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### Leadership/Management Assignment

The media landscape in the sport industry has gone through substantial changes over the last few years, and these changes have impacted on the way public relations professionals operate. For the past, several years PR revolved around traditional and legacy media companies such as newspapers, radio, tv and so on. If someone wished to communicate with the public, they had to use these outlets to convey a story or manage public perception. Sports organizations depended on journalists and broadcasts to create narratives and deliver news. But with the rising popularity of social and digital media it has now allowed organizations and athletes to communicate directly with fans while simultaneously increasing the speed of fan engagement. The newest challenge for the PR professional is managing real-time narratives or creating certain public image for a client to increase their brand awareness. These changes have made PR more strategic, and audience focused reducing the need for traditional legacy media outlets that at one point had served as gatekeepers to the public. There are two pioneers that stand out to me in this ever-shifting media landscape that implement this audience first approach and are using social and digital media to grow and expand their brand and public image. Haley Rosen the CEO of Just Women's Sports (JSW) and Mike McCarley the founder and CEO of TMRW Sports and TGL. Both of these leaders are at the forefront of implementing new strategies for public relations and adapting to the new media landscape.

Haley Rosen is a former collegiate and professional soccer player that played for the Washington Spirit (NWSL) and Glasgow city FC (SWPL). In 2017 her career was unfortunately cut short due to frequent injury issues but her passion for the game kept her deeply involved in the sports community. After her life as a pro athlete she started working at a tech start up back home in California. While working in a field outside of sports she began to notice how little coverage there is for women's sports in traditional media. As a former female athlete she recognized and understood the issues with professional women's sports and the huge gap in coverage they received as opposed to their male counterparts. This motivated her to create the digital media outlet Just Women's Sports founded in 2020. Her main goal was to fix the imbalance in sports media as women make up half the participants in sports but a small percentage of the viewership. She not only saw this as unfair to the athletes but a missed opportunity to increase the fan base and branding of women's sports overall (Rosen). This relates back to an essential skill that was noted in this week's reading regarding leadership and public relations "an understanding of what's going on in the world around them." Rosen identified a problem that she was enthusiastic about and wanted to be a change maker. "Highly successful PR leaders are curious about the world around them." (Expert panel). Her and her team produce podcasts, documentaries, and other social media content that is mostly hosted or featured with former female athletes. This format gives the athletes ownership of their image while fostering authenticity, which is a key driver for modern PR. JWS has attracted major sponsorships from companies like Nike and Google proving that inclusive story telling can be socially meaningful and financially viable (Just Women's Sports n.d.).

From humble beginnings the platform that started as a small Instagram account posting highlights and another curated content was able to gain a following and expand into a multimedia operation. Rosen is helping shift the narrative around what kind of sport stories get invested in and how rights and media deals consider female athletes. She also emphasizes authenticity and community rather than just replicating typical legacy sports media norms. This helps the company to appeal to a younger and more diverse audience which has seen tremendous success since its founding and claims to have over one hundred million views monthly combined on all of their platforms (Just Women's Sports n.d.). This type of growth is mostly contributed to being one of the only media companies in the world that focus solely on women's sports paving the way for next generation. JWS uses direct-to-consumer media thriving on direct fan engagement, filling the unmet demand for more women's sport content. Very similarly Mike McCarley is utilizing his brand to fill a very different unmet demand.

Before founding his company of TMRW sports in 2022 in partnership with Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy, Mike McCarley was a long-time employee of NBC sports spanning from 2000-2021. Most notably while with NBC he was the president of golf and global strategy where he saw much success. After leaving NBC McCarley saw an opportunity to create a more engaging format that appeals to younger and more diverse audiences with a special focus on golf (TMRW Sports). TMRW sports is a leader in bringing modern approaches in sport media and entertainment. The flagship project of this new business venture is TGL or The Golf League. The league features six teams of PGA stars competing in a virtual golf tournament. It is a new tech driven golf league designed to reimagine golf for the digital age blending a real in person golf experience with advanced virtual reality technology. TGL uses advanced graphics with real time stats similar to what you would see at a virtual golf range in addition to real putting greens. One of the benefits of this is that it allows you to condense a large golf course into a small studio that spectators can sit and watch from one location as opposed to an actual golf event where fans have to walk sometimes for miles to several parts of a course to see players perform. The actual time of play during the contest is designed to be fast paced to keep audiences engaged, each match is around 90 minutes long (TGL n.d.).

