

Media Interactivity and Fantasy Sport

Thierry Jutel and Tony Schirato

Introduction

Many sport enthusiasts, supporters and spectators now experience professional sport exclusively via television, newspapers, magazines and new media (the internet, digital phones etc) coverage. The use of technologies and techniques that take you 'to the game', along with changes to rules that are designed to make professional sport attractive to a wider demographic, has produced a situation where professional sport now has two quite distinct audiences – what Bourdieu refers to as 'connoisseurs' and 'laymen' (Bourdieu 1991: 364). The connoisseur identifies strongly with a team or perhaps the game itself, almost at the level of an idealised abstraction, while the laymen will only identify with and show interest in a sport, team or player when it is fashionable to do so, or when the media hyperbolise an event or story. Consequently, sporting contests are watched by an increasing number of casual spectators who "see only violence and confusion" (Bourdieu 1991: 364). As Pierre Bourdieu writes, one only has to think of what is implied:

in the fact that a sport like rugby (in France - but the same is true of American football in the USA) has become, through television, a mass spectacle, transmitted far beyond the circle of present or past 'practitioners' ... to a public very imperfectly equipped with the specific competence needed to decipher it adequately. The 'connoisseur' has schemes of perception and appreciation which enables him to see what the layman cannot see, to perceive a necessity where the outsider sees only violence and confusion, and so to find in the promptness of a movement, in the unforeseeable inevitability of a successful combination or the near-miraculous orchestration of a team strategy, a pleasure no less intense and learned than the pleasure a music-lover derives from the particularly successful rendering of a favourite work. The more superficial the perception, the less it finds its pleasure in the spectacle contemplated in itself and for itself, and the more it is drawn to the search for the 'sensational' (Bourdieu 1991: 364).

The media's attempts to extend its sport watching audience to an increasing number of laymen have gone hand-in-hand with the development of strategies, aimed at the more literate and committed fans,

that seek to commoditise sport in a more detailed, lucrative and intensive manner (see Horne et al 1999; Rowe 1999; Whannel 2002; Crawford 2005). The most important of these is what is referred to as interactive dimension of contemporary media sports coverage.

Media Sport and the Lure of Interactivity

Media interactivity in the field of sport functions as both a lure and a way of transforming a viewer's relation to a game. At a basic level it brings audiences into the sports-media mix. So on the BBC Sport website, for example, there is a 'Have your say' facility (recently updated to a page called '606'), a boxed section which allows fans to offer brief general comments on contemporary sports events and issues; the live update of scores and incidents from European Champion's League and international soccer games interpolates television viewer's predictions and reactions; and from these facilities there is a link to a site where, while a game is in progress, those same fans can rank and evaluate (by providing a score of out ten) player performances. As the introduction to the site declares 'BBC journalists and 606 site managers contribute – but 95% are written by you' (BBC 2008). The comments are necessarily inane and the content irrelevant: the point is that the viewer is now part of the story and is authorized and encouraged to contribute even in the form of a contribution to a telephone 'rant line'.

The BBC site shows the extent to which major sport websites have taken on the pedagogical task of acquainting the masses with a variety of sports and their rules, skills, histories and cultures, and by extension turning them into sport fans and consumers - very much akin to what happened with newspapers in the early part of the twentieth century. Interactivity serves this purpose by turning the viewer-as-consumer into part of the text that is being consumed. The fact that the game is taking place is not enough; the response of the fans must be inscribed into the logic of the spectacle even if that response functions as a tautological assertion of the fans' presence. As a European Champions League game is updated play-by-play ('Shot by Ronaldo on Milan goal high and wide right etc'), the fans comments are not just interpolated into the information stream as forms of evaluation/meta-commentary ('United getting on top'; 'We need to make more of these chances'), but initiate dialogues and threads that generate their own mini-audiences and participants, with topics of conversation that are usually, but not necessarily, tied to the game at hand.

