

# **‘Allez Wiggo’: a case study on the reactions of the British print media to Bradley Wiggins’s victory in the Tour de France**

On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012 Bradley Wiggins became the first ever British cyclist to win the Tour de France. This paper examines how the events surrounding Bradley Wiggins’s victory in the 2012 Tour de France were reported in the British (London-based) print media the day after his victory. Thematic coding revealed two specific themes: “Arise Sir Bradley Le Gentleman” and “Wiggo the Mod”.

*Key Words:* Print media, road cycling, Tour de France, Bradley Wiggins

Road cycling can be difficult for the casual spectator to understand primarily because, unlike many other sports, the themes of conflict and association coexist (Williams, 1989). In road cycling, competition is a flexible rather than a reified ideology in which competitors move between opposition and association and back again. Apparent opponents shift between antagonistic competition and associative efforts (Albert, 1991). These constant changes between individualism and collectivism can result in the tactical nuances of road cycling being missed or misunderstood by both casual spectators and non-specialist journalists in the mainstream print media. This paper examines how the events surrounding Bradley Wiggins’ victory in the 2012 Tour de France were reported in the British (London-based) print media the day after he became the first British cyclist to ever win the event on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012. In the following section, the historical context that has arguably enabled a British rider to win the Tour de France is provided. More specific details regarding the history of the Tour de France are also discussed before the data collection and analysis techniques utilised are outlined in

the methodology section. The paper concludes by discussing the findings of the thematic analysis.

### **Road to Glory: the rise of British cycling that enabled the Wiggins victory**

Despite the recent success of Bradley Wiggins at the Tour de France, bicycle road racing in the UK remains a minor sport with relatively few participants, although there are 1400 cycling clubs in the UK (British Cycling, 2012), there are by contrast 37500 football clubs (FA, 2012). In France by comparison, cycling is a national sport and there the bicycle has always been cherished as a French invention with social, cultural and political significance and as a popular and cheap means of transport which in its early history was seen as taking the technology of the industrial towns back in to the countryside and allowing new city workers to keep in touch with their rural cousins (Campos, 2003). In France from the 1890's onwards bicycle racing on public roads flourished with a number of spectacular endurance races testing the limits of both men and machines. The Tour de France first held in 1903 has grown to become France's pre-eminent sporting competition and arguably the greatest cycling race in the world which has captured the imagination of the French people and acquired symbolic significance in French culture (Dauncey & Hare, 2003).

Prior to Wiggins's success at the 2012 Tour de France, only thirty two British riders had finished the event and only eleven British riders had achieved stage wins (Fife, 1999). The relative lack of British success is due in part to the almost total absence of bicycle road racing in Britain until 1959 when the British Cycling Federation was formed. Bicycle racing on British roads was effectively banned in 1890, a ban driven by increasing hostility towards racing on public roads as a consequence of the widening class profile of cycling in the 1890s (Cox, 2008). Bicycle racing in Britain had begun in 1869 and by 1880 had assumed a

remarkable degree of definition and institutional organisation (Richie, 1999). The bicycle provided the working class with the physical means of escape from the confines of early industrial life and bicycle races which attracted large crowds quickly became working class gatherings in the countryside. The governing body of cycling in Britain the National Cyclists Union (NCU) aligned itself to a continued emphasis on cycling as a gentleman's leisure pursuit fearing a total ban on cycling as a recreational activity (Cox, 2008).

It was not until 1922 with the formation of the Road Racing Council that racing on public roads in Britain was officially sanctioned and then only in the form of time trials against the clock. Massed start racing during this period was confined to airfields and motor racing circuits until Percy Thornley Stallard, a Wolverhampton bicycle shop owner, instigated the re-introduction of road racing by staging an 'illegal' road race from Llangollen to Wolverhampton on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1942. The NCU promptly suspended all those involved and in response Stallard founded the British League of Racing Cyclists (BLRC) and the sport of bicycle racing in Britain became divided. The BLRC was responsible for the re-introduction of massed start road racing following the continental format of attracting sponsorship and publicity and this approach culminated in the first Tour of Britain being held in 1951 under the sponsorship of the *Daily Express* newspaper (Woodland, 2005).

