

Construction of a National Sports heroine – Carolina Klüft in Swedish media*

By Leif Yttergren and John S. Hellström

The new Swedish heroine: Photographers vie for an unusual close of European champion Carolina Klüft.

Photo: picture-alliance



Introduction

This article analyses the mediafication of Sweden's Carolina Klüft, who during the period 2002 to 2007 was the best athlete in the world in her event, the heptathlon. In this period she became the European champion twice, the world champion twice, and the Olympic champion once. At the World Championships in Osaka 2007 she set a new European record. Her sporting success meant that she received massive attention in Swedish and international sports media. In Sweden she was hailed a national hero, and on several occasions she was named Sweden's best sportsperson. Apart from her sporting achievements, Klüft was hailed for her strong character. Unlike other Swedish sports stars, known for their quietness and introversion, she was known for her playful and spontaneous style on the track. In front of the TV cameras she showed, through her gestures and body language all her joy, anger, frustration and fighting spirit.

She stressed in interviews that the most important thing for her was not winning but having fun.

Klüft's successes and great charisma made her popular with Swedish journalists. But her popularity proved to be strongly tied to her youthful manner. During the latter part of her career, when she toned down the playfulness and showed a more serious side of herself, interest in her declined as, at the same time, criticism in the media grew. Despite the fact that she achieved the best results of her career during her final years as a heptathlete, she had by then lost much of her status as a national hero.



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The phenomenon of sporting heroes has given rise to lively discussion in the past decades (Hughson, 2009; Smart, 2005; Whannel, 2002). Several researchers have questioned sport's potential for producing true heroes. Smart (2005), for example, believes that the intense pace of the 21st century media society means that few of today's sports stars have time to achieve hero status, and the few that do are overshadowed by celebrities who temporarily gain great attention in the media. Others tone down the difference between heroes and celebrities and point out that heroes are also created in the media. According to Andrew and Jackson (2001), the hero is just one of several categories in a whole system of celebrities in the sports entertainment industry, with winners, losers, villains, rebels and leaders being other categories. These categories are established characters in the narratives that the media create to give sport meaning.

Sporting heroes have traditionally been constructed around qualities associated with masculinity, such as strength, stamina, decisiveness and courage (O'Neill & Mulready, 2015; Bruce, Hovden & Markula, 2010; Markula 2010, Pfister 2010). Hargreaves thus believes that the sporting hero has a gender identity, which makes it impossible for women to be heroes on the same terms as men. Women's sport has historically been marginalized and trivialized, and sportswomen who have in fact put in exceptional performances, even according to male ideals, have been defined differently from sportsmen. Hargreaves believes that the hero and the heroine should thus be differentiated as different types of heroes (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 2).

However, in recent decades there has been a change in Sweden and other countries regarding media's representation of women's sport (Bruce, Hovden & Markula, 2010). Quantitative analyses show that women's sport is being given more and more space in the mass media, at least in connection with international championships such as the Olympic Games and the World Championships, in commercially strong sports (Hedenborg, 2013). A study of Swedish newspapers reporting from the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004, demonstrates that it was Carolina Klüft who was the Swedish sportsperson most written about during the Games (Tolvhed, 2010). The increased interest in women's sport is also reflected in qualitative changes. Several studies point out that there is an increased ambivalence in sports journalists' representation of women sports stars. There are also innumerable examples of sportswomen who have gained international star status at the same time as examples of trivialization and sexualization still exist (Eagleman, 2014; Pfister, 2010; Bruce & Wensing, 2003). In the light of this development, Bruce (2016) believes that there is a need for new perspectives regarding media's reporting of women's sport. Differences between men's and women's sport

do not need to be solely negative. Bruce points out a development where the media, not least the social media, portray what is distinctively female as something positive. A female sporting hero today can be strong, tough *and* beautiful without there being a contradiction (Bruce, 2016).

The aim of this article is to let a specific case contribute to increased knowledge of media's construction of sporting heroes in general, and of female sporting heroes in particular. The study is a qualitative analysis of the reporting on Carolina Klüft in six Swedish daily newspapers during the major championships between 2002 and 2007. The principal questions examined are how Carolina Klüft's performances and personal qualities were valued during these championships.

