

## **John Affleck**

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### **Summary**

Starting my 13<sup>th</sup> year as an endowed chair at Penn State, I became the department head for journalism on July 1, 2022, responsible for setting the direction for a curriculum that serves about 400 majors. I have worked to improve and diversify both our basic skills courses and our capstone experiences, with professional publication always in mind. I also continue to lead the university's sports journalism program, one of the best of its kind. Penn State has scored more points in the nationwide Hearst Journalism Awards competition for sports writing than any other school in four of the last nine years, and, in 2019, I was named a Penn State Teaching Fellow by the Alumni Association, one of the university's top awards for its instructors. Prior to my arrival in State College, I had a long and varied career in national news and sports at The Associated Press, and at Penn State continue to partner with the AP on various projects, including coverage of the Women's World Cup and two Paralympics. My interests are not limited to sports, but a primary focus is making my students better communicators while using sports – both inside and outside the lines – as the topic of their work. I also report and comment on sports and sports media, with work appearing on Fortune.com and Forbes.com, the Los Angeles Times and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette among other publications.

### **Professional Experience**

#### **Pennsylvania State University (2013-present)**

##### **■ Department Head for Journalism. (July 2022-present)**

I am responsible for establishing our curriculum and leading about two dozen full-time faculty, along with a substantial group of adjuncts, who all serve our roughly 400 journalism majors. In this time when communications technology changes with unprecedented speed, I see it as vital that we provide fundamental journalistic storytelling tools to our students and the ethical foundation to negotiate professional conditions that will undoubtedly change substantially in the coming years. I am particularly interested in getting our third- and fourth-year students practical experience covering important events and stories in a professional context, and in helping to build a nimble, diverse and dynamic faculty to mentor our students. To that end, I have played an important role in

the hiring of six dynamic faculty members over the past three years. We also have revamped and updated the basic news writing course that all journalism majors must take. Also, under my leadership in this new role, Penn State won the 2022-23 writing division of the Hearst Journalism Awards, an intensely competitive contest in which more than 100 schools enter.

■ **Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society. Director of the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism.** (August 2013-present)

I shape Penn State's academic program for aspiring sports journalists and sports communicators, with more than 100 students on their way to earning an academic certificate at any given time. The center emphasizes not just traditional reporting skills but also mastery of reporting off-the-field issues, in-depth enterprise, and the cultural importance of sports. My aim is to develop students who think critically, communicate effectively and are prepared to take over as leaders in the world of sports journalism, however it evolves and whatever the medium. I have pushed the boundaries of what our students have produced in project-oriented courses, including short documentaries and television specials.

During my tenure, the Curley Center also has worked successfully with professional partners including The Associated Press, the USA Today Sports Network, the Miami Herald, the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association, PennLive and more. We have covered Penn State football playing in Ireland (2014); NASCAR at Pocono Raceway (2105); Penn State baseball in Cuba (2015); the Super Bowl (2014, 2016, 2020, 2022–2025); the men's golf U.S. Open (2016); the Rio Paralympics (2016); the Pittsburgh Pirates home opener (2017); the Little League World Series (2017-2025), the NFL in London (2017); Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane Maria in the context of sports (2019); and, how sporting traditions mix in Scotland with modern-day issues such as climate change, the declining popularity of traditional sports, and sectarian violence (2022); the Women's World Cup (2023); the Paris Paralympics (2024).

In addition to providing such special, off-campus experiences, I emphasize practical skills in the classroom such as reporting, writing and interviewing, and work with several students each year on long-form projects, always with an eye toward getting published. My teacher evaluations have been consistently stellar, and I won the college's student-nominated Excellence in Teaching Award in 2015.

My mission also involves examining issues within sports that cross over into a broader societal context, which dovetails nicely with what I see as a vital skill for sports journalists; that is, understanding the power structure that supports the sports industry. A class I developed on covering the business of sports revolves around answering the question, "Who gets paid?" as a clarifying starting point.

Beyond the university, I have taken advantage of my mission to comment regularly on sports media and outside-the-lines sports topics such as: the dearth of coverage for elite,

disabled athletes; the impact on pro football of daily fantasy sports; how the coverage of gay and lesbian athletes has changed over time; why universities should offer post-graduate education, and not just money, to athletes as an incentive in the name-image-likeness era; and, baseball as a diplomatic tool between the U.S. and Cuba. I've spoken to academic conferences at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland (twice), and to a sports studies conference on Ireland and Irishness in sport at the University of Galway (2022).

