# The Athlete Lifestyle revives provocative sports blogging amid digital media shifts



More than six decades have passed since the inaugural Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue debuted, an event that intertwined sports journalism with a markedly sexualised aspect of sports fandom. While the swimsuit edition initially emerged as a lighthearted diversion during sports' off-season, it soon evolved into a significant annual feature that financially supported much of the magazine's broader operations.

However, the rise of sports blogs during the 2000s and early 2010s saw a shift in the landscape of sports content. Blogs focusing on the appearance of athlete partners (WAGs), cheerleaders, and collegiate figures began to gain prominence, encroaching on Sports Illustrated's subscription and advertising revenue. Today, many of these blogs have fallen into obscurity, with sites like Busted Coverage leaving only empty remnants of their "girls" sections, and platforms such as OutKick and Barstool Sports showing a reduction in updates to their more provocative content segments.

In this context, former Sports Illustrated executive Chris Pirrone and his business associate Matthew Graham have embarked on reviving what some might term "horny sports blogging." Operating under Sports Illustrated's banner, they manage a content vertical called The Athlete Lifestyle, which notably amplifies the sexually charged tone of past sports-related blogs. Critics have noted a stark contrast between Pirrone’s previous contentious period at Sports Illustrated and his current venture, with a former staffer describing his tenure with “complete disdain.”

The Athlete Lifestyle is marked by its unabashed focus on the physical appearances and social lives of athletes and their close associates, with posts praising cheerleaders, partners of sports figures, and other public personalities with suggestive headlines and detailed commentary on their outfits and poses. For example, one November 2024 post celebrated Dallas Cowboys cheerleader Kylie Dickson’s “flawless kissy selfie,” reinforcing the site's characteristic style.

Central to the prolific output on The Athlete Lifestyle is a blogger named Matt Ryan, whose byline appears on thousands of posts averaging nearly ten daily entries from late 2024 to early 2025. Ryan’s profile was initially cloaked in mystery, devoid of any personal information or contact details, leading to speculation about his identity. Attempts to correlate him with known figures sharing the same name were unsuccessful, adding to the enigma.

Further investigation revealed that The Athlete Lifestyle operates within a complex digital media framework, characterised by “independent publishers” who manage various content mills. These publishers, including Pirrone and Graham, produce content under revenue-sharing arrangements where contributors are compensated based on article views, a common model across sports media platforms such as Fansided and Athlon Sports. Pirrone, who also retains ownership of other sports blogs including The Big Lead, runs The Athlete Lifestyle through his company, CPMs (Chris Pirrone Media Solutions).

The vertical employs a small cadre of semi-regular contributors, with content spanning from unabashedly provocative pieces to conventional sports gossip. Matt Ryan, however, dominates the output with posts featuring headlines like “Livvy Dunne's Christmas nightie gets her on Santa's naughty list” and “ESPN’s Molly Qerim wags tongue teasing low-cut full-length dress,” illustrating the site’s notable fixation on sexualised content.

Questions surrounding the authenticity and origin of these prolific posts led to examinations of potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) in content creation, particularly concerning another contributor, Kilty Cleary. Cleary’s work displayed hallmarks of AI-generated writing, which was supported by analyses conducted via Pangram, a recognised AI detection tool. While Cleary’s content was flagged as 99.99 percent likely AI-generated, the posts under Matt Ryan’s byline were consistently deemed human-authored by the same technology.

The media ecosystem underpinning The Athlete Lifestyle includes outsourcing arrangements with companies such as Kings Digital Media, a content production entity involved in multiple high-profile media platforms. The exact relationship and contractual details between Pirrone, Graham, and these external contributors remain opaque. Efforts to obtain definitive confirmation about Matt Ryan’s identity and association were met with limited disclosure. Matthew Graham indicated that Ryan’s lack of biographical information was an “oversight” and affirmed collaboration with him, describing Ryan as a "digital monetization expert." Graham denied that others write under Ryan’s name and confirmed no AI use in his content following routine internal checks.

The parent company overseeing Sports Illustrated’s digital platforms, Minute Media, has implemented quality control measures concerning AI-generated content and asserts a commitment to editorial standards. Paige Graham, Senior Director of Strategic Communications at Minute Media, acknowledged the volume of output from Matt Ryan but attributed it to the brevity and quick turnaround of his pieces. She confirmed ongoing monitoring for AI use and indicated removal of content that fails to meet guidelines. Nonetheless, a significant portion of AI-flagged posts by Cleary remain accessible on The Athlete Lifestyle and other On SI verticals.

Sports Illustrated’s Editor-in-Chief, Steve Cannella, clarified in discussions that SI’s core staff and its unionised journalists do not oversee the On SI network, which includes The Athlete Lifestyle. While On SI sites bear the SI brand’s association, they operate independently, with separate editorial oversight. Cannella emphasised the expectation that these publishers adhere to the organisation’s AI ethics guidelines. However, he refrained from commenting on individual personnel or editorial choices specific to On SI.

The Sports Illustrated Union expressed concerns regarding differentiation between the main SI platforms and On SI, underscoring the desire for distinct editorial standards and human-produced journalism for content bearing the SI name.

The situation at The Athlete Lifestyle reflects broader tensions in digital sports media, particularly the challenges posed by monetisation models based on page views and the balance between traditional journalism and high-volume content mills. The continued presence and proliferation of content featuring sexualised portrayals of athletes’ partners and celebrities, facilitated through such models, signify an ongoing evolution in sports media’s digital presence.

Chris Pirrone, when approached for comment about his editorial approach and leadership of The Athlete Lifestyle, acknowledged efforts to serve the organisation and colleagues but declined to address specific queries about content contributors. Matthew Graham and Minute Media maintained general affirmations regarding quality and ethical standards without divulging extensive operational details.

As the media landscape evolves, The Athlete Lifestyle’s blend of provocative content, rapid publishing, and complex production arrangements illustrates one facet of sports journalism’s ongoing transformation in the digital age.

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

## Bibliography

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