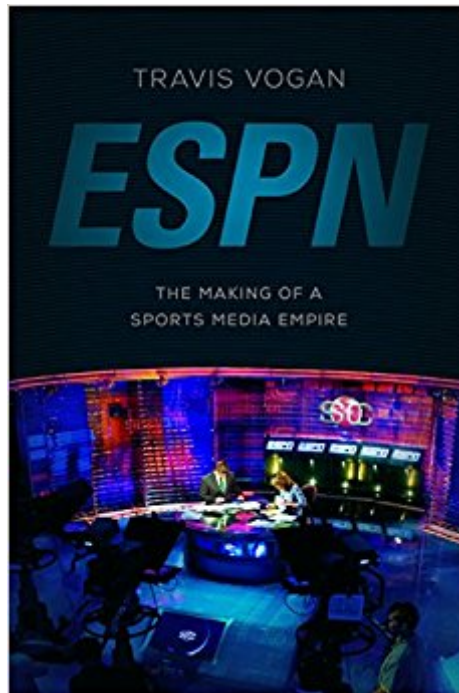




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ESPN: The Making Of A Sports Media Empire



Synopsis

Once a shoestring operation built on plywood sets and Australian rules football, ESPN has evolved into a media colossus. A genius for cross-promotion and its near-mystical rapport with its viewers empower the network to set agendas and create superstars, to curate sports history even as it mainstreams the latest cultural trends. Travis Vogan teams archival research and interviews with an all-star cast to pen the definitive account of how ESPN turned X's and O's into billions of \$\$\$.

Vogan's institutional and cultural history focuses on the network since 1998, the year it launched a high-motor effort to craft its brand and grow audiences across media platforms. As he shows, innovative properties like SportsCentury, ESPN The Magazine , and 30 for 30 built the network's cultural caché. This credibility, in turn, propelled ESPN's transformation into an entity that lapped its run-of-the-mill competitors and helped fulfill its self-proclaimed status as the "Worldwide Leader in Sports." Ambitious and long overdue, ESPN: The Making of a Sports Media Empire offers an inside look at how the network changed an industry and reshaped the very way we live as sports fans.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Vogan's research provides him with ample fodder to engross readers with stories and insights into the world behind their notable shows. . . . Sports fans will enjoy this well-researched and fascinating look at how ESPN has impacted both television and the viewing habits of millions of watchers."--Library Journal "In this fascinating history, journalism professor Vogan imbues the network's nascent struggles with a sense of adventure. . . . Sports fans, especially those of the

couch-potato variety, will find this account of the life of a TV network as enjoyable as most star biographies."--Booklist"Represents a genuinely original and overdue assessment of perhaps the most significant entity in sports media since the penny press. An exceptional trove of interviews, archival information, and industrial and aesthetic analysis." --Victoria E. Johnson, author of *Heartland TV: Prime Time Television and the Struggle for U.S. Identity* "This well-researched book is a gold mine of information about the origin and philosophy of ESPN. Highly recommended."--Choice"This smart, lively examination of ESPN's place in American culture and how it continues to consciously work its way in is a trove of research, insight, and fascinating stories."--Robert Lipsyte, New York Times columnist and author of *An Accidental*

How the Worldwide Leader turned X's and O's into billions of \$\$\$

As expected

This is a very short book but with very good insights into the evolution of: the Cable industry, the sports TV and broadcasting and of course ESPN central role in all this. If you are interested in startups, entrepreneurship and keeping up afloat of new disruptive technologies, then this book can give you some idea of why sometimes they lose money or don't have earnings despite their high revenues and great future prospects. This quote from the book comes to mind: "Gentlemen, I would like to equate ESPN with an oil well," he would say. "Seismic indicated there was a reservoir, and we determined that was true. Experience has shown that the reservoir is there and is a hell of a lot bigger than we originally thought. Unfortunately, it is also deeper than we thought. So I need more pipe." It is also a book about creating, managing and maintaining a brand.

