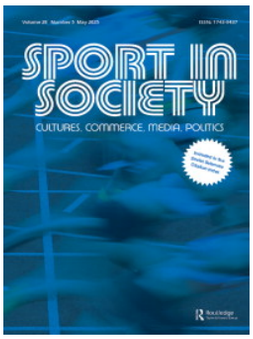

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ARTICLE COMMENTARY

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Game, set, glitch: why post-match press conferences are broken and how holograms could fix them

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ABSTRACT

This commentary presents a speculative technological solution to the future of post-match press conferences, in the form of holographic technology. Current post-match press conference formats, whether it be in person, or through the use of Zoom, present challenges. To address these issues, this paper proposes a technologically driven solution to facilitate a transformation of the press conference, in order to reshape a format that has largely been the same for over a 100 years. In particular, the authors present holographic technology as an effective means of supporting the athletes' voice whilst engaging with the press, sponsors and fans alike. In the tennis arena, holographic technology has been used by players such as Emma Radacanu and there is the potential to for it to be used more widely. This commentary identifies the benefits and challenges holographic technology presents and highlights its significance as a communications platform in a reimagined press conference.

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Introduction

On 26 May 2021, Gen Z tennis player Naomi Osaka chose her social media platforms Instagram and X (formerly known as Twitter) to articulate her decision not to participate in press commitments at the French Open in 2021. It led to a media storm and ultimately to The Grand Slam Handbook being updated regarding regulations concerning post-match press media. In the past, players had to attend the 'post-match media conference(s) organised immediately or within thirty (30) minutes after the conclusion of each match' (Grand Slam Board 2021, 42). The updated rule now refers to 'reasonable grounds' and extended the timeframe to 60 minutes as being reasonable.

From Osaka's perspective, she expressed her experience of journalistic practice at post-match press conferences in now deleted social media posts (26.5.21). Although Osaka maintains a good working relationship with journalists, she has been explicit that she

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finds the format of post-match press conferences extremely stressful (BBC, 31.5.21). Elaborating on this point during the 2021 French Open, Osaka drew attention to aspects such as repetitious questioning, the self-doubt journalists' questions can cause, and previous negative examples of this happening to other athletes (including Venus Williams and former NFL player Marshawn Lynch) in now deleted social media posts. These are not new arguments; the literature points to similar issues such as the 'adversarial framework' created in these media contexts (Sznycer 2010, 460). At the same time, the importance and value of the post-match press conference for 'interlocking forces of television and sponsorship' (Whannel 1992, 151; qtd. Boyle and Haynes 2009, 44) cannot be underestimated. Even though social media platforms have given a voice to the athletes to share personal and professional news at a time convenient to them, the use of social media has been riddled with its own complexities and challenges (Mendis, Cox, and Stewart 2021; Cox, Mendis, and Nicholson 2025).

This commentary, which is a follow-up to the authors' research article titled 'Beyond the Baseline: Tennis Athletes' Voice and the Future of Post-Match Press Conference' in *Sport in Society* (Cox, Mendis, and Nicholson 2025) presents a technologically driven solution in the form of holographic technology. The authors propose holographic technology as a means of disrupting and reimagining the press conference. As educational psychologist Levs Vygotsky argues, 'the human being [is] a creature oriented towards the future, creating the future and altering his [sic] own present' (Vygotsky 2004, 9). In this process of looking to the future and altering the present, imagination and technology act as the vital component to 'anticipate' the future (Turner 2020). By blending these two concepts of the future and imagination, as articulated by Phil Turner, holographic technology as a format is proposed to address present issues, in order to shape beneficial interactions between the athlete and press in this new technological era. In doing so, this commentary highlights the benefits it presents to athletes, the press, fans and sponsors alike, whilst also outlining the challenges that needs to be overcome.

The power of immersive technologies

Recent advances in technology, including augmented and virtual reality, provide the opportunity for immersive experiences where users can see, hear and interact with others from anywhere in the world in a 3D environment. These technologies point to an immersive future which can be adapted to meet the needs of all participants. For example, virtual reality (VR) offers a fully immersive software-generated 3D artificial environment through the use of a head mounted device. On the other hand, augmented reality (AR) provides an enhanced vision of reality overlaid on top of the user's real-world environment viewed through a smart device such as a smartphone (Xiong et al. 2021). In the sports industry, VR, AR and data visualization have been used very successfully and widely for aspects such as training, performance analysis and coaching techniques (Cossich et al. 2023) as well as for improving fan engagement and contributing to fairness in sport (Qi et al. 2024; for example, Hawk-Eye in tennis; assisting the third umpire in cricket). While providing a fully immersive experience, these technologies present a single-user experience, either through the use of a VR headset or through the use of a smartphone or tablet. Research by Cevikbas, Bulut, and Kaiser (2023) shows that constant use of VR and AR technologies can lead to discomfort, nausea, anxiety and cognitive load. Furthermore, while VR and AR technologies

present many benefits for training and coaching, their viability for a tennis athlete to communicate directly with the journalists, sponsors or fans has limited appeal and therefore, may not be their first choice.

