

## The Smooth Talk of National Sports Radio

**Abstract** This chapter focuses on a prominent sports talk-radio show with a large national market, *The Dan Patrick Show*. The narratives contested on it over time tend to suggest themes that resonate with such a broad listenership. Those narratives reflect a dominant tone of inclusiveness and generally restrained conflict of views, which can be read as contributing to a metanarrative most compatible with a truly national and relatively diverse audience.

**Keywords** Sports-talk radio • Sociology • Narrative analysis

When it comes to sports talk-radio shows with large national markets, *The Dan Patrick Show* provides an example of one of the most prominent. Its syndication on almost 300 stations across the nation and simulcasting on the Fox Sports Radio Network and DIRECTV are all testament to its major institutional status in the field and indeed the sports world more broadly. *The Dan Patrick Show* consistently reaches and maintains one of the largest national audiences in sports-talk radio, and the narratives contested on it over time will tend to reflect themes that resonate with such a broad listenership. That reflects what *TDPS* contributes to the vast media cosmos, or what sociologist David Rowe characterized as “the media sports cultural complex.”

In terms of this study’s concept of the hyper-mediated marketplace of sports narratives, *TDPS* represents one of the more prolific participants

in the unprecedented multitude of narrative advancement and rejection that so very recently has been established as the perpetual reality of media as we know it, multiplied exponentially through watershed technological and sociological transformation.

The show's Website describes Dan Patrick as the "legendary multi-platform sports host" who "features the most extensive A-list interviews from the world of sports." Patrick became a household name in that world as co-host of ESPN's Sports Center with Keith Olbermann from 1989 to 2006, still considered by many the best host pairing in the history of that groundbreaking cable-television show. He has hosted this version of his radio show since 2007 (an earlier version ran on ESPN Radio 1999–2007), also hosts NBC Television's showcase *Football Night in America* just before each week's *Sunday Night Football* matchup, writes for *Sports Illustrated*, and has appeared in some seventeen movies such as *The Longest Yard* and *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry* and music videos with the likes of alternative rockers Hootie and the Blowfish and country singer Brad Paisley. *Talkers* magazine ranked him Number Five on its 2017 "Sports Talk Heavy Hundred," in which it annually lists its determination of the one hundred most important sports-talk-radio hosts.

*The Dan Patrick Show* can also be heard on venues such as Sirius satellite radio and PodcastOne podcasts. The show airs from a studio often referenced as "the man cave" and featuring decor that includes sports memorabilia, a basketball hoop, a pinball machine, and a bar with three kegs. Patrick has a regular supporting cast of other commentators who are known on the show as The Danettes.

### QUALITIES OF A VERY HIGH-PROFILE NATIONAL SHOW

A typical show begins with an announcer who tells the audience, "Here he is, joined by the Four Danettes, Dan Patrick." Usually Patrick starts off with various commentaries: Perhaps his view on how Cleveland quarterback Robert Griffin III needed to show "how smart he is more than how tough he is" and slide to avoid hard tackles like the one that had just left him unable to play for eight to ten weeks. Or which college teams face "must win" games on the upcoming weekend. Complaining about the Chicago Cubs clinching first place in their division in a game played at an opponent's stadium instead of in front of their home fans. Castigating the Houston Texans for losing in a shutout in an NFL game

Patrick and most other observers expected them to win. Retelling on a show airing just after the weekend death of professional golfer Arnold Palmer how Patrick once walked with Palmer and fellow great Jack Nicklaus at the Master's as they finished their round—"Still one of my all-time favorite moments." How younger fans like the antics of flamboyant New York Giants receiver Odell Beckham—such as taunting and tussling with other players and parading around on the field with his shirt off—but older fans are offended by it. How he finds it difficult to explain to his children why Cialis commercials (which air frequently during televised sports programming) feature couples sitting in adjacent bathtubs.

