

**ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS:
How Aaron Sorkin's *Sports Night* Portrayed the Sports
Journalist as a Modern, Educated Professional While Still
Fitting the Classic Molds of Journalists in Popular Culture.**

By Eric Alvarez

Abstract

Aaron Sorkin's *Sports Night* focuses on the events that unfold in the newsroom of a nightly sports highlight show. The impulse of the series stems from the relationships amongst the show's two anchors, three producers and its managing editor.

As individuals, the journalists are smart, talented and dedicated in their professional lives. Yet, despite their capabilities and professionalism, each echoes characteristics and faces problems similar to those of journalists in classic popular culture. They often put the job over their personal lives and struggle when faced with the consequences. But in the end, they always tend to band together as a newsroom family.

* * *

"Five minutes to air. First team in the studio.¹" The voice echoes through the newsroom at 10:55 p.m. It is the nightly wake-up call for the *Sports Night* team. Journalists both in front of the camera and in the control room scramble as the clock ticks toward show time. And then it starts. The one thing that gives the journalists a home, a family and a sense of accomplishment.

The team of anchors and producers creates a nightly, one-hour highlight show from New York, “the most magnificent city in the world. It’s the city of Gershwin and Cole Porter. Damon Runyon and Fiorello LaGuardia.”² The world outside the office is a place of high rises, full of life and peppered with millions of people. Yet the *Sports Night* team forfeits the experiences of the lustrous city for the buzz of the newsroom and the thrill of a high-scoring game every night.

They find a home in the studio, a family in co-workers and their child in the show. Their lives and relationships are perpetually linked to the newsroom. From inter-office romance to failed marriages or disputes over journalistic ethics, one character’s problem is faced by the group. Relationships peripheral to the newsroom family suffer and inevitably fail because of each character’s unyielding loyalty to both the profession and the co-workers.

In *Sports Night*, Aaron Sorkin creates characters who are educated, articulate, quick-witted, liberal and dedicated. As a unit, they embody all that is positive and progressive about the generation that ushered in the 21st Century. But as individuals, they echo stereotypes of journalists that have been present in popular culture for decades.

Casey McCall (Peter Krause) and Dan Rydell (Josh Charles) are the bright but conceited anchors. Isaac Jaffe (Robert Guillaume) is the fatherly managing editor with a penchant for drinking. Natalie Hurley (Sabrina Lloyd) is a journalist who becomes the story and Dana Whitaker (Felicity Huffman) is a successful, stop-at-nothing journalist who dumps her responsibilities to keep her man. The brilliant but awkward “nerd”

Jeremy Goodwin (Joshua Malina) rounds out the cast as the newest journalist on the show.

Despite vastly different personalities and talents, the team bands together as a newsroom family to keep the show running every night.

The faces of *Sports Night* are its two anchors, Casey McCall and Dan Rydell, in that order. On the air and as a team they are sharp, intelligent writers. But behind the scenes and on their own they demonstrate shades of insecurity and narcissism.

I. The Franchise³

I did my job with aplomb.—Casey McCall⁴

The older brother on the *Sports Night* team is Casey McCall, a good-looking, intelligent anchor in his early thirties who calls the highlights to 3.5 million people every night at 11.

Aaron Sorkin, the creator of the show came up with the idea of a behind-the-scenes sports show while writing the screenplay for *The American President*.⁵

“I sat in this hotel room for 13 months writing *The American President*. To keep me company, I would have *SportsCenter* on,” he said.⁶

In keeping with Sorkin's inspiration, Casey resembles former *SportsCenter* anchor Craig Kilborn, who eventually became the host of Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* and later CBS' *The Late Late Show*, in both his intelligent humor and physical appearance.

In *Sports Night*, Casey mentions he was offered NBC's *Late Night* five years prior but unlike Kilborn he turned the offer down to anchor a sports show in Dallas with his current co-anchor Dan.⁷

In the pilot episode, Casey has recently divorced from his wife and struggles with the separation from his seven-year-old son. A Phi Beta Kappa⁸ college graduate who speaks four languages,⁹ Casey has an extensive vocabulary and remarkable ease in solving the New York Times crossword puzzle.¹⁰ His wit and confidence makes him a natural leader.

But for all his charm and intelligence, Casey still fits the mold of the egocentric anchor. However, his particular brand of narcissism is more realistic than that of classic television sitcom anchors such as Kent Brockman in *The Simpsons* and Ted Baxter in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.

Casey frequently behaves as sort of a self-proclaimed captain for the *Sports Night* team. In the episode "Eli's Coming," he gives an inspirational speech to the entire newsroom prior to their coverage of March Madness, the college basketball national tournament. "I'm pumping up the troops," he explains to Dan Rydell, his co-anchor.¹¹

He also frequently scolds and ridicules Dana, the executive producer, whenever she makes a mistake.

Dana, who is a superior of Casey, remarks of his constant criticism, "I find Casey to be judgmental. And in my case I find him to be hyper judgmental."¹²

Though Casey often believes he has a sense he knows what's best for the other main characters, he has a seemingly complete disinterest in the lives of the show's minor characters.

When Casey blanks on the name of one of the cameramen Dan says, "I think as a New Year's Resolution you should rededicate yourself to the idea that this is a team. You play for a team, a team with many players."¹³

The next day, Casey appears on *The View* where he is complimented on his on-air appearance. Rather than give credit to the people in wardrobe, he deflects the compliment with a joke.¹⁴

When he returns to the office he is confronted by Monica from wardrobe who asks Casey if he knows her name. Casey responds that he is not good with names. Monica asks who the No. 2 man on the Red Sox in 1977 was. Casey knows right away.

"Mr. McCall, you get so much attention and so much praise for what you actually do and all of it's deserved," Monica responds. "When you go on a talk show and get complimented on something you didn't [do], how hard would it be to say that's not me?"¹⁵

Casey does not come across to Monica, Dana or the other coworkers as a bad person, only one overly concerned with his own image and intellect.

In a joint magazine interview for *Esquire* for which Dan gets in serious trouble with the network, Casey is more concerned by the fact that he doesn't appear cool in the article.¹⁶

"Don't get me wrong," he says. "Dan's my closest friend and I like to think of our relationship as selfless, but at the moment I'm not as concerned about him as I am about how shall I say...me."¹⁷

Casey is so disturbed by his appearance in the article that he goes to Dan for help.

"How can I be cool again?" He asks. "I'm a newly divorced man. I'm young. I used to be cool. I need to be cool again."¹⁸

Through most of the series, Casey is afraid of reentering the dating scene after 15 years of marriage. He married straight out of college at 23 to a woman he met as a freshman.¹⁹ His relationship with his a 7-year-old son named Charlie becomes distant and strained due to the divorce and Casey's long work days.

