2-6-2008

Why was Yao Ming Fined?

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive

Part of the Asian History Commons, Asian Studies Commons, Chinese Studies Commons, and the International Relations Commons

"Why was Yao Ming Fined?" (2008). The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012. 120.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/120

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the China Beat Archive at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
Why was Yao Ming Fined?

February 6, 2008 in Uncategorized by The China Beat | No comments

A colleague here at the Beijing Sport University whom I have known for over ten years, Yi Jiandong (易剑东), is one of the two most vocal media commentators on Chinese sports in the academic world (along with Lu Yuantian 卢元镇). He has reached an exalted status that an American professor like myself can only marvel at from afar. He is one of the “Big-Name Bloggers”(名人博客) on the Qzone blogsite, where he shares space with the likes of Feng Shuyong, head coach of the national track and field team (whose main purpose seems to be to report on Liu Xiang, 2004 gold medalist, 2007 world champion, and world record-holder in the 110m hurdles) and Lin Dan(two-time world champion in badminton, who writes his own blog).

Professor Yi also gets paid good money to blog, something that cannot be said of myself. Among his 80+ posts since August 2007, the one that has gotten the most hits was on the topic, “An explanation for why ‘Japanese Don’t Show Respect for Liu Xiang,’” which elicited 1,594 comments and 224,447 hits. Not only can a lowly American professor not aspire to his kinds of numbers and financial remuneration, I can’t even expect that sports fans care about what I have to say. I take this as an illustration of the greater respect for university professors in Chinese popular culture generally and – in contrast to the U.S. – in the sports world in particular.

I thought it might be interesting to The China Beat readers to know what my Chinese counterpart is blogging about, so I selected one of his blogs from September 22, which at 55,902 hits and 321 comments was also one of his more popular posts. Since non-Chinese probably aren’t that interested in whether Japanese respect Liu Xiang (do non-Chinese even know who Liu Xiang is?), I have selected a post about the NBA star Yao Ming – who, based on my superficial impression, seems to take a backseat to Liu Xiang in China at the moment. After all, Yao Ming has never won a world championship and probably will not win an Olympic gold medal. In keeping with a theme of The China Beat, Yi uses Yao Ming to launch into a criticism of the poor treatment of sport journalists in China, explaining that this is due to the fact that sports are less market-oriented here. Foreign journalists, take note – you are not the only ones who get high-handed treatment.

A biography of Professor Yi follows the post.

Yi Jiandong’s space: an independent critical voice, realizing the value of constructive action, growing along with the Olympics.

Why was Yao Ming Fined?

According to a report in the Houston Chronicle on September 21 (Beijing time), Morey, the general manager of the Houston Rockets in the American NBA, said that Yao Ming would be fined because his participation in the opening ceremony of the Special Olympics forced him to miss the team’s media day and the first two days of practice. Morey also specially pointed out that the team would send someone to Shanghai to oversee and coordinate Yao Ming’s training in an attempt to reduce the effects of his inability to train with the team. However, the fine for missing the media day was mandatory and Yao Ming must accept it. Many fans might ask, what is media day and why would Yao Ming be fined for missing it? I found a fairly clear definition of media day in the American book Media Relations in Sport. American’s aren’t real fond of giving definitions to things, but excel at pinpointing their attributes and outlining their range and function in actual practice. The book said, “Media day is a news event created by college and professional teams, which is an effective and popular means of publicity.”
Some sources I have read say: Media day, a reception for the media that is meticulously organized by sports organizations, is a very important public relations event. The media day of college teams typically organizes reporters to visit the college campus and the team facilities, and to interact with the athletes, or even eat a meal together with them. Every fall, the media days of some college teams give reporters and coaches, team leaders, and media spokespeople an opportunity to get together. Furthermore, the usual situation is: the reporters who have been invited will have an opportunity to ask questions of any official or athlete in the sport organization.

For the four big professional sports leagues, including the American NBA, media day is an opportunity to deepen relationships with the media before the start of the season. It is also a good chance for the team to improve its external image, market itself, and strengthen relationships with its public and fans. When the reporters come to the team on media day, in addition to receiving various brochures that the club has prepared ahead of time and printed out, the team introduces the preparations for the new season, and the coaches and some of the starting players give interviews.

Frankly, this model, which American professional sports have already employed for decades, is extremely unfamiliar to the Chinese sports world.

A sports bureaucrat once said to me: On what basis do you state that coaches should learn tactics for handling the media? They can close their training sessions and absolutely can ignore the media.

And there was once a very well-known scholar of sports communication who said: Sport organizations do not need to provide services to reporters – since they come to report on sports events on their own, they ought to prepare everything on their own.

