

Production Notes

Journals and notes from the production staff of E:60.



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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2012

Salters on Interviewing

In interviews with E:60 reporter Lisa Salters, Detroit Lions wide receiver Calvin Johnson revealed himself to be thoughtful, modest, caring, and affable, with an endearing ability to laugh at himself.

But those qualities emerged only after Salters broke through the shyness that has kept Johnson's off-field profile far below his mythical on-field profile as "Megatron".

They weren't total strangers. She had met him several years ago when she covered a Georgia Tech-Notre Dame game - he was 20 - and she reminded him of that. A shared memory broke the ice.

Salters lives in Atlanta, where Johnson makes his home in the off-season. They chatted about local neighborhoods, parks and

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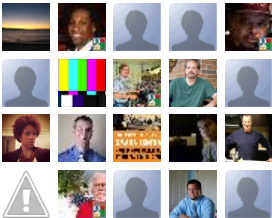
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restaurants. The ice began to melt.

"I like to find some common ground and go from there," Salters says. "When people are shy the best thing you can do is make them feel comfortable."

Turned out Johnson played the "Michael Jackson Experience" on his Nintendo Wii. Ditto Salters. By now the ice was a puddle.

On camera, Salters' manner was conversational and playful.

"My nature is to tease guys - he saw that," Salters recalled. "I wanted it to be fun, more like hanging out than an interview."

"If you have notes in your hand, and you're reading the questions, one by one, that's not how people talk. My style is conversational, and if a subject veers on a tangent it can lead to material that doesn't get used, but that's how conversations go with most people."

Salters has a rule of thumb: "Share a bit about yourself."

In an interview with Eagles running back LeSean McCoy that has yet to run, McCoy spoke haltingly about his grandmother's fatal battle with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). Salters mentioned that the mother of one of her close friends also was stricken with ALS, with the same symptoms.

"The interview went from him telling his story to him helping me help my friend," she recalled. "He opened up more, absolutely."

As McCoy opened up he became more emotional.

"I could see LeSean feeling self-conscious and having a hard time controlling his emotions," Salters recalled. "Once he went back to her illness and death he was really upset - even though it was two years ago he was upset all over again."

As a second rule of thumb, Salters recommends empathy.

"You have to show that you care about them, too," she said.

"You're asking them to be personal and honest and to be very real. You have to show that you're hearing them, and you're feeling with them."

"When they're telling me something I'm feeling exactly what they're feeling, as much as they give me. I end up walking out emotionally drained, too. You don't want to tell somebody something personal and not feel they are impacted."

"It's kind of like being a psychiatrist. You have to make them feel safe like a psychiatrist does. The environment has to be non-judgmental and safe. Nobody will share unless they feel safe. If they feel like you are a million miles away, not really serious or trying to get to dinner, you're not going to get anywhere."

Posted by Steve Marantz, September 6, 2012

Posted by [E:60](#) at [12:30 PM](#)

Reactions: [funny \(0\)](#) [interesting \(0\)](#) [cool \(0\)](#)

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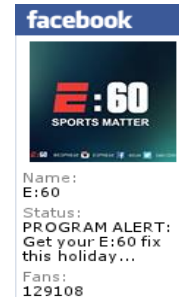
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TUESDAY, JULY 17, 2012

The Art of Sound

The difference between good television and good radio is as simple, and as complex, as the difference between sight and sound.

Many of E:60's stories make the jump from video to audio on "The Sporting Life", a weekly one-hour show (Friday, 10 p.m. Eastern, Saturday 5 a.m and 7 a.m, Sunday 5 a.m.) hosted by Jeremy Schaap.

Some don't.



“Cheese Rolling” did not. That was the 2009 piece about a medieval race in England where people tumble down a steep hill in pursuit of a bounding round of cheese.

“You had to see the participants on that hill - I don’t know that the audio translation would have cut it,” said Peter Ciccone, program director.