TGL partnered with ESPN to broadcast these virtual golf matches in prime-time slots in an effort to make golf more accessible for the casual fan. The goal was to modernize the entertainment experience of live sports and blend it with reality TV. TGL had a successful inaugural season in 2025. It exceeded expectations with many media executives admitting that the league performed better than they thought it would in terms of ratings. Viewership peaked at just over one million when Tiger Woods played during the second week of competition. This relates back to one of the skills discussed in this week reading persistent relationship building (Expert panel). If it were not for McCarley's persistent relationships with members of the PGA especially its founders, it is hard to see how this league would be successful without the name recognition of Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy. During their evaluation phase they discovered that fans were pleased with how fun and engaging the broadcasts were.

As it relates to public relations TGL hopes to rebrand golf's identity from a traditional slow paced and elite sport to a high tech and inclusive fan focused experience. This innovation goes along with the shift in sports media where sports tech, storytelling and live entertainment intersect. Another purpose of TGL was to bridge the gap between traditional golf fans with new younger fans accustomed to streaming and interactive features. Considering that the league was co-created by two of the most recognizable names in the sport, it adds to its authenticity and credibility. McCarley's leadership in this venture positioned technology not as a threat to tradition but as a bridge between fans athletes and innovation. This approach balances the interests of athletes, tech partners and traditional sports institutions by emphasizing values such as performance and growth. Through the use of strategic PGA influence and innovation in media formats TMRW sports is setting a new standard in public relations. Their newfound approach enhances fan engagement and establishes a blueprint for others to follow and build off of.

After researching both of these industry leaders I have come across three of my biggest takeaways. Those include prioritizing authentic story telling over promotion, engaging fans as stakeholders instead of spectators, and using innovative technology and data to get real time insights.

Viewers of today's media value authenticity and transparency. By organizations having authentic communications with their consumers, it shows that they stand behind their values and actions. JWS was a company founded on authenticity, the followers of JWS believe in their commitment to elevating women's sports and not to exploit it for clicks or engagement. Often times athletes are dehumanized and made out to be sources of sole entertainment. JWS offers its viewers to see athletes share their personal stories allowing people to view them as people and not just athletes. This uncommercialized and non-performative form of fan engagement shows that the goal of JWS is to build strong real connections with the athletes and their fans. This type of thinking applies to Mike McCarley and TMRW sports. This organization is entering into a new form of sports entertainment, and the company will need to follow in JWS's footsteps to create those authentic and transparent relationships. Skeptics of TMRW sports will need to see that they are not trying to replace golf but enhance it with something new and exciting. That all starts with transparency. Transparency and authenticity relate to my next key take away of engaging fans as stakeholders instead of spectators.

PR professionals and leaders must now realize that fan engagement is a two-way relationship and that they should engage fans in the public relations process as stakeholders instead of merely consumers. Leaders in the industry must manage communities and not just your audience. A few ways you can do this is by using social media to communicate with your fans and incorporating interactive campaigns to ensure fans feel heard by allowing them to offer feedback. This allows for a more individualized touch and better responsiveness to fan sentiment. For example, TMRW sports attempted to make the sport of golf engaging for fans in an interactive viewership experience inside the Sofi center in Florida. In this case fan experience is at the forefront of their mission to bring a new immersive experience never seen before in golf. Catering to the wants of viewers that typically attend traditional golf events and listening to

feedback to adjust to their needs. JWS does this as well by giving their fans a voice by allowing them to give commentary and feedback that directly affect future content. JWS's Instagram and Tik Tok content frequently feature fan reactions and fan generated clips showing that the audience is part of the story. This utilization of technology leads to my last key take away.

Sports public relations leader must use technology and real time data insights to understand audiences, manage reputations, and communicate effectively. This is especially important in today's media landscape, which moves at a rapid pace. An example of this is when TMRW sports first launched TGL they used social media to monitor and track fan feedback and adjust the structure of their broadcast and its story telling mid-season to highlight what fans were most interested in. Another demographic they were able to see with their data analysis was the league performing well with viewers in the 18-49 age bracket. In terms of JWS they use engagement data to refine its coverage strategy to generate the strongest connection with viewers and tailor PR strategies accordingly. Real-time data allows PR teams to monitor public sentiment, media coverage, and audience engagement as it happens. This allows you to react strategically instead of merely guessing.

In today's ever-changing media PR professionals must prioritize all three best practices of prioritizing authentic storytelling, engaging fans as stakeholders, and using modern technology and data to get real time insights. True and authentic story telling builds trust and credibility by highlighting real voices and experiences instead of just public promotions. Engaging fans as stakeholders transforms audiences from spectators into active participants who help to form and shape a brand's image. While a company follows these first two steps they can monitor and adapt new strategies with the use of new technology with real time data. Together these practices keep brands trusted and relevant.

## Sources

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