



More Than the Final Score:

The Storytelling Behind Sports Media

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Table of Contents

3 Executive
Summary

4 Team
Branding

7 Uniform
Design

9 Photography

11 Graphic
Design

13 Broadcast

14 Conclusion

Executive Summary

There is storytelling in every aspect of our lives. “Storytelling is universal to the human experience. Indeed, although it is likely impossible to prove, it has been suggested that storytelling developed not long after the development of language itself” (National Geographic). People communicating with peers and entertainment like TV shows, movies, or music are great examples of storytelling surrounding our everyday lives. These storytelling qualities go all the way back to the early ages of humanity. According to the History of Visual Communication, “Thus, the history of visual communication, that is the history of the visualization of the spoken word, will largely follow the development of typographic systems, with a special focus on Latin typography, given that this is the system that I am working with. Although the main focus will be on the usage of typography in layouts, I will also cover other visual material such as illustration, illumination, photography, shapes and symbols, as and where they relate to the main subject.” From the simple communication methods of the past to the much more complicated discussion methods used currently, it is all ridiculously important to humans’ way of life.

One of the biggest forms of entertainment is sports. Millions of people tune into football, basketball, baseball, hockey, or really any other sport on a daily basis. This realistically shows how important they are to people. A component of that is the storytelling media companies and the teams and leagues do themselves to keep viewers invested in the story. The Interaction Design Foundation talks about storytelling and how people react to it, saying, “Products that



Executive Summary & Branding

“Products that people love are products that people use over and over again. Products that they like, on the other hand, quickly slip from the user’s mind and are replaced in time with products that are liked better or even loved. The cornerstone of emotional design is the idea that if you can elicit strong emotions in your users – you can use those emotions to either create loyalty or to drive a customer to take action.” This is exactly how people react to sports. From something as simple as the team’s logo or branding to different narratives being displayed on a broadcast, storytelling is huge in the world of sports. A good story keeps you coming back, and that is something seen in so much of sports coverage.

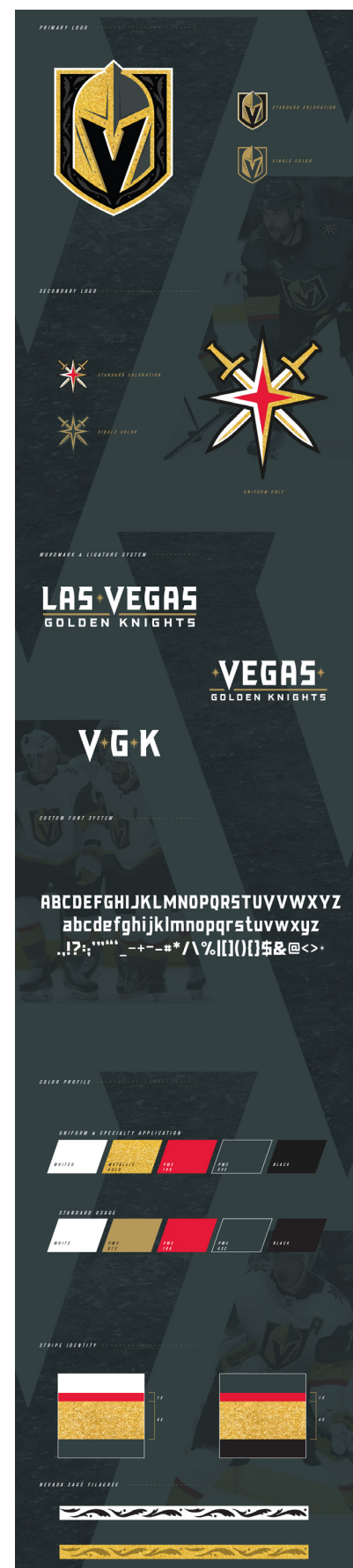


Such a unique lens to look at storytelling from is within the team’s branding. Every single team’s logos, colors, typefaces, and jerseys all tell the story of the location of the team and their identity as a whole. A great example of branding is the Vegas Golden Knights of the NHL. The franchise has been around for ten years and, as a whole, has done a fantastic job building and maintaining a social identity. Design Director Jeff Eagle mentions that, “The new team brand needed to be one befitting a modern hockey franchise located in arguably the most non-traditional hockey market