Most E:60 stories do well on audio, though some require slight tweaks. Subtitled dialogue on television needs voice-over identification on radio. Lisa Salters’ report on a girls’ soccer team in post-earthquake Haiti required voice-over. ESPN Radio anchors Christine Lisi, Marc Kestecher and Doug Brown often do the voice-overs.

“We want someone with no inflection - some of our anchors are so distinctive you want to stay away from them,” Ciccone said. “You want a flat matter-of-fact translation of the speaker. The idea is to leave the speaker’s original voice in a way that the listener can gauge the emotion of the speaker. It’s something NPR (National Public Radio) does well.”

More tweaks: TV can abide by silence if the visual is good. Audio does not like silence, unless it’s a dramatic pause in someone’s oratory. A mood-enhancing specialty shot for TV tends not to help an audio broadcast. Audio producers inject sound whenever possible.

“If we think sticking with the sound of a crowd in a gym or on a field a bit longer would help we encourage that,” said Ciccone. “Sometimes an additional play-by-play highlight - especially if it’s a profile of a well-known athlete. We might suggest something extra in the way of narrative in setting up a scene. Anything to lend texture.”



In April 2011 E:60 aired “Hero: The Paco Rodriguez Story”. It told of a boxer who died from ring injuries but whose donated organs allowed several others to live. Schaap was the on-air talent, so it was a natural to bring to “The Sporting Life”.

Conversion of “Paco” to audio required that it be split into two segments.

“We look for the climax, we want to find the conflict - we use that to close segment one,” said producer Bill Ennever.

The break came at the bite from Paco’s widow, Sonia Rodriguez, who said, “He wanted to be a hero and he would always tell me that, and so I said you know, if that was his goal in life then, you know, we’re going to do it for him.”



Schaap re-tracked the audio to provide identifications for the numerous speakers. Producers had a difficult decision on an emotional scene - subtitled in the video version - in which the mother of an organ recipient whispered into the ear of Paco’s mother, and thanked her.

“It was tricky - I believe we left the whisper even though it was inaudible,” Ennever said. “You could hear that they were talking to each other in a solemn tone, so the meaning wasn’t completely lost to our listeners.”

Producers also grappled with a couple of visuals of women as they cried, but did not speak.

“The visuals were incredibly compelling,” Ennever said. “On radio it was still important to let it breathe, allowing the listener to be in the moment. But we felt that listeners would eventually get lose or grow tired of the sobering silence, so we shortened those parts.”

In June 2012, “The Sporting Life” won a prestigious Edward R. Murrow Award, for Outstanding Audio Sports Reporting for its version of ‘Paco’. The award cited producers Vin Cannamela and Frank Saraceno, and editor Josh Drake.

posted by Steve Marantz on July 16, 2012

Posted by [E:60](#) at [3:55 PM](#)

Reactions: [funny \(0\)](#) [interesting \(0\)](#) [cool \(0\)](#)

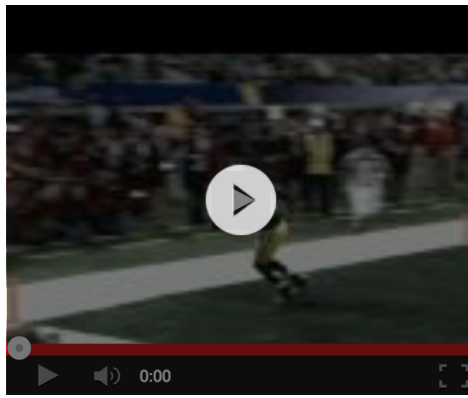
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FRIDAY, MAY 4, 2012

Off the Cutting Room Floor



At 12 minutes Aaron Rodgers and Patrick Willis are compelling. At 24 minutes they should be twice as compelling. At least that's the theory behind E:60's new sub-brand called Profile E:60.

"Sometimes we have great content on the cutting room floor," said executive producer Andy Tennant. "Why not branch out and dig even deeper and expand the story further? It's a way for our producers to spread their wings."

