholarship: first, literature on memory in media; second, boundary work in journalism, which interacts with memory; thirdly, signifiers and myth in journalism. Wove together, these three areas lay the

groundwork for sports journalism's construction of Joe Paterno, a cultural object so complex that his meanings continue to shift years after his death.

Theorizing media memory

Media and memory necessitate addresses to the past. Journalism needs collective memory to put its accountings into context. Memory can exist without journalism, but journalism's public accountings of the past streamline memory work into the public consciousness (Zelizer, 2008). The interface between media and memory benefits from a relationship that reinforces and builds cultural understanding through the use of narrative and boundaries as cultural, journalistic devices (Berkowitz, 2011).

This dissertation conceptualizes media memory as journalism informed by collective memory that provides mediated context for present and future events. As such, this conceptualization will be broken into two sections: first, it performs a review of journalism within memory studies; second, it discusses how memory helps understand journalism as a text and how memory serves as a tool for production.

Using memory to inform culture. Sociologist Emile Durkheim sought to understand the collective memory of a culture in 1893's "The Division of Labor in Society." Not until Halbwachs' research into collective memory in the 1930s and 1940s, however, did memory studies begin to take shape as a discipline. Halbwachs wrote that there are two primary forms of memory: that which is our own and is difficult to access (influenced by Freud and not of interest to this dissertation), and that which comes from a "common domain."

Journalists construct collective memory to maintain their authority as storytellers of public events (Zelizer, 1992). Memory serves a cultural purpose. It helps a community make meaning from its past, understand present relationships, and creates expectations for the future. Media communication, whether written word, electronic, or digital, contributes to collective memory by preserving pasts for present and future generations that did not experience the original moment (Edy, 1999). Journalists, Edy wrote, use history in three ways: to commemorate; to make historical analogies; and to provide historical contexts.

Edy argued that media communication stores collective memory older than the oldest living person. Digital archives and warehoused information on the Internet have accelerated this stewardship. Hirsch called this concept "postmemory" (2008). She conceptualized postmemory as the relationship of second generations to powerful experiences that preceded their birth but were nevertheless communicated to them so that they developed their own "memory" of the experience. Hirsch centered her discussion on trauma and visual media, but her discussion can be explicated to include other genres of journalism.

Understanding the memory-journalism interface means understanding how to study journalism culturally (Zelizer, 2004; Berkowitz, 2011). Cultural scholarship allows scholars to develop a toolkit to understand journalism's symbols and rituals in a more global context, beyond normative practices (Reese, 2001). If culture can be thought of broadly as a collection of actions and understandings performed in consensual ways, then journalism can be understood similarly, as a profession with cultural performances of collective behavior.

The great conflict arises, Zelizer argues, when cultural analyses of journalism contradict conventional analyses. This tension showed in research of coverage of the Columbia Space Shuttle explosion (Edy & Daradanova, 2006). Journalists who covered the event believed they did good news work by drawing comparisons to the Challenger disaster from two decades earlier. The researchers saw it differently. Memory freed reporters from having to rely on official sources, which supported autonomy and empowered the reporters. It also potentially damaged the experience of news consumers. Columbia and Challenger were distinct disasters for NASA, but collective memory grouped them together and limited coverage of the timelier Columbia story.

Journalists also use memory to commemorate their own profession (Carlson, 2006). During wartime, for example, a country's collective memory runs deep, which makes it a key place for journalists to locate the importance of their work. The death of a prominent journalist allows journalists to discuss the state of their own profession (Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014), but it also allows journalists the opportunity to embed the value of their profession in the collective memory of their communities (Carlson, 2007b). Part of journalism culture is to constantly try to legitimize and make meaningful their work to themselves and others (Hanitzsch, 2007). As a result, journalists narrate memories of two cultures: the communities they cover, and their professional culture (Meyers, 2007). Despite this, Kitsch argues, the two cultures are not mutually exclusive; journalism fits within a larger culture's collective memory. Media's memory work, which constructs memory across time and space, serves the needs of both the broader culture and itself (Kitch,

2008). Media do not just record events that become memory. It also forms memory, and in the age of the digital archive acts as a hub for other memory networks.

Journalists use collective memory to construct narrative (Berkowitz, 2010). After New Orleans suffered Hurricane Katrina, journalists combined memory of Katrina to the city's long history of professional-sports mediocrity (Serazio, 2010). Journalists wrote and said that the New Orleans Saints' Super Bowl victory had somehow "healed" New Orleans. The victory may have been fun—even provided an emotional release—but the city itself still faced legitimate infrastructural challenges.

Although journalists help shape collective memory, it is imperative to remember that collective memory is a multidirectional process. Culture informs journalism as much as journalism informs culture (Neiger, et al, 2011). Where journalists stand apart is through their ability to rapidly concretize collective memory. Collective memory is concretized through structures such as folk stories, newspapers, films, and the Internet. Collective memory infuses journalism, which in turn infuses collective memory by comparing events to other social actors or using sources and interviews to compare them (Berkowitz, 2011).

Memory as a tool for reading journalism as a text, and for journalism production. Memory can also be used to understand journalism as a text. Journalism, like most professions, is an interpretive community with individuals who bring beliefs and attitudes to the communities they cover. Internal discussions within communities are never in consensus and are almost always in negotiation (Zelizer, 2004). For instance, a journalist's view of journalism is influenced by the perspectives with which she has aligned herself, her upbringing, the organization

she works for, and her memories. Other journalists bring their own influences, too. Journalists and their experiences and memories form part of the culture of journalism. Reading journalism as a text means trying to understand journalism as an exclusive culture and as a component to wider culture.

Journalism as institution carries different meanings than journalism as profession. Practices, people, and behavior comprise part of what we mean when we say "journalism." Approaching journalism as a cultural text frees us to research what those institutions and behaviors *mean*. Shifting journalism from an object to text transforms journalism into discourse.

Collective memory exists to assist interpretive communities make meaning of their pasts. Journalists support journalism by acting on the collective memory of journalism's role in society (Carlson, 2007b). The collective memory of Vietnam, the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan, and the September 11 terrorist attacks are mediated collective memories. Nothing about 9/11 took place without a video camera or a reporter narrating it. Journalists understand this and, through memory work, make sure their communities know it as well. Ultimately, one of the primary roles of journalism is to champion journalism.

Another way to read journalism textually is by studying how it fits within the broader culture. The story of the Holocaust survivor who died at Virginia Tech was an example of journalism working in a healing capacity (Berkowitz, 2010). Memory also allows journalism to reappropriate sour memories as empowering memories, like the Israeli journalist who gave new meaning to the Holocaust by "celebrating" Holocaust Remembrance Day (Neiger, et al, 2014). The sports journalists in New

Orleans (Serazio, 2010) searched for signs of healing within their city. Memory as a tool uncovers how cultures use journalism. Journalists have agency, but memory is multidirectional, and cultures will do with it what they want or need.

Memory work occurs at the intersection of trajectories and domains (Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014). Trajectories are activities that unfold between two points in time, like World War II from 1939-45. Domains are the single moments where the work is done on a subject, like storming Normandy, the liberation of Auschwitz, or the raising of the American flag at Iwo Jima. In this respect, memory informs us when and how journalism will take place. Prospective memory—the representation of something that needs to happen or has not yet happened—hints that journalism's place in culture is not simply to narrate memory, or to help a culture learn from its past, but to create its future (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011).

Memory also gives journalists points of reference for how to cover current stories. It informs them of what questions to ask, which sources to use, and how to structure a story (Edy & Daradanova, 2006). Whether or not they consciously consider cultural impact, editors understand that their consumers attach personal experiences to stories. Meyers (2007) argued that journalists use memory to explain the cultural trajectory of journalism publications. One publication he studied was at first deviant, then launched the careers of popular journalists, then became accepted by the public.

Memory also serves news consumers who unknowingly crave the comforts of familiar narratives instead of the cognitive dissonance that occurs when journalists or cultural events break from the narrative. Memory and media are

intertwined. Journalism would be culturally disassociated without memory, while nurturing collective memory within a culture that does not have journalism would be terribly inconvenient. It is tough to imagine sports journalism without the historical significance of statistics, or without the memories of Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson, or track athletes John Carlos and Tommie Smith proudly raising their fists at the 1968 Olympics. Winners and losers are remembered through journalism, record books, Internet search engines, and in stories passed down through generations. Journalists compare players from one era to players from another for the purpose of determining "the best" or the "most villainous." Sports journalists' memories of pre-televised events were formed fully by mediated collective memory, within the globital memory field (Reading, 2011; Edy, 1999).

Bourdieu conceptualized "fields" as arenas for struggles related to cultural production. It is the "site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42). Anna Reading conceptualized globital memory fields as a memory field held together by electronic, algorithmic, and geographic production. The field does not rank the physical witnessing of an event any higher than the mediated witnessing. The more vital elements to witnessing in the digital world are the velocity of witnessing (time between when the event occurs and when it is witnessed) and the modality (on television, laptop computer, or a mobile device). Electronic and algorithmic factors flatten time, which is one way sports journalists can slip

seamlessly from writing about LeBron James to writing about Jim Thorpe without jeopardizing journalistic authority.

Digitally driven selective memory has created a flourish of "memory silos" (Edy, 2014). Memory silos occur when groups of people within communities of interest share a collective memory unique to their group. These groups operate oblivious to the notion that their memory is "atypical" outside the boundaries of their community. When Joe Paterno became swept up in the Jerry Sandusky scandal, non-sports journalists, nontraditional sports media, and news consumers expressed mortification for Sandusky's child victims. "How did Penn State University let this happen?" was a common question. Traditional sports journalists fit what Edy would call a selective "community of interest." Operating within a memory silo, their most common question was, "What does this mean for Joe Paterno?"

Technologies disrupt journalism's boundaries

Journalism offers scholars a unique opportunity to study professional boundaries (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003). Rapidly changing technologies, a restructuring global economy, and corporate shifts have reshaped journalism discourses of professionalism while rebooting questions such as what is journalism, who is a journalist, and who gets to decide (Singer, 2003; Deuze, 2005; Anderson, 2008)? New technologies have developed as the Internet has grown. Chat rooms and message boards corralled people with similar interests from across the world, blogs and other self-publishing platforms dramatically reduced printing costs for those looking for avenues into media, and social media changed concepts of labor and distribution (Robinson, 2011). As the news environment rapidly transforms,

"journalism" becomes a disputed term (Edy, Snidow, & Rozzell, 2016). One consistent note throughout the changes has been journalism's performance of boundary work. Dominant themes have emerged from these discussions of boundaries, including professional discourse, autonomy, normalization, identity, and gatekeeping.

The fundamental aim of a profession is for groups to create boundaries that allow them to judge their own competence and set their own standards (Anderson, 2008). Boundary work in journalism began before the digital age. Its goals are broader than whatever happens to be the technology of the day. Boundary work allows a profession to determine for itself who gets to be "in the club" and who does not (Geiryn, 1999, cited in Lamont & Molnár, 2002). It allows members of a group to be able to self-identify and find their social worth. The growth of the Internet has brought boundary work to the surface of journalism studies. Inherent digital traits, including a culture of openness and the democratization of information, disrupt autonomy journalists long have coveted.

In 2001 Deuze urged scholars not to think of the Internet as a news venture with boundaries separate from journalism's. Instead, given the Internet's potential for rapid development, he urged them to use it as a testing ground for new forms of journalism. The Internet, a digitized network with global reach, could provide fertile ground for the reconsideration of news-making skills, professional roles and definitions, and audience expectations. In addition to what journalists might do with the Internet, Deuze surmised journalists might struggle with what others do with it. Journalists have struggled. The Internet democratized information. Online

characteristics such as interactivity, hypertextuality, and customization of content were granted not just to journalists, but most anyone with access to a computer and Internet access.

Professional journalists engage in boundary work to create distinct spaces of "us" and "them" (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Boundary work can be typification systems that indicate differences and similarities between one group and another, such as the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics. It can also be a form of mobilization in reaction to external or internal challenges. When a group faces a boundary challenge, it responds by attempting to expel the challenger from its boundaries, by expanding its boundaries to include the challenger, or by protecting its autonomy to declare that an outside group lacks the authority to make boundary claims (Geiryn, 1999). Professionals form symbolic and social boundaries. Symbolic boundaries include negotiated norms that categorize appropriate professional practices. Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences.

This "discourse of professionalism" (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003) serves as a mechanism for occupational change. Journalists engage this discourse as a form of occupational identity and self-discipline. It allows them to wear an occupational "badge" (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003; Singer, 2003) that gives meaning to their work. This ideology enables both self-discipline and, to a degree, self-exploitation, while at the same time justifying their profession's social importance. Adoption of professional norms sets boundaries. It also reinforces identity to such a degree that it makes professional change a slow, difficult process.

Journalistic myths, like that of the crusading scribe taking on unscrupulous public figures, reproduce through literature and film to give journalism social capital with the American public. Attitudes toward journalism in the United States are a shared professional discourse between the public and journalists. The "fundamental challenge" posed by online journalists to traditional journalists is about the discourse of professionalism (Singer, 2003). Because of the online format of digital newsrooms, scholars looking to define journalism need to study what journalists *do* instead of the structure of their newsrooms.

What do journalists do that makes them autonomous, ethical professionals? Such exploration of professional discourse unnerved traditional journalists. Many online journalists did not operate within ethical boundaries of the profession, nor did they need to (Deuze, 2005). Online journalism's inherent speed coupled with editorial and commercial interests challenged the traditional professional discourse of journalism. Despite these conflicts, online and traditional journalism became more integrated, not less. Singer identified two necessities to integrate online and traditional communities. First, there would have to be considerable adaptation in the self-identification of what a journalist is and does. Second, online journalism would have to make changes to the way it carries itself out.

New forms and technologies appeared as online journalism became more common. Furthering Deuze's argument that online journalism should not be looked at independently from traditional journalism, research turned toward normalization and gatekeeping. Weblogs, or blogs, are online journals that can be used for personal, professional, or social benefit. Singer (2005) found journalists used blogs

to fit and enhance traditional journalism norms and practices. Like other forms of technologies, blogs were normalized by journalists. Blog posts by columnists held more opinions than blog posts by reporters, suggesting they were trying to maintain their professional roles in the new format.

Although the Internet allowed for interactivity, blogging reporters showed little evidence of wanting to incorporate user input, which helped journalists maintain their gatekeeping status. Those who used hyperlinks usually linked to other professional journalists, not to readers or independent blogs. They were trying to maintain control over the information. The journalism-blogging relationship became an occupational struggle contested within an organization of production (Lowrey, 2006). In the case of traditional journalists versus bloggers, Lowrey noted five differences, including variations in tone, content, and work processes. Occupations exist within interrelated systems, where they compete for jurisdiction over roles. When competition arises between two occupations, the advantage lies with the more institutionalized occupation. As traditional journalists competed with bloggers, journalism found that it could adapt some of its professional norms to fit the blogging format, while blogging had to adopt whole new sets of norms to fight its way inside journalism's boundaries.

Carlson's findings (2007a) supported the organization of production. He uncovered tensions between traditional journalists and bloggers that Singer had earlier noted between traditional and online journalists, which suggested that tensions are more culturally based than technologically based. Journalists expressed frustration that bloggers lessened their gatekeeping function. Journalists responded

by creating a discourse on the credibility of blogs. This discourse was a boundary performance, an attempt to expel bloggers from the profession of journalism while simultaneously—through acknowledging blogs' usefulness in reporting—normalizing blogs within the profession. Recognizing a blog's ability to interact with audience, journalists sought to embrace those and other technological affordances to make news more inclusive and transparent (Robinson, 2007). The press created new forms of journalism by adopting new technologies. In doing so, the press also created a new, interactive public sphere. Intentionally relinquishing some gatekeeping duties was journalism's admission that it needed malleable boundaries to remain socially desirable.

Values between online and traditional journalists overlapped. Both valued truth. Traditional journalists saw the search for "truth" as a defining professional value, while bloggers championed truth by watching the watchdogs (Singer, 2007). Arguing that democratic power is spread out, not concentrated, bloggers contested the autonomy of traditional journalists. Traditional journalism's move into the online sphere meant contested autonomy was inevitable, because online almost everything is connected. Bloggers checking on journalists gave journalists the opportunity to strengthen their norms and discuss their public value—even if they did not like the bloggers' methods.

Because the fundamental aim of a profession is to allow groups to define their own standards (Anderson, 2008), challenges to autonomy are met with boundary performances, or sometimes outright banishment from the group. The interconnectivity of the Internet makes expulsion difficult, so attempts are made to

negotiate expansion or adaptation of boundaries. User-generated content, for example, resulted in an expansive range of experimental practices by news organizations (Thurman, 2008). Some experiments were shaped by cost, others by perceived audience interest. These threats—or opportunities, depending how news organizations treated them—led to changes in professional identity. The threat of deprofessionalization altered norms. Journalists tried to protect their boundaries more than ever by clinging to ethics. Beam, Weaver, and Brownlee (2009) observed that nonprofessional journalists had the freedom to tinker with new technologies, but corporate and market pressures made taking advantage of technologies difficult for professional journalists. The Internet squashed journalists' gatekeeping ability—their "knowledge monopoly." The Internet's connectivity, described by Singer (2007), was explicated by Wiik (2010), who noted that knowledge-based occupations such as journalism, where information is currency, were having their self-identity dismantled by the Internet. The knowledge monopoly disintegrated as the Internet diffused more and more knowledge.

News became a social process. Robinson argued that news transitioned from product to a social contract of transactional, professional, and civic work (2011). Most notable in Robinson's study was how the work had become a shared process between producers and users. Journalism had become its own form of social media. The journalism process, she wrote, began when a reporter or blogger produced content, at which point the news process came to include commenting, sharing, and the production of follow-up content. For users, it was an entirely new form of labor. Their work was never done. They will forever be asked to evaluate and share news

that they find useful to their personal, social, and professional lives. Users became active participants in the news, although some journalists, reluctant to relinquish their gatekeeping duties, may choose to look at users as "active recipients" (Singer, et al, 2011). Journalists expected users to take a more active role in distributing information. It took time, but journalists came to grips with prying open what had long been a closed profession.

Although two decades have passed since digital culture met journalism, technology driven tension continues to flourish. Lewis (2012) argued that the sociology of journalism and the ideology of digital media and online cultures held fundamental contradictions that made finding a remedy difficult. Journalism is a profession. Its participants engage in boundary work. Journalists hold a near impenetrable ideology of gatekeeping, identity, and information control that, when broken, threatens their identities and social worth. By contrast, digital culture operates with a foundational logic of openness and participation. Juxtaposing the ideology of journalism with the ideology of online participation produced an unyielding tension. The two sides continue to engage in negotiation, but how far is either willing to go in the service of news work?

Social media further muddied journalism's jurisdictional claims to news production (Hermida, 2012), especially because journalism cannot reconcile the need to gate-keep with its reliance on active participants and recipients. Social media, meanwhile, has produced a secondary layer of gatekeepers (Singer, 2014). News companies have optimized their websites to allow users to share information,

making everyone a gatekeeper. Or, as Singer wrote, there may be no gates left, but there are more gatekeepers than ever.

One can begin to understand modern journalism by studying its three principles: professionals, practices, and participants (Carlson, 2015). In the following section, I will apply the discussion points of boundary work, new technologies, and professional journalism discourse to sports journalism. Some connections will be made anecdotally.

Boundary work in the sports-journalism sphere. Singer (2003) showed that traditional journalists feared online journalists not only because online journalists operated outside professional ethics, but because consumers paid no notice. That was the case when the digital sports-media website *Deadspin* paid $12,000 for information that produced a sexually charged story that violated social norms (Deggans, 2011). The story shattered *Deadspin*'s record for visits to the site. *Deadspin* even ended up setting the tone for how traditional journalists covered the story.

Sports journalists care deeply about their professional identities, but perhaps in a different vein than the concepts of self and identity described by Aldridge and Evetts. Whereas Aldridge and Evetts saw journalists' sense of self as something that gives their work social meaning, sports journalists may view their identities as a form of social currency, more in line with Wiik's research showing journalists have increasingly fewer ways of distinguishing themselves from other journalists. Longtime sports journalist Frank Deford delivered a keynote address called "Sportswriter is One Word" to the professional organization Associated Press Sports

Editors. In his memoir, "Scribe," Boston sports journalist Bob Ryan told readers "Sportwriting is a two-part word" (p. 6) to wall off sports writing from other forms of journalism.

Although sports journalism research exists in journalism studies, far more is needed. Early research of sports journalism revealed similarities to the boundary performances of news journalists, including gatekeeping, identity, and normalization. Sports media members extended their gatekeeping authority into networked realms to broaden access, but they replaced them with new, more subtle gatekeeping functions (Coddington & Holton, 2014). Similar to Singer's 2005 findings that journalists normalized blogs, Reed (2013) showed how sportswriters normalized Twitter while largely ignoring Facebook. Twitter allowed for boundary maintenance. Sportswriters could tweet *at* readers and mostly retweeted other sportswriters, just as political journalist-bloggers at one point mostly hyperlinked only to other journalists. Facebook's allure stemmed from its interactivity, argued Reed, while Twitter acted as a news ticker, more useful in engaging what Singer, et al. (2011) labeled "active recipients." Facebook users shared content, too, a detail Reed did not fully address. But far more interaction is expected through Facebook than Twitter, he argued, allowing sportswriters to retain their gatekeeping functions.

Traditional sports journalists condemned the practices of online-only sports journalists, but they also adopted practices. While traditional sports journalists followed *Deadspin*'s lead by reporting on the sex story, it continued to patrol journalistic boundaries by simultaneously criticizing *Deadspin* for violating

journalism ethics. The *New York Times* ran a story with a headline telling readers *Deadspin* had paid $12,000 for the content, assuming readers would find it interesting (Sandomir, 2010). The story also noted that *Deadspin* published against her will the name of the female employee who received the player's photos and voicemails, and also that the NFL had opened an investigation into the matter.

A year later the *New York Times* performed similar boundary work against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. The *Times* collaborated with Assange to use his information to produce stories about secret American government dealings, but it simultaneously condemned Assange for everything from his business practices to his physical appearance (Coddington, 2012). The *Times* positioned itself distant from WikiLeaks, even as it collaborated with WikiLeaks, just as boundary maintenance allowed the *Times* to distance itself from *Deadspin*, even as the news organization used *Deadspin*'s content for its own follow-up reporting.

Online-only journalists resist "old journalism" by establishing their own badges and boundaries (Singer, 2003). Since the turn of the millennium, the Online News Association has acted as a resource for new journalists. Digital sports websites such as *SB Nation* and *Bleacher Report* pulled the bulk of their content from fan-generated blogs that lacked the access and institutional knowledge of traditional sports journalists. Fan-generated blogs rely on websites such as ASAP Sports, which publishes transcripts of athletes' interviews at press conferences and other events. The value of access was disrupted because the Internet provided almost identical sound bites. Some former traditional sports journalists, who now work at online at digital-only companies, have said their reduction in contact with athletes has made

them feel freer to report honestly and accurately (Simmons, 2009). They no longer fear having their access revoked on the whim of an angry player or media-relations worker.

In some cases, online sports journalists turned traditional journalistic boundary spaces against traditional journalists (Schwartz, 2015). *Deadspin* caught former *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN.com* columnist Rick Reilly self-plagiarizing three times between 2009-2014. *Deadspin* and other online sites, including *Uproxx*, engaged the discourse of professionalism by citing publicly the traditional ethical standards that Reilly breached. Reilly retaliated by claiming bloggers were nonprofessionals who worked in their "mothers' basements" (Leitch, 2008; Anas, 2011).

Interestingly, Lewis' juxtaposition of journalism ideology and online culture plays differently within sports journalism than the traditional (non-sports) journalism of which he was writing. Portions of Lewis' model would have to be rethought if sports journalism were included. Journalism's professional boundaries call for control over information and selective dissemination, but sport, like online culture, is communal (Simons, 2013). American sport is a spectacle, created to be enjoyed en masse. The ideology of openness and participation in digital culture cited by Lewis fits nicely within the ideology of spectator sports. Millions of Americans fill college and professional sports stadiums each year to watch their teams, and tens of millions more congregate over social media to discuss sports they are watching on television or streaming online (Wagner, 2016). Twitter users generated thousands of tweets per second during the Super Bowl. In ways that "traditional" journalism

and digital cultures cannot coexist peacefully, sports journalism and digital culture might be able to. Sports journalism lives at the intersection of the journalism ideology/online culture Venn diagram.

Although sports journalism in the United States dates to the early 19th century, it does not sit firmly within the boundaries of traditional journalism as described in journalism studies. While traditional journalism uses identity to create an us/them scenario between journalists and non-journalists, sports journalists use identity to create an us/them scenario between sports journalists and non-sports journalists. Boundary work is performed by professionals, not just journalism professionals, which makes one wonder whether journalism and sports journalism are two related yet ultimately different industries.

Signifiers and myth in journalism

Myth is a second-order mode of signification that enables cultural associations beyond their initial, literal significations. It is how, Barthes argues, cultures give meanings to their worlds. Mythologies "disappear" history. What is true or untrue is irrelevant (Durham & Kellner, 2012, p. 89). Truth does not exist. Rather, "facts" are supported tautologically, unchallenged. Myths create defined cultural parameters inside of which individuals must define themselves. The individual is discouraged from re-inventing herself beyond those parameters because the parameters are presented as timeless.