This is not specific to the BBC site. The Australian Football League (AFL) website 'Bigfooty' provides forums for fans of the teams, where participants produce threads on issues such as team selections, best players, trade news, injuries, club politics and anything else of relevance, as well as posting photographs and clips (of match highlights, brawls, etc). There is also a page for discussing/commenting on games 'as they happen', involving both sets of fans. If a match is particularly close, or informed by dramatic changes in the score line, then that will tend to be the focus

of comments. However, and as is the case with all mediated sporting contests, games can go through very dull periods where little or nothing of significance is happening; or even worse, the match can sometimes be over as a contest within the first half. This leaves plenty of time left to play, with the likelihood of a loss of audience interest, attention, involvement and presence. This is the main attraction and advantage of interactivity as an incitement to, and a form of, (self)consumption: watching oneself and other fans-as-correspondents in action – as part of the game, and more generally the media – takes up the slack when the game fails to deliver or generate excitement or passion. Instead there is ritual and/as entertainment. At an initial level participants will introduce themselves, briefly ('I'm Buddy, a Hawk's fan'), ask questions ('Is Mitchell injured?'), provide information often derived from the still privileged position of watching television coverage of the game ('Starting to rain'), and boast about their team or disparage opponents. But more often than not forms of involvement and comments take on a life of their own, usually tending towards the ludic: too many undifferentiated or naïve questions about the absence of a particular player or the state of the game, for instance, will produce mock versions and responses that continue throughout the game, almost as a parody of the 'chant and response' activities of live crowds at British football games. This is analogous to the situation with talkback radio, where the listener's reactions and opinions are given a public voice and airing; but it also mirrors the (inter)activity of events such as the Wellington (New Zealand) Rugby Sevens competition, which attracts large crowds (a high percentage of whom would correspond to Bourdieu's 'laymen') composed mainly of people who dress up and perform in an over-the-top and parodic manner (men dress as nurses, grown women as schoolgirls) – specifically for the amusement and entertainment of television cameras and their audiences. The unwritten contract which underlies the crowd's involvement is that of a requirement to perform as seen on television in previous tournaments or through the promotion for the tournament. During the tournament, the spectators in the stadium have no expectation and no means to pay attention to results, the tabulation of scores into pool standings, progression through quarter finals, semi finals and finals of the three parallel competitions (bowl, plate, cup) since no such information is posted even on the giant screens. And nobody seems to mind.

An interactive dimension of some kind is now a necessary aspect of every major sport website, and in the most popular sites the level of interactivity is becoming both more pervasive and sophisticated. The BBC sport website initially had one link on its home page where correspondents could send in to-the-point one liners about the event of the moment or day ('Sack the coach', 'Chelsea players are a disgrace'). But as the relatively basic mix of scores, reports and analysis has now burgeoned to include pages with photographs, tips and tactics tutorials, comic parodies, dietary advice, health and fitness programs, celebrity diaries, blogs, movable line-up predictors, gossip/rumours, and audio-visual clips (the latest goals, violent incidents, how to improve your butterfly stroke, etc) – most of which have an interactive facility (rate this article on a scale of 1 to 5, provide your own tips and advice).

This interactive facility is also becoming part of other forms of media sports coverage. The UK BSkyB's digital service, for instance, allows viewers to choose their own camera angles and frames, and split the screen to display different games or to show a sporting event and the various betting odds available. As an English Premier League game is being played, viewers can edit the coverage in real time. The particular technological mediation of sporting contests is used almost exclusively to facilitate and incite desire and consumption: in breaking down each minute or aspect of play, the spectator is thoroughly and pervasively integrated into what Baudrillard refers to as "a world of generalized hysteria" characterised by a "flight from one signifier to another" (Baudrillard 2003: 77). The BSkyB facility produces a hystericized form of watching, albeit in a very focused and detailed way: the viewer uses the available technology and her/his presumed literacy to break the game down into signs and sites of consumption (moments, angles, frames, patterns and tendencies) with the promise of returns (the pleasure of knowing, finding and predicting).

Fantasy Sport

The lure of interactivity is perhaps even more germane to fantasy sport – to the extent that it produces entirely new sets of relations between spectators-as-fans and sporting contests, and transforms what Jonathan Crary would refer to as the 'visual regime' (Crary, 1998) of sport spectatorship. Fantasy sport started in the USA, either forty (Shipman 2005) or just under thirty years ago (Isidore 2003; Smith et al 2006), depending on the criteria you privilege (earlier leagues were small and private, later leagues larger and more public, and were often located in and played through newspapers). The first leagues started with "owners compiling weekly stats with various sports newspapers, such as the Sporting News" (Isidore 2003: 1). Competitions moved quickly to, and are now played mainly on and through, the internet (see Shipman 2005): it had the advantage of being able to provide services "that would quickly crunch the stats and send out standings via e-mail or post them on a Web site", which gave the games "explosive double-digit growth through most of the 1990s" (Isidore 2003: 1). This initial level of growth has been maintained: a study conducted in 1999 estimated that in the USA almost 30 million people aged eighteen and over played some form of fantasy sport, which translated to 15% of that particular demographic (Zillgitt 2000: 1). Although the earliest games were started by baseball fans, currently the most popular fantasy sport is the National Football League (NFL) with "93% of fantasy players participating ... More than 60% play fantasy baseball, while other sports account for 30% of the market or less" (Woodward 2005: 13).