Profile E:60 was conceived last fall after Yaron Deskalo produced a standard length feature on Rodgers, the Packers star quarterback. The story was good at 12 minutes, Deskalo knew, but there was more to tell. ESPN Programming agreed, and Profile E:60's first effort, on Rodgers, ran at the start of the NFL playoffs.

In doubling the length of the Rodgers piece, Deskalo used material about Rodgers' friendship with a young cancer patient, and his foray into the music business, as well as a sideline interview Rodgers gave reporter Jeremy Schaap prior to the Packers' 2011 season opener. None of those elements had been in the original piece. Moreover, Deskalo expanded the section in which Rodgers' talked about being backup to Bret Favre.

"The biggest thing was how to lay out the piece," Deskalo said.

The 24-minute piece had three parts and two commercial breaks. Part One covered Rodgers' early years - he was underestimated at each step of his career - up to his arrival at Green Bay. Deskalo decided to forego the traditional "bump" - "E:60 Profile will be back with more on Aaron Rodgers" - before a break in favor of a "cold" in and out. The first part ended with a question, "What was it like to follow a legend like Favre?"

Part 2 required a decision. Fill it with the Rodgers-Favre material and Rodgers' Super Bowl victory or bring in the cancer material. Deskalo decided on the latter because it dovetailed with a comment Rodgers made to his mother, which she repeated, about being a good man as well as a good quarterback.

"I felt that led perfectly into his charity work and relationship with this kid Jack (Bartosz)," Deskalo said. "It was an easy way to end that segment because it was so emotional. Starting a segment with that would have made it hard to keep the emotions running."

With the luxury of time, Deskalo let the Rodgers-Favre material run for about 2 ½ minutes.

"It's not that we glossed over Favre in the 12-minute piece, we didn't," Deskalo said. "But some of the sound we put in really enhanced that section. You got a feel for what Rodgers went through at that time."

Part 3 focused on Rodgers' marketability and business ventures, and on the Packers' 2011 season in which they won 13 straight before losing.

The long form enables the story to expand beyond the playing field to a more rounded portrait, Deskalo said.

Producer Beein Gim's profile on 49ers linebacker Patrick Willis, in expanding to 23:40, brought in new material on the tragic drowning of Willis' brother, Detris, in 2006.

"We couldn't get into that in the original story - how do you spend 20 seconds on a death like that?" said Gim.

In the long form, Gim uses Part One to tell about the abuse Willis and his siblings endured at the hands of their drug-addled father. Part Two shows how Willis used sports to cope with his problems at home, and concludes as he and his siblings are taken in by his high school basketball coach. Part Three details his rise to stardom at Ole Miss and

with the 49ers.

"With the longer piece you just let it breathe - you can tell a fuller story," Gim said. "The shorter piece is harder. You have to leave things out and weigh things. You have to be more disciplined as to what fits the spine of the story."

Long-form storytelling at ESPN has a proud history, with the SportsCentury series at the millennium, the 30 For 30 series in 2009 and 2010, and more recently the documentaries by ESPN Films. Profile E:60 aspires to the tradition.

Tennant said MLB stars Justin Verlander and Matt Kemp could be the next Profile subjects.

"Our fans look to us for the definitive profile now," said Tennant. "We're getting the sense that athletes, agents and teams understand what we do. Profile E:60 is now part of the conversation with agents - they're interested. It's great exposure. We're getting a lot more buy-in from agents and teams because of this brand."

(posted by Steve Marantz on May 4, 2012)

Posted by [E:60](#) at [1:17 PM](#)

Reactions: funny (0) interesting (0) cool (0)

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TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 2012

Salters Helps Rwanda Pay it Forward, One Girl at a Time



In late March, E:60 reporter Lisa Salters boarded a plane in Atlanta, transferred in Brussels and 20 hours later landed in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. Over the course of the next three days, she would learn many things about the Rwandan people, history and (for better or worse) food. But she was there to teach.