Using Barthes' 1972 conceptualization of mythology, anything can be a myth because myths are discourses, not objects. Through discourse, an object's or event's history is appropriated into new meanings. Those meanings can be further

manipulated to create even more meanings. Its citizens no longer choose meanings, so ownership of history becomes a form of cultural currency. They only have to endorse them. Journalistic mythmaking draws its strength from a culture's need for reassurance (Bird & Dardenne, 1988). Journalists reinforce cultural narratives by telling reassuring tales, providing answers to difficult questions, and making a framework for cultural understanding. The components for these constructions—"facts," names, and details—form a "symbolic system," the sum of which "teaches" a cultural about its constructed and reconstructed history.

News stories spring from reliable formulae loaded with mythical archetypes (Lule, 2002). Lule studied the *New York Times* in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001 and found the publication used four myths to shape events: the end of innocence, the victims, the heroes, and the foreboding future. One can explicate this study of news into sports news with archetypes like the hero, the villain, the underdog, and the aging veteran. Culture drawing strength from media narratives, discussed by Bird and Dardenne in 1988, is complicated by digital technologies (Bird & Dardenne, 2009). Keen (2008, p. 81) argued that amateur journalists who operated digitally were a "deeply disturbing" phenomenon of the modern web. But this opinion failed to consider alternative media's ability to police—even improve—the professional practices of traditional journalism. Further, digital media allows nontraditional journalists to propose competing narratives if "journalists today do not have the will to do it, or if the corporate and other owners don't provide the resources to do it" (Bird & Dardenne, 2009).

Sport journalism, itself a canvas for competing narratives, is infused with myth (Wenner, 2012). Media are not simply creating narratives out of thin air. Media reflect what culture is willing to accept. Sport media, argues Wenner, consolidate the meanings of "amazing athletes" and "moral character" into a single narrative. Athletes who violate narrative usually do not disrupt the narrative because journalism works to vilify the athlete, even expel him from the system for the sake of narrative maintenance. If anything, a misbehaving athlete reinforces the narrative because a sports figure who receives a suspension or fine—or receives a permanent banishment, such as Paterno—forfeits the right to participate in sport. The figure, absent of morality, is no longer exceptional. Journalists blame the person, not the system in which he participates.

Sports journalists use football and other sports to signify cultural values (Butterworth, 2010; Anderson, 2001; Oriard, 1993). Newspaper journalists in the 1960s mediated college football players as anti-hippies and anti-radical (Oriard, 2009). That was untrue. Many black football players in the American South participated in protests. College football players of varying economic and cultural backgrounds in the American North engaged in rebellion by joining student-action groups, wearing the day's fashions, and publicly speaking their minds. But as Barthes noted, truth is irrelevant. If sport is myth, then sport maps our narrated world (Jhally, 1989). Riffing Marx, Sut Jhally wrote that sport is the new opiate of the masses, a provider of emotional gratification that gives consumers "compensatory fulfillment." What's more, the relationship between sport and consumer is always

narrated. Mediated sport is not coverage of an event. Mediated sport is coverage of a sport that is mediated.

The relationship between sport and media has always been symbiotic (McChesney, 1989; Oriard, 2004). When colleges struggled to recruit students in the late 19th century, they found that football games attracted newspapers and that newspapers attracted revenue-generating local fans (Thelin, 1994). Sportswriters in turn found celebrity through their work. Grantland Rice, one of the 20th century's earliest celebrity sportswriters, wrote that if a sportswriter was not turning athletes into heroes, he was not doing his job (Inabinett, 1994). One might laugh off that approach as coming from a different moment in time, but it persists. For example, Bob Ryan, the longtime Boston sports journalist and ESPN personality, wrote in his 2015 autobiography that his style was influenced by the greats he read while growing up, including Rice. To Rice, sport was "a separate and significant reality" that "stood apart from the ordinary world" (Harper, 1999).

To create myth, argued Barthes, signs are used as signifiers to make meaning. Meanings are malleable because signifiers are malleable, dependent upon amending cultural values. This creates the "shifting signifier," a cultural object, text, or artifact that is "provisional, contingent, and improvisatory" with evolving and adaptable meanings (Barry, 2009, 3rd edition, pp. 143-147). Shifting signifiers resemble floating signifiers because their meanings are difficult to pin down. However, whereas a floating signifier is "void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning" (Levi-Strauss, 1987, pp. 63-65), shifting signifiers are not void of meaning.

Cultural objects hold meanings, but those meanings become unstable as the cultures they represent discard old values and adopt new ones. Shifting signifiers reflect the fluidity of cultural relationships, absorbing meaning, even if that meaning will not be permanent. The shifting signifier might even contribute to the instability (Giroux, 1991, p. 17). Shifting signifiers are dynamic (Furman, 2002, p. 54). Their meanings—whether for the hero, villain, or something unrelated—fluctuate.

Individuals in societies emulate the behaviors and values celebrated in their great people, but societies also remake their heroes to fit their current needs. Although the foundational elements of the hero myth remain unchanged—living a "hero-life" while performing "hero-deeds" (Campbell, 2008, p. 300)—the behaviors and values that a society celebrates in its heroes exist in a constant state of flux (Roessner, 2014, p. 8). The tales of heroes and leaders exemplified a form of social behavior that added to the "maintenance of an established order" (Campbell, 1995). Signifiers—including the traits of a hero—do not just shape culture. They reflect and reinforce the cultures in which they exist.

Therefore, I ask the following questions:

RQ1: How has memory been used by sports journalists to narrate Paterno mythology?

RQ2: How did sports journalists' use of memory shift the meanings of Paterno?

RQ3: How did sports journalists covering Paterno patrol professional boundaries and bestow cultural authority?

RQ4: What role does memory play in constructing the professional boundaries of sports journalism?

Methods

This research is based on qualitative textual analysis of archival materials about Joe Paterno and related topics. The research is also grounded in critical historical analysis, which allows for multiple historical perspectives of past events and is crucial for understanding past mediated works across contexts. This section of the chapter describes the approach for each method, which leads to the triangulation required of critical-historical research (Howell & Prevenier, 2001; Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

Newspaper, magazine, and online articles can be used as primary or secondary documents, depending on what is being studied. Articles presented in this dissertation operate as primary texts. Analysis was focused on content, tone, organization, authorship, and narration. Articulating the articles in this manner benefited the dissertation by confronting the research questions.

Textual analysis of journalism

Joe Paterno's mass-mediated life began in the box score of a high school football game on November 6, 1944, his junior year at Brooklyn Preparatory School ("St. Cecilia on," 1944). A *New York Times* article reported that Brooklyn Prep lost to St. Cecilia. St. Cecilia was coached by Vince Lombardi, who went on to become *the* iconic coach of the National Football League. Historical coverage of Paterno fit this study in two ways. First, the majority of sports-focused research within journalism studies has focused on current trends, like how sports journalists use social media (Sanderson, 2008; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010; Hutchins, 2011). It also has focused on normative values like relationships between writers and sources, salaries, and

celebrity (Andrews, 2013). A textual analysis of past and present content helped build a more foundational understanding of how sports journalism fits into journalism studies.

Second, although American sports journalism can be traced back to the early 19th century, the institutional form as it appears today took shape during the Hearst-Pulitzer news battles of the early 20th century. That time period was when newspaper publishers, to drive circulation, created separate sections for sports news and elevated sportswriter salaries. The earliest primary texts examined for this dissertation—newspaper articles about former Yale and Stanford college football coach Walter Camp—were created during this period.

This textual analysis focused on uncovering common themes related to the conceptual framework (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). Emergent themes around Paterno included money as evil temptation, the value of academic integrity, and the college coach as vessel of American ideals. Data from different time periods were collected to saturation, the point when "data adequacy" had been attained and "no new information is achieved" (Morse, 1995). Saturation relies on the researcher to become aware of all or most possible outcomes. In this dissertation, cases were "chosen because there may be a good reason to believe that 'what goes on there' is critical to understanding some process or concept, or to testing or elaborating some established theory" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 129).

Data came from sports-news articles discovered online through LexisNexis, online historical databases managed by the Free Library of Philadelphia, the ProQuest Historical Newspaper Database through the University of Iowa Libraries,

online search engines Google and Bing, "The Vault," which is *Sports Illustrated* magazine's online archive, and Newspaper Archive, an online archive of smaller daily and weekly newspapers. Data also came from physical and microfiche archives at the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Penn State Sports Archive hosted by the Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State University, and the Manuscripts and Archives Room at Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library. Some contextual data were collected from sports-journalism autobiographies and mass-market books written about Paterno by sports journalists.

In all, these searches yielded 408 news items, opinion pieces, and blog posts. Data collected from Yale University focused on select papers of Walter Camp from 1890-1925, dealing primarily with Camp's correspondence related to the formation of football, and obituaries following his death. The Free Library of Philadelphia houses archives of two historic Philadelphia newspapers: *The Daily News* and the *Inquirer*. There are no digital archives for those newspapers for content produced before 1979. I sought editions of *The Daily News* and the *Inquirer* dating back to 1950. The Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State University allowed me access to key primary documents related to Paterno, including speeches, internal memos, and media guides. The Penn State archive also included files of old Paterno-related news clippings from sources unavailable electronically. I also used the archive to view old Penn State football broadcasts. The Free Library of Philadelphia and Penn State University archives were especially useful to locate data from the first 15 years of Paterno's tenure as head coach, 1966-1981.

The Free Library of Philadelphia's online database of historical newspapers proved invaluable to collecting data from the 1980s. The database includes archives to more than 3,600 daily and weekly newspapers from 1982 to present. "The Vault," *Sports Illustrated*'s online archive, was useful because of how much space the magazine has devoted to Paterno over the years. "The Vault" also proved a challenge because the website launched a redesign during my research period. This redesign included a shift from Boolean search to an algorithm-driven keyword search that (often wrongly) tried to anticipate what I was looking for. The switch complicated my ability to search *Sports Illustrated*'s archive based solely on the headline of a story.

Updating technologies are a common challenge of Internet research. Internet data and the structure of online databases and archives problematize the linear nature of research (Hine, 2012, pp. 96-97). Google and Bing use "bots" to search the Internet for key words, web traffic, and social media shares. These elements of "search-engine optimization" make it difficult to find useful data from less-visited websites, such as local newspapers. Articles from the past week receive priority over articles from 20 years ago.

To compensate, Hine suggests thinking about archived data both in-context—the time in which it was created—and in the present. A 2012 article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on the death of Joe Paterno can be considered in a 2012 context among other Paterno tribute stories. In a 2016 context, the same story might be notable because the headline and story make it an ideal match for Google's "bots." This provides one way for a researcher to understand narratives in the

historical contexts in which they were produced, while also learning how new technologies alter context. For example, the *New York Times* has digitally optimized its full archives for Internet search, but the *Chicago Tribune* has not; some scans of old *Tribune* editions have been uploaded, but text within scanned documents is not searchable. Locating the *Tribune* scans took hours of research. Locating *Times* articles sometimes took seconds. In the 1970s the two major regional newspapers produced comparable Paterno coverage, but search engines, which do not prominently display *Tribune* archives, might lead one to think that journalists' interest in Paterno was limited to the East Coast. That was not the case.

As for the hard copies of documents, all information gathered from the Yale, Penn State, and Philadelphia Library archives was digitized into PDF form. A spreadsheet was built to catalogue all data, which were numbered consecutively based on production date. Each item was read for central themes that followed from the conceptual framework. The key themes were then connected to examples that illustrated them. Those examples are presented as the foundation of this dissertation.

Historical methods: A critical approach to journalism

This dissertation's historical textual analysis was rooted in critical history. Critical history digs "beneath the surface of events and phenomena using critical theoretical interpretive frames" (Aldridge, 2015, p. 103). It deployed a "new cultural" historical construction, which focused on textual analysis as a form of cultural analysis. This method is reflected in a discussion of critical history by Sanders and Williamson (2001). Although truth via interpretation is never concrete,

the triangulation of paradigms can paint a more complete picture of history than trying to see it through just one paradigm.

Gasman (2007) endorsed a multiple-paradigm approach when she suggested paradigms could be temporarily integrated, depending on the subject that is being studied. Gasman encouraged researchers to broaden their paradigmatic scope to broaden their understanding of sources. When journalists discussed Paterno's endorsement of George H.W. Bush for president in 1988, they considered his age, his politics, Bush's racial politics, and masculinity. Each of those subjects on their own create meaningful research, but combined they work together to produce a historical reconstruction of the era.

The challenge of interpreting history through social and cultural lenses is why Davidson and Lytle (2009) called history a "painstaking construction" held together by hypotheses and inferences. There is no single history; there are histories. While it might be unavoidable to get differing viewpoints about the meaning of a single historical event from different historians, Brundage called this lack of consensus essential to the field. Critical historians "demand accuracy in interpretation and an inclusion of all relevant factors when interpreting particular historical events" (Sanders and Williams, 2001). Interpreting Paterno as a shifting signifier—a cultural object with adaptable meanings (Barry, 2009)—requires a reconsideration of the historical periods in which sports journalists created his mass-mediated life.

Digitized historical records enhanced access to Paterno-related data. As Osmond and Phillips pointed out, digitized records are both a "utopian dream" for

historians and a complication because of other issues it raises (2015, p. 13). Concerns center on who gets to decide what gets digitized what does not, and how materials will be stored. This conflict implores historians to consider both the data and the methods by which the data were archived (Hine, 2012). Research into Paterno faces these concerns because his mass-mediated life transcended multiple eras of archival technology.

Reflections on data collection and analysis

Data were collected primarily from three time periods: 1966-1974, 1979-1988, and 2011-2012.

The first period, 1966-1974, began with Paterno's ascent to head coach and concluded with two historical moments key to this dissertation: Richard Nixon's resignation of the presidency, and the afterglow of 1973, a pivotal year in journalism's construction of Paterno. For context, there is some discussion of articles produced before 1966 and after 1974, but most content considered was produced during this time period.

The second period, 1979-1988, began with a temporary rupture in the Paterno narrative. His football team struggled, and several of his players faced disciplinary action. Former players told reporters that Paterno was not a good in-game coach and was emotionally distanced from his players. This led the *Philadelphia Daily News* and *Washington Post* to question Paterno's effectiveness as a coach.

The period ended with Paterno's political apex—his nomination of George H.W. Bush at the 1988 Republican National Convention. The couple of years before

and after 1980 proved useful because sports journalists transitioned Paterno from noble steward to secret despot to national champion. Penn State University's 1982 national championship—Paterno's first of two—transformed Paterno from idealist into the ideal.

The third time period, 2011-2012, is tied almost entirely to Penn State's Sandusky scandal. Some primary sources from 1989-2010 were referenced to fill in contextual holes. Otherwise, the most useful moments occurred from early November 2011, when mainstream media took hold of the Sandusky story, through late January 2012, when Paterno died from cancer. Restricting data to this three-month period allowed me to focus the dissertation on a specific moment of myth disruption—visible public actions and events that disrupt mythology and shatter cultural understanding. "Traditional" mainstream media and "nontraditional" digital media during this period found themselves at sensitive professional junctures.

Data collection was an academically rewarding process, but it also was personally fulfilling. Some of what I expected to find appeared in spades, which was gratifying. There is comfort in realizing you understand the discipline in which you work. I also found much that I did not expect. For example, I anticipated decades of praise heaped upon Paterno by journalists for his philanthropic work, especially with Penn State University's libraries. Yet the topic rarely came up, except in passing. In this I learned there is greater comfort in discovering much research remains. We are closer to the beginning of understanding how sports journalism fits within journalism studies than we are to the end.

Other considerations

Research requires scholars to make choices. Sometimes, choices are made for us. Two obstacles appeared during content collection.

Paterno Archive at Penn State University. I look forward to expanded research opportunities when they become available. For example, this dissertation does not contain material from Penn State University's Paterno Archive, held on the university's campus. Representatives of the university said the archive was sealed by the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General because of ongoing litigation related to the Jerry Sandusky affair. They said it could be "years" before the archive is re-opened.

Philadelphia Daily Bulletin. Although I was grateful for access to *The Daily News* and *Inquirer* during my time in Philadelphia, I was disappointed by my inability to gain access to the archives of the *Philadelphia Daily Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* was the city's largest newspaper at the time of Paterno's ascension to head coach in 1966. It went out of business in 1982. The *Bulletin*'s archives are housed at Temple University.

I made arrangements to visit Temple during my Philadelphia visit, but technical problems at the university's Samuel L. Paley Library made viewing the *Bulletin* impossible. I found several stray *Bulletin* articles in other archives that indicated its data would have been similar to that collected from the *Daily News* and *Inquirer*, so I do not believe the lack of access significantly altered this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: THE INCORRUPTIBLE PATERNO

Joe Paterno made Bill Conlin's job easy. The first thing Conlin, a *Philadelphia Daily News* columnist, told readers about Penn State's new football coach was that Paterno was a great quote (Conlin, 1966b). Maybe Penn State could win under Paterno. Maybe Paterno could advance players to the NFL. One thing was for certain: the man could *talk*. Paterno was an "extrovert guaranteed to produce crisp, readable quotes," wrote Conlin (para. 8). To sports journalists whose jobs depended on access to authoritative sources, Paterno's hiring in February 1966 was a dream come true.

In Paterno, sports journalists found their muse. When they asked Paterno about race relations in sports, he answered. When they asked about politics, he answered. Journalists bring beliefs and experiences to their profession. They know what they want a story to be and select sources who support their arguments. During the period when Paterno arrived, journalists viewed corruption as college sports' inevitable partner (Donaldson, 1974, para. 6-8). Academic fraud and underhanded recruiting were parts of the game. Paterno's emergence let journalists indulge their biases. Finally, here was someone to stand up to college football's corruption, someone worth promoting and celebrating for the good of the game.

Not long after Conlin's first column on Paterno appeared, Penn State University introduced Paterno in its media guide with a quote attributed to longtime New York sports journalist Stanley Woodward. "[Paterno] can't run and he can't pass. All he can do is think — and win" ("Joseph V. Paterno," 1966, p. 32). The university claimed Woodward wrote the line in 1949, when Paterno was a senior

quarterback at Brown University. The quote might be fabricated. Research for this dissertation turned up no evidence, Woodward's memoir does not mention Paterno, and none of Paterno's numerous biographers could find it:

> It's likely … that Woodward never wrote the line. Paterno never knew of anyone who had actually seen the quote, and though his family had clipped many of the stories written about Paterno as a player, no copy of Woodward's quote was found (Posnanski, 2012, p. 49).

Woodward's phantom quote set the tone for Paterno's mass-mediated life. It built a comfortable theme—the cerebral Paterno—despite suspect origins. It also planted the seeds for the traits sports journalists tried to instill in Paterno over the next half-century: awkward, talented, intelligent, resourceful. Whether those traits proved true did not matter.

Before Paterno became JoePa, the beloved father figure of Penn State University and journalists' hand-picked choice to carry college football's moral flag, he was an undersized but hard-working quarterback at Brown University. He came to Penn State in 1950 as an assistant coach. He remained an assistant until 1966, when he took over as head coach for his mentor, Charles A. "Rip" Engle. Engle was Paterno's head coach at Brown.

Between 1950 and 1965, Engle deployed Paterno to handle tedious media responsibilities in addition to his coaching duties. Paterno had a knack for it; Engle found it boring. Engle promoted Paterno to associate coach in 1964, which positioned Paterno as head-coach-in-waiting ("Joe Paterno is," 1964). When Paterno became head coach in 1966, the *Philadelphia Daily News*' Conlin wrote—without attribution—that Paterno "is a highly respected man in his field" (Conlin, 1966a). The article, which reported that Paterno once turned down the head-coaching job at

Walter Camp's old school, Yale University, marked the first of many in which Conlin championed Paterno.

Sports journalists began their construction of Paterno immediately after he became head coach. Wire service *United Press International* introduced two Paterno storylines that lived for decades ("Paterno is named," 1966). The first, which was true, was that Paterno forsake law school to become a college football coach. This was noted as far back as 1950 in the *Providence Bulletin*. The second, which was false, was that Engle had been so smitten with Paterno that he went out of his way to convince Paterno to abandon law school. In truth, Engle was desperate. Paterno was Engle's fourth choice (Michael O'Brien, 1999, pp. 39-40; Posnanski, 2012, pp. 52-53). Just before the start of Paterno's first season as Penn State's head coach, the *New York Times*' Lloyd Millegan wrote that Paterno's approach to football made Engle's hiring of him a foregone conclusion. "Engle," wrote Millegan, "was impressed by Paterno's leadership ability, and when he moved to Penn State in 1950, offered him a job" (Millegan, 1966, para. 12).

Paterno's head-coaching career began during a time of great American transition. Generational collisions of hopes and anxieties were playing out politically, on the streets, and through journalism. The "cultural revolution" (Kimball, 2001, pp. 4-5) did not occur suddenly. "[The cultural revolution] is not simply a new political orientation. It works through the depths of society. It writes the play in which political leaders will act much later. Besides, a complex 'developed' revolution is likely to be slow" (Revel, 1978, p. 9).

United States military troops entered Vietnam in March 1965. The Cold War between America and the Soviet Union drove global conflicts. In 1963, America's first Catholic president, John Kennedy, was assassinated. A year later the U.S. government passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Feminism leapt beyond academia into mainstream culture. The U.S. passed the Equal Pay Act in 1963, the same year Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater lost his 1964 bid for president but reinvigorated American conservatism and turned the Republican Party into a "breeding ground for the [1980] election of Ronald Reagan" (Grove, 1994, para. 13). The Black Panther Party for Self Defense was established in October 1966, one month after Paterno coached his first game. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy were assassinated two months apart in 1968. In 1969, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people gave public force to the gay liberation movement with the Stonewall Riots. This is but a very small sampling of what was going on in 1960s America.

Paterno was still finding was his way when U.S. voters elected Richard Nixon president in 1968. Some saw Nixon's ascent as conservative America's pushback against progressive politics (Converse, Miller, Rusk, & Wolfe, 1969). Whatever the reason, "Millions of Americans recognized … that America was engulfed in a pitched battle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. The only thing was: Americans disagreed radically over which side was which" (Perlstein, 2008, p. xii). Journalists used the coming years to make Paterno part of American discourse.

Paterno versus Nixon: The press picks sides

Penn State struggled to a 5-5 record in 1966, Paterno's first season as head coach. It improved to 8-2 his second season. By 1968 Paterno had turned Penn State into a national power. Four days after Nixon won the presidency on November 5, 1968, Paterno's Penn State football team beat the University of Miami to improve to 7-0. Penn State finished the year undefeated but did not win the national championship. Sportswriters, who used to vote on a national champion, awarded the championship to Ohio State ("Championship history," 2016).

At that point Paterno's and Nixon's careers appeared to be taking very different trajectories. But in 1969 Penn State was again streaking toward an undefeated season when Nixon made a seemingly innocuous decision that angered Paterno. On December 4 Nixon's press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, announced that Nixon would attend that weekend's college football game between the University of Texas and the University of Arkansas. Nixon would crown the winner college football's No. 1 team, and he would personally present that team with a plaque. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, this infuriated Pennsylvania governor Raymond Shafer, Paterno, and Penn State fans ("Nixon fumbles ball," 1969). Penn State's supporters believed their team deserved consideration.

By the following day, according to the *Inquirer* story, Ziegler had held three press conferences to address Penn State football. Shafer, Pennsylvania's governor, pushed back on the White House by telling journalists "Penn State is the nation's No. 1 football team." Ziegler responded by pushing back on Shafer. Ziegler cited an *Associated Press* poll that indicated the winner of Texas-Arkansas should be No. 1.

The *Inquirer* used football puns to describe Nixon's gaffe. The headline declared "Nixon Fumbles Ball on Award to Penn State." The body of the story noted that Nixon "bobbled" Pennsylvania's electoral votes, but that he "recovered the ball just before the whistle blew." Ziegler "was pushed deep into his own territory," and Friday, "his footwork was faster if still uncertain."

The *Inquirer* assigned one of football's most egregious errors, a fumble, to the nation's highest office. The story was written lightheartedly with a tone that suggested amusement rather than outrage. The climax occurred when Ziegler "reported breathlessly" that Nixon also wished to acknowledge Penn State ("Nixon fumbles ball," 1969, para. 10). The president would award Penn State a plaque to honor its undefeated season if the Nittany Lions won their Orange Bowl game against the University of Missouri.

Then Paterno entered the conversation. Sports journalists positioned him opposite Nixon. Nixon's decision to honor another football program gave Paterno a microphone and access to journalists from coast to coast. In 1969 college football was completing its transition from a regional game with national rooting interest to a fully national endeavor (Oriard, 2009, pp. 127-190; Branch, 2011).

The governing body of college athletics, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), tightly controlled how many games could be seen on television, who could see them, and which teams appeared (de Oca, 2013, pp. 84-92). Broadcast deregulation of college football did not begin until the late 1970s (Lee, 2009). In 1969, coaches struggled to command a national audience. Standing on the

back of the President of the United States, however, Paterno found his pulpit. He argued his team's case for a national title.

But Paterno broke character. Instead of feeding reporters articulate quotes, he let Penn State University craft a press release on his behalf. Press releases are a medium tailored made to achieve maximum media exposure (Lassen, 2006). Paterno's hit its mark. "Said" Paterno:

> First, I wish to congratulate [Texas] Coach [Darrell] Royal, not only on a great victory, but for having the courage to go for two points. This will stand him in good stead in the Cotton Bowl. It appears that Texas and Arkansas read the script from our Orange Bowl game last year and from our win over Syracuse.
>
> In response to numerous telephone calls I received today regarding President Nixon's television remarks concerning a plaque to Penn State for having the nation's longest unbeaten streak, I have heard nothing official about any such plaque.
>
> Before accepting such a plaque, I would have to confer with my squad. I'm sure they would be disappointed at this time, as would the Missouri squad, to receive anything other than a plaque for the No. 1 team. And the No. 1 team following the bowl games could be Penn State or Missouri.
>
> To accept any other plaque prior to the bowl games, which are supposedly to determine the final No. 1 team, would be a disservice to our squad, to Pennsylvania and to the East, which we represent, and perhaps most importantly to Missouri, which might just be the best team in the country.
>
> Due to the fact that I had to babysit with our four children while trying to watch today's game I did not get to hear all of President Nixon's remarks. But it would seem a waste of his very valuable time to present Penn State with a plaque for something we already have undisputed possession of—the nation's longest winning and unbeaten streaks (Hyman & White, 1971, pp. 5-6).

