

SPORTS JOURNALISM SEMINAR

MEDIA RELATIONS

MATT CHMURA – BOSTON BRUINS

ADAM KAUFMAN – PROVIDENCE BRUINS

Matt, you get to go to all the games, stay at all the fancy hotels, fly on all the jets...you've got the best job in sports right?

Matt: Sometimes. It's certainly exciting. There's parts of it that's great and there's parts of it that the normal fan or normal person doesn't get to do. But there's a lot of negatives about it, not a lot, but there are some negatives about it. Certainly the amount of hours. The fact that you're on call 24 hours a day to deal with future journalists and regular journalists is not always exciting the fact that your personal life takes is always second to work. On the other hand there are a lot o perks about it and every day when I get up I look forward to work everyday and that's certainly a good thing and something a lot people can't say.

Adam, you've worked in some really exotic places like Auburn, NY and Frasier, MI and Amarillo, TX...

Adam: I've been around. There's no question about that. It's follow the dream, which all of you will figure out when you get out of here what the dream is exactly. Whether that is the dream. You go to a lot of places, maybe live in a lot of places that you never even thought you'd visit such as pretty much everywhere. I had never been to Texas before and then went to actually living there. SO it's interesting and it's all about personally climbing the latter much to get where matt is doing that same type of thing. And also learning along the way. There's a lot that the different people you run into can teach you whether those are the players themselves, fans...Everybody has a different objective, things that they want to learn from you, figure out along the way, learn from your team and I think you can take that on with you to different places along the way.

What does the director of Public Relations do?

Adam: A lot of things that don't fall under that title. That's one thing in minor league sports from day one that I've been involved. The cliché is many hats, you wear many hats in minor league sports. I was in Auburn, NY working in baseball. I was one of the chief leaders of the tarp crew when it rained. Onto Detroit and Texas and where I am now and it was sort of a different skill along the way. I handle all of the team's graphic design for instance. I never took a graphic design class in class in my entire life before getting to Providence. You learn a lot of things on the job. You realize that minor league sports in particular in most places, not everywhere—some of the bigger markets like bigger staffs—but there will be a lot of smaller staffs in minor league sports. In Auburn

there were 5 of us that were full time and most interns not getting paid, myself included. Now we have about 15 people and most are tickets sales so I'll handle graphic design, media relations, public relations and go on appearances with players. Any number of things can fall into that.

Matt, what's the difference between what Adams does as head of public relations and director of communications?

Matt: What I do is I try to keep every communication that our organization with the customers, that are the fans or the people in Boston, consistent. That means that what we do in our publications whether it's media guide or yearbook down to our game day programs are consistent with the message of our GM, coaches, owners want to send. I make sure that players when they're conducting interviews after a game or practice that the message that they're sending is consistent in that making sure what's happening on the website editorially is consistent with that message so that hopefully that same message that is coming from the top is being directed from all the way our organizations out to the ten. So this year as an example...After last season was over as we talked of our goals to our General Manager and the ownership group. One of the things we decided was for our team to be tougher to play against. That was something that the Bruins felt we had to establish, one, for our identity in Boston for our team looking back in history that our team has gotten tough to play against. We have to have a lot of grit, a lot of transition, mix it up when we need to but we need to be tougher to play against. When you listen to our guys talk at the beginning of the year and when you hear them talk now that's a constant theme of our team this year is being tougher to play against. One thing we try to do in everything we do is that consistency in theme. Now in addition to that one thing we're always looking for is to get more publicity but...something that's probably different with my position than yours is that in NHL you're always balancing your responsibilities to the hockey operation side and to constantly winning with trying to draw and get more media. SO we're both wanting to get more people to cover us but at the same time shielding our guys and our team. It's a fine balance and my background coming from major league soccer was more of the posed as the NHL but was more of "Come cover us. Come give us more publicity." Where I also interned for the Patriots for two season and the Titans where there it's almost always shielding from the media and protecting football ops and protecting that side of things. The NHL falls right in the middle so it's finding that balance for our department and in my department I oversee the website, all of our publications and the media relations. So it's finding that balance between the three of those different groups and at the same time sending that the message that we want to send gets out there. That's kind of my job in a nutshell.

You had those internships with the Revolution and the NFL teams. Is it a skill set of responsibilities that you can take from team to team or is it different?