Finally, an online publisher, Great Jones Street, purchased and published on Kindle and other e-readers a collection of my short stories, "Winning and Losing," most of which have something to do with the way sports impact our lives. I continue to write flash and short fiction in my spare time.

## **On-campus Service at Penn State**

### ■ **Committee Work**

I have served on multiple committees within the Bellisario College of Communications, including hiring committees, a 2016 committee on the future of The Daily Collegian in 2016 that pushed the student newspaper toward producing digital editions, and chairing a committee that drafted a strategic plan for curriculum in the Penn State Journalism Department in 2016-17. I also served on the executive committee of Penn State's Center for the Study of Sports in Society, a cross-campus, multi-disciplinary effort, from 2016-20. I now serve on the Bellisario College's Executive Committee.

### ■ **Faculty adviser, Association for Women in Sports Media, Penn State chapter**

Since 2014, I have mentored our aspiring female sports communicators and led the group on trips to AWSM's annual convention. Hundreds of students have been members of our group since the chapter was formed and we were selected by national AWSM as student chapter of the year in 2018, 2020 and 2024, the first school to win the honor three times.

### ■ **Faculty partner, Penn State track and field.**

From 2015-2022, I served as the mentor and first fan to the Nittany Lions' men's and women's track teams, attending practices and home meets regularly, acting as a listener and source of support to student-athletes and coaches. I have traveled with the team to several conference championship meets. I take no credit but am happy to say the Lions won the Big Ten title in indoor track (women, 2017) and outdoor track (men, 2017) during my tenure.

## **The Associated Press (1991-2013)**

- **Sports Enterprise Editor / Deputy Sports Editor, New York, NY (2008-2013).**  
Brought on to improve sports enterprise and my role grew steadily from there.

Eventually became one of two managers running day-to-day sports operations, from major stories to routine daily sports coverage for a department of about 70 reporters. Key accomplishments: directed coverage of the Lance Armstrong saga, resulting in several major breaks for the AP; coordinated coverage of Jerry Sandusky case with news department; ran the domestic sports report in July and August 2012 while the department was split between Olympic and non-Olympic coverage; directed college football coverage, 2008-12; directed Final Four coverage, 2013.

- **Editor, National Reporting Team**, New York, NY (2001-2008). Responsible for leading a dynamic group of seven national reporters with broad topical beats such as religion, race, family and state government. The team broke spot news and produced long-form enterprise. Key accomplishments: Built up the team and turned it into a prolific, award-winning force in the AP's daily national news report. Led 50-state, yearlong investigative project on sexually abusive teachers, which inspired legislation in eight states and new laws in at least two that made it tougher for teachers with a record of abuse to get back into the classroom.
- **Correspondent**, Cleveland, OH (1997-2001) Reporter/manager responsible for leading seven-person bureau covering Northeast Ohio. Key stories and assignments: Covered the wrongful imprisonment lawsuit in the Sam Sheppard case, the true crime story that inspired "The Fugitive"; supervised sports writer and directed coverage of the Cleveland Browns' return to the NFL; contributed spot and feature coverage of Cleveland Indians during their 1990s run of success, including trip to 1997 World Series; and, game coverage of Cleveland Cavaliers.
- **Correspondent**, Buffalo, N.Y. (1995-97) Reporter/manager responsible for leading the AP's three-person bureau in western New York and, occasionally, southern Ontario. Coverage of spot news, sports, business, features. Key stories and assignments: A popular enterprise piece was a story on the difference between the way Canadians and Americans have viewed and used Niagara Falls; supervised sports writer and also helped with practice and game coverage of Bills, Sabres, college basketball.
- **Newsman**, Albany, N.Y. (1991-95) Reporter, copy editor in the AP's main Upstate New York bureau. Key stories and assignments: Earned a spot covering the New York legislature and Gov. Mario Cuomo's administration; spot coverage of a wave of mail bombings around Christmas 1993; routinely edited sports copy with occasional spot assignments, such as Army football and the state high school basketball tournament.
- **Special assignments**, outside my normal duties.
  - **News**: Presidential election stalemate, Florida (2000); Media recount of presidential election (2001); Death of Pope John Paul II (2005, editing in New York); Iraq War coverage in Baghdad (2008); Arab Spring, Cairo (2011); Hurricane Sandy (2012); Election 2012 (declared the winner in every statewide and state legislative race in the Dakotas).

- **Sports:** World Series (1997); Summer Olympics (2000, 2004); World Cup (2010); BCS college football championship game (2009-13); Men's Final Four (2013).

## **Education**

University of Notre Dame, bachelor's degree in American Studies, with honors, 1986.

