Uplink

November 1997

Uplink Update

For years, the media have been dropping the ball when it comes to covering sports. But in many places homerism has been replaced by hard-hitting investigations and stories that cover sports as a business thanks to CAR.

This issue of *Uplink* examines how some news operations are tackling sports' issues.

NICAR's Kara Morrison analyzes how the Associated Press created its own database to compare the salaries of Texas high school football coaches with classroom teachers.

Greg Reeves of the *Kansas City Star* explains the computer-assisted reporting work that helped produce the Star's latest series on the NCAA.

Griffin Palmer diagrams how The Daily Oklahoman uses CAR on a weekly basis to rank local teams.

NICAR's Sarah Cohen explains how statistics can help sports' staffers, and columnist Nora Paul shares what is available on the Internet for sports lovers and writers.

I n s i d e

Coaching for dollars

Kara Morrison
IRE Resource Center

When Linda Leavell heard her AP story being discussed on a three-hour Dallas radio program, she knew her investigative series was a winner.

The story, Leavell said, was one nearly everyone in Texas could relate to: hometown high-school football coaches, revered in many communities, were making about 75 percent more than the state's teachers.

Leavell, a day supervisor at AP's Dallas bureau, along with reporters Jaime Aron, Peggy Fikac, Ed Montes, Mark Babineck and Mike Cochran, put together a seven-story package called "Pigskin Paychecks" that was run by nearly every media outlet in Texas in October 1996.

The initial legwork was extensive, because there was no ready-made database compiling the information the AP needed. The story idea stemmed from false rumors that coaches often earned more than their superintendents.

To gather the data, AP sent questionnaires — all hand-tailored and addressed by name to each superintendent and complete with the name of each football coach — to 238 school districts.

Leavell even anticipated compliance problems, and sent a state attorney general's open records ruling with each letter.

"Schools are often notorious for refusing first and complying later, and we were trying to head that off," Leavell explained.

Eventually, all 238 districts repre-senting 428 coaches in the largest Texas high schools, responded with the information. Leavell said most schools responded quickly, but about 75 or 80 of them had to be recontacted. Eventually, she ended up calling all the districts again to double check the information.

Finally, all the data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, which contained each school name, its district's average teacher salary, the superintendents' and

Bending the Rules

Greg Reeves
The Kansas City Star

Eight databases contributed to *The Kansas City Star's* six-day series Oct. 5-11 on the role of the National Collegiate Athletics Association and money in college sports.

The NCAA provided two of the databases on diskettes, including a history of student-athlete graduation rates by school, sport, race and sex, and 100,000-plus votes by member schools on NCAA legislation in the past four years.

The NCAA also gave us early access to its Web site that will contain text files of all major NCAA infraction cases since 1987.

We built several other databases

Salary analysis

coaches' names and salaries and the school size.

The numbers spoke for themselves. Leavell learned head football coaches at the largest Texas high schools earned about $54,000 on average — 75 percent more than the average teacher's $31,000 paycheck. The highest paid coach made more than $82,000.

Texas coaches receive state-set, base salaries determined by teaching experience, just like any other teacher. But in addition, coaches are paid a district-set stipend.

Leavell said she received some help and suggestions from AP computer-assisted reporting experts Bill Dedman and Drew Sullivan on analyzing and explaining the data.

Dedman's suggestion that Leavell explain the median salary became a key graph in the overall piece, making the findings easier to understand:

"The statewide averages are not inflated by just a few high-earning coaches," the story read. "The typical coach makes $54,239. Half make more, half make less."

The series also used U.S. Census data to show coaches' salaries were about $25,000 to $30,000 higher than average Texas household incomes and those of federal, state and local government employees.

Along with an overall story on coaches' salaries, AP's series included profiles of the highest- and lowest-paid coaches, reactions from non-coaching teachers, education experts and state legislators, and even a personal essay by Mike Cochran, who explained what his own hometown football coach had meant to the community.

The series, which took six months to complete, raised questions about the large salary disparity AP found.

The AP team had also considered comparing each school's academic ranking with its economic focus on sports, but the reporters soon learned they couldn't assume a direct link between the salaries and academic performance.

One graph in the series, however, mentioned: "Only two schools among the top 50 in coaches' salaries rank as 'exemplary' in state academic ratings . Meanwhile, six are considered 'low performing.'"

Leavell said the series brought mixed reactions from the coaches.

"Some were mad, some were accusing us of singling them out or trying to humiliate them or stirring up trouble," Leavell said. "Even after it came out, I had a coach call who said, 'It's not anybody's business what I make.'"

Other coaches were willing to talk frankly about their pay, which they said often compensated for lack of job security. From compiling the data, Leavell learned coaching turnover was in fact high.

"It didn't really occur to me that coaches could be fired in the middle of the season or would leave," said Leavell, who learned to specify she needed only the salary of the coach who had started the 1995-96 season, rather than the current coach.

Leavell said if done again, she would have made this clear in the questionnaire and would also have asked for the principal's salary.

Because of the series, AP's Dallas bureau became a model for successfully using the Texas open records law. Leavell also won the Headliners Award for the best sports story of 1996 and received honorable mention in a national AP contest.

"I was wholly satisfied," Leavell said of the final project. "It was really successful. It brought a lot of satisfaction to me personally and brought a lot of praise to AP in Texas nationally."

Open records tips

Leavell's tips for successful open records act compliance:

• Know exactly what data you need.

• Tailor specific questionnaires for schools to fill out.

• Send the letters directly to administrators by name rather than title.

• Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and a fax number.

• Keep a detailed log of each follow-up call you've made to the school, including names of people you talked to, when you called and what they said.

• Enclose a state attorney general's decision about a similar open records case with each letter.

Kara Morrison can be reached at (573) 882-0684 or by e-mail at kara@nicar.org

NCAA investigation

by scanning the NCAA membership directory and 1,200 pages of NCAA convention books containing 694 legislative proposals since 1993 with accompanying discussion.