Matt: They're all completely different. Especially when you're graduating from school and get those entry-level jobs. An entry-level job in an NFL PR department in an NFL media relations department is so much emphasis based on statistics and providing that information. You're almost more of an SID than a PR professional. Whereas when you

go to major league soccer you're doing that part and that's part of it—that statistical work—and getting it to the media but the majority of your day is how can we get the team out there more? How can we get more coverage on this team so that we get more customers to come into games? In the end of the day we're in the entertainment business and our competition right now is concerts, the movie theater, a play. We need to provide ways to market the team without the team spending any money. Where the marketing department is spending money and finding out ways to support tickets sales or sponsor sales we're trying to figure out how to do that same thing just without the team having to spend any money to do it. Whereas in the NFL you're pretty much talking protection, protection., protection. At a higher level in the NFL in the PR department at a more senior level look at Stacey James level, I think he has more PR responsibilities. When I first graduated I had accepted a job with the Denver Broncos in their PR department and when the major league soccer opportunity came up a little bit later I ended up passing on the Broncos because I wanted to get a more rounded experience and I'm pretty happy I did that.

Adam, you also do play-by-play for the games. Is it hard to separate your responsibilities on game day?

Adam: At first maybe. You get use to it. There's an interesting divide. In past places I've been there's maybe been a separate PR department and I haven't had to focus as much on preparing the game notes and writing and updating content on the website to make sure everyone (fans) had their idea of why they should be coming to a game. The play-by-play takes kind of a backseat which can be frustrating at times. More than anything else is having butts in seats. You'll hear that at any level. People need to be in the stands so I'll first thing come in, update the web a little bit, write something to prepare for the game and then put together the various packs of game notes, make sure that the coaches have them—home and away—same in the locker room. Set up the press box, nametags, find out which media are coming. It's always easier when they call in advance. Obviously we have a limited press box in terms of seating as opposed to a garden where you can set up for everybody that may show up in terms of the local media we're more relegated to about 20 seats where even in our press box includes any front office from the Boston Bruins comes down to see our games. I think our first game in the new press box this year I'm broadcasting the game and as close to me as Matt is right now I had Peter Chiarelli sitting there. So it's an interesting demographic throughout the day getting use to everything but you also have to...there's a trust issue that you have to really as you get to know people, earn their trust and be able to speak freely with the players, with the coaches—as I'm sure Matt can attest to—as a PR person you develop relationships with people and they the players/coaches you shouldn't go ahead and repeat and as a play-by-play person you have to earn that trust so they know they can say whatever it is to you and you're not going to go on the air with it. It's the same thing with doing interviews. You're going to hear about things that maybe you shouldn't interview a player about so you have to use discretion. It's tough to separate sometimes but you get use to it.

Do you every get the feeling that you're not doing either job well enough because you have to go do the other job? What do you do in the middle of the game if someone says how many goals did he have in the game with so and so? You can't talk because you're doing play-by-play...

Adam: You hope that your media notes are very inclusive and that everything's in there that people would possibly want to know. There was a big issue with our new press box about who's actually allowed up there. Are scouts able to come up? Do they have to sit in the building and choose their seat wherever because maybe we have the Providence Journal or the Boston Globe, any number of places that may come down, we have to have seating for them. At the same time you want to make sure people have what they need and with that there have been a couple of times where I'll be on the air and my phone will ring. That means somebody's standing behind me and they're wondering if they're allowed in the press box or not and I'm focusing on who has the puck and where it is. You get into a rhythm but there always things to pop up. The many hats in the minor league. You'll never at the major league level of any sports find a person who is a PR person and a broadcaster and there's a reason for that.

How many members of the media do you deal with on a daily basis Matt?

Matt: On a daily basis? On an average practice day...it's six writers at practice and then NESN was there with a camera today. Then outside of that you'll maybe have email conversations with another dozen or so. Email or phone.

On game day?

Matt: At a morning skate probably 12...weekdays we get more on morning skate because I feel like it's easier. On the weekends there's a lot of family things and what not that keep them away. Morning skate 12 or so from our side and then the visiting team's bringing 2 to 5 writers plus their TV crew plus their radio station. So you're probably talking 20-25 members of the media at morning skate and then the night of the game it varies from anywhere on the low end on a Saturday night when somebody else is playing in town we're talking 30-35 and at the high end 55-60 on a Thursday night when nothing else is going on in Boston.

What has a bigger impact on the coverage of your team—overall record of the team or the fact that half of your games are in competition with the team that's in the Super Bowl?

