



U-Media: An educational project for student-reporters

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Guide for young reporters covering international university sports events on social media

Nowadays, not only the audience physically present in sports events is welcome to participate, engage with the competition and competitors and comment. **Globalization came also to sports and social media, television, radio and other media formats bring the audience closer to the sports, even if they are thousands of kilometers away.**

As a (young) reporter in charge of **promoting the engagement of audiences in the social media platforms of international university sports events**, there are different aspects to be taken into consideration, such as: **purpose of the social media, algorithm, language, engagement and timing**. To make good use of all of those, it is imperative to think in strategies beforehand.

First steps when building a social media strategy

In order to make a good social media coverage of international university sports events, consider taking these first steps:

1. Know the event and the sports. You will be communicating the event and, eventually, be managing the social media platforms of the organization. Therefore, you need to be the one knowing more about it. Research the competition, teams, athletes, rules, etc. Familiarize yourself with previous editions, records and storylines. Get to know who is coming to the event, whether is an internationally known athlete or someone with a surprising story. Contact the managers of the participating teams to find out these details.
2. Establish the audiences you want to reach and communicate to. When you know that, study it to answer these questions:
 - a. Which social media platforms do they use?
 - b. How do they communicate? What is the style of communication?
 - c. What are the other social media profiles they follow that we can take as reference?
 - d. What are the limitations of the social media platforms I want to use?
3. Choose wisely your platform(s): consider the most used ones, such as Instagram, Facebook, X and TikTok. Depending on the audiences, the selection may vary to more or less platforms.
4. Prepare as much as possible in advance:
 - a. Design layouts for posts.

- b. Editorial criteria.
- c. Ideas of content. Planification.

- d. Engagement policy for social media.
- e. Storytelling.
- f. Timing of posts.
- g. Team tasks and responsibilities.
- h. Hold preparatory meetings to discuss all the topics and promote exchange of ideas.
- i. Grant accesses.

Study!
Read about the event and previous editions. Know all about the institutions involved, the organization, the host city, etc. There is no need to know all of it by heart, but it is a good strategy to study in advance and share the knowledge with the team. Perhaps, prepare a document with key information, contacts, universities involved and sports to be practiced. Do not be afraid to use it throughout the event.
Who are you communicating to?
Who are your audiences? What do you know about them: how old are them, what do they like, where do they live, what do they do, how much free time do they have to check social media? These are just a few questions you should answer when you build your personas . To adapt the content to your audience, social media managers should not avoid studying their audiences, which can mean losing good opportunities of engagement and wasting time and effort in communication in less effective ways.
Platform(s)
<p>Each platform has its benefits and downsides. Choose wisely which ones let you accomplish your goals best. Study its limitations and understand the meaning of the word “algorithm”, so important in nowadays social media strategies. Combining strategies can maximize reach, engagement, and the overall success of the event’s digital presence.</p> <p>Facebook: Facebook allows you to have groups and engage more privately with different people. At the same time, it lets you publish albums of pictures and post longer videos. Facebook is “longer posts friendly”, also allows live streaming for press conferences and match highlights.</p> <p>Instagram: Instagram is ideal for visual storytelling with high-quality photos, stories and reels. Stories allow you to provide real-time updates, BTS content and interactive features.</p> <p>X: X (Twitter) is made of the instant. It is very effective for real time updates, breaking news and live commentary. Hashtags are very well used in this context, boosting segmentation of content and facilitating conversations.</p> <p>TikTok: TikTok is all about caption, video and trends. It is ideal for creating and engaging short-form videos. Good for challenges, BTS and helps attract younger audiences and increase event visibility through trends.</p>

YouTube: YouTube is good for long-form videos and live streaming. Playlists can be created to organize content and also can stay as an archive.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn is useful for networking. There, it can be shared in-depth articles about the event's impact, engage with sponsors, industry professionals, bring visibility to student-athletes.

Preparation(s)

The more your team prepare in advance, the less you have to work under pressure and running against time.

Design layout for posts: prepare all the templates that you want to use throughout the event. Make tests of color, lettering, feed, etc. Choose how you want to post results, agenda and warnings.