In the pilot episode he complains to Dan because the athletes on which the show reports influence Charlie more than Casey does.²⁰

"I have a 7-year-old son that I get to see on Wednesdays and alternate weekends, and these are his heroes," he says. "Now six days a week they're also his male role models."²¹

Though Casey wishes he could spend more time with his son, he knows that the divorce was a direct result of Casey's involvement in his profession. In the episode "Thespis," he mentions he was offered the job of hosting NBC's *Late Night* five years earlier. Casey turned down the offer to anchor a show with Dan in Dallas. He later admits that the fight with his wife over his decision to stay loyal to Dan was the beginning of the end of the marriage.²²

Casey's closest friend in the newsroom is Dan. They have known each other for 10 years and have been anchoring sports shows with together for five. Despite their friendship, the two often clash when Casey behaves like the older brother.

At one point, Casey reprimands Dan for his on-air performance.

Dan, notably irritated, replies, "You know, Casey, I'm getting a little tired of you being senior camp counselor around here."²³

"Hey, you know what? If you're not here then I can't use you," Casey answers before referring to the show as his own and saying he cannot do his job if Dan won't cooperate.²⁴

The incident causes a rift between the two anchors. Dan calls Casey on his narcissism. "Why don't you go into the control room and pick up the troops that'll make you feel better," he says.²⁵

Casey replies that he is paid more and that Dan only got the job *Sports Night* with his help.²⁶

"I know it's real hard taking off that Eagle Scout uniform because you look so snappy in it," Dan snaps back.²⁷

The friction spreads over to their broadcast in which Dan asks Casey an impromptu question and as a result, Casey looks unprepared on national television.²⁸

Eventually the two anchors resolve their dispute for the good of the show which demonstrates that though the characters clash, they come together over the show.

Casey eventually accepts Dan's apology. "I wouldn't trade the last 10 years working with you for anything," he says. "Not for anything, Danny, I swear to God."²⁹

II. Eli's Coming³⁰

I'm gonna go scrape my self image off the floor and get ready to do my show.
– Dan Rydell³¹

Dan Rydell is the junior anchor of *Sports Night*. A graduate of Dartmouth College,³² Dan is charming, funny, youthful and knowledgeable about sports. Despite his public status as 29-year-old “man’s man” and bachelor, he has an impressive knowledge of women’s shoes.³³ He enjoys a moderate amount of fame and celebrity because he anchored shows alongside Casey for five years.

But where Casey is the well-spoken leader, Dan is a rebel who often has trouble expressing himself. His on-air charisma and womanizing demeanor come to a head when Dan suffers heartbreak from a woman he truly likes and later picks up a woman at a bar who happens to be a psychiatrist.

Dan hides a haunted past concerning his family and has trouble getting close to people. These problems push him to seek the approval of the audience of strangers he addresses on television.

Though his lack of eloquence and occasional on-air screw-ups are more realistic than those of Ted Baxter of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Dan fits the stereotype of the anchor as a careless reader.

A small collection of Dan’s on-air mistakes includes his inability to pronounce the phrase “Red Wings locker room.”³⁴ He also has trouble saying the name of Russian tennis player Yevgeny Kafelnikov as he attempts to record a voiceover.³⁵ Later, he mistakenly says “a neighborhood park all covered with cheese” when he means to say “covered with trees” during a live broadcast.³⁶

In an early episode he claims to suffer from “emergency writer’s block” much to Casey’s amusement. Dan takes the problem seriously and Casey has to write Dan’s script for that night’s show.³⁷

The most notable mistake Dan makes, however, comes off the air in an attempt to spark an educated conversation with Hillary Clinton at a campaign breakfast. Dan, who has a crush on Mrs. Clinton, tells her that he opposes public finance for secular programs only to realize later that he meant to say he opposes public finance for non-secular programs.³⁸

Back at the office he tells Casey, “Hillary Clinton thinks I’m an idiot.”³⁹

Casey responds, “either that or a religious bigot.”⁴⁰

“I went to an Ivy League school, Casey. I made an idiot of myself in front of Hillary Clinton.”⁴¹

But Mrs. Clinton is not by a long shot the only woman in Dan’s life. Dan is a recovering womanizer.

On one occasion Casey says to him, “there are certain ways in which I’m not like you. You walk up to women. You’re that guy. You have a smoothness. It works for you.”⁴²

But in fact, it rarely works for very long. Dan has a hazy history with Bobbi Bernstein (Lisa Edelstein), a substitute anchor and recurring character.

Bobbi is convinced Dan slept with her years ago in Spain and never called her afterward.⁴³ Dan denies having slept with her and says he has never even been to Spain. Dan later learns that years ago he actually did sleep with her but did not remember it.⁴⁴

He then apologizes to Bobbi. "You know I've done enough rotten things to women I like. There's no question I'm going straight to hell."⁴⁵

Dan also becomes involved with a market analyst in the building named Rebecca Wells (Teri Polo). At first she seems uninterested in going out with him and Dan says to Casey, "my real problem is that I seem to have made no impression on her at all."⁴⁶

The fact that she turned him down is less hurtful to Dan than the fact that she did not recognize his good looks or celebrity.

It turns out that Rebecca does not watch the show, which baffles Dan because they work for the same company. He pursues her but faces rejection 19 times.

When Jeremy Goodwin (Joshua Malina), a producer at *Sports Night*, asks Rebecca why she won't go out with Dan, she says sportscasters "are self-absorbed, narrow-minded immature people of limited intelligence and limitless ego."⁴⁷

"I just think if she saw me on the show she would like me," Dan later says to Casey. "I'm my best on the show. It's what I want people to see. I put all day into one hour and I'm proud of it."⁴⁸

In the second season, Dan picks up Abby Jacobs (Jayne Brook), an attractive psychiatrist, at a bar. She gives him her business card and there is confusion between Dan and Casey about her intentions. Dan goes to her office to pick her up for a date but the relationship develops quickly into therapy.⁴⁹

In one session Abby asks, "Is it important to you that you get every attractive woman you meet to like you?"

"It's important that I get the unattractive ones to like me too," Dan says.⁵⁰

But Dan's problems extend far beyond narcissism. Abby tells him he has severe issues regarding acceptance.

She says, "The only time you're really comfortable with people is when you're talking to them on television. You're convinced you're responsible for the death of your brother. You're convinced your parents blame you as well."⁵¹

Dan's younger brother died in a car accident after driving under the influence the day Dan went off to college. Dan says he believes the worst influence was the fact that his younger brother looked up to and imitated him and started doing drugs.⁵²

On several occasions Dan suggests a close relationship with his mother. In more than one episode, he signs off the broadcast by saying "Goodnight, Mom"^{53 54} and becomes exceedingly upset when he thinks there might be something wrong with her in the episode "Dear Louise."⁵⁵

Dan's mother never appears in the series but his father does visit him in a scene of the second-season episode "The Cut Man Cometh." Dan's father (Peter Riegert) visits the studio and spends the entire scene with his hands in his pockets responding in short, simple sentences.⁵⁶

Dan's father seems significantly unimpressed with his son's success and says he is double parked on the street below the high rise three times in two minutes. He leaves just as quickly as he arrived.⁵⁷

In Abby's professional opinion, Dan has issues with his father and only truly feels comfortable when he is on television.⁵⁸ But Dan does seem to feel comfortable with the

other main characters in the show, particularly Isaac Jaffe (Robert Guillaume), the managing editor, with whom he is particularly close.

