

The University of Washington's Husky football team is much beloved in the university's home city of Seattle. The decision made by the *Seattle Times* to publish an in-depth investigation of criminal wrongdoing by several of the team's former members was not one to be taken lightly, especially in a time of economic turmoil: In doing so, the newspaper ran the risk of alienating readers and losing subscriptions.

Reporters Ken Armstrong and Nick Perry originally set out to investigate a Husky football player who appeared to have received exceptionally lenient treatment by the justice system after a series of arrests. As their investigation continued and expanded, Armstrong and Perry uncovered many things: a pattern of special treatment for Husky football players at several levels of the justice system, the repeated vilification of victims of Husky players' alleged violent attacks, and a tradition of indifference to these situations by the newspaper itself. What they found convinced Armstrong and Perry that this story had to be told regardless of the possible consequences.

Armstrong and Perry faced a host of interrelated, but distinct, ethical concerns:

- Whether to name the two dozen UW football players who had been accused or arrested, but not charged and/or convicted, with violent crimes. The reporters decided to reveal only the names of those who had a pattern of violent behavior or a particularly serious instance of such behavior.
- Whether to pursue an interview with a woman who had accused a UW football player of rape and had settled a civil case on the grounds that she would not comment on the case. The reporters decided not to pursue the interview with this woman, and built their article instead on court documents and other interviews.
- Whether to report on the domestic violence accusations against Curtis Williams, a well-loved UW player who was deceased. The reporters' honest portrait of Williams's story earned them praise from his widow, who later thanked them for their integrity.
- Whether to discuss the actions of former *Seattle Times* columnists, who were complicit in covering up the stories of football player wrongdoing for several years and had since retired from the paper. The topic was addressed directly, although no former *Times* reporters were named.

As expected, the publication of "Victory and Ruins," Armstrong and Perry's four-part series about the University of Washington football team, generated a firestorm among the team's fans, many of whom were *Times* readers. But just as many fans thanked the *Times* for its fairness in both portraying a well-loved, but flawed, local sports team and admitting to its own past shortcomings.

1. Should financial pressures ever influence a reporter's decision on which stories to pursue? Why or why not?
2. Armstrong and Perry made the decision to pursue a potentially unflattering story about deceased Husky football player Curtis Williams. Does it make a difference if the potential subject of a story is deceased? If so, how does it affect your coverage?

3. The *Times* was also self-reflective about its own failings in covering the Husky football team. Could the story have been reported without being so self-critical? Was it important that this element be a part of the “Victory and Ruins” series?