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Learning English

By Reading Sports News Headlines

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Abstract

English, an international lingua franca, has long been considered a critically important tool. It has absolutely become the minimum requirement of accomplishing important tasks. No matter where we are, or no matter what we will do, English is by all means indispensable. Based on such a premise, ignoring English is totally out of the question; however, most senior high school students in the PE department, if not all, can't spend much time studying English due to a lot of training programs and sports events required. What's worse, their confidence is usually badly shaken while having trouble learning English. As an English teacher in the PE department in a senior high school, the author has been trying out every specific teaching method to meet his classroom needs, taking pains to hunt for a bagful of tricks to increase the motivation of the students and to help them build stronger self-esteem. One of his tricks is to help the students learn English by reading sport news headlines in the newspapers or on the Web, which will not merely help the students have fun learning a living language, but also broaden their horizons of their knowledge in the field of sports. The purpose of this article is to discuss the characteristics and the classical expressions of the sports news headlines.

Key Words: Headline

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I. Introduction

A headline is the title of a report or a story in the newspapers or on the Web, which is usually printed in large letters above the report or the story. Its purpose is to catch the reader's attention at a glance and sum up the whole news report or story on the other. (Hsu, 1978) Consequently, the headlines must be Exact, Concrete and Concise; the structure of the headlines, for this reason, is significantly different from our grammatical perspective.

In the following, the characteristics of a sports news headline will be examined carefully in minute detail. The analysis will be divided into three parts: the form of a sports news headline, short-length words used in a sports news headline, and the classical expressions in a sports news headline.

II. The Form of A Sports News Headline

The following are some characteristics of a sports news headline,¹ which present the ways how a sports news headline is formed:

1. The articles(a, an, the) are usually left out, for example:

Celtics go down to Clippers for 14th straight loss

(<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/news/archives/sports/200724/101711.htm>)

(=The Celtics went down to the Clippers for 14th straight loss)

Surging Raptors Playing Unselfish Basketball

(<http://www.nba.com/news/366623.html>)

(=The Surging Raptors Are Playing Unselfish Basketball)

Swimmer Park named Most Valuable

(<http://www.doha-2006.com/gis/menuroot/news>)

(=The Swimmer Park has been named the Most Valuable Player)

2. Every word in a headline is always capitalized in traditional practice, but small letters are being used more and more in sports news headlines except the word at the very beginning of the headline.
3. Simple present tense is used to express the action, activity, state or event happening in the past, for example:

Celtics go down to Clippers for 14th straight loss

(=The Celtics went down to the Clippers for 14th straight loss)

NBA drops Hardway after anti-gay tirade

(<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/sport/archives/2007/02/17/2003349469>)

(=NBA dropped Hardway after anti-gay tirade)

West Dominates East in Las Vegas

(<http://www.nba.com/games/20070218/ESTWST/recap.html>)

(=The West Dominated the East in Las Vegas)

4. The present participle is used to show that the action, activity, or event is going on at the present or continuing to happen, for example:

Surging Raptors Playing Unselfish Basketball

(=The Surging Raptors Are Playing Unselfish Basketball)

New Orleans Planning NBA's Next Big Party

(http://www.nba.com/nba_news/AllStar_2008.html)

(=The New Orleans Are Planning NBA's Next Big Party)

Pressel seeking first win at SBS Open

(<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/golf/wires/>)

(=Pressel is seeking the first win at the SBS Open)

5. The past participle is used to show the action, activity, or event in the passive tense, for example:

2006-07 NBA Schedule Released

(<http://www.nba.com/news/372476.html>)

(The 2006-07 NBA Schedule Has Been Released)

Swimmer Park named Most Valuable

(=The Swimmer Park has been named the Most Valuable Player)

Residents asked to audition for Doha 2006 Ceremonies

(<http://www.doha-2006.com/gis/menuroot/news>)

(The residents are being asked to audition for Doha 2006 Ceremonies)

6. The infinitive “to” is used to refer to the action, activity, event, or arrangement for the future, for example:

All-Star 2007 to reach fans in 215 countries and territories

(<http://www.nba.com/global/>)

(=The All-Star 2007 is to reach fans in 215 countries and territories)

(=The All-Star 2007 is going to/will reach fans in 215 countries and territories)

Radmanovic to miss two months

(<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2007/basketball/nba/02/20/>)

(=Radmanovic is to miss two months)

Cavs center to miss game with Raptors

(<http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/news>)

(=Cavs center is to miss the game with the Raptors)

7. The verb “be” is usually omitted, for example:

BOA bullish on 2012 medal target

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/other_sports/olympics_2012/6379379.stm)

(=BOA is bullish on 2012 medal target)

Stars For Sale

(<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/basketball/nba/>)

(=Stars are For Sale)

Indian shooters optimistic

(<http://www.doha-2006.com/gis/menuroot/news/>)

(=Indian shooters are optimistic)

8. A comma (,) is used instead of the conjunction “and”, in order to separate things in a list or to say that one action or event follows another, for example:

LeBron, Kobe give good show in front of sell-out crowd

(<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2007/basketball/nba/02/20/>)

(=LeBron and Kobe gave a good show in front of the sell-out crowd)

Mexico rebounds, beats South Africa

(<http://ww2.worldbaseballclassic.com/2006/news>)

(=Mexico rebounded and beat South Africa)

Nash practices, hopes to return on Tuesday

(<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2007/basketball/nba/02/20/>)

(=Nash practiced and hoped to return on Tuesday)

9. A semi-colon (;) is used to separate two different parts of a headline, for example:

Bryant wins MVP; Stoudemire completes comeback as West rolls

(<http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/news?slug=allstarweekend&prov=st&type=lgns>)

