

Reporting Test

for Class of 2008-09

NAME _____

DATE _____

INSTRUCTIONS:

Follow these instructions. Use a separate sheet for each story and critique; your response should be no longer than one page for each story.

These stories are fictitious, created only for this test. The sources quoted and the events presented here should not be taken as real situations. For purposes of this test, assume that Swanson is a city of 86,500 and that you are writing these stories for a daily newspaper.

*For each story, write the opening five paragraphs of a news story, based on reporter notes about each day's developments. You are to write the opening of a **comprehensive** news article – splitting this material into two stories is not an option. For stories 2, 3 and 4, you can also use material from the earlier day(s).*

Then, briefly, discuss why you wrote the opening of each story this way and describe what other reporting you would have liked to have done. Were there any legal or ethical issues presented by this material?

Story 1, Monday events for Tuesday's newspaper

BACKGROUND:

The event will celebrate arrival back home of one Olympic athlete from Swanson. It will take place at 6 p.m. today (Monday). Swanson city pop: 86,500. Ethnic diversity: 40% Latino, 30% white, 15% black, 10% Asian; 5% Native American and other. John Johnsan will arrive at Swanson Regional Airport and will be welcomed by city officials. He received a gold medal in the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens. He is the first resident—or former resident—of Swanson to have collected a medal in the Olympic Games.

The athlete arriving Monday is often called “John John.” Full name is John Q. Johnsan. Born (Aug. 25, 1980) and raised in Swanson; graduated Swanson High in 1998; played football and track there. Is African American. Attended Portland University on a track scholarship. Did not graduate. Was NCAA champion in 200 meters in 2001. Injured left ankle, 2002. Returned to running, 2003. Got gold medal in the 1,600 meter relay (often called the 4 x 400 relay); he was one of four runners in that 1,600-meter race. He failed to qualify for the final in the 200.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS:

Media gather, starting at 5 p.m., at the terminal Swanson Regional Airport. The place is crowded by about 10 TV camera crews. Scores of family and fans gather too. Some signs from the crowd say: “Go U.S.A.” and “Johnsan, You Are Golden.” At 6:15, plane lands. It is a corporate jet owned by Flyin Athletic Shoes. Johnsan has signed a \$1 million contract with Flyin. He will do multiple promotions for the shoe that he used when he ran in his gold medal winning race.

Johnsan comes into terminal at 6:25. Officials from Swanson city and loved ones crowd in around him. Mayor Peggy Walch makes presentation of “Swanson Key” to him and says, “We and Swanson are all very proud of your achievement. You have become the most famous Swansonian in our city history.” The crowd goes wild with cheers and shouts of “John-san, John-san.”

Johnson accepts key. Says, "Thank you Swanson. It's good to be back home -- know what I mean? It's an honor to be a gold medalist in the relay with my brothers. Athens was an amazing experience. I have to say though, there were some things I didn't like. You know, we had a 9 p.m. curfew because of security reasons. That was a drag. And it was tough for us to schedule quality time at the best training facilities there. They were overcrowded. Also, I found out about trainers for the U.S. team offering to provide performance-enhancing drugs. They were saying the stuff wouldn't be detected. Anyway, I don't want to mess up this beautiful day so I guess that's all for now. Thanks a lot."

Several reporters call out to Johnsan but he walks away.

Swanson High Principal Emma Bancos steps to the microphone: "I'd just like to invite all Swanson High alums to please come to our school tomorrow at noon for a special ceremony to honor our gold medalist. Thank you."

Story 2, Tuesday events for Wednesday's newspaper

Notes from Reporters at the Scene:

Cars start arriving around Swanson High around 10 a.m. People are allowed in at Swanson gym. Event is to start at 12 noon. Gym has a seating capacity of 1,550.

At 11 :30 a.m. the school bell rings and regular students of the school head to the gym, built in 1962, and stream inside. Right before noon, the head security officer for the school tells students admitting people in: "We're full. Do not let anyone else in."