Team Branding

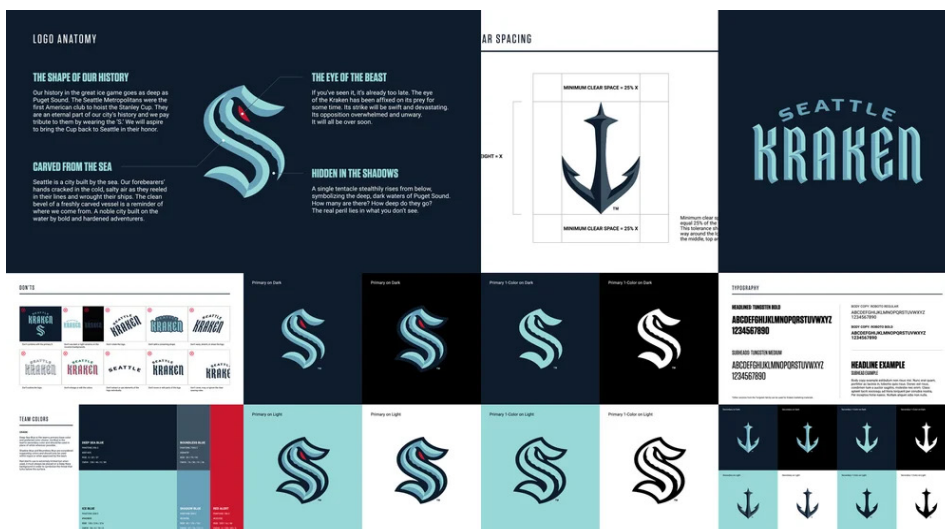
in North America. A critical factor was this hockey brand needed to first and foremost resonate with the local Las Vegas community who would ensure the long-term sustainable success of the franchise through long term purchases of season tickets. It also needed to represent the globally familiar essence of Las Vegas's in order to capitalize on the marketable opportunity of merchandise to the millions of tourists who visit this destination annually. Lastly, per direction of the NHL, the brand needed to avoid any perceived negative stereotypes often associated with the tourist activities of Las Vegas." Being the first major sports team in Las Vegas, they knew the branding needed to be high quality and also tie back to the area. They chose the color scheme because gray represents strength, and the additional colors, such as gold and red, represent the scenery of Las Vegas. Built into the primary Golden Knights logo is a hidden "V" for Vegas in the negative space of the helmet openings. In addition, the secondary sword logo is designed to look like the famous "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas Sign." These points, on top of the excellent job Vegas does to uphold the Golden Knights branding, do a great job of building a follower base and a fanbase in a nontraditional sports market.

Sticking with hockey, another team that did an excellent brand when creating their branding is the Seattle Kraken. The team name comes from Scandinavian and Norwegian folklore about an underwater sea monster. They were able to take this unique name and build a very strong brand that includes several different shades of blue, representing the stormy waters and ice, and a deep red to represent



Team Branding

the Kraken's eye. These elements can be seen within the logo, as a tentacle wraps around an "S" for Seattle as the deep red eye stares back at you. The Kraken's secondary logo is even more genius, as it combines an anchor and the Space Needle. The brand continues on with a custom typeface used in the team's wordmark and seen as the font on the back of the jerseys. This font seems to be the closest to a display font, which Envato Elements mentions: "Designers and brands usually opt for display fonts to give an impression of individuality and difference, with the practice of the psychology of fonts for logos often featuring display styles. Many of the logo examples below use completely customized fonts or illustrative type, using the psychology of fonts in logos to create a unique effect that is unlikely to be seen anywhere else." Having such a unique-looking typeface, it really helps the mysterious atmosphere given off by the logo. Seattle was able to take all of these mythological elements and combine them all together to tell a story within their logos and branding. This really helps consumers get bought in and attach to this new team.



