

Ben Raby, Washington Capitals Radio Network and Mark Zuckerman, NatsInsider.com

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Thanks for listening to It's All Journalism. I'm Megan Cloherty joined of course by Mike O'Connell.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Hello.

Megan Cloherty

And today we have Mark Zuckerman and Ben Raby with us. Many sports fans know Mark from reading his sports reporting in *Washington Times*, where he spent the better part of the last decade. In 2010, he created the NatsInsider.com, his own website funded by readers and advertisers. And tired of competing with Mark, Comcast Sports-Net then just purchased the blog and hired him on in 2011. That's where he is now.

Ben is a game day and studio host at the Washington Capitals Radio Network. He's a contributor at NHL.com and a part-time sports reporter at WTOP radio here in Washington. He's also the creator and host of *Morning Skate*, a weekly talkshow on 106.7 The Fan. Ben has background in TV, print and radio and is also serving as a producer for Wizards' radio broadcasts.

Megan Cloherty

So, we've got sports pretty much covered in Washington, I think. Thanks for joining us guys.

Michael O'Connell

So tell me about the tennis team, the ladies' tennis team.

Megan Cloherty

So how excited ... we're on the cusp right now. NHL just came back. How busy are things for you guys right now?

Ben Raby, studio host, Washington Capitals Radio Network

It's fun. It's a long time coming. There were some restless weeks in the fall for sure and it would've been a pretty dark winter if hockey didn't come back. So, very, very excited and everyone's happy to be back at the practice rink and the players are happy and the reporters are happy.

Megan Cloherty

A lovefest.

Ben Raby

Yeah. So, a lot of happy folks.

Megan Cloherty

And the Nats, just to get a feel for where things are right now, a really busy time with trades and everything that's going on.

Mark Zuckerman, sportswriter, NatsInsider.com

Sure, sure, and this is a totally different off-season than any previous one because there's never been expectations for this team before like this. It was always kind of, "Oh yeah, The Nationals, someday they'll be good." Well, they are good now. They had the best record in baseball. They've added to that roster. There are people around the sport that have already proclaimed them the favorites to win the World Series this year. I'm fascinated to see both how this is covered and also how everybody with the team handles this new element of expectation that they never had that before.

Megan Cloherty

Mark, tell me exciting it is to be a sports reporter in Washington, because I think it's been a tough job for the last 10 years or so. Tell me, is it exciting to be covering teams that are really doing well and have national attention now?

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah, it's funny. It kind of coincides with when I came to town. I got here in 2001 and really for the first decade-plus of that time, the Caps made the playoffs a few times and I think the Wizards maybe made the playoffs once or twice in that time. They didn't do much. The Redskins, actually, I covered them for a couple of years, not when they were in the playoffs. And the Nats, when they finally arrived, everybody hoped, they knew it would take time, but I'm not sure anybody thought it would take that much time before it finally happened. And now, all of a sudden, in one year, the Nationals make the playoffs; the Caps, obviously, are a powerhouse; the Redskins, with RG3 [quarterback Robert Griffin III], make the playoffs and the Wizards, I know they're still figuring out their way ...

Megan Cloherty

Clunking a little.

Mark Zuckerman

But just the return of John Wall, you at least see some glimmers of something. It's gone from a sports town that, around the country, people didn't pay a whole lot of attention to, to now being one of the focal points between not just how good the teams are but some of the star power that you now have. Every team has somebody that's really well known and among the most popular players in the league.

Megan Cloherty

And the Caps are one of the first teams to come back around and get exciting again in Washington, so now you have competition.

Ben Raby

That's also one of the reasons we're talking about the lockout, which recently ended. We were very hopeful that the Capitals would come back because the sports fan in this market would be forgiven if the Capitals would sort of fall away from the radar, given the success of the Redskins and the Nationals. The Capitals sort of had the market to themselves, you could say, for parts of the past few years. Now, the competition is good, but if you're the Capitals, you've got to come back strong from the lockout and it's, all are happy for each other's success, but it's getting crowded and for the sports fan, that's a good thing.