Editorial criteria: when you are part of a social media team dealing with the same platforms, it is good to be on the same side of the force. Use the same language, answer the same way, use the same tone of voice and work on the same pace.

Ideas of content and planification: promote ideas exchange, create mood/inspiration boards and list what content is good to do and do not forget legal commitments, like sponsors. Create a social media planner (appendix 1).

Engagement policy for social media: establish how you and your team will answer comments and mentions. Do you want to address users by their first name, be impersonal, fun or serious? When you come to this conclusion, be consistent and homogeneous.

Storytelling: which stories do you want to tell and how many of those can be prepared in advance? Think about places, equipment, light, etc.

Timing of posts: when we talk about sports events, it's a lot about good timing. Posting results only makes sense after each competition and reactions in the next hours. Try to stick to those timings and position yourself on the other side: when do you want to know if your university won the table tennis game – when it ends or one day after?

Team tasks and responsibilities: whether is a team of 2 or 10, it is fundamental to know what each one is responsible for. Who is in charge of the design, the Facebook team, the Instagram team, the video editors, etc. Respect the team members and remember you all have the same goal.

Hold preparatory meetings: preparatory meetings to discuss all the topics and promote exchange of ideas is a good way to kick-off the team work. Promote team tasks to develop interaction within the team and break the ice.

Grant accesses: do not forget to grant/get the accesses needed to get the job done. Emphasize the importance of keeping passwords confidential.

Good practices

The role of social media managers in events like this is crucial in bringing the excitement, stories and key moments to a global audience. Knowing each audience will affect the strategy, there are a few strategies known for maximizing reach and engagement, such as:

Use a multi-platform approach
Based on the type of audience you want to reach, choose the social media platforms and be realistic: the number of social media platforms you have must be accompanied by a team that can handle all of that. Answer the question: Is it better to have many and do a poor communication in all of them due to lack of resources or to implement your strategy and have resources in less?
Storytelling
Humanize the communication and give faces to your stories. And let's be honest: Sports competitions are full of faces – athletes, volunteers, coaches, fans, staff, other universities representatives. Take advantage of that and know who your good communicators are. For example, invite the different “characters” of the competition tell the story: A day in the life of a voluntary, a day in the life of an athlete, a day in the life of a coach, etc.
Invest in visuals
Social media is everyday less and less about the content itself and more about the visual you deliver. Invest in high-quality images, videos, stickers and infographics.
Live updates & real-time content
Provide live coverage through your social media. Be on the spot and be the first to deliver the news, the results and the reactions. Create the habit in the fans to search for your profiles when they want to know the latest updates. Add value to your content.
Behind-the-Scenes content
Who doesn't love BTS content? Showing exclusive moments like athletes preparations, team spirit, infrastructure preparations, etc. Show what could not be seen while the games were not ON.
Athlete & fan interactions
Conduct short interviews with athletes, coaches and fans. Promote fans engagement by asking them: What would you like to ask Athlete X? What do you want to know about Y?
Trends
Be a fan of other profiles, stay up to date on trends and know which of those can be used in your university sports event. On the other hand, be the one trending! Create challenges, filters, and event-themed trends.

Hashtags

Make a hashtag research based on subject, organization, previous events and trends. Create your own hashtag events.

Types of content

1. **Pre-event content:** Build enthusiasm and expectations, both in the student-athletes coming to compete and in the fans.
 - a. Building teasers – where is it going to be held, what it will contain, details, venue tours, etc.
 - b. University and student-athletes introductions – get to know the institutions involved in the event and student-athletes competing.
 - c. Sports – add knowledge to your audience with information about the different sports involved in the event.
 - d. History – do you know which university was the last champion of this sport? Did you know that this competition started in ...? Fun facts about the event, the hosting city, etc.
 - e. Sponsors – depending on the type of agreement made with the sponsors, it might include a presentation of the sponsors.
2. **Live-event coverage:** Keep the audiences interested in your content.
 - a. Score updates.
 - b. Best moments.
 - c. Game highlights.
3. **Fan engagement:** Bring the fans closer to the athletes. Promote Q&A sessions, reactions and features.
4. **Post-event highlights:** The communication does not end after the last match.
 - a. Winner interviews.
 - b. Best plays.
 - c. Records.
 - d. Fans testimonials.
 - e. Appreciation post to volunteers, staff, sponsors, etc.
5. **BTS:** Show what could not be seen and the hidden side of the competition.
 - a. Daily vlogs.
 - b. Bloopers.

