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Narrative analysis of football reports in a Finland-Swedish daily newspaper

In the summer of 2000, I began my career as a freelance sports reporter for the regional newspaper *Vasabladet*. I was to report the local Second Division matches. It was the first time I had written anything that was to be published, and being nervous, I asked advice from more experienced sport reporters, i.e. my father. The advice was as follows: "Remember that the text should be easy to read, and write about the things your readers are interested in!" I wasn't told exactly how that was to come about, but in order to find out what the readers might be interested in, I flicked through some match reports that had been published earlier in the newspaper. Having read football reports before, I was familiar with the style and terminology involved, with words like "canons" and "last ditch tackle". Reading these texts keeping the question "how" in mind, I recognised certain tendencies I had not previously been aware of. Most striking were the similarities in form and content, which had gone unnoticed earlier. The same basic pattern in nearly all: first, the result, followed by the match details, and finally interviews and future prospects – sometimes overlapping, but always presented in this order.

This observation was – hardly surprisingly – a coarse simplification. The structure of

the reports is not as hard and fast as I had thought, but this observation did awaken an interest in the form and content of football reports. The aim of this article is to study the structure of football reports, and by concentrating on the main points of the report, create an understanding of football, by which I refer to what makes football newsworthy; why is football written about in the daily papers? Analysing the structure of these newspaper articles, I indirectly regard the newspaper's role as a narrator.

As a method for examining the structure of the articles, I decided upon a narrative analysis of my material. This is done mainly by making a thorough qualitative analysis of three match reports on FC Jaro, published in the local paper *Jakobstads Tidning* (later referred to as JT) during the summer 2000 football season. Furthermore, I have taken into consideration 24 articles about FC Jaro published during the season in the same newspaper, as background without conducting a thorough analysis of them. I was looking for a team with a strong local connection, with a feeling of the team being "our team" in the reports, which is why I chose JT and FC Jaro. I wanted to analyse a Finland-Swedish newspaper and being born and bred in Vasa, the local team and

articles about them in the local paper would have been a natural choice. The only problem being that they were mainly written by a person with the same surname as the author of this article, which would have caused problems with analytical distancing. This is why I chose a different team and a different newspaper, FC Jaro and JT. I wanted to analyse all 27 articles published during the season, but in order to limit the amount of data, I decided to concentrate on three and to use the rest as background. In this study, a match report refers to an article about a match that has already been played. These are more than just summaries or reports of a game of football. The 27 articles were written by seven different journalists, only one of them female. The three main articles were written by two males. I do not think this selection of data in any way distorts any point made in the analysis. A word or a sentence does not gain in value depending on the number of times it is repeated in various texts, but according to the context in which it is used.¹

The three articles selected were the first and last written that season, with one from the middle of the season as Jaro secured its second place in the league. The articles were published on the following dates: 30.4.2000, 8.8.2000 and 29.10.2000. These were conscious selections. In choosing the first article I wanted to include the expectations for the team at the beginning of the season, and the last to show how the team managed to live up to the expectations. Furthermore, these were the extremities of the football season. The mid-season article serves as a bridge between the other two articles. As Jaro had secured the second place, they focussed on to the playoffs. This is emphasized by the fact that the last league match is described as "uninteresting" as the result made no difference to promotion (Sundqvist 2000). The three main articles in this study are special in that they reflect more directly the team's success during the

football season, and receive their main meaning through that.

Narrative analysis

Discussion on the definition of a narrative is quite extensive. Arthur Asa Berger, for example, defines a narrative as something that has happened or is happening, and it consists of a sequence of events in a certain place, in a certain space of time. Viveka Adelswärd in turn gives a more limited definition of the concept; narratives are verbally narrated events that have taken place, and she describes this process: "time passes, something takes place and the event is evaluated or assessed" (Adelswärd 1996: 31). She continues by saying that a narrative is different from a report because a narrative gives evaluative information, whereas a report is more like a list in its nature. The evaluative characteristic of a narrative is called the narrative point (ibid: 38). Adelswärd refers to three different points in a narrative: "anecdotal point", "underlying point" and "the narrative point". "The anecdotal point" can be found in an amusing story – what the narrator considers the listener may find amusing, unusual or exciting. "The underlying points" are more subconscious, what the narrative deals with on a deeper level: the value systems and themes the narrative expresses. "The narrative point" made by the narrative is in a way "an underlying point". A narrative can be seen as self-presentation, and "the narrative point" refers to how the narrator presents himself or herself with the help of the narrative. (ibid: pp. 46-)