Results

When Carolina Klüft came to the European Athletics Championships in Munich in 2002, she was still unknown to a wider sporting audience. Nevertheless, her career had developed dramatically prior to the European Championships. Previously, the same year she had taken bronze in the pentathlon in the European indoor championships and just one month before the European Championships, she had won gold at the Junior World Championships in Jamaica. However, performing at the Junior World Championships was one thing, but performing in her first major outdoor championships was something completely different. Few journalists seriously believed that Klüft would also be able to be at her best at the European Championships after peaking at the Junior World Championships. It could be said that the expectations of Klüft were rather hopes that she might be able to be in the fight for a medal. Expectations in the Swedish media were, therefore, low. She was considered to be a promising future prospect, but the step from junior to senior was considered too great for her to be able to hope for one of the top places (*Dagens Nyheter*, July 22, 2002).

Klüft began the championships in a sensational manner. With growing fascination, the journalists noted how she set new personal records in three of seven disciplines. Despite her youth and inexperience, she managed to perform at her best when it really mattered. Her win was the top news story in all the daily



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An innocent child of nature: In a five year period from 2002 Carolina Klüft won Olympic heptathlon gold at the Athens Olympics and was world champion in 2003, 2005 and 2007. She also won European Championships in 2002 and 2006.

Photo: picture-alliance



newspapers examined, and the comments on the sports pages emphasized how sensational her performance was. She seemed to have come from nowhere and become a star overnight. One columnist described her as a gift to international athletics (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 11th August 2002).

The question is: what it was about Carolina Klüft's victory that was so sensational and made the press react with such unbounded enthusiasm? The performance in itself is not explanation enough. In the first place, a gold medal in the European Athletics Championships was not such an important achievement that it deserved an obvious place in Swedish sports history, especially not in the heptathlon, a somewhat obscure event for Swedish media. Historically speaking, it was an Olympic gold and the world record that created heroes in athletics. In the second place, there were several winners to celebrate in the 2002 European Championships. Both the high jumper Kajsa Bergqvist and the triple jumper Christian Olsson took their first golds in international outdoor championships. Klüft's victory was not as surprising as the media described it. Her winning points from the Junior World Championships was best in the world for seniors as well, and on the basis of previous results, she was one of the favorites to win.

No, what was sensational about Carolina Klüft was not the fact that she won, but the *ways* she did it. Apart from surpassing all expectations and setting a personal best in three of the seven disciplines, she literally acted her way through the competition. She waved and grimaced when the TV cameras zoomed in on her, clawed at the TV camera lens with her yellow and blue nails, and showed her full range of emotions in each part of the competition. When others were competing,

she was often to be found standing by, enthusiastically cheering on her rivals. In interviews she spoke of how she prepared by listening to music from Disney films and Swedish pop music. Again and again she described herself as a completely normal girl who just competed because it was fun. The journalists were amazed that she did not take the championships more seriously. Competing in Munich's Olympic Stadium seemed no stranger to her than training with her friends in her home town of Växjö in the south of Sweden (*Aftonbladet*, 10th August 2002; *Expressen*, 11th August 2002).

The combination of the young bouncy girl, who made strange faces before a critical moment when competing, and the top performances of an elite athlete created a narrative that did not fit into the traditional framework of sports journalists' accounts of Swedish heroes (Wennerholm, *Aftonbladet*, August 10, 2002).

But it was not, of course, the unwritten laws of athletics that Klüft defied, but the sports journalists' own preconceptions of how a Swedish sports star should be. Whannel (2002) believes that sports journalists' way of describing sporting events is based on more or less pre-made narrative templates. By comparing a new star with already established stars and thus fitting him or her into a pre-existing reference framework, he/she becomes easier to understand for the general public. The problem is that not all stars fit into media's pre-made stories. Hills and Kennedy (2009) have shown how the English middle distance runner, Kelly Holmes, created problems for English journalists because she so clearly deviated from the standard reference frameworks for how an English sporting hero should be. As a woman with a working class background, with an English mother and a Jamaican father, and a history of sporting failure, she was far from being a prominent star or an English hope for gold before the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004. When she, nonetheless, won two golds, the victories could not be explained as they did not fit into any of the established explanatory models. In the same way, Swedish journalists did not have a pre-made narrative in which to put Carolina Klüft. She was unlike any other Swedish sports star and there were, therefore, no given reference frameworks with which to explain her. Consequently, she was described as strange, inexplicable, and even unreal.