Dan approaches Isaac frequently for advice. In their conversations, Dan always refers to Isaac as "Sir" and Isaac is one of the only people who calls the anchor "Danny." Dan is closer to Isaac than the other characters. Casey takes particular care when he tells Dan of Isaac's stroke.⁵⁹

Their relationship extends beyond boss and employee. Dan is extremely respectful of Isaac, who never hesitates to put Dan in line with hard but caring advice.

On one occasion Isaac says to Dan, "Because I love you I can say this: No rich, young white guy has ever gotten anywhere with me comparing himself to Rosa Parks."⁶⁰

Scenes such as these, in which Dan connects with Isaac, suggest that Dan finds the father-figure he lacks outside the newsroom in Isaac Jaffe.

III. The Old-School Father Figure

My name is Isaac Jaffe. I run this place. Anyone else who runs this place please raise your hand.—Isaac Jaffe⁶¹

Managing editor Isaac Jaffe represents the relic of the honorable print journalist in *Sports Night*. As a young, black journalist, his career developed during the Civil Rights movement. He worked on newspapers for 23 years before moving into broadcasting. Isaac started out as a stringer for the *Atlanta Journal*, won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the NASA Gemini missions and retired as the London Bureau chief for CNN before coming out of retirement for the show.⁶²

Though Isaac's job is to direct and organize a broadcast sports highlight show, he embodies many of the same characteristics newspaper editors display in director Frank Capra's films of the 1930s.

The editors in Capra's films are loyal to their reporters and often become the reporter's best friend. Also, they often shed the personality of a stern boss and lend a helping hand if the reporter is ever in serious trouble.⁶³

Isaac becomes a grandfather in the eighth episode but serves as a father figure to all his employees throughout the series.⁶⁴ He is closest to Dan with whom he shares a special handshake, but he shows a deep, fatherly relationship with all his employees.

In the pilot episode Isaac jokingly says to Dana, "The show is going to hell in a hand basket and I'm ready to fire the whole bunch of you."⁶⁵

Dana replies, "Yes, but you won't because we're all family here and I'm just like a daughter to you."⁶⁶

Isaac laughs and says, "No. This is a television show and you're very much like an employee to me."⁶⁷

In the second season Christmas episode, Casey asks Isaac what he wants for the holiday. Isaac says he would like a cheese grater. Casey comes back to Isaac's office with 12 expensive cheese graters.⁶⁸

Isaac laughs and chooses one at random before giving Casey some fatherly advice: "A famous monk once said, 'I don't always know what the right thing to do is, my lord. But I think that the fact that I want to please you pleases you.'"⁶⁹

Casey leaves the office and Isaac steps over to a shelf behind his desk where he keeps his awards for journalistic excellence. He picks up a crystal award and replaces it with the metal cheese grater with the colorful bow.⁷⁰

Later, when Natalie comes into his office upset about a legal issue (when what really bothers her is her breakup with Jeremy), Isaac asks her what's really bothering her and offers her the night off. Natalie breaks into tears and falls into Isaac's arms. Isaac consoles her and calls her "baby" as one could imagine he would either of his grown daughters.⁷¹

In this sense, Isaac resembles Lou Grant, the managing editor on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. In *Love Is All Around: The Making of The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Lou is described as "a father confessor, capable of great patience and understanding, even gentleness."⁷²

Scenes in which Isaac appears often take place in his large, luxurious office. Often, other characters walk in to ask Isaac for advice. His office contains not only his extensive collection of awards, which includes a Pulitzer Prize, but also a bar stocked with expensive bottles of alcohol.

Grant formed a very close bond with Mary Richards. But he also drank from the bottle of whiskey he kept in his desk drawer. Like Grant and the editors in Capra's films, Isaac Jaffe frequently takes a break with the bottles in his office.

In the episode "Intellectual Property," he walks into the control room. "I'm always smiling this time of night. You know why?"

Dana asks, "Double Chivas on the rocks?"

Isaac smiles and replies, "That's right."⁷³

Robert Guillaume, the actor who played Isaac, suffered a stroke in 1999, an incident that was written into the episodes. In the fictional world of *Sports Night* the team learns Isaac is in the hospital in the episode "Eli's Coming."

In the next episodes, the show suffers in Isaac's absence because Dana takes on some of Isaac's responsibilities and struggles to deal with the network and produce the show at the same time.⁷⁴

When Dana asks why Isaac won't allow the *Sports Night* team to visit him in the hospital, Natalie comments on Isaac's pride and career. "This is a fully grown man of enormous dignity and accomplishment," she says. "He's covered wars and he's dined with kings. And he can't move the left side of his body, and he doesn't want us to see him like that."⁷⁵

Isaac returns to work five months after the stroke, well short of the recommended recovery period of 12 months. He takes on his old job and though his employees are concerned with his health, Isaac embodies the characteristics of the professional, hard-as-nails editors of the Capra films.⁷⁶

Along with the work-ethic, Isaac also upholds the highest standards of journalistic integrity. When Michael Jordan's public relations representatives ask for editorial approval on an interview, Isaac refuses even though the show needs the ratings Jordan's interview would generate.

"Tell him that we're professionals and that we want to be the best at what we do. If anybody can understand that, it'll be Michael."⁷⁷

A staunch Democrat, Isaac grew up during the Civil Rights era and is thankful for his success.

When Dan asks Isaac for advice about donating to charity, Isaac says, "Danny. Every morning, I leave an acre and a half of the most beautiful property in New Canaan. I get on the train and come to work in a 54-story glass high rise. In between, I step over bodies to get here. 20, 30, 50 of them a day. So, as I'm stepping over them, I reach into my pocket and give them whatever I've got."⁷⁸

The prospect of the future and the coming millennium fascinate Isaac in his old age.

"The next millennium will be spectacular!" he says. "It will be. I'm managing editor of *Sports Night* and a hundred years ago I wasn't allowed to vote. The future's just fine with me."⁷⁹

Isaac's voice represents the voice of wisdom on the *Sports Night* team. His years as a dedicated journalist give him respect toward the profession. However, he also the ability to step back and realize that other things in life are important as well, a lesson he tries to teach his employees.

In the episode "Special Powers," the show is delayed by another program and Dana is forced to restart the show.⁸⁰

"This is the craziest thing I've ever experienced in my life," Dana exclaims after bursting into Isaac's office.

"Well then you gotta live more, Dana, because there's some crazy ass stuff out there," Isaac answers simply.⁸¹

IV. The Sob Sister⁸²

I'm a 33-year-old television producer and for one hour every night this is my little corner of the world and nothing screws up here unless I screw it up.—Dana Whitaker⁸³

Dana Whitaker is the executive producer for *Sports Night*. She is a young, single woman living alone the city. She has a master's degree in broadcasting and has worked as a producer for 10 years.