At first you might be forgiven for thinking that this book is a little too specialised, targeting a niche of a niche as it were, yet strangely the tale of the creation and expansion of an American sports television channel is rather fascinating, managing to serve several audiences at the same time. Unless you are particularly interested in sports programming or the broadcast television industry, ESPN might not mean so much to you; especially the further you are away from the United States. Yet this company has grown and probably exceeded the wildest dreams of its founders and there is a good chance that you could have seen some ESPN output and didn't know it. If you are focussed on the broadcast industry you have one great story, if you are more interested in

business start-ups and development here is another. If you are a generalist there's a good story to tell, and the professional or academic can take other things out of this for their own particular needs. Dependent on your interest, you may skip a few pages here and there, yet overall you still are given an interesting, credible and powerful read. Whilst the trials and tribulations of the early days are satisfactorily covered, the book particularly focuses on the post-1998 activities of the company as it branched out to become a multi-country, multi-platform and multi-output behemoth. Some attempts at diversification failed; yet you can still learn from the mistakes of others. Rather a lot has worked though! Some of the anecdotes placed in the book really made it shine, even if it was not the intention. Something simple as this quotation of an event straight after the channel's launch in 1979: "the Washington Post's Jane Leavy asked the new outlet's president, Chet Simmons, how he thought the public would respond to an all-sports cable TV network. 'I guess we'll have to have a battery of divorce lawyers standing by to handle all the cases,' Simmons quipped. 'Did you ever think that a television network would be named as a co-respondent in a divorce action?' Three years later, a woman in Austin, Texas, actually did name ESPN in her divorce suit. She claimed it ruined her marriage by offering her apparently addicted husband too much sports coverage. Simple; and still new to this reviewer who spent nearly a decade covering the European satellite and cable television industry. Or harmless, such as this quoted factoid: "On January 26, 2000, Alisha and Chad Blondeel of Newaygo, Michigan, named their newborn son Espen" a tribute to Chad's favorite TV channel. (In 2004 as part of the channel's 25th anniversary, they had a report featuring eleven children who had been called Espen or Espn, all since the channel's launch.) For those who care about such things, this book also features a comprehensive index and very extensive bibliography for further reading and source checking. This was a surprising find; the book appears to be a lot more attractive and desirable than one originally expected. It was an enjoyable read, even to somebody who cannot abide televised sports. Look past the sport towards the organisation and here, for this reviewer, was the best story.

I'm far from a sports fanatic, but on the other hand, I've got a long history of mostly non hands-on participation that dates back to the 1950s, when I loved to watch the Gillette-sponsored Friday night boxing matches with my dad - on our black-and-white TV set (complete with rabbit ears, no less). Later, I was a die-hard viewer of ABC's "Wide world of Sports" that launched in 1961, and I waited impatiently for the every-four-year coverage of my beloved Olympic games. My heart was in my

throat as my hero, Jean-Claude Killy, schussed his way to wins in all three Alpine events in the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France. And who could forget late sportscaster Jim McKay's emotional, "They're all gone" as he reported on the Munich massacre at the 1972 Summer Olympics? Except for the Olympics, which now come at us every two years (and with far less impressive TV coverage, IMHO), those other programs have long since come and gone. But on Sept. 7, 1979, another sports phenomenon emerged: ESPN (the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network). It hit the ground running, and - although I learned from this book that it didn't turn a profit until 1985 - it's pretty safe to say it's become a household acronym. In 2014, as the author points out, ESPN was named the "world's most valuable media property." Today, I'd bet the farm that not a day goes by that my husband and I - separately or together - tune in to some kind of ESPN show. Virtually every weeknight, you'll find our set tuned to one of my favorite shows, "Pardon the Interruption," to watch the sparring between hosts Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon. So it was that when I was granted the opportunity to read and review this by the publisher (via NetGalley), I jumped at the chance. Let me be perfectly clear, though: This is a scholarly publication. If you're expecting witty quotes from famous athletes or network executives or smack-on-the-butt locker room jokes, you'll be disappointed. Rather, it's a straightforward and exceptionally well-researched documentation of how ESPN and all its offshoots - from the magazine to books to made-for-TV movies and docudramas - came to be. Initially, it was to a degree a matter of right place, right time, given more public interest in sports, the emergence of cable TV and increasing deregulation of the communications industry. But transforming that beginning into the media powerhouse as we know it certainly didn't happen by accident; the author details almost every step of the route to success, such as the launch of "SportsCentury," a concept headed by Mark Shapiro that helped bring much-needed credibility to the network. The well-written book reads almost like a doctoral dissertation - albeit a much more interesting one than the few I helped edit back in my days as a university administrator - complete with extensive references at the end (close to 25% of the book is comprised of footnote and other resources, most arranged by chapter). In short, it's exactly what I would expect from a university press. That said, there's no way I can condense all the information that's in here; but I will say that if there was a stone left untouched, I'm confident it isn't an important one.

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