Michael O'Connell

Our podcast is about digital media, how it's changed the way the news is covered. For the sports fan, how do you reach them? What's the best way? The sports fan has been, traditionally, through call-in radio shows and things like that, has always been somebody who's really vibrant about talking, giving their opinion —

Megan Cloherty

Reaching out to you.

Michael O'Connell

And reaching out to you. So, how is social media, how is online journalism working into that and reaching that fan?

Mark Zuckerman

I think what you have now is there are so many different ways to interact and it can be by voice, it can be by sight and it can be just over the computer. My job's changed tremendously over the years in that covering teams for a newspaper, for a long time, you didn't really have a lot of interaction with readers. Every once in a while, they might send you an email or you might run across somebody at a game and they'd say "hi" to you.

Well, in the age of Twitter and blogs and the interactivity that is involved in all of it, you now kind of have a direct one-on-one communication with them. And one of the cool things that that allows us, both getting to meet them, but also they can help you in your coverage by giving you ideas. "Hey, what's going on with this?" or "I'm interested in a story about that." And you can immediately respond to them.

That's something I think is very cool and it's helped close the gap, I think, between the media and fan. I'm not saying putting them on a level playing field, because they're not, but there are certainly things that fans have access to and the ability to let us know about that almost put us on the same level.

Ben Raby

I agree with the idea aspect, that's an interesting one, that Twitter, social media allows reporters to take advantage of story ideas is a big thing, be it in print or radio. I think that offers one, you know, you could get a, I don't want to say a "tip," but yeah, you could get a heads up or a notice that "Hey, such and such is happening at this place." You could take advantage of it and that could come from anybody, anyone of your Twitter followers and etcetera, etcetera.

And also, as far as the communication, we, for example, on the Capitals broadcast, you have a call-in post game show. There's maybe a 30 minute window to call in if you so desire to do so. Thanks to email and Twitter, etcetera, you don't have to be at you phone over those 30 minutes of a talk radio show to call in or send in a question or a comment. Throughout the course of a day or a week, get back to said listener or reader and appreciate their feedback as well. Yeah, it's a different outlet that you could take advantage of.

Michael O'Connell

How has it changed the way you, as a journalist, think about covering your beat and writing your stories and going to your sources?

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah, it's in a lot of different ways. First and foremost is the immediacy of it. It used to be, I remember writing for a newspaper and something happens early in the day, "Well, I have all day now to work on that story. I'll file it at the end of the day and it will appear the newspaper the next day. Nobody's going to read it until then." Now, something happens, I'd better be posting that somewhere immediately, whether it's Twitter and then ultimately on the blog or on the website, because people want to read this immediately.

And, it's changing. It's evolving over the course of a day. Maybe there's new information. And so, you're publishing a short bit of something and adding to it along the way. There's that aspect of it. And, again, because of that immediacy, readers are much more in tune with everything that you're writing and they're going to spot things that are not right.

Ben Raby

That never happens, Mark.

Mark Zuckerman

No, no, never. And also in that your competitors are kind of all in the same medium and so everybody's reading each other, following each other and so you know what somebody else has. They might have it a few minutes before you. You might have it after them. It used to be I'd wake up in the morning and I'd pick up *The Washington Post* and see what do my competitors have? What did they have that I didn't get? And vice versa. Now it's instantaneous. They're going to post something on Twitter and within seconds I'm going to see what they have or they are going to see what I have.

Michael O'Connell

Do you see that as sort of as a problem that you can't "scoop" anybody anymore?

Mark Zuckerman

The idea of "the scoop" has changed dramatically. There are still a few of them out there that I think what I call a really good scoop that you've talked to a lot of people, you've put together a good story and you don't post it until, say the morning, or even, you post it on Twitter with a link to your article and it's the kind of thing that your competitors can't just pounce on immediately because there's depth to it.

The problem is nowadays a lot of the "scoops" are, is "Oh, well, they just signed this player or they just traded this player." You get the news of it. You put a little line on Twitter and within, let's say, I had it first. Well, within five seconds, one of my competitors is making a phone call. They're confirming it and now they're reporting it or vice versa. It gives me the opportunity to follow up on something, so scoops last literally seconds now where they used to be a day or two.