Coworkers describe her position and success as an associate producer as a great accomplishment for a woman her age.⁸⁴

Whitaker grew up in a family with six brothers, one of whom plays for the Denver Broncos. Her mother sent her to a series of all-girl schools but Dana never lost the passion for sports she learned from her father and brothers.⁸⁵

Producer Jeremy Goodwin describes her as “an irresistible combination of brilliance inside the office and something a little less than brilliance anywhere outside of it.”⁸⁶

Whitaker's passion for her job often raises the morale of other employees. Her ability to inspire becomes clear during an episode when she addresses Casey's apathetic on-air personality. “I love producing *Sports Night*,” she says. “I live from 11 to midnight and the rush is so huge I don't come down until 3 o'clock in the morning.”⁸⁷

Whitaker personifies the symbol of success, capability, independence and strength of the modern woman. But for all her self-reliance, she falls into the same contrived stereotypes of other female journalists in popular culture: the sob sisters in the films of the 1930s and 1940s.

The sob sisters were hardly pushovers and had to earn the respect of male counterparts in order to succeed as journalists.⁸⁸

The most famous sob sister of the 1930s was Torchy Blane, according to Joe Saltzman. "No one else better epitomized the aggressive, self-assured, independent female reporter in films."⁸⁹

Like Blane, other female journalists in the genre like Gallagher in *Platinum Blonde* and Hildy Johnson in *His Girl Friday* were strong-willed professionals who eventually settled into the lifestyle deemed acceptable for a woman in the 1930s.⁹⁰

"Male screenwriters," writes Saltzman, "would make sure that by the final reel, these self-sufficient females would succumb to love, longing for what 1930s audiences were sure every woman really wanted – a man, marriage, and children."⁹¹

Dana spends much of her time trying to balance the show with her failing personal life. In one episode, Dana's conflict inevitably forces her to dump her responsibility to the show to keep a date with her boyfriend, Gordon.⁹²

Dana leaves the show one night in the hands of Sally Sasser (Brenda Strong), a producer of a later show, because she feared Gordon would break up with her if she cancelled on him again.

Just before announcing her decision to the others, she says "the world in which I'm confident is running right smack into the world in which I'm not."⁹³

"I understand what makes a woman think that any man is better than nothing," Jeremy says in a letter to his sister. "I'll just never understand what makes a woman think she's got nothing."⁹⁴

In this episode Whitaker feels she has no choice but to follow her boyfriend. She later finds out Gordon slept with Sally, the very producer to whom she handed off the show.

Dana obviously suffers from a lack of fulfillment in her life outside the show. She tries to fill the void with Gordon, but two episodes later she finds satisfaction in places she previously mocked.

In the ninth episode, Dana takes her niece to see the play *The Lion King* after explaining her distaste for the theater. She returns to the newsroom beside herself with excitement and exclaims to Dan and Isaac, "I don't think you've lived until you've seen this show."⁹⁵

Later, she tells Casey about her experience. "It was really quite something. The music began and I just started to cry. I don't know where it came from."⁹⁶

In the episode "The Local Weather" she ducks out of a rain storm into the first building she sees, a church. Once again, she returns to the newsroom deeply affected. "I sat in a church and I felt good," she says. "I'm going back. There's something there for me."⁹⁷

Dana becomes obsessed with cameras and photography after learning of Gordon's affair with Sally. She buys several expensive pieces of equipment and takes them to the newsroom.

"She doesn't know anything about cameras but she felt the sudden need to own one," Casey says upon seeing the elaborate setup.⁹⁸

Throughout the series, Dana constantly searches for fulfillment. She needs it from Casey, Gordon, Isaac and her mother.⁹⁹

But her life is the show. She sacrifices her life outside it—relationships, marriage, the prospect of a family—for the thrill of the control room.

“I have a job that involves me and stimulates me and rewards me and takes up a lot of my time,” she says. “And I’m not willing to do my job just a little bit. I want to do all of it. It’s part of me and I am different without it.”¹⁰⁰

Like the sob sisters before her, Dana faces the choice of succeeding in her profession or giving it up for a fulfilling personal life.

The classic sob sisters often sacrifice qualities considered feminine such as compassion to make headlines. They were “hard-boiled dames ready and willing to do anything their male counterparts would do to get the story.”¹⁰¹

Whitaker loses not only her femininity but also her moral standards when she sends Natalie, a young producer, into the locker room for a pre-interview of Christian Patrick, an NFL player recently accused of beating his girlfriend.¹⁰²

Patrick exposes himself to Natalie and then violently grabs her wrist. Dana struggles with the decision and tries to justify her position to Casey. “I am closer to Natalie than anyone in this world and I’m also a woman, so don’t imply that I’m somehow insensitive to what’s happened here, but there happens to be an exclusive story sitting in the green room.”¹⁰³

Though she eventually calls off the interview and apologizes to Natalie, Dana suffers from the realization that her no-holds-barred approach to journalism has robbed her of compassion, even toward friends.¹⁰⁴

V. The Journalist Becomes the News

I have a journalism degree from Northwestern. I started out as a summer intern. I worked my way up to senior associate. Tomorrow I'd be a cocktail party joke
—Natalie Hurley¹⁰⁵

Natalie Hurley works on the show as the senior associate producer for *Sports Night*. Originally from a small town in Ohio¹⁰⁶ with a degree in journalism from Northwestern University, the 26-year-old has worked her entire life to get to that position. Dana refers to Natalie as her “second in command,” and when she is handed the reins to produce the show for a night she not only does it well but she also breaks a story.¹⁰⁷

Like Dana, she is young, attractive, capable and determined. Like Dana, she inevitably falls in love with a bright young man in the newsroom.

But unlike Dana, Natalie does field reporting for the show, a job that inevitably lands her in the middle of a media frenzy when she becomes the story.

In the episode “Mary Pat Shelby,” the show books Christian Patrick, a disreputable NFL player for an interview in the studio.¹⁰⁸ The news team is excited for the interview because Patrick was recently convicted on charges that he beat his girlfriend, Mary Pat Shelby.

Natalie is as excited as anyone because the exclusive interview will help the show's ratings. She does not second-guess that Dana sends her to the locker room for a pre-interview, though Dana never requires pre-interviews.

Natalie enters the locker room for a pre-interview with the player and prepares him for his appearance on the show that night. The player exposes himself to Natalie and hurts her wrist in the otherwise empty locker room.¹⁰⁹

When Dana realizes what has happened she says regretfully to Casey, "I sent her there on purpose. I sent her there instead of Jeremy because I knew how Patrick felt about women in the locker room and I thought I could provoke a better response to the questions."¹¹⁰

Dana then tells the player's lawyer and agent that Natalie will deny reports that she was assaulted and not file a report with the police in exchange for an on-camera interview in which questions concerning the abuse allegations surrounding the player are fair game.

Isaac offers Natalie the night off because Patrick is on his way to the studio.

"I'd like to stay," Natalie says in a display of courage and professionalism. "I'm the senior associate producer here. I've got a show in 38 minutes. I'd like to be allowed to do my job."¹¹¹

Dana scrambles to get the story out. "There happens to be an exclusive story sitting in the green room that's gonna be wildfire whether we light the match or not. It happened," she insists. "It's news. I can't decide not to pursue it just because it happened to us."¹¹²

In the end, Dana calls off the interview and Natalie confronts Patrick in a dark hallway.

