

# How to Get the Media Coverage Your Athletes Deserve

By Julie Harwin

Your best runner set a school record last week and all you got was a fleeting mention on page D6 of your local paper. Ever wonder how you can get the media to cover your star athletes?

Media relations is an important component of your job as a high school athletic administrator and is more than just free publicity. When there is an announcement of an upcoming event, the media can be a great source for disseminating that information.

There are many benefits of developing an ongoing relationship with your local media. If you haven't already, consider contacting journalists who cover sports as well as local and community events. Provide an overview of your athletic program and offer to be a resource for future stories they are working on. Make yourself their expert.

In order to get accurate information into the media's hands in a quick manner, you may issue a news release.

A news release is primarily used to make an announcement, relate timely news, issue a statement or take a stand, while providing background information about an event or issue that affects your community. Journalists receive a tremendous volume of news releases each week and many end up in the trash. Your news release should be simple, concise and factual, while catching the attention of busy readers. Follow these tips to ensure your information grabs the media's attention:

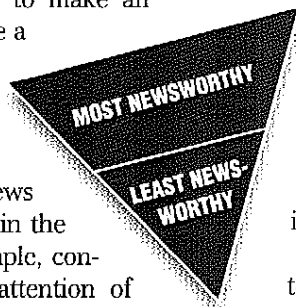
## 10 Tips for Writing a News Release That Will Get Noticed

1. Use a creative headline that grabs the journalist's attention – keep it short, edgy and descriptive.
2. Put the most important information up front. Journalists should be able to tell what the release is about from the first paragraph. Otherwise, they probably won't read further.
3. Avoid hype and unsubstantiated claims. Journalists get "pitched" every day, so stick to the facts and provide specific information.
4. Be active and to the point. Use clear language that will get the reader excited about the news.
5. Keep the release short – one or two pages only. Journalists do not have the time or the inclination to do extensive reading of news releases. The goal of the news release is to engage the journalist. Once he or she is interested, you can provide more in-depth background.
6. Don't use jargon. This might alienate new journalists or those unfamiliar with your organization. Keep it simple.
7. Highlight the benefits. Instead of hype ("best, most, first," etc.) explain how people will benefit ("more activity, healthier lifestyle").
8. Be specific. Don't rely on generalities to attract journalists' interest. Instead, give specific examples and detail why the announcement is important.
9. Include contact information to ensure media can follow up with someone in the organization and receive more information or schedule interviews.
10. Proofread. When you've finished the news release, remember to read it for accuracy and proper grammar.

### How to Structure Your News Release like a Pro

Now that your athletes are breaking records, it's time to get them noticed! Remember to write using the inverted pyramid format. Picture an upside-down triangle with the narrow tip pointing down and the broad base at the top. The broad base represents the most newsworthy information in the news release, and the narrow tip is considered the least newsworthy information. When you write in inverted pyramid format, put the most newsworthy information at the beginning of the story and the least newsworthy information at the end. The point is to emulate the structure of a news story and ensure that the most important information does not get lost or disregarded.

The news release should be issued on original school letterhead. You should identify it as a news release by typing "NEWS RELEASE" in the top left-hand corner in bold, capital letters.



Below the banner, on the left-hand side, type "For Immediate Release" with the date of the release on the line below. On the right-hand side below the banner, type "CONTACT," followed by a contact name and title, with the phone number on the line below, as follows:

## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release      CONTACT: Jane Smith, Athletic Director  
September 1, 2005                      555-555-1212 x123

The next essential component is the headline. It should be centered and in bold font. Good headlines are concise, short and snappy, no longer than 10 to 15 words and should have a subject, verb and object.

The release should have at least one-inch margins on both sides and at least 1 1/2 inches of space above and below the body text.

Start the body with a dateline, set flush left. This should include the city name in all capital letters and an abbreviation of the state. The body of the news release is very basic: who, what, where, when and why.

The lead paragraph of the news release should contain a brief summary of what the news release is about. In other words, answer the questions, "who, what, when, where and maybe why and how," although those latter two often come in later, explanatory paragraphs. This is where you will grab your reader and persuade him/her to read more.

The second paragraph should explain in detail who cares, why the reader should care, where more information can be found and when an event will happen or took place. Whenever possible, use quotes to liven up the story and increase the impact of your points.

The final paragraph is a summation of the release and should include further information on your organization with additional contact information, if available.

The content of the news release, beginning with the date and city of origin, should be typed in a clear, easy-to-read font (Times New Roman, Arial, etc.) and double-spaced. If your news release exceeds one page, the second page should indicate 'Page Two' in the upper right-hand corner.

After finishing your news release, have someone else proofread your work to check for spelling, grammar and other typographical errors.

When you are ready to issue your news release, be sure to distribute the information to the right audience using the right method. For example, some journalists prefer to receive information by e-mail, while others prefer fax.

And don't forget to congratulate your athletes on a job well done! **IAA**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *Julie Harwin is the former manager of communications for the American Beverage Association ([www.ameribev.org](http://www.ameribev.org)) in Washington, D.C. She received her master of arts degree in political communication and public relations from The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Harwin also holds a bachelor of science degree in communication and management from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan.*



## Checklist of Successful News Releases

The following checklist may be helpful when writing a news release.

- Put the release on organization letterhead.
- The words "NEWS RELEASE" should appear in all caps on the top left-hand corner.
- "For Immediate Release" or a release date should appear on the left-hand side, with the date underneath.
- "CONTACT:" and the person's name and title should be on the right-hand side, with the phone number underneath.
- The headline should be centered in bold text.
- One-inch side margins and 1 1/2-inch margins above and below the body.
- Dateline flush left followed by the beginning of the text.
- Use simple, easy-to-read fonts and double-space the body copy.
- Let your reader know you are finished by adding ### to the end of the release.

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