The press release triggered a chain of events by journalists that helped shape the next four decades of Paterno coverage. *United Press International* ran the statement but did not tell readers it came from a press release. It presented the

article as if a reporter spoke to Paterno ("Paterno may refuse," 1969). The wire service wrote:

> 'It would seem a waste of his [Nixon's] very valuable time to present Penn State with a plaque for something we already have undisputed possession of—the nation's longest winning streak,' Paterno said after watching the Texas-Arkansas game on television" ("Paterno may refuse," 1969, para. 4).

The *Philadelphia Daily News'* Bill Conlin altered Paterno's press release even more (Conlin, 1969a). Using the same excerpt lifted by *United Press International*, Conlin summed up Nixon's day at the Texas-Arkansas game, which was won by Texas. Of Nixon's proposed plaque for Penn State, Conlin concluded, "The only thing missing was the Paterno seal of approval." Conlin wrote that Paterno's words were, "said acidly," even though they were never actually said at all.

Penn State University issued a press release on Paterno's behalf. The next day a wire service used excerpts from the release that were presented as direct quotes. The day after that, Conlin attached an emotion to a quote that did not exist. Conlin's decision was reminiscent of one made by Grantland Rice. In 1924, Rice nicknamed four Notre Dame football players the "Four Horsemen" in what one author called "the most famous football lead of all time" (Maraniss, 2000, p. 35). Rice coined the phrase while writing about a Notre Dame football game that he neither attended nor saw (Inabinett, 1994).

Conlin then pivoted. He shifted blame for Penn State's snub away from Nixon toward Paterno. Conlin reported that Penn State's players voted against playing Texas in the Cotton Bowl in favor of playing Missouri, which ruined the Nittany Lions' chance of facing off with Texas. Conlin argued that Paterno was suffering from sour grapes, as Nixon once had. Conlin wrote that Paterno "is coming on with the

grumpy logic displayed by Nixon after losing the 1960 presidential election" (Conlin, 1969a).

The mass mediation of Paterno's anger spread. Making no reference to the press release, syndicated *Washington Post* columnist Shirley Povich wrote that Paterno's quotes were said in a "manner snide" (Povich, 1969). Tongue in cheek, Povich defended Paterno by reminding readers of Nixon's presidential responsibilities:

> In the first place, what Mr. Nixon did Saturday was unconstitutional and a usurpation of powers. The authority vested in the President of the United States is defined precisely in Article II with due recognition as chief of the armed forces, and his power to make treaties, and his duty to inform Congress in state of the union messages about what is ailing the country, or what isn't. Nowhere in the constitution, nor by faintest precedent, is the President authorized to go around the country awarding plaques to college football teams and giving a team White House blessings as No. 1 in the nation (Povich, 1969).

In 1969 the responsibility for picking college football's national champion was supposed to fall to sportswriters. Nixon butted in to the process, stealing sportswriters' autonomy. Povich tried to expel him. Like Conlin, Povich referenced football failures to describe Nixon's decision. He wrote that the Penn State exclusion was a "bobble," a football synonym for fumble, and added that Nixon may have been distracted by a "losing scrimmage," Povich's term for a judge Nixon had nominated who was defeated in a congressional vote.

Paterno and Penn State University did their parts to keep Nixon's snub in the news. On the day Povich's column ran, Nixon received the Gold Medal award from the Football Hall of Fame. Sports journalists received the transcript of a telegram sent to Nixon from Paterno that read, "We may disagree on your football analysis,

but Penn Staters have no doubt as to who is the nation's No. 1 college football fan" ("Penn State grid," 1969, para. 1). Paterno was aware how his behavior toward Nixon played publicly. He remarked on the speaking circuit in 1971 that "at least I was fighting with Nixon before it became fashionable" (Hyman & White, 1971, p. 8).

"We have a right to be heard," Paterno told reporters on Dec. 10, the day after releasing the telegram ("Paterno on feud," 1969, para. 2). *United Press International* called Paterno vs. Nixon a "feud" both in headlines and the bodies of stories. Paterno tried to recast the storyline when his team arrived in Southern Florida for the Orange Bowl. He told *The Associated Press*, "If our little commotion did it [helped college football steal headlines from professional football], it was worth everything that was done" ("Want him," 1969, para. 8). Journalists began to treat Paterno like a martyr, willing to sacrifice himself for the well-being of his team. "The Penn State players and their coach Joe Paterno, who are totally accustomed to the brushoff treatment by now …," wrote *The Philadelphia Inquirer*'s Randy Padwe (1970a).

Penn State defeated Missouri in the Orange Bowl, 10-3, after intercepting seven passes. Conlin wrote that Missouri ran into "one of the great college football defenses of all time" (Conlin, 1970). Texas also won its bowl game, prompting a congratulatory call from Nixon to the Texas staff and players ("Nixon hails bowl," 1970). A sitting United States president calling to congratulate a championship sports team was nothing new, but when word leaked that Nixon also called to congratulate the University of Southern California on its bowl victory—but not Penn State—Nixon's press secretary, Ron Ziegler, got involved again. He told reporters Nixon had "no intent" in ignoring Penn State. The president called the other two

schools for "personal reasons" ("Nixon hails bowl," 1970, para. 10). Nixon was from Southern California, and his wife, Pat, was a USC graduate. Nevertheless, the *Daily News* ran the story in its news section under the headline, "Nixon Hails Bowl Winners, Snubs State." Paterno played up the martyr theme when he told reporters, "We sputter around, but we win. All I can say is that we have as much right as anyone to be No. 1. I've got to stick up for my kids. I put a lot of pressure on them when I said they were No. 1. I can't sit back and let Richard Nixon say someone else is No. 1. I'd be a lousy coach if I did ("Paterno, Devine agree," 1970, para. 3-4).

Defenses such as these—"I'm doing this for my kids"—became a common Paterno media tactic. If he was not going to stand up for innocent college kids, who would? Paterno appeared to understand what tropes sports media valued and used them to his advantage. Journalists responded by positioning him not just as a coach, but as a father figure who looked out for the best interests of his players. Paterno, who was on his way to becoming the "quintessential patriarchal hero" (DeSantis, 2009), had as much to do with anointing himself the "idealized coach" as the journalists themselves. Paterno and journalists collaborated to elevate Paterno's moral authority.

With the story now in its second month, sports journalists wrote articles with quotes such as Missouri coach Dan Devine's about Penn State: "I can guarantee you that I wouldn't vote Penn State No. 2 under any circumstances" ("Paterno, Devine agree," 1970, para. 6). In March—the story's fourth month—the *Atlanta Constitution*'s Charlie Roberts reported that Paterno told him Nixon's Secret Service detail disagreed with Texas as national champion (Roberts, 1970). Quoting Paterno,

Roberts wrote that Secret Service agents told the coach, "We just want you to know the boss is all wet," and, "we KNOW who's number one." Roberts' only source in the story was Paterno. Roberts argued that Nixon "awarded" (quote marks in original) the Longhorns the national title. Roberts quoted Paterno as saying, "I can't afford to get in a fight with the president of the United States though. Especially when he can draft Italians over 40 any time he wants to" (Roberts, 1970). Roberts let Paterno position himself as the underdog to Nixon, just one of the little guys trying to avoid one of Nixon's abuses of power.

Paterno also faced criticism. "Outside of Pennsylvania and Missouri Paterno's remarks generally were regarded with disdain" (Padwe, 1970b). The *Arkansas Democrat*'s Jack Keady regionalized the debate. "All the eastern invaders were trying to run down the 'Presidential Plaque' given Texas, instead of Penn State" (Keady, 1969). Southern football fans wrote letters to Philadelphia newspapers, calling Paterno the "No. 1 cry-baby." Southern journalists pointed to Penn State's earlier decision to not play Texas as the reason why the Nittany Lions were undeserving of the national title, even though Penn State was unaware at the time what playing Texas might mean (Sarantakes, 2006).

Even Povich, who expressed displeasure that Nixon used his power to influence college football, acknowledged that the president likely did not think his honor of the University of Texas would blow up as big as it did. "In [Nixon's] gesture to Texas U. he either got bad advice or took his eye off the situation momentarily" (Povich, 1969, para. 3).

Paterno versus Nixon subsided by early spring of 1970 and remained mostly quiet—but not wholly absent. On Jan. 1, 1972, Penn State finally had its game against Texas in the Cotton Bowl. The Nittany Lions easily defeated Texas, 30-6, holding the Longhorns without a touchdown for the first time in 80 games ("The classics," 2015). Penn State tried to win games while respecting its opponents, Paterno regularly claimed, but with about three minutes remaining and Penn State winning by more than three touchdowns, the Nittany Lions attempted a deep pass to the end zone that fell incomplete. Paterno told that reporters beating Texas "is one of the greatest victories in Penn State history. I don't think we've ever had a game that we had to win more than this one" (Flounders, 2009).

Morals over money: Mediated nobility

Paterno's mass-mediated reputation continued to rise. Not only was he winning the public-relations war against Nixon, but Penn State's football team had no equal. Between 1968-1972 Penn State won 50 games and lost six. Paterno's success drew the attention of teams in the National Football League, the top American professional football league. Paterno in 1969 turned down what he called a "staggering" offer to coach the Pittsburgh Steelers ("Paterno turns down," 1969, para. 10). Paterno told *The Associated Press* he rejected the Steelers because he felt his job at Penn State was "undone." By quoting Paterno, sports journalists attached another narrative that Paterno willingly fed throughout his career: He cared more about integrity than money.

The second paragraph of *The Associated Press* story reported that Paterno made $20,000 a year at Penn State. The Steelers' contract was worth $70,000 a year for five years. Explained Paterno:

> I asked myself what that much money would mean to me. It would only mean that I could go home and say I make more money than this guy or that guy. I didn't think it was worth destroying my values, [which were] my genuine love for a great university and a community in which we live, the relationship of a college coach with fine young men at such as vital stage in their lives, my personal goal of giving Penn State the best of big-time football within the framework of sound academic and financial policies, and my deep belief that football can and should be fun and make a strong contribution to higher education (Associated Press, 1969).

The Associated Press created Paterno's quote out of a hodge podge of spoken words and a press release. The part of Paterno's quote that began "my genuine love …" came from a Penn State University press release. It became a focal point of Penn State's 1969 football media guide, which began its Paterno section stating, "When Joe Paterno decided last January to turn down a lucrative offer to become a professional coach, he revealed some stimulating philosophy on what the college game and Penn State meant to him" (Penn State University, 1969). Sports journalists jumped on the quote. The story played nationally. Paterno's university-approved quotes, spread by *The Associated Press*, appeared on January 9, 1969, in newspapers including *The Daily Herald* in Provo, Utah (p. 9); *The Gettysburg* (Pennsylvania) *Times* (p. 20); and *The Weirton* (West Virginia) *Daily Times* (p. 14), to name just a few.

The quotes entered Paterno lore. Decades later, they reappeared in a *Yahoo! Sports* story headlined "Joe Paterno was almost the Pittsburgh Steelers' head coach" (Chase, 2011). The same day Yahoo's story ran, CBS Sports' website ran a similar

item (Wilson, 2011). Ryan Wilson's CBS Sports blog post used different quotes from the press release without telling its readers that the quotes were originally released by Penn State University. Wilson likely had no idea. NFL.com, the website of the National Football League, also wrote a piece that day, and again it included quotes from the original 1969 press release (Sessler, 2011).

Paterno's declination of Pittsburgh was his opening act for an even bigger decision. In 1973 he strongly considered, then declined, an offer to coach the NFL's New England Patriots. Local and national sports journalists gushed over Paterno's decision to turn down a five-year, $1.25 million contract offer from New England to remain with Penn State, where he earned $32,000 a year ("Money and Joe," 1973).

The Los Angeles Times argued that money and sport should not mix. The newspaper applauded Paterno for resisting sport's great temptation:

> In these days of multi-million dollar TV deals with pro clubs, six-figure salaries for athletes and $15 tickets for Super Bowls, money seems the dominant influence in sports. Thus it's refreshing, as well as almost unprecedented, to see a man like Joe Paterno say no to the big dough. Paterno: … 'Winning isn't everything and money isn't everything. The world won't come to an end if we lose.' Amen! ("Money and Joe," 1973, p. D3).

Paterno's refusal of a big contract earned near-unanimous praise from sportswriters. They celebrated his decision through clichés. *Sports Illustrated* republished the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin's* "There's more to life than one million dollars" and the *Terra Bella* (California) *News'* "Money isn't everything" (Johnson, 1973). *The Philadelphia Inquirer*'s John Flynn wrote that Paterno "had done a lot of soul-searching in recent days while weighing the New England offer of wealth against the good things Penn State offered which money can't buy" (Flynn, 1973, para. 2).

The *Philadelphia Daily News'* Conlin followed suit. He cited Paterno's Grand Experiment, the belief that football teams can achieve concurrent athletic and academic success (Denlinger, 1969). Conlin wrote that the offer "was staggering" and declared that Paterno's "'Great Experiment' will continue" (Conlin, 1973, para. 1, 7).

The Grand Experiment (or "great experiment" as it sometimes appeared in media) dominated Flynn's story. Flynn wrote that Paterno chose to stay for three reasons. The first was most in line with the Grand Experiment: "The opportunity to work with young people and influence their lives" (Flynn, 1973). The other reasons were Paterno's "love of Pennsylvania and its people," and, "the challenge to help make the university great in all directions."

Although turning down $1.25 million made for a good story, Paterno actually earned more than his $32,000 salary from Penn State. He employed an agency to handle his business dealings, most notably product endorsements (Sperber, 1990, pp. 189-190). And Penn State offered a job perk unique to college coaches: academic tenure and free tuition for children of coaches (Millegan, 1966; "Joe Paterno turns," 1973). If he lost his job as head football coach, he could remain at Penn State as professor of physical education without worrying about how he would send his five kids to college.

Almost no one in journalism acknowledged this advantage. Journalists wrote about the college football coach who refused the big money. Paterno lived, worked, and was mediated in a manner that reflected the "idealized coach," a transcendent public figure infused with tales of unimpeachable morality. Journalists inscribed

Paterno with values once reserved for Walter Camp, the former Yale coach who became journalism's first template for the idealized coach. Camp's death in 1925 prompted the *New Hampshire Register* to write:

> Not only sports writers, but editors and all the other many workers in these pulsating hearts of public opinion felt the blow [of Camp's death] keenly, and set about with solemnity to put on paper for the millions soon to mourn with them, the story of the simple greatness of the man who had done so much for manly courage, good health, clean living and high moral standards among men. Walter Camp will live on ("Walter Camp," 1925a).

The Philadelphia Inquirer announced Paterno's decision to stay with a banner headline placed above the front-page masthead, a move sometimes reserved for declarations of war. "Paterno Spurns Million to Stay at Penn State" stretched across the top of page 1A. Paterno told reporters he accepted the Patriots' offer but rescinded. Indeed, a few days earlier the *Philadelphia Daily News* reported Paterno had accepted, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, unable to confirm the story on its own, reported what the *Daily News* had reported ("If Joe's signed," 1973). Philadelphia newspapers wrote that Paterno's changed his mind because happiness trumped a big paycheck. The story went national.

An unidentified *Associated Press* journalist asked "Why would [Paterno] turn aside what appeared to give him lifetime financial security" ("Joe Paterno turns," 1973)? The wire story ran without new quotes from Paterno, so the author re-ran Paterno's press-release quotes from when he turned down the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1969. Paterno's rejection of the NFL solidified the theme that college sports should not be about money. Journalists argued that Paterno would have taken New England's deal if money was his goal. His goal was about something more valuable: values, commitment, and leading young men into adulthood.

A sampling:

> Money couldn't by [Paterno], either, and in today's Gimme-Gimme world that's really something. You may read about it in Ripley's Believe It Or Not someday. Joe Paterno has class. It rubs off on his players, on the Penn State fans and even on some opponents (Roessner, 1973).
>
> I fully believe I'd taken the million bucks the pros dangled in front of me and been content to be a bit less happy working as a 'business man' coach. But my name isn't Joe Paterno. One way of looking at it, Paterno's decision is a big boost for the moral [sic] of the college athletic picture and further emphasizes that professional sports is strictly a business thing. In one way, I'm glad that Joe Paterno decided to stay at Penn State, because the pro teams, in all sports, have been entirely too mercenary and ruthless in the way they have lured even lower-class men away from the college campuses (Currence, 1973).
>
> With this [Paterno] was more than saying no to his own personal prospects for big money; he was also jarring the temple of professionalism in sports that measures success in dollars at the gate more than in character. … he has held out for the belief that the values of life do not all fall in line behind money and winning. … It could be argued that the pro ranks also need more leaders with a concern for larger life values. But the point is that at least on one occasion in sports a man named Paterno didn't let money make a decision for him. And there's a lot of example in that ("Good for Paterno," 1973).

A search of Newspaper Archive, an online trove of smaller daily and weekly newspapers, turned up more than 500 results across 40 states in a search for publications that ran *The Associated Press* article that quoted Paterno saying he "got back to what I really wanted to do. I realized that I wouldn't be happy just being a football coach in which winning and losing was everything' ("Joe Paterno turns," 1973). *The Associated Press* and Paterno united to presume that college football possessed a moral depth that professional football did and could not. Professional football was judged by the bottom line; college football added to society's moral fabric.

The Penn State community rallied around Paterno. Penn State football's 1973 media guide ran a story about Paterno turning down a lucrative coaching offer. In 1983's media guide, the item still appeared. It became part of the Paterno story. *Sports Illustrated*'s Johnson wrote that Paterno had become a "folk hero." He described a scene from a Penn State basketball game in which Paterno stood up to make his way to a restroom:

> Someone saw him and began to applaud. Others joined in. The clapping spread through the gymnasium until 7,000 people were on their feet with an ovation for Paterno, and the game was halted until he managed to get out of the auditorium (Johnson, 1973).

Pennsylvania governor Milton Shapp declared March 31 "Joe Paterno Day" across the state, and Penn State's student body invited Paterno to deliver their 1973 commencement address (Fitzpatrick, 2011, pp. 142-144). Paterno accepted. He gave a stirring speech, but one line stood out beyond the rest. It was a line about Richard Nixon.

Paterno gives journalists what they want

Sports journalists made Paterno their moral spokesperson. His willingness to discuss the Vietnam War and Kent State separated him from his peers ("Joe addresses the graduates," 1973, pp 29-31). On June 16, 1973, Paterno delivered the commencement address to Penn State University's graduating class. Two weeks earlier *The Washington Post* reported that Nixon had knowledge of the Watergate break-in and cover-up (Bernstein & Woodward, 1973).

Even without Watergate, the scandal that led to his resignation of the presidency, Nixon faced intense scrutiny from journalists for his handling of Vietnam and other issues. Nixon was *a* cause of social unrest, not *the* cause, but his

position as president made him a worthy target for journalists (Lytle, 2005, p. xii). Watergate gave journalists something specific to attach to Nixon. Given Paterno's past with the president, journalists eagerly awaited the coach's opinion.

Paterno came through during his commencement address. He told the audience:

> Who knows, I may be the only commencement speaker this year who doesn't give his opinion on Watergate. Although I do want to make one comment on President Nixon's role in the affair. I'd like to know, how could the President know so little about Watergate in 1973, and so much about college football in 1969 ("Joe addresses the graduates," 1973)?

The Associated Press picked up the story ("Paterno tackles Nixon's," 1973). *The Philadelphia Inquirer* ran the *AP* story on the front page of its Sunday edition, the week's most-read day, under the headline "Paterno Tackles Nixon's Priorities." *The Atlanta Constitution* ran the story under the more accurate headline, "Paterno Address Recalls Nixon Snub." *The Washington Post* used the headline "Nixon Expertise Doubted." The *Chicago Tribune* included Paterno's quote about Nixon when it, too, ran *The Associated Press* story, under headline, "Joe's Penn statement: 'Compete.'"

Some reporters and headline writers recalled Nixon's involvement in the 1969 national-championship debate. Others did not, offering no context for Paterno's commencement jab. Those who did reference 1969 selectively excluded details of the original situation, including two key points: first, that Penn State had a chance to play the champion, the University of Texas, and chose not to; second, that Nixon's administration tried to make amends for omitting Penn State. The commencement joke became one of the most celebrated moments of Paterno's

career. Paterno later attempted to alter the context in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*' Bob Oates.

> 'Our schedule was tougher than Texas' [in 1969]. Although Texas beat Arkansas, that was about it. We had gone two years without a licking and had beaten five Big 8 teams. That's why we were upset when President Nixon declared Texas No. 1. The other day when one of my assistants was watching the Senate hearings on TV, he said he couldn't understand how Mr. Nixon knew so much about football in 1969 and so little about Watergate in 1973' (Oates, 1973, para. 39-41).

When Oates reminded Paterno he had made the same joke during the commencement speech, Paterno replied he was "just trying to get a laugh, but some people took me seriously." The *Chicago Tribune*'s Robert Markus returned to the Nixon snub before Penn State's January 1974 bowl game. By this point, the mass-mediation of the 1969 "feud" dictated that Penn State deserved at least a share of the national title, with Markus noting "that '69 [Penn State team] was the one that smothered Missouri in the Orange Bowl," while "Texas had barely beaten Notre Dame after winning its big shootout with Arkansas at the end of the regular season" (Markus, 1974, para. 8). Penn State won by a touchdown, 10-3. Texas beat Notre Dame, 21-17, hardly the disparity in scores suggested by Markus.

New York Times columnist Dave Anderson used Paterno's commencement address as evidence of Nixon's complete failure. "At this point, the Nixon Administration has fumbled its football credibility, too" (Anderson, 1973). By January 1975, Nixon had been out of office for four months. Sportswriters like the *Chicago Tribune*'s Rick Talley gave Paterno free reign over the Nixon story. Talley quote Paterno as saying, "We got jobbed in 1969 when President Nixon stuck his nose in and crowned Texas" (Talley, 1975, para. 2). Talley did not refute Paterno's

claim. It would have gotten in the way of the now-common tale of Nixon short-changing Penn State.

Like journalists Woodward and Bernstein, Paterno took on Nixon and won. Paterno was the outsider journalists needed to reclaim college football from money and corruption. When Paterno began as head coach in 1966, sportswriters cheered his differences from the buttoned-up taskmasters who were considered to be his coaching peers. Paterno also was controlling, but it was an acceptable kind of control. Penn State was allowed to "bask in the glory that this Brooklyn-born quarterback has produced and kept alive there over the years. Football at Penn State is all Paterno Football" (White, 1973).

That Paterno won without sacrificing integrity became sportswriters' proof of integrity's necessity to football. Watching Paterno deliver a speech, *Sports Illustrated*'s D. Keith Mano concluded that Paterno was "eloquent and dignified and straightforward. And extempore. The speech moves us all. There is thunderous applause. Suddenly you stop wondering why this man wins. Paterno has class" (Mano, 1976).

Paterno spent his first decade as head coach straddling the line between coaching outsider and throwback to the noble bygone era of American sport, albeit one updated with a quick wit. It was as if journalists welded to Paterno the meaning of sport once attached to Camp. The *Rochester* (New York) *Herald*'s obituary for Camp would have been as apropos to the early Paterno as it was for Camp:

> [Camp] was a personage of unusual power, of rare presence and of high ideals. Through his consistent record as an advocate of clean sport, he became in the course of years a leader to whom gravitated all the forces endeavoring to uphold the standards of sport in America ("Walter Camp," 1925d).

New memory: 'A different kind of football coach'

Paterno entered the picture at the right time. Sports journalism experienced sea changes in the 1960s. Television surpassed all other media as the ideal medium for sports consumption (Powers, 1984, p. 14; Whannel, 1992, pp. 70-71). Baseball, "America's Pastime," fell grossly behind football in popularity (MacCambridge, 2005, p. 212; Oriard, 2007, p. 7). The journalism profession pivoted away from hero-crafting, "gee-whiz, aww-nuts" sports journalists, such as Grantland Rice and Walter "Red" Barber. A more progressive sports-media lineup included the rise of *Sports Illustrated* magazine, broadcaster Howard Cossell, and the "New Journalists," including Thomas Wolfe, Gay Talese, and Hunter S. Thompson, an unofficial group that marked "a historical moment at which new understandings of the cultural and political significance of athletes and sporting events emerged in the work of journalists" (Oates & Pauly, 2007).

Journalists from the 1960s benefited professionally from the presence of political sports figures like Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, and Joe Namath. They made for great copy. Among these sports figures was Paterno, whose quotability and public declaration of high ideals earned him the label of "Renaissance coach" (Conlin, 1969b) and led sports journalists to write lines such as, "But how about a football coach who also turned out to be an authentic folk hero in a society desperately hungry for integrity" (Johnson, 1973, para. 27)?

Sports journalists turned Paterno into a symbol of American possibilities. The transformation could not have taken place without Paterno's two great antagonists: Nixon and money. Paterno came around at an opportune time for journalists who were unhappy with college football's trajectory. Journalists granted Paterno an inherent nobility because he attended Brown University, an Ivy League school. They called on memory of the Ivy League to invoke Paterno's purity within a profession of scoundrels. By Paterno's third season, 1968, the fact that his teams won while his players attended class was testament to his Ivy League education. *Sports Illustrated*'s Dan Jenkins marveled at Penn State's academic culture:

> A Beethoven Symphony swirls through the mind of a defensive tackle. A linebacker earnestly dashes to physics class on the morning of a game. Test tubes intrigue a cornerback, math fascinates a center, engineering problems make a safety swoon. … Penn State has become an unusual place in a lot of ways. It has more or less evolved into a big Ivy League type of campus on one end and a small Big Ten type on the other (Jenkins, 1968, para. 1-2).