Ethical and professional social media management

Regardless the goal your team want to reach, the **Organization values cannot be discarded or disrespected**. By respecting them, you ensure that the social media presence of the event and organization remains credible, professional and engaging. Here are some important values to respect:

Accuracy and credibility:

- Verify all information in trustworthy sources before posting to avoid spreading misinformation.
- Use official sources of information and share the sources. It gives credit, but also responsibility.
- Correct errors transparently.

Respect:

- Promote a positive and inclusive communication.
- Create and maintain safe spaces for exchange of ideas.
- Avoid discriminatory language.
- Be inclusive when communicating about student-athletes, universities, volunteers, staff, organizations and audiences.

Privacy and consent:

- Obtain permissions to post.
- Respect the privacy of athletes, staff, volunteers and attendees. It's always good to ask when if you can post when producing content.
- Follow RGPD regulations.

Transparency:

- Disclose partnerships, sponsorships and promotional content.
- Be prepared for crisis and address them professionally.

Possible challenges and suggestion of solutions

There is a number of challenges a social media team can face when covering sports events.

Challenges	Solution
Limited access to internet	Pre-schedule content and use offline tools for editing.
Content approval delays	Plan ahead of time and coordinate with your team who will approve posts.
Negative comments	Follow official moderation policies and avoid engagement with harmful content.

Technical issues	Have backup devices and troubleshoot in advance.
Keeping up with fast-paced events	Assign specific roles and tasks – photography, videography, interviewers, designers, etc.

Suggestion of tools for social media management

There are many tools available online that can help social media managers creating and editing content. These tools provide, often, services of social media management – such as statistics, scheduling, etc.

For video and photography editing, design creations, Canva and the Adobe apps are very good options. For quicker editions of videos, InShot and CapCut can help making it easier and user-friendly. Meta Analytics gathers scheduling of content on Facebook and Instagram, and also statistics about how your work is performing online.

For team coordination, task distribution and work-flow organization, Trello shows up as a very good alternative, allowing you to share notes about different topics, set timelines, deadlines, add comments to colleagues, assign tasks.

And remember: Less is often more. Most social media networks have the necessary tools for good and effective communication. As long as the content is interesting and rich, the communication will work!

Conclusion

Managing social media in university sports events is not an easy task, but it is certainly exciting. By staying prepared, being creative and engaging effectively with the audiences, you are combining the right ingredients for a successful and impactful digital presence for the event.

Embracing the challenge and counting on the team are good ways to kick off the project of Rhine-Ruhr 2025 FISU World University Games.

Social media planner

Facebook							
Day	Hour	Description	Copy	Image	Notes	Status	Owner
					Hashtags, mentions, links.	To approve, approved, Scheduled, Posted, Canceled.	

Instagram							
Day	Hour	Description	Copy	Image	Notes	Status	Owner

X							
Day	Hour	Description	Copy	Image	Notes	Status	Owner

U-Media: Educational Program for Student Reporters at University Sports Events

LinkedIn							
Day	Hour	Description	Copy	Image	Notes	Status	Owner

Media training guide for university student-athletes

Introduction

Media attention is an integral part of the journey of a university student-athlete competing at an international level. Engaging with the media effectively can enhance students' reputation, build their personal brand and, simultaneously, contribute to improve the image of the institution represented. Therefore, **this guide aims to equip the student-athletes with the necessary skills to navigate through media interactions.**

Understanding media & its impact

Media plays a crucial role in promoting sports, athletes and competitions. Journalists and other media professionals aim to inform, entertain and get the audience's attention, so understanding their perspectives will help athletes and media relation professionals handling these interactions in the most positive way.

