



Victory is Ours!
Narrative Reconstruction of Victory and
Exultation in Written Sports Reports

Jonas Nygaard Blom and Ebbe Grunwald

Email: barditi@unam.mx

Email: ebg@journalism.sdu.dk

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Abstract

The article presents a narrative and linguistic text analysis of the way Danish sports reporters reconstruct national victory and ecstatic exultation at Olympic sports events. Based on a case study of news reports (n = 73) from three consecutive Danish victories in the women's Olympic handball tournaments, 1996-2004, it is documented that the reporters use a variety of narrative and stylistic devices to reconstruct the victory and the emotional discourse of the event, most prominently a highly personal narrative voice, meta-commentaries, descriptions of ritual celebratory acts and figurative language that frames national unity. This leads to the conclusion that the reporters seek to transcend the narrative and stylistic clichés of regular sports journalism in order to reconstruct the extraordinary story and, presumably, make the readers (re-)experience the exultation of the event..

Contributor Notes

Jonas Nygaard Blom (1978), Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Centre for Journalism, Department of Political Science and Public Management, University of Southern Denmark. Main research areas include media language and broadcast journalism. He is currently co-authoring a book on language in the electronic media for the Danish public service channel, DR.

Ebbe Grunwald (1943), Associate Professor Emeritus, Centre for Journalism, Department of Political Science and Public Management, University of Southern Denmark. He has published academic articles and book chapters on the narrative of written news, journalistic genres, metaphors and other image-evoking mechanisms in the language of journalism. Important books are *Artiklen* [The Article] (2004) and *Sprogbilledet* [Images of Language] (2006).



Sport is in its essence about competing, about winning and losing, but it is also an allegory for social and cultural relations, “us” versus “them”, and common emotions such as exultation and disappointment.

Correspondingly, sports reporting is often based on culturally defined framing devices (Kennedy and Hills 2009:75), represented in formulaic narratives with heroes and villains acting in dramatic plots (Whanel 2002), and told by a narrator who embellishes and emphasizes the emotional excitement of the game (Yahov 1988 as cited in Carmelli 2001:4).

From this perspective, sports reporting can be seen not only as a representation of a given sports event, but also as a way of (re)constructing a drama and a set of shared social and emotional sensations experienced during the match.

This is of particular importance in written sports reports where the reporter has to describe an event which typically has been witnessed by the readers on television the day before. As Rowe (2004:127-128) puts it:

The written sports reports text, therefore, unlike the more immediate audiovisual form [...], is

reliant above all else on connotation, evocation, elaboration, embellishment and interpretation.

If the reporter does not succeed in adding these extra dimensions to his narrative, he risks telling the readers what they already know; i.e. pure redundancy.

This article studies the way Danish sports reporters overcome this challenge by way of a linguistic and narrative text analysis of the coverage of three consecutive Danish victories at the Olympic Games from 1996 to 2004 (Atlanta, Sydney and Athens) by the women’s national handball team. Specifically, the article examines how national victory at the Olympic Games is framed and reconstructed as a narrative in written sports reports, and how narrator and spectator exultation is expressed linguistically.

This specific case has been chosen for three main reasons: 1) the extraordinary achievement and news value of three Olympic victories in a row, 2) the massive public interest and press coverage of the events in Denmark resulting in a high number of match reports, and 3) the

national euphoria triggered by the victories which may have led to a strong framing of collective national identity.

The dramatic devices used to embellish sports events in TV commentating have previously been examined by Bryant, Comisky and Zillman (1977) and Morris and Nydahl (1985). This article expands on the subject by focusing on *written* sports reports where the journalist not only has to comment, but also reconstruct an event (Kayam and Kaufman 2011). The article should thus be regarded as a text linguistic contribution to a broader discourse analysis (van Dijk 1988) of media sport texts.

Emotional discourse

Sports journalism is often criticized for its superficial content (Rowe 2007) and rightfully so if quality is measured in terms of critical 'watch dog' criteria. According to the International Sports Press Surveys in 2005 and 2011 (Schultz-Jorgensen 2005, Horky and Nieland 2011) few sports articles feature angles on money, politics and social consequences, compared to match reports (30.7 %), performance stories (28.6 %) and competition previews (18.4

%). Furthermore, most sports stories use either one (41 %) or no sources (26 %) and focus predominantly on men (85 %) rather than women (9 %).¹ Also the stylistic quality of sports journalism is subject to derision (cf. Rowe 2006), especially the abundance of sports clichés.²

Sports journalism is, nonetheless, also able to recreate and even enhance the drama and emotions experienced at a given event (cf. *The Best American Sports Writing* series). In this respect, sports journalism, in particular sports reporting, should be assessed not merely on its choice of content and number of sources, but also on its narrative and rhetorical qualities.