Adelswärd's description of "the points" is useful, but I cannot agree with her definition of a narrative. She seems to view narratives as something linked to the past, which I cannot agree with. For the purposes of this study I use Marander-Eklund's less limited view of narratives as "narrated events, that are somehow interrelated, with

cause and effect that are assessed or evaluated, and make a point, also including self-presentation” (Marander-Eklund 2000: 33).

Narrative analysis is a theory that is suitable as a method of analysis. According to William Labov, a complete narrative consists of a basic structure that includes six elements I shall use in this study. These are: *abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution* and *coda*. Narratives often include an abstract where the narrator signposts what is to come to the listener. This is followed by the orientation with a presentation of the actors, the time and place, as well as a description of any other significant circumstances. After the introduction follows the core of the narrative, as the narrator describes the action, the problem, the changes taking place and how the problem is solved. The body of the narrative is where the evaluation takes place, i.e. this is the point of the narrative. The coda is where the narrative is summarized and the narration is brought to its end (Labov 1972: pp. 363-).

The current material is analysed by trying to discern the six elements presented by Labov in the three main articles. As I want to analyse the structure of the articles, the method also becomes an aim in this study. Labov’s structural elements offer a tool to break down the articles into sections and to analyse them. I begin by giving an overview of the features the articles share, as a basis for my analysis. I then move on to analyse the three main articles in more detail by using Labov’s theories on narrative structure.

Features the football reports have in common

The formats of the narratives have some shared features. The headline comes first, and is printed in the largest font type. This is followed by subheadings that support the

main headline. These are not necessary, but they are very common. The result is given before the preface in boldface type, and its aim in principle is to describe what the article is about. Between the preface and the text proper, we see the name of the writer. Alongside the text, there will often be some photographs of the match, or archive photos of a player. At times there is a table with points awarded for individual players’ performance.

Each report describes a particular match. Naturally, it is not enough for a local paper like JT to merely publish the score of a match involving FC Jaro. The newspaper does not report the match, but gives a kind of a narrative about it. The only First Division team the paper reports is FC Jaro. In my view, this is due to the fact that the team and the paper have the same “home town”, and at least some of the readers (and why not also the editorial staff) feel for the team and football. There must be someone who has some interest in the reports in order for them to be published in the newspaper. The fact that it is “nice”, or “good” that Jaro scores a lot of goals (Lindholm 2000) and that “unfortunately, the edge was lacking in the finishing” (Furu 2000a), indicates sympathy for FC Jaro – it is *our* team.

The texts are quite similar in content. The results, the team (actors), and various indications of time and place are used consistently. “Expert commentary” may be given in separate interviews, or at times included in the report itself. Various aspects relating to the game or specific incidents are taken up, e.g. the condition of the pitch, weather conditions, decisions made by the referees, substitutions and goals. The main thing is that they build tension in the narrative, or that they may have influenced the final result of the game. One and the same journalist is not limited to a specific form, there is variation between texts and between journalists’ style. The journalist’s writing style has not

The football season's first game is described as a "Footballparty", which express positive associations and expectations. The game did not, however, end so happily for FF Jaro, who did not make it to the league football. JT 30.4.2000

Järnbrocks Tidning



"Kryset var öppet"

Fotbollsfesten har börjat
Jaro hade inga som helst problem i första matchen i Wäkeförsäkringens premierskytt.

United dominerade stort

SPORTSVECKAN 2000

been the focus of my research.