Writing news articles about any subject is often about how journalists write the stories, and athletes can contribute to this **storytelling** by providing authentic insights and by being the "characters" that are needed in the (sports) stories. By being present in the media for the "good reasons", athletes increase the chances of building a positive public image. However, it is important to note that, although it represents opportunities of promotion, it also means a bigger exposure to risks. This is where media training plays a significant role on how to minimize the risks.

These are some of the reasons why public and media relations professionals working at the universities need to be on top of this matter, together with the need to guarantee that the students that will represent their institutions do the best job promoting their integrity and values.

Different media formats

Regardless the type, media exposure can and often lead to audience attention and, consequently, sponsorships, scholarships and career opportunities. However, it is beneficial to know what different types of media coverage there are:

- Traditional media: television, radio, newspapers and magazines.
- Digital media: blogs, news websites and other platforms.
- Social media: Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, etc.

Different formats mean different approaches, both from the media producers and from the student-athletes.

The **traditional media** outlets are known for the deeper content – interviews with athletes, coaches, specialists, reporting sports events, etc. As it is consumed by older audiences, it requires an engagement in a more formal way.

Digital media is, many times, an adaptation of the content produced for the traditional media to the online platforms. These outlets allow the media channels to be faster, more immediate and interactive, both for fans and haters.

With the rise of **social media** platforms, the media role grew from “mandatory” to “beneficial” when student-athletes want to talk with the audiences. With social media, athletes can engage directly with the public and express opinions without the press filter – which can represent an even bigger risk sometimes. Despite the type of profile held by the athletes, it is important to keep in mind what are the career goals and what certain posts and opinions can bring.

It is also important to add, at this point, the **press conferences and others**, that can mix all the above mentioned at the same time. After major competitions or smaller competitions with big audience interest, athletes may be required to express opinions publicly and to answer questions.

Preparing for media engagements

It happens frequently that the media interactions are planned and can be prepared in advance. However, it is not rare the case when interviews are requested on the spot. Therefore, it is important that media relations professionals organize sessions where, for example, this guide is used as a base for some media training.

Taking that into consideration, **this media training guide is to be used to prepare student-athletes to major university sports competitions**. There are, initially, important steps to be advised:

- Identify two to three key messages the student-athletes want to convey about: themselves, their sport and the institution they represent.
- Keep a positive and consistent speech.
- Know the values that are more important to the institution to be shared.
- Try to anticipate common questions, for example: about the training, previous experiences, challenges and future aspirations.
- Be updated with the ongoing subjects in the “sports world”. Prepare responses for potentially challenging questions.
- Practice in front of a mirror or someone of trust. It can also help to self-record.

By preparing these first steps, student-athletes already are reducing the chances of being “caught” without the information that is expected from them. Also, by thinking about this and anticipating possible scenarios, student-athletes decrease the feeling of stress and nervousness, typically linked with the unknown.

Interviews

Journalists have many ways to conduct interviews and to publish them. Depending on which format the interview is going to be recorded and published, there are a few aspects to take into consideration:

- Appearance.
- Posture.
- Content.
- Speech.

Written interviews

When talking about written interviews, student-athletes do not have to worry about the appearance and posture, as the focus will be on the text.

In these cases, the focus stands on the content and way of developing a written speech, so it is a very good practice to read and re-read the answers before sending them to the interviewer. In case it is needed to also send pictures while practicing sports or a profile picture, pay attention to the details, such as clothes, posture and facial expressions. Getting counseling from the University PR in what regards to the answers and pictures to be send also decreases the chances of making mistakes.

Live and recording video interviews

If the interview is made with video – live or recording -, all the aspects must be taken care of:

Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dress appropriately and follow the institution guidelines – use the university official clothes, properly washed and nit.• Avoid distracting patterns and excessive accessories.• Proper grooming.• If having long hair, take into consideration if the logos of the institution are hidden.
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit or stand upright with shoulders back – projects a confident attitude.• Use natural hand gestures and pay attention to the positions of the hands when resting. Avoid crossing arms (which reminds of a defensive posture).• Be natural.• Avoid excessive gestures to don't be distractive.• Make eye contact.• Pay attention to facial expressions. Smiling causally promotes empathy with the audience.