Michael O'Connell

You could make a lunch out of it.

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah.

Megan Cloherty

It's a lot to stay on top off too because, say somebody tweets that there was a trade, then there has to be, "Well, for how much? Well, what's that mean?" It's like different angles come out right on top of each other.

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah. There's different levels of it and maybe one reporter posts that "I'm hearing they're close to signing Player X." That's the first part of the scoop. Well then, somebody else adds, "It's a done deal. They've signed Player X." And then the third person has "Player X signed for \$5 million." So who gets credit for the scoop?

Megan Cloherty

Right.

Mark Zuckerman

Because everybody had a little different piece of it. That's the kind of thing in the past you post any of that until you had all of the information. Now, any little sliver I have that can advance the story, I want to get out there so I get the credit for having reported it.

Megan Cloherty

The reason I think I thought that we should have these guys in today is because we've been talking on this podcast about convergence, about how reporters and journalists need to kind of change it up, come at their stories maybe think about them from a different medium, how they need to use social, if you should get involved, you know, with writing, more print. You guys have been doing this for years, because I feel like sports reporters have had to kind of just pinch hit, for lack of a better ... you've got to be able to do multiple things. Ben, how did you get started with, I know you have TV, you have print, you have a whole different, kind of arrayed background.

Ben Raby

It's funny that you mention that's how it seems to be going for sports. I thought 10 years ago, when I was finishing up at school, I thought it was a bad thing that I couldn't say in one sentence, maybe it is, but I couldn't say in one sentence, "I want to be a play-by-play announcer. I want to do this." This is what I said: "I like to write. It like the broadcasting side. I like a lot of different things." And at the time, I thought, "This probably isn't good. I should probably narrow this down." But yeah, as you said, I couldn't have predicted this 10 years ago, but it seems, yeah, the more you're able to do ... I know Mark, for example, started out in a much more traditional print background. Now, you see Mark on Comcast SportsNet on TV. You have to be able to have that presence on camera, etcetera, so it's definitely an advantage. It's weird because in schools I think they still have print programs and broadcast programs.

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah.

Ben Raby

When are those just going to become ...

Michael O'Connell

You're a journalist.

Mark Zuckerman

I remember I was in school in the mid-'90s and they had a course, one course in "new media" and that was involving the Internet, and it seems like such a foreign concept. "Oh, this is just sort of a little part of what we might be doing."

Michael O'Connell

"This is email."

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah. And it's amazing to see how "new media" then is what media is now. You have to be versatile to be able to all of it because there's so many different mediums to be able to communicate.

Megan Cloherty

But, it can also be a double-edged sword because it's great that you can, you know, jack of all trades, do all these things, but where does your priority lie?

Mark Zuckerman

No, that comes up too because essentially my position that I'm both an online writer covering the team and I'm also a TV reporter for Comcast SportsNet.

Megan Cloherty

And you have to tweet about it, Mark.

Mark Zuckerman

And that too, which always gets in the way. And so, certainly, there are times when I can't be two places at once and I have to decide what gets the priority. Sometimes, unfortunately, in my opinion, I think TV takes priority over the written word because, obviously, the immediacy of it. It's live and all that.

Ben Raby

Eyeballs, Mark, eyeballs.

Mark Zuckerman

I know, I know. It's still my old traditional print background spilling in here.

Megan Cloherty

But that speaks to, everybody comes from their medium, you know. That's your first love, so it makes sense that you'd want to flesh it out and want to do a long article about it.

Mark Zuckerman

Sure.

Megan Cloherty

But that's not, the business is changing and you've got to get it out there.

Michael O'Connell

And we were sort of touching on the fact that like through Twitter and immediate news that a story, somebody signs a new contract, that story develops over a period of time and you're following it and your competition is following it. Where's your endgame for this? Where is the product you are creating that's going to make you unique as opposed to you're just a copy of what everybody else is doing?

Mark Zuckerman

Right. And I think that's one benefit of Twitter and just the way that everything is so available to everyone now. I do think, in some ways, it pushes you to come up with new and creative ways to present the information.