Significant portions of *TDPS* are always devoted to Patrick's interviews with all sorts of sports and sports-related figures, such as: Star ESPN college football commentator Kirk Herbstreit. Comedian and impressionist Frank Caliendo, who often does impressions of sports figures such as former NFL coach and commentator John Madden and regularly appeared in sports-related sketches for several years on Fox Television's *NFL Sunday* (and who tells Patrick the key to popular impressions is less sounding exactly like the actual person than making some feature of their personality connect with audiences—such as the facial expression of someone who just ate a lemon as central to his impressions of the boisterous, intense, idiosyncratic Madden). Three-time triple-Olympic-gold-medalist and multiple-world-record holding sprinter Usain Bolt (who responds to Patrick's question about how big a head start Usain Bolt could give him and still win a 100-yard dash by estimating at least forty yards). Keith Jackson, perhaps the best known broadcaster in the history of college football (who tells Patrick he decided to retire in 2006 after "it became more and more difficult trying to assume that someone was right or wrong, and it became more difficult to chase it down and get a declaration that you could believe in. I got tired of doing that, and I figured I wasn't qualified to be what I was trying to be, so I quit. Fifty-six years is long enough." And: "The game of football involves every emotion that is possible to a human being. In sixty minutes, I think you can probably be touched by any emotion you can think of, short of childbirth, and I think they're working on that." Continuing with that line of insight, Jackson declared: "To this day, you can tell on the playground which one of the little fellas has squared his shoulders and bowed his neck and will go to express himself over the opponent. And that's life. It's competitive. It has all of the competitive elements of making a living and raising a family, and you know, all that.").

The show has such a high profile nationally that interviews with governors and former governors are not unusual. In an interview with Ohio Governor John Kasich, he tells Patrick how worried he is about Major League Baseball because there is no revenue sharing as is common in other professional leagues, meaning the richest teams in the largest markets tend to dominate excessively. "I think baseball is going to die. I think in the NBA and NFL they have figured out a way if you're not a giant you can still be competitive." He says, noting that he has analysis of comparing the teams with the largest player-salary payrolls to those with the smallest that shows clearly how the teams that are able to pay their rosters of players the most are consistently the teams that win most often. Ohio has two of those relatively smaller market teams in Cincinnati and Cleveland. "I'm worried with America's pastime it's going to fade away because the smaller markets don't have anyone to root for. This is not good for us. Baseball is great. I'm afraid it's going to dwindle," he says, observing that when the smaller-market teams (like the Kansas City Royals' recent World Series champions) get good players, they leave as soon as they can get more money with a larger market team.

In an interview with former Mississippi governor and then Secretary of the US Navy Ray Mabus (before the annual game between the Army and Navy military academies), there is considerable focus on that long-running rivalry, about how the athletes involved face a choice top players at other colleges don't—"After their second year, everyone at Naval Academy has to decide [whether to continue their military commitment], and if they sign up for two more years, they are signing up for five more [including their active service after graduation]." But somehow they also get into a discussion, at the instigation of Patrick, as to how many names Mabus has in his Rolodex. "I was governor of Mississippi so I have a lot of names in my phone – probably eight or ten thousand," Mabus replies.

"Who would I be surprised at?" Patrick asks. "Archie Manning?" (Manning was an All-American at the University of Mississippi, had a long NFL career, and is the father of two Super Bowl winning quarterbacks, Peyton Manning with the Indianapolis Colts and Denver Broncos, and Eli Manning twice with the New York Giants.)

"Yes," Mabus says, seeming to astonish Patrick. "But we were at Ole Miss together," Mabus adds casually.

"Well, who would surprise me?" Patrick presses.

After a slight pause, Mabus says, “Brooklyn Decker [the actress and former *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Edition cover model].”

“Really?” asks an even more astonished Patrick.

“Well, we were in the movie *Battleship* together.” (Decker played a Navy physical therapist who helps defeat aliens who attack Earth. Mabus played the commanding officer of an aircraft carrier involved in the battle.) Mabus goes on to discuss with Patrick how he has encouraged filmmakers to develop movies that raise the profile of the US Navy.

