

One of the pleasures of owning a sports team is the fun of dealing with the sports media. The majority of reporters and columnists are good people. There are a couple, no make that 1 Sam Smith of the Chicago Tribune who I can't stand. I don't like that I don't like him, because if I ever met him, I certainly don't remember it. I don't dislike many people. Disliking someone I don't really know is just counter to the way I am.

Sports reporting has turned into a confused business. You would think that with the net, everyone would recognize that a "scoop" doesn't quite have the value that it did back in the days when the new stuff came with the morning paper. Today, every scoop gets posted to the paper website first, so the paper can prove they broke the story. It's seen and reported on and immediately world-wide within minutes afterwards. That doesn't stop reporters from focusing first and foremost on "breaking scoops". Not stories. Scoops. Anything you think you know that the other guys don't. The joy of getting the props for getting the story on the site before the other guy.

Their grab for glory is my continuous nuisance. It gets really old getting pestered about transactional items. Its amazing how many emails I get ... are you going to make a trade, did you make a trade, who are you going to trade? Who are you going to sign? Questions they all know I won't answer because the minute we do something, we are going to release it to the world in a press release. Yet the reporters hold out hope that maybe, just maybe, they can catch a deal or something else just before it happens and luck turns into a scoop. Scoops make the bosses happy.

If its not a transaction, it's the game of trying to play "Get Mark Fined". I actually don't mind this game, but I'm amazed at how poorly they play it. After a Mavs game that was poorly officiated, it's inevitable that the reporters at the game will come to me asking for a comment about the officials. Sometimes I will, sometimes I won't. Just depends on what is happening behind the scenes. If the game reinforces something I had been telling the league about, then it usually helps to reinforce that issue publicly. Unfortunately, the only way you can effectively and easily communicate a message to the entire league is through the media. I couldn't discuss officiating in any depth in a league meeting, but if I criticize someone in the press, I know without doubt, everyone will read it and probably call the league to complain to them and ask them to fine me. But that's a topic for another day.

Back to reporters and me getting fined. I have been trying to set them up and prod them to write proactively about officials. If a paper or media outlet would write an in-depth analysis of a game and the officiating, they probably could get me to talk for hours on the subject because there would be hard data to refer to. Time and again, I have suggested that they hire an official, retired, college, whatever, and have them go through the tape of a game and evaluate it. They won't get every call right or be 100% in sync with how the league calls games, but it would be hard not to be 95% right, and to see just how well or poorly the game was officiated. I have suggested that they track some basic data. If every paper in an NBA city stuck a couple interns at a game and had them just track which ref made which call and then started aggregating the data, I would be so shocked that they did something that made so much sense and provided such a strong basis for a discussion, I would buy them dinner and discuss the topic all day long.

But sports media doesn't work that way. The goal isn't to know a subject cold and find elements that make all those read it smarter about the subject. There isn't a Wall Street Journal or even a NY Times Business Section for sports. In sports, its about filling up 500 words. Quick story. On to the next day.

Which leads me back to Sam Smith. While the sports media won't do in-depth analysis, it's usually not the reporters fault. It's the job they were given. At least they should try to make sure that what is in those 500 words is accurate. If those emails are aggravating, at least I appreciate them trying to get some facts. I can't say that about Sam Smith. His columns have easily surpassed Peter Vescey's as the place I can read about things I didn't know I did or said. Which is because they didn't happen.

Sam Smith writes that I was in Miami to see Pat Riley to discuss him becoming the coach of the Mavs. It didn't happen. I had never talked to Coach Riley in my life other than to say hello on the court after we played the Heat. I'm the easiest person in the world to reach. There are a hundred places to find my email, and I check it more than most. He also could have called Pat Riley. Of course that would result in him having the truth. I wish I could just call Sam Smith lazy. He may or may not be, but I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt and guess that he isn't lazy, that he is only malicious.

He knows how sports media works. He knows that no one in the business is going to care about whether what he wrote is true or not. He knows that every reporter that covers the Mavs or NBA is going to have to ask me if what he said is true. Each and everyone of those reporters will preface the question by saying that they know it's not true, and that they know it's Sam Smith writing this, but their boss wants them to check it out. And if they are checking it out, they are going to write about it. If they write about it, then wires will pick it up and it will be all over the net and news with me "denying" that I am talking to Pat Riley, and he also knows that within a day, that no one will remember that he started the process, and people will start commenting on the stories and adding their own speculation. So give credit to Sam Smith. He knows he is a malicious liar. He may be doing it as a favor to someone, or just because it makes him happy. Doesn't matter. The effect is the same.

That's what the sports media business has come to.