Victory by Bradley Wiggins and domination of the 2012 Tour de France by a British team is perhaps the most tangible evidence yet that bicycle road racing in Britain has now closed the gap on continental racing which was created by a near seventy year absence of racing on our roads. Wiggins's Tour de France win came after he had finished 24<sup>th</sup> in 2010 and abandoned the race in 2011. Wiggins had also previously finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2009 riding for the Garmin Slipstream Team. Victory by Wiggins in 2012 represented the completion of his transformation from world record holder and Olympic gold medallist to Tour de France winner and his victory was achieved largely as a result of the defensive strategy adopted by

Team Sky. The route included a 41.5 km individual time trial (Wiggins's specialism) on Stage 9 which allowed Wiggins to gain time on his main rivals and take possession of the race leader's yellow jersey. Wiggins had significantly improved both his time trialling and also his climbing ability and his team mates had been specially selected to defend the advantage gained in the time trial by controlling the race during the subsequent mountain stages which represented the only opportunities for his rivals to reclaim the time lost to Wiggins in the individual time trial. The strategy was successful and Wiggins was able wear the race leader's yellow jersey for the remainder of the race, extending his winning margin to 3 minutes and 21 seconds during a second individual time trial (53.5km) on the penultimate stage of the race.

### **Method**

Hard copies of the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express*, *The Sun*, *The Star*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Times* and *The Guardian* were examined as a sample of British daily newspapers. These newspapers were chosen because of their mass circulation and therefore national prominence (Press Gazette, 2012). In addition they typically contain sports coverage and represent different readerships of the British newspaper market. Across the nine titles, seventy one pages of coverage had been dedicated to the story on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012.

Inductive open coding was used by analysing each line of text and allocating content to particular themes (Biscomb & Griggs, 2012; Griggs & Gibbons, 2012). A total number of eleven different themes emerged from coding the entirety of the data. Further review concluded that some themes were sparse in content and these were combined and recombined in order that themes were thought strong enough to report. Repeated rereading and analysis of

the data led to the themes being grouped together into axial codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). By the end of the process, two robust axial codes or themes were developed and these form the basis of the discussion. These were titled “Arise Sir Bradley Le Gentleman” and “Wiggo the Mod”.

## **Discussion of findings**

### **Arise Sir Bradley Le Gentleman**

A number of the papers unreservedly regarded the Wiggins victory as *the* greatest British sporting achievement of all time:

Magnifique! Wiggo hailed UK’s greatest sportsman. (Palmer, 2012)

It took him just three weeks to become a national hero. (Palmer & Byrne, 2012)

The most glorious fairytale in a century of British sport. (Chadband, 2012)

Others compared his achievements with those of other British athletes in other sports throughout history. As such the familiar sense of sporting nostalgia upon which depictions of British/English nationalism in the national press have often been based (Griggs & Gibbons, 2012) were also apparent in the coverage of Bradley Wiggins:

He is in the pantheon now with the rest of our sporting greats. (Holt, 2012)

Britain’s first tour victor takes rightful place among sport’s greats. (Malvern, 2012)

The ‘Kilburn Flyer’ cemented his place among the nation’s greatest sporting heroes. (Sheldrick, 2012)

What Wiggins achieved is one of the single greatest feats in our sporting history, certainly. But there is a distinction to be drawn between that and whether it put him above all our other sporting heroes. Just because he conquered a feat of endurance

does it mean he should be revered more than Bobby Moore who captained England to World Cup glory in 1966? (Holt, 2012)

[Asking if] his victory is the greatest achievement of any British sportsperson – ever. I wholly agree. Remembering our 1966 our World Cup heroes perhaps...others will doubtless take a different view. (Jones, 2012)