Neither of those interviews got deeply political, but others occasionally do, such as a November discussion between Patrick and Mike Freeman, lead professional-football sports writer for Bleacher Report (whose Website describes it as “the leading digital destination for team-specific sports content and real-time event coverage”). Their focus was on a recent article by Freeman in which he reported on NFL locker rooms that had grown divided between players who voted for Donald J. Trump for president and those who didn’t. When they start talking, Patrick says he was aware of how sports locker rooms could often be divided by women or money, but not by politics. “Locker rooms are just like the rest of America,” Freeman tells him. “This election has been different, as you know, as everyone knows. It’s a whole different ball game. And politics has always been a part of every locker room I have covered, but it’s in sort of a minor way. This has moved to the forefront.” He says he isn’t contending that has happened in every NFL locker room but “I think it’s a pretty good representation. There’s a lot of heated discussions, or in some cases, no discussions, which is almost the same thing. And people and players just feel very strongly.” He emphasizes, “When I talk about division, I don’t mean someone is not going to block for someone,” and “It’s not going to cause fist fights and people aren’t going to be throwing chairs at each other,” however “when you look at how black people in general view Trump, it’s not very favorable. But many white people view Trump favorably, and those things clash, the same way they clash outside of locker rooms.”

Most of the time on *TDPS*, the tone is kept much lighter. When Patrick interviews University of Oklahoma quarterback Baker Mayfield, much of the conversation focuses on the way Mayfield often dances to celebrate, and he says he has more moves he hasn’t yet shown. When Patrick asks if Mayfield despises rival opponent Oklahoma State University, Mayfield says he doesn’t hate them, but “I don’t like ’em, that’s for sure.” Patrick asks then, “What would happen if you wore

your jersey and walked in downtown Stillwater?” Mayfield replies, “I don’t think very many good things could happen if I did that.” After that interview, Patrick says that Mayfield is the “new crush” of Danette “Paulie” (Paul Pabst, who in addition to participating in the show’s on-air banter also serves as executive producer). “Paulie falls in love with a new quarterback usually about once a year. Like you sometimes have multiple quarterback boyfriends,” Patrick jests. “They don’t all work out,” Pabst says. “You never know.”

Time is devoted regularly to Patrick and the Danettes debating and joking about topics such as those above and others, often subjects that callers for the day are encouraged to comment upon as well. A good deal of each show is also devoted to commercials. In testament to the market reach of *TDPS*, it always features a cavalcade of spots for major advertisers such as American Express, Lowe’s, Geico, Sony, Subaru, Macy’s, J.C. Penney, NAPA Auto Parts, AutoZone, O’Reilly Auto Parts, Advanced Auto Parts, Quicken Loans, Buffalo Wild Wings, LifeLock, Draft Kings, Great Clips, Sleep Number, and Dollar Shave Club. Frequently, Patrick does the pitches himself. For Omaha Steaks: “Are you looking for the perfect gift this holiday season? Wanting to avoid the long lines at the mall? How about Omaha Steaks? For only forty-nine ninety-nine you can get my family gift pack when you to to OmahaSteaks.com, enter my promo code DANP in the search bar and get seventy-seven percent off.” For Dodge Ram pickup trucks: “Ram 1500 is what I drive, check the full lineup at ramtrucks.com. Remember, it’s guts, it’s glory, it’s Ram.” For Rocket Mortgage: “It brings the mortgage process into the twentieth century. You can share your files with the touch of a button. A quick online process you can manage from the comfort of your couch.” For LegalZoom: “Don’t let things like legal matters become a distraction. Use LegalZoom instead. You never have to worry about an attorney’s billable hours piling up and costing you a fortune. You can have the peace of mind of working with an independent network of independent attorneys, all at a reasonable flat rate. Need to make it legal? Make it LegalZoom.” And even with so much time devoted to all the sorts of activities highlighted above, *TDPS* still regularly includes call-in segments in which listeners can offer their own comments. A promotional spot on the show pays tribute to the vital role of the audience, declaring (with profuse related sound effects): “Two simple words that go a long way—thank you. We want to thank you for putting up with our yelling, our stuttering, our egos. But most of all we want to thank you

for allowing us into your car, home smart phone, or office. To the best sports fans out there.” And the diverse originations of the calls illustrate how the show’s nationwide sweep brings in such fans from every corner of the country, such as, to note just a few: Greg in North Carolina, Matt in Iowa, Josh in Oregon, Jeff in Detroit, Jeffrey in Memphis, Corey in California, and Will in Arkansas.