Interestingly enough, all articles except one include expert commentary, which is cause enough to draw the conclusion that they are of some importance. These commentaries have two main functions: they strengthen credibility by expert evidence, partly to legitimize emotional reactions or moods. In case the author's voice becomes too conspicuous, if the author's person or feelings are too explicit, the assumed objectivity of the narration is at risk. Objectivity and expertise are "narrative points" in journalism in so far as the author never mentions his or her own person in the narrative, and moods are reflected through other actors. Their presence can also be seen as a "narrative point" – the text is supposed to give evidence of the writer's presence, while, paradoxically remaining invisible. The writer should have information that the reader does not have access to, and should be able to get his or her message across in a believable manner. A way of doing this is to present the text as a witness whilst showing one's competence. Players and

trainers are silent experts, they are the ones that create the game and are the game. By adding commentaries by them, the writer adds "presence" and competence, legitimising emotions in the narrative.

The introduction of the narrative

For the purposes of this study, I shall begin my analysis in accordance with Labov's structural elements. The introduction consists of an abstract and an orientation. The football reports begin with a clearly marked abstract: the headlines. They appear first, and indicate what comes next in the text. They often include background information and if strictly based on Labov's structural elements should be viewed as 'orientation'. The headlines do not capture the reader's interest through classic narrative means, for example by saying "it was extraordinary", but instead by exposing the contents of the narratives. For example, the headline in the final article "Defeat for Hangö – no promotion for FC Jaro" (Furu 2000b) contains information about the place (Hangö), the actor (FC Jaro), and the result (defeat), as well as the consequences (no promotion). While containing the information, the headline signposts the contents of the article and it functions both as abstract and orientation. Thus the headline awakens the reader's attention, giving an opportunity for disinterested readers to ignore the rest of the article. According to Umberto Eco, the writer aims at creating a *model reader* – who interprets the text in the way the writer wishes. In reality, the reader aims at creating a readable, sensible text by interpreting it from his/her own premises (Eco 1992b: 64). Bearing in mind that the reader's choice to either read or not read the article is based on the headline, one can argue that the *model reader* of the football reports has at least some previous interest in football.

My choice of the earlier example was

carefully made – not many of the headlines give as much background information. Quite a few of them, however, narrate both where the match was played and which team the article is reporting, and only few of them can be seen as “genuine” abstracts. The first article of the season is an example of the latter type, with the headline “The football feast has started” (Lindholm 2000). This headline does not specify the actors, the time, events, etc, but it says that there is a football feast that has started the moment the word “feast” is read.

According to Labov, different kinds of background information may be presented later in the narrative or, as in this case, before the action. The order of the different elements is not fixed (Labov 1972: 364). Even though it may be difficult to differentiate the elements, it is obvious that the football reports always begin with an abstract and an orientation. The headline, the subheadings and the lead already tell how the match went, and gives a general outline of it. The subheading of the first article reads: “No problems for FC Jaro in the first match”. The lead of the same article reads: “FC Kemi Kings hammered in the premier 5-0...” These two sentences strongly indicate that FC Jaro is superior, and they enable the reader to read and understand the rest of the article.

In order to clearly indicate the result, the football report always shows the result between the headline and the lead, where also the sport in question is indicated, as well as the teams, the division, how many goals were scored by each team. This information is emphasized – and emphasizes – information in the text, in the headline and the lead, which also often give the names of the teams and the result. These two combined outline the match and the final result. In football reports the abstract gives quite a lot of background information, not only signposting what is to come in the text proper.

The beginning of the main text is often reminiscent of the abstract and orientation. This is to be expected, as this is where the narration itself really starts. The three main articles start by giving a fairly superficial account explaining the match photograph or the result. Jaro won the first match of the season by 5-0 (an overwhelming result in a football match), and the introductory sentence reads: “Jaro was the better team, no doubt about it.” (Lindholm 2000). This sentence explains both the match result and the match as a whole, while also strengthening the headline and the lead. The second article in this study tells about a match won by Jaro 3-1, with the introductory sentence: “FC Musan Salama from Björneborg is a football team with skilful players such as Saku Laaksonen, Janne Puputti and Tomi Leivo-Jokimäki, and FC Jaro had great problems in asserting control over the game early on” (Furu 2000a). This does not explain the match result, but it does help the reader understand why the beginning of the match was how it was, and also indicating how the game looked early on. This sentence also strengthens what was already said in the lead: “The reds won in the end quite comfortably” (Furu 2000a).

