Does one bad apple truly spoil the entire bunch?

A few weeks ago, Denver Broncos' rookie quarterback Tim Tebow was approached in the locker room by two media members. Instead of doing their public duty and getting some answers out of the young football player, the two men decided to ask for autographs.

This is quite the shameful act for people with press credentials. The two men obviously were escorted out of the stadium and had their press privileges revoked. The fire really started to light up when it was revealed that the two men were from a well-known blogging website.

In reaction to this, it was leaked by Greg Wyshynski of Puck Daddy that the NHL held a conference call last week with team media relations directors and NHL executives regarding internet bloggers being given press privileges. Wyshynski, a distinguished member of the Professional Hockey Writers Association, seems to come out in support of letting bloggers into the mainstream media masses.

“They [bloggers] cover the game, pass information to their audience, and have done so for the last several years without many incidents of unprofessional behavior, despite approaching the coverage from a fan's perspective.”

Since the article was posted, many people have come out voicing their opinions on the matter. One of whom was mentioned in the Puck Daddy blog, but it was not quite in a positive light. As a member of Blueshirt Banter, a very popular blog site for the New York Rangers, Jim Schmiedeberg has been under the telescope for quite some time by the Rangers organization. He has not been granted press credentials by the team, nor is he allowed to have members of

the Rangers club on his podcast. Blueshirt Banter was put under scrutiny when they covered a rally held by Rangers fans that called for Rangers general manager Glen Sather to be fired.

“Quite simply, we covered the rally because it was newsworthy,” Schmiedeberg said in his reaction to Puck Daddy on blueshirtbanter.com. “Ranger fans were talking about it, and if it's something Ranger fans are talking about, we aren't going to ignore it. We aren't here to sugarcoat anything, we don't give you the homogenized look at the team that you get from some other places. If the Rangers stink, we like to think Ranger fans are smart enough to realize that. If there is another rally in the future, we'll cover it the exact same way.”

Despite the Rangers denying the website access to their home games or media events, the NHL opted to give access to Schmiedeberg and his co-writers for the NHL Draft in Los Angeles this summer. This seemed to anger the Rangers public relations team (amongst other clubs), as they are now calling for teams to have more control over media access outside of their home rinks.

But Blueshirt Banter is not the only blog weighing in on this subject.

Bluenote Zone, a St. Louis Blues blogging site, explained what they thought of this debate in a way that they felt necessary. Writer Jeff Quirin used a cause-and-effect approach in explaining his opinion:

“People (including hockey fans) go online for info.
Bloggers are masters of the online information game.
The NHL does not compete well against other major sports in traditional channels.
Does it not stand to reason that the league needs to have a better formal working relationship

with the blogging community? I think so.
Instead the proposal is to make the bloggers feel like second class citizens. Section us off, brand us separately and restrict access."

But if certain NHL teams are considering leaving bloggers out of the media community, they obviously don't care what these non-media members have to say. But what about the owners of the teams?

Ted Leonsis is a very successful businessman who has dipped his funds and mind into film-making, investing, authorship and philanthropy. He even has put up a blogging website, entitled "Ted's Take," which he writes on almost everyday. Oh yea, he also happens to be the owner of the NBA's Washington Wizards and the NHL's Washington Capitals.

Leonsis is very well known around the league for giving press credentials to bloggers. He recently wrote a short blog, displaying his love for the "blogosphere."

"Bloggers deserve our respect and our gratitude," Leonsis said. "They work hard. They generate pixels. Pixels generate interest and higher rankings on Google and other search engines. Higher rankings generate more click though. More click through means more relevance with today's citizens. And it is good business, too!"

Leonsis and the Capitals obviously are in support of the NHL being more open to bloggers, but they aren't the only ones. The New York Islanders even set up the "NYI Blog Box," which is a designated area for hand-picked bloggers from the New York region to report on the game, and even allows access to Islanders' personnel and players. It does restrict the members of the box to just Islanders, leaving the visiting team to the Islanders' mainstream media. The Islanders

have made some changes to the Blog Box, now in its fourth season.

“The reason we have continued this program and even overhauled it for this season is to bring extended insight around the coverage of the team,” Islanders Director of Communications, Kimber Auerbach said last month. “The bloggers that our staff selected were put through an audition process and were interviewed. We’ve let all of the bloggers know what we expect from them and we’re committed to taking this program to previously unimaginable heights and to become a leader in how teams embrace the blogosphere.”

The NHL Board of Executives will ultimately be making the decision on whether or not there are mandatory stipulations set forth for all NHL clubs regarding blogging. Mike DiLorenzo, the NHL Director of Social Media and Business Communications, has even publicly stated the NHL's stance. It just may not be something that the New York Rangers public relations team will want to agree with.

"Blogs are the original social media, and at the League level, social media is an important audience development device. As a first step we've tried to cultivate relationships with bloggers, and build some mutual respect. Expanding their access at League events may be a natural follow-on for those blogs that demonstrate that they can cover League events with the requisite quality and sensibility."

If the NHL is so positive that bloggers can only help the league, then why are so many teams finding it difficult to follow suit? Are they just too scared to bring in a new type of media that can't be controlled as easily?

As a blogger and website columnist for over ten years who also studies the ins and outs of

journalism on a daily basis, I understand why this is such a problem for many clubs. Every team has a certain newspaper, magazine or website that is given press capabilities for every game their club plays. Just like any business, there is always money involved in some indirect way that might make some writers and editors think twice about publishing something that chastises a player or coach's decision. With bloggers, it is more of a free-range market. The blogger may realize that the press pass was given as a privilege to that particular blogger, but that probably won't hinder him enough to keep his mouth shut when it comes to negativity. Many bloggers do not have a boss of any kind to answer to, so their opinion free-flows a lot easier than a typical media writer's thoughts would.

But could bloggers not also be taken as a positive as well? Fans who blog are usually very passionate followers of that team. They want their opinion to be heard, but also for it to come out as logical and precise as possible, so as to not sound like a buffoon who just runs his mouth at the first sight of trouble on the ice. These fans watch the game differently than a coach or manager; they don't have any financially invested interest in the success of the team. Will they lose their job if the club is not performing to the best of its abilities? No. Many bloggers make very educated suggestions in their blogs that coaches or managers may not have thought about, since they are seeing it in a different light. A good sports blogger is someone who follows their own personal code of ethics, but also portrays the voice of the die-hard fans in an easy-to-understand written format. Being a fan and a new-school journalist is a big responsibility that the serious sports blogger understands.

Blogging has become a new form of media that cannot be ignored anymore. Many people, including those on Twitter and Facebook, rely on bloggers to get the scoop out and throw in some analysis. To hide these people from the press-room and locker rooms would only keep the NHL hidden from the sports world, which is a trend that we have seen go on for far too long. Embracing bloggers would only help get the word out about the game. By adding more media coverage, the word of the game would grow and soon enough NHL bloggers would blanket the search engines and news archives all over the internet. When taking this into consideration, how can giving bloggers a chance be a negative?

Tim Tebow will still be asked for autographs. New media members will still be kicked out of stadiums and arenas. They will still have their credentials revoked, and they will still make headlines for years to come. But the media is evolving and to try and slow it down is barbaric.

Accidents will happen and mistakes will be made, but that is all a part of the process.

Bloggers are the media nowadays, it's just impossible to tell when we will be recognized for it.

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