### A VENUE GENERALLY CHUMMY AND A BIT WONKY

Although, as will be evident in later chapters, some sports-talk radio encourages and even instigates high levels of interpersonal intensity in its discourse, *TDPS* generally maintains a relatively mellow vibe, engaged intellectually but rarely at more than a mildly emotional level. It encourages narratives that tend to be expressed relatively less than argued. A great many exchanges with callers tend to be polite and highly straightforward, even rather wonkish. In a September exchange, for example, a caller from the West Coast says, “I just had two points from last night that I wanted to talk about. The first would be [Denver Broncos quarterback] Trevor Simian’s performance [compared to Carolina Panther’s Cam Newton in the game between those two teams]. First off, Simian had a higher completion percentage and he had only sixteen yards less passing on seven less attempts. The one thing he doesn’t have obviously is the running.”

Patrick: “Yeah, I don’t want to compare him to Cam. That’s not a fair comparison because Cam is great. When you see him in person, watching him do what he does, the other guy who comes to mind is [Seattle Seahawks quarterback] Russell Wilson – that ability to keep something alive and make a play, to do something a little more special.” But then Patrick softens that narrative: “Trevor Simian did well. And if I’m a Bronco fan, I would feel a whole lot better after what I saw with Trevor Simian last night.”

A caller from North Carolina a little later in that show seeks to counter what he considers an overly positive narrative on Simian’s performance: “Number one, let’s pump the brakes on this Trevor Simian worship festival. He threw for a buck and a half on a bunch of rookie defensive backs. He missed a receiver in the end zone who was wide open. His one touchdown pass was a one-yard pass.” He also complains about excessive hits on Newton not being called for penalties by the officials, which he declares to be “reee-dic-ulous.”

Patrick finesses the matter diplomatically: “Absolutely, great call. We’re not saying Simian is going into the Hall of Fame. I’m just saying composure-wise – that’s a big stage [for a young quarterback]! Against a good defense.”

Often the callers and Patrick frame their comments in chummy tones of familiarity, of guys at the office catching up Monday morning on sports developments from over the weekend. A caller from the South begins: “Good morning, Mr. Patrick. I’m doing great. I’ve got a best of the best for you. First, just got back from Nashville. Got to watch my Minnesota Vikings win on defense alone, oh yeah. Second best, how about those hometown Razorbacks, winning over TCU, upset, double overtime, Thanks for taking my call.” A caller from the West Coast says the best of his weekend was the Raiders winning again, and the second best was making his girlfriend watch the *Terminator* trilogy with him. A caller from the Midwest cheerily begins, “Hey, Dan, birthday morning, talking to my favorite guy on the radio, having a wonderful day. Best of the weekend is going to be Central Michigan University beating Oklahoma State. Man, that game was wild. Loved it.”

Patrick wishes the caller a happy birthday and talks about the game he referenced, one of the most bizarre of the 2016 season, in which an incorrect rule interpretation by the officials allowed Central Michigan an extra play it should not have had, on which it scored a touchdown that gave it a major upset of a more major football program. Patrick and the Danettes discuss whether, given the circumstances, Central Michigan should forfeit the game back to Oklahoma State. “Don’t think it’s going to happen,” he says. “But hey, they could win an Espy for doing that [referencing the awards ESPN hands out in a glitzy annual televised ceremony on the lines of the Oscars at the Academy Awards].” (For narrative construction of the same game in harsh contrast to that, see the analysis in Chap. 4.)

An Ohio caller says he made an eight-hour drive with his 13-year-old son to a game weekend at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. “I took your advice, Dan. Bucket-list item, for sure. Great experience. Definitely best of weekend. And the worst was spilling coffee at a gas station between Louisville and Bowling Green on the way back.” A Los Angeles caller pleads with Dan to change the sound effect from the loud siren they have been using for the show’s frequent “Hot Takes” segment, in which *TDPS* cast members make bold predictions about upcoming games. “I was driving down the street, dropping my son off at



school and you guys played the siren for about fifteen seconds and I literally stopped in the middle of the street and started pulling over. The guy behind me is honking. I was looking in my rear-view mirror like, *What's this guy's problem? Where's the fire truck?*" He continues: "And then you guys started talking over the sound effect and I was like, I've got to do the obligatory wave to the guy, like *Oh my God, I'm sorry, I'm an idiot.*" Patrick suggests: "OK, maybe we just do the campfire sound there." Then he and the Danettes discuss what might happen if someone thinks there is a campfire behind them on I-95 or in their back seat.