And, like several other news organizations, we used data entry to create tables from the 1996 Gender Equity Disclosure Act forms we requested from 305 NCAA Division 1 colleges and universities.

None of the databases in this project were particularly complicated. The lessons for computer-assisted reporting had more to do with scanning, data entry and text analysis.

The generated files gave us the ability to search for statements on NCAA legislation by school officials and others. It also enabled us to build a searchable database of every NCAA legislative proposal since 1993.

The data entry taught me a valuable lesson. We hired temps, some of them very good, to input gender equity forms and NCAA infraction summaries. Then we hired other temps to proofread the work. At the end we still had errors embedded in the data — fewer than a dozen, but dangerously hidden until uncovered by a query or report.

It would have been cheaper to have two persons enter the data, then compare the results. That's how I plan to approach future projects requiring data entry.

The NCAA graduation-rates database comes from a complex report submitted annually by Division 1 schools detailing enrollment and degrees received in 42 categories by student-athletes and other students.

Most of the same data is published in the NCAA's yearly Graduation Rates Report. The book lists a number range for athletes graduating in each sport; the database lists the actual number. We asked the NCAA for this database and they provided us with four Paradox tables zipped onto a single diskette.

The database makes it possible to rank schools by graduation rates of student-athletes or other students.

We created flags for whether schools were public or private, and which had the best won-loss records over the past decade.

These flags, along with fields on gender, sport, race and athlete type (aid or transfer) made it possible to analyze graduation rates in literally hundreds of ways.

The infractions files, which we downloaded from the NCAA's yet-to-be-released Web site, totaled more than four megabytes of text. There were 124 files, some as long as 10,000 words.

As I read each file I typed in brief markers, or flags, for the source of the infraction (the NCAA, the school, the press, etc.) and for every penalty listed (coach fired, sport suspended, etc.).

Then I wrote a short program in XPL, the Xywrite scripting language, that flew through the files and threw the file name and flagged text (usually just a few words) into a file.

I appended this 1,700-line text file to a FoxPro table, then linked that with the NCAA Enforcement Summary, which lists probation, post-season bans and television bans for major infractions since 1952.

We now had a powerful way to analyze NCAA enforcement trends and show, that tough measures like bans on post-season play and television were being replaced by often meaningless probation.

We collected gender equity forms from 305 Division I NCAA schools and analyzed them about the same time as several other newspapers.

The reports showed that women are 52 percent of students at Division I schools, but only 37 percent of athletes. It also showed schools overall lost $200 million on sports programs in 1996.

The federal law requires schools to fill out eight tables, on enrollment, athletic participation, number of coaches, average coaches' salaries, operating expenses, recruiting expenses, athletic aid and overall revenue and expenses. The reports are due Oct. 15 each year.

The NCAA also provided us with diskettes containing FoxPro tables of more than 100,000 votes by the 933 member schools at the organization's past four annual legislative conventions.

This database showed how hard it is to categorize political legislation.

We examined each of nearly 700 proposals and tried to flag each one with some kind of meaningful evaluation. In the end, however, the database told us mainly what the NCAA did and did not address.

Greg Reeves can be reached at (816) 234-4366 or by e-mail at greeves@kcstar.com

News releases about recent cases involving rule infractions are now available at www.ncaa.org/ releases.

Hunting for data

By Kara Morrison
NICAR

Bill Loving was looking for a quick-hit, computer-assisted, sports story this spring when he recalled reading stories analyzing hunting accidents.

Loving and reporter Dennis Anderson then came up with an even better twist: analyzing hunting and fishing violations. Anderson had heard the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources had been lax in its enforcement of violations in recent years.

Loving, computer-assisted reporting editor at the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, set out to see what databases were available. To his delight, the Department of Natural Resources was helpful.

"Not only did they have good data going back to 1987, but they let us have it for free," Loving said. "They also agreed to let me download it via anonymous FTP, instead of dealing with tapes, etc."

Dissecting the data

The database contained a wealth of information, including:
- Type of violation
- Amount of fine
- Date, time and county in which the violation occurred
- Badge number of the conservation officer
- The outdoor activity involved

From it, Loving was able to confirm Anderson's hunch.

DNR enforcement had in fact dropped, while ironically, outdoor activity was at an all-time high.

The story, which ran on the front page of the March 27 *Star-Tribune*, detailed a 28.2 percent drop in total DNR citations from 1991 to 1994.

In that period, hunting and fishing citations, including tickets for poaching and invalid licenses, dropped by an even steeper 32.6 percent.

"A second main finding was that enforcement of game laws was declining while enforcement of boat/snowmobile laws was rising," Loving explained.

"Given that the DNR had been working with a frozen budget and staffing level for decades, it looked as if they were making a conscious choice to re-direct resources away from hunting/fishing and toward motorized vehicles. Anderson's reporting confirmed that hypothesis."

Loving said he used Access 97 to establish the general trends.

He grouped hunting and fishing and motorized-vehicle violations together, grouped them again by year, and pasted his query results into Excel. He then used Excel to build a series of summary tables and charts highlighting his findings.

The database also gave Anderson a good idea of which officers to interview.

Unfortunately, Loving said most refused to talk on the record.

But those who spoke to Anderson gave him the rest of the story, detailing how low morale, budget shortfalls, and a rift between officers and the enforcement director played a hand in the citations plunge.

Few problems

The biggest challenge of the project was coordinating schedules with Anderson. This took months.

After the two found time to work together, Loving said the story took only a couple of weeks to complete.

There was only one other slight glitch in the data that Loving was able to work around. "They initially withheld the cases in which juveniles had been ticketed," he said. "But I later persuaded them to give me those records, too, but with the juveniles names deleted."

In all, Loving was pleased with the story, which he sees as a good example of CAR on the beat.

