# The revival of provocative sports blogging under the Sports Illustrated banner



It has been more than six decades since the inaugural Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue was released, a publication that merged the realms of sports journalism with the appeal of sensual imagery. Originally conceived by bored editors to pass time during slow sports calendar periods, the swimsuit issue evolved into a highly profitable annual event for the magazine. However, the rise of sports bloggers in the 2000s and early 2010s, many of whom adopted a similarly provocative tone with their coverage of WAGs (wives and girlfriends of athletes), cheerleaders, and other figures, gradually eroded Sports Illustrated's subscription and advertising revenues.

Many of these once-prominent "horny sports blogs" have since faded into obscurity, relegated to almost-empty web pages. Examples include Busted Coverage, whose "girls" section now only displays its title without content. Other platforms such as OutKick and Barstool Sports have notably reduced updates in their titillating sections, highlighting a retreat from such content.

Nonetheless, former Sports Illustrated executive Chris Pirrone, alongside business partner Matthew Graham, is spearheading a revival of risqué sports blogging under SI’s banner through a vertical called The Athlete Lifestyle. This venture is distinguished by its unabashedly suggestive content and prolific output, particularly under the byline of a blogger named Matt Ryan, whose posts routinely focus on the outfits, poses, and private lives of athletes and their close associates, including high-profile personalities like Taylor Swift, Livvy Dunne, Hailee Steinfeld, and Bill Belichick’s girlfriend, Jordon Hudson.

The Athlete Lifestyle’s editorial approach evokes an earlier, more salacious era of sports blogging. For instance, a post from November 18, 2024, titled “Cowboys cheerleader Kylie Dickson flexes flawless kissy selfie before Texans game,” opens with the line: “If the Dallas Cowboys are ‘America’s Team’, then well, the Cowboys cheerleaders are ‘America’s Sweethearts.’” The article proceeds to display Instagram photos of cheerleaders making kissy faces, describing the mood as “happy game day even for non-Cowboys fans.”

Matt Ryan’s byline dominates the site, with an average of nearly ten posts daily recorded from November 2024 through March 2025, including weekends and holidays. This relentless publishing pace led to scrutiny about the identity and authenticity of Matt Ryan, given his lack of a conventional journalistic presence online. Investigations revealed that Ryan is not an AI-generated persona, with AI-detection tools confirming his posts are likely human-written. However, his real identity remains opaque.

The Athlete Lifestyle operates within a complex and often opaque sports media ecosystem. While Sports Illustrated employs full-time, unionised journalists who produce traditional magazine content, The Athlete Lifestyle is part of On SI—a network of niche blogs publishing under the SI.com domain but managed by "independent publishers" outside the unionised newsroom. Pirrone, who briefly served as Sports Illustrated’s senior vice president and general manager until January 2024, oversees multiple On SI blogs through his business entity “CPMs” (Chris Pirrone Media Solutions). This network functions partly on a pay-per-click revenue-sharing model, a common practice in digital content mills.

The revival of provocative sports blogging under The Athlete Lifestyle coincides with challenges in the wider Sports Illustrated organisation. Pirrone's tenure witnessed significant layoffs and controversies, including the publication of product reviews attributed to fake AI-generated authors. Following the transition from The Arena Group to Minute Media in early 2024, some stability returned, with many laid-off journalists rehired and efforts made to move away from the rapid "churn" content model.

Despite these efforts, The Athlete Lifestyle evidently operates under a distinct editorial philosophy, prioritising volume and virality over traditional journalism. Some contributions exhibit suggestive, repetitive headlines and focus on the physical appearances and personal lives of female athletes and other prominent women connected to sports figures. A sampling of headlines includes: “Livvy Dunne's Christmas nightie gets her on Santa's naughty list,” “Megan Thee Stallion grinding Angel Reese seductively wins Halloween parties,” and “Brittany Mahomes puts Patrick on dad duty being official breast-milk holder.”

Further investigations revealed that part of the writing and editing for The Athlete Lifestyle is outsourced to contractors affiliated with an LLC named Kings Digital Media, which appears to be separate from and unrelated to a Sri Lankan digital marketing company of the same name. This non-Sri Lankan Kings Digital Media acts as a content-mill middleman, supplying writers to various media outlets including On SI platforms, with a network reportedly overseen by a CEO named Eli Lippman.