What could be termed *the emotional discourse* of a sports event plays a pivotal role in sports commentating and reporting. As observed by Kayam and Kaufman (2011), sports reporters use a variety of rhetorical devices to arouse moods in the readers and resonate the excitement of game in an often highly subjective style (Yahav 1988 as cited by

¹ All percentages are quoted from Horky and Nieland (2011).

² A quick search on Google results in a variety of top ten lists and a website dedicated to the phenomenon.

Carmelli 2001:4). This type of reporting presupposes a set of shared social emotions that the journalist has to (re)construct in order to convey victorious exultation. Consequently, it can be argued that sports reporting is different from regular news reporting.

News reports are prototypically personal accounts of an event with varying degrees of narrator involvement, and it is often debated how personal the account may be and whether or not it is 'allowed' to be explicitly subjective. Steensen (2009:167) has remarked: 'The deeper the journalist is involved in the situation she is reporting from, the more important is visible subjectivity'.³

Sports reporters cannot be said to be directly involved in sport events, and they do not affect what is happening in a match. However, they are often highly involved in the emotional context of the event, experiencing the same sensations as the audience and viewers in national unison during an Olympic event. A high degree of personal involvement⁴ in the

³ Translated from Norwegian.

⁴ Roughly speaking, a journalist can either involve or detach himself (cf. Chafe 1982) from the readers by using a personal or distanced narrative voice. Regular news stories are often exponents of the latter, basing their standard

(re)construction of emotional discourse is therefore predictable, not only as part of the general 'strategic ritual of emotionality' in journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen 2012a, 2012b)⁵, but also as a testimony of the personal experience at the matches.

Hypotheses

We propose that in order to effectively reconstruct – in writing – an Olympic triumph and victorious exultation, sports reporters must a) transcend the narrative and stylistic clichés of regular sports reporting, and b) evoke a set of emotions shared by the readers, i.e. a collective experience similar to one experienced during the event.

norms on objectivity/fairness and neutrality/impartiality (Tuchman 1972; Deuze 2005; Skovsgaard, Albæk, Bro and de Vreese 2012). Consequently, it is in general regarded as a violation of traditional journalistic norms to make (explicit) subjective assessments of an event in a regular news story.

⁵ Wahl-Jorgensen has argued that in addition to the strategic ritual of objectivity in journalism, there is a ritual of emotionality, although policed and disciplined in such a way that journalists do not normally express their own emotions. They use their sources instead, without implicating themselves.

Based on this hypothesis, we expect that the reporters will try to find innovative ways of conveying the drama as a narrative as well as new stylistic ways of expressing exultation. Furthermore, we expect that the journalists will position themselves, linguistically speaking, in a proximate relation to the readers by using a personal narrative voice and by framing the event as a collective national victory.⁶ When readers are exposed to the sensation of being united nationally, they are, presumably, able to share the collective exultation expressed by the reporter. Finally, descriptions of spectator exultation is expected to play a critical role in the (re)construction of the emotional discourse of the event. Victorious exultation at sports events is a feeling that is often shared by crowds of people and expressed by yelling, singing, bodily movement and rhythmic sound. In the exulted state the spectators generally move outside the borders of everyday language and follow the rules of ritual communities and 'prelanguage'. Losers are silent. Winners jump, scream, kiss and dance. Citing neuroscientist Merlin Donald (1991:168), the anthropologist Steven Mithen (2005:167) defines this

⁶ Which in turn is based on a perception of national unity (cf. Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell 1993).

kind of communication as 'the ability to produce conscious, self-initiated, representational acts that are intentional but not linguistic'. In order to evoke this non-linguistically expressed exultation in the minds of the readers, the journalist has to show, by means of mimetic devices, how the players and the audience act in the exulted state.

