

DigitalSports® Style Guide

Quick Keys to Writing a Good Sports Story

- * **The basic tenet of journalism remains:** Get the facts and get them right. In other words, the Who, What, When, Where, and Why will always be the most important parts of your story.
- * **The order never changes:** Always list time, date, and the place of an event. (Ex: *The Saxons and Bulldogs will play at 7 p.m. Friday at Stone Bridge High School.*)
- * **Don't bury the score:** The result of any game – the score itself – is what everyone wants to know. Always report it within the first three paragraphs of a story. And always report the winning team and its total first, no matter which team you are there to cover. (Ex: *The Bulldogs defeated the Saxons, 21-7, in a key Liberty District game. **NOT** The Saxons lost to the Bulldogs, 7-21. **NOT** The Bulldogs beat the Saxons, 7-21.*)
- * **Team records:** Wins, losses, and ties are separated by hyphens. (Ex: *The Bulldogs are 7-1. Stone Bridge is 3-1-1. The Bulldogs are 4-6 in their last 10 games. Stone Bridge has won four of its last 10 games.*)
- * **Gathering statistics:** Even if you keep stats yourself, check with the coach or team statistician after the game to double-check your figures. They'll have the game's "official" numbers there for you to use.
- * **Be balanced and unbiased:** When writing about a high school team, never refer to it as "we" or "our team" even if you attend the school. Only refer to a team by the school name or its mascot.
- * **Proper identification:** On first reference, use the full name of the school or the person you are writing about. After the first reference, alternate referring to the team by its school name and its mascot, and only use the last name of the person. (Ex: *Stone Bridge Coach Mickey Thompson has led his team to the playoffs each of the past seven seasons. The Bulldogs have reached the postseason on the strength of Thompson's single-wing offense and a hard-hitting, speedy defense. Stone Bridge is one of the highest-scoring teams in the Northern Region*)
- * **Misused pronouns:** A school name and any general reference to a team is an "it" **NOT** a "they." Only the team mascot is a "they." (Ex: *Stone Bridge won its fifth game of the season. The football team improved its record to 5-0. The Bulldogs won their fifth game of the season.*)
- * **General Numbers:** Spell out all numbers at the beginning of a sentence. Otherwise, spell out only numbers below 10. Numbers 10 and higher are always written in numerical form. (Ex: *Running back Jeron Gouveia led the Bulldogs with 127 yards rushing and two touchdowns. Gouveia, who is also the team's starting free safety, added a team-high 13 tackles and three interceptions on defense.*)

*** Age Exception:** One exception to the above rule is age. A person's age is always listed in numerical form. (Ex. *Quarterback Patrick Thompson's 6-year-old sister ran onto the field as soon as the game ended to embrace her big brother in a hug.*)

*** Capitalization:** The word "Coach" is capitalized when used as a title. But "head coach" or "assistant coach" are not. (Ex. *Stone Bridge Coach Mickey Thompson is the father of starting quarterback Patrick Thompson. Bulldogs' head coach Mickey Thompson is the father of starting quarterback Patrick Thompson.*) Coach is also capitalized when substituted for a name as a term of address. (Ex. *"Just before the game, Coach told us it was going to be close so we had to stay focused," Sean Ryan said.*)

*** Other Titles:** Aside from coaches, other formal titles should be printed lowercase when following a name, but uppercase when preceding a name. (Ex. *Stone Bridge Director of Activities Dave Smith said the school will hold an open tryout Thursday* **OR** *Dave Smith, Stone Bridge's director of athletics, said the school will hold an open tryout Thursday.*)

*** Apostrophes:** Use apostrophes to show possession or in contractions. (Ex. *Stone Bridge's offensive linemen average 290 pounds. That's part of what makes the Bulldogs' rushing game so effective.*) Do not use an apostrophe when forming plurals of dates or acronyms. (Ex. *Stone Bridge was the most dominant team in the Dulles District in the 1990s. Dave Smith and Terry Howell are two of the region's longest-tenured DSAs.*)

*** Present Tense:** When describing what happened in a game, make it a point not to use the word "would" in front of a verb. It's common to see: *Stone Bridge would rally from an early deficit.* But the correct form is: *Stone Bridge rallied from an early deficit.*