“Do you remember how much you wanted to play professional football when you were a kid?” she asks. “That’s how much I wanted to be a sports reporter. I was just there doing my job. But tomorrow, the sky’s gonna fall down on both of us. Because as soon as my show comes down at midnight, I’m going over to the 23rd Precinct and I’m swearing out a warrant for your arrest.”¹¹³

The following episode revolves around the hate mail sent to Natalie blaming her for entering the locker room in the first place. Natalie is clearly shaken up by the media attention and begins to lose and forget things. But because of the circumstances, the other journalists go easy on her.¹¹⁴

“All I want is to get it right and when I don’t I expect to be treated like a professional,” Natalie says at the end of a show in which she made several mistakes.¹¹⁵

Throughout the series, Natalie demonstrates extraordinary talent as a producer but unlike her mentor, Dana, Natalie desperately wants to be in front of the camera.¹¹⁶

In the episode “The Reunion,” Natalie gives Dan her audition tape and asks him for advice. Dan tells her she has a lot of potential but Natalie wants him to recommend her for substitute anchor.

Dan tells her she is still a few years from being ready for an anchor position. But rather than becoming upset, Natalie’s reaction is one of determination.¹¹⁷

In another episode, Natalie gets in an argument with Jeremy after receiving a job offer for on-air position on a local news station in Galveston, Texas.¹¹⁸

“Natalie, they wanted you to be a damn weather girl!” Jeremy says. “You weren’t going to get to do any writing. You weren’t going to get to do any reporting. They were going to hand you wire copy and dress you great.”¹¹⁹

“We both want to be on camera,” she responds. “And this isn’t the last time this is gonna happen.”¹²⁰

The fight however is not between two producers with conflicting aspirations—it’s between a young woman and her boyfriend.

Like Dana, and the long line of sob sisters before her, Natalie inevitably falls for the young producer, Jeremy. However, because they work in the same office there is no need for Natalie to give up her job.

The relationship between the two is rocky at times, but Natalie seems to control most of it. However, when they break up, Jeremy seems virtually unaffected emotionally whereas Natalie falls apart.¹²¹

None of the other people who work on the show see the interoffice romance as unprofessional. Most even root for the two “kids” to get back together.

In the days around her assault by the football player and then her breakup with Jeremy she becomes almost incapable of doing her job. For all Natalie’s professionalism and dedication she frequently behaves like a high school sophomore when she is around the animated Jeremy.

VI. The office Clark Kent

Jeremy, this is television. Things happen. If you want to work here you gotta not spontaneously wig out. – Dana Whitaker¹²²

Jeremy Goodwin, the latest addition to the *Sports Night* team, joined as an associate producer in the pilot episode. Young and idealistic, he sees the chance to work for the show as a dream come true.¹²³

“You guys, he is so totally cute and intense, with a dark mystery about him that says this is not a technician, this is an artist,” Natalie says before Jeremy’s first appearance on screen.¹²⁴

From his first scene, Jeremy Goodwin becomes the latest in a line of neurotic yet brilliant journalists depicted in films and television. Initially more comfortable behind a computer monitor than working with other people, he soon lets his superior intellect make up for his clumsy nervousness.

His brilliance extends beyond sports into a wide array of fields including Greek mythology and computer science. Jeremy is a self-proclaimed “meteorology nerd”¹²⁵ with a degree in applied mathematics from Amherst College.¹²⁶

Jeremy’s unimpressive fashion sense often involves a bland suit and tie or khakis and a plaid shirt. His voice, appearance and overall behavior resemble the neurotic, young producer on *Murphy Brown*, Miles Silverberg.

But Jeremy’s demeanor along with his dark hair and dark-rimmed glasses also recall arguably the most famous of all bumbling reporters in popular culture: the mild-mannered Clark Kent.

Excluding the fairly recent series, *Smallville*, Clark Kent is generally a weak and soft-spoken character. When played by Christopher Reeve in the *Superman* films or Dean Cain on *Lois and Clark*, he is nervous, clumsy and often at a loss as to how he should pursue his love interest, the smart brunette in the newsroom, Lois Lane.

Like Clark Kent, Jeremy is nervous and clumsy. Like Clark Kent, he is in love with the smart brunette in the newsroom, Natalie.

But unlike Clark Kent, Jeremy has no alter ego or special powers. When Natalie is assaulted by the football player in the locker room, Jeremy loses sleep over how to protect her. He eventually figures out the password to her email in order to intercept hate mail from fans of the player.¹²⁷

"I'm not a big man, Dana, I can't beat people up and I don't carry a gun," he says. "I'm a research analyst with a degree in applied mathematics, so this is what I do."¹²⁸

Jeremy compensates for all his physical weakness with an astounding intellect. Like all the other characters in *Sports Night*, Jeremy is well-educated. He is also a masterful poker player¹²⁹ and able to predict the exact plays a coach is going to run in college football games.¹³⁰

He also seems to know more about sports than anyone else in the newsroom. His love for the job is so immense that his idealism overcomes his calm intellect.

"Ms. Whitaker, I would be great at this job," Jeremy says during his job interview, in the pilot episode. "You gotta believe me when I tell you I've been training my whole life for it."¹³¹

Before coming to *Sports Night*, as Isaac later recalls, Jeremy worked for *USA Today*, *The Free Press* and *The Sacramento Bee*.¹³²

Isaac later tells Jeremy what his old bosses said about him. "They all said that Jeremy Goodwin was a bright guy with a world-class understanding of popular sports but that he didn't quite fit in and there was little chance that he'd advance in their organization"¹³³

Jeremy gets his first break for the show when Isaac sends him out to produce a segment on hunting in the Adirondacks. He returns to the city with the piece but not until after suffering from a nervous breakdown when his team shoots a deer.¹³⁴

Isaac asks why Jeremy didn't tell him how he felt about hunting when he was given the assignment

"With all due respect, Mr. Jaffe, I have \$80,000 dollars in college loans to pay back," Jeremy answers. "My instincts told me to shut the hell up and do what I was told. Not fitting in is how qualified people lose jobs."¹³⁵

Isaac tells him that a lot of times: not fitting in is how they end up working at *Sports Night*.¹³⁶

But even in a newsroom where everyone has issues, Jeremy stands out as an extraordinary character.

"You know, Jeremy, Don Quixote was a hero of my father's and my father would like you, you're a very quixotic character," Dana tells him after he loses sleep over Natalie's incident. "However, my father would also say you're a fool."¹³⁷

But Jeremy never turns off his unique brand of nerdy charm and eventually succeeds in dating Natalie. When he finally does, his enthusiasm for life, sports and for the show reaches an all-time high.

“We’re citizens of this planet,” Jeremy tells Casey during the show’s coverage of an ascent of Mt. Everest. “George Mallory, Edmund Hillary, Magellan, Balboa, Desmond Corey, you and I. And I don’t think anyone should tell us how high we can climb.”¹³⁸

Jeremy Goodwin presents the most promising image of the journalist in *Sports Night*. He represents a generation of journalists that is young, intelligent, idealistic and prepared to take on whatever the world can dish out.