The final article is different from the previous two in that the headline and the lead do not paint a picture of the match, but instead focuses on the result and its consequences. FC Jaro lost the match described in this article and did not gain automatic promotion. Since FC Atlantis beat FC Jokrut, the result of Jaro’s last match was irrelevant regarding the outcome of the season for the team, subsequently the match photo was not of much interest. The introduction explains FC Jaro’s loss by saying: “the players could hear when anything happened in the Jokrut-Atlantis match ... when the situation was 0-3, the loss of interest showed on their faces...” (Furu 2000b). Each individual match has

to be viewed in the context of the season as a whole. Jaro aimed at gaining promotion and it seems that this aim gave significance to the whole competition. I will return to this later in this study.

The main action of the narrative

The main action of the narrative deals with incidents that may have had a significant effect on the outcome, or were in some way sensational. These specific incidents are narrated as shorter narratives. According to Alf Arvidsson, narratives are "limited episodes told by the interviewees as narratives with a beginning and an end, built around a narrative structure with a complication – resolution (Arvidsson 1998: 25). Despite the fact that Arvidsson talks about interview situations, the terminology applies to match reports, too. They consist of stories about incidents during the course of the match. The main action of each report – being a narration as such – consists of several narratives that more often than not include the central elements of a narrative: time, space, place and action. The action in the reports is presented in narrative form. The following passage is an example of this:

"The final nail in the Björneborg-lads' coffin was the last ten minutes of the match. Svanbäck made a successful interception, arriving before the oncoming MuSa goalkeeper. This time Svanbäck unselfishly pulled the ball back to Timo Peltola who had an easy job of putting the ball in the net." (Furu 2000a).

This section of the report narrates an incident in the match, and consists of time, place, actors as well as action.

The narratives function as a description of the action and are most often presented chronologically. The action of the first article is presented in this order and with the following definitions of time:

1. "Early on also the visitors seemed a little

sharper ..."

2. "In the 17th minute of the match the first goal was due."

3. "Three minutes after the opening goal, the visitors almost equalized."

4. "Five minutes before half time FC Jaro put together a fine attack..."

5. "In the 45th minute Nicklas Widjeskog took a quick free kick ... FC Jaro were able to go in at half time with a secure 2-0 lead."

6. "...the same frenetic pace continued for about ten minutes early on in the second half. That was how long it took FC Jaro to extend their lead to 3-0."

7. "After the 3-0 goal, the game fizzled out."

8. "FC Jaro did nothing until there was only 18 minutes of the match remaining..."

9. "With only 15 minutes of the match remaining, FC Jaro changed their tactics and employing man for man markers."

10. "He came onto the pitch with 20 minutes left, and in the 88th minute he increased their lead to 4-0."

11. "*In the last minute of normal time, Peltola set up Borissov for 5-0.*" (Lindholm 2000. The author's italics)

It is obvious that the action is presented in chronological order. Furthermore, the narratives exist in their own separate time frame, as time is expressed in terms of match time.

In the introduction the narrator places match time in the context of ordinary time.

Time is stated more precisely in the narratives, than in the abstract and the orientation, in accordance with match time, Borissov did not score at 8.15 pm, but in the last minute of the match.

In addition to the time frame, the narratives also name the actors, and often also a place of action. Actors and places are more accurately indicated in narratives of action than in the introduction/orientation. Rather than merely stating the name of the team, the narration takes place

on a more individual level, calling the players by name, for example: "Ridvan Zeneli and Fredrik 'Mini' Svanbäck worked a short corner and the resulting cross was headed in by Mathias Kass for 1-0. ...", rather than, for example "one Jaro player passed the ball to another who crossed the ball to a third player who headed in 1-0." Without the details, the article would be all too uninteresting. As an observation, it may seem absurd, but it makes a point: despite the fact that football is a collective team sport, the articles require individuals as heroes and losers. Rating of each player's performance is done in a separate box at the end of some articles, which supports the above assertion. One should, however, pay attention to the fact that the (opposing team) players are often described in terms of their role on the pitch, such as "full backs" and "MuSa-defender" (Furu 2000a). The actors are named in football terminology. The same applies to descriptions of space, when certain areas of the pitch are mentioned in more detail. Places of action are specified in more detail in the narrative than in the introduction, and one writes about "the left touchline", "on the right hand side" and "on the edge of the penalty area" rather than "Jakobstad" and the name of the stadium. The narration moves on to using football terminology in terms of space: the football pitch.