4. Data and methods

Our data set consists of match reports (n = 73) covering the Danish women's handball team at the Olympic Games in 1996, 2000 and 2004. All reports derive from *Politiken* and *Berlingske* (broadsheet press) and *Ekstra Bladet* and *B.T.* (tabloid press), which in total cover four of the five major news papers in Denmark.⁷

The majority of the articles have been written by 11 main reporters, making it difficult to analytically determine if potential narrative and stylistic differences between broadsheet and tabloid papers are caused by general diversities in newspaper language norms or differences in personal writing styles.

⁷ *Jyllands-Posten* has been left out in order to balance the amount of broadsheet and tabloid papers.

	B.T.		Berlingske Tidende		Ekstra Bladet		Politiken	
	<i>Reports</i>	<i>Main reporter</i>	<i>Reports</i>	<i>Main reporter</i>	<i>Reports</i>	<i>Main reporter</i>	<i>Reports</i>	<i>Main reporter</i>
1996	5	C. Vittus	6	N. Crone	10	F. Stilling	8	A. Nielsen
2000	3	K. Moe	4	C. Tromborg	6	F. Stilling	5	N. Kragh
2004	7	K. Nielsen	9	H. Hansen	4	None ¹	6	R. Bech
N	<u>15</u>		<u>19</u>		<u>20</u>		<u>19</u>	

Therefore, we have chosen not to make a cross comparison of the newspapers. A longitudinal study has been abandoned for the same reason.

We have collected the articles in digital form on *Infomedia* – the most comprehensive article database on Danish news papers – by using the search string *håndbold* (*handball*) confined to the three time frame periods of the Olympic handball tournament.⁸

Each article has been analyzed and color coded by both authors using the following categories:

- Personal pronouns
- Figurative language and other stylistic patterns

⁸ We have discarded other types of articles covering the same events – regular news, background stories, player portraits etc. – since they are not representative of the types of narratives we are focusing on, that is narratives based on reports from the matches.

- Positive evaluating expressions and exclamations
- Descriptive 'showing'

Personal pronouns are deictic expressions of proximity/distance (Levinson 1983:68) and thus semiotic signs of a narrative voice that can be either intimate (*I, you, we*) or distanced if not explicitly present in the text (Vagle 1990). Furthermore, the use of personal pronouns can frame social group constructions: *us* vs. *them*, and is therefore an important marker of the framing of shared emotional and national discourse, in addition to the metaphorical framing of the event (cf. Rowe, McKay and Miller 1998). Likewise, the use of exclamations and intensified positive assessments (cf. Roksvold 1975 and 2005) are tell tale signs of a personal and evaluative narrator tone which may be used to evoke reader excitement.

Descriptive showing is the final category, chosen for its predicted part in the

(re)construction of emotional discourse. Descriptive language is the mode of mimesis as opposed to diegesis (Mithen 2005:168), i.e. the mode of showing as opposed to telling. By showing, the narrator expands and elaborates on the very moment and place of a scene in order to depict central aspects of the story in detail. By telling, the narrator crosses the borders of time and place guiding the reader through the essential points at a higher narrative speed. It is therefore essential to analyze how the journalists show and thus reconstruct the spectators' jubilation.

The coding of figurative language has been systematized by following a set of principles similar to those of *MIP. A Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse* (Pragglejaz 2007).

1. First we read the entire text-discourse to gain a general understanding of the meaning.
2. For each phrase in the text, we established its meaning in context and determined if it has a more basic meaning in other contexts.
3. If yes, we marked the phrase as metaphorical.

Our method differs from MIP by using phrases instead of lexical items as analytical units as well as by simplifying part of the identification procedure used in MIP. Since our research object is the 'intended' metaphor use only, as opposed to the everyday use of 'dead' metaphors,⁹ we have not found it necessary to assess every lexical unit in the text for a figurative meaning.

Since the goal of the analysis is not to quantify or measure analytical units in a scale, reliability tests were not conducted. Instead, we compared and discussed discrepancies in our individual analyses to ensure analytic reliability between us as coders. Furthermore, text examples will consecutively be provided in order to document the validity of the analytical assertions.

The following sections account for the results of the analysis.

The game as an inter-narrative drama

⁹ Which can often only be spotted at the lexical level by a semantic comparison of the basic conception of word content (i.e. in a dictionary) and the figurative meaning of the word in a given context.

As Whanel (2002) observed, sports journalists typically reconstruct events as formulaic dramatic narratives with heroes and villains as actors. This is also the case in the data set where players are turned into characters with heroic names picked from mythological and religious discourse 'Furien Anja'¹⁰ ('Anja the Fury'), 'Munken' ('the Monk'), 'Vor Frue' ('Our Lady') or with alliterative nicknames reminiscent of comic book heroes: 'Kanon-Karen' (Karen the Canon) and 'Super-Sanne'.

