

Transfer deadline day is over for another year. As always, it brought drama galore, with deals thrown together at the last minute, like the “shock” announcement three hours before the deadline that [Danny Welbeck would be leaving Manchester United for Arsenal](#). Meanwhile, Radamel Falcao’s loan move to United was the major signing as Premier League spending hit a record £835m. All this activity is amped by the fact that our knowledge of what goes on is frustratingly limited.

Taking place at the end of January and August every year, deadline day coverage straddles broadcast and print – from the visual extravaganza of [Sky Sports News](#) to live blogs across the [BBC](#) and [newspaper](#) websites. But, all too often, the sports media spends all day groping around. Sources are unnamed and therefore the audience is unable to ascertain the credibility of the journalist’s information and the motives behind the source.

Not the whole story

It is a big leap of faith to ask the audience to trust a story coming from a mystery man. But sports reporters’ hands are often tied as sources refuse to go on the record. And there is a world of difference whether that source is an agent, the selling club or the buying club.

The shroud of secrecy doesn’t stop there and reporters can generally only get as far as finding out fees, contract lengths and wages – if they are lucky.

Yet this is only the partial story. The finer details of contracts such as bonuses, sell-on and release clauses and image rights are rarely available. All too often we hear obscure references to contract talks breaking down without really finding out why.

In the [12 years since the transfer window system was implemented](#), we have seen not only the growth of agents but also super-agents. Image rights and third-party ownership have emerged as players have become brands and commodities in their own right.

The audience rarely gets to see the complexity behind football business and this means the public perception of football is skewed. The media portrayal of transfer dealings ends up being bright and breezy and full of fun rather than the tough and murky business it really is.

Media role

Sports media may have a commercial imperative – to attract viewers and sell advertising – but it can also provide a public service to fans who pay expensive ticket prices and buy merchandise. [With concerns over sustainability](#), the football industry needs to start thinking about taking care of its customers and recognising the role the media can play in this. Social media has brought sports journalists closer to their audience and made them more accountable. Yet there is still a disconnect and distance between football clubs and their fans.

At the same time, there is more rumour and speculation than ever as a result of Twitter. Journalists must balance this with the pressure they’re under to get the story out into the public domain as soon as they can. The pressure to both get it first and get it right is enormous.

There is a risk that the sports journalist is used as a pawn by football clubs who might use them to create a smokescreen or a diversion to throw rivals off the scent for a particular player. The same goes for an agent trying to engineer a move for his client.

Sports journalists must always scrutinise motives when assessing the reliability of their sources - otherwise there is a danger that being in cahoots with them is at the expense of honesty to the audience. With reliable information hard to come by – even if from an official source – they can find

themselves confronted by ethical dilemmas because of the secretive and manipulative nature of the transfer business.

Deal details

But, by the same token, the sports media should never shy away from reporting the background detail if they have this information on the record. It is very easy to dismiss it as inaccessible or unnecessary to the audience or would make a report overly long. Football fans are knowledgeable and need this detail to make informed opinions and decisions about the clubs they follow.

There is no harm in journalists exploring transfer stories in greater detail in the cold light of day after the frenzy of the transfer window is over. Two years ago, the Portuguese midfielder Joao Moutinho's proposed move to Tottenham collapsed because of the complexity of a deal which involved a sell-on clause and third-party ownership. [The Telegraph revisited](#) the story the day after the deadline to give a full breakdown of why it didn't happen.

This is important information to a football fan because it gives an insight into how transfer business works. Yet all too often the media circus has moved on and is more interested in throwing the story forward to the player's official unveiling, first press conference or debut.

Deadline day is great fun and highly entertaining but it also ends up being a sketchy and superficial portrayal of a complex business. Clubs need to start connecting more with fans - and they could do worse than use the media to show how football really works.

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