

## **Fan-Athlete Interaction**

This past decade has been defined by the growth of digital media technologies such as Facebook and Twitter, and these technologies have created new opportunities for fan-athlete interaction. Pegoraro (2009) found social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are built around developing relationships. The inherently social natures of these sites can allow one's individual message to be seen by hundreds, thousands, or in some instances even millions of others, even those who do not directly follow the account that posted the message. High-Profile athletes are among the many demographics of digital media users to develop networks of hundreds of thousands of followers, and they represent some of the most notable examples of using the interactivity of these sites to communicate directly with their network of followers. Greenhalgh, Hambrick, and Simmons (2010) divided tweets by professional athletes into six different categories: interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, fanship, and promotional opportunities, and they found that athletes with the most followers were most likely to send tweets that fell in category of interactivity, so they could connect directly with their followers.

Frederick, Lim, Clavio, Pederson, and Burch (2014) found that nearly half of all athlete tweets could be characterized as interactive, and that athletes used twitter for self-disclosure, connection, and in some instances even to meet up with some of their followers in person. Frederick (et all) viewed relationship building through digital media platforms as parasocial, allowing fans and athletes to interact almost as if they were friends. New digital media technologies have created an environment that encourages connection and relationship building, and professional athletes have used this interactivity to create and develop relationships with a

growing, and ever connected network of their fans. Clavio and Walsh (2014) found this network of fans spans into collegiate sports as well despite the fact some behind the scenes officials of major collegiate sports teams have been hesitant to adopt a social media strategy, since the players are considered amateurs. Due to the rules and limitations on collegiate sports teams' use of digital media, and therefore fan connectivity, research has found that college students that do follow their school's sports teams on Twitter tend to do so more for informational purposes, and less to develop a connection through interactivity. Lim, Waldburger, and Witkemper (2012) suggested that sports teams should use social media for largely informational purposes, where fans can learn more details about their favorite players, provide opportunities to win discounts, and learn about information about upcoming games .Relationship building can be formed through this interactivity, and it is important to know the motivations of sports fans on social media in order to meet their needs (Lim et all, 2012).