In early November, at a time when the Green Bay Packers have been playing poorly, a caller Patrick announces as Jake in Wisconsin seeks commiseration: "Man, what a brutal weekend. Last night just was not fun, going to Lambeau [Field, where the Packers play]. Obviously I was there. Tough right of the bat. Special teams blowing up completely took the wind out of the sails."

Patrick sympathizes: "Yeah, they looked lethargic. It's almost as if they said, all right, they scored a touchdown, no big deal. We're at home, they're the Colts, we're going to win this game. And then it's 14-3 and I went, 'Green Bay's in trouble here, folks.'"

The caller continues: "Yeah, it's just not good right now. The defense couldn't get off the field on third-down conversions. The most entertainment the entire game until the last seven minutes was that stupid squirrel running around on the field." He was referencing a game delay to clear the animal from the field. "Can you imagine when the Packers, were like, 'Hey, does anybody know where a fishnet is? We need to get this squirrel.' It was just nuts. No lie, that was the most entertainment the entire time for a fan in the stands."

Patrick: "Yeah, they tried to put him in uniform but they couldn't find one for him and they could have used him."

Later, a caller from Florida jests darkly about his concern for the Packer fan, who is something of a regular caller. "My worst of the weekend—I was going to go with the Packers' defense, but you know, Dan, you worried about Jake in Wisconsin now. He's in a blind right now out in the woods with a firearm. I'm sure there is alcohol somewhere involved. And cheese."

Such calls and the rarely more than gently assertive narratives they introduce reflect overall the most representative of *TDPS*. That dominant tone of inclusiveness and generally restrained conflict of views can be read as contributing to a metanarrative most compatible with a truly

national and relatively diverse audience. As will be evident in the following chapters that level of restraint and collegiality tends to be less pronounced in the less-than-national markets, sometimes drastically less.

### THE SALIENCE OF THE ERRANT BUT MOST FEROCIOUS NARRATIVE

When a particular narrative is promoting in ways that disregard the overall modicum of *TDPS*, it stands out in stark relief. Commenting on the Florida caller's concern noted above, Patrick says, "It's sort of weird. Shea has become the old Jake, and Jake has become the old Shea. They sort of switched bodies there." He was referencing a caller who over the course of the 2016 football season by sheer force of will (more than accuracy) made the narrative he asserted relentlessly one of *TDPS*'s most salient. Announced by Patrick as "Shea from Irving," the caller probably wound up with more cumulative air time than any other caller for that season. And the consistency of the framing he advanced regarding the Dallas Cowboys was rivaled only by its ferocity. (Irving, Texas, is a large Dallas suburb.)

By early in September the narrative he would maintain doggedly was already clear: The Cowboys were severely handicapped by an "awful" head coach who did not understand—as Shea in Irving made overwhelmingly clear *he* did—that the team erred egregiously when it failed to rely much more heavily on its running game than on passing. And even though the Cowboys began a run of remarkable and unexpected success about that time—despite being forced to rely on a rookie quarterback in Dak Prescott after the team's all-time leading passer, Tony Romo, was injured for an extended period—that narrative would never waver. Indeed, it would build to ever greater levels of intensity in the months ahead, advanced with such raw, unpolished aggression that it eventually seemed to unnerve to some extent Patrick, as well as the Danettes. But more and more time would be devoted to his calls as the weeks went by.

In a mid-October call, after Dallas had upset favored Green Bay on the road, Shea in Irving (hereafter SII) told Patrick: "I don't know what I did to deserve this, but they ran the ball thirty-two damn times last night, yesterday, whatever the hell you want to call it. I'm living in tomorrow world, Danny. I don't know which way is up. All I know is

the Cowboys keep winning by running the damn ball.” In such comments, SII asserts the validity of his overriding narrative that “running the damn ball” is what Dallas must do to succeed: “It’s like my lips to God’s ears. I don’t know how it happened, but it’s happening.” He condemns any deviations: “I will say, some of the play calls in the fourth quarter, Danny, when they were making the rookie, Dak Prescott, throw out of his own damn end zone when they could have just run the ball and iced the game had me worried that they were getting way too comfortable with the arm of that rookie.”