Uniform Design

This same principle can be seen in uniform design. Within every stripe or color of a uniform can be a hidden meaning. This is a great way to tell a story in a unique way. A league that does a great job of creating well-designed jerseys is the MLB, specifically their “City Connect” line in collaboration with Nike. A great example of one is the Houston Astros, who leaned into the space themes built into the Texas city. In the simplest explanation, the jersey is navy with “Space City” written out across the chest. But just explaining it that way would completely avoid all the details built into the jersey and all the aspects created



for storytelling. For example, the orange to yellow gradient seen on the logos and piping of the jersey is a callback to something the team wore in the 60s and 70s; the font for the name and number is meant to mimic the typeface used by NASA; and there is a grid pattern on the shoulders of the jersey meant to mimic star charts used by astronomers. All of these little details all tie back to Houston and its space history. Even something as simple as the jersey color has

Uniform Design

important meaning. The psychology of the navy blue jerseys represents strength and reliability.

Another great example of smart jersey design is the Buffalo Bills' new 'Nickel City' uniforms. These brand-new jerseys are meant to represent the working class that is commonly found in Buffalo, New York. Some of the interesting details that go into these jerseys are the color, representing the color of nickel; the physical blue collar on the jersey to represent the blue-collar work in Upstate New York; and placing the Bills logo over the heart to show the love the team has for its fans. It seems like these jerseys were designed with fans in mind, so it is really cool to see all these details being made to represent them, the actual consumers buying these jerseys and the matching merchandise.



A major aspect when it comes to storytelling is through photography. This is such a great way to pull raw emotions from live events and trap them in a singular frame. Regardless of whether it is positive or negative emotions, a photograph does an excellent



SLEEVE

With the exact stripe weights & ratios as our primary uniform, these tonal stripes are formed under extreme pressure as a sign of strength and durability.



COLLAR

A tribute to the blue-collar workers of past & present who represent the strength, work ethic and authenticity of our city.

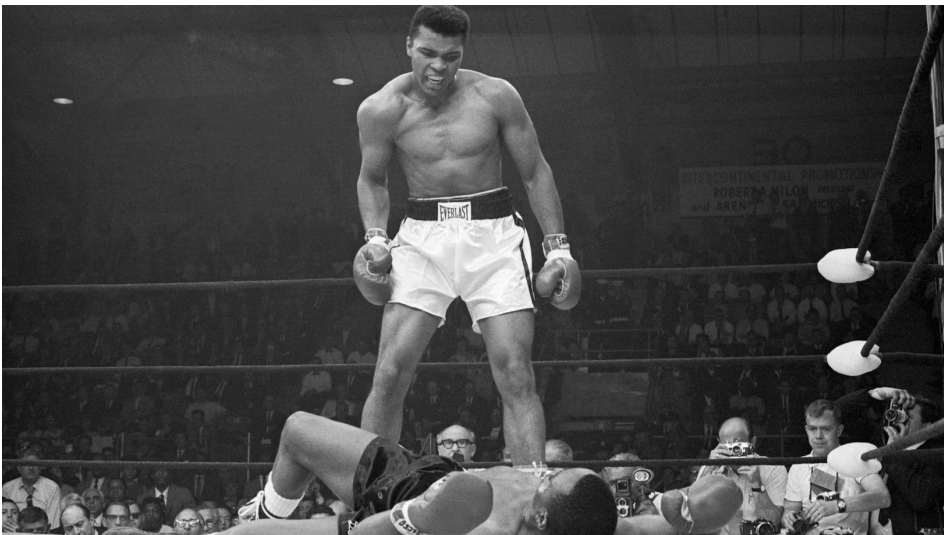


CHEST

Positioned close to the heart, the Charging Buffalo placement represents the love we have for our team and the pride so many Bills Legends have shown.

Photography

job of being able to slow down the game and to see the unfiltered expression from the players. According to Smashing Magazine, “Emotional connection is an essential part of the storytelling process and can be conveyed through visual elements like colors, sounds, illustrations, animations, and images. These play a huge role in motivating and giving intention to the actions taken by the user.” This is exactly why sports photography is so important and why people connect with it so much. When thinking about iconic sports images, it’s hard not to think about the photo of Muhammad Ali standing over Sonny Liston after their fight in 1965. Seeing the competitive level in Ali’s eyes and how genuinely excited he is to take down his competitor really comes through in that photo. In addition, you see Liston lying dead cold on the ground, which also shows the point of his defeat. Even the reaction of the crowd behind the two of them is very telling, as they all seem to be so intrigued by what is going on, with visible curiosity and shock going through their faces.