The students at the doors--they appear to be jocks--try to close the doors. A group of non-students--they appear to be from the neighborhood in South Swanson--try to force their way in. There is pushing, shoving. A tall and muscular student in a Letterman's sweater tries to block the entrance. As he is pushed forcefully to the side, he loses his balance and falls. He does not get up. After a few minutes, the crowd clears out. Student is seen on the floor, holding his right wrist and arm. An ambulance arrives.

In exclusive interview, School Security Officer Jana Roberts says: "I cannot identify the student injured because of privacy issues. He was taken by Ruben's Ambulance to St. Mary's Hospital. We are trying to find the students-actually I can say that they were not Swanson High students, about 15-16 years of age-who tried to force themselves into the gym. They ran away after our football player fell. We believe they should be held responsible."

Ms. Bancos opens the program at 12:11 p.m. The stands are packed. She introduces John Johnsan, calling him Swanson High's "very own gold medalist." There are 120 seconds of cheering and clapping. A student gives Johnsan a letterman's jacket. According to a person in the stands (would not allow name to be used), Johnsan never had the money to buy a Swanson letterman's jacket. The crowd roars in approval at end of the ceremony. At 1:15, event ends. Johnsan tells reporters following him: "See you at 6."

A student goes up to a reporter and asks, "Do you know who that was that was injured? That was our starting quarterback for our football team. Yeah, that's Jason Brown." In follow up calls to the school, none of the officials will say who the injured student is. They will neither confirm nor deny that it is Brown. Officer Roberts says: "All I will say is that it is a football player who was injured."

5:30 p.m. The Swanson Press Club is buzzing. This is most media that ever showed up for a press conference. ESPN, CNN, Fox, NBC, local media there. At 6 p.m., Johnsan emerges from a side room and goes to microphone. He says: "Hello, I am John Johnsan. I have an important statement to make regarding the U.S. Olympic track team. I believe in good, hard and clean competition. I am deeply troubled that people close to the team offered to give us an undetectable substance to improve performance. As you know, that is illegal. One day at my dorm in the Olympic Village, one of the U.S. trainers took me aside and said he could give me a boost that would not be detectable. He showed me some capsules. I wanted no part of it. But the dude came up to me again later and made the same pitch. I couldn't believe it. I know other athletes were approached too. I know of one athlete who accepted the capsules but I do not know if he actually used them. I'm sure there will be an investigation so I do not want to say more now. And I have been advised by my lawyer and my shoe company to avoid any details. Believe me, I am not just blowing smoke. There is fire to this smoke."

Reporters shout out questions but Johnsan steps away without answering.

Story 3, Wednesday events for Thursday's newspaper

Swanson High Principal Ms. Bancos calls press conference for 11 am. In front of the school's main building, Ms. Bancos addresses the assembled press.

She says: "in response to numerous inquiries, I can tell you that the student injured yesterday at the entrance to our gym is Jason Robert Browne. He is an honor student, a member of the National Honor Society, senior class vice president, a trumpet player in the band and starting quarterback on our varsity football team."

Reporter asks: "How serious are his injuries?"

"He has a broken wrist, the right one, and he bruised his arm and shoulder.

Obviously, he won't be playing Friday night against North Swanson High. Or for a long time, for that matter. He also won't be playing the trumpet."

Another reporter asks: "Have you found the students who pushed him?"

Ms. Bancos: "The Swanson police and our security officer are checking that out. I don't have any information. Frankly, I do not know if those guys are to blame or if it was just a freak accident. We're sorry it happened at an otherwise joyous occasion. Thank you. That is all I can say for today."

From a sports writer comes this information: Jason Robert Browne had played two games this year as starter at quarterback position. He had led team to two wins. He is considered a strong college quarterback prospect.