Patrick: “Yeah, but it did say something about their confidence level in him, though I understand what you are saying, Shea, at the end of the first half with about fifty-five seconds to go, they were trying to score and they eventually scored a touchdown. That’s a confidence level I was not expecting to see with Dak Prescott.”

SII: “That was goofy. That was so crazy. I did not see that coming. But I gotta say at this point, Danny, Tony Who? And I think everybody is saying the same damn thing. If Mr. Botox [apparently a reference to alleged cosmetic treatments on the part of Dallas Cowboys Owner Jerry Jones] comes in and screws this up bringing in Romo, I am going to lose my damn mind.”

Given the regularity of their conversations, Patrick at times tries to follow up on other matters in the caller’s life, a social gesture made perhaps in hopes of eliciting other themes that might be among his priorities, asking: “How’s the baby front?” [It had been established in earlier calls that SII’s wife was expecting their second child soon.] But in that regard, the caller firmly maintains a related narrative that all else in his life is relatively minor in relation to his focus on the Cowboys and other football interests.

For example, when SII responds to that question with only, “Oh, I had the kid,” Patrick suggests the caller’s priorities might be a little skewed, noting, “So *that* wasn’t the lead, it was the Cowboys winning?” When SII brushes that aside—“Oh yeah, of course, duh.”—Patrick tries to draw out more of what might be the caller’s family interests beyond football: “How do you tell your significant other that you love her?”

SII asks if Patrick is asking about “the roommate,” as the caller often refers to his wife. When Patrick affirms that, SII notes offhandedly, “Usually by coming home.” Patrick tries to press the point, asking, “No, I’m talking about saying it. Do you have a sensitive side, or do you just yell, ‘I love you!’?”

Finally, the caller takes enough interest in the subject to elaborate relatively more: “Yeah, usually in an argument, I will apologize, say, ‘Put the knife down, I won’t do it again, I love you. We don’t need to do this again.’ That’s what I usually say, as I put the phone down with my hand on 9-1-1 speed dial.”

Patrick: “There you go – Shea in Irving.”

A couple of weeks later, on a morning after Dallas has beaten Philadelphia, a top division rival and a good team, in overtime, highlights the caller’s tenacious advancement of his core narrative (indeed a metanarrative for him) despite contradictions. “Let me bring in Shea so he can move on with the rest of his day,” Patrick announces during that show. “Shea in Irving. Shea, good morning, how are you?”

SII: “Good morning, Danny. You know how I am.”

Patrick: “No, I don’t.”

SII: “You freaking do, Danny. I don’t give a damn that it was overtime. You let Dak Prescott, the rookie, throw the ball thirty-nine times, and that running back that you spent a Number Four [draft] pick on, you should get slapped in the mouth. Thank God they won, thank God they pulled it out.” So, to emphasize, Dallas won, despite contradicting the fundamental dictum of SII’s narrative that in order to win the team must run more and pass less. Yet the caller ever more fiercely insists his narrative must prevail. “Explain to me, why the hell they keep refusing to run the ball in the Red Zone? Explain it to me. This team was built to run aggressively. Why? Tell me why?” [As is often the case, his comments tend to get louder and louder as his calls proceed, and his tone reflects more and more anger.]

Patrick basically agrees, but that does not calm SII in the least: “You got six minutes left, and you’re like, hey, Dak Prescott might as well be Tony Romo. Let’s air it out, throw it deep. This is stupid, Danny. This is why I get so frustrated. Cause I ain’t smart, and I can figure this crap out.” In his tirades, the caller often derogatorily references Dallas Head Coach Jason Garrett as “Ginger” or “the Ginger”—perhaps because of his red hair—and often Garrett’s Princeton University education as well. Garrett played quarterback there and later for Dallas and other NFL teams before moving into coaching. “This idiot, this Ivy League Ginger, went and got a \$200,000 education, thinks he’s smarter than everybody else on the football field – he ain’t! You don’t have to be that smart. Look at the O-Line you have. Why are you throwing the ball in the red zone with a rookie quarterback?” Week after week, SII reasserts his

metanarrative: “So just run the damn ball. Who do you think you are? Thank God they pulled it out, because you play like this against a better team, the Vikings, or heaven forbid, the playoffs, something weird happens, they’re losing that damn game.... The play calling was crap, Danny.”