Content & Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak slowly and clearly.• Try to reduce filler words, such as “like”, “you know”, “hm”, etc.• Listen carefully.• Stay on-topic and avoid too long answers.
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At the end of the interview, is always good to express gratitude by thanking the interviewer for their time and opportunity granted to talk.

Radio and podcast interviews

Radio interviews are often seen, by the student-athletes, as easier interviews due to the fact that image won't be a clause to take into consideration. Despite the fact that the interview is not a video intended interview, **media relations professionals must advise the student-athletes or the student-athletes themselves should consider the increase of podcasts and radios that also record video to publish and broadcast live.**

Therefore, image should not be disregarded. Adding to the previous notes, it is vital, for the good result of the audio, to look upon the bracelets and necklaces used. If student-athletes wear bracelets that are loose and rest hands on a table, the chances are that those accessories will make noise and interfere in the quality of the sound recorded. Also, when wearing necklaces and a microphone attached to the clothes, it is likely that, at some point of the interview, the necklaces will touch the microphone and prejudice the result of the recording.

Social media management

Social media is, nowadays, almost a “most-have” in society, especially if athletes want to build a public image and promote their careers. Therefore, **it is fundamental to be careful with the posts made and community built.**

There are many books written about guidelines and precautions when the subject is social media for public figures or people with public figures aspirations, but the most important includes:

- Keep the profile clean, positive and professional. If needed, create a second account that remains private and restricted to close friends and family.
- Share professional achievements and progresses.
- Promote good values and interact in a responsible way with the community.
- Avoid controversial topics and heated discussions.
- Be cautious with written humor and sarcasm – not everyone thing in the same way.
- Think before posting.

After-competition responsibilities

Depending on the sport, the end of competitions can involve different types and quantity of press attention. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, it is positive to be prepared for it.

If the student-athletes are accompanied by a media relations professional invested in taking care of their interests, it is important that the students acknowledge their presence, trust their work and take advantage of their presence by consulting when in doubt.

When approached by the media – in any type –, **student-athletes should take their time to think about the questions made and the answers to be given**. In case it feels uncomfortable, it is a good strategy to use the **bridging technique**: in case of difficult questions, acknowledge and redirect (such as “That is an interesting question, but what’s most important is...”).

After winning or losing, acknowledge victories and defeats with grace. Show respect for the other teams and institutions. Highlight the effort of the team players and members – coach, physiotherapist, massagist, etc. Also, avoid blaming individuals or external factors to justify something – team mates, referees, weather, for example.

Crisis – what if?

As much as communication departments and student-athletes prepare for hypothetical communication crisis, they are always based on assumptions and suppositions that can never happen, or that can happen in ways no one has thought about. **This does not mean they should not be prepared, but instead that they should be as wide and adaptative as possible.**

However, **anticipating and preparing for communication crisis is not something that student-athletes can do by themselves**, especially due to lack of knowledge about media functionality, institution support and, above all, possible consequences.

Therefore, **it is fundamental that student-athletes seek for help** and count on the media relations of the institutions they represent, in order to get media training and advise for possible crisis.

How to deal with negative comments and publicity

As said earlier, more media attention results in better results, but also bigger risks. Facing negative media attention can happen, but it is crucial to remain calm and composed. There are some steps to take when facing communication crisis:

1	Assess the situation Gather as much information as possible about what is happening, what is the source of information and source of negativity.
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2	Consult Coaches, public relations/media relations: get the team to act and to set a strategy before making any statement.
3	Build a response, if needed If the team concludes that addressing the issue is necessary, be factual and informative.
4	Avoid emotions Emotions can lead to misinterpretations.
5	Redirect Negative acts must be acknowledged and excused, but no one should be dwelling on negativity. Instead, do not take too long to shift the topic to improvements, future goals.

In case apologies are needed

Sincere apologies are often required when mistakes are made. Often, those sincere apologies help rebuild trust and credibility. To take into consideration when apologizing:

- Take responsibility and do not blame others.
- Avoid long-winded explanations. Invest on genuine regret and corrective actions.
- Explain how it is planned to improve so it demonstrates growth. Actions speak louder than words, so engage in initiatives that show the explanation had a true meaning.