"A friend of mine is the head communications person for the Nike Foundation, which is sponsoring a project called The Girl Effect," Salters said. "The project aims to end global (poverty). It does that by equipping young girls through journalism. It tries to teach young girls a skill so that their voices can be heard and they can go work as journalists and pay it forward in their families.

"When I was asked to be a part of this, I said sure. I'll do anything you need."



Salters and two other journalists, ESPN's Jessica Mendoza and CNN's Suzanne Malveaux, signed up to teach a class of nine Rwandan students, ranging in age from 14 to 26. The goal was to teach basic principles of journalism, so the students could go on to write for a magazine the Nike Foundation established - think Seventeen

magazine for Rwandan girls.

The students, some of whom spoke a little English, were divided into groups of three; translators were used when necessary. On the first day, they learned about conducting interviews and operating handheld cameras that shoot video (eventually the magazine will have a website on which video will be posted). On the second day they reported from the field, while on the last day they wrote first drafts of stories.



Salters' students were assigned to cover a soccer team's practice on the second day, only this was no ordinary team. It was the only professional men's team in the country that was coached by a woman - the kind of story you might see on E:60.

Or so they thought. When Salters and her pupils arrived at practice, they were greeted with a dose of unwelcome news: none of the players, it turned out, were men. Salters used the misinformation to teach a lesson.



"I told the girls, this is what happens in journalism everywhere," she said. "Information turns out to be untrue. She was, in fact, the coach of a women's team. So this poor girl, my poor student, her piece was about the female coach of a men's team. She spent all night coming up with questions. So we had to sit there

as practice was going on and come up with a whole new list of questions. Her new piece was just about being a female coach in Rwanda. The coach was still the only female coach in the country.

"The girls were very enthusiastic. When they interviewed that soccer coach - I think I put the fear of God into them. I said look, when you're out doing a story, you have to become an expert on that story. If we get back and I ask you how old the soccer coach was and you don't know, I'm not going to be happy."

Dean Stoyer, Salters' friend who runs the Nike Foundation office in Rwanda, viewed Salters as a natural teacher. "Lisa's calm encouragement and unwavering support made the girls instantly comfortable," he said in an email from Kigali. "Lisa truly stepped into the mentoring role, gracefully guiding her students through Socratic questions, allowing the students to discover the information for themselves. Her girls owned it. And it was powerful to watch."

The days were long, starting at 7 a.m. and finishing after 5 p.m. But Salters, Mendoza and Malveaux still had time to explore Kigali. One day they went to the Reconciliation Village, where the Hutu and Tutsi peoples live side by side. It's an image that not too long ago seemed impossible. In the spring of 1994, Rwanda garnered international headlines as the Hutus slaughtered an estimated 800,000 Tutsis in approximately 100 days.

Salters knows all about the ethnic cleansing that took place in Rwanda. She reported from Kigali in the fall of 1994 for WBAL-TV in Baltimore, where she was a reporter before joining ESPN in 2000.

"But I didn't really get a sense of how big the scope of the massacre was until now," Salters said. "I had always thought of it as a civil war. But there wasn't a war here. It was slaughter, there was no fighting back. But I see now that the Rwandans have tried to move past it."



At the Reconciliation Village, locals danced for Salters, Mendoza and Malveaux and served up a Rwandan delicacy: grilled goat on a stick.

"I was like, please God do not make me eat this," Salters said, laughing. "And they bring out these full plates. All these villagers are looking at you and are so happy to serve you. I'm like, ugh, I don't want this goat. But I took a bite and it wasn't just goat, it was goat kidney. And so it was the nastiest thing ever and I knew I couldn't spit it out. I just had that one bite."

There were other hardships along the way. The first of the two hotels at which Salters, Mendoza and Malveaux stayed was infested with moths. But Salters simply rolled with the punches. After all, she has seen much worse. Two years ago, Salters reported from Haiti for an E:60 story about the Haitian under-17 girls' soccer team. At the time, the country had been rocked by a devastating earthquake.

