

MEDIA

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MEDIA

The Public Relations Manual for the SYL has been produced to provide guidance and assistance to all teams in the SYL system. This manual summarizes the responsibilities and duties of those who serve as public relations contacts for teams affiliated with SYL.

Having a successful community-based team is much more than wins and losses. How well your city embraces your team -- regardless of its record on the field -- affects attendance, sponsorships and, ultimately, your organization's bottom line.

Many tools are at your disposal to help you stay in contact with the general public. One of the least expensive and most effective ways to do this is to utilize the media: newspapers, internet, television and radio. Taking advantage of opportunities with the news media starts with your ability to deliver your news to the media outlets in a consistent and professional way. This is especially true with soccer, a sport that is not readily accepted by mainstream sportswriters and editors. If they have to work too hard to get news of your team, it might not ever make the paper.

The most important thing to remember is that if you have questions or need advice please call or e-mail us. We are here to help you.

SOUNDBITES OF PR ADVICE

- Know what kind of stories fit in a particular newspaper and which stories will never have a chance to make it. For example, does your newspaper have room for feature stories, or is hard news your only chance for coverage?
- What do media want the most? Our experience tells us the media want compelling stories -- especially those with some interesting twists. With soccer, many times your best opportunity for placing a story is not soccer itself, but an activity off the field, which makes for an interesting feature that can run in a part of the newspaper other than sports.
- Make the media's job as easy as possible. Above all, success in dealing with the media depends on you. Do everything in your power to make their job easier so that the media know they can rely on your help, chances are you'll be able to get that desired coverage or place that big story.

NEWS RELEASES – The Most Important Tool in Dispersing Info

Press releases are a good starting point for building media interest in your team and studies have shown that nearly 60 percent of the editorial content of two of the nation's most respected newspapers, the New York Times and the Washington Post, were generated by news releases and other public relations efforts.

Do's Checklist

1. Put yourself in a reporter's role. What facts would you want for a story?
2. Write a news release only when you have something important to announce.
3. Write a headline that is to the point. (One line – two maximum)
4. Write your release in the "inverted pyramid" style, with the most important facts at the beginning to the least important in descending order.
5. Try to anticipate most of the questions the media would ask about your announcement.
6. Attribute the announcement to an official source (i.e., GM or Owner) other than yourself
7. Triple-check all the facts and other information for accuracy.
8. Include a release date, a contact name, phone number and e-mail address.
9. Edit your final draft so it's free of spelling and grammatical errors.
10. Release news only after you have obtained all the necessary approvals.
11. Issue the release on professional looking company letterhead with team logo and address.

Don'ts Checklist

1. Do not underline quotes. To draw attention to quotes, set them off in their own paragraph.

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2. Do not use overblown headlines. Two lines is standard, either with a two-line headline or a headline with a sub-head. Four lines is too much.
3. Editorialize or sensationalize, that's the reporter's job. In other words, don't write the story for them. Promoting or "pumping up" your team is to be expected, but a release should simply present the facts in an interesting way.
4. Criticize referees or league management. This reflects on your club negatively

News Release Terms

Disclosure: As your team's public relations director, you will often be privy to information that may never be disclosed. Make sure to ask what should not be publicized. A news release must be a complete story, because some publications may run it in its entirety.

Contact Info: Include information on whom to contact (usually the public relations director) and a phone number and e-mail address, so you can be reached if the media has questions or needs more details than your news release provides.

Dateline: Include the date the release was issued (and a date indicating when the information may be made public, if the dates differ). If the dates coincide, you may type: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE somewhere above the body of the release. A dateline (i.e., "TAMPA, Fla. (Nov. 13, 2001)--"), which tells the reader where and when the information is being generated, should open all releases.

Headlines: Unless the headline is obvious, you may want to write the news release first, then add the headline to the top. Remember to keep it succinct and to the point. It should grab the attention of the media without having to sensationalize. Cuteness and puns are not always appropriate and can often be confusing.

Quotes: Quotations should be used in most releases for a variety of reasons: 1) to lend authority to a statement you make or facts you submit in your release; 2) to add opinion to an announcement; and 3) to gain insight from an individual speaker. Some officials give their public relations directors authority to make up quotes for them. If you do, make sure all quotes are approved before sending out the final draft.

Style/Grammar: Grammatical mistakes can have the same negative effect on your appearance as factual ones. There are a number of stylebooks on the market, but since your news releases are most often directed at the media, we recommend the Associated Press Stylebook, which is available in major bookstores. Consistency in format and grammatical style will enhance your professional credibility and help you avoid the many pitfalls inherent in the English language. You may wish to develop and regularly update your own style sheet, so someone working in your absence will have a guideline and not stray from the norm.

Distribution: Each SYL team is required to fax or e-mail all news releases to the league office. If it's big news, we can send it out via fax and e-mail to our extensive national media list for wider readership. On the local level, find out if your media prefer receiving releases via fax or e-mail and compile a complete list for each for quick reference.

CONTENT: GET TO THE POINT.

Members of the media do not want to read a whole page or more to find out what your news is. Give them the basic news story in the first paragraph. If they want more they will read on. The most important details should come first with the least important last. In the first or "lead" paragraph, address the "five Ws" - who, what, where, when and why; ("how" is often called the sixth W) of the announcement. The reader should be able to get all of the basics by simply reading the opening paragraph.