These constructed characters are inserted into different kinds of narrative schemata:

(1) På det blå gulv blev der i perioder også serveret kongelig underholdning I topklasse. Med Karen Brødsgaard som ballets ubestridte dronning og hvorfor ikke med Henriette Mikkelsen som prinsesse. (*Berl.Tid.* 16 August 2004).

'On the blue floor, classy royal entertainment was served now and again. Karen Brødsgaard was the undisputed queen of the ball, and

why not Henriette Mikkelsen as the princess'.

Queens and princesses appear as in a fairy tale, and there are main and supporting characters plus extras as in a play:

(2) Med [Lotte Kiærskou] i hovedrollen, forvandlede Camilla Andersen foruroligende nok til en totalt anonym og tilsyneladende umotiveret back (*Ekstra Bladet* 26 April 2000).

'Disturbingly, with Lotte Kiærskou in the leading role, Camilla Andersen was transformed into a totally anonymous and seemingly demotivated back'.

Key players are referred to as heroines or even goddesses:

(3) Den store heltinde – 'The great heroine' (*Berl.Tid.* 20 September 2000)

(4) Danmarks olympiske gudinder – 'The Olympic goddesses of Denmark'

(*Berl.Tid.* 30 August 2004)

¹⁰ 'Furies' are the gods of vengeance in roman mythology, and the term is often used to describe a furious and vengeful character.

The villains are but implied. However, it follows from the nature of the game conflict that they are from the opposing team. The matches are staged like a movie or a play, and the finals are hailed as *the drama of all dramas*, as one reporter puts it.

The allegorical conception of the match as a dramatic story is by no means an innovation in making a plot and could be regarded as a narrative cliché, especially since every match seems to be a drama in sports journalism. The notion of *ultimate* drama is therefore predictable when the final match is reconstructed as a narrative.

However, some of the reporters choose a different strategy to reconstruct the narrative climax. Instead of just using the drama as a template, they overtly point out the similarities to staged storytelling.

(5) Ingen iscenesætter kunne have gjort det bedre. Det brændte straffekast var det naturlige dramatiske punktum i en OL-finale, der var et 70 minutters studie i, hvordan de vigtigste ingredienser fra lige dele action-film og klassisk drama kan smelte sammen og blive nervepirrende håndbold-

underholdning. (*Berl.Tid.* 5 August 1996)

'No stage director could have done it better. The missed penalty throw was the natural dramatic finish in an Olympic finale that was a 70 minute study of how the most important ingredients from part action movies, part classical drama can merge, turning into thrilling handball entertainment'.

One journalist, Rasmus Bech from *Politiken*, takes it a step further by meta-commenting his own narrative and writing:

(6) Den ordinære kamp – prøv at følge med, og hold tungen lige i munden, når jeg for dramaets skyld hopper fra nutid til datid – var tæt og spændende i hvert minut. (*Politiken* 30 August 2004)

'The regular match – try to keep up and watch your steps when I jump from present to past tense in the name of drama – was close and exciting, every minute of it'.

This is an intertextual, or rather inter-narrative, technique by which the narrator exposes his own remedies for creating suspense and turns them

upside down, most likely inspired by a match out of the ordinary.

In the same article, Rasmus Bech applies a similar technique to reconstruct the emotional discourse of the event:

(7) Og så til straffekast – for første gang i landsholdets historie. Du store kineser, hvem skulle kaste, hvem havde nerverne. Jeg vinkede, hvis nogle skulle have fået ideen, afværgende fra tribunen, hold mig udenfor.

'And then the penalty throws – for the first time in the history of the national team. My goodness, who would throw, who had the nerves. I waved from the stands to ward off anybody who might get the idea; keep me out of it'.

In this case, the narrator stages his own persona and emotions as an eyewitness speaking on behalf of the spectators. Again, humor plays a vital role, protecting the narrative from the aforementioned clichés, but there is more to it than that. It is a particular narrative strategy, a way of reconstructing a sensation of suspense that has already taken place, i.e. a sensation that cannot be reconstructed merely by summarizing the chain of events. Somehow, the

narrator has to trigger emotions similar to the ones experienced at the match – a challenge the narrator chooses to explicitly elaborate on in the beginning of the article:

(8) Hvordan skriver jeg om det, der skete i den olympiske håndboldhal?