One of the functions of the article is to explain why the result was what it was. A general principle is that you start from the match result and then go through the whole match, describing the main action chronologically, until you have created a narrative that reaches the end (the result), which was already stated at the beginning). This is achieved by narrating the dramatic, significant and strategic incidents, together with commentaries from the players and the coaches. A text is constructed that affirms the initial image.

The action is described in more detail in

the body than in the introduction, and the narration is narrated by using concepts of football time, space and actors. The introduction creates a framework through which the short narratives are interpreted.

The narrative is evaluated and assessed by narrating the "surface points" of the action that are mentioned in the narration. They have been selected as points of interest. I recollect the advice I was given: "The text should be easy to read, write about the things your readers are interested in". In other words, the goals and scoring opportunities, exceptional circumstances, incidents that are relevant to the final result, etc. are all "surface points". The development that takes place in the course of the season is another one – individual matches and how they affect the season's ambitions or the league position are commented on frequently. The last article begins: "Because FC Atlantis outclassed Jokrut by a 5-2 score line in Helsingfors, *it did not matter* how the match between Hangö Sports Club and FC Jaro ended" (Furu 2000b, my italics). This means that FC Jaro did not gain promotion. The sentence has both "a superficial point" (FC Jaro did not gain promotion) and "an underlying point" (the individual match gets its significance from the season as a whole). As I mentioned earlier, the crowd and the fans had expectations in regard to the team. The players also had their own ambitions, the goals they expected to score before the season started. The season lasts from the end of April to the end of October, and everyone involved in such a long undertaking will want to see the fruits of their labour. The "value" of the final goal increases with the amount of time and effort put in. Sure, it's always nice to win, but matches certainly gain in value as the season progresses; to reach the long-term objectives is more important than success in an individual match.

In other words, the season acts as a frame

of reference by which to interpret the match reports. It gives meaning to the individual matches. Each match in turn gives meaning to individual incidents occurring within it. The anecdotal point/superficial point in telling how, when and where a goal was scored, or an opportunity to score that was missed has consequences on the course of the game. The underlying point in these narratives is that these have consequences on the season's success. This functions simultaneously as a superficial point in the narratives of the matches: how the season progresses.

What is the point of knowing how the season goes? In my view, the "underlying point" of football and football narratives is that they awaken emotions, a feeling of belonging to a *winning* or a *losing* community that is created in the team. The relationship between the team and its supporters can be demonstrated by the following quotation:

"He calls for an organisation that functions better, that does not promise what it cannot keep. According to Paananen, FC Jaro has a responsibility towards its fans..." (Furu 2000b).

This expresses a responsibility the team has, not to disappoint its supporters – by giving the fans a sense of belonging to a losing community. As I pointed out earlier, objectivity and information overflow could be "narrative points". I also found that there has to be an interest in football and FC Jaro that makes them worthy of the space given in the newspaper. There is also an emotional engagement that is recognizable in the way it is talked about. Empathy for the team can be seen as a "narrative point" highlighting the sense of belonging. When writing that it is good to see the team score, the journalist strengthens the sense of belonging with the model reader, who, choosing to read the match report on reading the headline is supposed to be interested in football. I also

think that the imagined reader should also empathise and support FC Jaro. As Anne Eriksen writes, the mass media appeals to us not through its content, but through embellishment, and the way the narrative catches our emotions (Eriksen 1989: 67). The match reports are very emotive – they allow the reader to feel the joy of winning and the disappointment in losing a match.

