

Buster Olney's Tips for Bringing Your Sportswriting to Life

Buster Olney is a former New York Yankees beat writer for the New York Times. He now writes for ESPN, the magazine, and can be seen on "Baseball Tonight" on ESPN. He shared these tips with reporters from the Star Tribune—and we are pleased to bring them to you. A special thanks to Project Editor Laurie Hertzell for sending them our way and for giving us permission to share the wealth.

- **Write for Buster's mom.** When Olney was a kid, he was the only person in his family who cared about baseball. One day, his mother told him, "Buster, you have tremendous potential ... for becoming extremely boring." This taught him to: *Always write stories that will pull in people like his mother—those who have no particular interest in baseball. Make the stories come alive with action, drama, emotion, and personality.*
- **Drop stuff in slowly.** When it comes to technical information like scores, sprinkle it around other stuff and give it context. It should be there for the hard-core sports fans, but at the same time, the article should be readable for Buster's mom.
- **Put the reader there.** Buster likes to put the reader right on the mount, or in the dugout, or wherever the story is set. If you're covering an event, pay special attention to what people are doing. What are their facial expressions? Does their body language say something? Then, ask them later: What were you thinking when you made that face?
- **Look for detail.** Say you're at your school's homecoming game. Notice the color of the sky during the game. Does it change? If it happens to be gray during a low point in the game, use that. Details liven up your writing—if you use them in appropriate places.
- **Prepare.** Don't go to a game or event without researching the teams who are playing. Who are the players to watch? What are their histories? Scope out the venue and hang on to your notebook. Take copious notes—you never know when you'll need them.