Chapter 28

Sport Omnibus Events as Media Shows

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ABSTRACT

Inside the wider commodification process that the social field of sport has been subject to, sport events are not only about the competition itself, but they have become a global multilayered show. The ‘symbiotic relationship’ (Valgeirsson & Snyder, 1986, p. 131) between sport and media made them one of the most successful entertaining products as they provide an intense spectatorship experience. The main aim of this chapter is to focus on the media-sport nexus in order to understand the impact that this hybridization process between the two social fields had on sport events? How media reflect and redefine sport competitions as media events? What are the main aspects that make sport events so competitive on the wider entertaining (media) market? Despite the undisputable transformative effects brought by sport competitions entering the media logic, I will argue that there is also a reverse effect that major sport events exert upon the media field, focusing mainly on their interruptive quality (Dayan & Katz, 1992) in terms of media and social agenda. In discussing these aspects I will narrow down the analysis on the major sport competitions, as they are the most complex media-sport constructs. The ‘fun factor’ (Kellner, 2003, p. 3) and the emotional flow of the competition reach their most spectacular form through what I call omnibus events. By omnibus events I refer to major competitions on the sport global map that are defined as impressive shows, involving worldwide audiences, significant number of sport acts and actors and high commercial value (i.e. The Olympic Games, The World Cup). More important, their vortexual nature (Whannel, 2002) makes them referential for the public agenda, drawing everyone’s attention and building alternative ways to connect large number of people to them. The chapter will approach these sport omnibus events as media shows by analyzing their multilayered structure: the dramaturgical dimension of sport acts and its corollary management of impression, the ritual dimension of sport ceremonial practices, the axiological dimension of sport events as social values’ system, the commercial dimension of sport events as products on the entertaining and celebrity market, the aesthetic dimension of sport
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acts as expressive media constructs and their emotional dimension in terms of spectatorship experience. On this last dimension there are two main aspects that I will focus on, one regarding the live-remote experience and the other one directed towards the multiplication process of sport competition related events (from special TV shows, social media events, to thematic parties or marketing events). Media’s centrality inside the social field of sport came with a consistent spectacularization effect, contributing to sport competition becoming resourceful media shows in terms of public impact and commercial value, a process that this chapter manages to lay emphasis on by addressing the multilayered nature of such events.

INTRODUCTION

The quid pro quo relationship between sport and media, which has been mainly built on commercial grounds, led to an entire reconfiguration of the sport acts and the spectatorship experiences. When most of our sport experiences are, in fact, mediated ones, media’s centrality inside the social field of sport has become somehow truistic. It is more and more difficult to think about sport outside the media logic, as media not only conquered the world of sport, but they have also profoundly transformed it (Whannel, 1992). This symbolic colonization of the sport imagery by the media came with a consistent spectacularization effect, contributing to sport events becoming resourceful media shows in terms of public impact and commercial value. Inside the wider commodification process that sport has been subject to, sport events are no longer only about the competition itself, but more and more about the global-scale show that they end up providing.

The main aim of this chapter is to discuss the impact that the sport media events have in terms of multilayered entertainment constructs. From the overcrowded pool of sport events which managed to rise to the media event status? What are the premises that facilitate the conversion of sport events into such impressive media events? What are the main aspects that make sport media events so competitive on the wider entertaining market?

Despite the compelling structural force exerted by the media (Bourdieu, 1996, p.64) over sport competitions as transcultural phenomena (Hepp & Couldry, 2010), I will argue that some of them are more than ritual media events (Couldry, 2003; Hepp, 2004) or ‘high holydays of mass communication’ (Dayan & Kats, 1992, p.1). When crowned with the media events’ halo, they go way beyond the interruptive festive viewing (Dayan & Kats, 1992), becoming subject to an impressive multiplication process. Therefore, the sport media event is rather a conventional formula for what I call the sport omnibus events, because, de facto, when addressing such global scale phenomena, we are actually speaking about a consistent cluster or mosaic of micro-events.

In order to understand why and how sport events can push the media events framework even further in terms of engagement, transformative and vortextual nature (Whannel, 2002), I will focus on the three constitutive dimensions of such events: the dramaturgical richness embedded in sport performances, the commercial spiral that they manage to fuel and their impressive emotional capital. For this reason I would argue that sport media events are a multilayered construct that should be placed at the junction between the sport, the media and the marketing ethos, acting as a powerful social, cultural and economic palimpsest. The dynamics of such events is, thus, strongly connected to the increasing role of popular culture within today’s society (Grindstaff, 2008; McGuigan, 2010) and the successful evolution of the sport industry within the global market economy.