"We didn't uncover any major scandals, but it was an inside look at a public agency that most people don't know much about," Loving said. "And given the extreme importance of natural resources and outdoor recreation in Minnesota, it shed light on some real concerns about how the resources were being managed."

Loving recently compiled his own database using DNR violations to analyze hunting accidents, just in time for start of deer-hunting season.

Kara Morrison can be reached at (573) 882-0684 or by e-mail at kara@nicar.org

CAR ranks teams

By Griffin Palmer

The Daily Oklahoman

Much of meat-and-potatoes of day-to-day sports reporting is driven by statistics. FoxPro is ideal for processing statistics and getting them ready to put in the paper.

At *The Daily Oklahoman*, we use FoxPro to generate typesetter-ready prep football standings charts. During the basketball season, sports reporters use FoxPro to generate win-loss reports for prep teams.

Sports staffer Penny Soldan says she used to devote an eight-hour day each week to calculating prep football standings and keying them into the system. Soldan said she used to spend more than eight hours a week wrangling numbers for girls' basketball. She now does the same tasks in about 30 minutes.

Computer rankings

Because *The Daily Oklahoman's* newsroom network is so crotchety, it has been impossible for us to create a system where agate clerks can key scores into a central database.

We've worked around the network's limitations by transferring weekly scores files out of our SII typesetting system, importing them into FoxPro, and using FoxPro's relational capabilities to write scores from the weekly scores files to a master schedule.

Then, we use FoxPro's report generator to create a weekly standings file, including typesetting codes, from the master schedule. We transfer that report back to the SII system. It's a crude solution, but it works.

I've accomplished all this with the FoxPro training I've gotten at NICAR conferences, what I've picked up off NICAR-L and other Internet lists and newsgroups, and what I've been able to dope out by reading the FoxPro manuals.

Each summer, *The Oklahoman* publishes a master schedule of all prep games. That forms the nucleus of our weekly standings system. The sports staff uses SII macros to convert the schedule into a comma-delimited file, which we import into FoxPro.

Once a week, we take the scores file published in the Saturday paper, convert it to comma-delimited, and import it into FoxPro.

Then, we run a program that compares the team, opponent and date fields in the weekly file with the same fields in the master schedule, and writes the appropriate scores into the master schedule.

This gets a little tricky. In the master schedule, every game involving two in-state teams is listed twice: Once in each team's schedule. The program has to write each score into the table twice — in reversed order. Another twist is the fact that in the weekly scores table, the winner always appears in the left-hand column; the loser, in the right.

Our program accounts for all this, and writes all the scores into the proper columns.

The master schedule contains district win-loss columns, overall win-loss columns, a column for a weighted scoring system developed by our sports staff, a column to indicate district and non-district games, and an overtime column.

After writing scores into the correct columns, the program writes 1s into the appropriate win and loss columns and calculates weighted scores. It sums in-district wins and losses, overall wins and losses and weighted scores for each team, ordering by win-loss and weighted score within each class and district.

It stores the results to a separate table, from which FoxPro generates the report.

I figured out which of FoxPro's special characters correspond to the correct SII typesetting codes by opening an SII-formatted standings file into FoxPro's text editor.

I then selected the necessary characters from FoxPro's menu of special characters and inserted them into the report profile as literals. FoxPro's report generator allows you to build expressions with FoxPro functions.

I used the iif() function to vary insertion of SII spacing codes, depending on the number of bytes written into the win-loss columns and weighted-score columns.

We sometimes get errors when a team's name is written differently in the weekly scores file than in the master schedule.

I've written queries that checks the values in the master schedule, after the program has run, against the values in the weekly scores file. Another query tests for mismatched team names when the two files don't balance out.

Looking for story ideas? Try IRE's "100 Computer-Assisted Stories." The book includes story summaries ans tips on how to do them. It can be ordered for $20 for IRE members and $25 for non-members plus shipping and handling by calling (573) 882-2042.

D7	▼	=CHITEST(B3:B5,D3:D5)

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1						
2		Actual	Act%	Expected	Exp%	
3	Hits	3	30%	5	50%	
4	Misses	7	70%	5	50%	
5	At–Bats	10	100%	10	100%	
6						
7			Chi	0.449		
8						
9						

Excel Table A.

Playing with Statistics

By Sarah Cohen
NICAR

It's always surprising that sports reporters avoid computer-assisted reporting classes offered by NICAR in newsrooms around the country.

Of course, sports reporters keep strange hours, are often out of the office, and take month-long breaks to make up for the grueling hours they put in during the season. But no other beat depends so much on framing numbers in an entertaining and insightful way.

First, NICAR is looking to help. We're searching for a good time of year to hold two-day classes in computer-assisted reporting just for sports reporters.

Instead of government budgets and school reports, these would focus on covering high school football and stadium issues.

Let us know when you think you could fit it in.

That said, sports reporters have an instinctive understanding of statistics. Here are a few more tips for sports reporters that can make those numbers-laden stories just a little more insightful:

Understand Averages

The single biggest problem in sports reporting, particularly on salaries, but also on other player statistics, is a confusion between the words, "average" and "typical."

Get to know the concept of a median rather than a simple average, and use it in your stories. A median is often called the typical value, because, for example, it's the middle salary rather than the total paid divided by the number of players.

That has a huge effect on what most readers view as astronomical player salaries.

If one player makes $7.2 million, but the other eight make closer to $500,000 then the median is half-a-million. The average is something like $1.3 million.

Which one more accurately portrays how much players get? The median.

Which one says more about the finances of the team? The average.

Pick yours wisely.

Pay attention to the database

Everyone understands in their guts that batting .333 is very different when a player bats 1-for-3 versus one who bats 33-for-100.

The first could obviously be a fluke. The second shows consistent performance.

That's easy. But what happens when it's 2-for-6? Or 3-for-10?