*** Commas:** When listing a series of three or more things do not put a comma before the final "and" or the final "or" in the sentence. (Ex. *The Bulldogs expect record-breaking performances this season from Terrence Glenn, Jeron Gouveia and Ryan Moody. All three players boast tremendous speed, strength and athleticism.*)

*** Dates:** Spell out months when used alone or with the year only. (Ex. *September 2009*) Abbreviate months – except for March, April, May, June and July – when used as a part of a complete date. (Ex. *Sept. 20, 2009*) Do not use "on" with dates. (Ex. *The game is set to be played Aug. 15.* **NOT** *The game is set to be played on Aug. 15.*) To indicate sequences or inclusive dates or times, use an en dash (--) instead of "to." (Ex: *The speed camp will run July 7-9 from 8 a.m.-4 p.m.*)

*** Time:** Use lower case with periods for "a.m." and "p.m." When writing a time that falls on the hour, do not use ":00." Simply state the hour with an "a.m." or "p.m." following. Also use "noon" and "midnight" never 12 p.m. or 12 a.m. (Ex. *Kickoff is set for 3 p.m. Saturday.* **OR** *Kickoff is set for noon Saturday.*)

*** Spacing:** Use a single space at the end of a sentence and after a colon. Double spaces date back to the days of typewriters, when all characters were allotted the same amount of space. Computerized typesetting adjusts the spacing for a good fit. Extra spaces create gaps, wasted space, and looks unprofessional.

*** Nicknames:** In sports stories and columns, commonly used nicknames may be substituted for a first name without the use of quotation marks. (*Ex. Tiger Woods or Magic Johnson*) But in sports stories where the given name is used, and in all news stories: *Paul "Bear" Bryant*. Use the most-common, publicly-recognizable reference. (*It is uncommon to refer to Tiger Woods as "Eldrick Woods" or Magic Johnson as "Earvin Johnson"*)

Getting Sport Specific

BASEBALL/SOFTBALL

RBI: Since RBI technically stands for runs batted in, there is no need to add an "s" even if there was more than one run batted in. (*Ex. Sean Ryan led the Bulldogs with a game-high eight RBI. He and Jeron Gouveia combined for 14 RBI in the game.*)

ERA: Acceptable on first reference for a pitchers' earned run average.

Frequently used words and phrases: backstop, balk, ballclub, ballpark, ballplayer, baseball diamond, baseline, baserunner, batter's box, batting order, bottom half, breaking ball, bullpen, bunt, centerfield, center fielder, change-up, curveball, designated hitter, doubleheader, double play, dugout, extra innings, fair ball, fastball, first base, first baseman, fly ball, flyout, force out, foul ball line, foul tip, ground out, ground-rule double, home plate, home run, infield, infield fly rule, inning, left field, left-hander, line drive, line up (v.), lineup (n.), on deck, outfield, outfielder, passed ball, pinch hit (v.), pinch-hit (n., adj.), pinch hitter (n.), pitcher's mound, pitcher's circle, pitchout, play off (v.), playoff (n., adj.), pop fly, put out (v.), putout (n.), rundown (n.), sacrifice, sacrifice bunt, sacrifice fly, sacrifice hit, save, second base, shoestring catch, shortstop, shut out (v.), shutout (n., adj.), slider, slugger, squeeze play, strike, strikeout, strike zone, tag out, Texas leaguer, third base, top half, triple play, umpires, wild pitch.

BASKETBALL

Height: A players' height is often reference in a basketball story. It can be written a few different ways: *the 6-foot-10 forward, the 6-10 forward, Smith is 6 feet 10 inches tall.*

Frequently used words and phrases: air ball, alley-oop, and one, backboard, backcourt, backstop, baseline, center, double dribble, fast break, field goal, foul line, foul shot, fouled out, free throw, free-throw line, front end, frontcourt, full-court press, goaltending, half-court pass, halftime, hook shot, jump ball, jump shot, layup, man-to-man defense, midcourt, one-and-one, personal foul, pick-and-roll, pivotman, play off (v.), playoff (n., adj.), point guard, power forward, screen, shooting guard, shot clock, slam dunk, small forward, technical foul, three-point play, traveling, up-tempo, zone defense.