These opinions vividly illustrate a current trend in China: it is not worthwhile for sport organizations to provide services for the media.

So why does the American NBA care so much about media day?

Because if the media do not get enough information services, they might produce more erroneous reports.

If the media does not get the requisite transportation services, their game reports might be affected.

If the reporters can’t even find something to eat, it’s hard for them to keep reporting on a game.

In both of the last two Olympic Games there were reporters who died during the Games, and for a long time there have been statistics demonstrating that journalism has become one of the high-risk occupations globally. In the last few years there has been an annual average of nearly 100 journalists who have died. I’m sure that many people still remember Zeng Li, the Beijing TV reporter who died for his country during the Athens Olympic Games. For this reason it is considered that the fierce battle fought by the media at major sports events is more brutal than the sports competitions themselves. On the one hand this is because different media covering the
same event must necessarily set themselves apart in order to appear original. On the other hand this is because the media personnel always work more hours than the athletes. The technical personnel covering the Olympic Games work for at least one month, and their workload and its intensity are extremely high. Furthermore, at the Olympic Games a large number of events start at the same time and most media are short-handed, so they need the support of media transportation, etc.

In American history, the first media public relations personnel and sport agent were both originally sport reporters, and in order that the media could produce better coverage of events and clubs, America started to put a huge effort into pushing media services in the mid-20th century. Media days are an excellent activity for serving the media.

If you are interested, you can take a look at the NBA club websites, where there are photos and brief introductions of the partnerships of the various clubs with all of the media reporters or editors. You could say that many clubs see their media partners as members of the family, or at least they see them as honored guests of the family. It should be a natural task for sport organizations to serve their family’s honored guests.

And so there is a certain significance in the fact that Yao Ming missed media day in Houston on behalf of the Special Olympics held in his hometown of Shanghai. He responded to the needs of his country and his hometown, but was not able to meet the needs of his new home at the same time – the needs of the Houston Rockets, and he did not meet with his family guests – the partner media of the Houston Rockets – to talk about expectations for the upcoming season.

And so the fine for missing media day was mandatory. The former is an internal problem that can be settled, the latter is an external problem that cannot be easily settled. In fact, in a mature professional league, a fine for not taking part in media day is only one part of a whole code of conduct. Because the team recognizes all too well that the media and the team, together with the local community, corporate sponsors, fans, etc. are “links” in the entire chain of interests in professional sports that cannot be broken. If one is left out, it harms the operation of this community of vested interests and everyone will lose the opportunity to secure their own benefits.

While they are calculating their interests, when will China’s sport organizations recognize the irreplaceable and important role played by the media? Or when will they be able to recognize why there are media days, why they should provide service to the media?

Behind the attitude in the saying “avoid fire, avoid theft, avoid reporters” is impatience with some of the adverse behavior of the media, but if we could recognize that the media exercise an element of influence on our interests that we cannot avoid, perhaps favorable treatment of the media would become an automatic action and attitude.

When will media day be introduced in China?

As an increasing number of international sports competitions land in China and push forward the formation of a system of event services that links up with Western standards, we hope our professional teams will be able to learn something from American management experience. Setting up and implementing media day could be a breakthrough. On this point, our CBA
Chinese Basketball Association, through the operation of its all-star competitions, has already done a lot to improve treatment of the media. When will other sport organizations wake up?

About Yi Jiandong:

Yi Jiandong is chair of the Sport Journalism and Communications Department at the Beijing Sport University. He received a B.A. in history from Nanchang University, where he was also the school champion in the 1,500m., 5,000m. and 10,000m. running events. He earned an M.A. at the Chengdu Institute of Physical Education, and a Ph.D. from Beijing Sport University. He was a visiting scholar at Victoria University (Melbourne, Australia) in 2002-2003. He is the author of 10 books, including Social Capital and Enterprise Growth: A Study on the Contemporary Chinese Sporting Goods Enterprise (2005) and Cultural Studies in Sport (2006); he has edited 3 books, including Coverage and Media Service for Major Sporting Events (2008), Encyclopedia of the Olympic Movement (3 vols.) (2007), and The Construction of China’s Sport Media System (2006). He has also translated two books into Chinese, Media Relations in Sport (2005) and Sport Public Relations (2008). For CCTV-5 (China Central Television Station’s sports channel) he wrote the text for the documentary series “Fifty Years of Sport in Modern China,” and gave 80 5-minute lectures in “Olympic Classroom” (2004-2005).

He has written regular columns for People’s Daily – Market News, The Beijing News, Global Times, and Beijing Youth Daily. He is a member of the expert lecturer’s group of the Volunteer Department of BOCOG and is vice president of the Special Committee on Sport Communication of the Chinese Communication Association.

Tags: The 2008 Beijing Olympics