

MEDIA RELATIONS HANDBOOK
2008-09

FOR UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO
STUDENT-ATHLETES AND COACHES



PREPARED BY THE
UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO
ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

MEDIA RELATIONS: UB STUDENT-ATHLETE/COACH RESPONSIBILITIES

The University at Buffalo's athletic teams generate a high level of public interest and media attention. One of your responsibilities as a student-athlete or coach at UB is to cooperate with the media. The Bulls' athletic programs benefit from tremendous local, regional and sometimes national media exposure. UB student-athletes and coaches have an outstanding reputation of positive media rapport over the years, and the Division of Athletics is aware that its image affects the reputation of the entire University. Therefore, it is important to understand the media, the value of positive media relations and how to best deal with the media.

You have a responsibility to the University, your coaches and your teammates to cooperate with the media. You should view your obligation to cooperate with the media as a chance to promote your team, yourself, your sport and the University at Buffalo. Just as giving 100 percent on the playing field and in the classroom are your responsibilities, cooperating with the media as arranged by the Athletic Communications Office is also part of the package of being a UB student-athlete. Interviews can be a very valuable part of a student-athlete's life at the University at Buffalo, as they serve as a great learning and growing experience for you. As a freshman, you may be nervous about speaking to the media; however, by the time you graduate, you will have become relaxed, confident and articulate. This growth and personal confidence can be carried with you into the business world.

To assist you in your dealings with the media, the UB Athletic Communications staff has prepared this handbook for you. Please spend some time to read through it and keep it handy throughout the year. It is hoped that through this handbook, you will develop a better understanding of the media and the job they are trying to do. Remember names and faces of the media. Understand that their role is not to be a cheerleader, but to report the facts. They are also not the enemy. You will find that the more cooperative you are with the media, the better chance you will have of the media presenting positive stories about you and your teammates. The better you treat the media, the better they will treat you. Media attention also means your conduct both on and off the field will be under intense scrutiny because of your position as a UB student-athlete or coach. The last thing you want is to receive publicity for an off-the-field incident. You must always remember that your off-the-field actions are viewed by the media as relevant news, while a non-athlete's activities may not be viewed in the same manner.

UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS

The UB Athletic Communications Office serves as the link between UB student-athletes, its coaches and administrators and the media and general public. We attempt to provide timely and accurate coverage of UB athletics by coordinating interviews, serving the information needs of reporters, compiling and maintaining statistics, photos and historical records and updating the UB athletics website. It is our goal to help promote the positive things our student-athletes and coaches are doing and to get the word out about each sport and its individuals. We do not, however, "manage" the news or publicity. We are not part of the media and we do not and cannot write or speak for the media.

The Athletic Communications Office is located in Alumni Arena, Room 175 (next to the general student fitness center). Our office has an Associate Athletic Director for Communications, a full-time Athletic Communications Director, a full-time Athletic Communications Assistant Director, a full-time staff photographer/designer, a part-time assistant, a graduate assistant, an office manager and student-assistants. We are here to help you. If you ever have any questions or concerns about the role of our office, the coverage of your team or dealing with the media, please let us know.

UB Athletic Communications

Alumni Arena Room 175

Phone: 645-6311 Fax: 645-6840 www.buffalobulls.com

Paul Vecchio, Associate Athletic Director/Communications

Football

Office: 645-6761 Cell: 912-0631 pvecchio@buffalo.edu

Jon Fuller, Athletic Communications Director

Men's Basketball, Football

Office: 645-6762 Cell: 359-2728 jfuller3@buffalo.edu

Brian Wolff, Athletic Communications Assistant Director

Volleyball, Women's Basketball, Baseball, Softball, Rowing

Office: 645-6993 Cell: 359-2750 bcwolff@buffalo.edu

Ted Wasko, Athletic Communications Assistant

Cross Country, Men's Soccer, Wrestling, Track & Field, Swimming & Diving, Men's & Women's Tennis

