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## CoSIDA Teleconference:

### Collegiate Communications Issues & Challenges: With an NFL Perspective

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** NFL Vice  
President of Football Communications

**DEREK BOYKO:** Director of Football  
Media Services, Philadelphia Eagles

**TED CREWS:** Senior Director of  
Communications, St. Louis Rams

**PATRICK SMYTH:** Executive Director  
of Media Relations, Denver Broncos

**SHELLY POE, CoSIDA 3<sup>rd</sup> VP:** Hello,  
everyone. Thanks for joining us. This is Shelly  
Poe from Ohio State. It's my pleasure to be Third  
Vice President with CoSIDA this year and work  
with the Continuing Education Program.

We have a great panel today put together  
by Michael Signora of the National Football  
League, and we appreciate his efforts. Our  
moderator today is Dan Lepse from Seattle Pacific.

If I can give a quick little bio on him. First,  
I want to say that I've known Dan, I want to say,  
17, 18 years. Kevin Keys, who many of you know  
from Liberty University, and I were working in West  
Virginia, and we decided at the CoSIDA workshop  
let's find someone to sit with that is as far as  
possible from West Virginia. We found these guys  
from Washington, and we sat down and have been  
great friends ever since.

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It speaks to the value of attending the  
workshops and getting to know other people  
because Dan is a great professional and has been  
a good friend. I would have never had a chance to  
cross paths with him if it wasn't for that lunch at the  
workshop.

Dan is in his third year as Associate  
Athletic Director at Seattle Pacific. Before that, he  
was 20 years on the communications staff at the  
University of Washington, and prior to that, he was  
on the other side of the fence in the media, five  
years working for the Associated Press, covering  
all the professional teams in the Seattle area,  
including the Seahawks.

So I really appreciate his willingness to  
moderate today and all our panelists. I'll turn it  
over to Dan Lepse, from Seattle Pacific. Thanks,  
Dan.

**DAN LEPSE (MODERATOR):** Thank you,  
Shelly. I guess it's to my benefit you couldn't find  
anyone from Alaska or Hawaii at the CoSIDA  
convention.

I'd just like to say thanks again to Shelly  
and to Mike at TRZ and Barb Kowal and everyone  
else at CoSIDA for setting up this session.

Today's topic is Collegiate  
Communications Issues and Challenges From an  
NFL Perspective. Boy, do we have an NFL  
perspective. I'm pleased to present four veteran  
PR professionals from the NFL. Many of what they  
do with media organizations mirror what we do. So  
I hope we'll gain some insights.

We already have a few questions for the  
panel that we'll address before taking questions  
that come in. But if you do have a question,  
please feel free to e-mail that to  
[Barbkowal@cosida.com](mailto:Barbkowal@cosida.com).

As we introduce each of these individuals,  
I'd like them to talk briefly about what they do  
during a typical game week. First off, I would like  
to thank Michael Signora for arranging this panel.  
Last year Michael was named the NFL's Vice  
President of Football Communications. In that  
role, he oversees all football publicity efforts for the  
league along with directing media operations for all  
NFL events, including the Super Bowl and the NFL

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Michael previously served four years as the league's Director of Media Relations and International Communications, and he attended Penn State. Michael, thank you so much for joining us.

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** Thanks, Dan. Happy to be here. In terms of a typical week for the football staff at the league office, our goal is to help keep the media's attention on the field. We know that's what the fans are most interested in, the game on the field. That's what we want them to be talking about. That's what we want them to be focused on. So everything we do in terms of publicity during a typical game week is focused on that goal.

So to give you a quick overview, if we start with Tuesday, that's when we issue our weekly preview, which is an overview of the coming week. We have capsules that preview each game individually. We have AFC and NFC Notes that focus on key themes or trends by conference.

We get into Wednesday, and we have Players of the Week, the Injury Report and the What to Look For release, which is milestones and achievements that might be coming up. Thursday we have our Injury Report. On Friday we put together a document called Tweets of the Week, which is some of the top football-related tweets that we circulated from the past seven days. We collect them in one document and send them out again.

On Sunday nights we distribute our Seven From Sunday document, which is a look at the top seven statistical performances from that day's games. And then on Monday, we have our What to Look For – Look Back, which is focused on the top achievements of the past week. On Tuesday we start that cycle all over again.

So basically everything we do is geared to keeping the attention on the field. And, of course, with the advent of new media, there are more and more outlets for this content to be seen by the masses. So that's something we definitely try to take advantage of.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thanks so much. Now I think on that same topic, we'll get a team perspective. Our next panelist is Derek Boyko, who's in his 12th season as Director of Media Relations for the Philadelphia Eagles. Twice Derek and his staff received the coveted Rozelle Award from the Pro Football Writers of America to

honor the top football PR staff. He's a graduate of Canisius. Derek, thank you for talking with us.