What is the source of this belonging and interest in a football team? What makes people scream and hug each other out of joy when a team scores? Jaana Venkula states in her praise of football "*Fair play jalkapallon sieluna ja käytäntönä*" ("Fair Play, the soul and the practise of football") that football imitates life, which makes it an emotive activity. The significance of mimetic activities lies in the fact that being emotive they allow the expression of these emotions in a way that is not as "dangerous" as they would be elsewhere (Venkula 1998: 45f). Venkula wants to explain why football is played, but I think it also explains the interest in football of the numerous people who do not actually play themselves. As my study indicates, football is popular because it is emotive (raises emotions) – at least for some. Football and narratives about it are a battle between winning and losing which gives anyone interested a chance to feel and express the joy of victory and the disappointment of defeat. The battle between winning and losing – between heroes and losers – makes it attractive and exciting. With this in mind, it may not be that difficult to understand a pass as "catastrophic" if it gives the opposing team a scoring opportunity – a goal that may change the narrative of victory of a winning team to a narrative of defeat for a losing team.

Is it not then unlikely that one can feel joy by investing emotions in a football team? Only about one in ten to twenty teams can be the best at the end of the season, does that mean that there are many who never win? The fact is that there is a sense

of justice that mitigates the circumstances. The match result is evaluated in the light of the match as a whole. In the match reports this equals the overall picture that is given. It is the “sum total” of the narratives, which become the evidence in evaluating the fairness of the match. The evaluation is often given in direct terms, e.g. “the visitors were good opposition and they deserved to win” (Lindholm 2000) and “the right team won the match with the right result” (Furu 2000a). The season’s result is evaluated in relation to the aims of the season – how a team achieves its ambitions. In the quotation I gave earlier Jaro’s coach called for an organisation that functions better, that “does not promise what it cannot keep” (Furu 2000b) in order not to disappoint the fans. How things go for “us”, and how things should go decides if “we” are the heroes or the losers. Even if it is important to win, the self-image is preserved if the team gives a good fight.

The conclusion or resolution is more demanding to deal with. As I explained earlier, the obvious objective of the story is to explain why the result was what it was. The narratives do not aim at exposing the result of the match, that information is given in the very beginning in the introduction, and the rest of the narrative supports and explains the initial information. According to Labov, the conclusion or the resolution should be placed at the end of the main action of the narrative, but in the articles analysed in this study the result is given very first, and yet the reports follow the development towards the result. The main action reaches the conclusion, and the results are given when the narratives work through to match result.

The conclusion or the resolution need not be the match result; it can also be expressed in the description of the final goal or the final whistle. This is where the narrative descriptions of the football incidents or narrative events the narrative moves on to

Järnbadstidningen

Jaro säkrade andraplatsen

Tabelltrean MuSa från Björneborg fick stryka på foten med 3-1 i "Rätt lag vann"

SVENSKA Nya spelare i Jaro. I matchen mot MuSa blev det två mål för Jaro och ett för MuSa. Jaro är nu tvåa i tabellen. MuSa är trea. Jaro är nu tvåa i tabellen. MuSa är trea.

SKANSKA Jaro har blivit tvåa i tabellen efter en seger mot MuSa. MuSa har blivit trea efter en förlust mot Jaro. Jaro har blivit tvåa i tabellen efter en seger mot MuSa. MuSa har blivit trea efter en förlust mot Jaro.

Foto: Jaro Fotboll / Jaro Fotboll

Jaro är bättre än KuPS

MuSa-brånarna eniga efter möten med de båda toptopplagen

ALM ...

Jar Juniorer vann

Jar juniorer vann mot KuPS i en match som spelades i Jaro. KuPS blev tvåa i tabellen efter en förlust mot Jaro. Jaro blev tvåa i tabellen efter en seger mot KuPS.

The appearance of the football articles vary. This article consist of both a picture, grades and a separated interview. The result between the headline and the introduction appeared in all the articles studied. JT 8.8.2000

the coda to lead the reader away from the text.

The conclusion of the narrative

The three main match reports are rounded off with different kinds of abstracts. The last sentence of the first article says: ” In addition to scoring the team likes to push forward which is promising”. Considering that the lead mentions ”FC Jaro is one of the favourites for promotion”, this is very interesting. I think that, too, expresses the significance of the rest of the season. The same happens in the second main article, when FC Jaro’s coach comments that the team has secured second place in the regular season. The last sentence says: ”I would like to express my gratitude to the players and their performance so far, Paananen said”. This sentence expresses that the aim has been partially fulfilled, the ambition has not quite been achieved yet. This is a way of setting the time. Both past ambitions and expectations, and those remaining are expressed here. The first

introduces the text, the second leads the reader on.