Office: 645-6877 twasko@buffalo.edu

Erin Dengler, Athletic Communications Graduate Assistant

Women's Soccer, Men's & Women's Swimming and Diving

Office: 645-5523 edengler@buffalo.edu

Paul Hokanson, Staff Photographer/Designer

Office: 645-6697 pdh3@buffalo.edu



Paul Vecchio



Jon Fuller



Brian Wolff



Paul Hokanson



Ted Wasko



Erin Dengler

UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO MEDIA POLICIES

• First and foremost, all interviews must be arranged through the UB Athletic Communications Office. *Please, ONLY do interviews that have been arranged by a member of the Athletic Communications staff.* This allows us to ensure that requests for your time are legitimate and allows us to remind you of appointments. Also, in the event of a negative occurrence, we can handle requests appropriately and offer advice on how you might deal with certain questions. You should never receive calls or visits from the media - even from reporters from the student newspaper - that have not been arranged by the Athletic Communications Office. If someone shows up at your door or calls you directly, as politely as possible explain that you are not permitted to do an interview under such circumstances and refer the person to the Athletic Communications Office (645-6311). We will never give an athlete's phone number to a member of the media and we strongly advise you not to do so either. You don't want a late-night phone call from a reporter catching you unprepared during a time of crisis. Please let us know immediately if a reporter tries to contact you directly or if you have any other problem with a member of the media. Our office is at your service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's OK to call us at home or in the office if a media-related question or situation arises.

• We understand that an athlete's studies, team practices and competition schedule come first. We will do our best to coordinate interviews and other media requests accordingly. Keeping that in mind, if you have an interview scheduled, we ask that you show up and be on time. Because of deadlines and your tight schedules, the media relies on you to be on time. Should you have a problem making a scheduled interview, please call the Athletic Communications Office.

• The longer you are on a team, the more likely it becomes that you will develop a personal relationship with some of the media representatives regularly covering your team. While we encourage these relationships, remember that, regardless of what is said, a reporter's first obligation is to report the news. *Don't say it if you don't want it in print!* View the media as friends, not adversaries. However, do organize your thoughts before a scheduled interview. Often a comment that seems innocent verbally looks different when it appears in print.

A word about DEADLINES...

Just as your sport might have a clock that winds down, many members of the sports media have to keep an eye on the time. Most newspapers require their writers to submit their stories by a daily 10:30 p.m. deadline. Wire services and radio news have almost instantaneous deadlines, while TV news crews must put their segments together for the early evening and then the late evening news. So time - and accuracy - is of the essence for journalists. Keep deadlines in mind. When the media is seeking access to you after a practice or game, visit with them as soon as possible.

A word about HEADLINES...

The sportswriter who interviewed you didn't write the headline for their story or the caption under the picture. An editor wrote them, after reading the story. So don't blame the writer for a less-than-complimentary headline the next time you see him/her.

TYPES OF MEDIA: KNOW WHO YOU ARE TALKING TO

Newspaper Beat Writers: These newspaper writers cover UB on a daily basis. While beat writers may become the most familiar members of the media to you because of the amount of time they spend at UB, they still must remain independent and impartial. During the week, they often write player feature stories which may require more in-depth interviews. Game stories are a little different, because they are usually on a strict deadline and only need a few quick quotes to help complete their stories.

Newspaper Columnists: Columnists cover all stories and are not assigned to any specific sport. Therefore, you will not see them as frequently as beat writers. Unlike beat writers, columnists are assigned articles and allowed and encouraged to express their opinion. It is a creative form of sports writing. These opinions are often reflective of the team's performance on the field. If you do well, they are positive. If you play poorly, they tend to be more critical. You might not always agree with what a columnist writes. Don't take their criticism personally; they are just trying to do their jobs. As with beat writers, take your time and think answers through.

Television News Crews: Although you likely won't see camera crews from the local television stations as often as beat writers, don't overlook their impact. More people get their news from television than newspapers. Speak clearly, answer honestly and don't forget to smile. You'll be amazed at how far those three things will carry you. Remember, they are

most likely to only use 30 seconds of sound bites.

Television Game Broadcasters: If a game will be televised either live or taped, count on seeing the announcers (a play-by-play announcer and color analyst) around the week before. They will often come out to view some of your practice and, along with the TV producer and director, may want to speak to you informally before the game. Obviously, you should not discuss game strategy in detail or share confidential team information. But if you make a good impression and share some useful information, they'll likely talk positively about you and your team during the broadcast. Often, immediately following the game on the field/court, TV may do a live interview with either players or coaches.