"Haiti, that's kind of what Rwanda reminded me of," Salters said. "But I got to say, Haiti was much worse. It really kind of put it in perspective, how bad Haiti was. As bad as that hotel in Rwanda was, I was telling people, this is like the Taj Mahal compared to where we stayed Haiti."

Salters said she planned on staying in touch with her Rwandan students, all of whom have Facebook accounts. And she hopes to return to Rwanda in six months or a year to continue her role as a teacher.

"It was a quick trip but really cool," she said. "We were literally teaching these girls how to find their voice. Girls who didn't have a voice before now feel like they do. Really rewarding."

-Submitted by David Picker

Posted by [E:60](#) at [12:04 PM](#)

Reactions: [funny \(0\)](#) [interesting \(0\)](#) [cool \(0\)](#)

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FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 2012

Art of the Tease



It's not as sexy as it sounds. We're talking about the first minute of a show that introduces content and hooks viewers.

Production Assistant Toby Hershkowitz, who works on E:60 teases, describes the creative process as "delicate and difficult".

"You want to highlight some exciting part of the story, but you want to leave meat on the bone so when they watch the story it will be new and exciting," said Hershkowitz.

Producers risk losing viewers if the tease gives away too much. And they risk losing viewers if it doesn't offer enough.

Typically, the tease promotes three long-form stories and a short "interstitial". The E:60 tease, voiced by an unseen narrator, tends to be conversational and familiar. The language is energized, provocative and begs a question: what happened? Or: who is that?

A show in July 2011 featured three long pieces: a profile of Ozzie Guillen, then manager of the White Sox; a story on former middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik's bout with alcohol; and a story on a 17-year-old girl who lost part of her left leg in a boating accident and recovered to play high school soccer. It also offered a five-minute piece on a triathlete who wrestles alligators, and a short on Albert Pujols' visit to a bat factory.

The tease started with Guillen. The key tracks were "a manager with no filter between his mind and his mouth", and "Ozzie Guillen is the best interview in sports". There was sound from Ozzie - "We played like bleep" - film of the White Sox celebrating a championship, reporter Jeremy Schaap handing Guillen a beer, and a specialty shot of Guillen's head highlighted by thought balloons, among them "under the bus", "family", and "honesty".

"There are times when someone is so big that just having them is enough to sell the story - that was the case with Ozzie," Hershkowitz said. "We said he was the best interview in sports - we thought people would tune in just to hear what he had to say.

"That said, the thought balloons indicated we had something people haven't seen before - a trip inside his mind."

Next came Pavlik. The first track, "Once the middleweight champion of the world, the hope of a struggling town." - was over film of Pavlik in the ring and of deserted factories in Pavlik's hometown. Then another shot of Pavlik in the ring, and SOT from a ring announcer, "He's from Youngstown, Ohio." The second track was, "Now Kelly Pavlik faces the fight of his life", over a specialty shots of Pavlik in the ring and up close. Then a SOT: "In a 12-month period he had more interventions than fights."

Hershkowitz explained it:

"The line about him facing the fight of his life is the undetermined conclusion. The hook is 'I wonder if he makes it, beats the addiction, and finds success again as a boxer? I don't feel I have the whole story. I know it's about addiction, but I don't know the outcome'.

"It's less effective if we say Pavlik defeats his demons and comes back to glory. A tease is ineffective if the viewer knows exactly what the story is going to be."

The tease moved on to Lexi Youngberg, the high school soccer player, introducing her as she ran on to the pitch, with the SOT, "Number Four, Lexi Youngberg." Tracked over film of her playing soccer is "A vibrant athletic 17-year-old", and as the film cuts to a boat speeding over water, the track intones "a deadly accident, and a life forever changed". Cut to an interviewee, who says, "I really thought she was going to die", followed by a track, "the soccer

comeback story of the year” over film of her team in a huddle.

The key phrase was “a life forever changed” because while the tease tees up a boating accident, it does not disclose that Youngberg lost part of her left leg, and now plays soccer with a prosthesis. Those facts are held back for the story.