There are about four or five of us that cover the Nationals on a daily basis for different outlets. There are certainly going to be things that we all have to write the same thing because it's the basic news, but you have to be able to distinguish yourself because, I think, a lot of fans out there are reading all of us. They're following all of us on Twitter.

One of the funny things you see sometimes is somebody complaining, "Why are the four or five of you tweeting the exact same thing in succession?" I'm presenting the news. I can't say, "Well, my competitors had this, so I'm not going to present it." But I think it has pushed me and others to come up with creative ways and unique ways of how to present that same type of news.

Megan Cloherty

Do you think though that it's changing the expectation and making the job a little muddled? I kind of wonder, I worked at NBC4 [in Washington, D.C.] and I was a lowly cog. I just went out and interviewed players and took pictures and stuff. But I even felt like, "I'm not [sports anchor] Dan Hellie." But I was out there and expected to get photos, to get sound, to tweet. There were multiple things that I had to get done, and I'm not even the one who's their main guy. Do you guys feel like sometimes it's a little much and you have octopus hands and you need to just focus on one thing?

Ben Raby

I was going to say, I think you go in with a game plan and a main assignment, a story to get done. If you can get anything else done in the interim, in the process, that's almost a bonus. I'm sure Mark can speak to this. If you go in with, if there's an obvious storyline at Nationals Park on a game day and there's breaking news, that's your priority. If Mike Rizzo the general manager holds a scrum holds a scrum and he makes reference to a sidebar story, so to say, an injury update, yeah, you could tweet to it, but you've got a priority there. You've got a main assignment. You can't lose track of that.

Mark Zuckerman

You do have to prioritize. One thing that has been a negative out of all of this, though, is that because you're in such a rush to get information out there as fast as you can, it doesn't necessarily give you the opportunity to develop depth that you'd like to have.

And it's probably also lowered our standards in some ways. Where in the past I might have said, "I really want to nail this thing." I want to make sure I have all the angles of it and have it all confirmed an all that and then post something in its entirety. Now, any little sliver of information you get, you're going to put out there and it may not be the full story sometimes. And, I think, in a lot of ways, that has, from a journalistic standpoint, I think that's been a negative in that the standard of what you should normally have to put out there to the public has been lowered and people post things that may have part of

the story correct, but maybe not all of it. And in some cases, things that are actually wrong because they got bad information. In the past, you had time to clean that up before the public ever saw it. Now it's out there immediately.

Michael O'Connell

Is that just the drive to be first, to get something out there?

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah, it is and it's unfortunate that sometimes that supersedes the drive to be right. But there is so much pressure to have things first and to get the clicks when it comes to website stories. If you're the first one that has a story out there and people are going to click on it, if I'm three minutes behind you and I'm writing the same exact thing, am I going to get the same number of clicks?

It's not necessarily a part of the job that I enjoy. I would rather be able to say, "Hey, give me five more minutes to really put something better together that I feel like the quality of this is better." But, if in doing so, it's now bringing fewer people to my website and to my employer's website, that's not their ultimate goal. Their goal is to bring as many eyeballs to that as they can.

Michael O'Connell

Tell us about launching your blog, what lessons you kind of learned out of that.

Mark Zuckerman

Wow. I'll try to give the short version. Basically, I was at the *Washington Times* for nine years, and right at the end of 2009, the paper made the decision to kill off the entire sports department. It has since come back. But, at the time, there were a bunch of us out of work immediately, and in trying to figure out what I was going to do, I was still looking for other jobs and had some things that could've come together and didn't. And we're getting close to spring training. Now the season's starting and I didn't have an actual job. And I knew that I wanted to keep covering the team in some way to try to keep my voice out there, to maybe help me get a job, full-time eventually. And so, after talking to some people, I decided, "Let's start my own blog and write about the team."

And it was received really well initially, and then I realized, "Well, wait. They're all going to spring training in a couple of weeks. If I'm not there, why is anybody going to read what I have to report?"

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Mark Zuckerman

All the journalists are down there getting firsthand knowledge. Well, it costs money to go down there of which I may have had some on my own to spend, but certainly not enough to go down there and spend a full six weeks at spring training.