FOOTBALL

Field goals: Field goals are measured from the point where the ball was kicked, not the line of scrimmage. The goal posts are 10 yards behind the goal line and most kickers drop back 7 yards to

kick. So add 17 yards to the line of scrimmage to get the correct field goal distance, or look where the ball is placed when kicked and add 10 yards.

Numbers: All yardage is written in numerical form. (*Ex. The 5-yard line, the 10-yard line, a 5-yard pass play, he plunged in from the 2, he ran 6 yards, a 7-yard gain, facing 4th-and-2.*)

Frequently used words and phrases: ball carrier, ballclub, blitz (n., v.), coin toss, cornerback, defense, defensive back, defensive line, end line, end zone, fair catch, field goal, fourth down (n.), fullback, fumble, goal line, goal-line stand, goalposts, halfback, halftime, handoff, interception, kick off (v.), kickoff (adj.), left guard, linebacker, line judge, lineman, line of scrimmage, long snapper, Outback Bowl, offensive line, offseason, onside kick, out of bounds (adv.), out-of-bounds (adj.), overtime, penalty flag, pitchout (n.), place kick, place-kicker, play off (v.), playoff (n., adj.), preseason, punter, quarterback, quick kick, running back, safety, special teams, split end, tailback, tight end, touchback, touchdown, turnover on downs, two-point conversion, uprights, wide receiver.

GOLF

Numbers: Use figures for handicaps. (*Ex. He had a 3 handicap; a 3-handicap golfer; a handicap of 3 strokes; a 3-stroke handicap.*) Use figures for par listings. (*Ex. He had a par 5 to finish 2-up for the round; a par-4 hole; a 7-under-par 64; the par-3 seventh hole; the par-3 17th hole.*) Use figures for club ratings. (*Ex. A 5-iron; a 7-iron shot; a 4-wood.*) Miscellaneous: the first hole, a nine-hole course, the 10th hole, the back nine, the final 18, the third round. He won 3 and 2.

Associations: Professional Golfers' Association of America or PGA. Members teach golf at golf shops and teaching facilities across the country. The PGA Tour is a separate organization made up of competing professional golfers. Use "tour" on second reference.

Frequently used terms and definitions: approach, approach shot, back nine, backswing, ball-marker, ball-washer, birdie (one stroke under par), bogey (one stroke over par), bunker, caddie, chip, clubhouse, dogleg (a left or right bend in the fairway), double bogey (two strokes over par); downswing, draw, drive, driver, eagle (two strokes under par), fairway, flagstick, foursome, front nine, golf bag, golf balls, golf cart, golf course, golf shoes, green fee (a fee paid to play on a golf course ... **NOT** greens fee), handicap, hazards, hole-in-one, irons, lay-up, lie, match play, mis-read, mulligan, out-of-bounds, par, pin, putting green, putters, putts, rough, sand trap, sand wedge, scramble, scratch golfer (a player whose handicap equals zero), short game, shotgun start, stroke play, tap-in, tee, teeing area, up-and-down, water hazards, wedge.

GYMNASTICS

Events: Men – floor exercise, vault, pommel horse, still rings, horizontal bar (or high bar) parallel bars. **Women** – floor exercise, vault, balance beam, uneven bars.

Frequently used words and definitions: all-around, back-to-back tumbling, chalk, dismount, gainer (a skill in which a gymnast performs a backward somersault while moving forward), leotard, mount, release move, roundoff-back handspring, salto (a somersault), springboard, start value (the maximum score a gymnast could receive for a routine, taking into consideration all bonus skills, combinations and fulfillment of required elements), stick, stuck landing, tsukahara (any vault that has a handspring with a $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ turn into a salto backwards is classified as a tsukahara), tumbling, yurchenko (any vault with a roundoff-back handspring entry is classified as a yurchenko).