In this space in September, John Sullivan discussed the use of significance testing in the newsroom.

Here's an obvious case for a chi-square statistic.

It tells you whether the batting average is likely to have occurred by chance.

You can use a spreadsheet, a piece of statistical software, or a pocket calculator to test it. You'd

Sports statistics

set up your test like *Table A*.

The .449 says that a difference as big as the one shown could happen about 45 times out of 100 just by pure, dumb luck. In other words, if a player hits 3-for-10, he might or might not be better or worse than random chance (or 5-for-10).

We don't need to set it up to expect hits to happen randomly.

We can make our test more realistic by setting them up proportionately. This is usually a fairer way to test.

Look at Table B.

This time, I calculated "expected" hits by figuring the team's average of 15 percent hits (or 15 of 100).

That percentage was applied to our star player's at-bats to compute the expected 2 of 10 hits, and to the rest of the team to figure the 14 of 90 hits.

Now the 0.000 means that we'd rarely find a player to do this differently from the average purely by chance, or 0 of 1,000 times.

Yes, it's a little work to get.

But if your sports story revolves around a star's performance in a limited number of games, it's worth checking to see whether this could happen without any particular talent.

Evaluate players salaries

As many of my colleagues know, I'm not a big fan of gratuitous use of statistical techniques in the newsroom.

But player salaries may be one area in which a regression can help.

The problem is, it's a classic case of a difficult variable to test using simple linear regression.

In fact, it's one of the best examples of why reporters have to pay attention to the kind of data they're trying to predict or explain using regression.

In a linear regression, reporters try to guess a salary, a school's score or any other value based on a series of other figures that they think will explain its performance.

In this case, you'd try to guess a salary based on the idea that better players get paid more. The trick is to figure out whether it's consistent – if you get 40 percent more hits, do you almost always get a 10 percent higher salary?

How can you get a model?

Rather than reinventing the method needed to accurately predict or explain salaries, borrow from another field. Studies abound in explaining chief executive salaries in major corporations.

In fact, one consultant uses a method that helps tell shareholders whether the executive is worth the money he or she is paid.

Why not try adapting this model to sports?

These techniques argue strongly for better use of the information that most sports reporters keep in books, in nightly reports and in their heads.

If they'd just type some data into a spreadsheet instead of writing it on paper, they'd be able to work through any of these problems on the fly.

It's worth it.

Sarah Cohen can be reached at (301) 942-2199 or e-mail her at sarah@nicar.org

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1			Actual			Expected	
2		Player	Rest of Team	Total	Player	Rest of Team	
3	Hits	3	12	15	2	14	
4	Misses	7	78	85	9	77	
5	At-Bats	10	90	100	10	90	
6							
7		Chi	0.00				
8							

Excel Table B.

One-to-many how-to

By Jo Craven

The Washington Post

Recently, I had a large Home Mortgage Disclosure Act table called master.dbf that included a field with Census tract numbers. The various tract numbers appeared repeatedly, indicating the numerous loan applications that came from each area.

I wanted to identify these tracts by their common neighborhood names.

To do this, with information provided by a local Census Bureau, I created a table called lookup.dbf with two fields: one called "tract" with the tract numbers, and the second called "hood" with the neighborhood names. Master.dbf already contained a tract field; I added a second corresponding field called "hood."

My task was to use lookup.dbf to fill in neighborhood names in the newly created and blank "hood" field in master.dbf.

To do this, I wrote the following FoxPro program, which works by advancing through each table, plucking neighborhood names from lookup.dbf and dropping them into master.dbf when the tract numbers from the two tables match.

Getting technical

In geek speak, this is known as a one-to-many relationship: One record in lookup.dbf corresponded to many records in master.dbf.

Here is the program; an explanation follows:

```
clear
clear all
close all
use c:\master in 1
use c:\lookup in 2
select lookup
do while not eof('lookup')
   scan
      select master
      replace master.hood with
lookup.hood for
master.tract=lookup.tract
   endscan
select lookup
skip 1
enddo
```

Explanation

```
clear
clear all
close all
```

These introductory commands make sure that you are working with a clean slate — everything is cleared or closed before the program begins.

```
use c:\master in 1
use c:\lookup in 2
select lookup
```

The two tables are opened with the "use c:\master in 1" and "use c:\lookup in 2" lines. You must still tell the computer which of these files to use first. "Select lookup" takes care of this.

```
do while not eof('lookup')
```

This acts like a scan loop. It steps through lookup.dbf. The "not eof" means "not end of file" and instructs the computer to continue working as long as it has not reached the end of lookup.dbf.

```
scan
      select master
      replace master.hood with
lookup.hood for
master.tract=lookup.tract
   endscan
```

This nested scan loop then selects the second table, master.dbf, and issues the replace command, which fills in the empty "hood" field in master.dbf with a neighborhood name drawn from the "hood" field in lookup.dbf when master.tract matches lookup.tract.

```
select lookup
skip 1
```

The computer has looked at the first entry in lookup.dbf, then scanned through every record in master.dbf and made the appropriate changes. But the computer still needs to advance to the next record in lookup.dbf and perform the same job. "Select lookup" and "skip 1" tells the machine to return to lookup.dbf, skip one record, and repeat the procedure. It does this until the computer reaches the end of lookup.dbf.

```
enddo
```

"Enddo" concludes the "do while" command.

Jo Craven can be reached at at (202) 334-6259 or by e-mail at cravenja@washpost.com.

World Wide Sports

By Nora Paul
The Poynter Institute

In the interest of full disclosure, I'm not much of a sports fan. I have no special teams I loyally root for. But I am a dedicated fan of *Uplink* so when the assignment for the column was changed to sports, I didn't try to punt it back.

