

## Sample C2 Reading text

### **Sports Photographer**

Sports journalists – writers and photographers both – pride themselves on their lack of imagination. They boast about a kind of gritty professionalism: an ability to supply the required commodity absolutely on time. From such people you get your eight paragraphs bang on the final whistle, along with your perfectly sharp photograph of the goal-scorer. Who couldn't ask for anything more than that? Few sports editors do.

On the other hand, perhaps the readers themselves, some of whom do actually have a modicum of grey matter, could want a little more. Sports journalists tend to get submerged by their own deadlines, and by their subject: nothing but sport and the recording of sport seems to matter. No unsporting thoughts ever enter the heads of such professionals, you would think from their work. It is more than their jobs are worth, for a start. Back at the editorial office, the men who judge the material produced are equally slaves to the 'news value' of events, to the entire myopic philosophy of gritty professionalism.

Sports journalists are not required to go beyond the recording of the day-to-day trivia of sporting life. If you are a photographer, you must get stuck in with your ultra-long lenses and your motor-drives and come back with a hard, sharp picture of a sporting hero. It is perfectly possible for a photographer to do more: the best can use their craft to convey the pleasure and pains of sport. The great English writer Dr Johnson once said that the point of art was to teach us how better to enjoy life, or how better to endure it. But on the whole, it is better not to use the term 'art' to people in newspapers. They tend to shy away from it like frightened racehorses. The point here is that sports journalism tends not to go beyond the ordinary because of a kind of conspiracy of ordinariness between its practitioners.

Eamonn McCabe is one of the photographers to have cracked this conspiracy. He has worked for many years at *The Observer* newspaper, taking the kind of sports pictures that would have given a fit of the horrors to a man too much a slave to news values: but in an immensely fruitful association much of his finest work has been used bravely, boldly, imaginatively and memorably. That newspaper doesn't insist on a picture of the winner: they will use a picture of the man who came 71<sup>st</sup> if it is a picture that means something. A touch of art has infiltrated sports journalism: frightening thought.

People in sports journalism talk about 'an Eamonn McCabe shot' even when McCabe did not take the picture. They are talking about a style, a vision, a way of looking at sport. Take his famous picture of a boxer's hands. If you wrote 'Eamonn McCabe' over it in letters of fire, it would not make its provenance more obvious. No one else would have bothered to take the photograph; or even if they had, they would not have got it quite like that.

While decrying the tyranny of news values – McCabe has had people say: 'We can't use this brilliant picture of that footballer getting tackled as he was about to score, because he was on the winning side. We could only have used it if they had lost' – McCabe has known many occasions when the hard news photograph really was the only thing that could be run. There are times when boxers' hands, or bald

goalkeepers, or tennis players eyeballing each other – all famous pictures by McCabe – are an irrelevance, and a newspaper photographer must simply record events. If he can use his talents to make the event more real, more understandable, that is a great bonus. But he must, above all, get the picture.

McCabe's record of getting the picture for the major and unexpected event is impressive. Indeed, there are moods in which he will pride himself more on the big story pictures than on his genuinely innovative photography. He takes his own vision, his ability to take 'Eamonn McCabe shots' for granted. After all, it is innate. But the skill of getting a major news shot has also been acquired: a matter of good timing, good luck, and good professional habits. He was, for example, the only working photographer to get a picture of the Cambridge University crew sinking in the Oxford versus Cambridge Boat Race in 1978.

McCabe of course, being the man he is, will tell you that he has been 'lucky' with the number of major news photographs he has got. But as the old adage goes: the more you practise, the luckier you get. There is more than coincidence, and there is more than experience, behind McCabe's 'luck'. It is something to do with McCabe's attitudes towards whatever it is he is photographing. He becomes emotionally bound up in the events, and has an intuitive understanding of what is happening and, crucially, what will happen next. That is why, time and again, pictures happen for him, the timing of the comedy is perfect and the people seem inevitably to form into patterns for him.