ICE HOCKEY

Frequently used words and phrases: backhand shot, blue line, boards, body check, breakaway, center, center forward, center ice, crease, defensemen, empty-net goal, face off (v.), faceoff (n., adj.),

flip shot, forward, goalie, goalkeeper, goaltender, goal cage, goal crease, goal line, goal post, goaltender, hat trick, icing, line change, neutral zone, offside, penalty box, penalty shot, penalty shootout, periods, play off (v.), playoff (n., adj.), power play, power-play goal, puck, red line, shorthanded, slap shot, two-line pass, two-on-one break, wings, Zamboni.

LACROSSE

Frequently used words and phrases: attack, attacker, attackman, body check, cage, check, cradle, crease, defender, defenseman, dominant hand, face off (v.), faceoff (n., adj.), foul, far post, full strength, full-strength goal, game stick, goalkeeper, goalie, ground ball, lacrosse stick, long pole, long stick, man down, man-down goal, man up, man-up goal, middies, midfield, midfielder, offsides, penalty box, release, restraining line, save, shot, short stick, shot clock.

SOCCER

Accounting for goals: In the box score and the game story, the time of a goal is based on how far into the game it was scored. In high school, teams usually play 40-minute halves. So a goal scored with 13:14 left in the first half is scored in the 27th minute. There is no 0th minute. If a goal is scored on the opening kick off, it is scored in the 1st minute. Times are always in numerical form and do NOT reset after halftime. If a goal is scored on the second-half kick off, it is scored in the 41st minute. (*Ex. Robinson junior Sam Bader scored an amazing 60-yard goal in the 55th minute. Robinson junior Sam Bader scored an amazing 55th-minute goal from 60 yards away.*) To calculate a time of goal, simply disregard the number of seconds remaining and subtract the minutes remaining from 40 or 80 when in the first or second halves, respectively.

Frequently used words and phrases: attacker, bicycle kick (n.), bicycle-kick (adj.), carded, cautioned, chest trap, corner kick, crossbar, defender (rather than defenseman), direct free kick, dribbling, dropped-ball, far post, forward, foul, fullback, goal kick, goalkeeper (goalie is acceptable but goaltender is not), goalposts, halfback, hand ball, header, in bounds, indirect free kick, juggling, kick off (v.), kickoff (adj.), lead pass, linesmen, marking, midfielder, near post, offside, outlet pass, penalty kick, penalty shootout, red card, red carded, referee, save, shin guards, sideline, slide tackle, stopper, striker, sweeper, through pass, throw-in, timekeeper, yellow card, yellow carded.

SWIMMING

Frequently used words and phrases: anchor, backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, cool down, deck, dolphin kick, finish judge, flip turn, flutter kick, freestyle, heat, individual medley, lane, lane rope, leg, length, qualifying time, record, relays, scratch, split time, starter, stroke judge, swimmers' turns, swimmers' strokes, timekeepers, turn judge, unofficial time, warm-up.

Scoring: Times are kept in minutes, seconds and tenths of a second. Extend to hundredths if available.

Distance: Events are measured in metric units. Identify events as boys' 4x100 relay, girls' 100 backstroke, etc.

TENNIS

Frequently used words and phrases: ace, advantage, backhand, backspin, baseline, break point, crosscourt, deuce, drop shot, fault, foot fault, forehand, game point, groundstroke, line judge, lob,

love, match point, mis-hit, net point, overrule, point, racquet, rally, serve and volley, slice, spin, straight sets, stroke, sweep, tiebreak, tiebreaker.

Scoring: The scoring units are points, games, sets and matches. A player wins a point if his opponent fails to return the ball, hits it into the net or hits it out of bounds. A player also wins a point if his opponent is serving and fails to put the ball into play after two attempts (double fault, in tennis terms.) A player must win four points to win a game. In tennis scoring, both players being at love, or zero, and advance to 15, 30, 40 and game. (The numbers 15, 30, 40 have no point value as such – they are simply tennis terminology for 1 point, 2 points and 3 points.) If a game is tied at 40-all, or deuce, play continues until one player has a two-point margin.

A set is won if a player wins six games before his opponent has one five. If a set becomes tied at five games apiece, it goes to the first player to win seven games. If two players who were tied at five games apiece also tie at six games apiece, they may play a tiebreaker – a game that goes to the first player to win seven points and player must win a tiebreaker by at least two points.