“It’s effective if you give a sense of the story but withhold a pivotal turning point or a twist,” said Hershkowitz.

The tease concluded with a track on the alligator wrestler, “extreme sport, extreme danger, poisonous snakes, deadly alligators and a death-defying triathlete”, over film of Paul Bedard running, swimming, and messing with snakes and alligators. The last track, “the best stories in sports tonight on E:60” is over film of Pujols swinging the bat, and an up-close specialty shot of the slugger.

[The Poynter Institute offers 12 tips for producing a tease.](#)

Posted by Steve Marantz on March 30, 2012

Posted by [E:60](#) at [12:20 PM](#)

Reactions: funny (0) interesting (0) cool (0)

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FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2012

Saving 9-1-1

Demi Moore’s divorce from Ashton Kutcher seemed a long way from ESPN and E:60 until a 9-1-1 emergency call was placed from her Beverly Hills home in January. A female caller revealed that the actress had been smoking something, and was “convulsing”, “semi-conscious”, and “burning up”.

Moore was rushed to a hospital. A few days later the 9-1-1 call was aired by broadcast media. Subsequently, broadcast media came under attack by Dr. Travis Stork, who appears on “The Doctors”, a syndicated show in New York. “We’re gonna take a stand here on our show and say that, unequivocally, we do not feel as physicians that 9-1-1 calls should be sent out to be broadcast,” said Dr. Stork.

He argued that 9-1-1 calls should be excluded from public record under patient-physician confidentiality, and vowed to “take it up with Congress”.

E:60 producers have an eye on this. They have used audio from 9-1-1 to powerful effect, perhaps most memorably in Ben Houser’s 2010 story of a Florida teen, Nate Winters, who lost most of his left leg in a 2008 boat accident. The 9-1-1 call, placed by a friend of Winters from the boat, was used over video of the lake, and was cut between interviews with Winters and his brother as they reconstructed the scene.

9-1-1: “Fire Rescue”.

Friend: “We need an ambulance. His foot got hit in the boat propeller and it got ripped off.”

9-1-1: “Is it amputated?”

Friend: “It’s everywhere.”

9-1-1: “Do you have something to control the bleeding?”

Friend: "All right, we're going to try."

Another 9-1-1 tape used to memorable effect was in "Sacred Acre", the 2010 story of Ed Thomas, a Iowa high school football coach who was shot and killed by one of his former players.

Dispatcher: "County 9-1-1."

Darryl Myers: "We had a shooting right now in the bus barn down at the high school."

Dispatcher: "At the high school, where?"

Darryl Myers: "In the bus barn."

Dispatcher: "In the bus barn, do you know who it was?"

Darryl Myers: "No I don't. Uh, kids just come running out and said somebody shot Ed Thomas."

Dispatcher: "Ed Tho (gasp). Okay."

In neither story did the 9-1-1 tapes have news value - their value was in narrative and clarity.

But sometimes a 9-1-1 tape does have news value, as was the case in the 2009 hospitalization of then-University of Florida football coach Urban Meyer. University officials initially said Meyer's December 6 hospitalization was due to "dehydration" and that he had been driven there by a friend. But when ESPN obtained the 9-1-1 call placed by his wife it revealed that he was rushed to the hospital by ambulance after complaining of chest pains and a tingling sensation on his side. The 9-1-1 shed light on Meyer's health (which led to his resignation), but more importantly, it caught the university in a lie.

The potential news value of 9-1-1 calls is just one reason media want them. Another is that they make transparent an emergency system that, all agree, needs to function at a high level.

[The Radio Television Digital News Association, in its 9-1-1 guidelines, emphasizes the media's watchdog role.](#)

Nonetheless, [at the state level](#), the trend in recent years has been toward the restrictions advocated by Dr. Stork. More state legislatures are passing laws exempting 9-1-1 records - audio mostly - from public records laws due to privacy concerns and exploitation, according to Paula Lavigne, a member of ESPN's Enterprise Reporting Unit.