So, after hearing about a few other journalists I knew in some other cities and kind of getting a sense from fans and other people I knew about whether this had a chance, I decided to request reader contributions to help me cover the team and support my travel down there. And it took off more than I ever imagined. In 19 hours, something like that, I had reached my goal of what I needed to have to cover.

Megan Cloherty

Wow.

Mark Zuckerman

And by the end of the week, I'd doubled what I was expecting. And so, thanks to that, I was able to spring training six weeks, cover the team every day just like everybody else and do it without having an employer. My employers were my readers. And that allowed me to then interact directly with them and, like I was saying before, they were giving me ideas of what they wanted me to write and it pushed me to do that because they were my employers. They were the ones paying me. I'm no longer writing articles based on what an editor or boss of mine thinks I should be doing. I'm writing directly what the readers want me to do.

Megan Cloherty

How affirming is that?

Michael O'Connell

Yeah

Megan Cloherty

Do you attribute it to all your readers from the *Times* coming over to the blog?

Mark Zuckerman

It was a combination. It was some of that. It was kind of word of mouth starting to spread somewhat. And I think some people felt like, "Hey, this is worth paying for."

Think about it. You pay for a newspaper for the coverage. You pay for a magazine. We've been trained to think that the Internet is free, that the information on the Internet was free. And it was a big mistake by the industry 10 years ago, 15 years ago not to figure out a way to charge for it and now the expectation is that it's free, and I don't know if we're ever going to get to a point where we can charge people for it.

So, I think there were some who felt like, "Hey, this is worth paying for." And then others kind of heard about the story and thought, "That's a cool thing. That's a nice thing to do. I'm going to try to help him out."

It was incredibly gratifying, overwhelming support that I never could've imagined and then it allowed me to actually cover the team for the entire season, ultimately, because I

was able to set up more of a subscription model now, where people could fund the coverage of the who season and turn into something that I never in a million years imagine it would. This was just trying to come up with a way to allow me to keep covering the team for a while and maybe get a job. I didn't expect it to, at least for one year, be enough to sustain me.

Megan Cloherty

Obviously, you're working, you said, for your readers, for your fans of your work. But how did it change your day-to-day when you were at spring training? Did you end up doing more color or more of what you wanted to do?

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah. It was nice in that I didn't have to, like I said, I wasn't on the phone every morning with an editor trying to come up with story ideas. It was, "Hey, what do I want to write about? And what do my readers want me to write about?" And, I could go off the beaten path a little bit.

I also, again, I knew, like I was talking about before, a lot of fans, especially hardcore fans, they read everybody's coverage. It's not just one person. So, why don't I give them something different? I'm asking these people for money. I want them to feel like they're getting their money's worth and that I'm not just giving them the same thing they could get for free out of [The Washington Post](#) or [MLB.com](#).

So, it allowed me to explore some other things and do some other ideas. It allowed me to delve more into the analysis realm and the opinion realm, which, as a beat writer, you generally don't do. But, I think, that separated me from everyone else. And just have fun. There were certain things I was just able to have more fun with because I didn't have quite the constraints that you would have working for a traditional media outlet.

Megan Cloherty

Talking about getting response from readers, I think it's interesting, I'm a huge Redskins fan. So, whenever I'm watching the game, I'm on Twitter and now I don't know that I could watch a game without being on Twitter.

Mark Zuckerman

You should try it sometime, because it actually does change your whole perspective.

Megan Cloherty

I know, but if somebody gets hurt and you know immediately what the situation is. Anyway, I'm wondering from the other side, from your guys' side when you're covering a game, even when you're live broadcasting a game. Do you stay in touch? Do you figure out what people are talking about or is it kind of just, "Hey, I'm doing my job. I'm not going to focus on that right now."