More than a projection: holographic technology: the opportunities

In contrast to VR and AR, this commentary proposes holographic technology as an effective means of supporting the athletes' voice whilst engaging with the press and fans. The potentiality of holographic technology in the field of sports is currently being recognized, though admittedly lagging behind the music and film industries (Matthews and Angelique 2023). Recognizing its potential, former professional tennis player and WTA world no. 35, Cici Bellis, who is the Managing Director of venture capital firm Cartan Capital, made her first investment in the world's first holographic communications platform, Proto (formerly PORTL) in December 2023 (Schaefer 2023). Bellis recalls being drawn to Proto for its potential for 'in-stadium and fan engagement' opportunities, different to the offering presented by VR and AR technologies (Bellis qtd Coffey, 21.12.23). Bellis' support of this technology makes its transition to tennis a logical one. There are current uses of holographic technology in tennis including the opening ceremony to the Six Kings Slam (DAZN, 2024) and the Emma Radacanu coaching example for Vodafone (Vodafone Press Office 2023). The spectacle at the Six Kings Slam was used to heighten the entertainment and framing of the experience, whilst the personal example of two young players hitting with Radacanu resulted in an awe-struck response from participants who remarked 'it looks really cool' (Vodafone Press Office 2023). We anticipate the potential for this technology to revolutionize the player-press interaction.

The use of holographic technology in press conferences was first realized in football in May 2017. Ahead of the Audi Cup, at the Allianz Arena in Munich, Carlo Ancelloti, Jürgen Klopp and Diego Simeone gave a press conference. Through their use of this new technology, only Ancelloti was in sitting 'live' on stage in Munich whilst the other two managers 'appeared on stage' from their locations in Liverpool and Madrid (Delaney 2017). One of the greatest benefits of holographic technology is its ability to present a three-dimensional free-standing image (created with the photographic projection of light) which can be viewed and experienced with the naked eye (Guo 2023). Furthermore, holographic technology has the potential to reduce direct exposure to media pressure (as the athlete does not have to be in the same room) whilst giving the opportunity for journalists to conduct their questioning as before. In other words, holographic technology offers a three-dimensional version of the individual. Much like Zoom, the holographic experience offers an opportunity for the athlete to be in surroundings that are more comfortable for them. However, unlike Zoom, this new technology provides the platform for an athlete to appear lifelike to the audience thereby giving the impression that they are in the same room as the journalists or fans in any part of the world. It provides for greater accessibility and flexibility, paving the way for athletes to engage more meaningfully with sports journalists without the additional fatigue of in-person interaction and travel. In addition, players can be simultaneously broadcast into a variety of settings that enable a breadth of fan engagement without the travel or face-to-face exposure.

In addition, the use of new technology could mitigate what Simon McEnnis calls 'the homogeneity of content' from limited and formulaic press and athlete interactions to 'help

news organisations to stand out from the crowd in a competitive digital marketplace' (McEnnis 2022, 96, 97). There are potentially generational issues here as played out in the Osaka example (Cox, Mendis and Nicholson 2025), where participants have very different associations with technology. Accessing these Gen Z and Gen Alpha players at ease would likely result in some engaging content.

Projected but not present: the risks behind the hologram

Adoption, implementation and accessibility are common issues with embracing new technology (Haber and Carmeli 2023) and this is the case in holographic technology. Emergent technology will play a greater role in sport in time to come (Qi et al. 2024) and will transform the manner in which athletes, consumers and managers operate by 2030 (Frevel, Beiderbeck, and Schmidt 2022). Expense and investment continue to be a concern. Even if investment was to be addressed and tournament organizers opt for holographic technology in the future, there remain questions of implementation and accessibility and what it means for athletes, journalists and sponsors.

If holographic technology were to be deployed at tournaments, consideration will need to be given to sponsorship and product placement, which forms an integral part of the press conference. Sponsorship and advertising provide immense financial benefits for tournament organizers, athletes and the press – particularly in mainstream sport – and are the driving force behind sports entertainment (Naha 2015). As such, the adoption and use of new technologies for transforming the post-match press conference, will need to take sponsorship and branding into account (Xu 2025).

Furthermore, holographic technology is not easily accessible at present. It is expensive, requires ultra-high bandwidth, efficient streaming and network infrastructure for it to be successfully implemented (Clemm et al. 2020). This restricts its use to the very top tier of tournaments and those that attract the most sponsorship. Equally, this technology may be viewed negatively by journalists who may be reluctant to see change that further impacts their direct engagement with athletes. This concern is legitimate. In considering the ways in which Covid-19 has impacted sports journalism, Carolina Velloso argues that the bio-hazard measures which limited access to athletes has been replaced by more rigid control by athletes' press teams (Velloso 2022; see also Boyle 2006, 81) which could potentially continue with holographic technology.

Technology consistently changes and is upgraded. These improvements and associated expense may well be deemed another barrier to the adoption of holographic technology which in turn may lead sports organizations, journalists, athletes and fans to question whether they absolutely want or need it. Even if adopted, it will at least take another decade or more, before holographic technology will become the fabric of our everyday lives (Haber and Carmeli 2023).

Conclusion

The authors argue that holographic technology provides the potential for reimagining and transforming the traditional post-match press conference whilst providing a platform to engage creatively with the press and fans. At present, holographic technology, presents a number of challenges and issues from a technical and economic perspective that could

impact on the role of the journalist. At the same time, and as outlined above, it also presents advantages which can revolutionize the manner in which athletes engage with their fans, sponsors and the press. The authors propose that this type of immersive technology could transform communication between athletes and press when meeting shortly after matches. New technologies provide opportunities for interaction with the athletes more widely than ever before, whilst providing an alternative for those participants such as Osaka who articulated that she finds post-match press conferences highly stressful.

However, for this concept to be taken further, the authors note the need for follow up qualitative research to enhance the arguments presented in this commentary. Crucially, times of crisis provide opportunities to break established power systems and enable transformation. In order to do so, we propose the development of a network of athletes, press, technology stakeholders, tournament organizers and academics to explore the future of the post-match press conference. This supports the reflection made by Gregory Perreault and Daniel Nölleke that change is needed 'urgent[ly] for the institution of sports journalism' (Perreault and Nölleke 2022, 1861).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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