The ways the reports are concluded vary a lot, some seem to have no coda at all, some have no abstract, they finish with a conclusion (a resolution) or “leftovers”. Those finishing with a conclusion put a full stop on the match action, for example by saying: “...the team were more or less just waiting for the final whistle” (Bäck 2000). By “leftovers” I refer to any extraneous material tacked onto the end of the text, which did not fit earlier. A couple of “leftovers” can be found in the data studied here, mentioning, for example, the attendance or the amount of red or yellow cards issued.

The third main article is different in that almost the entire latter half is dedicated to explaining why the season’s ambitions and aims were not achieved. This is by no means out of the ordinary, the season had come to an end by the time of writing. Expectations have either been achieved or crushed. If all the season’s reports were analysed as one long narrative, this report could be called the coda of the season’s narrative. The narrative became, in this case, a narrative of losing, and the last sentences express the moral of the long narrative:

“It is not enough for the team to work towards promotion. Even the organisation has to pull its weight. Both Tampere United who was promoted last year, and FC KuPS who took a step up this year have a well functioning organisation behind them, concludes Paananen.” (Furu 2000b)

The reason FC Jaro’s narrative did not become a winner’s narrative can be found outside the field of play. The reader is safely guided out of the narrative, the scapegoat is found, and it is neither the team nor the fans, and therefore not “us”.

Conclusion

It is fairly obvious that football reports can

be seen as narratives. They are narratives of interrelated incidents which show cause and effect, evaluation, points, and self-presentation. Labov’s six elements of narrative structure correspond to a certain extent with my data. The reports include an introduction describing the match, arousing the (assumed) readers’ attention and interest. The body or the main action of the narrative consists of shorter narratives describing match incidents that underline the description in the introduction. This is, in my opinion, reasonably clear, but how Labov’s elements should be defined is open to interpretation, because it is not always possible to distinguish between the different elements. There are similarities between the structures of the reports, but no particular order can be identified.

Evaluations of the match incidents are useful when evaluating the match and the whole season. Football is a battle between victory and defeat, and whether “we” are winners or losers, good or bad – is decided by trials and tribulations of the team. The point of a narrative is created by this battle, and a sense of belonging, but the points vary. The anecdotal point is that the match result is significant. The anecdotal point in commenting on the matches is in turn that they are significant to the outcome of the season. With increasing engagement as the match drags on, the tension between victory and defeat increases, and emotions become involved. The underlying point of the narrative is that “we” FC Jaro supporters are winners or losers, depending on the outcome of the match or the season. Sympathies for a team function as a narrative point, giving expression to the sense of belonging. Judgements in the match reports are, in other words, also judgements of “us”. The fairness of the result is judged on the basis of the performance and the passion of the struggle. The performance is connected to your expectations of the team, and the

relationship between expectations and their realization influence the sense of joy or disappointment. Football offers football fans a chance to share an affinity with those who win or lose. Thus, it is not enough for the newspaper to only report the match or publish match results. Instead, it must make an attempt to describe the excitement or fairness of the match by narrating it. This concurs with Anne Eriksen's view on the mass media addressing us through our emotions.

NOTES

¹ There are most often one or two photos that accompany the match reports, but I decided not to include them. I also exclude anything that is not a part of the match review. Commentaries by players or trainers are often included, but there were none in six of the articles. Five of these had an interview with a player alongside the match review/report, but I chose not to include them in my analysis if they were a separate article. Neither have I included articles of cup matches, or smaller articles about FC Jaro. The material in this study is limited to the season in Division 1. In Finland the Finnish Championship league is the top league, followed by divisions starting from 1 downwards. The divisions are divided into regions and districts, and the further down the divisions you go, the number of districts included increases. As the districts become smaller, the more local, less time consuming and less professional it gets. The different divisions have different rules concerning promotion. In the summer of 2000 that I used in my study, in the beginning of the season FC Jaro was forecast a possible candidate to promotion during the season. (Lindholm 2000). However, they were not successful.

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