But Carolina Klüft needed explaining, both as a sportswoman and as a Swedish hero. It was not sufficient that she was a Swedish citizen, spoke Swedish with a regional accent and had naturally blonde plaits. To be able to embody the Swedish identity, the journalists needed to explain what it was about her that was so Swedish. In this context, a narrative developed in the media of Carolina Klüft as a child of nature. In brief, it said that what made Klüft unique was that she had kept her natural playfulness. While others had been formed

by the cynicism and commercialism of international athletics, she was the same innocent girl who had grown up in the security of her home town of Växjö. She was herself and did not care about what people thought of her. She had not changed. (Berglund, *Göteborgs-Posten*, 11th August 2002).

The media narrative of Carolina Klüft as a child of nature had several functions. The most important was that it explained the “impossible” combination of childlike playfulness and elite-level performance that Klüft represented. The talent and the winning instinct that she possessed did not come from machine-like and performance-oriented training, but from the pure joy of exercising her body and competing. She had transferred the playful atmosphere among the friends with whom she trained in Växjö to the Olympic Stadium in Munich. It, therefore, did not bother her at all that she was competing against the best heptathletes in the world, watched by millions of TV viewers. She was only doing what she always did. She was natural. After her victory in the 2002 European Championships, a columnist called her athletics’ answer to the beloved fictional figure, Pippi Longstocking (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 11th August 2002).

It was a parallel that stuck. Just like Pippi Longstocking, Klüft could be seen as the strongest girl in the world, who did what she pleased without caring about what people thought of her. Furthermore, she was a girl who did not want to grow up. She even said it herself, “I’m silly, childish, frivolous and foolish. They call me the clown of the European Championships. I want to be a child as long as possible, because children have the most fun, and I know that.” (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 11th August 2002)

The child of nature myth also fulfilled the function of anchoring Klüft in the Swedish cultural environment. A sports columnist painted an almost national-romantic portrait of Klüft’s childhood in the naturally beautiful Swedish countryside.

The link between her performances in the athletics stadium and the years when she grew up made Klüft part of an established Swedish sporting hero narrative. From having been seen as strange and inexplicable, she could now join the long line of Swedish sporting heroes who were brought up to be heroes in the Swedish countryside. The narrative of the child of nature meant that the many and sometimes contradictory experiences of Carolina Klüft could be gathered together in a meaningful unit, with the Swedish national identity as the common base. The secure residential area, the closeness to nature, and the solidarity with her friends at the training facility were portrayed in the media as typically Swedish phenomena that could be found everywhere and anywhere in Sweden, but nowhere else. It was not an obvious recipe for producing super athletic talent, but it inspired hope that the Swedish sporting model still worked.

The girl hero – Carolina’s media infantilization

The problem with the narrative of Klüft as a child of nature is that it diminished her own sporting achievements. It was of course she herself who ran, jumped, and threw herself into the world elite in athletics. But the message that was conveyed was that she hardly understood what it was that was going on. She was described as a big child who did not plan and did not reflect on what was happening. At a press conference during the European Championships in 2002, she was asked who her worst rival was. When she could not remember the name of this rival, she happily noted that “I don’t have a clue about anything.” (*Expressen*, 8th August 2002). She was sometimes described as a child who was not in control of her own situation, and one columnist began to worry whether she would not be able to perform as well if the playfulness and the joy were taken from her (*Stolt, Sydsvenskan*, 23rd August 2003).

The infantilization of Klüft’s own achievements came as a logical consequence of media’s narrative about her as a child of nature. What fascinated the journalists was that she seemed totally unaware of her own ability. She seemed to live in the present. She competed and had fun and let someone else take care of all the boring things, like planning and tactical dispositions. Even though she was the one who won the competitions, the message was conveyed that the heavy responsibility for her future career was in the hands of her (male) trainer. This phenomenon is not unique to Carolina Klüft. On the contrary, many authors have shown that sportswomen are often described as



Forget emotions:
the media were not
interested that
Carolina Klüft won,
but how she won.