University of Dundee (Scotland), postgraduate diploma in 20<sup>th</sup> century English literature, with distinction, 1987.

Northwestern University, master's degree in journalism, concentration in newspaper administration, with perfect 4.0 GPA, 1991. Awarded Kappa Tau Alpha status.

## **Awards**

A sampling of honors either I or students under my direct guidance have earned:

To me:

- Won the Excellence in Teaching Award from the College of Communications' Alumni Society Board, 2015.
- Won the Penn State Teaching Fellow Award from the Penn State Alumni Association, 2019.

To my students:

- Jim Murray Memorial Foundation Scholarship, \$5,000 scholarship for opinion writing on sports. National competition with more than 30 schools participating. Our students won in both 2015 (Garrett Ross), 2016 (Erin McCarthy) and 2018 (Patrick Burns). Contest now discontinued.
- Hearst Journalism Awards Program. National competition, sometimes called the Pulitzers of college journalism. Sports writing: second place, 2015 (John Stuetz); third and fourth place, 2017 (Ross and McCarthy); 2018 fourth place (Matt Martell), 15<sup>th</sup> place (Mark Fischer); 2019 fifth place (Patrick Burns), 11<sup>th</sup> place (Jack Hirsh); 2020 first place (David Eckert), 17<sup>th</sup> place (Tyler King); 2022 second place (Sebastien Kraft), fifth place (Andrew Destin); 2025 fourth place (Greg Finberg). In 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2022 Penn State scored more points in the competition, which routinely has more than 100 entries, than any other school.

A sampling of the awards either I or my reporters earned at The Associated Press.

To me:

- Association of Capitol Reporters and Editors, 2003. One of several AP reporters and editors to win first place award for a series called “Tough Times, Tough Choices” about the economic recession of that period.
- Ohio AP Staffer of the Year, 1999-2000. First time the award was given. Picked from a staff of about 30.

To my news reporters:

- National Education Writers Association, 2008, Hechinger Grand Prize, Teacher Sex Abuse series. Top award in a contest with hundreds of entries. To National Writers Robert Tanner and Martha Irvine. The series later won the Associated Press Managing Editors Award for Enterprise, its top award for enterprise/investigative work. Impacted legislation in several states regarding teachers found to have sexually abused students.
- National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. 2008, Journalist of the Year, to National Writer Martha Irvine.
- Columbia University’s Let’s Do It Better, 2008, winning reporters invited to a workshop on covering racial issues, to National Writer Erin Texeira for “Men Surviving Blackness.”
- Religion Communicators Council (first place) and Religion Newswriters Association (finalist), 2007 to religion writers Rachel Zoll and Brian Murphy, for a series called “The New Missionaries” about Christian denominations turning to the developing world for ministers because of the lack of vocations.

To my sports reporters:

- Awards in 2013 included National Headliners, sports writing, to Jim Vertuno for his coverage of the Lance Armstrong case; and, the Lisagor Award in sports writing from the Chicago Headline Club for “The Hardest Hit” an enterprise piece accompanied by compelling video on the NFL’s culture of disregard for injuries. I directed the project, which came from an idea I created.
- Associated Press Sports Editors, a contest of AP work judged by newspaper sports editors, 2012. Five of the six stories to earn recognition in the enterprise and feature categories were projects that I oversaw, including both winners.

## **Publications and notable interviews while at Penn State**

### ***For The Conversation***

*The Conversation* is an independent source of news and views from the academic and research community, delivered direct to the public. I am an author on 20 articles on sports-related topics, with more than 375,000 total readers.

A list of my single-author *Conversation* articles:

Affleck, John. Off the mat: boxing's triumphant (if brief) return in Mayweather-Pacquiao bout. *The Conversation*. May 1, 2015.

Affleck, John. FIFA prosecution is worth it, even if the big fish get away. *The Conversation*. May 28, 2015.

Affleck, John. Sepp Blatter's FIFA exit opens door for prosecutors, reformers. *The Conversation*. June 2, 2015.

Affleck, John. Salazar, Armstrong and the role journalists play policing sports. *The Conversation*. June 18, 2015.

Affleck, John. In today's NFL, forget Super Bowl dreams – it's all about fantasy. *The Conversation*. Sept. 11, 2015

Affleck, John. Sports history shows why playing ball with Cuba makes sense. *The Conversation*. Dec. 15, 2015.

Affleck, John. If football is deadly, why do we still watch? *The Conversation*. Feb. 5, 2016.

Affleck, John. March Madness means money – it's time to talk about who's getting paid. *The Conversation*. March 14, 2016.

Affleck, John. Don't run (and don't laugh): The little-known history of racewalking. *The Conversation*. Aug. 16, 2016.