Photography

This can go both ways, though, as photos can also show extreme emotion the other way as well. Eman Shurbaji says that, “Presenting a story through photography communicates a different — often deeper — understanding of person, place, event or narrative than can be expressed through written or spoken word.” This is definitely apparent when the speed of the game is so quick. This image of Martin Rancik really shows his heartbreak after he and the Iowa State Cyclones dropped the 2001 NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament Game to the Hampton Pirates.

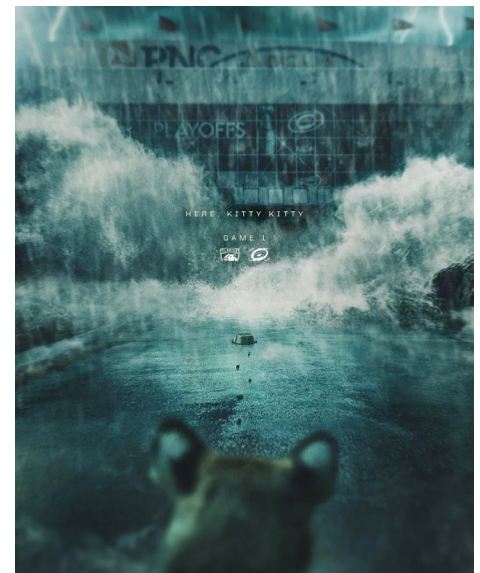


This was very unexpected, as can be seen in Rancik’s expression, as Iowa State was the two-seed in this NCAA tournament when Hampton was the fifteenth seed. When looking at the image, it is so clear how distraught and just in shock he is. What helps set the scene even more is having the entire Pirates team celebrating behind him. Just the way this is framed is so excellent to show both his emotions and the

Graphic Design

opposing team, as they are clearly ecstatic after that upset win.

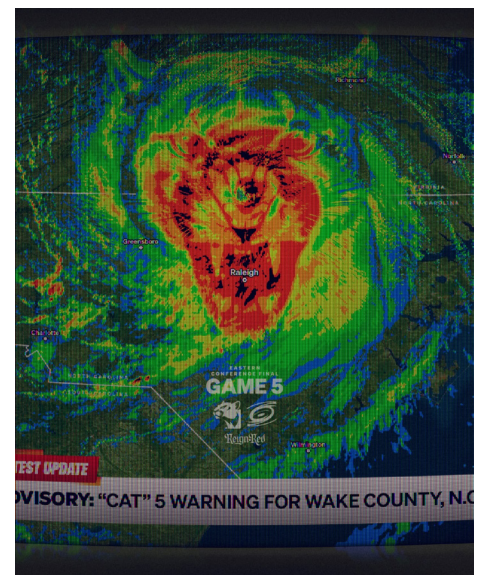
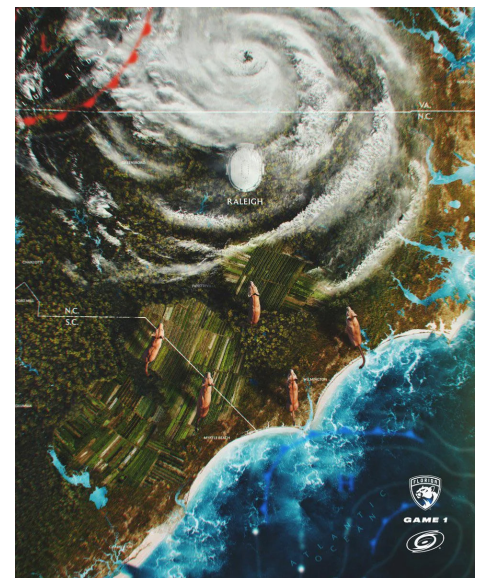
One aspect of sports storytelling that is overlooked is through social media graphics. Social media is a newer area teams are using to market themselves and overall tell a story that is very easy to connect with fans directly. According to the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, “Professional sports organizations have a long tradition of utilizing stories as part of their marketing efforts. However, as the media landscape has undergone considerable change as a result of information and communication technologies, most notably through social media, the conditions under which storytelling evolve have altered significantly.” With this new opportunity, teams have the ability to connect with fans in a much closer way than ever before. One of the ways that always stands out is a photomanipulation gameday graphic. These are something teams do mostly near playoffs to build hype for the series or match, as they take real elements and put them together into one image. A team that does this super well is the Carolina Hurricanes of the NHL. They have been doing so for their last few playoff runs and eventually ended up winning the Stanley Cup this year. They are able to use elements of the teams coming in and surround that in a stormy environment to build hype around it. For example, for a playoff series against the Florida Panthers, they show a panther being lured to the front of the Hurricanes arena with a bowl of treats while the entire rest of the environment is all wet and torrential. They pair this up perfectly with the phrase “Here, Kitty Kitty.” Another great example is from this year when the Hurricanes