Ben Raby

Yeah, it depends. I find that, you know, in a three-period hockey game, first period starts, yeah, you're keeping an eye on that. Second period, maybe a little bit less. Third period, in this case, I'm preparing for a post game show, maybe the beat writers are writing their stories. Third period, you're not necessarily looking at what's going on on social media, and I think a lot of the beat reporters, a lot of the tweets are a little bit less frequent towards the end of the game for that reason, because they're, at this point, filling their stories, etcetera, etcetera. So, I think it varies as the game goes on. Maybe the average fan doesn't necessarily wouldn't notice the smaller volume towards the end of a game, but yeah it's a way to, I find that, I wouldn't say you "steal" information, but you're sharing information, statistics that might be relevant. Even the media relations folks, it used to be that you'd have to wait till the intermission to find out certain information. Now they're posting it right away on Twitter. So, yeah, that becomes a little bit more immediate.

And in our case, on a radio broadcast, you use it immediately on the radio broadcast. I'm saying when it's from the team, when it's an official team announcement that doesn't have to be literally handed to you on a piece of paper and you don't know when that piece of paper is arriving. So, yeah, from a broadcaster's point of view, yeah, it does change a little bit anyways the game is done.

Michael O'Connell

So, do the two different sports, are the fans any different in the way that they are communicating with you? Or are they all pretty much the same?

Ben Raby

As far as hockey, I just find that you get more of a broader base. What I mean by that is both sides of the border, in my case, you have folks north of the border who chime in a little bit more. It's a little bit less, I don't know, I guess you could say a little bit less local than other sports.

Megan Cloherty

He means Canada folks.

Ben Raby

Yeah, a little bit less than some other sports, but that's just me doing it from a hockey perspective.

Megan Cloherty

Does it help you follow, I mean obviously, you guys are the experts, so you know coming out of a game what your angles are and what the interesting highlights were. But does it help you to kind of see what people are talking about?

Mark Zuckerman

Sure. Yeah. I think sometimes you might sense that people are focused on one particular aspect that maybe you didn't think about. Maybe I didn't think that was the most im-

portant thing, but a lot of people were asking about it. That helps drive your coverage and allow you to focus on certain things.

One of the other things that can be helpful with being on Twitter during a game, I'm at the game watching it with my own eyes. I'm not watching the broadcast. Sometimes, people at home watching the broadcast are going to pick up on things that they saw on TV that I can't see from 500 feet up in the air above home plate in the press box.

Ben Raby

At Nationals Park.

Mark Zuckerman

And so, that can be helpful or they hear what one of the announcers said and like, "Oh man, did you hear what this guy said?" Well, no I hadn't, so that's good information to have. So, there is a little back and forth, I think. I'm providing information to them, but in some ways, they're helping me out with their observations.

Michael O'Connell

So what about your sources, the athletes who are on social media. What's your interaction in that?

Mark Zuckerman

It's a dangerous thing, I think, for the athletes, personally.

Michael O'Connell

As we've seen.

Mark Zuckerman

They can get into so much trouble. On one hand it's great because it provides a window into their real lives and who they are and allows fans sometimes to interact directly with them. As a writer, I sometimes worry about it because you kind of always have to keep your eye on what, "Oh, what did Bryce Harper [[@BHarper3407](#)] tweet now?" There was a point that and now it becomes a story that I have to worry about.

It's a cool thing, but it's still something they have to be, everybody has to be careful. That includes all of us in the media. I really believe that you have to, before you hit that send button on a tweet, you've got to stop and think to yourself, "OK, this is fine, right?" Because it's very easy in that stream of consciousness as you're watching something, type something out that might seem innocuous and not that big a deal, but it can come across the wrong way and that can get you in a lot of trouble. Athletes have to be aware of that and I think media have to be aware of that.

Michael O'Connell

I'm not a sports reporter. I'll tell you that. I have very limited experience in covering sporting events. But I know that sometimes when observe interviews and things, certainly with major league sports, the leagues and the teams have spent a lot of time and money making sure that the athletes, when they're being interviewed, are responding on message in a certain way. I think then social media is opening up this window where we start hearing the real voice of some of the athletes and it's not on message. Is that sort of —

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah, yeah. I think that's true. I know the Nationals bring in a high-priced PR exec every year to spring training to talk to the players about how to deal with the media, how to deal with social media. They may try to stick to that, but sometimes, you can't help yourself. You just say what you're going to say. That could be in front of reporters and cameras or it could be in the medium of tweeting something out.