After "adult entertainment" sites, there are probably more Internet sites dedicated to sports topics than anything else. I don't go to them. In fact, a friend who runs a big sports server called to tell me all about his new venture when he was starting it up and I said, "Oh great, just what the Internet needs, another damn sports site." I haven't heard much from him lately.

But then, as often happens, life made me face something that I had avoided. I had to train sports copy editors and reporters at the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* on how to use the Internet. I had to explore sports sites. And I came away with an appreciation of some of the services and their meticulous arrangement and wide scope of sports information. I also realized that sports stories aren't just for the sports section, as a big story in Minneapolis, and in a number of other communities, has revealed. The hostage taking of communities by major league sports teams insisting they need a new stadium or they'll leave town is a business story, a community story and a government story.

So, whether you are a copy editor needing some verification of names and statistics, a reporter covering a big game or the investigative reporter needing to background some rich sport franchises' dealing, here are some sports links that can help.

Hope they help you pitch a field goal, or some such thing.

Links pages

Sometimes, finding the site that has the best collection of links is your first, best bet in searching.

Rely on "Web scouts" who go out and locate good sites rather than wading through the vast listings in large search engine sites. Here are a couple of good ones:

World Wide Web of Sports
http://www.tns.lcs.mit.edu/cgi-bin/sports
A sort of Yahoo of sports sites, compiled by students at MIT. The first page will link you to the listings for specific sports or click the "Sports Search" link to get a search box and look for specific items.

Handilinks

http://www.ahandyguide.com/
Check out this guide to Internet resources - categorized in broad subject areas. Click on sports and get a wonderful listing by sport, from back-packing to wrestling, with sub-categories for teams and other topics.

A great way to find the specific Web sites of particular sports teams, but be careful that you are looking at the "official" Web site, not just a fan's ravings.

Tip for finding sports link pages:
Go to the Infoseek search site (www.infoseek.com) and put in the search box: +title:links +title:<name of sport.
You'll find pages with the title containing the word "links" and the name of the sport you are interested in.

Mega-sports sites

CBS SPORTSLINE
http://cbs.sportsline.com/index.html
Get the latest news for free, pay $4.95 per month for other features and functions and access to reference works like the Information Please Sports Almanac.

ESPN
http://ESPN.SportsZone.com/
OK, even for a non-sports nut, ESPN's array of players' statistics and the manipulation and cross comparisons that can be done with the statistics is very impressive. Want to see your favorite player's statistics compared with others, you'll have to subscribe to the service, also at $4.95/month.

SPORTSNETWORK.COM
http://www.sportsnetwork.com/home.asp
Looking for U.S. and non-U.S. sports action?
This site specializes in providing sports scores, news and information from around the world from a number of different information services.

More suggestions from Nora Paul are available at Poynter's Web site. Point your browser to www.poynter.org

When the team leaves home

By Trebor Banstetter
Nashville Banner

The frenzy of big-league sports franchises pulling up the stakes and moving is one of the biggest stories to hit sports and business journalism in years.

In Nashville, the relocation of the Houston Oilers was the biggest story to hit Music City in years. I was assigned to cover the story from a business perspective, and it took the bulk of my time for more than eight months.

Here are some things to remember when relocation fever hits your city.

It's a money game

Always remember that professional sports is a business, and should be covered as such. Very often we don't look at a football team the same way we cover the town's big manufacturer, but its likely the team's revenues are just as high or higher.

Don't worry about the coaches and the players. Find out the names of the administrators, finance people, marketing and human relations people — these will be your real sources.

Early on, do a story profiling the team as a business. What's its revenue, profit? Who are its employees? What is its business strategy? Does it have any subsidiaries? How about its historical business performance? What else is the team owner into? (Rarely is the team their only business).

Since most pro sports teams are closely held, you'll need to get much of the financial data from the organization. But surprisingly, (probably because they're not used to being covered as a business) they often share a good amount of information. Other data can come from the league, and consultants and academics who track the sports business, and other business sources. Check state corporate records and the Securities and Exchange Commission to find out what other cookie jars the owner has his hands on and how successful he or she has been outside of pro sports.

Luxury, luxury, luxury!

The most important element in a team relocation that involves a new stadium is the luxury box (or skybox, luxury suite, dream suite, etc.) These suites are gigantic cash generators for the teams, and usually are the single largest source of revenue coming out of the stadium every Sunday.

In fact, one sports economics expert told me that the ideal stadium of the '90s would be 85 percent luxury boxes and about 15 percent seats to look good on television.

The reason for the importance of the luxury is twofold. First, they are enormously expensive.

A second reason for the luxury suite mania is the way they are structured in the stadium lease. Generally, the suites are managed by a separate corporation, and the revenues flow directly through that company, rather than the team.

Of course, the suites that create all this cash for the team owners are usually built at taxpayer expense. Nashville taxpayers will be coughing up more than $6 million to pay for the suites in our new stadium.

Who's behind the door?

After identifying the importance of luxury boxes, a fantastic story to pursue is identifying all the suite buyers and how much they are paying. Readers might be interested in knowing if luxury box owners include non-profit hospitals, public utilities, companies that have recently laid off workers, and city government political cronies. You can also check to see if anyone is getting a discount or break on their suite and why.

This is not an easy nut to crack. In most cities, the suite holders list is considered "super top secret" and they will not hand it over without a fight.

• Make your own list. Determine the obvious suspects from the big companies and rich private citizens in town, and then call around and ask if they've got luxury boxes. Many will own up, especially big companies that see the stadium as an economic development tool. The obvious problem with this is that you will never get a complete list, and many of the really interesting luxury box buyers will never admit they hold suite leases,

• Do some footwork. Work your way into the suite level of the stadium and look at the doors. In some stadiums, the suite holders names are printed. In Boston, a Globe reporter was invited to enjoy a game in a PR firm's luxury suite at the city's new Fleet Center, and was able to compile a

Pulling up stakes

complete list. He followed up by calling all the buyers, and using the standard city and county documents to identify more obscure names.