"Blame TMZ and celebrity shows for that, because they don't have much discretion in what they air," says Lavigne. "Sure, in cases where the records are clearly public you have every right to air them in their entirety. But you need to look at the big picture in terms of any blowback from that. As long as you can justify a good reason for airing the audio - aside from just having a broadcast element - I think you're on solid footing."

E:60 tries to use 9-1-1 tapes with discretion, said executive producer Andy Tennant. The calls are evaluated much as crime scene photos, with caution toward graphic and exploitive content.

"I understand why there is a movement to ban 9-1-1 calls from public records - many people feel airing those calls is a violation of privacy," said Tennant. "We in the media need to do a better job of using those calls only in situations where they have news value or can help explain a story. If they are used for the sake of melodrama or voyeurism, that's when the media crosses the line."

E:60 producers have been rejected or ignored on several 9-1-1 requests. Dave Picker struck out on his stories about Dwayne Goodrich and Marvin Harrison. Vin Cannamela came up empty on his story about Lexi Youngberg, a teenager who lost her leg in a boating accident in

Michigan.

SportsCenter producer Chris Bloxom asked Lavigne for help after he made an abortive effort to obtain the 9-1-1 call in December 2010 that preceded the death of La Roche College basketball coach Scott Lang, 41, who succumbed to a heart attack during a practice.

Her advice to Bloxom:

"Although 911 calls are public record in most states, Pennsylvania is a bit of an exception. The law states that, 'The Act exempts 911 tapes but permits access to them or a transcript thereof 'if the agency or court determines that the public interest in disclosure outweighs the interest in nondisclosure.' Section 708(b)(18).

"The only upside here is that the agency has some discretion in releasing it to you. What you need to do first is find out which agency has that tape, unless you've done that already. You want the 911 dispatch center, which could be the city police department or some sort of city-county agency. You need to make the request to that agency. It would help if you could make a good argument as to why this 911 call is in the public interest. If that fails, then I'm afraid you will need a court order, which would involve making a request to a judge in that county. And you'll likely need an attorney's help with that.

"One other angle you might try is to see if the family could help you. It's possible that a relative could get the agency to hand over the tapes without a lot of hassle. I'm not sure what your relationship is with them, but if it's good, you might go that route."

Bloxom filed requests through Pittsburgh police and the emergency response agency and was turned down. He decided against hiring an attorney to seek a court order, and let the matter drop.

To all producers and reporters Lavigne offers this advice:

"When you make a request, you really HAVE to have an address...the calls are saved/logged by address and phone numbers. (And who knows what phone someone was using when he/she called.) They're not usually logged by name...trust me on that. You should also have a date and an approximate time.

"And make sure you use a public records request letter to ask for them. That's usually helpful.

"Finally, 911 agencies are organized in all sorts of different ways. In some places, the 911 dispatchers are part of the fire department or police department. In other places, the 911 dispatchers belong to their own separate agencies. And there can be multiple 911 agencies within a region. So, just make sure you have the right agency before you launch into a request."

(posted by Steve Marantz on March 2, 2012)

Posted by [E:60](#) at [11:58 AM](#)

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2012

Graphic Content: Part 2 Journalism and Voyeurism

In April 2007 Michael Vick's dogfighting ring dominated the news. Outside the Lines and SportsCenter showed video of dogs in violent combat, and were stung by viewer backlash.

One viewer wrote: "I'll be honest: I turned that story off when they started showing the tapes of the dog fights...that was one of the few times where I completely and totally disagreed with an ESPN decision. Dogfighting is awful, we know it's awful, you don't need to show the tapes."

Those were the words of ESPN columnist Bill Simmons, in an online chat. Simmons laid bare the risk of graphic content. If he turned the channel, anybody might.

But that's only half of the risk - viewers also turn away from indifference. Graphic content can hold or build an audience, in its appeal to the intellect, through effective journalism, and to the gut, through voyeurism.