The danger thing about Twitter is that if you say some things in person or among a group of people, you get the sense of what their tone was or the context of it. In 140 characters on a computer screen doesn't always convey that and that's what you have to be careful about is that what you're writing out there, you may realize there's nothing wrong with it, but the general population might read that entirely different, interpret that entirely differently than you did.

Ben Raby

What surprises me, actually, is that Mark referenced when content on the Internet 10 years ago and it was free and folks didn't think at the time that we should be charging for this, so now it's almost too late. With Twitter, a few years ago, when athletes started to Tweet, it was something the athletes did on their own time. I think Shaquille O'Neal was one of the first that got it out there and got a million plus followers. I think if it started again, teams would be a little bit more to the individuals say, "Hey, maybe we shouldn't do this." But, it got to the point where players were slowly doing it one at a time, one at a time, and now it's sort of teams can't say, "Hey, no tweeting. You can't do that."

Mark Zuckerman

No, it's too late. Yeah, you almost have to be on it.

Ben Raby

So, what that also leads to though is that you got to be careful what the players are tweeting. They're doing it on their own time. They have the right. But at the same time, the teams, in many cases, they now promote the players' Twitter accounts. They'll put it on the website. They'll put it in the media guide, so, I don't want to say it's hypocritical, but it's kind of not one extreme or the other. It's like they're trying to blend both and who knows if that'll be successful?

Michael O'Connell

Are we seeing more in contracts that are being signed language about what they can and can't do on Twitter or social media? Have we seen that yet?

Mark Zuckerman

I don't know if I've ever seen anything quite to that extent. There are sometimes various character clauses and things. If you get in trouble with the law, that could void a contract.

Michael O'Connell

Don't tweet it out.

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah, well that too. But that's interesting. That's maybe something that has to come up here as this continues to blossom.

Michael O'Connell

Well, maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it.

Mark Zuckerman

No. It's not a bad idea. It's probably something that teams are going to have to at some point realize. The other part of it is, and this applies to all of us, I technically own my Twitter account. But it has my handle, [@ZuckermanCSN](#). It has the Comcast Sports Network logos on it. I'm representing my organization. These players, it's their own personal accounts, but they are representing their teams and that's where it can be a little dicey in that "Who is actually speaking here? Is it the individual or is the team somehow responsible or is my employer somehow responsible for things that I've put out there?"

Megan Cloherty

Talking about just sports reporters coming up who are interested in maybe have the same outlook that Ben had, "Not really sure what I want to do. I want to do nine things." Or, "I want to be a print reporter." What do up and coming sports reporters need to know now that maybe they didn't 10 years ago?

Mark Zuckerman

The Ben model is the way to go now. The more versatile you can be coming into this business, the better chance you're going to have because there's very few people, I think, nowadays, the way it's set up, that can say, "Hey, I'm only going to communicate in one way and be successful at it." The more mediums you're proficient in, the better chance you have. So, you were way ahead of your time, Ben.

Ben Raby

Sure. And as for types of mediums, I think still, at the end of the day, there's so many young folks who want to get into the business, etcetera. At the end of the day, and it

gets lost a little bit, but, again, from a print background I'm sure you'd appreciate this. They'll have to have the good ideas. They'll have to have the good content.

Mark Zuckerman

Totally.

Ben Raby

They'll have to have the good stories and —

Mark Zuckerman

And the ability to write. Because, whether you're actually writing words that people are reading or you're writing what you're going to be conveying, you still have to be able to communicate well and that starts with a foundation of being a good writer, I think.

Ben Raby

So, I think that does get lost a little bit. You can see some people starting out in the business, interns, etcetera, looking "Hey, I have 1,000 Twitter followers."

"Yeah, that's great. But show me some substance. Show me something a little bit different than your peers, some content, some story ideas. I still think that I feel like an old guy when I say that, but no really, I always have preached idea development and do something a little bit different than your peers that'll set you apart. No matter how the business changes, social media-wise or whatnot, those values, if you want to call them that, are always ...