Two years earlier Paterno had credited Rip Engle, Penn State's former coach, for creating a culture that helped him slide easily into his head-coaching position. Paterno retained Engle's assistant coaches. According to Paterno, other than switching the offense from the Winged T to the I Formation, Penn State operated mostly the same under Paterno as it had under Engle. Jenkins ignored Paterno's admiration for Engle. Jenkins honored the Ivy League when he wrote, "What happens is, you take a guy out of Brooklyn, put him through an Ivy League school—Brown, at that—and you'll get yourself a different kind of football coach. He will look like a New York detective and talk like a social worker. More than that, he will like the idea of having players on his team who can read" (Jenkins, 1968, para. 2).

The narrative that the Ivy League was antithetical to college football overrode a history documented by journalism. Penn State won games and demanded scholarship from its players before Paterno. It had not had a losing season since 1938. Engle-era alumni included Rosey Grier, an author of fiction and nonfiction, ordained minister, and bodyguard for presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, as well as Bob Mitinger, a prominent attorney influential in organizing professional football's labor movement (Wikipedia, 2016). "Rip [Engle] planned this all exceedingly well," Paterno said. "The whole situation here is a model for the way intercollegiate athletics ought to operate" (Conlin, 1966b).

Sports journalists frustrated with college football's in-your-face corruption found redemptive hope in Paterno. His public devotion to the Grand Experiment—belief that success on and off the field can exist harmoniously—gave sportswriters support they needed to honor him as college football's newest and best ambassador. Some journalists promoted Paterno as a political candidate (Johnson, 1973, para. 22-23). The *Atlanta Constitution*'s Randy Donaldson invoked *The Bible* to express disappointment in college football, arguing coaches were "reduced to playing the role of satan" (Donaldson, 1974, para. 7). He described the game as an out-of-control beast beyond taming even by its supposed stewards, the coaches. The modern culture of sports was to blame for the poor coaches who were "forced to compromise their principles" (para. 8). Donaldson blamed the game and turned the coaches into victims. But who warped the game in the first place?

In Paterno, journalists found college football's remedy. They gave Paterno, the "idealized coach," a platform to chastise the NCAA for not doing enough to

regulate college sports. Often they quoted Paterno. He spoke hard truths about college football, which meant journalists did not always have to. Journalists like Donaldson quoted Paterno:

> 'The NCAA has got to have some sort of enforcement organization and an investigatory group to stop this [cheating]. … Now, though, the NCAA operates on the system of schools turning one another in. But that doesn't work. I know of a few things myself, but I won't turn anyone in. I never have, and probably never will. I don't want to be responsible for a man losing his job' (Donaldson, 1974, para. 17-18).

Paterno was a mass-mediated Pied Piper, a man whose Grand Experiment was something that people had been waiting for, even if they had not known it. Sports journalists assumed their public craved corruption-free college football. If Paterno could clean up college football, surely he could clean up another hub of American corruption: politics. Paterno's father had been a community organizer for the Democratic party, but Paterno was a registered Republican (Denlinger, 1969). Paterno's politics were more complicated than Republican or Democrat. He expressed admiration for Democrat John F. Kennedy, but he also spoke at a Republican National Convention (Giles, 1988).

What was noteworthy, however, was not Paterno's politics, but that he chose to address it in the first place. He actually talked about it. "If his ideas about honesty in government are not unique, Paterno has added dignity to the coaching profession with his candor and humor" (Denlinger, 1969). As Conlin forecast in 1966, sports journalists loved Paterno because he gave them articulate quotes with humor and depth. Other coaches of the era, including the University of Georgia's Vince Dooley, Ohio State's Woody Hayes, and Alabama's Paul "Bear" Bryant, hid from the press aspects of their programs, from access to players to their thoughts on opponents.

Journalists linked this old-school mentality to older, more conservative politics (Jauss, 1975, para. 7, 9).

Bill Jauss' article in the *Chicago Tribune* again set Paterno outside the status quo. Jauss connected the Ivy League to a more elevated, progressive way of thinking. He compared Ohio State's Hayes to Nixon to show Paterno in a positive light. Paterno, meanwhile, stoked storylines about his political ambitions. He expressed interest in politics in one breath and demeaned his chances the next. "There's a similarity between good politics and good football—you can't do either one without a lot of early work, preparation," he said (Johnson, 1973, para. 22). Politics were always something Paterno might do. "In four, maybe five years, I might do it" (Denlinger, 1968). And to Johnson in 1973:

> 'But I'm not going to get involved in politics for a while—if I ever do. I want to coach for another four or five years. Then maybe take a year off or two to study. Yeah, maybe I'll study political science. But, look, I'm not fooling myself about politics any more than I fooled myself about football. Getting elected to office is only the beginning. So people know Paterno, so maybe they'd vote for Paterno because they heard of him, because he's popular' (Paterno, in Johnson, 1973, para. 23-24).

Paterno could not have so publicly engaged his primary antagonists—Nixon and money—without assists from journalists like *Sports Illustrated*'s Johnson. Journalists, via quotes they choose to include, infuse journalism with collective memory (Berkowitz, 2011). Johnson allowed Paterno to criticize the present political climate and dismiss himself from it. Money grants access to politics. Politics is corrupt. Paterno wanted to address the corruption but said he could not because he does not have money. As a result his "own idea of integrity in politics" (Johnson,

1973, para. 25) remained a party external to politics. Paterno remained uncorrupted.

For all Paterno accomplished during his first decade, one goal eluded him: college football's national championship. His earlier victories and moral crusades brought him admiration, but it did not bring him the status that comes with being a champion. Paterno was a quotable idealist. It would take a national championship to concretize Paterno's values as college football's values. By the time he won his second, Paterno had become part of America's moral fabric, which is why his ultimate fall from power reshaped sports journalism.

CHAPTER 3: A CONSERVATIVE CHAMPION EMERGES

Joe Paterno's and Ronald Reagan's careers directly converged just once, when Reagan welcomed Penn State's football team to the White House in February 1987 to honor the Nittany Lions' national championship. But even if Paterno and Reagan had never met, Reagan's America and Paterno's public persona aligned: stubborn, principled, successful. Conservative. The timing of Reagan's presidency proved fortuitous for the mass-mediated Paterno. Sports journalists who covered Paterno in the 1980s lauded him for guiding Penn State with stirring rhetoric and rigid morality. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s Ray Parrillo gushed:

> Interviews with Paterno … reveal a man who believes he has something influential to say and an obligation to say it, regardless of what others think of him; a stubborn, extremely confident man who believes he must have complete control over everyone and everything that involves him and his job; … a man who can move even the most jaded with his fiery rhetoric (Parrillo, 1986, para. 19).

In the 1980s, the journalistic narrative around Paterno declared that he deserved to win because he was conservative (Christ, 1986). He was exempt from criticism because he was conservative (Giles, 1988). He was a layered human being because he was conservative (Wilbon, 1985). Whether sports journalists knew what they meant by "conservative" is debatable. But they used the term nonetheless, and they used it favorably, especially when "Paterno" and "college football"—labels that became interchangeable—were threatened by academic challenges or up-and-coming college football programs that did not adhere to the game's traditional values.

The American values Reagan exploited as conservative existed in Paterno long before Reagan took office. Paterno once stormed out of a restaurant during a

family meal when one of his children took a cucumber off another's plate. Only one salad bar had been paid for (Posnanski, 2012, p. 14). "These people work hard to run a business," Paterno yelled. "You are not supposed to share food. It says, very clearly, all *you* can eat. Not all *you and your sister* can eat. You stole from them."

This chapter argues that media covering Paterno during the 1980s altered Paterno's meaning from that of college football radical to college football pillar. Sports journalists shifted previously told Paterno tales to reposition him as the representative of college football's traditional values. Paterno became Walter Camp—the coach who represented journalists' highest ideals for college athletics—for the Reagan era. "We're conservative," Paterno told Reagan during their 1987 meeting. "And when some of the smart alec are out there pecking away at us, we hang tough" ("President Reagan heaped," 1987).

On August 9, 1974, President Richard Nixon boarded a United States military helicopter and bid symbolic farewell to the American people. Although Watergate disenfranchised many Americans from their government, not all Americans reacted with equal amounts of repulsion and disappointment. Nixon was dispatched, but America's conservative base remained. The mid-to-late 1970s became "a moment that framed what Watergate meant: a battle over the meaning of America" (Perlstein, 2014, p. 155).

This was a demoralizing—if brief—period in American history (Wilentz, 2008, p. 6). The sting of Vietnam was fresh. The economy floundered. High inflation choked savings accounts. President Jimmy Carter, the bridge between Nixon and Reagan, was perceived as ineffective (Reeves, 2005, p. xvi). Reagan, president from

1980-1988, argued that conservatism remained America's best path. It just needed a more reliable steward than Nixon (Wilentz, 2008). Reagan told Americans that America had never stopped being great. America was exceptional, and conservative values would help keep it that way (Johnson, 1991, p. 13). Reagan's America, like Paterno's Penn State, made no room for gray areas; there was a right way to do things and a wrong way. "However inadequate the definitions of 'liberal' and 'conservative' had become in [Reagan's] America," Haynes Johnson wrote in 1991, "he intensified an already growing public mood of conservatism" (p. 456).

Paterno, so visible in the press, spoke often of acceptable behavior. Saddened by challenges young people faced in the 1980s, Paterno said that in his day, "Your church told you what to do, and your parents told you what to do, and you knew what was right and wrong" (Reilly, 1986, para. 18). That rigidness was nothing new for Paterno. Discussing in 1973 what kind of politician he would be, Paterno said, "Look, I believe this and this and this and I'm not going to compromise" (Johnson, para. 23). Paterno did not change what he said, but journalists changed how they used his words. In doing so, they recast the idealist as the ideal. In the 1980s, Paterno's values became college football's values.

Remembering the good to explain away the bad

Sports journalists who covered Paterno from the early 1970s into the late 1970s borrowed liberally from their earlier works. Throughout most of the 1970s, almost nothing new was being written or said about him. Paterno's career had stagnated, albeit at a high level: Penn State was still successful, but it had not won a national championship; Paterno's players still graduated at a greater rate than the

college football average; he still urged the NCAA to clean up the game. Journalists still thought of Paterno as a "Brooklyn-born, Ivy [Brown]-educated Eastern Liberal" (Jauss, 1975, para. 9).

The article "Paterno Paterfamilias," which appeared in the September 1978 issue of *Quest* magazine, was notable for its devotion to the status quo of Paterno coverage. Its author, Mark Goodman, described Paterno as infallible. It presented no new information. Paterno had turned down big-money offers from the NFL, wore thick glasses, his teams won lots of games, he was quick-witted and from Brooklyn, his players graduated at a rate beyond most in college football, and so forth.

Goodman even recycled an anecdote written by *Sports Illustrated*'s Johnson in 1973 about Paterno receiving applause at a Penn State basketball game while trying to use the restroom. The article noted Paterno's thick glasses and black shoes and mentioned his modesty. Perhaps most notable is that the story took on an eternal quality. Goodman, unlike Johnson, never told readers when the ovation took place. It could have been 1968, 1973, or 1978:

> Soon the whole section through which [Paterno] jerkily plunged was standing and applauding. Finally, as he reached the exit, embarrassedly waving, as nonplussed and swollen with pride as a *Gong Show* winner, 7,000 men, women, and children of Penn State rose to their feet in a tumultuous tribute to their football coach, Joe Paterno (Goodman, 1978, para. 1).

Sports journalists who covered Paterno behaved like they had run out of ideas. The *Chicago Tribune*'s Skip Myslenski spent the first 11 paragraphs of an article, "Joe Paterno – Penn State's real winner," recounting how in 1973 Paterno turned down the New England Patriots' million-dollar contract offer (Myslenski, 1978). At least there was some self-awareness. "That time and that decision [by

Paterno]," wrote Myslenski, "must be the center of any portrait of Joe Paterno, but it is his past that frames the picture and provides a perspective while viewing the man" (Myslenski, para. 15). Myslenski reprinted Stanley Woodward's alleged quote about Paterno that appeared in Penn State's football media guides: "[Paterno] can't run and can't pass. All he can do is think – and win" (para. 23).

At last, after Paterno suspended players before and during the 1979 season for various infractions, journalists found something new to write about. *The Washington Post*'s John Feinstein wrote the change to Penn State could best be seen in the players' quotes. "Suddenly," wrote Feinstein, "Penn State players are using all the clichés generally associated with losers" (Feinstein, 1979, para. 14). Journalists asked whether Paterno's Grand Experiment of simultaneous athletic and academic success was failing. Paterno suspended three players for poor academic performance, another player for drinking in public, and his *team captain* for refusing to take part in practice.

All players faced swift, fair punishment, consistent with how Paterno had handled past infractions. But Penn State was committing sport's ultimate sin: losing. The football team started the 1979 season 1-2. Feinstein recalled Penn State's high achievements to describe how hard the program had fallen. He wrote that "the gray skies hanging over this picturesque town for the past three days are somehow symbolic—these are dark days for Penn State and its Renaissance man in coach's clothing, Joe Paterno" (Feinstein, 1979, para. 1).

The headline proclaimed, "Penn State: Tough days for image." Then, reflecting how Paterno and Penn State's popularity extended beyond Pennsylvania's borders, the author quoted a Penn State dean who said:

> 'It's a matter of image. Because of the exposure we've had the last few years, a lot of people have come to think that Penn State football players never lose games and always make straight A's. We love that image. But it creates added pressure. What used to be a local story is now a national story' (Feinstein, 1979, para. 4-5).

Feinstein's *Washington Post* article was followed by a two-part series in the *Philadelphia Daily News*—"Happy Valley?"—examining the state of Paterno and the team. Both headlines focused on Paterno. Part one was "Paterno hears boos" (Conlin, 1979a). Part two was "Paterno offers no pampering" (Conlin, 1979b). Like Feinstein, *Daily News* sportswriter Bill Conlin questioned Paterno's Grand Experiment.

Conlin's tone differed from Feinstein, who had criticized Paterno. Conlin let others criticize Paterno but cited no one by name. He used vague terms like "people" and "media critics waiting to pounce." Conlin, who years later claimed to have created the term Grand Experiment (Posnanski, 2012, p. 108), wondered whether it was no longer compatible with college football. "People who this time last year were peacock proud of a program which could contend for a national championship without cheating are suddenly wondering why Paterno doesn't cheat more" (Conlin, 1979a, para. 4). Conlin provided no evidence that anyone said that. Using his own voice, he credited Paterno for increasing revenues and interest in the program. Ultimately, wrote Conlin, "The Grand Experiment has taken an eight-count. But

despite the warts and blemishes, Football Paterno's Way still beats the hell out of alternatives" (1979b, para. 21).

The shine was off Paterno, even though his 1979 team finished 8-4. *Sports Illustrated*'s Douglas Looney reaffirmed after the season what Feinstein and Conlin had reported. Looney advanced the story by describing other coaches' giddiness over Paterno's struggles. Looney then corrected course by reminding readers that the coach's image was well-earned. "Paterno's reputation for integrity and coaching skill," he wrote, "was entirely warranted" (Looney, 1980, para. 8).

Looney and Conlin worked similarly. They allowed anonymous voices to criticize Paterno and steered readers back to Paterno's greatness with their own. They protected the Grand Experiment. Looney's story included Paterno saying, "After four undefeated regular seasons and everything else, if the Grand Experiment is not a success, I don't know what is." *Readers Digest* contributed, too, once again recalling how Paterno shunned the NFL. "Despite the lucrative offers from the pros," wrote Kevin Cash, "[Paterno] is likely to remain at Penn State, where he can continue pursuing what he calls 'The Grand Experiment'—demonstrating that academic excellence and athletics can go hand in hand" (Cash, 1979, para. 26). Cash's story was likely written well in advance of its November 1979 publish date. It did not mention Penn State's struggles that season.

The pressure subsided, at least temporarily. During the winter of 1980 Penn State named Paterno the school's athletic director. Looney, again adopting Conlin's vague attribution habits, wrote, "In some quarters there was criticism that Paterno, who already had considerable power at Penn State, now had even more" (1980,

para. 29). But when Paterno's football team improved in 1980, going 10-2, criticism dwindled. Penn State finished 10-2 again in 1981. At the end of the 1982 season, Paterno's Penn State team finally won a national championship. The championship was a cocoon for Paterno. It offered protection from criticism and transformed him, in the eyes of sports journalists, into the quintessential hallmark of college football's highest potential.

Victory's meaning: The championship erases criticism

Paterno began 1982 by accepting the Bobby Dodd Award, an honor named for the former Georgia Tech head football coach that appreciates "a style that emphasizes something more than winning a game … a belief that the game of football should be kept in perspective with college life in general" ("Paterno receives Dodd," 1982, para. 3). Before the ceremony Paterno harshly criticized Texas A&M University for giving new coach Jackie Sherrill an expensive contract. In 1979 Paterno said he would not enter politics because that would leave coaching "to the Switzers and Sherrills," in reference to Oklahoma coach Barry Switzer and Sherrill, then at the University of Pittsburgh (Looney, 1980; Didinger, 1983c).

Paterno made the comments during an off-the-record meeting with sportswriters (Greenberg, 1986, para. 43). The *Philadelphia Daily News*' Jay Greenberg reported that Paterno apologized to Switzer but not Sherrill. Greenberg called the leaked quote, "not a great moment for journalistic ethics." Paterno by 1982 knew his words carried weight, so when he criticized Texas A&M after he won the Bobby Dodd Award he claimed, "I'm not critical of Sherrill" ("Paterno receives Dodd," 1982, para. 11).

Still, Paterno grew increasingly vocal in his criticism of college football each passing year. Sports Journalists let him fill their notebooks with musings on academics and finances (Booher, 1985, pp. 212-215). Since 1966, Paterno's first year as Penn State's head coach, no college football team won more games. A national championship, however, eluded Paterno. Sportswriter Ray Didinger produced the *Philadelphia Daily News*' second series in four years detailing misgivings and misconceptions about Penn State. The 1982 series was strikingly similar to Conlin's in 1979, except Didinger's five-part series was more specifically sourced. Even as Didinger criticized he stayed true to Paterno themes. Didinger said Paterno was Mother Teresa with a Brooklyn accent (Didinger, 1982a, para. 12). Didinger also acknowledged that Penn State under Paterno "is not Valhalla" in the same sentence that mentioned Penn State's 93 percent graduation rate. The underlying message was that Paterno was not perfect, but he was close.

Each article in the series echoed the previous. Wrote Didinger in part 2:

> For the past 17 years, [Paterno's] image had been that of a knight dispatched from Camelot to clean up our athletic programs, reaffirm our academic principles and put the chalice of idealism back on America's mantelpiece. Paterno has been glowingly profiled on '60 Minutes' and lauded in scholarly magazines. He is seen by most people as a hallowed figure in an Ivy setting, a combination of Mr. Chips, Don Quixote and Eleanor Roosevelt (Didinger, 1982b, para. 16-17).

Over five days Didinger mixed common themes around Paterno with fresh reporting, but the series appeared to get little play outside of Philadelphia. Paterno arrived in New Orleans for the Sugar Bowl in late December 1982. Penn State prepared to play the University of Georgia for the national championship. Georgia's biggest paper, *The Atlanta Constitution*, wrote a two-part feature on Paterno and his

team. The first part was a standard-issue feature on the players and Penn State's offense (McGrath, 1982).

The second feature, written by sportswriter Glenn Sheeley, was one of the most comprehensive question-and-answer interviews that Paterno gave (Sheeley, 1982). Curiously, the interview produced no new information about Paterno. Sheeley seemed most concerned with replicating themes to introduce Atlanta readers to the Penn State coach. Sheeley asked Paterno about topics Paterno had covered many times, including how he valued education and did not view money as his ultimate motivation. Sheeley began by telling readers, "[Paterno] demonstrated he is a man of many dimensions."

Sheehey wrote the article in a question-and-answer format, which allowed Paterno's quotes to run verbatim. Sheehey also paraphrased Paterno from Paterno's first biography, 1971's "Football My Way," without telling readers where the information came from. Sheehey hit all the Paterno tropes, including Penn State's high graduation rate. Sheehey called on public memory of sweaty practices on football fields and the value of hard work. "Paterno demands [his players] hit the books as if they were blocking sleds," Sheehey wrote. "If Paterno's academic requirements are a mere publicity gimmick, you won't find a player say so" (1982, para. 15).

Sheehey also wrote the follow-up story after Penn State's 27-23 victory. The win earned Penn State its first national championship under Paterno. Players carried Paterno off the field on their shoulders. Sheehey's article referenced the Paterno-Nixon dispute from 1969. Before the game Paterno told reporters a

national championship was less important to him than journalists assumed, because an "official" championship demeaned the memory of his undefeated teams that did not get the recognition he thought they deserved. Sheehey did not buy it. "Whatever, Paterno's excitement was as visible as Penn State's superiority was in the tussle which had just ended" (Sheehey, 1983, para. 7).

Like Sheehey in *The Atlanta Constitution*, *Sports Illustrated*'s John Papanek ignored Paterno's argument that Penn State's unbeaten teams were "national champions" on equal footing with the 1982 team (Papanek, 1983, para. 47-48). During Sugar Bowl media events and in previous years, Paterno consistently said he viewed his previously undefeated teams as national champions.

Sports journalists, who controlled voting that determined the recognized national champion, did not believe Paterno. They used terms of apprehension and doubt, like "claims" and "insists," to introduce Paterno's quotes. Wrote Papanek: "Still, Paterno insisted—'for the nine thousandth time'—that in his mind, his undefeated teams of 1968, 1969 and 1973 were champions as well, even if they weren't voted to the top spot in the polls" (Papanek, 1983 para. 47). Writing for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, sportswriter Bill Lyon admitted that media were frustrated by Paterno's insistence that not previously being voted No. 1 did not bother him. "That galled his detractors even more. They were sure he didn't really mean it" (Lyon, 1983, para. 40).

Penn State won the 1982 championship, but sports journalists gave the victory to Paterno. Announcers Keith Jackson and Frank Broyles broadcast the game on television for ABC. Broyles at the time also served as athletic director at the

University of Arkansas. He had been the football coach at Arkansas against the University of Texas in 1969 when Nixon named Texas the champion (Voigt, 2014). Broyles focused his broadcast almost entirely on what the win meant for Paterno. Broyles removed the team from the story when he told viewers, "in three previous trips to the Sugar Bowl game, Joe Paterno has lost all three of them, scoring only one touchdown in three games. Today he has, what, two touchdowns and two field goals in the first half" (Arledge, producer, ABC, 1983)? Broyles made Paterno bigger than Penn State. If one had listened only to the commentary—without context—they might have thought Paterno was on the field alone, playing every position. Paterno took the snap, threw the ball, caught the ball, and scored the touchdowns. Paterno alone was the hero, without any need for assistance.

The *Associated Press'* Bob Dvorchak wrote "The win brought a measure of vindication to Paterno, who had won 82 percent of his games over 17 seasons" (Dvorchak, 1983, para. 10). As Penn State players carried Paterno off the field in victory, Broyles said, "Keith, I believe this is a high-water mark for this young man, Joe Paterno." The *Inquirer*'s Lyon wrote that the national championship validated Paterno's Grand Experiment (Lyon, 1983).

Sports Journalists dialed up their prose about Paterno to levels beyond even his magical year of 1973. Those newspaper series that wondered whether Paterno's best days were over? Ancient history. Although Paterno's teams went undefeated three times between 1968-1973, when Penn State won the "official" championship it gave sportswriters the green light to call the Grand Experiment a success. Lyon simultaneously praised the Grand Experiment, preached Paterno's humility, and

reduced the rest of college football to beneath Paterno's high standards. Lyon cheered Paterno for winning without having to "pay for abortions for some player's girlfriend … [or] buy some hotshot recruit a car" (Lyon, 1983, para. 46).

> It would seem the Grand Experiment had come full circle. It was no longer an experiment but a reality. Penn State didn't cheat and still managed to win it all. … You can almost see the commercial, with [actor] John Houseman carrying a football in one hand, standing behind a lectern, leaning solemnly toward the camera and saying, soberly: 'They won the old-fashioned way. They earned it.' And yet, in his moment of greatest triumph, Joe Paterno was subdued. He never once mentioned the Grand Experiment (Lyon, 1983, para. 45-46, 48).

Paterno's national championship justified journalists' faith in him. Their praise for the Grand Experiment and Paterno's coaching acumen required one final push to become gospel. The championship was the push. Good grades were admirable. Paterno's quick wit was good for a laugh. But sports are a form of competition, where the ultimate goal is victory. The shift in journalists' descriptions of Paterno correlated with the championship. Before the Sugar Bowl, journalists described Paterno as the man who showed up "in a society desperately hungry for integrity" (Johnson, 1973, para. 27).

After the Sugar Bowl, *Sports Illustrated*'s John Papanek decreed that no coach "in America … deserves a national championship more than he" (1983, para. 46). The championship became more than an indisputable sign of success. It validated Paterno's entire way of life: work hard, study hard, tell the truth, focus on family and community. Journalists used Paterno to re-draw the parameters in which all others would be judged. Paterno "deserved" victory, and now journalists readied to spread his word. Ross Atkin wrote in *The Christian Science Monitor* that "the conservatively clad Pennsylvanians made believers out of 78,000 spectators in New Orleans'

Superdome" (Atkin, 1983, para. 10). The *Miami Herald*'s Christine Brennan wrote that the win was "a typical Penn State show" (Brennan, 1983, para. 7).

