

Best Media Writing of the Week #1

Ruffin Bailey, COM 267

My first Best Media Writing (BMW)

example comes from Twitter. On August 30th, Mike

Wise, a sports columnist for *The Washington Post*,

posted “Roethlisberger will get five games, I'm

told,” on his twitter account, accessible at

<http://twitter.com/mikewiseguy>. Roethlisberger is

the starting quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers,

and he had been given a suspension by the NFL for

six weeks, stemming from a charge of sexual assault in Georgia on March 5th. More

information regarding the charge can be found at the [Wikipedia](#), with [this document](#)

covering the district attorney’s thoughts regarding Roethlisberger’s guilt. Roger Goodell,


the NFL Commissioner, is in charge of the length of Roethlisberger’s suspension, and


had mentioned that good behavior could reduce the penalty to four games.

Mike Wise’s tweet was the first publication of any sort by a member of the mainstream media claiming to know the extent of the final suspension. Because of the way the Steelers’ schedule is configured, the difference between the expected four game suspension (which is what Roethlisberger finally received) and five was particularly significant. A five-week suspension would make Roethlisberger lose two week’s of practice time and a key game, which could hamper the Steelers’ chances of making the playoffs.

All right, it was a casino employee in Lake Tahoe.
2:00 PM Aug 30th via web

Can't reveal my sources.
1:48 PM Aug 30th via web

 **Ourand_SBJ** Fox will enter the regular season with the Super Bowl virtually sold out. The ad market for the NFL is scalding hot. <http://ow.ly/2wM0p>
12:22 PM Aug 30th via web
Retweeted by [MikeWiseguy](#) and 7 others

 **RedskinsInsider** McNabb and Portis not in pads for practice today. They stretched but weren't participating otherwise. Neither seemed to be favoring ankle
12:21 PM Aug 30th via web
Retweeted by [MikeWiseguy](#) and 2 others

Chris Johnson's Top Five 'Skins All-Time LBs: 1. Chris Hanburger. 2. Monte Coleman 3. Wilber Marshall 4. Sam Huff 5. London Fletcher
1:31 PM Aug 30th via web

Roethlisberger will get five games, I'm told.
1:01 PM Aug 30th via web

The significant issue here is that Wise later admitted that he was joking when he tweeted the information, and was performing a social experiment to see how far his unconfirmable tweet would be picked up by the mainstream sports media and printed as legitimate news. Mike Florio, a frequent guest and guest host on the Dan Patrick Radio Show, posted the contents of Wise's tweet on ProFootballTalk.com, a blog funded and hosted by NBC Sports, without further sourcing Wise's information. MSNBC's sports website also posted the information. When Wise admitted the ruse over an hour later, Florio was upset that he had been duped.

The August 30th edition of the LaVar Radio Show, a sportstalk radio show on 106.7 FM in Washington, DC, included an interview with Florio (recording at http://rufwork.com/267/files/083110_lavaranddukes_seg13.mp3). In the interview, Florio chastises Wise and asked for Wise to be fired from his job at *The Washington Post*. Florio argues that any tweet from a *Washington Post* columnist is obviously going to be taken at face value because the columnist's information carries with it the weight of the *Post* and its tradition as a reliable newspaper. Florio also noted that the information from the tweet went as far as Mike Tomlin, coach of the Steelers, who was asked about the five-game suspension. The clear, implicit critique is that Wise's experiment compromised not only Wise's own integrity and the *Post*'s, but also the reputations of Florio and beat reporters in Pittsburgh.

Wise was put on punitive leave from the *Post* for his "trick." To date, the last post on his Twitter account, posted just a few hours after his Roethlisberger tweet, is, "I just got an e-mail about The Post's guidelines on the use of Twitter. Weird. I wonder why?"

This tweet and subsequent brush up foregrounds several important issues with electronic and traditional media writing. The first regards the relative lack of sourcing in today's 24-hour news cycle, where it has become more important to be first (or consistently second) than to ensure that what is being printed (online or on paper) is accurate. Florio could have checked with sources to confirm Wise's information, but he did not. As Florio says on the LaVar Show, he sees himself as a news "aggregator" rather than a traditional reporter. News aggregation is a new, only arguably journalistic, genre, perhaps popular because of the Internet and the popularity of RSS readers. Wise was attempting to show how traditional reporting has become compromised by this sort of kneejerk repost/approach.

The second issue raised here concerns traditional authority and creditability. Ironically, Wise committed the larger journalistic sin through his experiment. He showed a poor understanding of the interactions of social media with traditional journalistic outlets. What Florio is doing is par for today's course, and Wise's off-handed tweet, though useful for showing the shift in Internet news, particularly in sports, also at the same time showed the importance of institutional authority for the Internet news ecosystem, the sort of authority that has been built over the decades by traditional media outlets like *The Washington Post*.