**DEREK BOYKO:** Thank you. I'll give you four talking points, four bullet points on this subject. The first thing we do entering a new week and a new game and a new opponent is to anticipate the trends, the issues, the controversies that will surround the upcoming game.

Once we have those figured out and can relay those to both the players and the coaches, we'll prepare them for those topics during each day of the week, whether it's Monday with our head coach or on Wednesday for his press conference or for any of the player interviews or press conferences that they may have. We will then relay those to them and give them appropriate responses, if necessary, or just pitfalls to stay away from.

The third thing that we would do is arrange those interviews and pitch items that we would take care of throughout the week. So our interviews will consist of local TV, radio, print, internet, as well as national interviews. We'll set those up and prioritize which ones are most important throughout the course of the week.

And the last thing that we would do is try to pitch items that we want to get out and integrate into the coverage this week. Obviously, there's going to be topics that we would like to stay away from that we can't, but in the meantime, if we can still have a chance to integrate some positive trends or off the field items that we're working on for a particular game, we like to integrate those.

So those are the four main things we try to generalize throughout each week.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thanks so much, Derek. Appreciate that.

Our next presenter is Ted Crews, who is in his 13th season in the NFL and his second as Senior Director of Communications for the St. Louis Rams. He's also worked with the Atlanta Falcons and Carolina Panthers. Ted is a South Carolina State graduate. Welcome, Ted. We appreciate you joining us.

**TED CREWS:** Thank you very much. I appreciate you guys having me. Since this is CoSIDA, I've got to give Bill Hamilton, who was the SID that introduced me to PR at South Carolina State, a shout out. Wanted to make sure I did that.

Kind of echoing what Derek said, I couldn't agree with him more. Basically, you split the week up to me in a couple of sections. You use Monday

as a day to decompress from the game that you just played with your coach, with his press conference. So you spend Monday morning preparing for that, getting all the stats and information from the previous week, and you kind of flush that out on a Monday with your coach's press conference. If you've lost the game, you generally have to open the locker room and make your players available to put that game to rest.

And then you spend Tuesday doing what Derek said. There aren't any players in the building, so you spend Tuesday transitioning from the previous week's game, preparing for your next game by getting those trends and those stats and familiarities between the teams. You work those things through, and you also get your weekly release done to send out to the local and national media as well as the broadcasting crew that's covering your game that week.

On Wednesday and Thursday, you have your open locker room sessions with your media. You have your conference calls with the opposing team, generally with your head coach and your quarterback. So you spend those days preparing for those, as well as, again, to Derek's point, promoting your message for the week and also anticipating what messages are going to naturally take their course based on your opponent and your record at the time.

On Friday you're really transitioning from the work week into game preparation, and that usually consists of the broadcasting crew coming and doing a production meeting with selected players and coaches. And then, obviously, the whole build-up is getting ready for game day and anticipating that day and what can come out of it.

So that's pretty much a peek into the week.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thank you, Ted. I was going to mention him in your bio, but I thought I'd keep it brief. Thanks for giving props to Bill Hamilton there.

**TED CREWS:** Absolutely.

**DAN LEPSE:** Our final panelist is Patrick Smyth, in his eighth year with the Denver Broncos and second as Executive Director of Media Relations. He also worked with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Philadelphia Flyers in the NHL. He worked three years in the Gators SID office. Patrick, thank you so much for joining our panel.

**PATRICK SMYTH:** Thanks to you all and everyone at CoSIDA for including me on the call. I really look forward to being a part of this.

As Derek Boyko and Ted Crews addressed, really most of the 32 teams have a similar structure with regard to scheduling their weekly availability. As Derek pointed out, the week for the Broncos starts out with listening, and that's anticipating story lines, potential issues that could be out there presented by either our opponent or a situation that the team is in or a player injury, those kinds of things. Also, we take into account players in heavy demand in terms of minimizing the media obligations and enabling them to be focused on the field. So those are the kinds of things we go to.

On Monday our coach will be available, similar to a fireside chat, very informal availability, seated with our press, recapping the previous game and injuries, those types of things.

Tuesday, heavy administrative day, focused really on our weekly release, scheduling our interviews, and also assisting our Football Operations staff with any of their needs in terms of statistics and other various projects.

Wednesday is the heaviest media day for us. Again, head coach and quarterback availability, and it's -- we really look at that day as an important day for us, setting the tone for the week, and it's a tremendous opportunity for our head coach and key players to set the climate for our media, who are going to be in our locker room for the next three days, talking to our team. Our head coach will talk to the team that morning about potential media questions and topics that are going to come up. But heavy opponent preview day, busy day with conference calls, open locker room period.

Thursday, similar availability. The one addition we have is our offensive, defensive, and special teams coordinators are going to be available to our media in a group setting.

Friday is lighter. Kind of a mop-up day for us. Lighter media crowd. We do contractual radio interviews. A lot of times production meetings are on a Friday or a Saturday.