Perhaps most ironic was a wire-service article in *The Providence* (R.I.) *Journal* about Southern Methodist University, which finished the season undefeated at 11-0-1 but behind Penn State in the final poll. It was the same situation Penn State had found itself in three times before under Paterno. While Paterno was reported to have handled disappointment with class, Southern Methodist coach Bobby Collins "did an exceptionally poor job of attempting to hide his bitterness." He "spat" his answers to questions from journalists. He "railed against the voters themselves" ("Penn State is No. 1," 1983, para. 7; 8; 11).

Paterno, meanwhile, saw his influence expand beyond college football. The Grand Experiment, for example, received credit for the great many Penn State players who reached the United States Football League, an upstart professional football league (Wallace, 1983). By the end of the decade, sports journalists would focus as much on his contributions off the field as they would on his team's play on the field.

Protecting the myth: Journalists put Paterno on their shoulders

Sports journalists cheered Paterno's hiring in 1966 because his quotes made their stories more interesting (Conlin, 1966b). As Paterno began his 20th season at Penn State in 1985, it had become clear that sports journalists rewarded him for his openness. "It's not just that he believes," wrote *The Washington Post*'s Michael Wilbon, "but that he speaks" (Wilbon, 1985, para. 17). Charismatic quotes enable journalists to create compelling copy. Paterno provided that. He talked about far

more than how his team fared on the field. Wilbon wrote that he appreciated Paterno's willingness to talk about academic integrity, educational reforms, and "the exploitation of an 'entire generation' of young black football players by white institutions" (Wilbon, 1985, para. 13).

In 1985, at age 59, Paterno was already the second-oldest coach in college football's Division I-A (Moran, 1985). Paterno told reporters that he was "beginning to feel like an old coach" (Moran, 1985, para. 9). Sports journalists signaled that Paterno's age was a sign of wisdom (Wilbon, 1985; Moran, 1985). When Penn State's football team struggled in 1979, those who covered him wrote for the first time articles that questioned his credentials. His 1984 team struggled even worse, finishing 6-5, but now Paterno had a national championship on his résumé, college football's ultimate social currency. After producing the championship, three undefeated teams, and the access he granted journalists, Paterno was untouchable.

Some sports journalists disregarded previous reporting about Paterno's grating management style. Didinger's 1982 series in the *Philadelphia Daily News* quoted numerous ex-players who questioned Paterno's general pig-headedness. Now, journalists created new history, placing him on a higher plane of existence:

> Nobody has ever questioned Joe Paterno's gentlemanly style. The man is a super human being and stands head and shoulders above a good majority of his peers. He represents the 'clean' side of intercollegiate athletics (Kunda, 1985, para. 1).

Sportswriters recalled literary tropes to narrate Paterno. The *New York Times*' Malcolm Moran invoked the fictional character Dorian Gray to explain Paterno's success despite his age, writing, "For all we know, there's a portrait sitting

on his desk that shows the age lines that surely must accompany 35 years coaching football. But Paterno, himself, still looks young and hard" (Moran, 1985, para. 2).

Moran reminded readers that Paterno attended Ivy League Brown University. He wrote that Paterno's success created opportunities to discuss academic integrity (para. 26). Moran did not consider—or at least did not acknowledge—that Paterno's success, coupled with his colorful quotes, inspired sportswriters to give him those opportunities. Moran's claim also ignored years of Paterno's complaints about college sports. Paterno had expressed frustration with recruiting tactics and academic flimsiness for nearly a decade before winning the 1982 championship (Donaldson, 1974).

Paterno, long a proponent of more secure academic checks and balances in college sports, used his newfound authority to advocate for Proposition 48 (herein Prop 48), an NCAA regulation that sets academic standards college freshmen must meet to compete in college sports (Heck and Takahashi, 2006). When the NCAA discussed adopting Prop 48 in 1985, education researchers expressed concern because the measure used a formula that included standardized tests (Siegel, 1994). Low performance on standardized tests affected the eligibility of players who came from low-income communities—often people of color. Low-performing schools often did not prepare students for the rigors of testing.

Many sports journalists missed the argument's complexities. They positioned the NCAA's decision to enact Prop 48 as a win for Paterno (Parrillo, 1986). In early January 1986 a friend of Paterno's won a legal settlement with the aid of Paterno's testimony. Later that month came "Paterno's second victory … when the NCAA

voted to adopt the controversial Proposition 48, establishing a set of standards, based partly on standardized test scores, for incoming freshman athletes" (Parrillo, 1986a, para. 4). The decision crushed academic and professional opportunities for scores of college freshmen. Black University presidents argued "the rule was biased against blacks, that standardized tests like the ACT and SAT favored whites and would adversely affect the eligibility of black freshmen student athletes and the recruitment efforts of athletic coaches at historically black colleges and universities" (Sailes, 1998, p. 134).

But to many sports journalists, Paterno was a hero. Prop 48 belonged to Paterno, who was cleaning up college athletics. "[Paterno] has challenged the NCAA to meet his terms on academic reform in college athletics" (Parrillo, 1986b, para. 13). During discussion of Prop 48 in *The Orlando Sentinel*, Barry Cooper's article, "Uneducated athletes: The impossible dream," declared in all capital letters, "SOMETHING MUST BE DONE" (Cooper, 1985). *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*'s Dick Williams acknowledged that Prop 48 would most hurt Black athletes. Yet he called dissent about Prop 48 a "self-serving debate" (Williams, 1985, para. 8). Williams championed Paterno. "[Paterno] urged his colleagues not to underestimate the abilities of youngsters, black or white, if a goal is put before them with emphasis – and the penalty of not playing ball," wrote Williams.

Even as some newspapers called Prop 48 "academic apartheid" ("Athletic apartheid an," 1986), Paterno escaped criticism. Sportswriters characterized Prop 48 as a way to elevate individual potential and long-term success. Jerry McConnell in *The Oklahoman* chose to quote University of Arkansas athletic director Frank

Broyles—who had gushed over Paterno while broadcasting Penn State's win over Georgia in the 1983 Sugar Bowl. Broyles said Prop 48 was "long overdue" so that academically struggling athletes would stop "embarrassing the athletic department, the football team and the school itself" (McConnell, 1986, para. 17).

Scripps-Howard sportswriter Mike DeCourcy wrote that charges of Paterno being a bigot because of Prop 48 were not true because "more than a third of Paterno's players are black" (DeCourcy, 1986, para. 27-28). Journalists like DeCourcy, who did not cover Paterno regularly, crammed as much Paterno lore as they could into their articles. In 1985 DeCourcy wrote a feature about Paterno that included Stanley Woodward's supposed line, "[Paterno] can't run and he can't pass. All he can do is think and win" (DeCourcy, 1985, para. 10). DeCourcy's 1986 article included, among other themes: Paterno was an intelligent Ivy League graduate; Paterno eyed politics; Paterno held high academic standards; Paterno valued quality of life over money, as if the two were mutually exclusive; Paterno tended to self-promote; and Paterno's morality steered him away from pro football toward college.

> Paterno has talked for years of his disdain for the lack of academic standards. He has lashed out at cheating. He could have escaped all this but coaching in the big-time holds a fascination for him, even if it means occasionally banging heads with people who aren't playing by the same rules. … When it's time to hand over his job to somebody, he wants to make sure it's as right as it can be (DeCourcy, 1986, para. 22, 24).

DeCourcy's words recalled memories of Walter Camp, the original "idealized coach." The *New York World* wrote that Camp "was the oracle, the original, the only true and genuine, the peerless one beside whom all other oracles were base pretenders" ("Walter Camp," 1925b). Paterno's authority spiked with Prop 48. It soared even higher later in 1986. Penn State's football team finished the regular

season 11-0. It earned a game against 11-0 University of Miami in the Fiesta Bowl. Penn State won, and Paterno had his second national championship. How sports journalists covered Paterno, Penn State, and Miami solidified Paterno's place in conservative America.

Memory of mediated images: White hats, black shoes

There is no evidence Paterno, whose Penn State team defeated the University of Miami in the Fiesta Bowl on January 2, 1987, publicly expressed ill will toward Miami or its coach, Jimmy Johnson. But *Sports Illustrated* printed three stories about the Fiesta Bowl in the weeks before and after the game that put Paterno at the center of the matchup. The magazine's writers portrayed Penn State as rugged and workmanlike, while Miami's swift, flashy offensive and defensive schemes developed bitter tones tied to race and urban-regional representation.

The University of Miami football program existed outside of college football's cultural history. When considering the University of Miami football team's place in college football lore, it helps to think of it as an expansion franchise. Yes, Miami's program began in the 1920s. Yes, it won the 1946 Orange Bowl. Miami did not really become "Miami," however, until 1979, when its Board of Trustees, faced with dropping the school's perpetually unsuccessful football program down to Division II, decided to give it one more shot (Feldman, 2004, pp. 18-19). The Board hired Howard Schnellenberger as Miami's new coach. He instituted a five-year plan to win college football's National Championship that included recruiting players out of Miami's urban neighborhoods. In Schnellenberger's fifth year, on January 1, 1984, Miami won its championship.

From 1984-1991, the Hurricanes won four national championships and disrupted the culture of college football. *Sports Illustrated*'s Alexander Wolff argued, in an open letter to the University of Miami, that its football program "has been worse in more ways over a longer period of time than any other intercollegiate athletic program in memory" (Wolff, 1995, para. 5).

College football's foundational figures—Walter Camp, Theodore Roosevelt, Caspar Whitney, Amos Alonzo Staff, Grantland Rice—envisioned the game as a training ground for civic leaders, athletic purity, and the American man, who oozed toughness, hard work, and intelligence (Oriard, 1993). When the *New York Evening Post* called to ban football because of its violence, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote "Of all games I personally like foot ball best, and I would rather see my boys play it than see them play any other. … I would a hundred fold rather keep the game as it is now, with the brutality, than give it up" (Theodore Roosevelt to Walter Camp, 1895). Champions were supposed to be proud but humble, not like Miami. Teams—win or lose—achieved sportsmanship through clean play, hard work, and respect for other teams.

Sports journalists insisted Miami showed none of those traits, nor cared to, especially once Jimmy Johnson became coach in 1984. Feldman disagreed, arguing that Miami lived up to the game's expectations. "Still, for all their recklessness and rambunctious attitudes, Johnson's players had discipline. Only Johnson's definition of *discipline* wasn't what Joe Paterno or Ara Parseghian preached to their players" (Feldman, 2004, p. 81).

One might be able to point to the exact day when sports journalists located Miami opposite to college football: Nov. 30, 1985. On national television, Miami embarrassed Notre Dame, 58-7 ("Miami vs. Notre Dame," uploaded 2012). As a parent might to a child, the television announcers lectured the audience that Johnson let Miami run up the score, which violated one of college football's unwritten rules. The color analyst, former Notre Dame coach Ara Parseghian, wondered why Johnson did not show compassion. Play-by-play broadcaster Brent Musburger asked why Miami would "humiliate" Notre Dame by trying to block a punt late in the game. "Nobody apologized to me when Oklahoma did it to me," Johnson replied (Feldman, 2004, p. 60).

Sports Illustrated writers drew their own conclusions. A few days before the Fiesta Bowl, Penn State and Miami jointly attended a steak dinner. As players spoke and took turns cracking jokes, Penn State punter John Bruno said, "We even let the black guys eat with us at the training table once a week" (Reilly, 1987). Miami players walked out and did not return. Eleven-time National Sportswriter of the Year Rick Reilly reported that the walkout was pre-planned and would have occurred regardless of whether Bruno had made his "joke." Reilly wrote that Bruno's comment was "harmless," even though Johnson said, "Our players were very offended by those racial remarks." Stories in *The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Sports Illustrated, The Sporting News*, and other publications each reported that Miami had walked out of the banquet. None mentioned the racial details of Bruno's comment.

Miami was portrayed as Penn State's Bizarro, the Superman villain who had all of Superman's powers but used them for evil instead of good. Miami was Paterno's perfect antithesis. "… at Miami, tradition and commitment are like hurricanes," wrote *The Dallas Morning News*' Mark Blaudschun, "seasonal in nature, appearing and disappearing rapidly" (Blaudschun, 1986). Johnson spent the week before the Fiesta Bowl fielding questions about suspended players and how his program administered drug tests (Cote, 1986a; LeBelle, 1986). Penn State's players arrived for the game in the customary, Paterno-ordered coat and necktie. Some Miami players wore camouflage.

> The Hurricanes looked like a band of war-primed mercenaries interrupting a Mexican mardi gras as they filed from airplane to waiting buses through a welcoming corridor of gaily dressed 'Tempe Diablos.' … Not all of the Hurricanes traveled in fatigues as fighting men. At least half were outfitted as regular people (Cote, 1986b, para. 6, 15).

Paterno grew tired of reporters contrasting Penn State with Miami (Wilbon, 1986, para. 3). But sports journalists refused to abandon the storyline. An article about Penn State linebacker Shane Conlan headlined "Shane Conlan: The All-American 'SAM,'" concluded that Conlan played "defense for the Nittany Lions with the same sparkle that is in his eyes" (Aubrey, 1986). Ronnie Christ's article in the *Harrisburg Patriot-News* brought together all of the week's themes when he wrote, "Rarely, if ever, have two teams that are about to play in a game to decide the national championship appeared to be so far apart. When Penn State meets Miami in the Jan. 2 Fiesta Bowl it's north versus south. Sweet versus sour. Hot versus cold. The good guys against the bad guys" (Christ, 1986).

Contrasting Paterno with Johnson, Christ added:

> Paterno is the solid conservative, the Mr. Clean of college football. If this was a Hollywood production, Paterno would be Tom Mix, the guy in the white hat riding off into the Arizona sunset. Johnson would be 'Black Bart.' Johnson is the ultra-liberal, a free-wheeling, high-pressure type who is the ultimate salesman (Christ, 1986).

Penn State won, 14-10. As the white-hat-wearing conservative riding off into the sunset, Paterno captured sports journalism's full attention. Surely the narrative would have been different going forward had Miami won, but Paterno won. Wrote sportswriter Steve Kelley in *The Seattle Times*: "It doesn't get any better than this. … The guys in the white hats and black shoes won. Good triumphed over evil" (Kelley, 1987, para. 1, 7). The result justified an article written two weeks earlier by *Sports Illustrated*'s Reilly. In "Not an Ordinary Joe" (1986), Reilly authored an article that named Paterno *Sports Illustrated*'s "Sportsman of the Year," an honor usually reserved for a high-performing athlete who crosses from sports journalism into pop culture and mainstream media.

Diffusing the Paterno narrative. After Penn State's 2011 child-rape scandal ended Paterno's career, Reilly wrote that he regretted writing the article that named Paterno the 1986 "Sportsman of the Year" (Reilly, 2012). The 1986 article seeded many Paterno storylines. In the three weeks following its publication on December 22, 1986, at least 50 newspapers mentioned or quoted from Reilly's article. That number climbed to more than 150 newspapers and magazines by 1996, according to research conducted for this dissertation. The most quoted line was:

> In an era of college football in which it seems everybody's hand is either in the till or balled up in a fist, Paterno sticks out like a clean thumb. His standard of excellence is so season-in, season-out consistent it borders on the monotonous; win 10, 11 games; send off another bunch of future doctors, lawyers and accountants (Reilly, 1986, para. 6).

Reilly touched on all the time-tested Paterno themes:

- [Paterno wears] glasses thicker than storm windows, a jacket and tie, white socks and pants legs that indicate continual fear of flash floods. He goes about 5'10", 165 and looks less like a football coach than a CPA for an olive oil firm (para. 1).

- In fact, when Paterno accepted Rip Engle's offer right out of Brown to take an assistant coaching job at Penn State in 1950, he promised his father he did it only to earn extra money for law school. Thirty-seven years later, it looks as though Joey will never become a lawyer (para. 10).

- Paterno wouldn't give up academia for a million bucks. Make that about $1.3 million, which is what he turned down from the New England Patriots in 1973 to stay at Penn State, which was paying him about $1.25 million less (para. 14).

- Later, during a 1973 commencement address, Paterno wondered, 'How could Nixon know so little about Watergate and so much about football' (para. 37)?

- Paterno once got a standing O at a basketball game just for getting up and going to the bathroom (para. 42).

- Politics calls. His stumping for George Bush in 1980 helped Bush carry the Pennsylvania primary. But Paterno bristles: 'If I'm the best qualified person for an elected government position, what does that say about our country' (para. 45)?

Sports journalists had constructed and reinforced these themes for years before Reilly's article. Reilly collected them all and put them in one place. And it was not just any place, it was *Sports Illustrated*, "the blueprint for modern American sports journalism, and the quintessential American middle-class magazine of the postwar era" (MacCambridge, 1996, p. 5). Plus, Reilly caught Paterno at the right time. Penn State's football team was undefeated and preparing for a high-profile national-championship game against Miami, the most vilified college football team in the United States.

Reilly's article scooped Paterno's two "hometown" newspapers, the *Philadelphia Daily News* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Both responded with their own glowing articles. "[Paterno's] stay as a Pennsylvania State University coach was supposed to be nothing more than a pit stop on the way to law school and a more appropriate career for in Ivy League graduate with a degree in English literature," wrote the *Inquirer*'s Ray Parrillo. "That was 37 years ago" (Parrillo, 1986b). The newspaper, which previously had not cited other publications, acknowledged Paterno had been honored by *Sports Illustrated*. The *New York Times*' Peter Alfano also noted *Sports Illustrated* in his article, adding, "Paterno has presided over a prosperous program in every sense, fielding winning teams without sacrificing academics" (Alfano, 1986).

Sports journalists blended Paterno themes with the award. Bruce Lowitt of the *St. Petersburg Times* wrote, "The deification of Joe Paterno is virtually complete. All that remains is the coronation. Having been named the 1986 Sportsman of the Year by *Sports Illustrated* magazine will mean little to the former kid from Brooklyn if Penn State fails to win the Fiesta Bowl and the attendant national championship" (Lowitt, 1987, para. 1-3).

Three years later the *Sports Illustrated* honor remained a common reference when writing about Paterno. "[Paterno] is the only football coach ever selected as *Sports Illustrated*'s Sportsman of the Year" ("Paterno: Teaching a," 1989). The article became as much a part of Paterno's legacy as turning down the NFL and his fight with Nixon. It also became a part of the mediation of Reilly. When Reilly expressed regret about the article in 2012, *Deadspin* blogger Sean Newell wrote, "Rick Reilly

has issued a *mea culpa* of sorts regarding Joe Paterno. Reilly essentially issued an apology for publishing a 10-page puff piece on Paterno for *Sports Illustrated*'s Sportsman of the Year award" (Newell, 2012b, para. 1.).

'Be Good, and be patient'

Journalists wrote that Paterno "deserved" his first national championship. They continued that theme after his second. *The New York Times*' George Vecsey argued "No coach is more entitled to this grandiose vision than Paterno, a voice of conscience and humor and rationality for 21 seasons" (Vecsey, 1987, para. 19). *Sports Illustrated*'s Papanek did not argue why Paterno "deserved" a championship. Vecsey did not explain why Paterno was "entitled" to glory. Paterno's merit was to be accepted at face value. Joe Paterno deserved to win because he was Joe Paterno.

One month after the championship, Paterno's Penn State football team went to Washington D.C. to meet with President Ronald Reagan. Reagan honored them as national champions and posed for pictures. Paterno, long speculated by media to fancy politics, stepped into the brightest political spotlight of his career to date.

Sports journalists depicted the weeks leading up to Penn State against Miami as right versus wrong, good versus evil, white hat versus black hat. Paterno's reputation as college football's lone honest voice preceded Penn State's trip to the White House. Said Reagan: "America is great because through our history we've had men and women with [Paterno's] kind of goodness, honor and decency, his kind of dedication to his calling and, yes, his kind of values" (United Press International, 1987, para. 5).

A wire-service story about the February 2, 1987 meeting in the *Philadelphia Daily News* led with Reagan and Paterno greeting each other as part of the "mutual admiration society" ("Nittany Lions, Reagan," 1987). The journalist gave them comparable social status. Reagan and his vice president, George H.W. Bush, wore Penn State University baseball caps to the meeting. Paterno gave Reagan a replica Penn State football jersey. "There are no stripes on this jersey. We're not flashy at Penn State," Paterno told the president. "And we don't put any name on the back because we're team players. We're conservative" (para. 5-6).

Paterno and Penn State shifted in the eyes of American sports journalists. When Paterno took over as head coach in 1966, he was an outsider because of his commitment to academics and willingness to talk openly with the press. Penn State played football as an independent, which meant they were not members of an athletic conference such as the Big Ten or the Southwest Conference. That status sometimes hurt them in the polls to determine a national champion. Yet by the mid-1980s, although Penn State still played as an independent, sports journalists transformed Paterno into the living symbol of college football's potential. The shift was more than conversational. It was journalistically palpable. *The Washington Post*'s Ken Denlinger wrote, "In the late 1980s, Penn State gets the benefit of nearly every doubt; in the late 1960s, it got almost none. The moral: be good, and be patient" (1987, para. 28).

Paterno accepted an invitation to speak in August of 1988 at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans (Giles, 1988). He delivered a seconding speech for Bush's nomination as the party's presidential candidate. He told *Sports*

Illustrated in 1973 that he was a registered Republican and that his father, an organizer for the Democratic Party, would "roll over in his grave if he knew" (Johnson, 1973, para. 22). Paterno also publicly celebrated progressive American Democrats or liberal figures who inspired him, including Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. Other than stumping for Bush in 1980, however, Paterno had never become involved in politics beyond giving his opinion when asked, which media did often because they knew he—unlike his peers—would answer such questions.

Paterno's speech in 1988 gave journalists an opening to accelerate Paterno-related political dialogue. One journalist used a quote from a Pennsylvania Republican delegate to position Paterno as staunchly right wing and, further, a victim of Democratic partisanship. Said the delegate:

> '[Paterno] is one of our own. It's unfair that the Democrats are criticizing an institution. He has a right to speak his mind. He's always been a Republican. His speech will be a great source of pride for those of us from Pennsylvania' (Giles, 1988, para. 12).

Use of the quote indicated that Paterno was above reproach because of his success as a college football coach. The reporter cited no specific Democrat who had criticized Paterno, but he did write vaguely that the speech "has been criticized by Democrats." Although Paterno was from Brooklyn—a fact noted often by journalists—in this article he was one of Pennsylvania's "favorite sons." A reporter for *The Dallas Morning News* pointed to Paterno's appearance as evidence that Bush lacked toughness. "Nomination night also features former Dallas Cowboy Roger Staubach and Penn State football coach Joe Paterno," wrote the reporter, "apparent

macho symbols for a campaign still fighting the 'wimp factor'" (Barta, 1988, para. 18).

"This is a convention of symbols," led Carolyn Barta in a story for *The Dallas Morning News*. Reporters such as those from the *Allentown Morning Call* linked Paterno's coaching career to his political activism. Attaching their own narration to Paterno's politicking allowed them to show the coach as a political firebrand too powerful to be contained by mere college athletics. Paterno told the crowd about his and Bush's compassion for "young people in inner cities," a point the reporters let pass without reference to Prop 48.

> Paterno … went on the attack in his seconding speech, challenging those who have mocked Bush in recent weeks. 'I'll be damned if I'll sit still while people who can't carry George Bush's shoes ridicule him,' Paterno said, his voice rising as if he was yelling at his football team. … 'After a lifetime of competition, I know a leader and I know a winner' Paterno said. 'I know the difference between bravado and the quiet, dignified, confidence of a Joe DiMaggio, a Walter Payton, a George Bush' (Drachler & Higham, 1988, para. 15-17, 19).

Paterno's quotes did not appear until the end of the article, but the headline read "Paterno rips Democrats." *The Philadelphia Daily News*' Gar Joseph continued the politification of Paterno when he wrote "In fact, in Pennsylvania, a vote for Bush is really a vote for former Mayor Frank L. Rizzo, Penn State football coach Joe Paterno and 23 other Republican electors" (Joseph, 1988, para. 13). *USA Today* reported convention buttons that included Paterno's name alongside Republican candidates were so popular that party officials hoped Paterno would run for Pennsylvania governor ("What's happening in," 1988, para. 80).

Links to Reagan continued, even in fun. Writing about Paterno's jet-black hair at age 63, a reporter quoted Florida State coach Bobby Bowden, who said, "There

ain't no dye involved. He and (former President Ronald) Reagan came out of the same box, boy" (Towle, 1989, para. 2). Of course, the article also included the requisite Paterno themes, including, "And Paterno has turned down several multimillion dollar coaching offers from National Football League teams" (para. 15). When Penn State struggled, *Orange County Register* sports columnist Mark Whicker suggested Paterno spend less time giving political speeches, adding, "Has Paterno followed the Reagan-Bush student-loan policy the last few years" (Whicker, 1988, para. 8)?

Criticism focused mostly on Paterno's age, a theme that remained to varying degrees until he was fired in 2011. One sportswriter described Penn State as wearing "a cloak of conservatism" (Christ, 1988, para. 4). Other sports journalists acknowledged that Paterno had achieved a level of authority that other college football coaches had not. *USA Today*'s Joe Saraceno wrote of Paterno's "buffed" public image and "deified" reputation, without fully considering where the image and reputation came from (Saraceno, 1989, para. 5, 8). The football team moved further to the background as Paterno's spotlight grew hotter. *The Washington Post*'s Denlinger quoted Paterno after 1988's losing season saying, "I deserved the kind of season we had" (Denlinger, 1989, para. 7).

