

How to Write a Sports Profile / Feature Piece

By Brian Olmo | 2022-23 PantherNOW Sports Director

Introduction:

Hello!

If you are reading this, welcome to the world of sports profiles and features! Glad to have you here.

Sports profiles and features differ from typical sports news and game coverage. Profiles are longer, more narrative-driven content focusing on a particular person or group. They lend themselves to more creative writing and storytelling.

But before you flex that creative muscle, you first have to understand the structure of a profile before you can play around with it.

That is what this guide is here for. I've included a breakdown of what a good profile needs with some of my personal favorite examples.

Happy reporting!

Primary Components of a Feature:

- **Strong Lede:** One of the hardest components to write of any good feature. A strong lede is free of confusing jargon; simple yet compelling. A typical lede for a feature is 2-4 paragraphs long. Different types of ledes include:
 - **Straight:** Doesn't beat around the bush, gets straight to the point of the story. **More used for hard news, not really seen in features.**

- **Scene-setting:** Describes the scene or setting where this article takes place with vivid, descriptive imagery. **These are the most common ledes used in features.**
 - Anecdote: Starts off the article with a relevant story that can then be connected to the main point.
 - **Zinger:** Dramatic and catch a reader's attention instantly. Think about the main point of your story and if it can be framed in a surprising, emotion-provoking way. Usually a sentence or two long.
 - Question: Starts by asking a relevant question. Use sparingly and only when the story absolutely calls for it. Never use a question that has a yes or no answer as a lede. Think carefully about the question.
 - **Nut Graf:** This is the paragraph that tells you what the story is about in a nutshell (hence the name). This is where you answer the reader's question "So what? Why do I care?" It comes after your lede and serves as a transition into the story.
 - **Background Info:** This is where you do your research. You get this from doing online searches, scouring documents in archives and most importantly, your interviews. *Be thorough!* Ask follow-up questions and explore various angles. Soon enough, you'll have a clear outline for your story.
 - **Quotes (+ their transitions):** Quotes can make or break a profile. Come up with a clearly defined angle for your story, think about the themes you want to explore and build your questions with this in mind and in conjunction with your research.
 - Also, when transitioning into quotes, avoid simply repeating what the quote says.
 - **Full-circle Conclusion:** You end your story referencing something brought up at the start to tie everything all together.
 - Pro tip: NEVER end a profile or feature with a quote!
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Examples of a strong lede:

The roar of masked Florida fans drowned out a rather unusual celebration on the sidelines on a late November afternoon.

The Gators were in the second half against the Kentucky Wildcats when Florida linebacker Mohamoud Diabate intercepted the ball and rushed it for 14 yards. His teammates swarmed him as Diabate darted off the field in celebration.

“Mabrouk! Mabrouk! Mabrouk!”

- [Mohamoud Diabate: More than an athlete](#) | Grethel Aguila | *Independent Alligator*
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Jacob Stanko’s frame fills any room he enters.

Six-feet-two-inches tall and a chiseled 230 pounds with thick, dark brown hair that effortlessly frames his face as it tumbles past his ears, it’s hard to ignore the self-described introvert.

Against his competition, he’s a giant among titans. But Jacob isn’t phased.

He takes a breath to collect his thoughts and recites a prayer to God. He’s practiced the throw a thousand times. Still, a conversation with God centers his mind toward his goal.

- [The Curious Life of Jacob Stanko](#) | Christian Ortega | *Independent Alligator*
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Tears swelled in Dana Joubert’s eyes when she saw her daughter, Mikayla Hayes, at a 2017 basketball invitational during Thanksgiving.

It was the first time Joubert had seen her daughter since she started playing basketball at UF. She anticipated minor changes typical in many college freshmen: a little weight gain, a new hairstyle and an updated fashion sense.

Instead, Hayes’ face was dotted with acne. She had put on an amount of weight that looked unusual on her skinnier frame. She was almost unrecognizable.

- [Former Florida women’s basketball players detail abuse under Coach Newbauer](#) | Zachary Huber | *Independent Alligator*

Jordan Chiles never shies away from the spotlight. An Olympic medalist with endless energy and eye-catching swagger, she has Hollywood written all over her.

But don't count on her to follow a script.

- [‘I’m doing it for me’: Jordan Chiles flips script, sets sight on 2024 Olympics](#) | Sam Settleman | *The Daily Bruin*

Examples of a nut graf:

That's not a word commonly heard on the gridiron. It's Arabic for "congratulations," and asks God to boost the good things in life. But that's what Diabate's teammates yelled as his first-ever collegiate interception resulted in a touchdown three plays later and secured the Gators' game against Kentucky 34-10.

The junior is the only Muslim on the Gators football team. Throughout his life, he has sought a delicate balance between religion and football in a modern world.

- [Mohamoud Diabete: More than an athlete](#) | Grethel Aguila | *Independent Alligator*

Two years with UCLA gymnastics later, Jordan is hitting pause on everything else to rehearse an act that was initially bound for the cutting room floor: a shot at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

- [‘I’m doing it for me’: Jordan Chiles flips script, sets sight on 2024 Olympics](#) | Sam Settleman | *The Daily Bruin*

Hayes isn't the only former Gator who endured a toxic environment in the women's basketball program. The head coach is accused of making racist remarks, throwing basketballs at players during practices and verbally abusing the team, assistant coaches and trainers.