Affleck, John. Why do the Paralympics get so little attention in the United States? *The Conversation*. Sept. 15, 2016.

Affleck, John. What happened to the openly gay athlete? *The Conversation*. June 21, 2017.

Affleck, John. If football is so deadly, why did 103 million people just watch the Super Bowl? *The Conversation*. Feb. 6, 2018.

Affleck, John. As states legalize sports betting, will sports media go all-in? *The Conversation*. June 26, 2018.

Affleck, John. With gambling legal in eight states, who really wins? *The Conversation*. March 21, 2019.

Affleck, John. Why it matters that more athletes are talking about their mental health. *The Conversation*. July 2, 2019

Affleck, John. Why it's such a big deal that the NFL's Carl Nassib came out as gay. *The Conversation*. June 24, 2021.

Affleck, John. How legalized sports betting has transformed the fan experience. *The Conversation*. Feb. 2, 2023.

## **For *Forbes.com***

In 2023, *Forbes* asked me to be a contributor on their website. I have since produced the following articles for the publication.

Affleck, John. Amateurism Is Dead In NCAA Sports And Data Suggests Fans Don't Care. *Forbes.com*. July 4, 2023.

Affleck, John. Live! From TV Studio New Zealand! It's The Women's World Cup! *Forbes.com*. July 30, 2023.

Affleck, John. Why Aren't Top 3 In Women's World Cup Final? Maybe 'Convergence.' *Forbes.com*. Aug. 18, 2023.

Affleck, John. NFL Germany: Best Spot For American Football? *Forbes.com*. Nov. 7, 2023.

Affleck, John. Lessons From The Michigan College Football Sign-Stealing Scandal. *Forbes.com*. Nov. 29, 2023.

Affleck, John. What Will We Lose With The New College Football Playoff? *Forbes.com*. Dec. 29, 2023.

Affleck, John. Jackpot! For Sports Betting, A Super Bowl In Las Vegas Is Winning. *Forbes.com*. Feb. 9, 2024.

Affleck, John. Super Bowl Features A Host Of Philanthropic Efforts. *Forbes.com*. Feb. 7, 2025.

Affleck, John. How Should Sports Journalism Adapt To The Women's Sports Boom? *Forbes.com*. June 25, 2025.

## **For newspapers and other publications**

Affleck, John. Words matter, even in sports. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Nov. 29, 2013.

Affleck, John. Pigskin problem: Coaches admit they can't do their jobs. *PennLive.com*. Dec. 16, 2013.

Affleck, John. The lesson in MLB vs. NFL is the lesson in business: innovation is key. *PennLive.com*. March 27, 2014.

Affleck, John. I believe that we are a soccer nation. *PennLive.com*. June 30, 2014.

Affleck, John. 2015: An almost great year in sports. *Centre Daily Times*. Dec. 24, 2015.

Affleck, John. New Ball Game: Covering Sports with Teams as Competitors. *Global Corruption Report: Sport*. Transparency International. February, 2016. pp. 352-358.

Under freelance contract, researched and contributed copy to Harvard University's *Protecting and Promoting the Health of NFL Players: Legal and Ethical Analysis and Recommendations*. November, 2016. Cited on page 372, with name misspelled.



Affleck, John. Here's who will really win the Mayweather-McGregor fight. *Fortune*. Aug. 19, 2017.

Affleck, John. Why can't the NCAA get its act together? *Fortune*. Oct. 31, 2017

Affleck, John. College football solution: Add one round, cut one regular-season game. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Jan. 4, 2018.

Affleck, John. Why winning the Super Bowl won't boost your city's economy. *Fortune*. Jan. 26, 2017.

Affleck, John. How the FBI's investigation could change college sports as we know them. *Fortune*. March 8, 2018.

Affleck, John. Op-Ed: The NCAA deserves its greedy reputation. Expanding athletic scholarships could change that. *Los Angeles Times*. June 11, 2019.

Affleck, John. For college football, what emerges from COVID-19 may be a bigger, better playoff. *PennLive.com*. May 1, 2020.

Affleck, John. What can we learn from the 'Plague Year' of 355 years ago? *Centre Daily Times*. May 31, 2020.

Affleck, John. What's behind American college football's fondness for Dublin? *RTE* (the Irish national broadcaster). June 14, 2022.

Affleck, John. Scottish club crowdfunds \$2.7 million, uses social media to pull in fans from U.S. — including Pittsburgh. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. April 19, 2025.

Affleck, John. A wee look at the future? A Scottish soccer club tries a new model of ownership and fans come along for the ride. *Sports Business Journal*. April 21, 2025.