In the episode “Kafelnikov,” Jeremy runs a Y2K test in the studio. At first he causes the power to go out. But when the show still goes on as scheduled, his enthusiasm inspires the entire newsroom.¹³⁹

At three minutes to air, he triumphantly says, “I am reinvigorated! You may have won the battle but there’s a war still to be waged, my foe.”

VII. Family

Jeremy’s victory over Y2K kept the show running another day just as it did until the final episode of the series. In the final episodes, the network is sold to a mysterious millionaire who keeps the staff, much to the relief of all the characters.¹⁴⁰

When the new owner tells Dana he plans to keep the show, she runs out of the bar exclaiming, “My show is on! My show is on!”¹⁴¹

She runs to the control room and speaks into Dan and Casey's ear pieces. Sorkin never reveals what she says in their ears but cuts away to the anchors' silent but auspicious reactions. As the series ended after two seasons, the *Sports Night* team avoided becoming disbanded.

Casey keeps the job that gives him his identity. Dan does not lose Isaac, the substitute father figure. Isaac delays retirement yet again. Dana retains the only relationships that seem to work as well as hope for finally conquering Casey's heart. Natalie and Jeremy get back together and keep the dream jobs they were fortunate to get at such a young age.

Like the characters in *Murphy Brown*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and many other TV families of journalists, the *Sports Night* team formed a family. Over the years, through the late nights, failed relationships, weekly array of personal problems and inter-office conflicts, it was their dedication to journalism, the show and one another that brought the *Sports Night* team together.

Though the series ran only two seasons and was not a major contender for ratings in its timeslot, it won three Emmy Awards and, for the fans who watched the show or bought the DVD complete series set, showed an image of the sports journalist as a professional whose life outside the office suffers but is still dedicated, capable, intelligent and loyal in the newsroom.

Endnotes

¹ Episode 17: "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" *Sports Night*. First aired March 9, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Marc Buckland. Written by Rachel Sweet and Aaron Sorkin.

² Episode 6: "The Head Coach, Dinner and the Morning Mail," *Sports Night*. First aired October 27, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Matt Tarses and Aaron Sorkin.

³ Jeremy refers to Casey as the franchise in Episode 43: "Bells and a Siren," *Sports Night*. First aired April 4, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Don Scardino. Written by Chris Lusvardi, David Walpert, and Aaron Sorkin.

⁴ Episode 6: "The Head Coach, Dinner and the Morning Mail," *Sports Night*.

⁵ Jeff Merron. "Keeping it real on 'Sports Night'" (*ESPN.com*).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Episode 8: "Thespis," *Sports Night*. First aired November 17, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁸ Episode 22: "Napoleon's Battle Plan," *Sports Night*. First aired April 27, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Robert Berlinger. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁹ Episode 18: "The Sword of Orion," *Sports Night*. First aired March 23, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Robert Berlinger. Written by David Handelman, Mark McKinney, Aaron Sorkin.

¹⁰ Episode 28: "Kafelnikov," *Sports Night*. First aired November 2, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Robert Berlinger. Written by Matt Tarses and Bill Wrubel.

¹¹ Episode 19: "Eli's Coming," *Sports Night*. First aired March 30, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Robert Berlinger. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Episode 11: "The Six Southern Gentlemen of Tennessee," *Sports Night*. First aired December 15, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Robert Berlinger. Written by Aaron Sorkin, Matt Tarses, David Walpert, Bill Wrubel.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Episode 2: "The Apology," *Sports Night*. First aired September 29, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Episode 12: "Smoky," *Sports Night*. First aired January 5, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Robert Berlinger. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

²⁰ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Sports Night*. First aired September 22, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Episode 8: "Thespi," *Sports Night*.

²³ Episode 40: "Draft Day: Part 1 – It Can't Rain at Indian Wells," *Sports Night*. First aired March 14, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Bryan Gordon. Written by Matt Tarses and Aaron Sorkin.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Episode 41: "Draft Day: Part 2 – The Fall of Ryan O'Brian," *Sports Night*. First aired March 21, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Danny Leiner. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Episode 41: "April Is the Cruellest Month," *Sports Night*. First aired March 28, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Don Scardino. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

³⁰ In Episode 19: "Eli's Coming," Dan believes the lyric from the Three Dog Night Song about a womanizer by the same name refers to an evil force approaching.

³¹ Episode 14: "Rebecca," *Sports Night*. First aired January 26, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

³² Episode 22: "Napoleon's Battle Plan," *Sports Night*.

³³ Episode 3: "The Hungry and the Hunted," *Sports Night*. First aired October 6, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

³⁴ Episode 8: "Thespi," *Sports Night*.

³⁵ Episode 29: "Shane," *Sports Night*. First aired December 7, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Robert Berlinger. Written by Kevin Falls, Matt Tarses and Bill Wrubel.

³⁶ Episode 15: "Dana and the Deep Blue Sea," *Sports Night*. First aired February 9, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

³⁷ Episode 7: "Dear Louise," *Sports Night*. First aired November 10, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by David Walpert and Aaron Sorkin.

³⁸ Episode 25: "When Something Wicked This Way Comes," *Sports Night*. First aired October 12, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Robert Berlinger. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Episode 24: "Special Powers," *Sports Night*. First aired October 5, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁴³ Episode 13: "Small Town," *Sports Night*. First aired January 12, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Paul Redford and Aaron Sorkin.

⁴⁴ Episode 19: "Eli's Coming," *Sports Night*.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Episode 14: "Rebecca," *Sports Night*.

⁴⁷ Episode 15: "Dana and the Deep Blue Sea," *Sports Night*.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Episode 28: "Kafelnikov," *Sports Night*.

⁵⁰ Episode 30: "Kyle Whitaker's Got Two Sacks," *Sports Night*. First aired December 14, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Dennie Gordon. Written by Tom Szentgyorgyi, Aaron Sorkin.

⁵¹ Episode 29: "Shane," *Sports Night*.

⁵² Episode 2: "The Apology," *Sports Night*.

⁵³ Episode 10: "Shoe Money Tonight," *Sports Night*. First aired December 8, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Dennie Gordon. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁵⁴ Episode 44: "La Forza Del Destino," *Sports Night*. First aired May 9, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Timothy Busfield. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁵⁵ Episode 7: "Dear Louise," *Sports Night*.

⁵⁶ Episode 34: "The Cut Man Cometh," *Sports Night*. First aired January 18, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Alex Graves. Written by Bill Wrubel and Aaron Sorkin.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Episode 29: "Shane," *Sports Night*.

⁵⁹ Episode 19: "Eli's Coming," *Sports Night*.

⁶⁰ Episode 2: "The Apology," *Sports Night*.

⁶¹ Episode 12: "Smoky," *Sports Night*.

⁶² Episode 7: "Dear Louise," *Sports Night*.

⁶³ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture, a project of the Norman Lear Center, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 2002), p. 84.

⁶⁴ Episode 8: "Thespis," *Sports Night*.

⁶⁵ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Sports Night*.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Episode 31: "The Reunion," *Sports Night*. First aired December 21, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Dennie Gordon. Written by Kevin Falls and Aaron Sorkin.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Episode 37: "And the Crowd Goes Wild," *Sports Night*. First aired February 8, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Alex Graves. Written by Tom Szentgyorgyi and Aaron Sorkin.