Is he the greatest of all British sportsmen?...The trick in all this is to give all the great men their own place in the annals of the nation's sport and if we do this there is no fear about the marginalisation of Bradley Wiggins. (Lawton, 2012)

Due to the novelty of the Tour de France win and how long awaited it was, some papers situated the victory either above or on the same level as triumphs in more 'mainstream British' events/sports. For instance, in the following extract one journalist makes comparisons with historic British victories in both tennis and football:

The century it took for a Briton to ride down the Champs Elysee in the leader's yellow jersey has surpassed the 76 year wait for a Wimbledon winner to follow Fred Perry and the 46 years of hurt since Bobby Moore lifted the football world cup for England. It's why Wiggins deserves to be spoken of in the same breath as those sporting legends. (Lee, 2012)

In a similar fashion, Palmer & Byrne (2012) state that the Tour de France win is "like 1966 and England's greatest cricket triumphs all rolled into one." Moreover, Williams (2012) stated that:

Wiggins victory has been compared to Fred Perry's hat trick of Wimbledon singles titles, Roger Bannister's four minute mile, Dennis Compton's 3187 runs in the summer of 1947, Geoff Hurst's World Cup final hat trick, the British Lions defeat of the All Blacks in 1971, Steve Redgrave's gold medals in five consecutive Olympic Games, Lennox Lewis' victories over Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson, and Paula Radcliffe's marathon world record.

Such was the scale of the significance of this inaugural victory that there were calls for Wiggins to be given the honour of lighting the Olympic flame at the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Games due to begin less than a week after his Tour de France win. Many stories appeared in the press calling for Wiggins to be given this once in a lifetime

opportunity over some of the more well-established heroes and heroines of British sport such as Sir Steve Redgrave, Daley Thompson, Dame Kelly Holmes and Roger Bannister:

Let him light the Olympic flame. (Walker, 2012)

Olympic chiefs were last night urged to reward Bradley Wiggins for winning the Tour de France by letting him light the Olympic cauldron. (Walker, 2012)

In addition, as has become increasingly more common over the latter half of the twentieth century, there were pleas for Wiggins to be given a knighthood for his achievement:

Bradley – now 6/1 with William Hill to be knighted in the New Year’s honours list. (Sales, 2012)

Demands to honour new star with a knighthood. (Ward, 2012)

His incredible victory has sparked calls for him to be awarded a knighthood and made BBC sports personality of the year. (Walker, 2012)

As Brad Wiggins stood on the podium yesterday he joined the pantheon of truly great sportsmen, Sir Bradley did someone say? Lord Wiggo of Kilburn would be more like it. (Wheatcroft, 2012)

By hailing Bradley Wiggins as Britain’s greatest sporting figure; by comparing his achievements with previous British sporting legends and by insisting that his achievements were worthy of a knighthood, it appears that the British press were framing him as the latest in a long line of British sporting heroes. As such, it is worth considering the newspaper coverage of Wiggins’ exploits in the Tour de France alongside established ideas of what a sporting hero is or should be. In ancient times heroes were usually warriors, or legendary figures, who performed brave and moral deeds and possessed attributes such as bravery, strength and steadfastness (Vande Berg, 1998). In contemporary times mediated heroes perform far less significant acts and possess attributes of less stature. Nevertheless, modern day mediated heroes still serve a variety of social functions, which include that of the role

model who embodies public values and ideals (Tomlinson, 2010; Vande Berg, 1998). Although, Whannel (2002, p. 225) has argued that the concept of the role model rests on an “outdated and discredited functionalist view of socialisation”, Tomlinson (2010, p. 395) maintains that the term continues to have a “prominent profile in everyday parlance”. Indeed, much of the newspaper coverage following Bradley Wiggins’ victory in the Tour de France focussed on his newly acquired position as hero and role model:

A worthy example for generations to come. Love him to bits! So we should. (King, 2012).