And game day is obviously a heavy day for us in terms of media demand and the post-game with numerous group and one-on-one interviews taking place.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thanks so much. We appreciate it. Now we've got other questions that we'll address. I'll have each of you answer them all, but I'll ask it to you directly just so our transcript people can keep track of who's speaking.

So first question, let's start with Michael.

How does the NFL maintain a consistent messaging strategy among all of its teams and entities?

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** I think the key, Dan, is that we talk all the time. So we're in constant communication with the clubs on issues of importance. We're exchanging information. We're exchanging ideas, and that's really the key factor in maintaining the consistent message, just by talking and by communicating with each other.

When we get a question from a media member that involves a specific club, before we respond, we'll be in touch with the club, make sure that they're aware of what issue has come up and what we're hearing, and then let them know how we plan to answer it.

So we really work seamlessly with the clubs to make sure the message is consistent across the board.

**DAN LEPSE:** Derek, anything to add to that one?

**DEREK BOYKO:** The only thing I could add -- and I would just tell this to Michael and reiterate it to you guys. The most important thing that the league office does is lets us know, as you said, of any time he communicates not only about our team but to the media that cover our team, so that we are not caught off guard when we see something in the paper or on a blog or when we're talking to a guy in the hall saying, hey, I spoke to Greg Aiello or Michael Signora at the league office, and I said this. I already know it.

I can approach it by saying, I got the league's message, and here's our message. So it's extremely helpful that the league does that, and the clubs appreciate it. I know I do.

**DAN LEPSE:** Ted, any insights on maintaining that consistent messaging strategy?

**TED CREWS:** I would echo that Derek said. I think the league does a tremendous job, and they're a tremendous resource for us at the club level. And what we do for a living is communicate, and I think we communicate through over communication. I know there's plenty of times where I'm not sure about something, and I'll pick up the phone and call up to the league, and they'll give you guidance that's consistent with what the other 31 teams are doing.

Also, they do a great job, if there is a trend or if there is something that is becoming an issue for the writers, they'll pose a question to all of us, do we think that it's necessary to change or to do or implement? And so, again, I just think we do a

great job utilizing each other, but more us for them as a resource.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thank you. Patrick, anything to add to what the others have said on this topic?

**PATRICK SMYTH:** We're extremely fortunate to have the league office, Mike Signora and his group, as such a strong presence and resource for all the clubs. I think, particularly as we've seen throughout the labor situation that all the teams have been dealing with, it really helps to have a synergy among the 32 teams and multiple individuals, clubs, executives, et cetera, enforcing a consistent message is really an effective way to communicate.

That's really helped us, the regular communication aspect of it. There are no surprises for teams. We're always in contact with the league office.

Each conference has an information manager, the AFC and NFC, who is kind of a direct contact for the 16 constituents in that conference, and there's never a time when we're unable to get guidance or clarification from the league office, which is very beneficial to the teams.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thanks so much. Now, Patrick, I think I'll switch you from clean-up hitter to leadoff on this next question. Do you have any training sessions for athletes to help them use social media effectively? And are there any procedures in place for when there are issues with athletes and social media?

**PATRICK SMYTH:** We do have several training sessions on a group level and also individually with our players in utilizing social media. I think we approach it from the viewpoint of it can be a tremendous resource in reaching fans directly, engaging your audience, and even for the players individually building their own brand, but there are also a lot of risks associated with it.

And it's important, just like when you put them in front of a backdrop behind a microphone, to know how to use it the right way. We go through, and we talk to our rookies as a group in early May, when they first arrive here, and as part of our media training presentation, we spend extensive time on social media, showing them real world examples on how to use it correctly as well as times when their peers may have made mistakes.

We try to just let them know that whatever they say, there's going to be consequences, and

everything's on the record. You can't take it back. And I think that the biggest thing that we teach them on a social media front is the brevity associated with Twitter, where there are 140 characters, or even on Facebook, there's no room for context or tone. So it's very easy for things to be taken out of context. And once it's out there, it goes very quickly.

Also, the fact that our players are sending these messages out from the comforts of their phone or at home, those kinds of things, it presents a false sense of security. So they need to have caution, and also again, we emphasize to them that someone is always watching them. Whether it's the media, teammates, fans, front office, or even somebody who would want to see your location, if they wanted to harm you. I mean, those kinds of things are real concerns for teams.

In terms of situations where a player has made mistakes on social media, we've talked to them. We've had circumstances where a player maybe has put something out on YouTube or Twitter that's going to be taken the wrong way. Typically, we've found, when you're honest with them and bring it to their attention, they want to fix it, and their mistake wasn't made out of malice or anything like that. It was just an honest mistake, and we can't assume that their level of awareness on these subjects is as great as ours at any point.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thank you. Ted, how do you handle social media and athletes in St. Louis?