Penn State finished 8-3 in 1989. In 1993 it ended its independent status and joined the Big Ten Conference. Paterno's 1994 team finished 12-0 but was voted second in the final *Associated Press* poll. Between 1995-2011, Paterno and Penn achieved varying levels of success. Journalists constructed both the good and bad

seasons around his age: during down years, it was time to step away; during good years, he showed the mind is ageless.

Media coverage of Paterno changed around 2008 when a new generation of sports journalists entered the profession—a point that will be discussed in the next chapter. Perhaps coincidentally, 2008 is the year historian Sean Wilentz identified as the unofficial end to the Reagan era, because of shifts in the U.S. Congress and the election of President Barack Obama. Using Reagan as its figurehead, conservative America "delivered what sounded like straightforward, commonsense solutions to the nation's ills" (Wilentz, 2008, p. 6). A more likely reason for the 2008 Paterno coverage than a shift in politics were introductions of new technologies and other related challenges to the profession of journalism.

Paterno did not have to worry about the Internet in the 1980s, when journalists had a far stronger grip on information that reached the public than they do today. Professional journalists controlled the mass-mediated Paterno. As long as his teams won and he continued to churn out those irresistible Paterno quotes, journalism endorsed Paterno's morality. Even when he was wrong, he wasn't. Prop 48, which Paterno supported, torpedoed a generation of Black college athletes. Journalists linked Paterno to Prop 48 mostly for academic reasons, not race. Paterno could be a tyrant to his players on the practice field, but his teams won, so journalists decided his methods were justified. What could have damaged Paterno's reputation instead fortified it, thanks to those who covered him. Then the Internet came along and wrecked everything journalists had spent 45 years to create.

CHAPTER 4: PATERNO AND THE SHAMING OF OLD JOURNALISM

From the late 1960s through the 1970s, sports journalists turned Joe Paterno into a symbol of their hopes for what college football could and should be. He was the honorable outsider. During the 1980s, sports journalists morphed Paterno into a conservative symbol. Paterno's way, they argued, was the way it had always been and always should be.

By the early 21st century, Paterno was more symbol than person, the fully formed "idealized coach," at least as far as sports journalists were concerned. He represented any number of institutions and causes. The cheer "We are … Penn State," popular among the school's fans, became "He is … Penn State," to honor Paterno (Flounders, 2012). He turned 73 years old nine days before January 1, 2000. Grambling State University's Eddie Robinson retired in 1997, which made Paterno college football's oldest active head coach. He represented new definitions of age and vitality. "Really great coaches are never too old to win," wrote a *USA Today* columnist (Neuharth, 2005, para. 10). Paterno also suffered ageist rhetoric when Penn State's team played poorly. "But if you're just coaching away and not really performing to expectations, isn't it time to retire" (Mao, 2004, para. 2)?

In September 2005 *Deadspin* debuted. The sports-media website, edited by journalist Will Leitch and owned by Gawker Media, commented on sports media as sports media commented on athletes and teams. Without publicly saying so, *Deadspin* adopted Sut Jhally's 1989 treatise that mainstream sport is not just mediation of an event; mainstream sport is mediation of an event that is mediated. Sports journalists, long the watchdogs of sport, became the watched. *Deadspin*

placed sports journalists inside the boundaries of what in the sporting world required coverage. Further, the website broke away from traditional sports journalism by blogging about news items deemed unfit for the sports pages. When Penn State fired Paterno in November 2011, *Deadspin* helped rip Paterno away from the too-old/not-too-old narrative vortex. It revealed Paterno as a symbol of the damage sports journalists inflict when narrative trumps reporting. Paterno spent the last years of his mass-mediated life represented as neither radical nor conservative. Instead, Paterno became the device sports journalists and sports-media critics used to argue the questions of "What is journalism?" and "Who is a journalist?"

A month after debuting, *Deadspin* ran a post with the headline, "Does Joe Pa hate lesbians, too" (Leitch, 2005)? The post was in response to accusations of homophobic behavior by Penn State University's women's basketball coach, whom Paterno hired during his brief stint as athletic director 20 years earlier. Although coverage of the women's coach made national news, Paterno's connection never appeared in mainstream newspapers. A few months later, *Deadspin* tried to humorously cover insensitive comments Paterno allegedly made about women trying to have sex with athletes, writing, "We agree Paterno's comments are somewhat offensive, but we adhere to our Octogenarian Postulate, which states that any coach over the age of 80 is forgiven for offensive comments and, in fact, credited simply for still being alive" (Leitch, 2006, para. 3).

Deadspin was not the first news organization to cover unorthodox sports angles, nor was it the first to comment on sports-media matters. Some newspapers

and magazines, including *USA Today*, employed columnists who wrote about sports media during the 1980s. Yet *Deadspin* debuted at the right moment in time with the right variables needed to contribute to the redefinition of sports journalism. Its founding editor, Leitch, received formal journalism training at the University of Illinois. The social media platform Twitter debuted in March 2006, six months after *Deadspin* (Bennett, 2013). Six months later, Facebook switched to open registration, allowing anyone to sign up ("Timeline: Key dates," 2014). These outlets let early *Deadspin* readers share content in ways previously unavailable. *Deadspin* was and remains majority owned by Gawker Media founder Nick Denton, a journalist turned Internet entrepreneur. Denton, who operates in both the journalistic and technological spheres, melded the two. *Deadspin* now generates nearly 13 million unique views per month (Quantcast, 2016) and owns an estimated worth of nearly $100 million (WorthOfWeb.com, 2016).

Denton grew *Deadspin* largely on the strength of its readers and user-generated content. Its hugely successful comment boards inspired copycats, some of which went on to commercial success (Mullin, 2015). For example, the football-themed website *Kissing Suzy Kolber* was founded by *Deadspin* commenters who decided to collaborate on their own venture. *Kissing Suzy Kolber* was later acquired by Gawker-like company *Uproxx*. Founding *Kolber* contributor Drew Magary was hired away by *Deadspin*.

Deadspin, *Awful Announcing, The Big Lead*, and similar nontraditional sports websites began publishing as Paterno neared his 80th birthday and suffered a series of health issues and injuries. In November 2006 players from Penn State and

Wisconsin collided with Paterno on the sideline. They broke his leg (Lapointe, 2006). In 2008 broadcaster Brent Musburger told radio host Dan Patrick that Paterno feared retirement because it could mean death (Daulerio, 2008, para. 2). "Now, this is not Musburger speculating," wrote *Deadspin*'s A.J. Daulerio, "but Paterno admitting he'll keel over once he retires, which is just extremely sad." In August 2011 Paterno's pelvis was broken when a Penn State player ran into him at practice (Rittenberg, 2011a, para. 1-2).

In 2009 *Deadspin* mocked Paterno's age with the headline, "Oh, Bill, don't interview Joe Paterno right after he wakes up from his nap" (Daulerio, 2009). Mainstream media took note of *Deadspin*, dismissing its writers as "bloggers," not journalists. Said journalist Buzz Bissinger:

> I hate *Deadspin*. I think it represents everything that's wrong with blogs because it's snarky, malicious, mean spirited and vaguely filled with invectives—in particular when it comes to the comments. The comments are guided by the posts (Ronquillo, 2008, para. 18).

The Detroit News' Chris McCosky separated bloggers from journalists. "A lot of times these bloggers use the work of legitimate reporters" (Sussman, 2007, para. 3). ESPN's Colin Cowherd became so furious with *The Big Lead*, a *Deadspin* spawn, that he told his listeners to log on to *The Big Lead* and crash their site (Schreiber, 2007, para. 2). Listeners did. The site was offline two days. Cowherd, using ESPN's authority and muscle, declared on-air, "… don't screw with us." Cowherd later expressed regret about the incident but positioned ESPN as "legitimate" and professionally superior to blogs. "My feeling on blogs has always been the same," he said. "I give you legitimacy because I talk about you" (Fogarty, 2010, para. 9). Cowherd made his remarks to *Sportsgrid*, an independent sports blog.

The boom in the popularity of sports blogs coincided with the twilight of Paterno's career. *SB Nation* and *Bleacher Report* capitalized on blogs' popularity by forming fan-generated supersites: networks of like-minded blogs under one corporate structure. Some of these outlets were staffed by writers not trained in journalism ("What Bleacher Report," 2016). However, as opportunities to work in sports journalism at "traditional" media outlets dwindled, sports journalists migrated to blogs and other nontraditional media (Yu, 2014). This changed the culture of sports journalism in two ways. First, hiring journalists to work at non-traditional outlets reinforced the social value of professional journalism. Second, it professionally legitimized outlets once chastised for operating "out of their mother's basement" (Bucholtz, 2015). It also increased the number of "journalists" writing about Paterno exponentially.

When news broke in November 2011 that former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky was under investigation for attacking and raping children—and Joe Paterno had been aware of the allegations for years—nontraditional sports-journalists pounced on mainstream journalism for how it covered the investigation. Both traditional and nontraditional outlets criticized Paterno. Nontraditional sports journalists went a step further, investigating—and/or poking fun at—the institution of sports journalism. In doing so, it transformed Paterno and Penn State into the effigy of bad journalism and announced itself as a more pure form of what journalism should be.

Sports journalists blame; bloggers contextualize

Before the Sandusky scandal, there were signs of sports blogs beginning to act like professional journalism organizations. When *Deadspin* received an anonymous tip about Paterno's health and possible retirement, the blog published a post that explained how readers should handle Internet rumors. It was a lesson worthy of any high school or college news-literacy course. "Don't believe email forwards. You know those ones that promise that if you forward it to 10 people, you'll get rich? How'd that work out for you" (Petchesky, 2010, para. 17)? The story appeared under the headline, "Last night's winner: Internet rumors of Joe Paterno's health as actual news." The post took readers behind journalism's curtain. It explained how *Deadspin* came into possession of multiple emails about Paterno, how the company went about vetting the emails, and why it decided not to report the emails' claims. The instincts of *Deadspin*'s editors proved correct: Paterno did not retire.

The *Patriot-News* of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania drove the Sandusky coverage. Led by reporter Sara Ganim, the reporting team eventually earned the Pulitzer Prize for local reporting (Pulitzer.org, 2012). The news organization had covered Sandusky allegations as far back as the late 1990s. Sandusky's indictment on November 4, 2011 accelerated the *Patriot-News*' coverage (Ganim, 2011). ESPN and other media outlets picked up the scent and also began to cover the story. The Pennsylvania State's Attorney Office indicted Sandusky on 40 charges of sex crimes against children. Sports journalists focused almost exclusively on Paterno, whose knowledge of the allegations was made known when the *Patriot-News* reported two

points. First, a Penn State assistant coach told Paterno in 2001 he witnessed Sandusky sexually attacking a child in a Penn State shower. Second, Paterno gave testimony to a grand jury about Sandusky in 2009 (Gamin, 2011, para. 15, 18; Henneberger, 2012, para. 3).

Some sports journalists immediately called for Paterno's resignation. FoxSports.com's Greg Couch, formerly of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, placed full blame for Paterno's sterling reputation on Paterno. For decades sports journalists wrote, reinforced, and regurgitated Paterno themes. Paterno was brilliant; Paterno was moral; Paterno was ethical; Paterno won "the right way." Yet it was common for sports journalists to disavow their profession's culpability, like when Couch wrote, "Paterno has spent 50 years pushing an image of righteousness:"

> If the report is right, Paterno, leader of men for the past half century, simply called his athletic director and passed on the information of the rape his graduate assistant described to him; like telling your boss on a co-worker who is stealing staples from the supply closet. … If he is really about more than just football, if all these years really meant something, then Paterno would have done more than just pass the reports onto his boss and wash his hands (Couch, 2011, para. 18, 42).

Sports blogs *Deadspin* and *The Big Lead* also called for Paterno's resignation. Yet their approaches differed from Couch's. Although the distinction was subtle, mainstream journalists claimed that Paterno was a hypocrite because he spent decades acting morally superior, while nontraditional journalists wrote that Paterno made a morally bad decision. Bloggers commented on the incident; mainstream media used the incident to apply a broad brush across Paterno's entire legacy.

Drew Magary, the *Deadspin* commenter who became a paid staff writer, implored readers not to judge Paterno until they considered human nature. Magary

told readers that anyone could mishandle a high-stakes situation as Paterno did. He reminded readers that legacies are complex sums made up of a lifetime of decision-making, unable to be judged in black and white. Magary wrote, "underneath that outrage, there is a real sadness and fear, the idea that 'good' people can still be hard-wired for self-preservation, even when faced with the ugliest truths. Even JoePa. Even you" (Magary, 2011, para. 4).

The Big Lead's Ty Duffy included Paterno's morality in his call for Paterno's resignation, but he did not assert Paterno was the greatest champion of his own morality. That morality was now part of the mass-mediated Paterno—on a cultural level—which made the story even more tragic. Duffy wrote that Paterno's legacy "may be ground to dust by this scandal" (Duffy, 2011, para. 11). He concluded that Penn State as a whole needed "a clean slate, entirely new leadership" (para. 12). The ultimate perpetrator, Duffy wrote, was Sandusky. Paterno shared responsibility for not doing more, but so did all of Penn State.

Mainstream sports journalists assigned Paterno the bulk of the blame for the cover-up. In doing so, they continued to place him on a pedestal above Penn State University and even the crime itself. In the coming days, traditional sports journalists continued their who-deserves-the-blame debate, while the sports blogs turned a large chunk of their attention away from Paterno and Penn State, recalibrating their critiques on the institution of sports journalism.

Forcing their way in: Bloggers out-journalism the journalists

One of the first shots fired at sports media during the Paterno saga occurred on a relatively unknown sports blog, *Busted Coverage*. On November 8, 2011, Penn

State University called a press conference for Paterno. Journalists prepared to question him about the scandal. But as approximately 200 media members waited in line to get in, a university official announced the school had canceled the event (Smith, 2011). Paterno also failed to appear on the Big Ten Conference's weekly conference call for football coaches. With no news to write, the cancelations became the story. Publications that covered the cancelation included *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *The Associated Press*, *Huffington Post*, *The Sporting News*, *Denver Post* (under the headline "Gutless Penn State cancels Joe Paterno press conference"), ESPN, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and at least two dozen others.

Apoplectic sports journalists called Penn State University and Paterno "cowardly" and "unprofessional," among other terms. The university and Paterno had obeyed legal counsel in their decisions not to speak. Journalists did not want to hear it. "Penn State cancels Joe Paterno press conference, media erupts!" rang *Busted Coverage*'s headline (Kinsey, 2011). Joe Kinsey's post briefly summarized Penn State's decision to cancel the conference, then turned its attention to sports media. Bringing readers into a conversation about professional journalism, Kinsey wrote, "The Penn State president made the decision to scrap the presser and of course the media – via Twitter – erupted in protest" (para. 1). Kinsey did not expand on the post, but the phrase "of course" signaled readers that sports media responded as he had expected. Mainstream sports journalism followed an established pattern.

Penn State had hinted it might cancel the event. Earlier in the day it issued a press release instructing journalists not to ask Paterno about Sandusky. "This ought

to be good," wrote *Deadspin*'s Dom Cosentino (2011a, para. 2), under the headline "Penn State to reporters: Do not ask about Jerry Sandusky at today's conference call."

SB Nation, the network of fan-generated sports blogs, published a long post to critique sports media. It discussed professional behavior and narrative. The author, Mike Pettigano, used Paterno as a canvas to paint readers an inside portrait of the business. One of his poignant messages was that sports journalists enjoyed the scandal because it gave them something to write and talk about. He portrayed Paterno as a media victim, astutely critiquing that "Without Paterno, we wouldn't be witnessing the collective hair-on-fire, ratings-generating outrage on anything close to what's going on around the nation today" (Pettigano, 2011, para. 23).

Pettigano's readers supported him throughout the story's 186 comments, a sign of their interest in reading about the practice of sports journalism. "Do me a favor," wrote one commenter. "Google search 'Jerry Sandusky scandal' – You get 1.38 million hits. Now Google 'Joe Paterno scandal' – You get 108 million results. Let me say that again. One-Hundred-and-eight-MILLION results. That is 106.62 million more than the guy who actually committed the crime. I had to do it 4 times to make sure I wasn't seeing things."

Pettigano's post blended insight with contempt.

> For 60 years, nothing happened to seriously compromise Paterno's integrity or the university's image. That's a long time. … Penn State and Paterno's fall would be the story of the century for college sports. The media was ready and waiting. It would be big. Now it's here, and it's not even in the same galaxy as what was expected to bring down JoePa & Co (Pettigano, 2011, para. 17, 19).

Pettigano's critique of media behavior was shared 4,304 times on Facebook from its original webpage, according *SB Nation*'s analytics. That does not take into account the number of times it was re-shared on Facebook or other social media sites that were popular in 2011, like Twitter and Pinterest. Concluded Pettigano:

> *The media will drive this narrative as hard and fast as it can, and if you get in the way, watch out, because you ain't stopping it* (italics in original). … The news media, in general, has not only dropped the ball on this one, it has done *harm* to the coverage this story should be getting. It's a disappointing display of what journalism should not be, particularly when such dynamic, emotional, downright disturbing events are under the public scrutiny. I can only hope the media gets its act together over the coming days and week. But I'm afraid I could be waiting for a very long time. Once this story dies down, nothing will be clarified later (Pettigano, 2011, para. 39, 43-44).

Later on the same day that Penn State canceled the press conference, Paterno and his wife, Sue, walked out the front door of their home to meet supporters and journalists. Paterno spoke and answered questions for several minutes. He told students to get back to their studies, and he cried a little (Cosentino, 2011b). Local news stations reported that the number of people accusing Sandusky of attacks had risen to 20. Some supporters in attendance filmed the scene to post on YouTube ("Joe Paterno outside," 2011).

Paterno, physically weak, spoke softly. *Deadspin* ran Paterno's words verbatim (Cosentino, 2011b), then ran them verbatim again in a separate post (Carmichael, 2011a). The website, which did not have a staff member on the Penn State University campus, directed readers via hyperlink to on-site reporters at other news companies. Further, *Deadspin* explained to readers where it found the Paterno quotes and linked to the original source to establish accuracy and credibility. Quoting sources accurately is an expectation of professional journalists that is

taught in journalism schools and included in staff manuals of professional news organizations. National Public Radio's ethics handbook includes an accuracy checklist with the item, "Are the quotes accurate and properly attributed" (NPR.org)?

Some mainstream journalists did not quote Paterno accurately. They butchered a key Paterno quote in which he mentioned Sandusky's victims. His actual quote was: "And as I said, I don't know if you heard me or not, is, you know, the kids who were victims or whatever they want to say, I think we all ought to say a prayer for them" (Carmichael, 2011a, para. 3). Post author Emma Carmichael wondered whether Paterno added "or whatever they want to say" because lawyers had coached him about what was OK to say in public during an ongoing legal investigation. She then turned to the mainstream journalists who got Paterno's quote wrong. "Still, the words came out, clearly and on the record," Carmichael wrote. "[But] this is how media outlets dealt with the quote in question."

Carmichael gave examples of eight media outlets quoting Paterno nine different ways. All differed from the accurate quote provided by *Deadspin*, YouTube, and the media outlets to which *Deadspin* felt comfortable hyperlinking. The offending outlets were: *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, *Daily Collegian* (Penn State's college news organization), *Chicago Tribune*, *Fox Sports*, *The Associated Press* news wire, and ESPN twice. Most egregious was removal of the phrase "or whatever" from stories in the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Associated Press*, and ESPN. Carmichael suggested that, "or whatever" potentially added layers to the story. She

sarcastically opined that mainstream journalists removed "or whatever" because there "must have been a space constraint" (Carmichael, 2011a, para. 16).

Carmichael and *SB Nation*'s Pettigano used similar tactics to separate themselves from mainstream journalists, with whom they did not want to be associated. Deliberate disassociation signaled readers that mainstream journalists should not be trusted. Carmichael wrote, "this is how media outlets dealt with the quote in question" (2011a, para. 5). Pettigano wrote, "I can only hope the media gets its act together" (2011, para. 44).

Bloggers make an example of ESPN. Bloggers targeted mainstream media, but they saved their most fierce criticism for ESPN, the all-sports network and most valuable media property in the world (Badenhausen, 2012). ESPN's visibility and multimedia diversity made it a wide target for criticism. Its Paterno coverage included live shots, legal analysis, historical montages, and the network's own college football analysts. One notable moment occurred when ESPN analyst Matt Millen, who played for Paterno in the late 1970s, broke down in tears on-air (Cosentino, 2011c). ESPN's Paterno coverage proved so constant that *The Heckler*, an online sports-parody publication, wrote a post titled, "In wake of Paterno scandal, ESPN staff to relearn sports" (2011). Wrote *The Heckler*: "Since Monday, the only thing followers of the network have heard is wall-to-wall coverage of the egregious acts of Penn State employees and the attempts to hide them" (para. 2).

ESPN is available in 81 percent of all United States homes that have a television (SportsTVRatings.com, 2015). It shows live games, reports hard sports news, produces documentaries, talk shows, and it has even created scripted

programming. ESPN "continues to build its brand as far as it will reasonably (and sometimes unreasonably) stretch. … pairs its global expansion with a steady infiltration of regional markets. … organizes these assets under its institutional banner and uses them as entry points into its ever-swelling empire" (Vogan, 2015, pp. 174-175).

The most extreme charge thrown at ESPN during the Sandusky saga was that its blanket coverage "quite possibly will provoke Paterno's eventual death" (Ziegler, 2011, para. 28). Paterno died from cancer—not excessive media coverage—two months later. *Bleacher Report*'s John Ziegler aimed his criticism at ESPN because of its place in the sports-media culture. The network had let him down. Perhaps more poignantly, Ziegler felt ESPN had let down "journalism." Someone needed to repair ESPN's damage. Ziegler's words and the words of others who criticized ESPN were similar to other bloggers who had been critical of sports journalism in general.

> There is no doubt that the media circus was not going away as long as Paterno was still, even as figurehead, technically at the helm. And why was that? It is because ESPN—which now has a virtual monopoly of sports news coverage—had decided that this was the biggest sports story of the decade and that Joe Paterno was the key figure. For the past three days, ESPN has basically blown out its normal broadcasting schedule to go with virtual wall-to-wall coverage of this scandal. Almost all of that coverage has been focused on Paterno and whether he could possibly continue as the head coach (Ziegler, 2011, para. 8-9).

Ziegler argued that ESPN's coverage was tone deaf. He described a scene in which ESPN anchors innocently wondered why demonstrating Penn State students overturned a television truck. The on-site reporter replied that students were "blaming the messenger" (para. 19). *Deadspin*, meanwhile, addressed ESPN's media production. One blog post pointed out that whenever ESPN hosts and analysts

introduced video clips of Paterno, the images always came with "sad guitar" music playing underneath (Toder, 2011). Matt Toder argued the music was emotionally manipulative. And media watchdog Poynter Institute slammed ESPN for Adam Rittenberg's November 8 online story about how the scandal affected recruiting (Myers, 2011).

Poynter's Jason Fry and Kelly McBride, who coincidentally were serving as ESPN's ombudspersons when the scandal broke, criticized ESPN in a post that appeared on ESPN.com. They argued that ESPN's large journalist pool should have enabled the network to take the lead on coverage of the scandal. They said ESPN's coverage was spotty—OK at times, but "more often seeming inappropriate. It wasn't until mid-afternoon Tuesday that ESPN finally seemed consistently to ask the right questions and find the appropriate moral outrage. That's 72 hours after the story first broke" (Fry & McBride, 2011, para. 6).

Blogs acknowledged ESPN's journalistic expectations and responsibilities by writing about what the network had not accomplished. The blog *Awful Announcing* criticized many of the major networks—including CNN— for under-covering Penn State's student demonstrations on the night Paterno was fired. *Awful Announcing* unleashed its harshest criticism for ESPN (Koo, 2011). Blogger Ben Koo wrote that ESPN failed to get a camera to the press conference in which Paterno was fired, missed Paterno when he made an appearance outside of his house, and had to rely on social-media feeds from the demonstrations because its reporters were out of position. Koo also wrote, "multiple times ESPN's coverage would contradict itself as

they would report there had been arrests while later on a reporter would claim that there had not been any arrests" (Koo, 2011, para. 11).

The *Awful Announcing* post acknowledged that it was "bagging on traditional media" (Koo, 2011, para. 9). Yet it and other nontraditional sports-journalism websites grounded its criticism of ESPN in journalistic principles. ESPN caught flack for assigning its reporters to the wrong locations, insulting viewers with manipulative music, getting "beat" by companies with fewer resources, misunderstanding how to play stories from the scandal, and faulty reporting. Most of all, ESPN took heat for making Paterno the story ahead of Penn State and Sandusky's victims. The network was accused by sports bloggers of sacrificing its journalistic integrity for sensationalism, with Paterno's star power as the catalyst.

Sports bloggers do journalists' work for them. Content produced by sports blogs during the Penn State scandal extended beyond poking fun at traditional sports journalism. Bloggers also produced "good journalism," conceptualized as that which makes "complex events and issues into simple and understandable stories" (Zelizer, 2005, p. 60). Two months before the day Paterno was fired, *Deadspin* discovered letters from Pennsylvania's two senators sent to President Barack Obama that recommended Paterno for the Presidential Medal of Freedom (Petchesky, 2011). *Deadspin* returned to those documents now that the scandal was in full bloom, beginning a public debate in its comments section about how the senators and U.S. president would approach the request in light of current events.