The stars of these so called minor sports would certainly make more appropriate role models - and none more so than Bradley Wiggins.” (Jones, 2012)

A life as a role model, an inspiration, a sporting idol, the sideburns and the Tour de France yellow jersey on posters plastered on the bedroom walls of teenage cyclists across Britain. (Speck, 2012)

A new generation of cyclists to woo.” (Chadband, 2012)

In particular the media focussed on Wiggins’ role as a family man and this resonates with media coverage of other sporting heroes. For example, Vande Berg (1998) explained that the commitment to home and family life of American sporting heroes Nolan Ryan (Baseball) and Joe Montana (American Football) was a constant feature of the media coverage of their careers. Another American superstar, Michael Jordan, has also been regularly portrayed in relation to his own ideal family circumstances (McDonald, 1996). In a British context Cashmore and Parker (2003, p. 220) argued that David Beckham’s “idyllic familial surroundings” have contributed to his own status as a contemporary sports icon, while much of the positive coverage around cricketer Andrew Flintoff during the iconic 2005 Ashes series against Australia was framed around the stability of his family life (e.g., Etheridge, 2005a; 2005b; Tozer, 2005). The coverage of Bradley Wiggins the family man

certainly reinforces his new found media status as a role model who embodies public values and ideals:

Bradley then went to find wife Cath and their kids Ben, seven and five year old Isabella. (Sales, 2012)

Pointing to proud mum Linda, he added ‘some dreams come true and now my old mother over there, her son’s won the Tour de France. (Walker, 2012)

Braddy Cool – son Ben 7, shares dad’s glory moment.” (Palmer and Byrne, 2012)

According to Holt (1999) heroes and role models also tend to be portrayed as having specific national characteristics. For example, Griggs and Gibbons (2012, p. 8) found that newspaper coverage of the then Tottenham Hotspur manager Harry Redknapp framed him as some kind of “English working class hero”. This type of reporting saw journalists continually referring to the very English virtues of hard work and application that they felt Redknapp possessed. In much the same way, Walton (2010) considered the distance runner Paula Radcliffe as a potential British hero and found that the media again tended to emphasise the virtues of hard work and dedication in their reporting of her. This is something that was also reflected in the coverage of Bradley Wiggins following his victory at the Tour:

Wiggins is hoping he can inspire the next generation to learn it takes hard graft to achieve success when so many youngsters chase immediate stardom. (Stewart, 2012)

Walton (2010) outlined, however, that the norm for a sports hero is that they are male and white and her analysis revealed that, as a female athlete, Paula Radcliffe was to experience only an ambivalent position as a British sporting hero and role model. Lines (2001) and Vande Berg (1998) both support this analysis suggesting that female sports stars are often absent from mainstream discussions around sporting heroes. With this in mind it is interesting that the media coverage of Bradley Wiggins seemed to emphasise his position as a

very male British sporting hero. Such coverage did not necessarily focus on characteristics such as toughness, aggression, power and courage that help to represent heroic images of men and masculinity (Whannel, 1992). Instead it tended to be more in line with the Muscular Christian imagery of the Victorian era, where male sporting heroes were admired for high morals, loyalty, and exemplary sporting behaviour (Lines, 2001). Such coverage included reference to Wiggins' attitude towards doping; a moral stance that had initially earned him the nickname of *Monsieur Propre* (Mr Clean) amongst the French press (Moore, 2012):

His humble background - with an absent father who suffered from a chronic drink problem - and a strong stance against drugs have earned Wiggins a devoted following in Britain and Europe. (Sheldrick, 2012)

The French actually like him. They like his style, they like his commitment, they like above all the way he has set the moral tone for an event that is every bit as much of an ethical minefield as cricket. (Barnes, 2012)

There was also a focus on his loyalty to his team, particularly in his leading out of Mark Cavendish on the final stage of the race. The Yellow Jersey would usually be found safely ensconced within the main bunch of riders at the end of any stage that is likely to end in a sprint finish, yet Wiggins' work in the final two kilometres of the race was a significant factor in allowing Cavendish to claim his fourth successive stage win in the race's traditional finish on the Champs Elysee in Paris:

They were equally impressed when, while wearing the race leader's yellow jersey, he started to appear in the line of riders pacing his Team Sky colleague Mark Cavendish for a bunch sprint. Normally the leader hides himself inside a protective posse of team mates. Yet here was Wiggins, putting himself at risk to give Cavendish the chance of glory. (Williams, 2012)

He is a consummate team man and wears that status like a badge of honour. (Gallagher, 2012)

Perhaps most notably however, the British media focussed on Wiggins' sportsmanship and another nickname given to him by the French media – this time that of *Le*

*Gentleman.* A common feature of European professional cycling is the nicknames that are given to riders. Examples include five time Tour de France champion Bernard Hinault being known as *Le Blaireau* (The Badger) because of his combative and feisty nature, and fellow five time winner Jacques Anquetil being known as *Maître Jacques*. *Maître* - meaning Master in French - is a title of substance and indicates the authority that Anquetil held over the peloton (Sidwells, 2011). Bradley Wiggins earned his own nickname when, during Stage 14 of the race, he slowed the peloton to allow one of his main rivals for the yellow jersey - Australian Cadel Evans - to re-join the race (Moore, 2012). As a result of sabotage Evans had suffered a number of punctures at the top of one of the day's climbs. Cycling's complex etiquette contains an unwritten rule that riders who are in contention should not be penalised on the basis of misfortune and so Wiggins, as race leader, took immediate steps to control the peloton's pace so that Evans could rejoin the group (Williams, 2012):

Wiggins who is known as Le Gentleman among the French for his sporting behaviour. (Sheldrick, 2012)

He comes across as a really good guy. He's shown great sportsmanship as well and he's become a hero as well as a champion. (Sheldrick, 2012)

The media there [France] refer to Wiggins as 'Le Gentleman' after his sporting response to an attempted race sabotage during an earlier stage. When a near rival's tyre was punctured by tin tacks deliberately scattered across the road by vandals, Wiggins signalled for the entire bunch of riders – a peloton in cycling parlance – to slow down. 'No one wants to benefit from other people's misfortune' he remarked later. (Wilkes, 2012)

Le Gentleman rides into Paris – and history. (Williams, 2012)

Brad Wiggins is Le Gentleman whose sheer likeability and decency have delighted the French. (Wheatcroft, 2012)

Ironically, sports heroes who reflect such values can be seen as somewhat boring. Tim Henman for example was celebrated as a gentleman British hero in the British press coverage of the 1996 Wimbledon tennis tournament but also came under scrutiny for being 'rather

dull' (Lines, 2001, p. 294). This can often result in the media turning their attention to those sports stars who fail to live up to the role of heroic British gentleman; individuals that Lines (2001) referred to as villains and fools. However, in the case of Bradley Wiggins there were other elements to his character on which the media could focus, and these are outlined in the next theme.

### **Wiggo the Mod**

Many papers reported the massive support that Wiggins had gathered both at home and abroad:

Thousands of Brits travelled to Paris to cheer 'Wiggo' home. (Sales, 2012)

[A] small army of Britons had gathered and had started the 'Wiggo, Wiggo' chant. (Slot, 2012)

Nearly 200 crammed the cyclist's local and chanted 'Wiggo, Wiggo' as he crossed the line. (Sales, 2012)

Wiggomania in Britain is also a tribute to him. (Lichfield, 2012)

Allez Wiggo; French fans are won over. (Hill, 2012)

Though cycling can command large crowds, as seen lining the route of many large events such as the Tour de France, what appears unusual here is the willingness of British fans to travel to it in such large numbers. Travelling to Europe to cheer on fellow Brits has been the preserve largely of football fans for quite some time (Frosdick, Holford & Sidney, 2012). Though it would be difficult to determine if the members of the crowd that day were also football fans who did travel to Europe to support their chosen teams, what is clear is that their behaviour was very typical of such crowds given the repeated chanting of 'Wiggo Wiggo' (Armstrong & Young, 2000). It is clear from such chanting also that the crowd hold

Wiggins with such affection given not only the repeating of his name but in particular the repetition of a shortening of his name which they have themselves chosen (de Klerk & Bosch, 1997).