## **Book chapter**

Affleck, John and Michaelis, Vicki. "Journalism professors take students to the press box," in "Media, Communication and the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup," edited by Yanity, Molly, and Sarver Cooms, Danielle. Chapter 8. Routledge, 2025.

## **Substack**

In 2021, I created a Substack feed called Day Late. On hiatus while I adjust to my new role as department head. The articles:

Affleck, John. In Defense of News Conferences. June 25, 2021.

Affleck, John. From Michael Sam to Carl Nassib. July 23, 2021.

Affleck, John. Bonus! As football approaches, let's get incentives into sports reporting. August 13, 2021. (reprinted by the *Centre Daily Times*)

Affleck, John. A lesson inspired by the IOC: Follow the money. Sept. 29, 2021. (reprinted by the *Centre Daily Times*)

Affleck, John. A lesson from the Sandusky scandal. Nov. 7, 2021. (reprinted by the *Centre Daily Times*)

Affleck, John. Here's to the winners. Dec. 29, 2021. (reprinted by the *Centre Daily Times*)

### **Fiction**

Affleck, John. *Winning and Losing*. A short story collection e-published by Great Jones Street. 2016.

Affleck, John. Two contributions, "Resignation Letter" and "Love at First Sight," to anthology, *Above the Bridge: The First Decade*. 2019.

Affleck, John. "The Time Traveler's Complaint." *365tomorrows*. May 15, 2020.

Affleck, John. "Family Secrets." *The Drabble*. June 20, 2020.

Affleck, John. "A Brief Guide to Invisibility," *Potato Soup Journal*. Aug. 7, 2020. Later anthologized in best of 2020 edition.

Affleck, John. "The Value of a Sidearm Pitcher." *Academy of the Heart and Mind*. Sept. 9, 2020.

Affleck, John. "Catechism Lesson." *Academy of the Heart and Mind*. Sept. 11, 2020.

Affleck, John. "Hard-Boiled Funeral." *Bull*. October 2021.

Affleck, John. "The Tell." *101 Words*. May 11, 2023.

### **Film**

*Quiet Sundays*. 2018. Short sports documentary on European fans of American football. Made by students / faculty over the 2017-18 school year. Roles: instructor of record; faculty producer. Won best student film, other awards, at film festivals.

*Running Home*. 2019. Short sports documentary on a track coach of Puerto Rican whose life journey culminates in trying to help friends and relatives after Hurricane Maria. Made by students and myself. Roles: instructor of record; producer. Picked up for national distribution by kweliTV.

*Running Safety*. 2020. Micro short film. Roles: Creator; director. A film of less than a minute made to express anguish at the killing of Ahmaud Arbery. Accepted and screened by the New York City Quarantine Film Festival.

*Big Johnny: Film Critic*. 2022. Short comedy. Roles: Writer; producer; actor. An 11-minute comedy shot over a weekend when lockdown ended, accepted and screened at four film festivals, including Summer in the South (in Atlanta) and Texas Short Film Festival (in San Antonio).

*Dirt Circus*. 2023. A student / faculty collaboration exploring the culture of dirt track racing in Pennsylvania through a season at one track. Screened in four festivals, including the Appalachian Film Festival and the International Motor Film Awards. Won the Made in PA Award at the Centre Film Festival. Roles: instructor of record; producer.

## **Personal**

### **Running**

A lifelong runner, highlights of my athletic career include: six high school MVP awards (Bishop Ludden High School of Syracuse, NY) in the running sports; earning a colour (British equivalent of a varsity letter) at the University of Dundee in Scotland for the school harriers; top 500 finisher at Boston Marathon (3 hours, 3 minutes net time) in 1999; nationally ranked by masterstrack.com in 2005 in four events (800 meters, 1500 meters, 3000 meters and the mile); master's All-American in the mile, having run sub-4:50 at age 40; and 800 meters at age 55 with a 2:29.04; anchored masters 50-and-over team for Central Park Track Club in the 4 x 400 meters at Penn Relays in 2017 and 2019; have entered and completed four sprint triathlons.

As a coach/volunteer in the running community: certified track and field coach by USATF, the sport's governing body; member of Central Park Track Club since 2001 and have served as an assistant coach, board member and member of fundraising committee.

### **Notable**

Grew up in Syracuse, N.Y. ... expert on the Beatles but prefer the Rolling Stones ... once piloted the Goodyear blimp ... Chuck Berry once asked me to run onstage and get his guitar cord for him ... have written and edited professionally on six continents, only missing Antarctica.