

Theme

10 Myths About Women's Soccer Journalists | BY BEAU DURE

Covering women's soccer is all glamour and glitz, right? Well, not quite. Beau Dure, who has covered everything from high schools and small-scale exhibitions to the Women's World Cup and Olympics, exposes some pressbox secrets.



Photo by Don Victorio

10. We're fanboys and fangirls. The thrill of chatting with a soccer star goes away after the first couple of times, and you just focus on the job. You start to see players as human, for better and for worse.

9. We're robots who aren't passionate about the game. We've all heard there's no cheering in the pressbox, and we try to maintain that. But when you see a fantastic strike, you're still going to hear a good "Whoa!" We still get hopping mad at refs. In my case, literally. One National Women's Soccer League ref had me shaking with rage.

8. We're cynics who tear everyone down. Wait a minute — weren't we just fanboys and fangirls a second ago? Now we're just out to dump on people? Which is it? Anyway — there's little to be gained by making our name

for ourselves as WoSo irritants, because the following statement is false ...

7. There's money in it. Full-time soccer writers of any kind are a recent phenomenon in the United States. Grant Wahl was still covering college basketball a few years ago. Steven Goff still has other assignments at *The Washington Post*, as do many local newspaper beat writers. Soccer was never more than 50 percent of my job at *USA TODAY*. ESPNW splits soccer coverage among ESPN staffers who have other responsibilities.

So you can pretty well forget the notion of being a full-time women's soccer writer at a major outlet. And trying to carve out a career as a women's soccer specialist is a brave decision. I spent seven months focusing on a book on the Washington Spirit, and I still haven't come close to earning enough to balance my expenses (editing, photography, two hotel stays, transportation). I nearly wrote "stay-at-home dad" on my tax return this year.

6. We live in fear of popular players and their Twitter followers. I was on vacation at the Jersey Shore when Alex Morgan called me an idiot on Twitter. The current count on Twitter shows 382 retweets and 1,048 favorites, and that doesn't include the people who wrote me directly to say they'd buy my book to hit me in the face with it. Or they'll kill me — twice. (Still don't know how that works.)

The sun rose the next morning. I still have credentials to cover NWSL and the women's national team. I've never been hit in the face with one of my books. I'm not dead. It blew over. It always does.

5. We're ogling players. That's pretty insulting. I have celebrity crushes, sure. (Because I'm a grown-up, one of them is Sarah McLachlan.) But even when I was still in my 20s (ages ago), I checked the stars in my eyes outside the stadium.

Female journalists fought for years and endured tons of abuse for the right to walk into a men's locker room and be a professional. If they can do that, I can chat on the sidelines with any women's soccer player. So can the other men in the press box. So can the gay women in the press box.

4. We're experts. Some journalists are tactical wizards. Some hear "4-2-3-1" and think someone forgot

how to count. It's OK. It's our job to ask questions.

Anyone could've dug up the court records on magicJack or gotten in touch with Dan Borislow to talk about them. I'm the one who did it. So for that period of time, I was an "expert" on what was going on with magicJack. But if you've ever seen me play, you know that I'm not some sort of magical soccer person.

3. We have a great view. Not at all. Press boxes often have partially obstructed views, and yet we often need to be in there to talk with team public relations reps. And if you're on deadline, you're often trying to write your story while the game's in progress. How's your peripheral vision? Can you keep one eye on the game and one on your laptop?

2. We get great free food. Maybe for a U.S. women's game. You generally don't even get a good free meal at MLS games. D.C. United does things well — you make a \$5 donation to their charity, and you get a meal that would normally cost you \$8-10.

At NWSL games, I'm usually offered a ticket that I can exchange for a sandwich at one of the concession vendors. Or nothing. And that's understandable. This league is keeping expenses lean. Might as well keep the journalists lean as well. Or at least make me buy my own Ben and Jerry's.

1. Our access corrupts us. Sure, there's a trade-off that you make when you interact with players. Some of the more cynical new-media organizations prefer NOT to get credentials for that very reason — they think they're more honest when they're viewing from afar, never meeting the people they criticize. I don't think so. They often miss the circumstances behind that costly error on the field, or they just get lazy and snark on everyone.

In a stadium, every vantage point has its pros and cons. I saw a game recently from behind one goal, and I saw close-ups of action I hadn't seen before. But I missed the other side of the field.

It's the same way in covering soccer. If you're watching on TV and don't know the players and fans involved, you may be able to give objective analysis of the tactics and technique. But like a fan sitting behind a goal, you're only seeing part of the story. A journalist's job is to give you the rest. ■



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