• Get a list leaked to you. This isn't easy, but if you have been cultivating business sources within the organization, sometimes you can find a lower-level person with access, who will share it with you.

• Take the team to court. If your paper or station has the stomach for this, a good case can be made that a luxury suite list in a publicly-funded stadium is public record. In Nashville, we successfully sued the Oilers and they gave us copies of all the leases a week later.

The political connection

Politics plays a major role in sports relocations. Look to see what kinds of deals are getting cut to get support from the city's legislators. In addition to just the stadium, lots of "pork" can be generated on the city and state level to get widespread support for the project. The paper's political writers can have a bonanza with this.

Watch the neighbors

Always compare your city to other cities of similar size that also have new sports teams.

Don't forget philosophy. There is a philosophical element to sports relocations that screams to be examined. Talk to philosophy professors, ethicists, and religious leaders about what the issue says about the community's priorities. A school teacher may have a very different perspective that needs to be pursued. Also, don't forget that there are people who oppose professional sports on principal, and see it as violent, exploitive pastime that is a major waster of civic money. Don't forget to examine this point of view.

It's a zero-sum game

If your city is getting a team, someone is losing one (unless it is through expansion, but that's only a fraction of sports movement today). Always keep close tabs on the city that the team is leaving. What do they think about it? People there can tell you what kind of a corporate citizen the team was, how active the owner was in the community, how they dealt with employees, unions, etc. See what kind of measures the city is taking to save the team. (Hous-

ton, for example, didn't care much at all that the Oilers were leaving. Even business leaders told me they would rather go without football and try to attract a new team than work to keep Bud Adams in town).

Pick apart the lease

The stadium lease is the real treasure trove of information. This document spells out exactly how the facility will be managed, how the revenues will be divided, how contracting will work, etc. This will be the single most important document of a sports relocation. Will the team manage the stadium? In Nashville, a subsidiary of the Oilers will manage the stadium, even for non-football events. That subsidiary will essentially have total control over the taxpayer — funded stadium — they get to choose the events, the scheduling, and keep 100 percent of the revenues for most of the stadium functions.

If the team is managing the stadium, look into what kind of controls the city has. How often will they be inspected and audited? Who oversees them? Does the city have the authority to fire them if its management is inadequate?

Look to the future

A team relocation is like someone leaving their spouse to marry someone else they recently met and decided they like better. The danger there is that they've done it before, they might do it again.

Check the lease for an "escape clause." In St. Louis, for example, the city's lease with the Rams has a clause that voids the lease if the stadium is no longer considered "First Tier." The problem here is that "First Tier" is not really well defined, and if the Rams decided in five years they want to move, that clause will be a strong tool to persuade a judge that the lease is null and void. The team would then also have the option of holding the city hostage and demanding millions in renovation to the facility.

Finally, one great question you must ask the team owner: Do you plan to permanently move to our city along with the team? (It's surprising how many team owners don't live in their host city.)

Trebor Banstetter can be reached at (615) 726-5968 or by e-mail at trebor.banstetter@nashville.com

Scoring with CAR

Program Info

The whole program is too long and klunky to lay out here, but one part of it is particularly worth sharing. That's the part that compares the weekly scores file with the master schedule and writes scores from the weekly file to the master file when the appropriate values match.

I've found this program useful when I want to write data from a source table to a target table when certain fields match, while retaining the records in the target table that don't match with the source table.

An if ... endif command combined with a seek() function, inside a scan loop, makes this possible. Here's how it looks. The join field in the source file (s22score.dbf) must be indexed:

```
set talk off
use \sports\s22score in 1 order tag
winner of \sports\s22score
use \sports\sked97 in 2
select 2
go top
scan for date='0918' or date='0919'
or date='0920'
   scatter memvar
   if seek(m.team,1) and
m.opponent=s22score.loser
      REPLACE sked97.TEAM_SCORE WITH
s22score.win_score
      REPLACE sked97.OPP_SCORE WITH
s22score.los_score
```

```
      replace sked97.ot with
s22score.ot
   endif
endscan
```

Here's what's going on: The program opens the source table into work area 1, setting the index to the winner field. Then, it opens the target table into work area 2 and sets work area 2 as the active work area. Then, the scan loop takes over. The loop moves the record pointer through the target table one record at a time. The scatter command stores all fields into memory from the record on which the pointer is set.

Seek works sort of like scan. It moves all the way through the specified table (in this example, the table in work area 1), comparing the indexed field with the specified search string (in this example, the memory variable "team"). If seek() finds a match, it moves the record pointer to the matching record and returns a .T. value.

Using seek in combination with an if ... endif command, the program writes data from s22score.dbf to sked97 every time seek (m.team,1) returns true.

Because the whole thing is inside a scan loop, the same process is repeated for every record in the table in work area 2.

Griffin Palmer can be reached at (405) 475-3311 or send e-mail to palmer@qns.com

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Sports on the Internet

RULES OF THE GAME
.FAQ
http://ps.superb.net/FAQ/

A wonderful collection of faq's (frequently asked questions) that hasdetails of the rules for every sport from AFM racing to volleyball.

Search tip: use the same technique as for finding link pages but put "rules" in the title: search.

Other interesting things

INTERNETS: your global link to 1,000s of databases

http://www.internets.com/ssportlk.htm

The category for "sports" has databases for auto racing, baseball, football, skiing and several other sports.

Some are databases of articles, others are databases of statistics and information.

Calculators On-Line

http://www-sci.lib.uci.edu/HSG/Ref Calculators1C.html

Golf handicap, leader size for fishing, freefall in parachuting, even quarterback passing rating - these are just a few of the calculators you are linked to from this site.

Nora Paul can be reached at (813) 821-9494, or send e-mail to npaul@poynter.org

Database update

By Justin Mayo
NICAR

In NICAR's database library we are continually trying to expand our database offerings as well as maintain the most up-to-date existing collection. Here's a run down of the new and updated data sets.