**TED CREWS:** You know what, I'd start with applauding the league again. They've done a tremendous job as our world, as we all know, has changed dramatically. It's become such a 24-hour news cycle business. They've put social media policies in place, and I think that's the place where it starts for us at the team level. There are certain things that players can't do on Twitter as National Football League athletes, which helps on game day, and that's a good starting point.

I think that here we've also incorporated social media training into our overall PR training, communication training courses that we also implement at the group level and then each player goes through a training as well.

The biggest thing that I try to relay to the players is every time they tweet something, they should assume they're tweeting it directly to coach and to their teammates and to their family because, obviously, it is a tremendous source to promote your particular brand as a player. It's also a great social tool to communicate with a broad

number of people at the same time. But it's like the written word. Once it's out there, it's out there.

And so we do try to relay to them how serious it can be if it's not used properly. And I think that, to Patrick's point, when a guy tweets something that's borderline or it's a little off base, you just bring him in. Really, with players, what I've noticed over the years is showing them an example of something really hits home. By showing them examples of their peers making mistakes or just-- you know, even if it's just borderline, because a lot of times, when you read something, it can be viewed a certain way. You're not sitting with somebody, and they're not looking at your face, your expression if you're laughing, none of that happens when you use Twitter or when you tweet. I only read the words. So, again, it's all education. We're all learning. And I do think that the league has done a great job in assisting us and putting policies in place.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thank you. Derek, would you comment on athletes and social media from an Eagles perspective.

**DEREK BOYKO:** Sure. It's hard in this position because the guys just said, and Patrick just kind of said all the things I would say.

The only thing I would add is we track -- we follow every player on our team that has Twitter. That goes without saying. You need to do that. You need to go through all the tweets every day and just make sure you know what they're saying. Some of them may be totally benign, but others may have some deeper meaning that we need to understand.

We meet with each player during the off-season. Obviously, not this off-season due to the labor situation, but we meet with each player to go over all of their media obligations, all of the media training that goes into that, and just talk to them about all the dangers and pitfalls.

I think the one problem with Twitter is, as these guys said before, I don't think players use the filter, the automatic filter they have when they're sitting in front of a camera or on a live radio interview, or sitting face to face next to a reporter. They don't use that filter when they're on Twitter sometimes, and I think they just need to be aware that you need the same filter of your words and your thoughts and what's really going through your mind needs to take place. That's something that we have communicated to them, that those words can be very, very dangerous if you don't take into

account that filter.

**PATRICK SMYTH:** And to add on to what Derek said, as he mentioned, there's no filter. There's no time for filter. The immediacy of it presents a lot of concerns because it's instantaneous, and when it's out there, you can't take it back. Oftentimes it's -- athletes sometimes are passionate and competitive, and they see something. And rather than go through the processes that they've been conditioned to go through when doing interviews and having that caution, they respond and it's out there. By that time, it's too late.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thanks so much. Michael, we'd like your insights on this but tailored a little bit for the NFL. I'm curious, do you do anything with rookies as they enter the league regarding social media policies? And also, do you deal at all with the players who show up for the NFL Draft, give them advice on social media aspects? Go ahead, Michael.

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** Yes on both those counts, Dan. I think it's important to note just philosophically from a league perspective, we think that social media can very effectively promote league and club initiatives, news, community relations activities, and a whole host of things that can really be very beneficial for everybody. So we're very positive about the impact social media can have on bringing us closer to our fans.

We also know that our fans love to engage in social media, and you can see that by the popularity of some of the different vehicles that we're talking about here. So all of those things are very positive.

To try to mitigate some of the negative consequences that can result when social media is not used properly, that's where we have as a league instituted policies to try to put some rules in place to govern some of this conduct. So in 2009, we instituted a policy with regard to the use of social media, and it covers really a whole host of different individuals and what they can and can't do. So league office employees, club employees, players, officials, et cetera, are included.

So for example, on game day, players are not permitted to take part in social media from 90 minutes prior to the game until the conclusion of their post-game media obligations. We want to make sure that a player is not going to take to Twitter, for example, in lieu of a post-game press conference. So rules are in place to cover that.

But overall, it's abundantly positive, the vehicle that we all have now in social media as being another way we can tell our story.

**DAN LEPSE:** Going to move on to another question. This time I'll start with Ted. What do you do when athletes don't want to meet their media obligations? And what role do agents play in this process?

**TED CREWS:** I'm assuming you mean from a team perspective during a week?

**DAN LEPSE:** Yes, sir.

**TED CREWS:** My approach has always been that you have 53 guys in the locker room that are all wired differently. And we try, my staff, myself, to learn all of our players. Get to know all of them, know how they tick. We generally do that during the off-season. This off-season is a little different.

But we try to go down to the locker room every day not to ask them for anything, but just to spend some time getting to know them. I know you're asking, what does that have to do with it? To me, when you get to the season, in my opinion, our job is, when we approach them, we're approaching them, yes, as a team employee and, yes, as somebody who needs something from them, but if we've done our job right, they trust us, and they know that we're bringing them what's been vetted through and it's exactly what we need.