Fantasy players process all the available information and statistics and function as virtual managers who draft actual players, or bid for them in auctions, and form virtual squads/teams that usually replicate real numbers and positions (an ice hockey team based on the NHL will have centres, wingers, goalkeepers and defenders). The leagues then take the statistics from NHL games (goals, assists etc)

and transpose those to fantasy league games. While the Ottawa Senators are beating the Edmonton Oilers by five goals to three, the statistics generated by that game are being used (often immediately) in thousands of fantasy leagues to determine results. Many leagues are hosted by the sports section of large internet news sites (Yahoo, USA Today, Fox, CBS), although an increasing number are run by private providers as businesses; fantasy sport attract up to thirty million players in America alone (Shipman 2005). They are served by an increasing number of specialist magazines, television sports shows and internet file providers (Shipman, 2005: 2) who give advice on who to draft or pick up from the waiver wire, track injuries and statistical variations, and rank players week-to-week according to their fantasy (rather than their professional) value.

The factors that characterize interactive sports betting also strongly inform fantasy sport. In fantasy leagues virtually every aspect of a particular sport is potentially available, and is produced, as a site of significance. So what's the difference with betting? Providers such as Yahoo have default settings to which most public leagues adhere: a public ice hockey (NHL-based) league, for instance, will make use of obvious categories such as goal scoring and assisting, as well as reasonably cognate or logically-derived variations such as a player's plus/minus rating (based on whether their team scored or conceded goals while they were on the ice), power-play or short-handed points (goals and assists achieved with a numerical advantage or disadvantage), game-winning goals, and shots on goal. However they also include esoteric categories such as points-in-minutes (PIMs), which is predicated on a complete inversion of conventional logic. When a player receives a two minute penalty, say, he hands the opposition a considerable advantage (they are playing with an extra man for that period), so it makes sense that taking a penalty would constitute a negative score – but in most NHL-based fantasy leagues acquiring PIMs is a positive category. A fantasy sport participant watching or following a game can sometimes be completely oblivious to who is winning, or which players are playing well or scoring goals: instead they may be focused on animosities between players that could lead not just to minor infractions (tripping, high sticking), but to violent confrontations that will earn a player a five or ten minute penalty. Those penalties are translated in positive points for the fantasy game players. The production of game statistics that is inherent to the connoisseur's appreciation of sports have been translated into parallel scoring systems and the manufacturing of results which bare no immediate relation to the sanctioned games' outcomes.

This process has a strong temporal dimension, as well: fantasy managers follow the minutia associated with players, games and competitions over the course of the season, sometimes throughout most of the day, every day. In leagues based on sports that only play two or three days a week, such as the NFL, the English Premier League or Australian Rules, the focus is relatively condensed - and therefore particularly intense. During the NFL season on a Sunday (USA time) fantasy managers will shift back and forth from television sets to computers following and taking in different developments and information (touchdowns, field goals, yards gained by running backs, quarterback pass completions,

tackles and sacks recorded by individual defensive players, injuries, changes to the state of the game which necessitate the quarterback on one team to throw at all cost) – and this will be drawn out from the first kick-off (at 1pm eastern time) until the end of the last game that night (Pacific time). In leagues based on sports that are played most days (NHL, MLB) the level of frenetic intensity is not so much reduced as extended and subject to pulsations of intensity. There are days when all teams play, such as Saturday with MLB and Thursday and Saturday with the NHL. But even on days when there are only a few games being played (Sunday in the NHL, say) the significance of a particular category of scoring, and hence the level of intensity of focus and involvement, will fluctuate depending on the state of play in the fantasy competition: the real game may be decided by halftime, and consequently of little interest to conventional ice hockey fans and spectators, but to numerous fantasy players any development (a meaningless goal or penalty incurred) or even non-development (no goals would mean a shutout for a goalkeeper) is potentially vital.