The characteristics of Wiggins which the public have taken to and the press have been keen to purvey appear to be a mixture of ordinariness along with a touch of humour and modesty:

[Wiggins is] far happier being just a normal bloke. (Slot, 2012)

Here is a person who would like to be ordinary but has achieved something truly extraordinary, almost in spite of himself. (Fotheringham, 2012)

The 32 year old described his glorious achievement with typical modesty as ‘job done.’ (Palmer and Byrne, 2012)

He had everyone in stitches as he stood on the winner’s podium and told the crowd ‘we’re just going to draw the raffle numbers now.’ (Walker, 2012)

He may lack the chutzpah, charisma and craziness...but in his bloody minded dedication and grit, Wiggins has shown himself a truly British Champion. (Seaton, 2012)

These characteristics which have been highlighted reflect aspects of what has been termed the ‘British National Character’ (Kumar, 2003) and are popular among the media to reinforce notions of British identity. Indeed broader ideas of British identity were further reinforced by repeated links made to Wiggins’ love of Mod Culture.

Many among the press identified Wiggins strongly as a ‘Mod.’ Indeed he was labelled as “a bike mad mod” (Chadband, 2012) who was “renowned for his love of mod culture” (Walker, 2012). Mod derives from the word modernist and in the context used here refers to a particular subculture which emerged in England in the late 1950s and gained prominence in the early to mid 1960s (Feldman, 2009). The idea of what mod culture represented is often

disputed (Rawlings, 2000) but over time identifiable trends began to be associated with it and subsequent revivals. These included fashion (commonly the wearing of well fitted suits), the riding of motor scooters and listening to popular music by British rock bands of the era (Hebdidge, 1993).

These identifiers were also highlighted by the media in connection with Wiggins:

They have been told about his collection of Gibson and Fender guitars and Lambretta and Vespa scooters. (Williams, 2012)

He relaxes by listening to music by groups such as the Jam and the Who and has collections of guitars and Mod scooters. (Lee, 2012)

Mods have been revived, bikes dusted off, a media frenzy unleashed. (O'Hagan, 2012)

Furthermore the media both at home and abroad focused upon his appearance as a way of reinforcing the Mod image which they were portraying. From the original subculture and further revivals, the iconic look of a young mod was smart and neat, with short hair (Rawlings, 2000) with conscious and critical style often influenced by European tastes (seen in both clothing and scooter choice). Many were keen on personalising clothing and accessories with iconic British symbols such as the Union Jack flag and the Royal Air Force roundel symbol (Jobling & Crowley, 1996). This image was also consistent with Wiggins and further exemplified by his distinctive sideburns:

Spaniards affectionately call him 'the sideburns' and the Dutch call him the 'banana with the sideburns. (Sheldrick, 2012)

Many fans say they are determined to emulate his lamb chop sideburns, which are inspired by his hero, John Entwistle, the Who bass player. (Martin, 2012)

They [the French] have been told...about the roundel on his helmet – originally the RAF insignia, appropriated in 1964 as a pop art device on a T shirt worn by Keith Moon, drummer with the Who, and then adopted as the symbol of the Mod revival...Colonel Wiggo they christened him. (Williams, 2012)

Oddly, the media portrayal of an ordinary British man achieving great things with determination, humour and modesty whilst in a foreign land resonates strongly with narratives of both the British Empire and of wartime (Rose, 2003). It can surely have last been in World War Two when the press would have reported how “a small army of Britons” were present in Paris following their victorious Colonel! In these parallels we also see the way in which both the state and the public decorated their heroes after the event bestowing the appropriate award upon them after evaluating their level of achievement.