Coach Spagnuolo has done a great job here making the communications aspect of their jobs important. I address the team probably four times a year about that. And so by the time we get to the regular season, most of our guys, they're very familiar with what they have to do. They need to be available when the locker room's open. They need to be available for production meetings. They need to be available in the locker room post-game. Those are the things that you need.

But you also have team requests and needs. You have radio shows for your team or website obligations and things of that nature.

In general, you just work it out with the guy. There are times when you have a player who's shy. He doesn't really like to do media, and that's okay, and you try to cater a media plan to his strengths. Obviously, we all know the most important players on your team are probably your quarterback, whoever your star player is on defense, and if you have any other lightning rod player. I mean, it's usually three or four guys that have more requests than everyone else.

And the league, again, has given us some leeway there. You don't have to make your quarterback available every day that the locker room is open. You don't have to do that. So you can work out a media schedule with your local media and that player.

And that's another part of it that's pretty critical. If you know that you have quite a few players who really don't enjoy the interview process -- and there are some of them. Most of them don't mind it. If there's a plan in place and if there's scheduling in place, guys generally meet those obligations.

And the times that I've had major issues -- when I worked in Carolina, I worked with a player who was a marquee player on defense, and he just really didn't want to be the focal point. It wasn't his makeup. He didn't really enjoy it. And I went to that player. He and I came up with a plan that was comfortable for him. I then went to our media contingent and kind of walked them through it. It wasn't that he was trying to skirt his responsibility. It just wasn't really in his makeup. So you get with your media as well, and you try to put a plan in place that makes everybody comfortable.

Sometimes the player isn't comfortable, but he has to do what he has to do. To me, that's when the relationship -- you lean on the relationship that you've built with the players. They see how you deal with them and the other players in the locker room, and for the most part, you're able to put a plan in place.

I think scheduling is important, that a player knows before he gets to the building that he has something that is critical, especially to the players that aren't really your go-to guys on your team, giving them advance notice.

And then it being what you say it's going to be. If you tell a player, hey, I need you for 10 minutes, make it 10 minutes. I'll be the bad guy. You don't be the bad guy. I think that's how you build credibility within your locker room, and that's how you build credibility with your players. And I think that allows you to get things done.

In terms of the agent, I don't like to work with the agent. They have their own relationship with a player that's different than mine. I have never called an agent to try to help me get a player to meet his media obligations. The only time I work with a player's agent is if they're trying to get the player to do things that aren't really in the best interests of the team during the season. That's the

only time I generally have conversations with agents.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thanks for elaborating, Ted. Patrick?

**PATRICK SMYTH:** The second part of that question with regard to the agents, our department approaches that potential issue as if it's taking place on team premises, it's under the jurisdiction of the Denver Broncos. If there's an issue with the player and the media, it's the responsibility of me and my department because, if there is a problem, our team president or our head coach, they're not going to be looking for the agent. They're going to be looking for me.

So as Ted said, the obligation is on the team. That's our approach in terms of handling any issues with regard to an athlete who's not meeting their obligations.

In terms of working with athletes to make sure that they're cooperative with the media, it starts with trust in relationships. Just like a coach, if your players see that you care about them and you can help them become better at what they're doing, they're going to be responsive.

And when you establish that trust and your players -- sometimes we often, when we talk to our team, one of the first things I tell our players is we work for the Broncos with the media, not for the media with the team. And that every interview that comes across our desk is a request, it's not an order, and we will not bring it to them if it doesn't serve the player individually or serve our team collectively or the NFL or any cause that's important to them.

I think we try to tell our players, if we have a guy who's difficult with the media, the fact that doing an interview request benefits the media in any way is a coincidence. It's not why we're doing it. We're doing it because it helps you, helps our team, helps the league. Those are the kinds of things, the educational process, whether it's a guy who doesn't want to do a TV production meeting saying, well, 'why should I sit in a boardroom talking with these announcers when it's not on camera?' Sometimes you need to tell them the audience that the television networks are reaching or the fact that the enormous amount of money that these television networks give to clubs as part of the TV deal that roughly equates to the salary cap, which is what our players are paid.

And the other thing, when we have players who are difficult, we try to tell them, our goal is to

be a championship team. We need to have an atmosphere here in our building, in our locker room with our media that is conducive to winning. The more we win, the more they're going to be here. If we can't deal with them now, how are we going to deal with them that Tuesday in Indianapolis on Super Bowl Media Day when there's 2,000 people, in terms of managing the distractions and making sure you say the right things and remembering your audience, those kinds of issues that could come up.

And we'll tell our players too, it's never about the writers who you're talking to. It's the other audience. It's your fans, obviously, your owner, your coaches, teammates, community, peers around the league who are turning on NFL Network in their cafeteria and seeing how you present yourself.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Michael, I wonder if you could give us the NFL's perspective on athletes not meeting media obligations.

