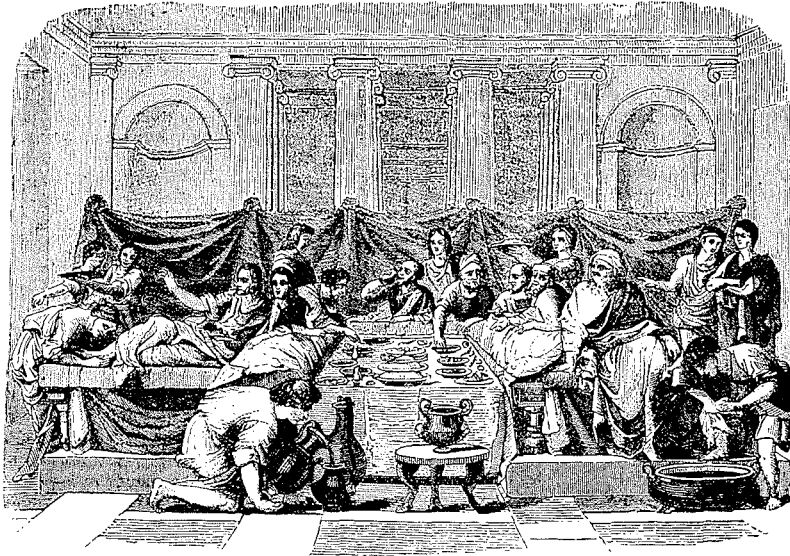


SOCIETY



The most prestigious seat at a Roman banquet was at the host's left, known as the "consular" or "praetorian" place.

ner where the host served choice dishes to his close friends and *vilia et minuta* ("cheap dishes and scraps") to everyone else. Other hosts resolved the conflict between moderation and refinement by serving exquisite food brought from their simple country houses.

The Romans loved disguising food to express the distinction between appearance and reality. The poet Martial (circa A.D. 40–103), for example, once "knew of a chef who could make a whole banquet out of gourds." Edmunds concludes that culinary deception derives from the belief that a person's outward appearance masked his inner nature. "The Roman banqueter," he notes, dined "upon his world view."

PRESS & TELEVISION

Reporting Sports

"The Rise of the Sports Page" by John Stevens, in *Gannett Center Journal* (Fall 1987), 2950 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10027.

For over a century, newspaper readers have grown accustomed to a section of their papers devoted to coverage of sports. But where did the sports section originate? Stevens, professor of communications at the University of Michigan, attributes "the economic and editorial origins" of the sports pages to the changing demographics of 19th-century America.

Until the 1830s, most American newspapers were only bought by the

 PRESS & TELEVISION

few people rich enough to have leisure to read. But rising mechanization in the workplace meant that working hours declined, giving more Americans leisure time. The first sports publications (such as *The American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine*, launched in 1829, or *The Spirit of the Times*, begun in 1831) catered to horse owners and gamblers craving news of harness racing.

By the Civil War, many newspapers covered sports, yet some papers did so reluctantly. *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, for example, once gave six columns to a prize fight, but added an editorial denouncing the brutality of the boxing match. As sports news drew more readers, sportswriters gained influence. Baseball writer Henry Chadwick (1824–1908) helped create the National League (which in 1876 became the first organization of professional sports clubs in the United States), and also founded the first sportswriters' association.

Technological advances (such as the Linotype) and cheaper newsprint allowed newspapers to become larger. The newspaper barons of the 1890s, constantly looking for new customers, placed sports in a separate section and allowed sportswriters free rein to create columns of purple prose. Yet sports reporters rarely wrote articles that would tarnish an athlete's reputation; when Babe Ruth was sidelined for the first six weeks of the 1925 baseball season after a "herculean" bout of "boozing, gorging, and wenching," journalists attributed his absence to "indigestion" after eating too many hot dogs.

Sports coverage remains popular today, filling 20 percent of most U.S. newspapers. Yet coverage is largely confined to the "middle-class" sports of baseball, football, and basketball; "lower-class" sports (stock car racing, bowling) or sports lacking "a visible and stable professional league" (soccer) are rarely mentioned. "Readers like what they get in the newspaper sports section and want more of it," says Stevens. And that is why there is unlikely to be any dramatic change in sports journalism soon.

Risky Business

"Reporting Hazards: Their Benefits and Costs" by Eleanor Singer and Phyllis Endreny, in *Journal of Communication* (Summer 1987), Oxford Univ. Press, 16-00 Pollitt Dr., Fair Lawn, N. J. 07410.

Reporting on risky activities or hazardous phenomena, from the spread of virulent diseases such as AIDS to the increase in potentially dangerous experimentation such as recombinant DNA research and organ transplantation, is very common in the media, both print and broadcast.

But do the media do an equally thorough job in reporting on activities or products that *could* be harmful? Singer, at the Center for the Social Sciences, Columbia University, and Endreny, an assistant professor of communications at the University of Illinois, think not.

The media's problems with reporting hazards, the authors contend, result from the priorities editors use to determine what is news. New and dramatic hazards are more newsworthy than more commonly recurring risks, even if the latter are more dangerous. Rather than cover life-threat-