In its decisions, ESPN must consider its own brand, as well as that of its parent company, Disney, says producer Ben Houser.

Yet, if ESPN uses graphic content for journalism, and another network uses it to exploit voyeurism, a cynical public might not make a

distinction, or care.

This two-edged sword that is graphic content asks two subjective questions of producers: 1) is it too graphic? 2) is it necessary?

When *Outside the Lines* pushed to use the moment of contact - baseball against skull - in the Gunnar Sandberg story, Sandberg's parents refused. The two diametrically opposed views reflect the nuance of the issue.

"Well, their motive was to protect the privacy of their child and their family," said coordinating producer Tim Hays. "Our judgment is based on two completely different criteria; what's appropriate and what represents the best interest of our viewers. We have to make a call that balances those two factors. We wouldn't use a piece of video that is particularly gruesome or gratuitous, even if the viewer would like to see it. However, if we feel like it's an important part of the story, we have to consider it."

Said Dwayne Bray, head of the Enterprise Reporting Unit: "We never want to be gratuitous. We use what we need to tell the story, and nothing more. If the storytelling is strong enough, we believe, then you don't need to exploit graphic or violent video images to enhance viewer engagement."

How graphic is too graphic? Where is the line between necessary and gratuitous? [The Radio Television Digital News Association](#) counsels "particular compassion to victims of crime or tragedy" and offers up even more questions to help news organizations decide.

Lots of questions, no easy answers.

Producers say they weigh criteria on a story-by-story basis, but it also appears to be the case that it is weighed on a show-by-show basis.

The story about alleged pedophile Bobby Dodd, former head of the A.A.U, and his accuser, Ralph West, ran in December on *Outside the Lines*, while an abbreviated version ran on SportsCenter.

"SportsCenter decided - after some discussion - to bleep out the word 'masturbate'," said producer Carolyn Hong. "Outside the Lines did not bleep it out of our long piece...I understand that some of the staff were complaining that their kids would see the broadcast."

Viewers were given a warning about the language in the lead-in to the story, Hong said. One broad area of agreement is that viewers should be warned if there is any doubt about the material.

Producer Martin Khodabakhshian recalled an HBO story about black market horse slaughter that did not warn viewers.

"They showed horses being sliced through - it felt like the Silence of the Lambs," said Khodabakhshian. "I felt offended that they didn't warn us this was coming."

Beyond that, producers apply their own rules of thumb.

Jose Morales, in his piece on motocross riders, used crashes in which the injuries were not permanent, though he would not use the fatal crash of Jeremy Lusk, nor would he have used the moment of impact - if he had obtained it - that paralyzed Stephen Murray.

"I think it's fair to say that the degree of injury has an influence on my decision," said Morales.

On the other hand, producer Yaron Deskalo said that, in his 2010 piece on the playing fields of Bhopal, India, he did not hesitate to use rows of dead bodies from the 1984 pesticide factory disaster "because there was not a lot of blood, which is the danger."

E:60 executive producer Andy Tennant advises special caution "on stories involving dogs, horses and children."

The time slot of a show is a factor, producers said. A weekend show in the morning or afternoon could have a larger viewership of children. Parental caution should be advised early and often for questionable material.

E:60 coordinating producer Michael Baltierra suggests more restraint with domestic stories than with international, because the emotional impact is greater if the image is closer to home.

"You probably wouldn't show a severed head in Cleveland," he said.

To that point, graphic content is defined by community and cultural standards, which vary from region to region, country to country, and are in constant flux. But as technology evolves, and citizen journalists feed YouTube and social media, community and cultural standards change. Today's graphic content may be tomorrow's elevator music.

Which explains why, in the future, Yaron Deskalo's decision not to air a flapping skull in Bahrain will be even more difficult.

"The definition of what a journalist is has changed," Deskalo said. "Those of us trying to tell a balanced story have to be more aware of what is being shown across the full spectrum."

Posted by Steve Marantz on January 19, 2012

Posted by [E:60](#) at [11:17 AM](#)

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