'How do I write about what happened in the Olympic handball arena?'

By posing this question rhetorically, the narrator shares the complication of reconstructing the experience with the readers. The victory was so spectacular that he has run out of words, so to speak. He has to find another way.

And so he does; partly by staging himself as an emotionally affected narrator (as illustrated above), partly by breaking down the syntactic units in stroboscopic elliptic fragments of events and inserting emotive interjections as expressions of spontaneous outbursts:

(9) Så begyndte det, fem straffekast til hver eller til en afgørelse – næsten med rygende revolvere. Karin Mortensen i målet, Eun Sang Lee på pletten ... og åh, 35-34 til Korea. Fruelunds tur. Puuh, hun

scorer sit 15 mål i kampen – 35-35.

'Then it began, five penalty throws to each team to reach a conclusion – almost with smoking guns. Karin Mortensen in the goal, Eun Sang Lee on the spot ... and oh, 35-34 to Korea. Next up, Fruelund. Whew, she scores her 15th goal in the match. 35-35'.

The narrator simultaneously a) mimics spontaneous live reporting on TV or radio, b) reconstructs the suspense and c) expresses the emotional register by using exclamatory interjections.

The use of a highly personal voice is primarily found in the narrative climaxes, first and foremost in reports covering the final matches when euphoria hits the narrator. In this example, reporter Finn Stilling from *Ekstra Bladet* is visited by the muse of exultation:

(10) Jeg ved ikke præcis, hvor Himmeriget ligger, men jeg har en lumsk anelse om, at det må være i nærheden af Sydneys imponerende Dome. Det var dér, Danmarks håndboldpiger fik englenerne til at iføre sig klaphat med en første halvleg, der fik i hvert fald en enkelt ganske garvet

håndboldreporter til at få gang i sprinkleranlægget bag brillerglassene. [...] 20-11! Utroligt. Vanvittigt (*Ekstra Bladet* 30 September 2012).

'I do not know exactly where Heaven is, but I have a funny feeling it must be somewhere around Sydney's impressive Dome [ed. where the final match was played in 2000]. This is where Denmark's handball girls made the angels wear clapping hats [ed. a Danish jubilation hat with two clapping hands on top] in a first halftime that made at least one seasoned handball reporter turn on the sprinklers behind his glasses. 20-11! Unbelievable. Insane'.

Victory ignites a narrative energy and linguistic ingenuity reconstructing the experienced ecstasy. It is as if the reporter tries to match the performance of the women's handball team -on paper. He dribbles past the clichés and resurrects the dead metaphor, the overused notion of victory as a divine event. Once again, humor is pivotal in the representation of the emotional experience keeping the pathos and platitudes in stock: The angels do not

sing, and the reporter does not cry. Instead, the novelty of the imagery is a way of expressing the exultation without overdoing it.

Narrative voice

In the previous examples the narrative voice is highly personal, which is a common denominator when victorious exultation is expressed – perhaps most vividly illustrated in the following example:

(11) Hold da kæft, hvor var det spændende, da seksten danske kvinder blev olympiske mestre i håndbold (*Politiken* 5 August 1996).

‘Holy shit, it was exciting when sixteen Danish women became Olympic champions in handball’.

By swearing, the journalist reinforces his personal excitement and emphasizes that the victory is so spectacular that ordinary journalistic language norms do not apply. These (imitated) spontaneous outbursts can be seen in several of the articles, either from the narrator's own perspective:

(12) Du er bare fantastisk, Anja! – ‘You are fantastic, Anja! [ed. the team captain]’ (*Berl.Tid.* 4 August 1996)

or from a joint national perspective, expressed in a collective ‘we’:

(13) Vi elsker jer!!! – ‘We love you!!!’ (*B.T.* 2 August 1996)

The three exclamation marks (!!!) intensify the scale of the narrator’s tribute. They act as a sort of orthographical volume marker, a way of shouting out enthusiasm in writing, the same way spectators whoop and cheer from the stands.

Similarly, positive assessments are intensified to their limit:

(14) ‘forrygende’, ‘fremragende’, ‘suverænt’, ‘genialt’, ‘fantastisk’, ‘storslået’, ‘medrivende’, ‘overvældende’, ‘sublimt’, ‘sindsoprivende’, ‘historisk’.