While games, and the statistics they produce, constitute the prime concern of fantasy players, their extended temporal involvement and focus is not actually dependant on whether or not games are being played. Fantasy sport never rests: there are always texts, sites, information, news, trends, rumours, rankings, statistics, discussions, lists, trades and other developments to consider. The Yahoo sport site has a fantasy section which links to five different NFL-based games; major fantasy games based on college football, the NBA, the NHL, and the MLB; and less utilized games involving sports such as golf and car racing. The general fantasy page provides links to generic articles and sites, updated daily, pertinent to each fantasy game. For the NFL-based games there are articles on the best free agent/waiver wire pickups (players still available in most leagues), advice about who to trade away and trade for and what to offer, which under performing players are likely to improve, who to start and bench each week (depending on match-ups); and lists and rankings of players both generally (the top fifty or hundred players) and by position (for instance, the top twenty running backs each week).

League home pages provide information about the teams involved, their managers, progress scores and tables (which will vary depending on whether the league uses a rotisserie or head-to-head format), schedules, which players were drafted in what order, current rosters, recent transactions, messages ('smack' talk or boasting, exchanges, debates, suggestions), and more links to expert advice and information (injuries, competition for positions, 'stock market' fluctuations, scouting reports, statistics about player involvement). There are also a link to each team's own page (which contains a record of the players on the roster, upcoming games, past results and player positions), and another to all players in the league, searchable via temporal (last week, last month, this season, previous seasons, month by month each previous season) and generic categories including positions (all running backs, tight ends, linebackers), ownership status (players in my team or that of my immediate opponent, all owned players, all free agents) and rankings (pre-season and current). This news and information, as well as changes to the (fantasy) status of players, are all updated constantly, and so the opportunities

to pull off a coup are not just confined to daytime hours: fantasy players who are willing to get up in the middle of the night can often be the first to gain access to much sought after free agents, thus improving their squads and gaining an advantage over rivals.

Fantasy Sport: the World Turned Upside Down

This carries over to practices and sites of television sports spectatorship: when managers watch an NFL game between Detroit and Dallas, for instance, they may be torn between wanting Detroit (whom they support) to win, while hoping that the Dallas running back on their fantasy team scores a couple of touchdowns. At this moment a gap is established up here between two largely antithetical ways of seeing, as Michael Silver, a Yahoo Sport columnist, identifies after an interview he conducted with the St Louis Rams quarterback Marc Bulger:

Bulger ... talked about the way fantasy football has changed fans' perspective, reasoning that if he lost a game while putting up big numbers, 'I guess if you throw for a lot of yards, to some people, it's not that bad of a loss.' To real competitors like Bulger, that's beyond annoying, and Sunday had a whole lot of that: Bulger (368 passing yards), the Bengals' Carson Palmer (401 passing yards, six touchdowns) and Johnson (11 catches, 209 yards, two TDs) and the Panthers' Smith (eight catches, 153 yards, three TDs) shined in defeat. I know all of these players well enough to be confident that they're all furious right now, even as their fantasy 'owners' rejoice (Silver 2007: 3).

Bulger may be looking at the same games as fantasy players, but the way he understands, narrativises and evaluates them, the criteria he uses, and what he considers correct and proper spectatorship, are of a completely different order to what is practised in fantasy sport. His way-of-seeing is predicated on a conventional or traditional notion of sports spectatorship, of the kind that characterized American and world sport from the time of college football games in the early part of the twentieth, where fans-as spectators entered into and invested themselves in a fantasy-driven relationship with the team, player or even the game itself. Like the ethos that pervades the field of sport, this form of identification isn't necessarily dominated by, or reducible to, winning and losing. Some fans are attracted to a club precisely because it has a history of being uncompetitive, or because something about its history has been transformed into cultural capital; the 'curse of the Bambino' doubtlessly worked this way for the Boston Red Sox, whose legions of fans are now in the curious position of having to come to terms with the fact that they are currently more successful than the rich and powerful – and much hated - New York Yankees.