Patrick: “Well, it’s going to be one of those games the Eagles look back on and say, we weren’t aggressive enough. We had them. You’re up by ten, and you had the fumble, and you made some mistakes where you could have put the game out of reach.” Still, he only pushes that relatively mild counter-narrative gently and then qualifies it: “But you’re right, we go through this a couple of times every year where we go, why are they throwing the ball more than twenty times, even with Romo in there? I got a great running back and a great offensive line, and I don’t want to have Dak Prescott throw the ball thirty-five times.”

SII: “Why would you put him in that position, to have him ruin his confidence? Unless The Ginger is sabotaging Dak Prescott – hear me out, Danny – sabotaging the rookie quarterback to get his boy back in the game, just like he sabotaged Wade Phillips, when he was the head coach [and Garrett was offensive coordinator], to get his own job in that seat.” It may be a purely subjective conspiracy theory, but it serves to provide support for the caller’s metanarrative. “See, people forget that, Danny. The only reason that Ginger is the head coach is because he sabotaged poor Wade, put a knife in his back with the play-calling duties. And all of a sudden, Wade is gone and the Cowboys go on a tear. Funny how that works, ain’t it?”

In addition to its single-minded consistency, expressed with similar vehemence regardless whether Dallas wins or loses, SII’s narrative includes such startling supporting mini-narratives—such as that assertion that the coach he considers unqualified only got his job by somehow coaching badly as offensive coordinator in order to achieve his goal of being promoted to head coach—that are always expressed with an unequivocal belief in their certainty.

After SII has gone on for some time in that vein on that occasion, Patrick reminds him: “You got a win.”

SII: “Damn right.”

Patrick: “Be happy.”

Instead, SII expresses another grievance, asserting that Danette Paulie should have contacted him so they could get together when both were recently in Chicago for the Cubs’ World Series games with Cleveland:

“Unless you’re a Quaker or a Mennonite, Paulie, you should have picked up the damn phone and got weird with Shea when he was in Chicago this whole weekend. I don’t know what your problem was, brother.”

Patrick (to Paulie): “Did Shea reach out to you?”

Paulie: “No, I didn’t hear from Shea. But I was worried if I hung out with Shea before Game Three that I may not see Game Three.”

SII: “There’s no way we would have made it to Wrigleyville [a reference to the Cubs’ ballpark] – absolutely not.”

Paulie: “I want to live.”

SII: “Loser!”

Patrick: “Thank you, Shea.”

SII: “Whatever.”

After the call ends, Patrick asks Paulie again, “So you didn’t reach out to Shea?”

Paulie: “No, I am a little scared.”

Patrick: “Oh, I would be too.”

One of the other Danettes adds, “That’s not the worst call by Paulie ever, not reaching out to Shea. That’s a pretty solid choice.”

A few weeks later, on a morning after Dallas has beaten Minnesota in a close Thursday night game, Patrick begins the call, “Shea, how are you today?”

SII: “Arrrggh. Not good, Danny.”

Patrick: “Well, it *was* a win last night.”

SII: “Crap! First off, cancel Thursday night. The product sucks. It’s never been good. It’s always trash. Secondly, the Ivy League Ginger got outcoached by a temporary coach. He put an awful team on the field, Danny.” So once again, even though Dallas has at least partially contradicted the caller’s metanarrative and still won, the caller only doubles down further on it. “How many penalties did they have? How many holding calls? How many false starts? How many turnovers? Yeah, they snuck out a win. Here’s my question.” And then he brings forth an evidentiary basis of support for his metanarrative: “So they had twenty-two designed runs against twenty designed passes. Good. That’s where we want to be. Except for the turnovers! How many turnovers are going to happen? That’s my fear with a team this young. You go on the road and you forget how to hold on to the damn ball.” And that brings him back to a recurring supporting narrative that those running the team do not understand football as he does: “Because there is a failure of leadership at the top of this organization.... and it goes right back down to Ivy

League Ginger. That's the issue.... All they had to do was get him away from that [head coach's sideline] headset and the Cowboys would have won by fifteen. Could have distracted him with an algebra equation or anything else."