A match may be either a best-of-three contest that goes to the first player or team to win two sets, or a best-of-five contest that goes to the first player or team to win three sets.

TRACK-AND-FIELD

Frequently used words and phrases: anchor, anchor leg, backstretch, baton, bend, blocks, boxed in, crossbar, DNF (did not finish), DNS (did not start), DQ (disqualified), discus, exchange zone, false start, field event, heat, high jump, hurdles, kick, landing area, lane, long-distance run/runners, long jump, middle-distance run/runners, on your mark, pole vault, relays, runway, shot put, spikes, sprint, sprinters, starter's gun, starting blocks, stride, take-off board, take-off line, triple jump, wind-assisted.

Scoring: Scoring is in distance or time, depending on the event.

Distance: Most events are measure in metric units. For those that include feet, make sure the measurement is clearly stated, as in boys' 100-meter dash, girls' 110-meter hurdles, etc. After first reference events can simply be referred to as the 100, the 110 hurdles, etc.

Time: For time events, spell out *minutes* and *seconds* on first reference, as in 3 minutes, 26.1 seconds. Subsequent times in stories require a colon and a decimal point, as in 3:26.1. Do not use a colon before time given only in seconds and tenths of a second. Use progressions such as 6.0 seconds, 9.4, 10.1, etc.

Field Events: For field events – those that do not involve running – use these forms: 26 ½ (for 26 feet, ½ inch), 25-10 ½, etc.

VOLLEYBALL

Frequently used words and phrases: ace, antenna, assist, attack, back row, backcourt, block, bump, carry, cross-court, defensive specialist (DS), dig, dink, double hit, fault, floater, front row, frontcourt, jump serve, kill, libero, lift, line shot, middle blocker, middle hitter, mis-hit, off-speed hit,

opposite hitter, outside hitter, overhand serve, pancake, pass, quick hit, quick set, rotation, set, setter, serve, service error, side out, spike, substitution, tip, top spin, underhand serve.

Rally Point Scoring: In all high school, college and international games, each of the first four sets it won by the first team to score 25 points. If the match is tied in sets after the first four sets, a deciding fifth set will be played to 15 points. In all five sets, teams must win by two points without a cap on points. A point is scored on every play, regardless of which team served the ball.

Libero: Widely adopted in 2002, the libero is a player who specializes in defensive skills. The libero must wear a contrasting jersey color from his/her teammates and cannot block or attack the ball when it is entirely above net height. The libero is only allowed to set under certain restrictions: to make an overhand set the libero must be behind, and not stepping on, the 3-meter line. An underhand set is allowed from anywhere on the court. There are also restrictions on the libero serving, which was prohibited until 2004. Now the libero can serve but only for one person, not for all the people for whom he/she goes in. When the ball is not in play, the libero can replace any back-row player without prior notice to the officials. This replacement does not count against the substitution limit each team is allowed per set, although the libero must be replaced only by the player whom they replaced.

WRESTLING

Frequently used words and phrases: 215-pound (adj.), 215 pounds (n.), advantage (or “up”), bottom (or “down”), changing levels, clinching, decision, dual meet, escape, hand-to-hand combat, holding, leverage, locking, major decision, neutral, near fall, pin (or “fall”), reversal, self-defense, singlet, takedown, technical fall (being ahead by 15 or more points and not in a position to pin).

Timing of pins: If a wrestler wins by pin, list the exact time into the match – not the round – that he pinned the opponent. (*Ex. Cooperstown sophomore Austin Provenzo won by pin in 1:57 at 130 pounds. Wildcat junior Jake Daling followed that up with a pin in 5:05 at 285.*)

Classification: Identify events by weight division. On first reference, write out the full weight class. Thereafter, the numerical weight value alone may be used. (*Ex. John Givens lost the 130-pound title to North Hill senior Colin LaBetter. As a sophomore, Givens fell to Dunbar junior Matthew Jacobson at 145. Then, last season, Brook Point senior Mitch Crass stopped him at 152.*)