Nash has triumphant return; Iverson fizzles in first game back

(<http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/news?slug=ap-nbardp&prov=ap&type=lgn>)

Iverson To Make Nuggets Return; Camby Still Out

(<http://www.nba.com/news/366621.html>)

10. A colon (:) is used to indicate the sources of the news or to express the act of quoting something that someone else has said, for example:

Rockets' Mutombo: 'I will play next year'

(<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2007/basketball/nba/02/20>)

Jordan: Bobcats Will Spend What It Takes

(<http://www.nba.com/news/372476.html>)

Platini: The Final's the only match that matters

(<http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com/06/en/060708/1/8onm.html>)

11. Some verbs (such as “say”, “confirm”, or “warn”) can be used to indicate the sources of the news, for example:

Defenders were the stars, says Lineker

(<http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com/06/en/060707/1/8mu1.html>)

Swedes confident, says Alexandersson

(<http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com/06/en/060619/1/7vgr.html>)

Clijsters confirms she'll skip French Open

(http://www.espnstar.com/tennis/tennis_newsdetail_4538645.html)

Iran will be tough, warns Pauleta

(<http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com/06/en/060615/1/7ms0.html>)

12. A question mark (?) is used to represent a guess or a rumor, to show great uncertainty, or to indicate that there is room for doubt, for example:

Japan for second disappointment?

(<http://www.doha-2006.com/gis/menuroot/news/>)

A Rose in Cleveland?

(<http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/news/>)

China way ahead?

(<http://www.doha-2006.com/gis/menuroot/news/>)

13. Short words or short phrases are used to make the headline more noticeable, for example:

Games tickets – faster, easier, better

(<http://www.doha-2006.com/gis/menuroot/news/>)

So far, so good

(<http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com/06/en/060625/1/89ht.html>)

Life is.... Doha 2006

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/other_sports/olympics_2012/5393626.stm)

III. Short-length Words Used in A Sports News Headline

Short-length words, or what are called economical words, are easily found in a sports news headline because these words can not only make the headline clear, easily interpreted and understood, but also help save the space.

These short-length words are most probably abbreviations, acronyms, clippings, or any other short forms of words or expressions. The following are the most oft-used short-length words and their equivalents.²

ad, advert = advertisement

ace = champion

aid = assist

Aussie = Australian

ban = prevent, prohibit, forbid

bike = bicycle

biz = business

body = group, committee, commission

boost = increase

champ = champion

chute = parachute

com'l = commercial

c'tee = committee

copter = helicopter

fete = celebration

flop = failure

gym = gymnasium

hurt = injure

int'l = international

IOC = International Olympic Committee

laud = praise

mark = celebrate

named = appointed, nominated, elected

nat'l = national

nod = approval, permission

pro = professional

rep = representative

Russ = Russia

set = ready

snag = unexpected problem, disadvantage

spur = encourage

step = progress

vic = victory

vie = compete

VIP = Very Important Person

IV. Classical Expressions Used in A Sports News Headline

Language is an expression of culture; classical expressions, as a consequence, can be easily found in a sports news headline. Most of these classical expressions are taken from Greek mythology, the Bible, the fables, Shakespeare, literary works and historical events, which have made their way into the English language and become part of everyday speech and writing. (Hsu Chang-Keng, 1978) Classical expressions are words or groups of words with particular meanings, considered to be important and serious; additionally, these expressions are mostly of great value, so they can continue for a long time. The following are the most commonly used classical expressions in a sports news headline:³

Pyrrhic victory: A victory in which the person who wins suffers so much.

Herculean task: A task needing great strength or determination.

Achilles' heel: A fatal weakness.

Sweet revenge: The defeat of someone who has previously defeated you in a sport.

Noah's ark: Hope.

Open a Pandora's box: To do or start something that will cause a lot of problems.

Crowning glory: Used to describe something that makes something complete or perfect, or is the best feature of something.

V. Conclusion

It is generally believed that winning lotteries is the most breathtaking and joyful thing in the world because with the money one can do whatever he wishes to. With at least six years' English teaching, however, the author personally think that learning English by reading sports news headlines is no less exhilarating than merely winning lotteries, for the learners can reap a reward that cannot be measured in money. Once the students get what's what about sports news headlines, their interest in reading the whole news or story will be aroused. What they will learn is not only the language itself but also a good understanding of cultural background.

Sports news headlines are the “keys” to introducing students to the up-to-date information and ideas about sports; students can easily get these “English-learning materials” in the newspaper or on line, and these materials can help the students open the window of today which will take them further in the near future. It is the author’s belief that the students will be able to challenge themselves in the international arena if their English improves and their confidence grows.

Notes:

1. All the sports news headlines are taken from the websites of sports news , available on February 20, 2007
2. Hsu Chang-Keng. (1978). *Ways To Journalistic English Reading* (pp.5-15). Taipei: The Crane Publishing Co.
3. <http://www.m-w.com/>, available on February 24, 2007

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看運動新聞標題學英文

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摘要

英文長期被視為是地球村最重要的交際語文，儼然成為做許多工作的最基本要求，因此，我們從來不會忽視英文的重要性。然而，大部分高中、高職體育班的學生由於長期大量的運動專業訓練和比賽，無法花太多時間學習英文。更糟的是，當這些學生碰到學習英文的困難時，信心便會動搖。身為體育班的英文老師，筆者長期以各種特別的教學方法來因應上課需求，並煞費苦心尋找一些訣竅，來幫助學生增加學習動機和建立自信心。其中一個訣竅，就是教這些學生利用閱讀報紙或網路上的運動新聞標題來學英文，這不但能幫助他們在樂趣當中學習到生活化的語言，更能開闊他們在運動專業領域的視野。本文的目的在討論運動新聞英文標題的特點及其引經據典的表達模式。

關鍵詞：新聞標題