⁷² Debra Marisa Greene. "Lou Grant: A Journalist's Journalist: An Analysis of the Character Who Spanned Two Successful Television Series and Became a Hero to a Generation of Real-Life Journalists and Would-Be Journalists" (IJPC Student Journal), p.8.

⁷³ Episode 4: "Intellectual Property," *Sports Night*. First aired October 13, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁷⁴ Episode 20: "Ordinance Tactics," *Sports Night*. First aired April 6, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Alex Graves. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁷⁵ Episode 21: "Ten Wickets," *Sports Night*. First aired April 13, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Matt Tarses. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁷⁶ Episode 24: "Special Powers," *Sports Night*.

⁷⁷ Episode 35: "The Sweet Smell of Air," *Sports Night*. First aired January 25, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Alex Graves. Written by David Handelman, Kevin Falls, Matt Tarses, Aaron Sorkin.

⁷⁸ Episode 9: "The Quality of Mercy at 29K," *Sports Night*. First aired December 1, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Bill Wrubel and Aaron Sorkin.

⁷⁹ Episode 28: "Kafelnikov," *Sports Night*.

⁸⁰ Episode 24: "Special Powers," *Sports Night*.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Editors used female reporters to cover the human angle or color sidebar of a story. Because these stories came to be known as sob stories, the female reporters were referred to as sob sisters. See Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*.

⁸³ Episode 8: "Thespis," *Sports Night*.

⁸⁴ Episode 7: "Dear Louise," *Sports Night*.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Sports Night*.

⁸⁸ Joe Saltzman, p. 54.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 55

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.56

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Episode 17: "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" *Sports Night*.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Episode 9: "The Quality of Mercy at 29K," *Sports Night*.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Episode 39: "The Local Weather," *Sports Night*. First aired March 7, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Timothy Busfield. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁹⁸ Episode 23: "What Kind of Day Has It Been," *Sports Night*. First aired May 4, 1999, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Aaron Sorkin.

⁹⁹ Episode 8: "Thespis," *Sports Night*.

¹⁰⁰ Episode 14: "Rebecca," *Sports Night*.

¹⁰¹ Joe Saltzman, p. 54

¹⁰² Episode 5: "Mary Pat Shelby," *Sports Night*. First aired October 20, 1998, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by Tracey Stern and Aaron Sorkin.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Episode 5: "Mary Pat Shelby," *Sports Night*.

¹⁰⁶ Episode 13: "Small Town," *Sports Night*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Episode 5: "Mary Pat Shelby," *Sports Night*.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Episode 6: "The Head Coach, Dinner and the Morning Mail," *Sports Night*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Episode 31: "The Reunion," *Sports Night*.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Episode 24: "Special Powers," *Sports Night*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Episode 36: "Dana Get Your Gun," *Sports Night*. First aired February 1, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Alex Graves. Written by David Walpert.

¹²² Episode 1: "Pilot," *Sports Night*.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Episode 14: "Rebecca," *Sports Night*.

¹²⁶ Episode 6: "The Head Coach, Dinner and the Morning Mail," *Sports Night*.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Episode 10: "Shoe Money Tonight," *Sports Night*.

¹³⁰ Episode 3: "The Hungry and the Hunted," *Sports Night*.

¹³¹ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Sports Night*.

¹³² Episode 3: "The Hungry and the Hunted," *Sports Night*.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Episode 6: "The Head Coach, Dinner and the Morning Mail," *Sports Night*.

¹³⁸ Episode 9: "The Quality of Mercy at 29K," *Sports Night*.

¹³⁹ Episode 28: "Kafelnikov," *Sports Night*.

¹⁴⁰ Episode 45: "Quo Vadimus," *Sports Night*. First aired May 16, 2000, ABC, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. Directed by Thomas Schlamme. Written by David Walpert.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Appendix:

45 Episodes: Aaron Sorkin, ABC, September 22, 1998 – May 16, 2000, *Sports Night*

Episode 1 "Pilot": Casey ponders leaving *Sports Night* as his divorce woes start showing through on-air, while Dana hires Natalie's favorite choice for an associate producer job - a good-looking candidate named Jeremy.

Episode 2 "The Apology": A breaking magazine interview reveals Dan's support for the legalization of marijuana and network top dogs look for an on-air apology. Natalie outs her feelings for Jeremy, who struggles to get a highlight piece just right.

Episode 3 "The Hungry and the Hunted": Jeremy struggles with his principles when his first big break is a segment about hunting. Meanwhile, jealousy rules when Casey sees a stunning Dana on a date to a formal party.

Episode 4 "Intellectual Property": While Dan painfully learns that "Happy Birthday" is a copyright-protected song, Casey is vexed by Dana's new romance, and the studio's relentless resident fly.

Episode 5 "Mary and Pat Shelby": A disreputable football star guests on the show, which is a big boost but he "reveals" too much and goes after Natalie in a pre-interview. She later struggles over legal options, and Dana decides to cancel the piece.

Episode 6 "The Head Coach, Dinner and the Morning Mail": Casey lashes out at a head coach over a decision, and Jeremy tries to shield Natalie from the hate mail she starts receiving, which leads to a disastrous first-date dinner.

Episode 7 "Dear Louise": While Jeremy drops a line to his sister about his job, Dan smashes into writer's block, Isaac endures his daughter's new boyfriend and Natalie indulges Jeremy with a kiss.

Episode 8 "Thespis": The ghost of Thespis is running amok on the set as a nervous Dana practices defrosting a Thanksgiving turkey on the show's set lights, and the gang experiences other troubles.

Episode 9 "The Quality of Mercy at 29K": Dana realizes a joy for theater she never knew before, while the crew gears up for a live remote from Mt. Everest as climbers approach the summit.

Episode 10 "Shoe Money Tonight": The staff amuse themselves with a not-so-friendly late night game of poker when Dan and Casey have to cover a west coast update.

Episode 11 "The Six Southern Gentlemen of Tennessee Tech": Sports Night follows six Tennessee Tech football players who walk off the team, refusing to play under the Confederate flag.

Episode 12 "Smoky": While rumors flourish that Isaac is on his way out, Dan thinks Casey should begin dating again - just stay away from Sally!

Episode 13 "Small Town": On their night off, Dana and Casey try to manage a dating debacle, while Natalie has to produce an elusive exclusive all by herself.

Episode 14 "Rebecca": Natalie encourages Dan to ask out Rebecca, but he is dismayed

when she has no idea who he is. The staff also worries over Isaac's job status, especially when he tells them not to.

Episode 15 "Dana and the Deep Blue Sea": Dana agrees on a snorkeling jaunt with Gordon despite the fact that fish give her the willies, while Dan fixates on Rebecca and enlists just about everyone to scout her out.

Episode 16 "Sally": There is no such thing as a slow news day when Casey sleeps with a woman he hardly knows, Dana obsesses over being stood up by Gordon and Jeremy tries to bone up on matters of faith to succeed with Natalie's family.