Social media canceling culture

Nowadays, social media is not only a place to share experiences, ideas and pictures, but also a place where criticism, negativity and hate grow. Therefore, it is important that student-athletes are well aware of the risks associated with having a social media presence. **To avoid the risk of being “cancelled”, there are some boundaries student-athletes can set:**

- Do not engage in arguments. Important discussions are addressed in professional ways and in appropriate places.
- Ignore unnecessary negativity.
- Correct misinformation calmly and choose the battles to be fought.
- Limit interactions, if necessary. Sometimes, disabling comments and filtering messages can help as a “crowd control procedure”.
- Seek professional advice.

Practical examples of communication crisis

Let's take the current international situation as an example to illustrate one way to react to questions from media. Nowadays, the world is facing multiple conflicts in different countries. Knowing that no one can ignore those political, geographical and economical conflicts, PR officers must prepare the student-athletes to answer possible questions. But what are the best answers to non-sports related questions?

As mentioned before, **it is always good to focus on the event and on the athlete's performance during the competition.** It is inevitable that everyone has an opinion, the difference is within showing it or not. The **bridging technique** is a good strategy to politely decline answering those questions that will position the students in one side of the "problem".

In case student-athletes do not manage to avoid the questions, it is a good option to always advocate for peace, dialogue and cooperation. Advocating for good values and positive attitudes from both sides is a way of showing respect for both parts involved and, at the same time, not letting any preferences be visible.

Conclusion

The success in the interactions between student-athletes and media is never only about how he/she behaves or how much star quality they have. Instead, it is about how well prepared they are for talking in public about their passion, their career, their goals and, in this specific case, the institution they represent. By preparing in advance, the positive exposure and protection of reputation are maximized.

Every media opportunity is a chance to share a story a inspire others, so let's use it that way!

Checklists in hand for student-athletes

Checklist 1: Preparing for an interview

	Know your key messages: what do you want to say?
	Research as much as possible: about the media, the interviewer, the style of approach that will be made, the social/world context, etc.
	Prepare possible questions and answers.
	Dress appropriately.
	Be mindful of your body language: posture, gestures, expressions and speech.
	Speak slowly and clearly, but naturally.
	Stay calm.
	Avoid controversial topics.
	Enjoy the moment and focus on your goals.

Checklist 2: Managing the social media of a student-athlete

	Be professional and authentic.
	Promote your good values.
	Engage with the audience in a respectful way.
	Avoid controversial topics and heated discussions.
	Think before you post.
	Focus on the achievements and milestones.
	Invest on good visuals – social media is about image.
	Review old posts and maintain only what is aligned with your strategy.
	Try to separate personal from professional accounts.
	Stay positive and avoid negativity.

Interview with the athletes

Purpose: “to enhance understanding and appreciation for the dedication and resilience of student athletes”.

Introduction & Background

1. Can you introduce yourself and tell us a bit about your academic and sports career?
2. What motivated you to pursue both university studies and high-level sports?
3. What does your daily routine look like when balancing both commitments?

Physical & mental preparation

1. How do you physically prepare for major competitions?
2. How much importance do you give to a “mental preparation”? Is it something you think about? Which techniques do you use (for example, mindfulness, sports psychology, coaching)?
3. How is it for you to deal with the pressure before and during competitions?
4. How do you keep up your motivation for those two sides of your life – student and athlete?

Challenges & obstacles

1. What has been the biggest challenges you faced when balancing your studies and your sports career?
2. Have you ever felt like you had to choose between the two? How did you handle it?
3. What support systems (for example, coaches, professors, teammates, family) do you count on to help you manage these challenges?

Time management & strategies

1. How do you manage your time effectively between training, competitions and academic work?
2. As a top-level athlete, do you manage to enjoy the social side of also being a student – for example, gatherings, celebrations, etc?
3. Do you have any productivity or time management techniques that help you?
4. What advice would you give to other student-athletes trying to balance a double career like yours?

What's ahead?

1. What are your future goals in both your academic and sports careers?
2. Do you see yourself continuing both paths in the long run, or do you plan to prioritize one?
3. If you could change something about the way student-athletes are supported, what would it be?