LEAD PARAGRAPH CONTENT

POST-GAME

Opponent
Score
Outstanding
Individual performance
Attendance

PRE-GAME

Where & when
Opponent
Both teams' records
Key past meetings

GENERAL

What Happened
Who was involved
When did it happen

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Internet Operations

E-Mail

It is mandatory that every team have an e-mail address that is checked daily and can be used to send press releases. Media receive hundreds to thousands of faxes per day. E-Mail allows you to be certain that your release actually gets to the specific person covering your team and allows you to establish a web presence.

Website

A team website is the ultimate in media and fan service. Being graphically pleasing to the eye is good, but it is by far not the most important aspect of a website. The following items and features should be present on your site:

- Contact Info – address, phone, fax and e-mail
- Schedule with promotions (and scores as season rolls on)
- Link to SYL Website
- Ticket Prices
- News / Press Release Archive
- Statistics / Stats Archive from past years/postseasons
- Player bios
- Stadium information - Directions
- Link to www.us-soccer.com
- Photos
- Merchandise info (pictures & prices with a mailing address)

Your website can be a fantastic source for updated team information for the media, who need to look something up quickly, or for the team's fans. Fans are more likely to become involved if they are up to date on team news and details.

Submitting Changes to the SYL Website

The internet is the number one source of information for soccer. Our intent is to provide as much information as possible accurately on our website. The details about teams change and we will gladly change them for you. Please remember that there are often numerous projects or changes on a waiting list for the website, so please be patient. We will make the changes as soon as possible.

Submit the Change in Writing

Send an e-mail to kevin.mcGovern@usisl.com clearly stating what should be changed or print out the page in question and write in your changes and fax it to the League Office attn: PR Dept. (813) 963-3807. Faxes are not always high quality, so if you think we may have difficulty reading your changes, please attach a memo describing them.

Statistics

In order to get maximum coverage from media outlets, you should update team and player statistics the day after each game and make copies available. All key statistics (goals, assists, cautions, ejections, and goalkeeper information) should be generated from the official game score sheets.

At a minimum, player statistics should include games played, goals, assists, points scored, and minutes, goals allowed and goals-against average for 'keepers, but you can expand your statistical report as you see fit. While the league keeps official statistics for all the leagues, each team should keep its own statistics to compare against those produced by the Communications Department to ensure accuracy.

You may want to ask your media outlets for their requirements, because different outlets will go into more depth than others. Set up the statistics in a table that is easy to read, preferably using a computer spreadsheet application.

Assists: An assist is simply defined as any pass that directly leads to a goal. The key here is the word

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“directly.” The pass must lead directly to a shot that results in a goal. An assist is not given following a pass where a player dribbles on his own to elude several defenders before scoring. [Note: Unlike Major League Soccer, the SYL does not recognize double assists and will not include them in official league statistics.]

Scorekeeper: Since most of the important statistics come from the game day score sheet, it is important that the following guidelines are followed:

- Select a competent scorekeeper whose sole responsibility on the day of the game is to complete the media report.
- The scorekeeper should also have a firm grasp for the rules of the game.
- The team scorekeeper must print clearly and legibly.
- The scorekeeper should use a copy of a score sheet for tallies during the game and fill out the official carbon version of the score sheet after the game is over that includes real numbers.
- The official scorer should have a "spotter" who acts as another pair of eyes and consults with the scorer on marginal calls.
- When in doubt, the team coaches should be consulted

Final Check: Check the final score sheet thoroughly and fill in any missing information before you fax it to the League Office. Doing so saves everyone time and aggravation.

Calculating Goals-Against Average: One of the easiest but most unfamiliar statistics to calculate is goals-against average. It's a simple formula and it has nothing to do with the number of games, but is a function of actual minutes played in goal:

$$\frac{\text{Goals Allowed} \times 90}{\text{Minutes Played}}$$

Here's an example: John Swallen has allowed 29 goals in 2,397 minutes, so we calculate his GAA as $29 \times 90 = 2,610 \div 2,397 = 1.09$. (Round off the answer to two figures to the right of the decimal.)

SYL Media Guide

The SYL Media Guide is invaluable as a public relations tool, but it can also serve your marketing, advertising, operations and other departments. All media outlets, large and small, print, TV and radio, should get a copy. Hand it to them in person, if at all possible. Usually, these people are anticipating the book anyway.

In addition to distributing the media guide to media, think of anyone else who might want or need a copy. Existing sponsors will want to see the national scope of the league and will react positively when they see its place in the larger picture. Meanwhile, potential sponsors will see the professionalism the book exudes and could be swayed by it.

Friends, supporters and VIPs could be thanked for their efforts by receiving a complimentary copy. Failing all else, you could designate some copies for sale to fans, or offer a free media guide as a prize for fans at games. Even if someone uses the book once, it has served them well. And always remember--undistributed media guides do no good.

Media Guide Requirements

The single most important public relations tool that the league office provides to member teams is the annual Media Guide. But we cannot put together a book with information on over 100 teams without the

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timely assistance of each and every one of the teams.

Services

Stat Changes: All statistical changes must come directly from the home team. If the visiting team notices an error in the official score sheet, they must contact the home team and settle the matter. The home team is then responsible for faxing or e-mailing a memo stating the statistical change to the SYL Communications Department and the visiting team. It is important that the home team sends a copy of the memo to both places out of courtesy to the visiting team and so the change can be made promptly.