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** We often hear about it, Dan, when it gets to the point that the media feels like they're frustrated and they haven't been able to get anything done on a local level. They'll call the league and try to have us intervene, and the first thing we always do is say, 'well, have you worked with Ted? Have you called Ted to try to work it out? Have you talked to Patrick about it? Have you talked to Derek?'

Occasionally, we'll get, 'well, no, we just decided to come to you.' At that point, we send them back to the team. It's always easier -- as the guys have described, it's always easier if it's something that can be handled locally without the league getting involved.

In some cases, media will go to the club, and they still may have issues. So then they come to us. Our role at that point is to try to help the PR directors, and by design, the league is playing the bad guy. So oftentimes, if a player has refused to talk to the media, what will happen is they'll get a warning letter from the league office, usually from me, describing the violation that has occurred and then reviewing what their cooperation needs to look like.

So we'll mention that their player contract stipulates they cooperate with the media. We'll point out the Media Relations Policy requires them to be available to the media four days a week in the open locker room setting, or whatever is appropriate for that individual instance.

Before we send that letter, we are always in communication with the club and the PR Director. So I will be in touch with Ted to tell him, 'hey, we're going to send this letter. Does this have all the points we need to make?' And usually, a letter like that can help the PR Director and reinforce the message so that Derek and Patrick and Ted can be the good guys. They are trying to work with the player and make that player understand why it's in his best interests to cooperate, and then here comes an independent letter from New York verifying what they're saying in terms of the need to cooperate.

So that's really our role. It's not usually to get involved with individual players directly. It's more to help support what the team is doing. Now, there have been cases when certain players have called us directly, and that's fine. We will engage them directly, and we will support everything that the team is trying to get accomplished.

**DAN LEPSE:** Derek, we'll go to you. Do you have anything to add to this topic?

**DEREK BOYKO:** The one thing I will add on this topic, the challenge for us most times is when a player does not want to speak to the media after a game in which he's had a -- either caused us to lose or had a bad play or missed a field goal or dropped a key pass. That's a challenge.

But what the NFL has set in place is this cooling off period of 10 minutes after a game. And what I try to do is talk to my assistants, and we'll come up with -- in these cases, we'll come up with a strategy on how we're going to deal with the player that really had a tough game. We know the media's going to want to speak with them. Let's get to that player during those 10 minutes, as tough as that may be, and say, listen, we're going to need you to speak to the media. You had a tough game. What's the best way we can do this? We'll give you time to cool off. We'll give you pointers on how to do this. Nine times out of 10, that plan works.

What players want more than anything is some direction. They don't want them to just -- they don't want to just have to figure out on their own and just kind of do it haphazardly. We find, if you give them some direction, you give them some pointers, you give them some talking points on what may have happened, I think that's the best way to go about it. We're fortunate to have that time before the media barges into the locker room and barges right to that guy's locker and he's kind

of caught off guard as to what to say at that point.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thanks so much. Our next topic, we're going to talk a little about websites. As they've grown, perhaps the goal of websites has changed. In a recent northwest AP sports writer meeting we had here, a writer from the official Seattle Seahawks website, he mentioned that their web content is designed to supplement the media's content, but he mentioned some other clubs don't see it that way, and they view it more as they prefer to break news on their website.

I'll start with Derek and just ask, first, what your policy or what you view your website's goal as. And then has there been any backlash with any breaking news or scoops that may have appeared first on your website rather than been given to the media?

**DEREK BOYKO:** In Philadelphia, one of the largest challenges we face is the competitiveness between media entities in this market. Everybody wants to break the story first. Everyone wants to have it on their website or blog or Twitter feed first, and that includes our own website. And they put a tremendous amount of pressure on us, our department, our organization to be able to be the number one news source for our fans.

We do give them -- we tip them off minutes, not hours or a lot of minutes, five minutes or so before we'll announce it to everyone else, we'll give them that opportunity, hey, if you want to put this on the site, we're going to send this press release out in the next five to 10 minutes. We're able to do that. It works.

Is there some media backlash? There was at first, but now that we've done it and they've understood this is the way we're going about doing so, they've understood it, and they just try to beat each other instead of trying to beat our website because they know for the most part, our news will get out on that site first.

It's a major competitive advantage for our site and adds to their viability as a media entity.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thank you. Ted, I'd ask the same question of you about your website.

**TED CREWS:** I think in St. Louis we are working towards that. We're not quite where Derek is yet. When I got here almost three years ago now, we were playing from behind. In Atlanta, we had gotten to that point before I left where the website was definitely breaking news and doing things of that nature.

Here what we've tried to do is make sure content on our website is different and unique. So we've used podcasts and chats to provide some insight that our local writers don't have, whether it be sit-downs with our GM before the draft, whether it be a podcast with coach before mini-camp. I don't mean to make this unique to St. Louis, but for us as trying to catch up, we're trying to provide that here in our marketplace, and it's done very well. It's been good over the last season and a half.