Fantasy sport, on the other hand, is more or less incongruent with regard to the field of sport, and its values, logics and imperatives – media and business inflected, or otherwise. As Silver and Butler make clear, there is no necessary articulation between the performance of a team or player in a real sporting contest and fantasy. In fact the opposite can sometimes be true: if a NFL team is losing badly or even hopelessly, for instance, then its quarterback becomes potentially very valuable because he'll have to throw the ball on just about every occasion – and in the process inflate his figures and those of his wide receivers. The gaudy statistics produced by Palmer, Johnson and Smith, and referred to in the Silver article, testify to this; but there are far more egregious examples, where in fact players who have performed so poorly that they are in danger of losing their place in real sport play a positive and sometimes decisive role in fantasy contests. This disjunction is even more pronounced in those NFL fantasy leagues that attach a positive value to conventionally negative statistics, and where fumbles, dropped catches, incomplete passes and conceding points are celebrated like touchdowns.

Fantasy Sport: from Connoisseurs to Laymen

People who take part in fantasy leagues are usually required to be highly knowledgeable, literate and enthusiastic sports fans, connoisseurs rather than laymen, who literally takes sport out of its world or field, and relocate it (players, teams, scores, activities) in an order and community of the literate. Shipman quotes Adam Slotnick of FoxSports to the effect that fantasy sport “is tremendously enjoyable and keeps many of us in touch to a greater extent than if the league never existed ... the fantasy sports world is a world that bonds individuals together into groups with similar likes and dislikes ... a family if you will’ (Shipman 2003: 3-4). And he goes on to make the point that:

Because of the length of a fantasy game – one sports season, so about six months – there is plenty of time for players who do not know one another prior to the season to interact and form lasting relationships. Since many leagues exist year-after-year with approximately the same set of players, these leagues can generate rivalries between players competing for the league championship as well as more sympathetic relationships between players near the bottom of their leagues (Shipman 2003: 4).

However the relatively exclusive status of fantasy sport is changing. Much like the rest of the field of sport, the growth in popularity of and participation in fantasy leagues has meant that:

media companies recognize fantasy sports as potentially profitable, and ... one popular fantasy-oriented Web site, Sandbox.com, enjoyed revenues of nearly \$7 million in 2000 after grossing just \$200,000 two years earlier. Other similar Web sites have been sold to investors for as much as \$20 million. CBS-owned SportsLine.com increased its profit by

more than one-third from 2002 to 2003 thanks to fantasy sports ... Overall, online media bring in an estimated \$500 million annually because of fantasy sports ... Corporate America has taken notice, too. Callaway Golf Company ... launched a Fantasy Golf Challenge in ... 2005 asking participants to ... select golfers they believe will win predetermined match-ups. The top performers each week receive prizes such as golf balls, custom-made clubs, or golf vacations (Woodward 2005: 11).

This incipient split in fantasy sport is manifested and played out on the Australian Rules fantasy website 'FanFooty', which provides updated generic fantasy scores (based on the scoring regimes used by most popular competitions), but divides its screen space more or less evenly between statistical information (updates of scores, goal scorers, injuries, number of possessions, free kicks etc) on one side and fan comments on the other. The site is useful for experienced and literate fantasy players from small, established leagues because it provides continuously updated (every thirty seconds, approximately two minutes behind real time) detailed match statistics that can be translated into any scoring format, no matter how esoteric. These fantasy players are probably present as visitors – simply because there is no other comparable service available for fantasy AFL. They are present as absences, however, from the accompanying 'Fan comments' section, which is almost entirely made up of neophytes playing the bigger, more recent, and simplified mainstream fantasy leagues. This is clear for three main reasons. First, their comments often specifically reference the leagues ('Supercoach', 'Dreamteam') that they are playing in, along with those particular scoring and transaction regimes (trades, player values, etc). Second, these leagues are marked by multiple, rather than specific, ownership of players (anyone playing in the 'Dreamteam' league can own the same player if they're willing/able to accommodate his monetary valuation within the general budget), and discussions often revolve around the advisability of adding a player, and the likely changes to his value based on statistics from the current game.

Perhaps the most significant indications of their status, however, can be found at the level of literacy and strategy. Generally speaking fantasy sport players tend to watch more sport than other fans (Woodward 2005: 13), so most participants will be relatively literate with regard to the sport on which fantasy league is based. With fantasy competitions, however, neophytes will make strategic decisions that are naïve or even illiterate, such as presuming that ability and cultural capital necessarily translates from, and is comparable across, real and fantasy sport domains. In their study of strategic decision-making in online fantasy basketball games Brian Smith et al (2006) concluded that "It was apparent that domain-specific knowledge use differed between novice and expert players" (Smith et al 2006: 354). One obvious point of differentiation was what they referred to as the "recognition heuristic", which in fantasy sport "translates into choosing athletes by virtue of name recognition" (Smith et al 2006: 354). They found that inexperienced fantasy players were more likely:

to create their teams using the recognition heuristic. Experienced players are able to use additional knowledge to choose athletes. Indeed, some players explicitly stated that they did not rely on name athletes when building their teams ... Some players simply choose athletes from their favorite NBA teams without considering their statistical performances. For instance, Houston Rockets fans might always select players from that team out of sheer devotion rather than looking closely at statistics to find athletes who might accrue higher points totals ... Such decisions are primarily based on loyalty to a city/team ... Recognition and team loyalty strategies are most likely to be used by novices (Smith et al 2006: 354).

The other form of strategic illiteracy found in the actions and discourses of novice players, frequently manifested on the 'FanFooty' discussion facility, is a lack of consideration of time and context. The participants who drop and add, praise and dismiss, and trade and acquire players 'on the spur of the moment', so to speak, are taken in by statistical aberrations and display a lack of understanding of context: a player may appear to be performing poorly in a game, but in terms of wider statistical information that performance may need to be re-evaluated if, for instance, it happened while playing against a good defensive team that consistently limited opponents scores. In short, the actions and discourses of these neophytes are, yet again, largely commensurate with Bourdieu's characterization of the sport fan-as-layman who is "drawn to the search for the 'sensational', the cult of obvious feats and visible virtuosity" (Bourdieu 1991: 364).

Conclusion

There is a strong continuity between fantasy sport and interactive new media sport, but there are also several crucial differences. First, while they are both informed by the same basic characteristics (bringing the audience into the activity, a hystericizing of spectatorship), in fantasy sport they operate in a manner that is more accentuated, pervasive and intense. Interactive websites and television allow audiences to become part of the spectacle/event (as commentators and analysts, articulating the voice of the fan group), and to make personalised decisions about how and what they will watch (game choices, multi screen options, camera angles, zoom functions etc). Fantasy sites and games not only move audiences/participants into the activity of real sport: to a large extent the game/sporting league, its players and their statistics function as the material on which the fantasy competition is based. In other words, while the principle of interactivity generally produces audience activity as complementary with regard to sport, with fantasy sport the original event is entirely vampirised.

Secondly, the same distinction applies to the issues of spectatorship and visual regimes. Although interactive television disposes spectatorial vision to look intensely, all the time, from every angle, at as

many incidents and activities in as many games as possible (theoretically in an attempt to increase the productivity of vision and to identify more detail and significance), in the end there is still a (visual) identification that binds the audience to the field of sport and its events. In other words, the self that is smuggled into the field of vision remains within the traditional role of the fan watching sport – even if the picture is now enlarged to include not just the event as visual object, but also the fan watching the fan watching (and to some extent, contributing to or even making) sport. There is certainly some kind of visual enhancement at work here. Technology not only disposes and facilitates continuous mobile vision, it also foregrounds watching as an active and productive process: the game that I watch is marked with and produced out of my work, my choices, my literacies. But I watch and enhance that sporting event largely within its own parameters and logics. This is not the case with fantasy sport: when I watch a NFL game as a fantasy sport manager the issue of what is significant or not is displaced from any conventional NFL regime or context. A two yard gain made by a running back, for instance, may be completely inconsequential as far as the state of the specific game is concerned, but it goes somewhere else, and becomes something else, in thousands of fantasy leagues. Moreover, the identity of that running back is extracted from the NFL team and taken to and spread, at a virtual level, just as widely. His affiliation with Detroit or Dallas is not irrelevant, but it is now largely intertextual: it functions, not with regard to itself, but as a trace (this is where he came out of when I drafted him) and a context (the team emphasises the passing game, so this running back will have limited value in fantasy leagues).