At a point when the caller's volume and apparent anger has been rising throughout the call, Patrick asks: "You done?"

SII: "Hell yeah, I'm done. I'm fixing to go to the bar and start drinking."

Patrick: "Yeah, maybe not."

SII: "No, I'm doing it. I'm gonna eat some tacos and have some bloody mary's and then I'm gonna have me about three-hundred-and-nineteen cervezas because the roommate is out of town, Danny. Yeah, it's about to get weird."

Patrick: "Hey, you got a new coach at [the University of] Texas."

SII: "Praise the Lord. I might go to church for the first time in a decade after that. I didn't start talking to God until Charlie [Strong, therefore the head coach at Texas] got fired. And then all my prayers got answered."

After the call ends, Patrick says to the Danettes, "I don't know if he is ever going to be happy. No matter what the Cowboys do."

"There are some people, Dan, who are happy when they are unhappy," says Todd Fritz, also both a Danette and an executive producer. "And I think Shea might be one of those. Things are working better when it's a little bit chaotic for him."

Patrick's concern seems genuine: "Cowboys are playing well. He's got two babies. You would think that things would be good."

But they aren't for SII, even after the Cowboys defeat Tampa Bay later in December in another close game and clinch a spot in the NFL playoffs. When Patrick takes his call the morning after that victory and asks SII how he is doing, he responds: "Awful. Another Sunday the Ivy League Ginger does everything in his freaking power to lose in December. Dak had thirty-six pass attempts, three sacks, and he took off running on a couple of'em. Forty pass attempts!" It does not matter that despite passing much more than the caller's metanarrative holds as viable, the team won against a good team: "We got a quarterback passing forty times in a game, with the best running back in the league, with the best O-Line in the league, and you barely beat the Bucs at home. Danny, the Cowboys held the Bucs to two-hundred-seventy-five total yards. And they still had a chance to win at the end of the game!" He continues

with the tirade until finally declaring, “This is a joke. This is a failure of leadership. What next? What are they doing running a reverse on third and two? That’s like me bringing nunchucks [a martial-arts weapon] to a gunfight because I want to be different. Well, bang, you are dead, dummy.”

Patrick: “Well, you *did* clinch a playoff spot.”

SII: “This team is not built to throw the ball that much. This team is built to run the ball.” He goes off again, blaming Garrett because he “thinks he is smarter than anyone in the room,” and insisting, “If they would just run the ball and lose, you wouldn’t hear me calling this much and getting this mad.” In that assertion, SII finds a creative metric for asserting that his metanarrative cannot be proven invalid by Dallas winning while contradicting it, but rather only by *not* contradicting it and losing.

Andrew Perloff, who blogs for *TDPS* and is also a Danette, notes that statistically the Cowboys have been running the ball more than anyone in the league that season.

SII: “They should! Shut up, Bayless Junior [a derogatory reference to controversial sports commentator Skip Bayless]! You don’t know what you are talking about. Enough! They are *supposed* to run it more than anyone. They should be running it even more than they are now!”

In those bodies of discourse and others, SII relentlessly advanced his unequivocal metanarrative over the course of what was actually one of the Cowboys most successful recent years, with thirteen wins and four losses for the season, including an NFL-best eleven-game winning streak. And still, it must be noted, despite Dallas achieving an overall record better than all of the other fifteen teams in its conference while so frequently contradicting SII’s metanarrative, after the season he could still maintain that it was proven correct after all—because the Cowboys lost their first playoff game.

However, as the chapters that follow will document further, with many of the most engaged participants in sports-talk radio, contradictory evidence almost invariably has little effect on the insistence with which they hold and continue to advance their dearest narratives. As those chapters also will show in contrast, Shea in Irving’s contributions notwithstanding, overall *The Dan Patrick Show* features a considerably lower level of raw intensity than other sports-talk radio shows examined in this study. For the other shows in the chapters ahead, being able to focus on a regional audience rather than a national audience like *TDPS*’s, seems to



allow for more of that rawness in the generating and contesting of narratives in such social arenas.

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