Matt: The Super Bowl. There is only a certain amount of space regardless of how well each team is doing. We were talking about the Celtics a week and a half ago that they're obviously doing extremely well and we're doing significantly better than all the projections this year and we both feel like we're not getting the coverage we deserve right now. We know that it's not because of our teams' performance. It's because of things that are out of our control—both papers in Boston only have so much space, when you have a team that just won the World Series and you have another team that was 18-0

up until Sunday that's a lot of space eaten up by those teams. That has the most dramatic impact on us. Secondly is our record. Even so, at the end of last year when we were terrible if we were the only team playing on a night in March we would still get three, four stories at times. The papers, TV stations that have time/space that they need to fill you're certainly going to be an option but where you are in that pecking order isn't always determined by your team's performance.

The Providence Bruins currently have the best record in the AHL. What's the difference in numbers of media that cover you and what Matt said?

Adam: I almost don't want to admit it. There's a competition with Boston and that's an understandable one—much the same that the Pawtucket Red Sox have with the Boston red Sox. Which one's going to take priority? If we have a home game on let's say Friday night and maybe Boston was home the night before and is traveling wherever it is the team being in Buffalo tomorrow night, odds are the Globe the Herald, both various outlets their own content will be sending people to cover the local game in town or just south of town which is us. We'll get the attention from the local outlets—the Providence Journal right, one or two visiting media with the other broadcaster. Very few of our games and AHL games in general with the exception of a few bigger market teams have their games televised. You do wipe out TV crews in that sense but at the same time we do have all of our TV stations that are down because our team is tops in the league so the local FOX, CBS, NBC, ABC will do their highlights for the first period or so they'll stick around longer if they can to get it back and edited for their story that night on the 10 or 11 o'clock sports. Beyond that we have a couple of writers but it's vastly different from the attention I think any big league team gets by comparison. At the end of the day everybody likes a winner but you are a minor league sport so you have to do those extra things to try and drop people in because they're not coming to see those million-plus dollar players.

One of the things you deal with constantly is the moving of players up and down. How difficult is that to make sure everyone is aware that "this guys is not here tonight" and why?

Adam: Well, fortunately one thing that doesn't fall under my jurisdiction is the hockey ops side of things so I don't actually have to deal with their travel and making sure, aside from the coaches, they know that they're going up and down. As far as me, there is a press release sent out to the media. I will be put up on the website regarding the move. It's a big move maybe we'll put in some phone calls. We had an incident earlier this year where...it was nationally covered to some degree...our backup goaltender, Jordan Sigalet, who is also Boston property back when he was at college at Bowling Green he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis still ends up going pro. He had previously been drafted before even being diagnosed. There was a game earlier this year, he's in his third year pro now, he's never had a major complication, nothing that's kept him out of the lineup. The reason he's such a big story is he's a big time ambassador for the MS society. We have a program with the Rhode Island chapter where Serono donates \$20 for every save he makes. Earlier this year back in November it was his first home game of

the year and midway through the third period Jordan collapsed in front of his net like a domino onto the ice face first. While broadcasting you can't speculate, you know that he has family friends listening, his girlfriend is at the game. It gets to be a foggy situation. He eventually makes his return to the ice two months later and while he may not be the most high profile player, when he came back for the first time just to practice that was a situation where we knew say a press release wasn't good enough. We were calling NESN, calling Boston letting them know he'd be out there and practicing if they wanted to do something for their website. That's probably one of the bigger situations. You try and notify them but getting beyond a point of just an email is probably pretty rare.

Some of these students will soon get to go into a locker room and none of them have done it so what's expected of them as newcomers?