Radio and Radio Game Broadcasters: Much like TV interviews, radio interviews require good sound bites. Remember to take your time and speak clearly. It is the way you pronounce your words, not your expression, that is most important on radio.

Photographers: Photographers for newspapers and magazines and TV camera operators tell their stories visually. They will circle the playing field during practice and at games. So while you must be careful in your comments to the media, remember that your actions can be captured on video or film too. Also, for feature shots, bare with them and feel free to offer any ideas you may have.



HELPFUL INTERVIEWING TIPS

The following tips have been adapted from a presentation by Sue Castorino and Randy Minkoff, the “Speaking Specialists,” given to UB student-athletes during the 2003-04 school year.

• **Remember who and what you represent:** *Remember that you are representing the University at Buffalo when you are being interviewed.* Your responses to questions will give people who read or listen to the interview not only an impression of you, but also an impression of the UB Division of Athletics and the University in general. When speaking with the media, be confident, courteous and prompt. Try to present an image that is consistent with the ideals and high standards of the University at Buffalo.

• **Speak only for your organization:** Don’t speak on behalf of other teams or rival schools. Try to turn the focus back on to your team and the University at Buffalo.

• **Know your audience and your message:** Know who you are speaking to, including their level of knowledge and expertise, and what you want them to know about your team or sport. Have a single key point that you can repeat, reinforce and personalize. Don’t stray away from your subject or get off topic just to keep talking. You don’t always have to say a lot if what you say is meaningful.

• **Anticipate questions:** Know the reason for the interview so that you can anticipate what some logical questions may be and formulate your answers ahead of time. Don’t be caught off guard. If you aren’t sure how to answer right away, relax and take the time to think about what you want to say. *It’s OK to pause and think about your answer. You don’t have to speak immediately after a question has been asked.*

• **Avoid “No Comment” and “Off the Record”:** If a media representative asks you a question that you are uncomfortable answering, there is nothing wrong with saying “I am not comfortable answering that question” or “I’m not at liberty/qualified/able to discuss that issue.” Be careful of phrases like “between you and me” or “I shouldn’t be saying this, but...” If you say it, expect that it will be printed, broadcast or reproduced somewhere.

• **Do not repeat negative phrases:** Focus on answering questions in a positive manner. Rephrase negative questions to reinforce the positive aspects of a negative situation or to focus on what is being done to improve a negative situation. In addition, do not criticize or blame your teammates, your coaches, your opponents, game officials, the media or the fans. Give your opponent credit.

• **Avoid jargon:** Avoid words or phrases that may be confusing or that your audience will not understand. Keep your message simple. Be careful of acronyms, cliches and technical terms.

• **Keep your cool:** Respond rationally to emotion. Don’t get flustered or defensive.

• **Tell the truth:** Honesty enhances believability.

• **Be aware of your physical presence:** Your voice and body work together. Use physical movement to enhance your vocal delivery. *Be energetic, smile and always look directly at the reporter or camera while being interviewed.* Also, do not chew gum or eat during an interview.

Interview Do’s...

- Keep your head up and smile. Have a positive attitude.
- Speak clearly and enunciate your words. Avoid “ums, you know, etc.”
- Be courteous. Understand that the media is just trying to do their job.
- Use the interviewer’s name in your answers.
- Be on time and be presentable in your appearance.
- Practice modesty in victory and self control in defeat. *Act professional at all times.*
- Contact the Athletic Communications Office if you have any problem with a member of the media.

Interview Don’ts...

- Joke or use sarcasm. You can’t control the tone in which it is written or the context in which it is aired.
- Say anything that you wouldn’t write down, add your signature to or feel comfortable showing your coach or your teammates.
- Provide locker room material. No trash talking.
- Pretend you are a coach. Let your coaches answer questions regarding who will start, game plans and strategies.
- Miss class or practice for any interview. Know your schedule.
- Take calls at home from a member of the media. Make sure the interview is prearranged by the Athletic Communications Office and that someone from the office has informed you of the reason for the interview.

Print Media Interview Specifics:

- Be prepared for a longer interview than with television or radio.
- Print reporters are still looking for short, quality quotes. You can give longer answers than you can with radio or TV, but understand that the longer your answer is, the more control you are giving to the reporter to determine what part of your response to use in the article.
- Print media reporters often use a tape recorder to conduct interviews. Don’t let that make you nervous.
- It’s OK to pause and collect your thoughts - pauses don’t show up in print!