- [Former Florida women's basketball players detail abuse under Coach Newbauer](#) | Zachary Huber | *Independent Alligator*

Examples of background info:

Hogan attended high school at Lincoln Park Academy in Port Saint Lucie, Florida before spending a year in Atlanta to play for Major League Soccer's Atlanta United Academy team from 2016-17. After his year in Georgia, Hogan returned home and played with Lincoln Park once again and played club soccer with the Davie Sharks.

Joining the Panthers in 2018, Hogan's time in the blue and gold has been filled with ups and downs, including a knee injury that kept him on the sidelines for a significant period of time. His freshman season was spent training before the injury shut his season down.

- [*A Goal for the Pitch: The Story of Tyler Hogan*](#) | Liam Rooney | PantherNOW

Patrick Murray's older brother, Chandler, was a member of that 2018 Little League championship team. Chandler and his teammates ran roughshod through that tournament, going undefeated and outscoring their opponents 26-3 over a five-game stretch. Honolulu capped off its dominating run with a 3-0 shutout of Japan, a country that produced five world champions between 2010 and 2017.

Patrick leaned on his big brother for advice about how to best enjoy the tournament, but he simultaneously dealt with the stress of living up to Chandler's success.

- [*Long way from home: The journey of Hawaii's Little League World Series team in a pandemic year*](#) | Andrew Destin | The Lion's Roar

Examples of quotes + transitions into them:

From the end of 2019 to the summer of 2021, Hogan went through surgery, rehab and like everyone else he dealt with the changed world caused by COVID-19.

"I kind of knew that year was going to be a grind, but I didn't know how much yet, because we obviously didn't know about COVID and no one kind of prepared for that," Hogan said. "But once we were all forced to go home, I really kicked it into gear and said I'm either going to go up or down from here."

- [A Goal for the Pitch: The Story of Tyler Hogan](#) | Liam Rooney | PantherNOW
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Not only did Krause grow up watching championship volleyball players, but every single person she looked up to was female. Role models like former Huskers outside hitter and Olympic gold medalist, Kelsey Robinson, two-time Huskers national champion, Mikaela Foecke and Minnesota's Hannah and Paige Tapp, who both played on Team USA.

"It's super important to have women that you can look up to, especially in a skill or maybe a profession that you want to accomplish in your life," Krause said.

She looked to them because they were "exemplary" players, and they were good people.

"I need to look at these women in powerful positions, doing what they can and they're rocking the game," she said. "And Jordan Larson, obviously, but she doesn't even seem like she needs to be named."

- [If you can see it, you can be it: How volleyball in Nebraska created a cycle of greatness](#) | Abby Barmore | Nebraska News Service
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Examples of conclusions:

When his days in this life expire, he hopes to leave a legacy, not only as a player on the field, but also as a leader who understands others. And for both, to hear others say: Mabrouk.

- [Mohamoud Diabete: More than an athlete](#) | Grethel Aguila | Independent Alligator
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For now, the cameras are rolling on Jordan's journey to Paris 2024 – a chance at Olympic redemption and the storybook ending she dreamed of. But Jordan's post-Paris story could go a number of different directions, and maybe the final act even takes place in Westwood.

Just don't check the script.

- ['I'm doing it for me': Jordan Chiles flips script, sets sight on 2024 Olympics](#) | Sam Settleman | The Daily Bruin

Kinslow and former players agree: The program is better off without Newbauer. They may no longer be at UF, but they feel a sense of peace.

There are no more players he can break.

- [Former Florida women's basketball players detail abuse under Coach Newbauer](#) | Zachary Huber | Independent Alligator
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Final Checklist + tips:

- Strong lede:** *Do you have a lede that grabs a reader's attention and gives a hint as to what the story is about? Did you choose an appropriate lede for this story?*
- Nut graf:** *Do you succinctly explain in a few sentences or less what this story is about and why it's important/timely?*
- Background info:** *Do you have enough research and info to construct an outline for your story that flows? Do you have enough info to conduct an in-depth interview?*
- Quotes:** *Do you have strong quotes that you can seamlessly transition into?*
 - Did you ask open-ended questions? (Avoided yes/no answers?)*
 - Did you ask follow-up questions?*
 - Did you interview at least 3-4 people of interest in this story?*
- Conclusion:** *Do you have a conclusion that ties everything together? Did you bring the story full circle?*
- Revisions:** *Have you had your story revised by at least 2-3 people?*

Final Tips:

- Features take time. When you turn one in, you should fully expect it to be full of edits and red lines. Revisions are important in making sure your story is as tight as possible.
- Show your story to as many people as possible. The more eyes on it, the better.

- Put a lot of effort into your interview questions. These along with your research will help you structure your story, making it flow.
- Above all else, keep writing. **Practice makes perfect.**

Additional Resources:

- <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-write-ledes-for-feature-stories-2074318>
- <https://culture.kissflow.com/all-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-ledes-but-were-afraid-to-ask-45f541774d8b>
- <https://www.wyliecomm.com/2019/10/how-to-write-a-nut-graf/#:~:text=The%20nut%20graph%20%E2%80%94%20aka%20the,central%20theme%2C%20of%20your%20piece.>