Mark Zuckerman

And the other thing I'd say a skill that you'd really have is the ability to communicate with people in person and develop relationships with people. It's real easy to sit back on your computer and only communicate that way. This business still comes down to face-to-face communications, developing relationships with the athletes, the coaches, the agents, general managers, other media. That's how you get your best stories. It's easy to think, "Hey, anybody can sit at home and craft a blog and spread it out to the world." But there's still to me something about journalism itself that requires that face-to-face interaction.

Michael O'Connell

It's not just, "Oh, I'm a big Caps fan. I want to go launch my own blog and mouth off at everything I see on TV."

Mark Zuckerman

Well, you can, but I think the standard there is going to be different and I think the way the general population is going to embrace you, the credibility that you're going to have, I think in a lot of ways, I think there's still a place for true journalism in there and to do that, I think you have to be there in person. This is kind of the whole idea of my blog and

why I felt it was important to be there at spring training and needed the money to do that because, yeah, I could've sat at home and riffed off what everyone else is reporting on, but that's not journalism. That's blogging. Journalism is being there and doing that first-hand.

Megan Cloherty

Has CSN let you kind of keep the voice of NatsInsider.com or has it changed since it was picked up.

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah, they have. It's sort of complementary to their main site. So, some of the things I write for the blog are a little different than that.

But yeah, I'd probably approach it a little differently now and know that they own it and it's maybe dulling back a little bit more in the traditional sense than kind of off the cuff, "Hey, here are just my own thoughts." Because I'm not just representing me anymore. Now I'm representing an entire corporation.

Megan Cloherty

So, it's obviously an exciting time in sports, especially in D.C. But how do you guys feel about the future of sports journalism? Where things are going? The expectations on you. It's kind of a question we ask everybody, like how do you feel about the direction we're moving in?

Mark Zuckerman

I think, in a lot of ways, sports journalism has never been better than it has been now. And in some ways, it's never been worse than it is now.

It's worse now in, like I was saying before, the need to put things out there immediately, to maybe not worry as much about accuracy and depth. But, at the same time, like I was also saying, because we now have the ability to reach anybody in the world immediately and readers have the ability to read everybody in the world immediately, it pushes us to do a better job and distinguish ourselves.

So, it may read differently, it may look differently than it did back in the good old days they talk about, but I would say there are more really good quality sports journalists out there maybe now than at any time in history.

Ben Raby

My hope is that they don't get buried along the way. I know that CBS this week actually just started *60 Minutes Sports*, which is going to be a weekly show, which I'm happy to see. I feel like a 29-year-old dinosaur here when I say this, but I liked those old —

Megan Cloherty

Long format.

Mark Zuckerman

Yeah.

Ben Raby

— in depth stories, which, you know, maybe you're asking about the future of sports journalism, which, I think, could be a little bit more difficult to come by only because there are so many more people trying to get stories. I think of, this is an extreme of course, but a media day at the Super Bowl is so crowded with who knows, who's there, what blog, which website?

I just hope that the traditional reporters with the journalism backgrounds, who can do the in-depth story, in-depth reporting, don't get buried or lost and hopefully not. I don't think that has happened yet and hopefully it doesn't. Again, *60 Minutes Sports* is just starting, so hopefully that continues. But you do see, magazines, *Sports Illustrated's* a little thinner these days than it has been in the past, so I'm hopeful that that part of sports journalism remains intact and hopefully improves.

Michael O'Connell

I'm old enough to remember when ESPN started and people were like, "Twenty-four hour sports? Come on, who's going to want that?"

Megan Cloherty

No one. Wait. All right. Guys, thank you again for joining us. Mark, where can we find you on Twitter? Obviously, NatsInsider.com.

Mark Zuckerman

CSNWashington.com. And my Twitter handle is @ZuckermanCSN.

Megan Cloherty

And Ben?

Ben Raby

[@BenRaby31](https://twitter.com/BenRaby31), and online, WTOP.com, and looking forward to continuing the hockey season on the Capitals Radio Network.

Megan Cloherty

Yeah, we're going to hear a lot from these guys in the coming months.

Michael O'Connell

Yes.

Megan Cloherty

All right, thanks again for joining us. I'm Megan Cloherty with Mike O'Connell. Thanks for listening.