Episode 17 "How are things in Glocca Morra?": A Pete Sampras tennis set holds up the show, Dana holds up Gordon by choosing work over friends, and Jeremy holds it all up to his sister in another letter.

Episode 18 "Sword of Orion": Dan tries unsuccessfully to get Rebecca to watch a pitcher come off a two-year hiatus, as Jeremy submerses himself in a boating disaster to cope with his parent's divorce - all the while neglecting Natalie.

Episode 19 "Eli's Coming": It's a big bad day for Dan when he has to confront his past and discovers Rebecca is only separated, not divorced; also Isaac suffers a stroke.

Episode 20 "Ordinance Tactics": Jeremy threatens Natalie with a breakup, the network brass threaten Dana with just who's the boss, Rebecca threatens Dan by trying to reunite with her ex, and a bomb scare threatens the show.

Episode 21 "Ten Wickets": The bomb threat still has Casey buffaloed, and his anger toward Dana has her becoming scatterbrained, while Rebecca seems set to return to her ex and Natalie eschews a breakup with Jeremy.

Episode 22 "Napoleon's Battle Plan": Dan and Casey's pants are MIA, and Gordon gets caught with his pants down when Dan tells Natalie that Gordon is sleeping with Sally.

Episode 23 "What Kind of Day Has It Been": When Casey's son visits the office, he tries to make dad proud by lying about his athletic prowess. In the meantime, looking for a last-minute save, Jeremy is rewarded with Isaac's comeback.

Episode 24 "Special Powers": Dana and Casey finally kiss with some prodding from Dan, and at the same time, Natalie is being offered on-air responsibilities out-of-state, sparking turmoil with Jeremy.

Episode 25 "When Something Wicked This Way Comes": Isaac hires a ratings expert to

punch up the show, and he's bruising egos as well. Meanwhile, an overly excited Dan meets his darling, Hillary Clinton, and promptly gets very befuddled.

Episode 26 "Cliff Gardner": The Sports Night Crew is pushed to the brink when the top brass foists "helpful hints" on the staff in the name of improving things, until everyone is naming favorites and finagling.

Episode 27 "Louise Revisited": Casey wants to best Dan in a web-based popularity poll plot, Jeremy pen pals with Natalie's father when she starts writing his sister, Louise, and Dana slips off her panties during a tedious dinner date.

Episode 28 "Kefelnikov": Jeremy's pride comes tumbling down when he tries to make Sports Night Y2K ready and the system crashes right before airtime. Meanwhile, Dan has a date with a psychiatrist but is it for pleasure, or just strictly business?

Episode 29 "Shane": Dana interferes when Casey wants to severely edit a taped interview to make Yankee player and friend look better, while Natalie obsesses over a Vatican announcement denying Hell really exists.

Episode 30 "Kyle Whitaker's got Two Sacks": Jeremy has to face firing a mistake-prone intern who happens to be JJ's cousin, while Dana faces a football steroid scandal that happens to involve her brother.

Episode 31 "The Reunion": While the entire crew contends over who is the Athlete of the Century, Dana frets over a visit from her brother amid the steroid mess, and there is no hiding the Secret Santas!

Episode 32 "A Girl Named Pixley": It's time to press the staff for ideas when Dana realizes the show will run extremely short on a slow news day, Casey presses for a date with Pixley, and Jeremy presses to draft an acceptance speech for an award everyone knows he can't win.

Episode 33 "The Giants Win The Pennant...": Inspired to cover the New York Giants' pennant win in 1951, Dan is puzzled when Isaac won't cooperate with an interview, just as Dana puzzles over her foolish dating plan with Casey.

Episode 34 "The Cut Man Cometh": The production team goes to the mat to anchor their first boxing match, but takes it on the chin when it is over in seconds. At ringside in relationships, Dana gets knocked out when Casey snubs her.

Episode 35 "The Sweet Smell of Air": There is an air of confusion when a Michael Jordan interview threatens the show's integrity, but Dana is shocked when a newly

returned Sam backs up her decisions.

Episode 36 "Dana Get Your Gun": Dana comes into a genuine American Revolution musket that creates a catalyst for some "tension" with Sam, and in the meantime, Dan's substitute anchor muffs his big chance by fretting over his girlfriend leaving him.

Episode 37 "And The Crowd Goes Wild": As Dana agonizes over Sam leaving, the show is ordered to hand over key riot footage they captured, which upsets Natalie even more than she already is from her breakup with Jeremy.

Episode 38 "Celebrities": While Casey makes the list for sport's 100 most influential people, Dan doesn't. And while Dan makes Natalie's monthly celebrity team game, Jeremy strikes out, but he goes after a new love interest who happens to be a porn star.

Episode 39 "The Local Weather": When Dan visits his therapist to postpone, he ends up spilling his guts anyway, while Dana finds herself in a church to get out of the rain, and realizes that she likes it.

Episode 40 "Draft Day: Part 1 It Can't Rain At Indian Wells": Dan and Casey are betting on the NFL draft, and everyone is also excited about first-round coverage, but the best-laid plans are awash with problems when a rainout extends draft coverage.

Episode 41 "Draft Day: Part 2 The Fall of Ryan O'Brian": Casey and Dan's growing rift makes it on-air through an impromptu question, while Dana admits to a nervous rash, and Jeremy's nerves put a strain on his relationship with Jenny, the porn star.

Episode 42 "April is the Cruellest Month": With looming cost cuts, the gang has to deal with fears for Natalie's job, a simple Passover dinner gone wild, and whether or not Dan and Casey can mend their relationship.

Episode 43 "Bells and a Siren": Despite Dan's potential sabotage and an impressive offer, Natalie turns down a job at Saturday Night Live, while Dan hires, fires and then rehires a publicist.

Episode 44 "La Forza del Destino": Dana encounters a mystery man who seems to have the inside scoop on the sale of the network, and Dan and Casey network over an L.A.-based job opportunity.

Episode 45 "Quo Vadimus": While a company named Quo Vadimus wins the bid for the network, Dana realizes her mysterious friend is the new owner who promises to keep Sports Night on the air, just as Jeremy rekindles with Natalie and Rebecca revisits Dan's life.

Writers:

Aaron Sorkin (45 episodes, 1998-2000)

Matt Tarses (9 episodes, 1998-2000)

Bill Wrubel (6 episodes, 1998-2000)

David Walpert (5 episodes, 1998-2000)

Kevin Falls (4 episodes, 1999-2000)

David Handelman (2 episodes, 1999-2000)

Tom Szentgyorgyi (2 episodes, 1999-2000)

Paul Redford (2 episodes, 1999)

Actors:

Casey McCall, senior anchor played by Peter Krause (*Six Feet Under*)

Dan Rydell, junior anchor played by Josh Charles (*Dead Poet's Society*)

Isaac Jaffe, managing editor played by Robert Guillaume (*Phantom of the Opera*, 1986)

Dana Whitaker, executive producer played by Felicity Huffman (*Desperate Housewives*)

Natalie Hurley, associate producer played by Sabrina Lloyd (*Sliders*)

Jeremy Goodwin, associate producer played by Joshua Malina (*The West Wing*)