‘terrific’, ‘excellent’, ‘brilliant’, ‘genius’, ‘fantastic’, ‘outstanding’, ‘riveting’, ‘staggering’, ‘sublime’, ‘exhilarating’, ‘historical’.

It is an adjectival homage roaming in the top range of biased positivity, but also bordering the minefield of sport clichés.

It is hard to surpass these assessments in positive valor within the adjective category. Instead, the reporters make use of rhetorical devices, for instance repetitive emphasis in this leading sentence from the final in 1996:

(15) GULD, GULD, GULD. – 'GOLD, GOLD, GOLD' (*Berl.Tid.* 30 August 2004)

It is like a mantra coming from the spectators emphasizing the 'magic' number of three consecutive wins. A related semiotic strategy is seen in this headline:

(16) Fantaaaaaaastisk – 'Fantaaaaaaastic' (*Berl.Tid.* 3 July 1996)

The prolonged vowel lengthens the narrator's cheer, imitating the ritual language of exultation from the spectator stands, or in this instance the celebrating exclamations from the hall speaker.

Showing exultation

The ritual of celebration and exultation is an important aspect of reconstructing the emotional discourse of the event. By showing how the coaches and the players act when the team is winning,

the reporters can try to re-evolve the shared sensations at the match:

(17) Spillerne kastede sig om halsen på hinanden, mens landstræner Ulrik Wilbek udførte en mindre krigsdans. (*B.T.* 2 August 1996).

'The players rushed into each another's arms while the team coach, Ulrik Wilbek, performed a minor war dance'.

(18) Assistenttræner Kim Jensen [...] begyndte at kravle op i metalstilladserne og synge »lå, lå, lå, lå, lå, lå« og knuse og kramme (*Berl.Tid.* 2 October 2000).

'Assistant coach Kim Jensen crawled up the scaffold singing "lo, lo, lo, lo, lo" [ed. a rhythmic victory chant] and started squeezing and hugging'.

Instead of just telling the readers that the coaches are thrilled, the narrator depicts the triumph by describing the actions, the body language and the singing, dramatically reenacting the ritual of exultation. It is by all probability a means to make the readers (re)experience the exultation of the event.

Thus the representational acts of body language and singing are used as a mimetic device for reconstructing emotions:

(19) Hele holdet kunne dele hoppe-knuse-springe-tude-knuge-begejstringen med hinanden (*Politiken* 5 August 1996).

'The entire team shared the hopping-hugging-jumping-crying-squeezing-exultation'.

The string of verbs mirrors the players' body language and is almost like a victory song in itself with rhythm, alliteration and assonance. Simultaneously, the shared exultation is visualized graphically by the hyphens connecting the verbs, the same way the players are connected in a celebratory circle, hand in hand.

A similar strategy is used to show the outbursts of the spectators. Again, the singing, dancing and cheering is described as ritual communicative acts. To rephrase J.L. Austin (1962), celebrating spectators normally 'do things *without* words', and the only way to reconstruct these nonverbal acts is by showing what the spectators do:

(20) Hele hallen eksploderede i rød-hvid ekstase. Sjældent har så mange halvblege mennesker fra det høje nord danset så hektisk Zorba.

(*Berl.Tid.* 30 August 2004)

'The entire arena exploded in red and white [ed. the colors of the Danish flag] ecstasy. Seldom, have so many pale people from the north danced such a hectic Zorba'.

(21) I løbet af 2. halvleg var det til tonerne af Sejle Op Ad Åen og USA Er Et Tegneserie-hold, at USA blev udspillet efter noder. Der blev klappet, råbt og hujet af begejstring (*Politiken* 27 July 1996).

'In the second half, USA was defeated to the tones of "Sejle op ad åen" [ed. A Danish celebrating song: 'Sailing up the river'] and "USA er et tegneseriehold" [ed. a Danish mocking song: 'USA is a cartoon team']. The audience clapped, yelled and cheered in exultation'.

Telling that the spectators are ecstatic, jubilant, exulted, euphoric etc. does not in itself reconstruct the victorious exultation. But by showing and re-

enacting the ritual celebration, i.e. 'the hectic Zorba' and the celebratory songs, the journalist creates a narrative illusion that mimics the representational acts.