"The many lies of Joe Paterno," posted on the blog *Lawyers, Guns & Money*, investigated Paterno's claims that he had been unaware of earlier accusations against Sandusky (Campos, 2011). Post author Paul Campos cross-referenced court documents, past Paterno statements, and events that occurred in and around the Penn State football program. Campos' evidence was available for anyone with similar ambition to study, but Campos was among the first to ask whether the initial Sandusky accusations—from the late 1990s—were tied to Sandusky's unexpected resignation from Penn State after the 1999 season (Jones, 2000). Campos wondered whether Paterno knew then about the accusations. Campos also juxtaposed an image of Paterno smiling with supporters from the same night when he said he was "devastated" by the scandal. The contradiction could lead readers to question Paterno's sincerity.

The Big Lead and *Deadspin* each published timelines of key moments during the scandal (Douglas, 2011; "A comprehensive timeline," 2011). News organizations use timelines to introduce audiences to the chronology of a story (McAdams, 2011). As the *Philadelphia Inquirer* attempted to wax eloquently on Paterno's downfall—"It was not supposed to end like this for Joe Paterno" (Fernandez, 2011, para. 1)—*Deadspin* aggregated quotes from past and current Penn State football players. *Deadspin*'s goal was to show the blind loyalty Paterno's players felt toward him (Brill, 2011). By including quotes like, "This is almost like a modern-day crucifixion," *Deadspin* established the depth of emotions Paterno endeared in his players. The *Inquirer*'s Fernandez, meanwhile, returned to old Paterno territory and offered no new insight:

> Penn State's [graduation] figure was a whopping 34 percentage points above the FBS average. Paterno didn't hesitate to sit down a player, even a starter, if he didn't attend class and keep up his grades, and he mentored his players in ways that went beyond X's and O's. And in the early 1970s, he passed up an opportunity for a big payday when he turned down an offer to coach the New England Patriots (Fernandez, 2011, para. 12-13).

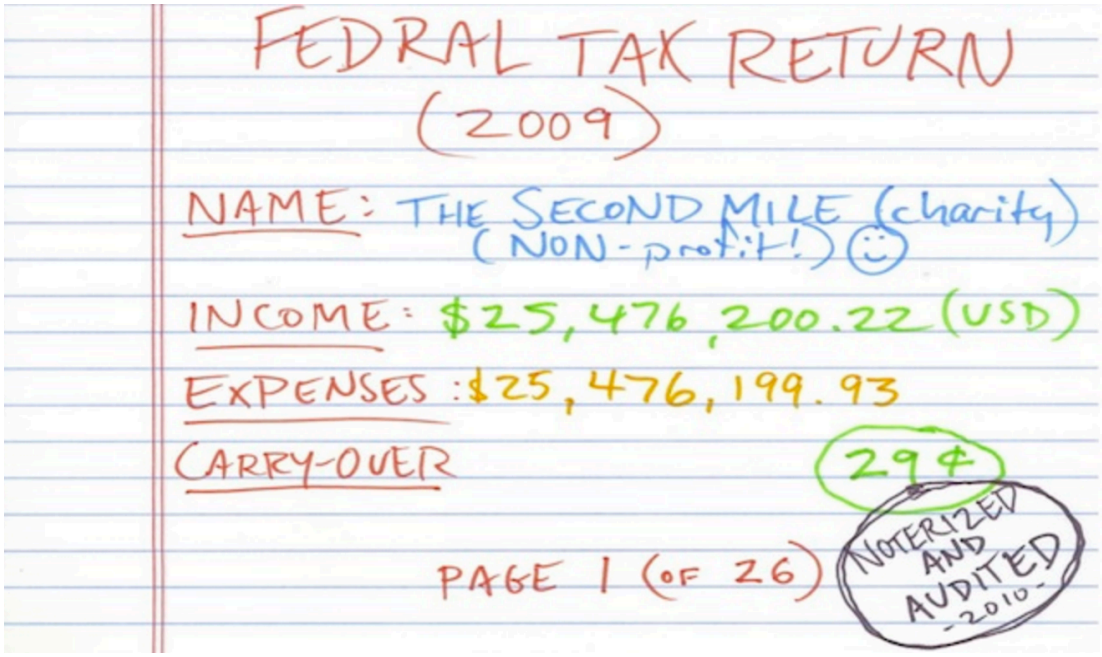
The blogs even treaded onto traditional media's sacred ground: original reporting. *SB Nation*'s *Black Shoe Diaries* blog, which covered Penn State athletics, tracked down a high school coach to debunk a false report that Sandusky continued to recruit players for Penn State while he was under investigation. The visual appearance of *Black Shoe Diaries'* online post looked similar to presentations used on the websites of mainstream news organizations. The blog mimicked the journalistic structure. It also held a local news station accountable for subpar reporting:

> **Update**: Travis Perry, Greer High School's athletic director, has informed Ben Jones of *Black Shoe Diaries* that Jerry Sandusky was never at a practice or a game and never recruited Ah Ching, calling Ah Ching's statements to the contrary to WYFF, the NBC affiliate for Greenville, S.C., 'false and untrue.' As of 5:25 p.m. (EST) on Friday, WYFF's story has not been edited (Kirk, 2011a, para. 1).

Deadspin uncovered documents that some mainstream media members did not know how to get. After *Deadspin* posted tax records filed by Sandusky's charity, NBC News emailed *Deadspin* to ask if it could email them a copy of the records ("Can someone help," 2011). *Deadspin*'s editor at the time, A.J. Daulerio, held the policy that anything anyone emailed the website could be considered suitable for publication. Daulerio published NBC News' private email request under the headline, "Can someone help NBC's investigative department figure out what's going

on at Penn State?" *Deadspin* further hazed NBC News by running a crayon rendering of the tax record, complete with a smiley face and deliberately misspelled words.

Figure 1



(In 2011 Deadspin acquired tax records for The Second Mile, a nonprofit organization run by former Penn State University assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky. When NBC News privately asked Deadspin if it would share the records, Deadspin made NBC's request public and hand-drew a parody tax-return form, which it published, to mock NBC. Deadspin illustration included with written consent of Gawker Media)

Deadspin was also the first journalism outlet that linked to the law that ensured Paterno would not face legal action for knowing about Sandusky's behavior (O'Brien, 2011). Following up on the Pennsylvania governor's appearance on the NBC News show "Meet the Press," *Deadspin*'s Luke O'Brien explained how Paterno's response to learning about Sandusky was handled properly, according to a law mentioned by the governor. In addition to including a hyperlink to the law, O'Brien embedded a PDF of the law within the post. Journalists are encouraged to link for four reasons, according to Harvard University's Nieman Journalism Lab (Stray, 2010). First, they are good for storytelling. Second, links keep the audience

informed. Thirdly, they encourage collaboration. Lastly, links enable transparency. ESPN, *The New York Times*, and the website for CBS Sports each followed *Deadspin*'s post with similar stories. None linked to the law.

Nontraditional sports journalists identified best journalistic practices to show readers how mainstream sports journalists failed to meet expectations. Next, they produced content that fell within the borders of standard journalistic practices. S.T. Karnick of the blog *American Thinker* wrote:

> … Paterno does not make sense as the central figure of the story, if name recognition and his personal reputation are removed from the equation. He was not a witness to the event, and one was in fact readily available: assistant coach Mike McQueary. … Yet although Paterno's involvement in the mess is undeniable, the rush to make him the center of the news coverage strongly hints at the media's true motive: the pursuit of a juicy story with a sex scandal angle and a chance to portray hypocrisy among the powerful. … JoePa, the beloved Penn State football coach and well-known advocate of high moral standards, exposed as a collaborator in child molestation—now, that's news (Karnick, 2011, para. 6-8).

Paterno the narrative pawn

The Penn State Board of Trustees fired Paterno on November 9, 2011. Some attending media members gasped at the announcement. "These guys didn't even have the guts to whack [Paterno] in person," wrote journalist Bill Conlin, then in his 46th year with the *Philadelphia Daily News* (Conlin, 2011, para. 3). For two days Paterno's firing dominated the sports-journalism and mainstream media news cycles. Nontraditional journalists derailed the cycle by turning their attention toward the profession of journalism, just as they had in 2007 when *SB Nation*'s T. Kyle King argued, "… in corporate mainstream media, The Narrative triumphs over all. The blogosphere, by contrast, can and does adjust on the fly. … 'The Narrative' is the 800-pound gorilla in the middle of the room" (King, 2007, para. 33, 37).

It takes a seismic institutional shift to force an industry to rethink its practices. Journalism's digital revolution may have been that shift. It opened the industry to people and publications that previously would have had no access to an audience. Although King's post was presuming and self-congratulatory of sports blogs, it opened a dialogue about whether nontraditional journalists were beholden—as mainstream media are—to narrative. Paterno's "story that generates all other stories"—as Jay Rosen conceptualized narrative (2003, para. 1)—was his morality. Examples of his mass-mediated morality have been playing out for 60 years, from the first *Sports Illustrated* piece in 1968 to the present, as journalists continue to debate his legacy posthumously. Identifying narrative is easy, but altering it is not (Rosen, 2003, para. 5).

The immediate days after Paterno's firing gave nontraditional sports journalists a chance to ask their profession, How did we get here? How responsible were sports media in the transformation of Joe Paterno into JoePa? And could he have accumulated the same degree of cultural power without the help of sports journalists? *Huffington Post* sportswriter Hank Koebler held those who covered Paterno accountable. "As Paterno's career has grown, he has become a warm and fuzzy character in a media-fueled feel-good narrative" (Koebler, 2011, para. 18). Journalists, Koebler argued, latched on to narratives to streamline storytelling. Narrative helped journalists tell stories that consumers were comfortable hearing. Koeber wrote that "Paterno's supporters are blinded by [the] myth of 'JoePa,' a lovable, harmless old man who is the symbol of everything right in a college sports landscape increasingly filled with wrongdoing," but … "The narrative has become so

ingrained in our psyche that it is easier to simply ignore any evidence that doesn't fit our preconceived notion of who Paterno is" (Koebler, 2011, para. 18-19).

Nontraditional journalists viewed glowing stories about Paterno as slop that fed the Paterno beast. The new-era sports journalist recalled inflated tales of Paterno's Grand Experiment, of turned-down millions from NFL teams, and of graduation rates. They saw them as significations used by sports journalists to turn Paterno's morality into truth.

Digital technologies opened a new corridor for sports journalists to discuss past professional behavior. Without the Internet, *Deadspin, SB Nation*, *The Big Lead*, *Huffington Post Sports*, and others like them might have been—at best—niche newsletters and zines mailed to and shared by media-criticism enthusiasts. Columns critical of Paterno coverage would have continued to appear only occasionally in disposable publications, editions of newspapers and magazines forgotten when the next issue arrived.

Online opportunities gave voice and audience to a type of sports journalist who otherwise could not have existed. It removed physical proximity and distribution as roadblocks to sharing. Furthermore, it readjusted the temporality of content. Online, content might live forever (Folsom, 2007; Manovich, 2012). An *Awful Announcing* blogger could write a post criticizing Paterno that might not be seen by a reader for months—but it would still be seen, eventually.

The blogosphere's ability to "adjust on the fly," as King put it, showed in Jason Kirk's *SB Nation* reflection. "Joe Paterno isn't perfect, and never really was the saint of college football. Most of us learned this the hard way while reading the Jerry

Sandusky grand jury report" (Kirk, 2011b, para. 1). Kirk, who hyperlinked to two mainstream journalism articles critical of Paterno, wrote that mainstream media only now felt comfortable criticizing Paterno because the myth had been disrupted so publicly, so drastically, and so obviously that contradicting the myth became fashionable. Until this point, mainstream media were "holding back thoughts on the former PSU coach for quite a while" (para. 1).

Numerous mainstream journalists, including some at ESPN and *The New York Times*, tried to attach a "good-man, bad-decision" theme to Paterno (Matthews, 2011; Hinckley, 2011). Bloggers rejected it.

> The idea that people who cover up the rapes of children – facilitating further rapes in the future by either inaction or becoming accessories – can be considered 'good' people is to turn the very idea of virtue on its head. One cannot deny justice to rape victims through their actions and still be called a "good man" as [the *New York Times*' Ross] Douthat calls Paterno. The myth of the Otherwise Decent Person is just that – a myth (Taylor, 2011, para. 13).

Deadspin attacked the "great man" myth after ESPN quoted Duke University men's basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski saying, "But as we judge [Paterno], remember that there's just a lot there. There's a lot, lot there. I think he's a great man and it's a horrific situation" (Carmichael, 2011b, para. 10). ESPN aired a 90-minute special in June 2011 with Paterno and Krzyzewski called "Difference Makers: Life Lessons With Paterno and Krzyzewski" (YouTube, 2011). Given how it backfired on the network—the Sandusky scandal broke about four months later—Emma Carmichael wondered why ESPN returned to the theme of Paterno's greatness. ESPN solicited Krzyzewski's quote less than one week after Paterno's firing. Carmichael wrote, with some sarcasm:

> To boil [Krzyzewski's comments] down: When great men get old, the culture around them changes and that can create horrific situations for the great men in question. Old great men are not as responsible for their 'ethics and integrity' as younger great men. So take heed, young great men of the world, of these 'horrific situations' as you age. They tend to threaten greatness (Carmichael, 2011b, para. 11).

Mainstream journalists built themes around Paterno over a half-century that reinforced popular public sentiment. They embedded America's cultural values into Paterno's image so that he came to represent America. When he betrayed those values, journalists worked quickly to salvage their professional reputations by either repositioning Paterno outside of American norms or by explaining to readers why they should continue to appreciate Paterno's overall body of work. Joe Posnanski, a journalist who sympathized with Paterno, paid the price for his devotion.

The biographer, the target. A notorious workaholic, Joe Posnanski held simultaneous employment with the *Kansas City Star* and *Sports Illustrated* when he received permission from the Paterno family to write Paterno's biography. Posnanski was on Penn State's campus teaching and researching the day Penn State fired Paterno (McGrath, 2011). Sports bloggers, aware that Posnanski was deep into his Paterno project, urged him to push back the publication date so he could revise with new information from the Sandusky scandal. Posnanski adjusted the book to include the scandal, but not enough to quell his peers. His reputation took a hit. The book came out August 2012, just seven months after Paterno's death.

Associated Press Sports Editors, a professional organization for sports journalists, twice named Posnanski America's top sports columnist. The first time occurred in 2002, when he was just 35 years old (APSE, 2016). The morning after

Paterno's firing, Posnanski told a Penn State class he thought Paterno was a "scapegoat" who "tried to do the right thing" (Pearlman, 2012). A student in the class tweeted the comment. Sports bloggers pounced, attacking Posnanski's integrity. The pushback grew so strong that "Posnanski, like his subject [Paterno], went 'underground'" (McGrath, 2011, para. 9).

The Big Lead's Jason McIntyre, like other nontraditional sports journalists, wrote that Posnanski was a nice person, then dispensed advice: Posnanski should be careful how he portrays Paterno.

> Paterno tried to do the right thing? *Huh*? Posnanski is a bright individual. Presumably, he read the detailed grand jury report. Presumably, he knows there was an *18-month* investigation into this matter. … Posnanski has accomplished a lot in his career and he has a lot of friends in the media, so it is unlikely he'll take too much heat for this. But he's approaching a career-defining moment if he continues with this narrative (McIntyre, 2011a, para. 7-9).

Posnanski responded with a blog post that told readers the Paterno situation "will remain unclear for a while" (McIntyre, 2011b, para. 6). That was not enough to allay concerns of sports bloggers. After Paterno's death in January of 2012, Posnanski's eulogy in *Sports Illustrated* referred to the Sandusky scandal as a "single, hazy event involving an alleged child molester" (Posnanski, 2012, para. 8). *Deadspin* criticized Posnanski with a post headlined, "A plea to Joe Posnanski: Stop writing mealy-mouthed nonsense about Joe Paterno" (Scocca, 2012). More critical to Posnanski's reputation was his unwillingness to significantly revise the biography.

Commenters on Posnanski's blog took him to task. Below a blog post written by Posnanski, one commenter wrote, "A real journalist would seize upon [being at Penn State when the student demonstrations began], whether he/she felt like doing

so or not, because that is what a journalist does. But Posnanski ran from it" (Posnanski, 2011, in "Comments"). Another wrote that there was agreement "on the point that there are different types of journalists; JoePo's [sic] feel-good tendencies seem to be his first instinct, and those are no longer what is required-demanded-for the Paterno book that now has to be written. … But [Posnanski] has to win over many former readers who have become doubters, and I think they will be watching closely" (Posnanski, 2011, in "Comments").

Jeff Pearlman, Posnanski's former *Sports Illustrated* colleague who gave up full-time employment to blog and write books, argued that Posnanski's book should not be released. Pearlman was one of several mainstream journalists who followed nontraditional journalists in their condemnation of Posnanski.

> So, over the past few days, I've been asked repeatedly what I'd do were I Joe Posnanski, working on a detailed biography on the life and times of Joe Paterno. … I scrap it. I do. I scrap the whole thing. I put it aside, maybe wait a year or two, then—when the dust clears and the implications are more understood—I return and write a real biography. Joe is a wonderful writer and, by all accounts, a good guy. … But there is no possible way, one month removed from a report that details Joe Paterno's knowledge of a pedophile roaming the Penn State campus … a proper biography can be released. No. Possible. Way. Can't happen (Pearlman, 2012, para. 1, 3-6).

Another former traditional journalist-turned-blogger, Ed Sherman, called Posnanski's effort "a hastily-rushed to market book," adding, "Posnanski says he wanted to write 'a truthful' book about Paterno. Perhaps in his mind, he did. … But didn't it all seem a bit gentle to you? And what other conversations did Posnanski have on the subject of Sandusky and crimes? He had the access. How hard did he push the coach for the truth" (Sherman, 2012, para. 17, 25)?

At the time of this writing, Paterno's mass-mediated inertia continued to weigh down Posnanski's reputation. *Awful Announcing*, speculating in June 2015 which sports journalist ESPN could build a property around, wrote, "There was a time a few years ago that maybe Joe Posnanski could have pulled it off … but the last few years of his career since the fallout of his Paterno book have certainly changed his status, rightly or not" (Levy, 2015, para. 14).

No individual journalist suffered more fallout from the Sandusky scandal than Posnanski. A three-way tussle between nontraditional journalists, mainstream journalists, and Internet commenters symbolically expelled the two-time national columnist of the year from the question, Who is a journalist? Posnanski's relationship with Paterno caused journalists to construct Posnanski as untrustworthy, lazy, and driven by money over truth. Public anger over these violations, even years later, showed up in the comments section of a 2015 *Awful Announcing* post when one reader wrote, "I, for one, am pleased to see the decline of Joe Posnanski's 'brand.' He has shown himself to be a moral coward, one who panders to his audience with a contrived, 'Aw, shucks' persona" (Levy, 2015, comments).

Posnanski's refusal to change his tone on Paterno led to discourse that irreparably damaged Posnanski's reputation. The fast pace of digital news could have helped Posnanski update his book. Instead, he took a traditional, wait-for-the-facts approach to journalism. That decision doomed him. When Paterno died in January 2012, Posnanski should have been perfectly positioned as an authority on Paterno's life. Instead, he slipped into the background as "old" and "new" media

fought for control over Paterno's legacy. Posnanski still works, but his previously good reputation has yet to re-emerge.

Contested signifier: Drifting between Camp and Sandusky

The conflict between mainstream and nontraditional media over Paterno's narrative climaxed with his death on January 22, 2012. The Internet typically has provided dynamic spaces for public grieving and creative memory (Thorpe, 2015, p. 184), but Paterno's association with Sandusky complicated journalism's memorialization of him. Although false reports of Paterno's death spread a day earlier—January 21—his actual death sparked a collision of old and new Paterno themes.

USA Today's Jack Carey wrote of Paterno's "thick glasses, rolled-up pant legs, white socks and football cleats" (2012, para. 22). Carey mentioned Paterno eschewing law school in the first paragraph and Sandusky in the second. The *New York Times'* Richard Goldstein worked both "symbol of integrity in collegiate athletics" and "child sexual abuse scandal" into his opening sentence (2012, para. 1). The *Los Angeles Times*' Chris Dufresne, early in an obituary, wrote that Paterno was an "Ivy League-educated coach who demanded that his players excel in the classroom as well as on the field" (2012, para. 2). That sentenced ended with a reference to the scandal. *The Associated Press*, the wire service subscribed to by thousands of news organizations around the world, lead with:

> Happy Valley was perfect for Joe Paterno, a place where 'JoePa' knew best, where he not only won more football games than any other major college coach, but won them the right way: with integrity and sportsmanship. A place where character came first, championships second ("Fired Penn State," 2012, para. 1).

The *Associated Press*' second paragraph referenced the Sandusky scandal. News organizations struggled with how to portray Paterno in death. On one hand, the instinct to memorialize is strong in journalism. On the other, the Sandusky scandal was so severe and so recent that relegating it to the end of Paterno's obituary seemed impossible. Some, like the *New York Times*, smashed the two themes together into a single sentence. Others stacked them: memorialize one paragraph; condemn the next. Journalists felt obligated to communicate both storylines to readers.

The memorializing focused on two common themes. The first considered Paterno's appearance. The *New York Times* wrote of Paterno's "rolled-up baggy khaki pants" (Goldstein, 2012, para. 3); *USA Today* described Paterno's "rolled-up pant legs, white socks and football cleats" (Carey, 2012, para. 23); the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that Paterno's "rolled-up pant legs came to embody the school's victories-with-virtue persona" (Dufresne, 2012, para. 6); *The Washington Post*'s Leonard Shapiro remembered that Paterno wore "rolled-up khaki pants, a white shirt and tie, white socks and athletic shoes" (2012, para. 20); Drew Sharp of the *Detroit Free Press* wrote that Paterno's "high-water, rolled-up khakis … belied a colorful, charismatic character" (2012, para. 1).

The second theme focused on Paterno's morality, character, and integrity. No obituary considered journalism's role in shaping the theme. Paterno's morality was either tautological or preached by Paterno himself. Ron Musselman of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* argued that if not for the Sandusky scandal "the remembrances today would speak solely of [Paterno's] legacy as the winningest coach in college football

history, of his role as a revered leader and molder of men and of his generosity to the university he loved" (2012, para. 1). Musselman's obituary included the possibly fabricated quote about Paterno that was attributed to sportswriter Stanley Woodward 46 years earlier in Penn State's 1966 football media guide. Paterno "can't run, can't pass -- just thinks and wins" (Musselman, 2012, para. 34).

The Associated Press decided Paterno won with "integrity and sportsmanship" ("Fired Penn State," 2012, para. 1). National Public Radio host Neal Conan talked at length about the Sandusky scandal but also acknowledged Paterno's "emphasis on academics and integrity as much as on his winning and for the donation of a library and funds for the study of the classics" (NPR, 2012, para. 1).

The vileness and timing of the Sandusky scandal ceased a full-blown memorialization of Paterno on the level of Walter Camp, the "Father of Football," whose 1925 death brought tributes in obituary pages across the country. But there were similarities. The *Philadelphia North American* wrote that Camp exemplified "true sportsmanship" ("Walter Camp," 1925c). The *New York World* championed Camp's "values which mould [sic] the character and determine the strength of our national civilization" ("Walter Camp," 1925b). And the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that Camp "taught others to believe in his ideal" ("Walter Camp-educator," 1925). Of Paterno, the *New York Times* wrote that he understood "the importance of being committed to an ideal" (Goldstein, 2012, para. 26).

Despite the scandal, American journalists positioned Paterno as an American institution. The country's largest sports-media organizations—ESPN, *USA Today*, and others—included in his obituary a quote from George H.W. Bush, for whom

Paterno delivered a speech at the 1988 Republican National Convention. Bush said Paterno "was an outstanding American who was respected not only on the field of play but in life generally – and he was, without a doubt, a true icon in the world of sports" ("Joe Paterno, 85," 2012, para. 30).

Like *The New York Herald*, which called Camp "a statesman of sport who viewed athletics in its larger aspects … in relation to college life, to ethics and the humanities" ("Walter Camp A statesman," 1925), those in the mainstream press who memorialized Paterno extracted him from the game to contextualize his importance. Or they elevated the game itself to emphasize Paterno's place in American culture. Sports bloggers and nontraditional journalists mostly took different paths. Although in Paterno's obituaries nontraditional journalists temporarily spared Paterno's character—those attacks began again after a period of mourning—they remained reluctant to blindly memorialize him.

Deadspin used the simple headline, "Joe Paterno dies; Paterno family releases statement" (Newell, 2012a). The post included a link to *The Associated Press* story and no editorial commentary. *Awful Announcing*'s Matt Yoder focused more on the previous day's premature reporting of Paterno's death than the death itself. Yoder briefly acknowledged the Sandusky scandal before adding, "But in yet another unfortunate series of events, Paterno's death was erroneously reported on Saturday night" (Yoder, 2012, para. 3). Even Paterno's death presented an opportunity for nontraditional journalists to critique old media. *SB Nation*'s obituary resembled *Deadspin*'s: matter-of-fact with a link to *The Associated Press* (Watson, 2012).

Of the blogs that had been critical of mainstream journalism during the height of the Sandusky scandal, only *The Big Lead* memorialized Paterno as mainstream journalists had. Ty Duffy tried to balance time-tested Paterno themes—academic responsibility and personal accountability—with the scandal's "good-man-bad-mistake" theme. Duffy used the totality of the memory of Paterno's actions to consider how the future might dictate Paterno's legacy:

> At peak poignancy [Paterno's] Sandusky role defines him. The future, and potentially future revelations, will decide whether the scandal encompasses him or recedes into a really strong footnote. In many ways Joe Paterno was a great man. He was also a reminder great men are human and can make profound errors in judgment (Duffy, 2012, para. 5-6).