Every Friday we have a player chat, a different player every Friday chats on our website, which has been great.

With regard to the breaking news, it's a very sensitive deal here. It's a one-paper town in St. Louis, and our beat writer has pretty much been the guy who's gotten everything. And trying to wean him off that and giving some stuff to our website has been somewhat of a challenge, but he realizes where we're headed. So we haven't gotten to the point where we do it with everything that happens, but we kind of pick and choose our spots where we'll do something on the website first and then send it out to everyone else. And sometimes we just do a normal releasing of information.

But our goal has been really to get some unique behind-the-scenes type of content that only our in-house people will get. We had our main writer for our website in the draft room last year when we picked Sam Bradford, and he was able to write kind of a first person account from being in the room. So we've been trying to do unique things like that to drive traffic to our site.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thank you, Ted. Patrick, could you talk a little bit about the Denver website and your objectives there.

**PATRICK SMYTH:** We've placed a heavy emphasis on building our internal and social media. I think it's important for us. One of our big initiatives is to establish ourselves as the number one authority on the Denver Broncos.

And there may have been a time when teams had issues with something written in a newspaper or something that was said on the news where the editor or station manager may have said, you know, if you don't like it, you can start your own paper, start your own TV station, and that's essentially what we're doing. We're delivering our news direct and personally to our fans, not like a billboard, but in a way that promotes engagement through our blogs and

message boards and allows them to participate in a discussion. I think that's important, an important part of it too. We're not just throwing stuff out there. We want to have a dialogue with our fans.

And also, we've seen our website is a tremendous resource for us in terms of listening to them and seeing what's important to them as they're posting comments on these blogs or participating in live chats, posting on message boards. It's great for us to be able to hear them, listen to them.

But it's also an approach that we've taken with our internal and social media, they're not a shortcut to what we're doing, and they're meant to complement, as Mike said, complement our efforts with traditional media because the reality is there are large parts of our fan base that get their news exclusively from newspapers, and that Denver Post masthead is very powerful, and it's absolute credibility. Most people get their news on television.

So we have to reach out to those two outlets and radio, and we're getting better at that. We want to have a synergy across our internal media, what we're doing on our website, doing on Twitter and Facebook, and also our efforts with the media who are here connecting directly with our fans every day.

We've done a lot of exclusive content on the website recently that's been received very well by our fans. When we interviewed for our head coaching hire, we did interviews with our website producer Chris Hall, did interviews with all the candidates out here. And we showed a little B roll from the actual interview with our owner and John Elway and team president in the interview room. These things, they're easy ways to bring your fans a little closer to what you're doing, and they're not compromising anything competitively or from an image standpoint.

Our fans are invested in the Broncos financially and emotionally. And anything we can do to improve the relationship and bring them in, that's our obligation. And I think the website and social media are very powerful mediums that enable us to do so.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thanks. Michael, I'd like you to talk just briefly about the NFL website and also do you have any guidelines for each of the club's websites?

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** It is up to our clubs in terms of how they want to craft the product and how they want to reach their fans that way. So it's

not something where we mandate a certain degree of content needs to be on the club websites.

The area that the clubs can really distinguish themselves in terms of from other websites that are in the market and are trying to do some similar things is through video content. The team websites have access to a whole array of video content and footage that other websites do not have. That's one factor that distinguishes those websites, the team websites from any other websites that are out there covering our sport.

Now, in terms of guidelines from the league, it is up to the clubs to determine the tone and tenor that they'd like their website to take. As with many things, you'll have very different styles and different types of content out there on each website, different tones, and that's fine. What's right for one market might not work in another.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thanks. Michael, I'm going to go back to you. I have a question from online, a real quick one. Someone mentioned trying to get in contact with NFL communications staffers or club staffers about getting updated photos of former players and all. And they said, the contact information isn't always on the website and all for media people. Is there a central location for this, or what's the best way for someone to go about contacting league personnel for things?

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** NFLmedia.com is our website for the media. Any of your members may access it. It's very easy to set up a user name and password, and then that would give you access to all of our policies, procedures, different publications, as well as a section there that has contact information for our department here at the league office and then the public relations directors at all 32 clubs.

So that is the best place to get that information, NFLmedia.com. And, of course, anyone could also reach out to me directly and I'll be happy to provide whatever contact information is needed.

**DAN LEPSE:** I have one other quick online question. I'm just going to go down the line and have you each give a quick response to. I'll go ahead and start with you, Michael.

As NFL PR people, how do you go about getting to all the players and coaches? Are you invited into staff meetings with the staff or team meetings? Michael?

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** We have rules in place. Take, for example, media training, that's

something that the league as part of the media relations policy has made mandatory. So teams have to conduct media training for their players. They have to conduct a separate media training session for rookies. There has to be a team meeting about media relations and dealing with the media in training camp.