Other contributors to The Athlete Lifestyle, such as writer Kilty Cleary—a friend of Pirrone—have been identified as utilising AI-generated content, according to analyses performed with AI-detection tools like Pangram. Cleary’s posts, particularly those about sporting memorabilia or team coverage, showed a consistent pattern of being 99.99 percent likely to be AI-written. Some of these AI-generated posts have since been removed from the site, though many remain available without any editor’s notes or disclosures.

In response to inquiries about editorial practices, Matthew Graham, serving as editor of The Athlete Lifestyle, affirmed that Matt Ryan is a real individual who works closely with the vertical, though he acknowledged that Ryan’s lack of an online bio or contact details was an oversight. Graham also asserted that their internal AI checks have not flagged Ryan’s content.

Minute Media, which acquired Sports Illustrated’s publishing rights in March 2024, maintained that they take the use of AI very seriously and conduct regular quality control checks. Paige Graham, Minute Media's senior director of strategic communications, confirmed ongoing monitoring and the potential removal of content or reporters if AI use violates their policies. Nevertheless, clarity remains limited regarding the extent to which outsourced content is AI-generated across the broader On SI network.

Sports Illustrated’s editor-in-chief Steve Cannella clarified that he does not oversee the On SI sites and that these contributors are not Sports Illustrated staffers. He emphasised that while the On SI family of sites shares the Sports Illustrated brand, editorial standards and oversight differ, adding: “We expect them to adhere to our AI code of ethics.” Cannella declined to comment on individual contributors or personnel decisions.

The Sports Illustrated Union also weighed in, reinforcing their commitment to rigorous editorial standards for Sports Illustrated’s main platforms and noting that union members have no input over On SI content. They stated, “Journalism with SI’s name on it should always meet the standards our audience has come to expect from us and be produced by humans, not AI.”

This division within Sports Illustrated’s digital presence illustrates ongoing tensions between traditional journalistic standards upheld by unionised staff and the operational realities of digital media's content mills. The rise of independent publishers like Chris Pirrone and his prolific output under The Athlete Lifestyle highlights a shift toward revenue-driven, high-volume digital publishing within the SI domain.

Despite controversies and criticism from former staffers about Pirrone's prior leadership, he describes his objective as striving to do what is best for colleagues and the organisation. The complex interplay between human and AI-generated content, multiple layers of outsourcing, and the blurred lines across Sports Illustrated’s various platforms represent a significant transformation in the media landscape linked to established sports brands.

As Digital content networks continue to expand under the On SI umbrella, readers can expect to encounter a diverse range of coverage, including substantial volumes of provocative, high-frequency posts authored by figures such as Matt Ryan, who remains a largely enigmatic presence in the evolving world of sports media.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sports_Illustrated_Swimsuit_Issue> - This URL provides background information on the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue, detailing its history and evolution from its inception in 1964.
2. <https://swimsuit.si.com/swimnews/a-timeline-of-evolution-at-si-swimsuit> - This site offers a timeline of key milestones in the history of the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue, including significant firsts and changes over the years.
3. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sports-illustrated-swimsuit-issue-cover/> - This article discusses the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue's anniversary covers, featuring multiple models such as Kate Upton and Chrissy Teigen.
4. <https://www.si.com/sports-illustrated/2016/02/14/every-cover-si-swimsuit-edition> - This link provides an overview of all the covers of the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue from its beginning to recent years.
5. <https://www.pulltabsports.com/blog/sports-illustrated-swimsuit-edition-enduring-the-test-of-time> - This blog post explores the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue's enduring popularity and its role in evolving sports media.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides additional context on sports media reporting, although specific details about The Athlete Lifestyle are not available here. The Noah Wire Services link was mentioned in the original text.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMilgFBVV95cUxQcno4ZTVPelZDYTVHUmtjblVLUFR3TkpySHlWVmFBUnFxa1pkQmRlWkU0ZzB4LWRfVFFhTU0wVS03N3RWcGlMZU9FM2dwejhxaDFNRU55cjlndTVKS3hlazd2YllPRXRUcmI5U0RCdzUybWRMNkRhTXNUY0xoeURmQUtwTExmOV82UzdRVVF0RG9nRGR1Wnc?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data