Recent Data Acquisitions

Adding to our expanding aviation databases is the Federal Aviation Administration's Enforcement Information System (EIS) The EIS has current and historical data on FAA enforcement actions against airlines, pilots, mechanics and designees filed from 1962 through mid-1997. The data set includes information on hazardous materials, security, drug testing, and training and maintenance infractions among others.

Another aviation data set is the National Transportation Safety Board's Aviation Accident Database, 1989-1997. This is the NTSB's version of the FAA's accident and incident database. Both agencies keep crash data but with a slightly different focus. The NTSB investigates civil aviation accidents and incidents within the United States and in international waters and has detailed information on the variables involved in the accident. The database contains information describing the aircraft, operations, personnel, environmental conditions, consequences, probable causes, and contributing factors of accidents. The NTSB also includes a narrative of the accident or incident.

NICAR has just finished the 1996 update of the Center for Disease Control's AIDS database. The data set provides case-by-case demographic information about Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome cases reported to state and local health departments. The information can provide a detailed look at AIDS in your area, including demographic breakdowns and risk factors of those with AIDS in your community.

National Endowment for the Arts, 1987-1996, has information on individuals or organizations receiving money for arts programs, including the type of grant, the total award amount and a description of the project.

Updated Data

Along with the two new acquisitions, we've also updated the rest of our aviation data sets.

The FAA's service difficulty reports (SDR), accidents and incidents, aircraft registration, and pilot licenses are all current through September 1997.

Additionally, NICAR can set up a monthly subscription to SDRs for those who want to maintain the most updated information. NASA's air safety reporting system, containing anonymous complaints by pilots and air traffic controllers, is current through August 1997 and is useful for finding near misses and problems at local airports, 1988-1997.

Other transportation data sets we've updated: the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration vehicle recalls and complaints, 1966-1997, includes information about vehicles that have been recalled by certain manufacturers; Federal Railroad Administration data for accidents, casualties, and highway crossings, 1991-1996; U.S. Department of Transportation hazardous materials accidents database, a collection of roadway, rail, air and waterway accidents from 1971 to 1996; U.S. DOT fatal accident reporting system, includes all roadway accidents from 1975 to 1996; and U.S. Coast Guard boating accidents, 1969-1996.

The 1996 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act database is also available. This can be used for tracking who gets loans and who gets turned down and for finding redlining patterns.

Up-and-coming Data

Data sets in the offing include the FAA's Near Mid-Air Collisions database, which is used to record reports of in-flight incidents where two aircraft closed to an unsafe distance but avoided collision. This database serves as a description of the incident, setting, weather, intended and actual operations, evasive actions (if any) taken, location, flight profile, flight conditions, aircraft and aircrew data for the two involved aircraft.

The following NICAR databases are presently being updated: the 1996 National Bridge Inventory System data, including inspection grades, will be available in December; Occupational Safety and Health Administration violation data, including worker accidents and exposures to hazardous chemicals by companies, will be also ready in December.

Justin Mayo can be reached at (573) 882-0684 or by e-mail at justin@nicar.org

To learn more about the databases offered by NICAR, check out our Web site: www.nicar.org. On this site, you will also find sumbissions to the NICAR-L listserv organized by author and subject.

Get your training

Newsroom Seminars

NICAR provides specialized training in your newsroom.

Learn to transfer data from government files into newsroom PCs. Build spreadsheets for insightful stories on the beat.

Comprehend documents with database managers. Navigate the Internet and online databases.

Cost varies. For information, call Lisa Barnes at (573) 882-8969.

December 3, 5 and 8, 1997 — Columbia, Mo.
On-the-road training for the Bureau of National Affairs

December 15-17, 1997 — Chicago, Ill.
On-the-road training for *The Chicago Tribune*

Workshops

IRE and NICAR can also bring road-tested workshops to sites around the country. We match regional public records experts and experienced reporters with our own trainers for unique seminars ranging from one-day demonstrations and panels on regional public records laws to three-day hands-on sessions on computer-assisted reporting or advanced techniques for data-intensive beats.

Don't wait for someone else to organize a computer-assisted reporting workshop in your area. I

RE and NICAR depend on members, news organizations, journalism schools and other journalism organizations to help us bring our seminars to you.

Contact Sarah Cohen at (301) 942-2199 or e-mail her at sarah@nicar.org

December 11-13, 1997 — Washington, D.C.
Computer-Assisted Reporting Workshop
Sponsored by NICAR and the Medill School of Journalism

January 23-25, 1998 — St. Louis, Mo.
NICAR Health Care Workshop

May 10-15, 1998 — Chapel Hill, N.C.
NICAR Advanced Stats and Maps Workshop

Boot Camps

Boot Camps are week-long, intensive training sessions offered at NICAR's headquarters at the Missouri School of Journalism in Columbia, Mo.

As with on-the-road training, you will learn to transfer data from government files into newsroom PCs, build spreadsheets for stories on the beat, comprehend documents with database managers, and navigate the 'Net and online databases — but you'll be drilled all day, every day for a full week. Tuition ranges from $500-$1,000 depending on circulation or market size.

For information, call Katy Fanning at (573) 882-0684.

January 4-9, 1998 — Columbia, Mo.
NICAR Regular Boot Camp

January 9-11, 1998 — Columbia, Mo.
NICAR Advanced Boot Camp

May 17-22, 1998 — Columbia, Mo.
NICAR Regular Boot Camp

July 12-17, 1998 — Columbia, Mo.
NICAR Regular Boot Camp

August 9-14, 1998 — Columbia, Mo.
NICAR Regular Boot Camp

Conferences

NICAR will offer training at the following professional conferences, including the IRE and NICAR national conferences. These conferences feature practical tips and story ideas shared by prize-winning journalists in quick-hit sessions. Keep up with our conference schedule through our Web site, at www.ire.org. Costs vary. For more information or to register, call Lisa Barnes at (573) 882-8969.