Graphic Design

took on the Philadelphia Flyers. Carolina leaned into the history aspect of it and showed the famous Liberty Bell from Philadelphia being soaked in a hurricane while the Flyers' arena and the rest of the city are shown in the background. Graphic designer for the Hurricanes, Jack Ridenour, shows a behind-the-scenes process of how he creates graphics like these on his personal X account.

Sticking in hockey, another team that does an excellent job with photomanipulation graphics is the Florida Panthers. They do a great job of combining the imagery of the panther itself and mixing it in with the players. A great example is actually a graphic they made for their series against the Carolina Hurricanes. It shows a map from above showing a swarm of panthers crawling towards the center of the hurricane storm, which ended up being exactly where the Hurricanes play, in Raleigh, North Carolina. It is a very simple concept that is executed very well. Another example they have done against the Hurricanes is the exact opposite of simple. It also shows a map from above, but it is very colorful, as it shows the meteorologist's hurricane symbols. Instead of it being a normal circle, though, the hurricane the map is showing is in the shape of a panther's face, which really tells the story of them dominating this series, which they would eventually end up winning in five games. One final graphic doesn't show any physical panthers in it but still does a great job of telling a story of their playoff run up until that point. The graphic shows a sports bar with a good quantity of Panthers memorabilia. In the foreground, it shows a television claiming the hurricane has been downgraded to a tropical storm, which is



Graphic Design & Broadcasts

an obvious dig at the team they just beat. Under this are the teams they beat all throughout the playoffs scratched into the bar counter side. Overall, this is such a clever way to show dominance over your competitors and to connect with your fans through story. These graphics are all things that visually look amazing and that a fan can connect with and understand. From there, they can spread these and continue the story onwards. Per Amplifi, “Utilize[ing] powerful pictures, videos, and other imagery [can] bring your story to life and your audience closer to your cause,” which is exactly why this is such an underrated part of sports storytelling.

One of the most obvious ways sports stories are told is through the actual broadcast of the game. Commentators and analysts use stats, facts, and other information going into the game. They are able to push a specific narrative, which is excellent for telling stories. One recent example that comes to mind is when Luka Dončić returned back to Dallas for the first time after being traded away from the Mavericks. Common Edge talks about how, “Central to fiction is a conflict, and this is mandatory. Without it, there is no story worth telling. Resolution of the conflict is organized around a plot, a deliberately planned sequence of events called plot points with slow reveals that trigger audience emotions and aha moments,” and that is exactly what was seen here. Dončić was a fan favorite player in Dallas, so when he got traded away, the fanbase was distraught. When he and the Los Angeles Lakers came to town for the first time, everyone knew it was going to be an emotional game. This was shown all over the broadcast, as he was the



Broadcast & Conclusion



topic of discussion all night. When the game was first starting, they showed a tribute video for him, and it was clear how important it was, as he got emotional on the spot. He was eventually supported by his teammates, and then the game started. Luka himself was able to continue the story of the game, as he was able to put up very impressive numbers on his former team, including 45 points, eight rebounds, and seven three-point shots made. This just shows how stories can be crafted, but at the same time they naturally are able to be uncovered as well.

No matter what corner of sports you look into, it is very clear that storytelling is apparent in it. From building a brand up to showing and explaining the emotions coming from the players, it is clear that there is always a story to tell. According to Tóth Dávid Zoltán, “A further conclusion is that storytelling can also help to build a larger fan base, as this method is



Conclusion

currently a major novelty, which means that even fans of neutral or other teams are interested in watching the material produced on this topic, which can lead to an increase in the club's fan base.” This is obviously very important when it comes to sports, so being able to grow the fanbase and potentially even the sport is so intriguing. The art of storytelling is something that is learned at a young age and is something that sticks with us. Being able to see these aspects come to life is very fulfilling.

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