

Harrison Carter

An ESPN, inc. executive listed access to athletes and competition with other media as major challenges to sports journalism during a presentation at the University on Tuesday.

John Walsh, senior vice president and executive editor of ESPN, inc., gave a lecture at Carroll Hall Auditorium at 5:15 p.m. He gave the Reed Sarratt Distinguished Lecture for this fall. One lecture has been presented by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication in memory of the University graduate each semester since spring of 1987.

Walsh discussed many of the challenges he faces at ESPN, inc. "Aside from the creative challenges ... you have [many] external challenges to deal with," said Walsh.

There are a variety of different types of competition that are faced by a network devoted to sports. They face competition from the sports that are their business. The NFL and the NBA already have their own networks and Walsh said he is certain hockey and baseball are soon to follow.

Walsh also said that many sports stories also get picked up by straight news networks causing more competition. He also said that they are always in competition with regular cable entertainment for the eyes of their viewers.

Walsh also spoke of the challenge of covering yourself. He said that all types of journalists are judged by how they cover themselves. He said they have recently dealt with this because of the firing of Rush Limbaugh and the pressure they have received from the NFL over the way the professional football is portrayed in the series Playmakers.

ESPN, inc. also deals with athletes, which brings other challenges. “Athletes don’t have a reason to come give an interview,” said Walsh. It becomes important to give friendly interviews while still asking the right questions.

Athletes also often have agendas that make it difficult to keep them on topic during interviews. Agents, promotions and apparel can all play a role in athlete agendas.

Walsh also made a point regarding the marriage of sports journalism and the sports that are covered. Walsh said that covering controversy in sports, like possible baseball contraction or the backlash from the 2002 All-Star game is a major challenge. It is a journalistic challenge to cover negative stories fairly when your business relies on the images of sports.