## **Summary**

This paper examined how the events surrounding Bradley Wiggins’ victory in the 2012 Tour de France were reported. In the first theme, ‘Arise Sir Bradley Le Gentleman’, the focus was on demonstrating how Wiggins’s widespread public appeal was reinforced by calls in the press for his achievement to be recognised among the greatest in British sporting history. Though the media had no problem with recognising the achievement as great in its own right, they appeared to struggle with qualifying just how great Wiggins’ achievement was and how he ranked compared to other British heroes. Within this theme aspects of Wiggins’ character such as loyalty and sportsmanship were highlighted and show how the media constructed their versions of heroes and role models. The second theme of ‘Wiggo the Mod’ highlights how the media portrayed Wiggins as just an ordinary British man connecting him with stereotypical British characteristics and cultural symbolism. Though the sport of cycling has yet to gain appeal among the masses within Britain, the football like chants of ‘Wiggo’ which lined the streets of the Champs Elysee reflected Wiggins’s ability to connect with the British public in a way that thus far has largely been reserved for footballers.

Within the following six months after this data was collected and analysed Wiggins cemented his sporting prowess with the British public by winning a gold medal in the cycling time trial in the Summer Olympic Games in London, the place of his birth. As a result of his combined success Wiggins not only received a knighthood as part of the Queen's 2013 New Year Honours list, he also received the Vélo d'Or award for best cyclist of the year; the 2012 BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award; and, he was nominated for the 2013 Laureus World Sports Award for Sportsman of the Year.

Overall the extracts reported in this paper suggest that the British media may have made a move away from its primary focus of the misfortunes of British sports teams—exemplified by the English football team and the nostalgia for unique victories in more mainstream 'British' sports from times past. This potential change of focus was highlighted in one of the newspaper articles analysed:

Painful as it might be to watch Wayne Rooney and his ilk being outclassed by superior foreign players, there is an abundance of genuinely world-class British sporting talent out there, and it is high time we embraced it. For today's couch-potato generation, who prefer computer games to the outdoors variety (and have nowhere to kick a ball around because so many playing fields have been sold off), the stars of these so-called 'minor sports' would certainly make more appropriate role models – and none more so than Bradley Wiggins. (Jones, 2012)

Coupled with the success of British sportsmen and women in the 2012 Olympics—including Wiggins himself who won gold in the Individual Time Trial—and the fact that the British football team only managed to progress to the quarter final stages of the Olympic tournament, there is evidence that the British media are creating new sporting role models in different sports. The success of Team GB, resulting in their third place finish overall in the medals table at London 2012, meant that for once football was not the main focus of most national media coverage. This is rare considering the domination of men's football in the

British national media. Have we entered a new era of more positive British sports reporting? This will largely depend upon whether the success stories keep coming.

### **Case Study Questions**

- A number of journalists regarded the Wiggins victory as the greatest British sporting achievement of all time. Is such a claim reflective of sensationalist journalism or will the statement stand up to scrutiny in the years ahead?
- If newspapers continually exaggerate the significance of a sporting achievement will we stop taking notice or is this precisely why they do it?
- How realistic is it for a journalist to refer to a
- sportsperson as a legend whilst they are still competing?
- The use of the term 'role model' is prominent in sports reporting. Is this just lazy journalism or does it still represent something in contemporary society?
- Unusually, Wiggins appears to be admired by both the French and the English alike. Which other sports stars are admired by the media of different countries and which qualities do they identify with?
- Journalists have chosen to identify with both Wiggins' appearance and music tastes. What purpose does this serve? How far should reporting go with the information it chooses to highlight e.g. food preferences, religion, sexual preferences?

- World War Two references are not uncommon in sports reporting in Britain. Is this understandable or does there come a time when this becomes either bad taste or irrelevant?
- Given the domination of men's football (soccer) in the British national media, does the departure in reporting cycling in such a comprehensive way indicate a new era of British sports reporting?

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