

The Emergence of Radio

Red Barber and the media's beginnings

Technology

- He broadcast while sitting in a box seat in the crowd with a plank acting as shelf for his mike.

Pioneers

- Early broadcasters, like Graham McNamee, did not have a model to develop skills. “There was no lamp of experience for the pioneer broadcasters.” (p. 23)
- In many ways, radio in the 1920s was much like the Internet at its beginnings (even today). There are many similarities.

Clash of media

- Print reporters did not like McNamee's approach to sports journalism – that he would laugh at his own mistakes, something that revealed a more human side.

Again, much like the Internet, where writers poke fun at themselves, write about their own lives, and speak more like fans – especially sites not connected to newspapers or TV. Check out Deadspin and other web pages.

Clash of media

- Mistakes by radio and TV journalists are unedited, unlike with print reporters. Yet, print reporters like to chuckle at their errors.

Internet sites do not have the same system where editors check stories through a more intense process.

Clash of media

- Once, McNamee said: “There’s a high foul ball behind third base ... Gehrig catches it.” He knew that Gehrig played first but had a slip of the tongue. (p.25)
- Another time, he announced the wrong winner at a regatta. Had not seen the MIT boat sank but weather offered poor visibility and he was 3 miles away. Print reporters did not help, angry that he spoke into their ears as they covered boxing. Some were just jealous.

Clash of media

- Newspaper journalists were jealous that he was now the star attraction, Barber believed. Even the police directed McNamee's car into the stadium before others. Said Barber: "The writers were deeply suspicious, as well they might be, of this new medium of instant reporting, to this radio." (p. 25) Today, journalists like Buzz Bissinger, who hate bloggers, are feeling irrelevant.

Different point of view

- Radio gave fans a second way of imagining a game they did not attend. Radio broadcasters re-imagined the games in a somewhat different manner than the wordsmiths. Wrote Ring Lardner: “I don’t know which game to write about – the one I saw today, or the one I heard Graham McNamee announce as I sat next to him at the Polo Ground.” (p. 25)

Another POV

- Ironically, radio was affected in the same manner as print a decade later when TV emerged. By 1939, radio was as powerful and influential as papers had been in the 1920s.
- “Television tore up the entire pea patch. Radio was so big, so dominant, so powerful in 1939 that television seemed mostly talk and conjecture.” *The Internet has also torn a sizeable chunk in this pea patch.*

TV's effects

- Radio held newspapers accountable by citing what they saw. No longer could reporters make up stories before games started or describe in any way they wanted. Internet reporters and bloggers also do this, digging into stories that mainstream media may not pursue either on purpose or oversight. Afterward, the mainstream media may eventually follow these stories.

TV's effects

- TV held radio accountable in the same manner. “The fake lateral passes that were safely invented for radio could not be employed on television.” (p. 52)
- By 1952, TV was king – it had the audience, sponsors, money and glamor.

Radio's power to promote

- In addition, sports leagues and associations recently tried to keep out bloggers. The NCAA, in particular, was concerned that bloggers would diminish viewership on TV. Kept the *Louisville Courier-Journal* out of a regional baseball game and attempted to prevent Iowa student-journalists from blogging at college football games.
- In the 1930s and 40s, teams like the Yankees, Dodgers and Giants, banned radio broadcasts during the early days. Other team owners, like Larry MacPhail believed radio would promote the sport and his team – especially to those who would not ordinarily attend a game, like women. He wanted out-of-town games done to keep fans in touch when the team was gone. (p.67)

Radio as promotional tool

- Radio helped teach people the game of baseball thereby promoting the sport. That's why MacPhail sold interest in the Reds to someone (Crosley) who owned two radio stations in Cincinnati. At one point, three stations broadcast Reds games. Multiple stations soon broadcast games at many ballparks.

Not a Gee-Whiz broadcaster

Barber: “The greatest danger with sports broadcasting today ... is the Gee-Whiz-Jack-Armstrong-All-American-Boy School of Microphone Mouthings. Not every pitch is a ‘great’ pitch ... not every effort on a two-yard gain is a ‘great’ effort. ... [The danger] is the wearing down of the audience by the constant overselling of routine plays until there is nothing left but a vocal sameness that is not worth listening to. When a truly great play occurs, it is an anticlimax.” (p. 112)

First big radio games

- The first baseball game was broadcast on Aug. 5, 1921 when KDKA offered a game between the Phillies and Pirates in Pittsburgh.
- First World Series was broadcast on Oct. 1, 1921, between the Giants and Yankees. A newspaper reporter relayed the game to him in Newark, N.J., where he broadcast the game atop the Westinghouse building.

First commercial success

- KDKA also broadcast the first commercially-sponsored sports event – a college football game between Pittsburgh and West Virginia in a ‘commercial broadcast.’
- Previously, games were ‘sustaining broadcasts, which meant colleges were not charged and stations did not earn revenue.
- This game started nationalization of football.

Other significant broadcasts

- WGN (World's Greatest Newspaper) broadcast the 1924 Indianapolis 500. The station also broadcast football games from all Big Ten campuses that fall.

Significant changes

- Concern over a U.S. government investigation changed the structure of American broadcasting. AT&T used its ownership of phone lines to build a 26-station network that stretched across the nation with WEAJ in New York City as its flagship station by 1924. Because of fears over a possible monopoly on network broadcasting, AT&T sold its stations to RCA in 1926. David Sarnoff, RCA chairman, created the National Broadcast Company (NBC) and the NBC-Red network. It proved so successful that a second network, NBC-Blue, was started shortly afterward. The initial broadcast on this network was the 1927 Rose Bowl contest between the University of Alabama and Stanford University. This was the first coast-to-coast broadcast in American history. (Eric C. Covil, Radio & Its Impact on the Sports World)

Uncertainty

- No consensus over who owned rights when team played outside their conferences.
- Colleges, once appeased by publicity, wanted to tap into the revenue radio stations made on broadcasts.
- School started selling individual rights in early 1930s. Michigan sold its rights for \$20,000 in '34. Following year Big Ten sought \$100,000 for all games.