At 1 p.m., an announcement comes from the Swanson Police Department: A press briefing will be held at 2 p.m. at police headquarters regarding John Johnsan. Chief of Swanson police Will Scot goes to the podium at 2:02 p.m. Here is a transcript of his remarks:

"I have a statement to make: We went to John Johnsan's house this morning after he called us. He reported that a caller had made a threatening phone call. The caller said: 'You better not talk if you know what's good for you.' Mr. Johnsan asked, 'Who's calling?' The man replied: 'We know where you live and we will come after you if you talk.' The man hanged up. We are treating this with all seriousness as a threat on Mr. Johnsan's life. We are still interviewing Mr. Johnsan about what he might know relating to performance-enhancing drugs for Olympic athletes. And we will be placing a watch over Mr. Johnsan to safeguard his safety. It is deplorable that this local hero, who is trying to do the right thing, has been subjected to such a threat."

A TV reporter asks: When will we be able to talk to Mr. Johnsan?

Scot replies: "I don't think Mr. Johnsan will be talking to you media guys for some time. That is all I can say, ladies and gentlemen." With that, he walks out.

A U.S. Olympic Committee spokesman, Mark Markos, states in reply to question from a reporter: "I am just shocked at Mr. Johnsan's allegation. This is the first I've heard of all this. We are taking this matter very seriously. I can say nothing more until our investigation of this matter is completed."

A caller tells a reporter over the phone: "you know what Johnsan said about drugs being given to athletes in Athens? He's right. I was there. The trainer involved lives on the Southside, and works in that area. The dude's name is Ed Harris. I am not sure if anyone is listening in so I can't say any more."

A reporter asks the caller: Who are you?

The caller responds: "I can't tell you that, but I know what I'm talking about." The caller hangs up.

Story 4, Thursday events for Friday's newspaper

Swanson police department calls press conference for noon, when a few local TV stations carry local TV news programs.

"Swanson police chief Will Scot opens the press conference with this statement: We are continuing to investigate the threatening phone call that was placed to Mr. John Johnsan on Wednesday. We have reason to believe that that phone call was a genuine effort to intimidate Mr. Johnsan and was a threat to his life. It was not a joke or a hoax. We developed some very good clues about who placed the call. We have a suspect in custody. We think this person is responsible for making the call. He was apprehended after officers concerned about Johnsan's safety noticed this person following him around. He was arrested outside Johnsan's house at 1 a.m. Thursday and was found to be carrying a 9mm handgun. The suspect is William Morgan, age 35, of Swanson. That is all I can say now about the arrest. We--along with federal authorities--continue to interview Mr. Johnsan about what happened and what was said in Athens."

The following Q and A takes place between reporters and Scot.

Q: What have you learned about the alleged offer to provide performance - enhancing drugs to U.S. athletes?

A: I cannot reveal any information at this time. The FBI is the lead agency on that matter now. That is all the time I have. Thank you.

A U.S. Olympic Committee spokesman, Mark Markos sends a fax to the newspaper. It says: "The USOC announced today that its officials, coaches and others associated with the U.S. Olympic team in Athens are cooperating with FBI agents on the matter brought up by John Johnsan. We have no further comment at this time."

A reporter is informed by a rep for Flyin shoes that a press conference will be held at the Swanson Press Club at 2 p.m. It starts at 2:12 with this statement: "My name is Mildred Ropper and I am the Vice President for Public Affairs for Flyin Athletic Shoes. At Flyin, we believe in spirited but clean athletic competition. That is why we are here today--to support our athlete John Johnsan in the statements regarding offers of performance-enhancing drugs in Athens to U.S. competitors. Some people behind the mike on talk radio have dismissed John's statements as grandstanding. But that is not so. What he has to say has validity. Three more track and field athletes under contract to Flyin are prepared to talk to authorities about what they heard and saw in Athens. We wish that what happened in Athens had not happened. But it did. Now, we want to expose person or persons responsible so that we can clean up the sport and go back to athletes competing against athletes without artificial means."

Reporter's Question: Will your athletes provide names of people involved?

Ms. Ropper: "Yes, at the proper place and time. No more questions. Thank you."