Television Media Interview Specifics:

- Be aware of how you sound and how you look. Most of the time, you will be interviewed in your uniform or practice gear. If you are in street clothes for an interview, remember to be clean and neat and to wear something that says Buffalo or UB if possible.
- Look at the reporter, not at the camera, and speak in the direction of the microphone.
- Remember that they are looking for short 15-20 second sound bites, so don’t ramble on and on.
- If the TV or radio interview isn’t live, don’t hesitate to stop and ask if you can repeat your answer or start over. Unlike a live interview, a taped interview can be edited.

Radio Interview Specifics:

- Be aware of how you sound, including the tone of your voice and how fast or slow you speak. Speak clearly.
- They are also looking for short 15-20 second sound bites, so don’t ramble.

WESTERN NEW YORK MEDIA NAMES TO KNOW

PRINT

AP Buffalo: John Wawrow, Ken Fox, Bob Matuszak
The Buffalo News: Rodney McKissic, Amy Moritz, Jerry Sullivan,
Bob DiCesare, Mike Harrington, Allen Wilson
Rochester Democrat & Chronicle: Jim Mandelaro
The Spectrum: Alex Rubin
Sports & Leisure Magazine: Marian Giallombardo, Dave Ricci
Tonawanda News: Jonah Bronstein, Tim Schmitt

TELEVISION

WGRZ-TV (Ch. 2): Ed Kilgore, Adam Benigni, Stu Boyar, Matt Pearl
WIVB-TV (Ch. 4): John Murphy, Paul Peck, Robin Adams
WKBW-TV (Ch. 7): Jeff Russo, Shawn Stepner
WNYO-TV (WB 49): Jeff Matthews

RADIO

WGR-AM 550: Howard Simon, Jeremy White, Mike Schopp,
Paul Hamilton, Brian Koziol
WBFO-FM 88.7: Gabe DiMaio

PLEASE REMEMBER...

When doing interviews, try to relax and be yourself. Communicating with the media is a learning opportunity that is not readily available to all students, and working with the media is part of your role as a Division I student-athlete. The media is always going to be around, so you won't be able to avoid them forever. It is important to be available and to be cooperative. *Remember that you are the expert - they are asking you the questions because they don't have the answers. You are in command of what you say. Have fun with it and try to enjoy the process. The experience will be more pleasing the more cooperative and positive you are.*

If you ever have any concerns or anxieties about doing interviews, please talk to a member of the Athletic Communications Office. We are happy to help you get more comfortable with the experience.

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS SAY ABOUT INTERVIEWS

Ronnie Lott, Hall of Fame Football Player

"Part of our job is giving interviews. It's not something you want to do at certain times, but it's part of the job. It comes down to being professional."

Magic Johnson, Hall of Fame Basketball Player

"The way you are perceived, that's everything. Athletes take it too lightly, but your image is very important. Especially if you want to get into something after your career is over."

Marv Levy, Buffalo Bills General Manager

"I don't think players realize a comment they make is interpreted in greater depth than the depth of thought they gave before making the comment."

Paul Tagliabue, former NFL Commissioner

"If you understand the media's role and prepare yourself properly, your relationship with the media can pay big dividends. Learning how to deal skillfully in this area results in tremendous benefits during your playing career and long after it has ended."

Steve Woodward, Author and Broadcaster

"Conventional media training is when athletes are told to survive the interview experience and to view the media as a negative. Proper media training is when an athlete is taught that the whole media experience can be a positive process that an athlete can control and enjoy."

NFL Media Relations Handbook

"Fans judge you as a player according to how you perform on the playing field. They judge you as a person according to how you perform with the media. If the fans develop a good impression of you through the media, especially when things are not going well on the field, the benefits to you can be significant."

Lora Banks, Pro Athlete Magazine Writer

"The power of the press can make or break an athlete's career. For a pro athlete, a good public image translates into higher off-the-field income. You can, to a degree, control how you are perceived by the press and the public, which is the key to building a positive public image. Fans will be more tolerant and the media gentler when an athlete who is seen as likeable is dealing with a slump or controversy."