January 31-February 1, 1998 — Washington, D.C.
IRE Regional Conference

March 5-8, 1998 — Indianapolis, Ind.
NICAR National Conference

March 27-29, 1998 — New York, N.Y.
IRE Regional Conference

June 4-7, 1998 — New Orleans, La.
IRE National Conference

From the NICAR library

NICAR offers a number of federal government databases. Here is a list of our growing collection:

NEW • National Endowment for the Arts, 1987-1996, includes information on individual or organization receiving money.

NEW • Immigration and Naturalization Service legal residency, 1980-1995, includes information on the characteristics of aliens who were admitted as immigrants.

NEW • National Highway Traffic Safety Administration vehicle recalls and complaints, 1966-1997, includes information about vehicles that have been recalled by certain manufacturers.

• U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Medical Devices Reports, detailing complaints about drugs, pacemakers and other medical products, 1974-1996.

• U.S. Centers For Disease Control's AIDS database, providing case-by-case demographic information about those with the HIV virus, 1995.

• U.S. Census Bureau's Consolidated Federal Funds Reports, showing which communities get how much under various federal programs, 1983-1995.

• Federal Aviation Administration's accidents and incidents, including major plane crashes since 1974.

• NASA's air safety reporting system, including anonymous complaints by pilots and air traffic controllers. Useful for finding near misses and problems at local airports, 1988-1996.

• Federal Election Commission campaign contributions by individuals and political action committees, 1990-1997.

• The Health Care Financing Administration's 1995 database of all Medicare-funded in-patient work in U.S. hospitals.

• Federal Railroad Administration data for accidents, casualties, and highway crossings, 1991-1996.

• Coast Guard boating accidents, 1969-1994.

• Federal Aviation Administration data, including airplane maintenance work documented in the service difficulty report, pilot licenses and grades, and aircraft registration, 1974-1997.

• Home Mortgage Disclosure Act records, for tracking who gets loans and who gets turned down, and finding redlining patterns, 1992-1995.

• Federal procurement data, 1992-1996, includes breakdowns by agency.

• Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms gun dealer records, 1993-1996.

• National Bridge Inventory System data, includes inspection grades, 1994-1995.

• FBI Uniform Crime Reports, a detailed compilation of crime data that includes statistical breakdowns of individual murders. This includes the 1995 final report.

• Social Security death records, by name and social security number, going back to 1937.

• Occupational Safety and Health Administration violation data includes worker accidents and exposures to hazardous chemicals by companies, 1974-1996.

• U.S. Department of Transportation truck accident and census data. It includes accidents by company and road.

• U.S. Small Business Administration loan guarantees, 1980-1997. This includes the name of the business, address, amount covered by the SBA, and status, including whether the loan went bad.

• U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loan guarantees, 1989-1995. This includes individuals and businesses, the amount covered by the SBA, and the status, including whether the loan went bad.

• U.S. Small Business Administration's list of minority companies certified for SBA assistance in seeking federal contracts. It includes the name of the company, its address, the owner, type of business and phone number.

• The National Inventory of Dams, 1991-1995.

• U.S. Department of Transportation hazardous materials accidents database, a collection of roadway, rail, air and waterway accidents from 1971-1996.

• U.S. Department of Transportation fatal accident reporting system. It includes all roadway accidents from 1975-1995.

• U.S. Coast Guard directory of U.S. merchant vessels. It includes the name of the ship, the managing owner, home port and various descriptive information.

For up-to-date prices and more information, call (573) 882-0684, or send e-mail to info@nicar.org

Handouts describing how to use these databases and others are available online at www.ire.org. Also, check out the job postings recently put on this page.

Bits, Bytes and Barks

Campaign Finance

The Campaign Finance Information Center is in full swing. Data, tips, links and stories are on the center's Web site, www.campaignfinance.org

Also, coming soon to a mailbox near you will be the Campaign Finance Information Center's newsletter. Stories from the Fall '97 newsletter include reports about states with electronic filing systems, a look at how states are going to inform the public of the connection between money and politics and an explanation of in-kind contributions.

Conferences and Seminars

NICAR is forging ahead with new seminars and new approaches to conferences and workshops. The annual conference, March 5-8 in Indianapolis, will not only include the usual panels and hands-on classes for beginners to the advanced, but also a set of special half-day sessions that will take in depth looks at how to use electronic information for particular beats.

We also are expanding our seminars for the intermediate range. Earlier this year we did a seminar on education and statistics. In the coming months, we plan to hold seminars on database design and data cleaning, use of SQL servers for the newsroom, mapping software, and business reporting. Watch our website at www.nicar.org for dates and times. For more information on seminars and boot camps, call (573) 882-0684.

NICAR Net

Recent topics on the IRE and NICAR listserv have included campaign finance data, troubles with traffic accident data, ethics, medical investigations and Access tips.

To subscribe to IRE-L or NICAR-L, send e-mail to listproc@lists.missouri.edu

In the body of the message, type:
subscribe NICAR-L<your name>
subscribe IRE-L<your name>

Also, check out the IRE-L and NICAR-L mailing list archives on our website at www.ire.org and www.nicar.org. You can see posts to both lists organized by thread, author and date. The list archives are available in html or in plain text format.

Reader Response

We are still looking for readers' ideas of how to improve *Uplink*.

Are there certain columns that you would like to add? Are there certain topics you would like covered? Have you done a story that you think should be featured in an upcoming issue? Do you have something you would like to contribute? A Tech Tip? A column about a CAR story you reported?

Here's your chance. Send comments, critiques and suggestions to *Uplink*'s editor, Jody Sowell, at jody @nicar.org We look forward to hearing from you.