Matt: Don't step on the B. The B is sacred ground in the locker room. I think it's similar to any time making a first impression. You want to be everything from the way you're dressed—appropriately for a locker room atmosphere—to the conversations you have to interview etiquette. If a writer's got a guy alone in the corner and he's talking to that player and it looks like he's either getting an exclusive or he's writing a feature you know you can't go over to him and jump in and throw your quarter in...to knowing that the guy who scored the hat trick that night is coming out of the shower and he's ready to talk that there's going to be a giant media scrum going 6-7 people deep after a game and you're going to get stepped on and it's knowing that that's okay. You have to stand firm and get your recorder in there and if you catch an elbow that's just what happens. The good writers are the ones that take the time to when they're meeting a player for the first time they take the time to introduce themselves when appropriate whether it's before or after the interview to shake their hand, look them in the eye and let them know who they are, who they write for. They start to develop those relationships. You're not going to get the most juicy information out of a player the first time that you meet him but the best reporters are the ones that by this point in the season are on a first name basis. When our players walk by they might give them a nod after a loss or give them a hello or they may address them by name and say "hey Pluto how are you?" You might not always be the most popular with the rest of the journalists if a player can walk by and say hi to you but you'll certainly be popular with your editor because you'll get the best stuff. It's about developing relationships and those are with the players in the locker room, with the coach, when appropriate with the PR guys and with other members of the media. If you're someone who is liked in the locker room by other members of the media as well, they'll be more respectful of the times when you do get a player in a one-on-one situation. It's difficult because there are times when a writer does get a one-on-one with a guy and it's rare and you know all the other writers are looking at the guy in the corner saying "I can't believe he got him to talk for that long" and they're all jealous so they're all staring at you. If you come into a locker room not dressed or carrying yourself in a professional manner and if you're not ready to work right away or you're not introducing yourself when appropriate—not at the beginning of a press conference with a coach—that's important. Also, when you do—if you're a beat reporter—have to criticize one of the most important things is that you are there the next day and big enough to not throw a stone from a mile away. Show up; that earns you a lot of points and earns you respect.

You have the guts to engage with that person you criticized if they decide to engage you, which I would certainly advise against since they are my players.

And don't go in the trainer or shower room after somebody....

Matt: Yeah, you wouldn't really get that far in our room. Just look for the posted signs and access areas.

Is it any different at the triple-a level?

Adam: I wouldn't think so. In many ways our players are getting themselves as much use to that as those guys are as well. You don't see too often...there'll be rookies in the NHL level but not many guys without any experience prior to the NHL level. A lot of guys will serve their time down I the minor leagues and they try to learn at the same time that we media learn to deal with the players, coaches, each other. You get a lot of guys, juniors, coming out of college, but they don't necessarily know what all the etiquette is. They look to some of the more veteran players for when they should be talking to a guy. Earlier this year one of our guys, Pascal Pelletier, had a stint up in Boston I was interviewing him and he had to cut us short because he knew it was just about time to get into a meeting with the coaches and the rest of the players and he wasn't going to be foolish enough and stay out talking with me forming our relationship when he knew he had work to do because that's not going to react well to him and later in the day will probably lead to a closed door meeting as well. Everything Matt said is true in terms of the press and with players as well, they get use to what they should or should not be doing and they take that up to the next level with them.

Are there questions young reporters shouldn't ask?

Adam: As someone who came up as a reporter I think you gain a lot more respect from a player when you put thought into your question. When there's something specific that you're asking. Sometimes there's a lace for it but I don't like and I can tell what players don't like is if a reporter comes up to them after the game and says "Great win for the team. Tell me about the game" That doesn't ask anything. If you go up to a guy and say "The team was 6-6 on the penalty kill. One was a double minor four minute kill that had to be a real momentum builder" he'll give you better quality stuff for your article, broadcast. The more specific you can get the better. Same thing with a coach as well—a very general question will get you a very general 15 or 20 second answer. If you want him to go on for a minute or two aside from the guys who are naturally longwinded, ask him something that he can go on.

Matt: There's two things I would say: 1) make sure you're listening to what's being asked so your line of questioning you're not breaking up an interview on something that might have been on the same lines. For instance if you are a fashion reporter or gossip and you are in a sports locker room you don't want to be in a media scrum around Tom Brady while he's in the middle of answering questions about their third quarter performance. He's answered three in a row and the rest of the media are on a roll and

then you pipe in with where did you get that suit or are you going to New York tonight? You will not earn points with a) the athlete or b) the other reporters. 2) You need to listen to what's already been asked. There's nothing that ends an interview quicker with a professional athlete than asking the same question that he's already answered. It happens so frequently that a member of the media comes in and they've already written the first 75-80% of their story and they know exactly what they're looking for, the quotes, so they'll stick their recorder into Zdeno Chara and look around the room to see who else is coming out and when they hear a break they toss in their question, well that question was just asked almost the exact same way two questions ago. Zdeno will just end it. He doesn't deal with it well. He wants you to respect his time, that he's giving up his time after a game when he needs to work out and then get treatment and maybe see his wife before we go on the road. That is the quickest way to become an enemy to the players and the other media by starting to not pay attention and repeating questions.