The third and most crucial difference between the two areas is tied up with the functional relationship new media interactivity and the distinction Bourdieu makes between audiences as 'connoisseurs' and/or 'laymen'. We suggested, at the beginning of this essay, that the media's attempts to widen audiences for media sport means taking the sporting event "to a public very imperfectly equipped with the specific competence needed to decipher it adequately" (Bourdieu 1991: 364). Media interactivity, in this context, has a number of important functions, all of which are designed to keep that wider audience attentive and interested, specifically in the face of 'violence and confusion'. As well as the obvious advantage of providing pedagogical tools and advice (visual and scriptural), interactivity provides the laymen with both the illusion of literacy-via-participation, and the ability to navigate away from the chaotic in order to settle on and enjoy what is known, understood and appreciated by the layman. Literacy-as-participation takes the form of the website inviting you in, as a participant and equal, 'one of us', and a member of the field (fan, analyst, spectator, enthusiast). The fact that the general viewer comments and contributions to the BBC website are completely inane and superficial only helps to naturalize that sense of belonging, since there is nothing (no performance of acuity, no opportunity for the highly literate to articulate literacy) to mark out or distinguish one contribution ('Great goal') from another ('We need to hang on'). Similarly with interactive television, what is offered, and is of particular value, to the neophyte is the performance and illusion of control – I may not understand particularly well what is happening, but I can make the game up to suit myself. This interactive facility also caters

to the inattentive viewer: if 'nothing is happening', they can switch from one game to another, split and re-split screens, or follow specific players until something appears or happens that appeals to them.

Fantasy sport constitutes a form of play-as-escape from what many connoisseurs of sport doubtlessly consider sport (both interactive and otherwise) has become (a commercialised, trivialised and hyperbolised media spectacle). However this form of escape that is increasingly being played out in and through the technologies and spaces of the media-as-business: consequently, fantasy sport is becoming mainstream, with large public and simplified public leagues, fantasy sport conventions and a Hall of Fame (Zillgitt, 2000: p. 1). In order to increase participation one-click fantasy games are being developed "that call for one or two minutes a day as opposed to the research needed to stay up on day-by-day fantasy leagues" (Passan 2006: 2). And a legal battle is taking place between fantasy sport providers and sport leagues over the requirement that the former pay licence fees to use statistics (Passan 2006: 1). All this points to "the transmogrification" of fantasy sport "into just another business" (Passan 2006: 2), aimed increasingly at the layman rather than the connoisseur.

Notes on the contributors

Thierry Jutel lectures in Media Studies at Victoria University, Wellington. He is currently completing a book on contemporary cinema.

Tony Schirato is a Reader in Media Studies at VUW. His most recent book is *Understanding Sports Culture*.

Bibliography

Baudrillard J (2003) *The Consumer Society* Sage London

BBC: Introduction to 606 (2008) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/606/5255800.stm>

Bourdieu P (1991) 'Sport and Social Class' in Mukerji C & Schudson M (eds) *Rethinking Popular Culture* (357-73) University of California Press Berkeley

Crary J (1998) *Techniques of the Observer* MIT Press Cambridge

Crawford G (2005) *Consuming Sport: Fans, Sport and Culture* Routledge London

Horne J et al (1999) *Understanding Sport* Routledge London

Isidore C (2003) 'The Ultimate Fantasy – Profits' *CNNMoney.com*

http://money.cnn.com/2003/08/29/commentary/column_sportsbiz/sportsbiz/index.htm

Passan J (2008) 'The Reality of Fantasy' *Yahoo Sports Website*

<http://sports.yahoo.com/mlb/news?slug=jp-fantasy042006&prov=yhoo&type=lgns>

Rowe D (1999) *Sport, Culture and the Media* Open University Press Buckingham

Shipman F (2005) 'Blending the Real and Virtual: Activity and Spectatorship in Fantasy Sport' *Centre for the Study of Digital Libraries and Department of Computer Science Texas A & M University*

<http://www.csdl.tamu.edu/~shipman/papers/dac01.pdf>

Silver M (2007) 'Morning Rush: Defiant and Dominant' *Yahoo Sports Website*

http://sports.yahoo.com/nfl/news;_ylt=AiYdWCSOw_lxl.HO.j7lhl5nYcB?slug=ms-momingrush091707&prov=yhoo&type=lgns

Smith B et al (2006) 'Decision Making in Online Fantasy Sports Communities' *Interactive Technology and Smart Education* 4 (347-60)

<http://www.personal.psu.edu/bks12/papers/ITSE.pdf>

Whannel G (2002) *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* Routledge London

Woodward D (2005) 'A Whole New Ballgame: How Fantasy Sport has Evolved in the Mass Media' *Dissertation for Master of Arts in Communication University of Texas Arlington*

<http://dspace.uta.edu/handle/10106/340>

Zillgitt J (2000) 'We Certainly Live in a Fantasy World' *USAToday.com*

<http://www.usatoday.com/sports/comment/jzcol53.htm>