We put that policy in place, and then we work through the PR directors at each club on actually implementing it. So it's not someone from New York that's necessarily traveling to St. Louis or Philadelphia or Denver, it is the folks in those local markets implementing the policies that we put in place.

We are really working through the teams and in very, very close, daily consultation with the PR directors.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thank you. Derek, are you invited into staff meetings or team meetings? How do you go about getting in contact with players and coaches?

**DEREK BOYKO:** In a typical off-season -- this one isn't typical -- we meet individually with each player, as I had said, and go over many different parts of our job and what the media obligations are and their trepidations with the media, if they have any. So we'll do that individually. It's a great process that's netted us a lot of good favor with the players because they feel the one-on-one attention is something that they don't normally get.

The other methodology of speaking to the players is meeting with the rookies as a group during the spring, which, obviously, it hasn't happened this year, but in typical years it has. And during training camp, I meet with the entire team, players and coaches, to speak to them broadly about media issues and what we're trying to accomplish as a staff and as an organization.

And then just throughout the year it's our job to develop relationships with the players in our locker room, with the coaches on our team, and with the media. That's the life blood of what we do, those relationships with the players, coaches, and the media that cover our team.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thanks so much. As we close, I just want to have each person on the panel here interject something, if there's something you would have liked to share but you didn't have an opportunity to, or if you have one tidbit of something that might help people in the SID profession. So starting with Patrick, anything you'd like to mention?

**PATRICK SMYTH:** Just the one thing I'd like to add, Michael Signora said, discussing the websites and particularly the video growth, what the league has done has been great for teams in terms of the restrictions that the league has placed on non-NFL websites and video content -- restrictions that really have enabled the team website to become the definitive video source for your team.

Team websites are the only outlet out there, team websites and NFL.com, that can archive video interviews or highlight packages of various players, and also there's the archive rule, but there's also the 90-second a day rule that the league has placed on television stations. They can't do it on their websites beyond 90 seconds.

It's driving a lot of traffic to team sites and presenting a lot of opportunity. Looking at our own website, by far and away, the video content area is the one that's shown the most growth and promise and we really put a lot of resources into continuing to build that, thanks in part to what the league has done in enabling us to establish ourselves as such a great authority in that area.

**DAN LEPSE:** Patrick, thanks so much for participating today. We really appreciate it.

**PATRICK SMYTH:** Thank you, guys.

**DAN LEPSE:** Ted, do you have anything you'd like to add in closing?

**TED CREWS:** No. I really appreciate the call. Thanks for having me on.

**DAN LEPSE:** You're very welcome. Derek, anything you'd like to add?

**DEREK BOYKO:** I think the one thing I want to say to all the college SIDs, is thank you for preparing these players that come into our league with the media training that you do. A lot of guys have mentioned that they have been coached up by you folks at the different colleges around the country, and it really helps us a lot. I just want to say a collective thank you from all of us here because it really makes a difference as they head into the pros.

I know there are different challenges and different markets that they have to deal with such as Philadelphia compared to a smaller collegiate market, but the same principles always are there. I think you guys do a great job in preparing them for life beyond college football. So I just want to say thank you.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thank you very much, Derek. We really appreciate your time

today. And lastly, I'd like to thank Michael for putting together this panel and ask, do you have anything you'd like to address? Anything to add.

**MICHAEL SIGNORA:** Thanks, Dan. Happy to take part. I would just echo Derek's remarks. We appreciate everything that you do certainly in the football area and beyond in helping these athletes prepare for their next step, whether it's in our league or something else. And so we greatly appreciate your efforts. And if there's ever a way that we here in the NFL can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. Thank you.

**DAN LEPSE:** Thanks so much. Really appreciate it.

**TED CREWS:** This is Ted. I'm sorry, Dan. I just wanted to say thank you as well to somebody who started actually in an SID office. I'm really honored to take part in this call and appreciative to be included.

The one thing that I wanted to add to what Derek was saying, and we all basically work in team sports. And one thing that, when I interviewed for this job and I spoke to coach Spagnuolo about and he allows me to do it during the season, is I sit in on every team meeting. So every time he addresses the team, he allows me to sit in the back of the room. And that's invaluable to me to understand what his message is to the team. It helps me formulate for him the theme of the week. And, again, I'm able to reiterate to the player, remember what coach said, hey, guys, remember what coach said our plan is for the week.

So I don't know if that's something that can happen on college campuses, but I think it's invaluable to know what your coach's theme and what his thoughts are in being able to articulate that to your student-athletes as well.

**DAN LEPSE:** Great. Thanks so much for adding that, Ted. We appreciate it. Appreciate all the panelists for taking part today.

As we close this discussion, I'd like to thank TRZ Communications team line, our official CoSIDA teleconference provider. And also thanks to ASAP Sports, our official transcript provider, and for Barb Kowal for coordinating it.

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