Beat reporters are being asked now to do a lot more—blogging during the game, before—sometimes papers are assigning two people to cover the game. Is your job different because you have in some cases more people?

Matt: It drastically affects our job. It makes our job 10 times harder. It gets harder everyday because there are more avenues for reporting whereas five years ago one writer having a piece of information five minutes ahead of another writer wasn't as big a deal as it is now. Right now literally every second counts to these writers and it makes such a big difference because a guy reports...today an example—rumors about Curt Schilling's shoulder and the Herald reported it literally fifteen minutes ahead of the Globe on their website and all the radio and TV stations gave the credit to the Boston Herald for breaking the story today. That's a big deal for their marketing, sales. It makes everyone's job that much harder working for a team in PR because every writer is looking for the edge every second of the day. When we in June fired our old head coach, Dave Lewis, and then we were in the process of replacing him with a new coach, the folks at TSN in Canada—which is like the ESPN in Canada—they would call my phone every hour on the hour for 24 hours a day. 3am, 4am for a week and that's just how it went. They have our home numbers, they have our cell phone numbers, they have our work numbers and they don't quit because it matters that much. If they're the outlet that breaks the story at 3:30am they get the credit and that's what matters. The blogging and the internet and the instant ability to put information up has changed everyone's jobs.

Adam: I think about the web there's the other side of it. Athlete's are, aside from bigger bank accounts, are absolutely no different from any of us. They're still people. Some are maybe less popular with media tension and have more freedom versus Tom Brady who can't walk down the street. So you'll see certain situations where you have to keep tabs on things to make sure guys aren't getting themselves into trouble. Last year a couple of our players were having fun and they put the video up on You Tube and it started to float around. It never go to the point of receiving any media attention but you have to say hey hold that off. It won't reflect well on you or us. Sometimes even the guys have to be reminded that they have a responsibility to not just themselves and fellow teammates but

to the organization and the parent club. It isn't always what the media themselves do but what the media can stumble upon.

You mentioned before that part of your job was to keep the website up to date. For some of these students who might end up working in the cities of the east coast, is that something they should expect to have to do?

Adam: A lot of the time in minor league sports you very rarely see a PR person hired who isn't also a broadcaster or vice versus. There's a lot of on the job learning. I wouldn't say you should be expected to have it. The reality is the supply of all of us looking to get started in professional sports starting in the minor league and those of us fortunate enough to keep climbing—the supply far exceeds the demand. You have to be well rounded and willing to learn. There are situations where something might not be your specialty but it better become it if you want to hang onto your job.

Matt, generally you get two kinds of call—the first call for basic info, then you get the call from someone who wants you to confirm info and hasn't been made public yet. Can you take us through the process of the give and take with the reporter?

Matt: Depending on who the reporter is. Every situation is dealt with differently. There's a guy in our office who spends a lot of the day doing our day to day practice stuff. He's our manager of media relations doing a lot of that work. I spend a lot of time learning and trying to keep up with everyone's vibe so when those kinds of things I hope to know the writer or reporter is and what their generally feelings about our organization and players are—if they have an issue with anybody in the organization a player, a coach GM. You're trying to look into a crystal and predict where they're going with this. Whether it's just looking to confirm for informational purposes or they are trying to kill us about something or hammer the player about something. Something that I encourage and like to do is if we're going to confirm or deny anything it's rare that I would ever do it over the phone. We would always do it with documentation via email. It's actually something that team that I had worked for was purchased by Red Bull and it's actually a Red Bull corporate PR policy that I took with me and I think's very good that they wouldn't go on the record with anything over the phone for the simple reason that if you do so—even if its just a no comment—it can be taken out of context and it's very easily that your words can be shifted or used against you. We politely say I'll get back to you in a few minutes via email. I have liberty via our GM and ownership group that I know that I can comment on or confirm or deny. Those things I will right away email. The other times I would take a question, draft what my response would be, think about who that response would come from—whether it's from me or our GM or Charlie Jacobs our Executive VP or Jeremy Jacobs the owner of the team—run the question and the response by that person and then issue that statement.

If I call you and you say "I'll get back to you" you go through this process, you send me that email first or you send it out to everyone on the email list?

Matt: No, you first. Whether that was necessary ten years ago but given the internet but you'd make enemies real quick if you jumped the gun and they asked you that question and you sent it to everyone. If a writer calls you and asks you a question and it's not made public, you answer his question first even if its by 90 second you have to do it.