Mainstream sports journalists recapped Paterno's life—favorably and unfavorably. Nontraditional journalists born from the digital age either linked to "old" journalism to memorialize Paterno or used his past to consider his future. His death gave journalists a sturdy bookend to a mass-mediated life. Although journalistic discourse over his place in American culture continues posthumously (see Epilogue, p. 146), the timing of his death acted as a convenient final chapter. Paterno did not linger in public life after his downfall, unlike Nixon, who survived 20 years after resigning the presidency. Paterno burst onto the national scene with near-immediate success as Penn State's football coach, rose in cultural stature, rose some more, plummeted, and died.

Nontraditional, digital-only journalists were present only at Paterno's end. They benefited from digital archives, more culturally acute journalism training than their predecessors had received, a job market that pushed them off traditional paths and into the arms of niche organizations, and new technologies that allowed them to

share dissident discourses. The media during that time became as much a part of sport as the teams that won or lost. Nontraditional sports journalists stole Paterno from their mainstream professional predecessors. They shifted how he was used. For most of his first 40 years, journalists deployed Paterno as a gauge for—or an agent of—American culture. Over his final 10, he was the litmus test for a profession, an instrument to shame, celebrate, and—ultimately—recalibrate.

The discourse of the Sandusky scandal and Paterno's role points to a typification of traditional and nontraditional media. Traditional, mainstream journalists fought like hell to hold their professional ground. Paterno belonged to them. When challenged, they belittled bloggers for operating outside journalism's symbolic boundaries. Bloggers, they wrote, lacked media credentials and access to players, so they lacked credibility. Mainstream journalists argued that bloggers could not possibly be taken seriously because they mocked Paterno and the media companies that paid journalists to cover him.

Digital, nontraditional journalists fired back. If the way mainstream media covered Paterno exemplified sports journalism, then maybe being outside of journalism was not such a bad place to be. It was not an accident that *SB Nation*'s Pettigano and *Deadspin*'s Carmichael referred to "the media" as something different from what bloggers were doing. Bloggers treated Paterno as a construct of time-tested themes that journalists tapped into when it served their needs. They discussed this construction in their posts, which showed their readers that bloggers understood how journalism works. Mainstream journalists were not ready to let nontraditional journalists into "their" profession, but there was nothing they could

do to stop bloggers from showing media consumers that bloggers had knowledge of sports journalism that even the professionals did not.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Before Penn State hired Joe Paterno, journalists knew who he was. He was a college football coach. A Brooklynite. Any Ivy League-educated man who worshipped football. Before Paterno took on Richard Nixon, journalists knew Paterno would help them fight corruption. Before Paterno emerged as a two-time national champion, sports journalists knew he was their best defense against the flash and greed of the modern athlete. And before anyone outside of a couple of investigators knew who Jerry Sandusky was, a new, technologically driven force of journalists understood how "old journalists" narrated culture to secure their own professional standing, even if it meant committing treason upon journalistic principles.

This dissertation began with the premise that journalists transform their subjects into shifting signifiers, objects whose meanings evolve to meet changing cultural norms. These symbols represent and reinforce meanings to such a degree that their factual reliability is moot. Within a profession such as journalism, which cherishes autonomy while it collectively generates narrative, the ability to produce and reproduce ideologies manifests in the stories it tells and the characters it creates. Cultural values are not black and white. Mainstream journalists during the late 1960s and much of the 1970s told of a struggle between progressive ideological principles and traditional values. Journalists then supported a surge in conservatism. Modern journalists, with their access to new technologies, continue to reconcile the openness of digital culture with the cultural and professional gatekeeping of days gone by.

Past and present discourse of Paterno presented a unique opportunity to study how journalists mediate a public life to promote or invalidate cultural symbols. Penn State University hired Joe Paterno in 1966 to coach its football team. A half-century later, journalists still vie to define him as the embodiment of virtue, or pride, or deception, or disgrace. Through textual analysis of historical content produced by professional journalists and bloggers, this study explored four research questions related to memory and boundary work in the mass-mediated construction of Paterno.

The first question asked how sports journalists used memory to narrate Paterno mythology. The answers to this question have evolved over decades. When Paterno became head coach, sports journalists used his background to show readers who he was and what he meant. Paterno came from Brooklyn, which stereotypically suggested street smarts and the gift of gab. He graduated from Brown University of the Ivy League, which prompted journalists to write that Paterno was smarter than his peers. His body was slight, but he had successfully played quarterback at Brown, so journalists said he was resourceful and possessed an indefinable will to win. Lastly, Paterno sacrificed a law career to become a coach, which revealed not only his love of football but the broader lure of football as an American game.

Journalists made Paterno's Grand Experiment, his belief that athletic and academic success were not mutually exclusive, a dual symbol. First, that such an experiment needed to exist at all validated college football's inherent corruption. All a journalist had to do was write Grand Experiment to bring to life images of academic and recruiting violations. The Grand Experiment was a remedy. Second,

the Grand Experiment indicated Paterno's virtue. Sports journalists did not know they yearned for a more pure college football until Paterno showed them the way. He symbolized their hopes of a return to Walter Camp's more dignified college game.

As time passed, sports journalists scrubbed memories to ensure they fit into evolved Paterno storylines. Journalists who did not cover Paterno early in his career engaged postmemory—knowledge acquired and then passed on solely through media—to describe how he turned down millions of dollars for the honor of remaining a college football coach. They omitted facts about pragmatic reasons for his decision, like concerns he held about uprooting his family. Sports journalists who learned about Paterno's fight with Richard Nixon exclusively through Rick Reilly's 1986 *Sports Illustrated* article did not understand that Nixon tried numerous times to atone for leaving Penn State out of the 1969 national-title picture. Instead, years later, they portrayed Nixon as a meddling boob who deliberately wronged the noble Paterno.

In the 1980s journalists used imagery to paint Paterno as being on the "right" side: white hats, like the hero cowboy; Mr. Clean; "North," in a perpetual showdown against the morally inferior South. Ultimately, as Paterno's career ended amid scandal, all journalists had of Paterno were memories. They reached for themes, and because Paterno lived for decades in the press, journalists could find just about any theme they wanted. When they memorialized him, they recalled his victories and academic triumphs. When they wanted a more even-handed approach, they used images of him belittling players at practice. When they wanted to challenge the

authority of old sports media, they accessed Reilly's 1986 *Sports Illustrated* article (that Reilly later said he wished he had not written).

Sports journalists deployed memory to fortify common cultural themes around Paterno. Those cultures could belong to college football, the United States, or the professional culture of journalism. The repeated engagement of memory enabled sports journalists to place Paterno first in opposition to the dregs of college sports, then as a symbol of its purity. It allowed them to tear down traditional journalistic practices by shaming old processes, then reaffirm their own cultural authority when the moment called for it.

Journalists first used memory like shorthand to create Paterno: smart, Ivy League-educated, short, quirky, Brooklyn-born. The traits could have applied to anyone who fit the description. As his career developed, journalists learned to mediate Paterno with the memory of Paterno. He became his own theme-filled well. In 1968 *Sports Illustrated*'s Dan Jenkins wrote that Paterno valued academics because Paterno went to Brown University. In 2011 the *Philadelphia Daily News*' Bernard Fernandez wrote that Paterno valued academics because he was Joe Paterno. To become myth, wrote Barthes, facts adopt tautological explanations.

In Paterno's earlier years, journalists used memory to radicalize him from the game of college football. They elevated him strategically, morally, and ethically. The second research question—how did sports journalists' use of memory shift the meanings of Paterno—first played out in the work of journalists like Bill Conlin and William Johnson. In 1969 the *Philadelphia Daily News*' Conlin said Paterno was a "Renaissance coach," and in 1973 *Sports Illustrated*'s Johnson wrote that Paterno

was “an authentic folk hero in a society desperately hungry for integrity.” Journalists first decorated Paterno by wrapping him in themes that contrasted college football. After Penn State won a national championship, journalists aligned Paterno with college football. In 1982 Paterno was again called a “Renaissance man” (Didinger, 1982a, para. 7). This time, he earned the label partially because he was a “shrill tyrant” who “coaches through intimidation.”

His values became college football’s values—even though Paterno the man hardly changed. Penn State’s Fiesta Bowl win against the University of Miami meant “good triumphed over evil” (Kelley, 1987). ESPN produced a documentary in 2009 that celebrated Miami’s 1980s football teams. Yet during the 1980s, Miami faced journalists’ scorn because its style “wasn’t what Joe Paterno or [former Notre Dame coach] Ara Parseghian preached to their players” (Feldman, 2004, p. 81).

Paterno found himself suddenly realigned in 2011 when a national scandal swamped Penn State University. Nontraditional journalists who worked solely in the digital realm located Paterno inside sports journalism instead of college sports. They transformed him into a symbol of sports journalism’s dysfunction as news broke that Paterno’s former assistant coach, Jerry Sandusky, had sexually assaulted children—and Paterno may have been aware.

When ESPN sent college football analyst Matt Millen on-air to discuss Paterno’s role, sports blog *Deadspin* questioned the professional and ethical implications of ESPN using a former Penn State player in this role. Millen broke down crying, which made for compelling television, but it provided little insight. *Deadspin* also wondered whether Millen was capable of providing viewers with

impartial analysis. *SB Nation*, another blog, warned that the threat of losing access to sources had prevented mainstream media outlets from covering college programs as openly as they should. A college football writer who lost access to Paterno could not fulfill basic requirements of the job.

The significance of Paterno's realignment holds roots in some of the earliest Paterno articles. Conlin delightedly told readers in 1966 that Paterno's hiring assured Penn State beat writers access to an articulate source who gave compelling quotes. It made the winding drive from Philadelphia to University Park, Pennsylvania, bearable, Conlin wrote. *Deadspin*, *The Big Lead*, and other sports blogs later repositioned the Paterno-media relationship as poisonous to journalism.

The relationship caused sports journalists to write "mealy-mouthed nonsense" that ignored the truth (Scocca, 2012). Use of the memory of Paterno to mediate his present caused traditional sports journalists to miss what was happening in the present, especially once the Sandusky scandal hit. Bloggers mostly avoided that trap. They focused on Paterno in the moment. In doing so, they identified his relationship with sports journalists as cause for concern about the practice of journalism. Bloggers told their audiences that sports journalists had been infatuated with Paterno for decades. The journalists, they argued, could not see past their own prose.

Journalists defining journalism also factored into the third research question, which asked how sports journalists patrolled professional boundaries to grow Paterno's cultural authority. This question was answered in two parts: pre-Internet and Internet. Journalists who covered Paterno when he was hired in 1966 were pre-

Internet. Their print and broadcast stories appeared in newspapers and magazines and on radio and television. If media consumers wished to participate in the news-making process, they wrote letters to the editor or called into radio shows. This method of news making continued until the late 1990s (Deuze, 2001). The Internet introduced new ways for consumers with online access to create and share news. Online chat rooms, message boards, commenting options, blogs, and social media altered the news-producer/news-consumer relationship.

Pre-Internet Paterno encouraged journalistic mythmaking to the nth degree. Only journalists had access to a mass audience. Journalists used their authority to devise elaborate, professionally endorsed methods of storytelling, strengthened through repetition. In 1973 *Sports Illustrated* evidenced Paterno's greatness by describing a standing ovation he received on the way to a restroom. In 1978 *Quest* magazine used the same tale without crediting *Sports Illustrated*. In 1986 *Sports Illustrated* returned again to the ovation story.

With little pushback from their consumers, pre-Internet journalists wielded unimpeded authority to reinforce narrative. Paterno became "Paterno" gradually, brick by brick, story by story. A local newspaper reporter, for example, alleged to have coined "Grand Experiment." The term next appeared in a regional newspaper, then on a far-reaching wire service, then in a national sports magazine, *Sports Illustrated*, then a mainstream non-sports publication, *Reader's Digest*, then the well-regarded and hugely popular television program "60 Minutes." Publications used each other's information; sometimes they cited each other and sometimes they did not. As journalists engaged in professional practices, Paterno's legacy grew. He gave

journalists someone around whom they could construct the image of the idealized college football coach—a culturally transcendent public figure infused with collective memory and narratives of unimpeachable morality. In turn, those who consumed the journalists' work were asked to accept common Paterno themes. Although this dissertation did not study audience, one can conclude that news consumers accepted those themes. Regard for Paterno—even during the Sandusky scandal—remained so high that Penn State students demonstrated on campus after his firing; some readers who commented on online stories verbally attacked journalists who questioned Paterno's morality; and Paterno fans drove to Penn State's campus from other states to put flowers at the base of his statue.

During the Sandusky scandal, nontraditional journalists from the Internet age performed two functions. First, they did boundary work against mainstream journalists by showing how their Paterno failings were actually failings of journalism. Second, they made room for themselves within journalism's professional boundaries by acting according to journalistic norms. They used sources to create new information and produced time-tested journalistic story forms, like timelines. The cultural authority bestowed by bloggers was upon themselves, not Paterno. They cast Paterno as bait to bring readers into stories, where they unfurled content that signaled to readers they were witnessing examples of real journalism. When a TV station reported that Sandusky continued to recruit high schoolers for Penn State while he was under investigation, *SB Nation* contacted a representative of the high school, who refuted the charge. The blogger noted in his post that the TV station had not corrected the story.

Bloggers showed more faith in journalism than they showed in journalists. Many bloggers acted the way they believed a journalist *should* act. They honored the social structure of journalism by fact-checking, crediting sources, and conducting original reporting, like the *SB Nation* reporter who tracked down the high school athletic director.

A key difference between mainstream journalists and bloggers is what function Paterno served for each. Operating from a position of authority, mainstream journalists imposed culture upon Paterno. They wrote definitively. *The Washington Post*'s Sally Jenkins wrote that Paterno's choices "made him, in the end, human" (2011, para. 29). Operating outside the profession of journalism, nontraditional journalists used Paterno to better understand culture, not define it. They were OK with not having all the answers. *Roll Bama Roll*'s C.J. Shexnayder argued, "[Paterno's death] is also a huge loss for college football as Paterno was one of the last living connections to an era that paved the way for the modern game. … The sport today would be dramatically different if there were no Joe Paterno" (Shexnayder, 2011, para. 8).

Walter Camp's death in 1925 gave journalists the opportunity to assign cultural values to the memory of a college coach. Camp was the first modern coach. The first "idealized coach." Before him, coaches were looked at unfavorably because they represented professionalization. Camp's coaching career at Yale and Stanford was short, but he also wrote many of football's rules and advocated nationally for the sport. His ascent beyond "just a coach" broadened his appeal, prompting the *New Hampshire Journal-Courier* to write that Camp "had been the idol of the college

athlete, while to the manhood of America and more particularly the football following, he had been the last word in the noblest ideal of true sportsmanship" ("Camp funeral private," 1925). Early journalists' willingness to herocraft their subjects set precedent for future generations, which led to the fourth research question about what role memory plays in constructing the professional boundaries of sports journalism.

Sports journalists used memory to grow their authority. Expanded authority allowed journalists for decades to contextualize Paterno as a modern-day Camp—as so much more than a coach. The device of memory made journalists king-makers. Paterno was a "leader of men," the embodiment of the institution of college football, and a voice for conservatism. Journalists accomplished this at the behest of a public eager to have its cultural values affirmed.

Although digital, nontraditional journalists performed boundary work against traditional media during the Sandusky scandal, they did not recast journalistic boundaries. Instead, they reaffirmed the value of those boundaries by showing how dangerous it was when those boundaries were breached. If anything, bloggers and their brethren called upon the memory of a sports journalism that never existed—one of professional transparency, fact-checking, and honest storytelling—to refocus public attention on how great it would be if they did exist. Traditional sports journalists, meanwhile, inflicted memory upon bloggers like a weapon, invoking such social boundaries as press credentials and access to mark professional differences. Bloggers responded by showing how mainstream journalists had corrupted the symbolic boundaries of journalism. The mass-

mediated Paterno, bloggers argued, grew from the failings of mainstream journalists who violated professional norms.

This dissertation used decades of news content to show how journalists manipulated Paterno across multiple discourses. The next step to this research will require interviews with the people who covered Paterno. There are so many questions. First, were they aware that they were repeating the same information from decades earlier, some of it questionable to begin with? This goes to deciphering whether journalists reproduce themes intentionally or subconsciously. Second, how did they go about researching stories on Paterno? How many were simply reading stories about Paterno from other markets to siphon information? Thirdly, how do they feel when others hold them accountable for "making" Joe Paterno? Fourthly, what do they think they learned about sports journalism from the Paterno saga? Lastly, now that sports journalism's professional sphere firmly holds traditional and nontraditional journalists, how do they view their professional obligations to their consumers and each other?

New York journalist Stanley Woodward likely never wrote nor said, "[Paterno] can't run and he can't pass. All he can do is think — and win" ("Joseph V. Paterno," 1966, p. 32). As an editor, he definitely told his staff to stop "godding up those ball players" (Voigt, 1984). Woodward abhorred the mythmaking tendencies of sportswriters like Grantland Rice, who saw herocrafting as part of the business. Woodward died in 1964. More than 50 years later, some journalists still have not gotten his message.

A century ago journalists described Walter Camp as sport's idealized coach. As recently as five years ago they gushed over Paterno. Today it is Duke University's basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski. "Mike Krzyzewski long ago carved out his impenetrable and long-lasting legacy. … [he is] a transcendent coach, one of the luminaries of the profession regardless of sport" (Norlander, 2015, para. 1-2).

Ten years from now somebody will take the mantle from Krzyzewski. But if there is one thing that the journalists who covered Paterno have shown, it is that no one's mass-mediated legacy is permanent. "The time may have come, through the excruciating agony of innocent boys, to stop godding up the coaches," Roy Peter Clark wrote on *CNN.com* in 2011, "and to dismantle brick by brick the arrogance of those who would turn a sport into a religion."

EPILOGUE: DISPUTED LEGACY

> All funerals are sad, but Paterno's was sad for an uncommon reason. Paterno's funeral was sad because just about everyone who cared about him secretly wished he had died six months earlier. – Chuck Klosterman, *I Wear the Black Hat* (2014, p. 14)

A separate dissertation could be written on Joe Paterno's post-death life. Or I could have added numerous chapters to this one. But dissertations have to end somewhere, and I chose to end with Paterno's literal death in January of 2012. Since then, journalists' fascination with Paterno's legacy has produced rich new data capable of taking research in exciting directions. My own future research will address many of these issues. For now, it is more useful to note how journalists have kept Paterno's legacy in the public discourse.

Journalist and social critic Chuck Klosterman summarized in his book, *I Wear the Black Hat*, what many journalists revealed themselves to feel: They wished Paterno's legacy had not been tarnished by the Jerry Sandusky scandal. The scandal stripped journalists of their authority because it revealed their mythmaking as a fraud. Journalists spent nearly a half-century portraying Paterno as sport's sanctum. In one week the scandal twisted Paterno's moral superiority into moral ambiguity. That ambiguity turned into a full-on indictment of Paterno's character in July 2012 when former FBI director Louis Freeh concluded in a report that Paterno had known about Sandusky's crimes for years.

Journalists went into crisis mode. Rick Reilly, who authored the *Sports Illustrated* "Sportsman of the Year" story in 1986 that was cited by hundreds of journalists, apologized for the article. Then at *ESPN.com*, he wrote:

> What a stooge I was. I talked about Paterno's 'true legacy' in all of this. Here's his true legacy: Paterno let a child molester go when he could've stopped him. He let him go and then lied to cover his sinister tracks. He let a rapist go to save his own recruiting successes and fundraising pitches and big-fish-small-pond hide. Here's a legacy for you. Paterno's cowardice and ego and fears allowed Sandusky to molest at least eight more boys in the years after that 1998 incident (Reilly, 2012, para. 16-18).

The Washington Post's Sally Jenkins conducted one of Paterno's last interviews before his death. The Freeh Report drove her to paint a similar picture of Paterno as Reilly's. "If Paterno knew about '98, then [Paterno] wasn't some aging granddad who was deceived, but a canny and unfeeling power broker who put protecting his reputation ahead of protecting children" (Jenkins, 2012, para. 3). Journalists constructed Paterno while he was alive. In death, with Paterno unable to defend himself, some journalists transferred maintenance of Paterno's legacy exclusively to Paterno. They wrote news stories and columns claiming to be as surprised as their readers.

Others vaguely opined that Paterno's legacy should be decided by others. Comcast Sportsnet's Ray Ratto argued that Paterno lost control of his legacy, adding, "A person's legacy is not his or her own anyway. It is defined by others based on their interpretations of his or her life" (Ratto, 2012).

Penn State University made a symbolic admission of Paterno's guilt when it removed his statue from outside its football stadium. On July 22, 2012, early on a Sunday morning, construction workers used jackhammers to dislodge the 900-pound statue from its foundation. The statue became a memorial to myriad conflicting meanings, including Paterno's success as a coach and Penn State University's culpability in the scandal (Schwartz, 2013). Two networks, ESPN and

Big Ten Network, struggled to describe the scene. They humanized the statue. An ESPN anchor described the statue's "final resting place," while a Big Ten Network anchor said the statue was an "enabler" to crimes committed against children.

Journalists used the statue to launch long-term Paterno coverage. The *New York Times* made a 6-minute documentary about the statue in November 2014. ESPN wrote multiple stories about alumni pushing to build a new Paterno statue (Moyer, 2014a; Moyer, 2014b). One headline read, "PSU should address Paterno's legacy." The day after Penn State removed the statue, the NCAA punished the university with penalties that included a $60 million fine, four-year bowl ban, and loss of 111 wins, which meant Paterno no longer was college football's winningest coach (Prisbell, 2012). Among other things, the NCAA said it was punishing Penn State for "hero worship."

Historian Ronald Smith explored Penn State's relationship with Paterno in his 2016 treatise, *Wounded Lions: Joe Paterno, Jerry Sandusky, and the Crises in Penn State Athletics*. He argued that the university's identity became indistinguishable from Paterno's. When Paterno suffered, Penn State suffered. Wrote Smith:

> Many believed that Paterno epitomized what was good about living in State College and the surrounding area. He was, to many, Penn State, and Penn State was the organization upon which the community was built. There appeared to be a naïve belief that Happy Valley, this insular and idyllic place in the geographic center of Pennsylvania, was different from the rest of America and that Joe Paterno made much of the difference (Smith, 2016, p. 3).

Many Penn State supporters rejoiced in 2015 when the NCAA restored Paterno's wins and his title of winningest coach (Mautner, 2015). The restored victories conflicted journalists. *The Sporting News*'s Mike DeCourcy labeled the

gesture meaningless because Paterno was "just a football coach" (2015, para. 2). *USA Today*'s Paul Myerberg acknowledged that Paterno played a role in the Sandusky scandal but added that the restoration of his wins "compounded the complex debate" over Paterno's statue (Myerberg, 2015).

Paterno's returned wins gave journalists license to support Paterno. Ivan Maisel of ESPN.com wrote—without citation—that the Freeh Report "carried all the factual gravitas of a high school term paper" (Maisel, 2015, para. 13). Maisel concluded that "locating the legacy of Joe Paterno on the road to redemption isn't hard at all" (para. 23). A *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter asked, "Now that a deal with the NCAA to restore 111 wins under late football coach Joe Paterno has been struck, is it time to honor him on campus" (Snyder, 2015, para. 1)?

Other journalists used the wins to reinforce Paterno's role in the scandal. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s Frank Fitzpatrick told readers that the wins were restored only because of "the alumni's relentless prodding" and "several lawsuits" (Fitzpatrick, 2015, para. 24). CNN's Roxanne Jones urged readers to separate on-field victories from off-the-field transgressions. "JoePa may be back atop the record books as the 'winningest coach ever,' but he was not an honorable man — not when it came to putting the lives and safety of children above football," she wrote. "And no NCAA ruling can change that history" (Jones, 2015 para. 21).

It would be fascinating to research what journalists mean when they use the word "legacy." Some dispatch the word benignly. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*'s Audrey Snyder wrote that three years after Paterno's death, "Penn State is still struggling to sort out Paterno's legacy" (Snyder, 2015, para. 7). Similarly, *Sports on*

Earth's Matt Brown wrote "We can search for a clear, concise legacy, but it's going to take a long time to get there, if we ever do" (Brown, 2014, para. 26).

The struggle over Paterno's legacy is the struggle for Paterno's place in our collective memory. Journalists who tip-toe around the issue ask the culture they serve what it is willing to accept. Instead of creating Paterno's legacy, some journalists have played it safe—or perhaps scared. Their timid words wonder, "What is his legacy? What will you allow us to say about him?" Sports journalists once tried to shepherd Paterno's legacy. The myth blew up in their face. Now they proceed cautiously, seeking permission to tilt Paterno one way or the other: hero or villain. Some push for villain. Paterno "helped orchestrate a comprehensive cover-up" (Wojciechowski, 2012, para. 5). Paterno "was the dictator of Penn State, the more football wins he accrued, the greater his invincibility" (Bissinger, 2012, para. 3). Wrote another: "JoePa in cuffs. That's what he deserved" (Wetzel, 2012, para. 10).

Others restored Paterno atop the mountain. "We all know that Paterno really did make a positive impact on many people's lives, that he helped propel Penn State to bigger and better things as a university" (Brown, 2014, para. 26). Yet most continue to play Paterno down the middle. The wins were good; the scandal was bad. The Sandusky scandal wiped Paterno's legacy like a shaken Etch A Sketch. It gave journalists a chance to start over and reposition Paterno as a cautionary tale. Wrote the *Orlando Sentinel*'s George Diaz:

> Paterno's rise and fall is the quintessential example of building a narrative that is incomplete. … The Penn State scandal is a teachable moment about the perils of worshipping false heroes. Joe Paterno was a fabulous football coach who won a lot of games. Perhaps we should have left it at that (Diaz, 2015, para. 17, 21-23).

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