Furthermore, the ritual singing is also like a match in itself between the Danish and the opposing spectators:

(22) Under alle omstændigheder svært at indvende noget imod, da det danske hold førte 10–5 midt i halvlegen, hvilket selvsagt fik den dansk dominerede hal til at eksplodere. Et mindre spansk kor forsøgte sig bag det ene mål, men også denne kamp var ulige (*Berl.Tid.* 20 August 2004).

'In any case, it is hard to object against the Danish team leading 10-5 at half time, which of course led to an explosion in the Danish dominated arena. A small Spanish choir gave it a try behind one of the goals, but this match was also unequal'.

This description of the audience points towards a narrative representation of the team and the spectators as a national collective.

Framing of national unity

The Women's National Handball Team is the official name of the three time winners of the Olympic handball tournament. However, they are seldom referred to in this way by the reporters. Instead, the journalists use a variety of figurative nicknames:

(23) Danmarks Darlings – 'Denmark's Darlings' (*B.T.* 31 July 1996)

(24) Guldpigerne – 'The golden girls' (*Berl.Tid.* 20 August 2004)

(25) De danske jernladies – 'the Danish iron girls' (*B.T.* 4 August 1996)

(26) Danmarks jernhårde ladies – 'Denmark's iron hard ladies' (*B.T.* 27 July 1996)

(27) Pigerne – 'the girls' (*E.B.* 2 August 1996)

Many of these nicknames were – and still are – national household names and can be seen as a framing device for creating national unity. For instance, the possessive genitive 'Denmark's' signals an underlying conceptual metaphor

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980) in national sports: *The team is a nation*.

This conception is best illustrated by one of the victorious headlines:

(28) Vores guld – ‘Our gold’ (*E.B.* 2 August 1996).

It is not the team’s gold, nor the players’ gold, but *our* gold.¹¹ The framing of the team as a nation creates an illusion of a collective national victory. This way, the journalist unites with the readers and simultaneously frames the event as a collective experience.

National unity is also fostered in the articles by the use of teasing puns based on national stereotypes or idioms containing national expressions:

(29) Susanne Munk Lauritsen spiste sig mæt i kinesisk selvtillid. Det var som at købe kina-kål hos grønthandleren. Flække det efter behag og bruge det som ingrediens i en let og lækker forret (*E.B.* 28 July 1996).

‘Susanne Munk Lauritsen dined on Chinese self esteem. It was like buying Chinese cabbage at the

¹¹ The phrase is probably based on a commercial pun from the beginning of nineties from Carlsberg, who coined the phrase ‘Our beer’.

greengrocer. Splitting it apart and using it as an ingredient in a light and delicious first course’.

(30) De norske jenter blev skubbet ud over fjeldkanten (*E.B.* 2 August 1996).

‘The Norwegian girls were pushed over the mountain side’ [ed. ‘fjeld’ is a Norwegian loanword for mountain].

This type of punning resembles a refined version of school yard ragging, playing on the conflict between *them* and *us*. It is part of the rituality of national sports events and once again a way for the reporter to transcend the clichés and unite with the readers.

Conclusion

Three consecutive victories at the Olympic Games are an extraordinary achievement and a challenging story to reconstruct in written news reports. Reports have to mediate an event that has already taken place and been witnessed by many readers on TV and (re)evoked a set of shared emotions that are commonly expressed in ritual celebratory acts, not words.

The article documents that Danish sports reporters during the Olympic Games in 1996, 2000 and 2004 used a versatile and innovative set of linguistic and narrative devices to do so:

- 1) a highly subjective narrative voice that transcends the regular narrative patterns and clichés in sports journalism by using emotive exclamations and humorous meta-commentaries preventing the narrative from going stale,
- 2) a variety of stylistic tools mimicking the ritual celebratory acts, such as vowel extensions, rhythmic repetitions and figurative imagery,
- 3) descriptive *showing* of how the team and spectators act out their exultation in ritual body language and joint songs, in order to reconstruct

the range of emotions created by the dramatic event,

- 4) conceptual metaphors that frame the event as a representation of national unity thus making it possible to convey victorious exultation as a shared collective experience, uniting the narrator with the team and the readers.

In conclusion, it can be argued that extraordinary sports events seem to trigger narrative and stylistic ingenuity creating new communicative constructions. In this regard, the critique of sports journalism as trivial and predictable is not fair. Sports journalism is more than that. At its best, it is a game of words that makes readers (re-)experience and enjoy the most dramatic moments in an ongoing fight for victory.

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Dr Paul Bowman: BowmanP@cf.ac.uk

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