Photo: picture-alliance



Marketing in the fore-front of the European Championships in 2006 in Göteborg: star photographer Jason Bell displayed the 'artistic' pictures which he had taken in training. Yet the thriller everyone hoped for never came to pass. Klüft's greatest rival, French-woman Eunice Barber was forced to retire from the competition through injury, just as she had at Athens 2004.

Photo: picture-alliance

younger and more inexperienced than they really are in the media. Infantilization is seen as one of many ways of describing sportswomen which contributes to the general marginalization of women's sport. This is primarily to create a perception that sport for women is more of a game than it is for men, but also because it objectifies women by focusing on their gender rather than on their achievements (Brookes, 2002, Bruce & Wensing 2003, Markula 2009). Bruce and Wensing (2003) show in an analysis of media's reporting on the Australian runner Cathy Freeman that, even though she was 27, she was often described as a girl with behaviour that was considered typical of girls. In Carolina Klüft's case it is clear how media's narrative about her was not based on an ideal picture of the Swedish sports star in general, but on journalists' perception of Swedish teenage girls as innocent, naive, and natural.

There are also examples of interpretations of Carolina Klüft that are not part of the narrative of the child of nature. One columnist instead described her as a representative of a new generation of young Swedes who had learnt to make full use of the visual power of television. Rather than being dizzy and innocent, the journalist saw another, and considerably more calculating Klüft, who had full control of the situation. In this article Klüft is described as smart and self-confident, a person who controls rather letting herself be controlled, and who lets everything happen on her own terms (Anrell, *Aftonbladet*, 11th August 2002). In

another article Klüft is described as "a little less bouncy, a little more mature, but still as happy and hungry for records" (Littorin, *Dagens Nyheter*, 31st May 2003).

What both of these alternative interpretations of Klüft have in common is that they describe her as a representative of a new generation that is on its way to taking over. They also show that the prevailing picture of Carolina Klüft as an innocent child of nature is not self-evident. It was quite simply the best story. By emphasizing the statements and sequences that confirmed the required picture, the media created an experience of Carolina Klüft which, at best, was a very distorted picture of reality.

Something that does *not* arise at all in media's portrayal of Carolina Klüft is sexualization, which otherwise is common in media's representation of young female sports stars. If this is because she did inspire this angle, or because Swedish journalists chose not to interpret her as a sex symbol, is difficult to judge. Probably it is a combination of both. Klüft took a clear stand against all forms of sexism with regard to herself and consistently refused to have pictures taken of her that could be interpreted as provocative.

A new athlete is constructed

With her victory in Munich in 2002, Carolina Klüft had made her sporting breakthrough and been introduced to the Swedish public. But she was still not a fully developed hero. Even though the feat of winning gold in the European Championships in her first major senior competition was impressive, journalists never tried to convey the experience of her victory as being of national importance. The basic elements of her heroic narrative were in place, but important parts were still missing.

In the first place, the picture of Klüft as a dizzy teenage girl needed to be revised. During the European Championships in 2002 journalists had been fascinated by her youthful enthusiasm and innocent attitude towards sport. But the picture of Klüft as an innocent child of nature without control of her own situation quickly became untenable. It was above all too simple. Klüft's playful expressions of joy were largely a construction, a selection of TV images and statements that were repeated time and time again, until they seemed to show the true picture. It became increasingly obvious that Klüft not only trained hard and purposefully, but also that she had full control of her life and her career, including outside the sports stadium. For example, she spoke in an interview about how she turned down sponsors who did not share her values. Before she began her cooperation with Reebok, she researched that there was no child labor in their factories (*Expressen*, 8th August 2003). On other occasions she had objected when a photographer's

proposed pictures were too sexually provocative (*Aftonbladet*, 7th August 2003). Experts' concern that she would be destroyed or corrupted by greedy agents and sponsors thus proved to be completely groundless. Instead of the narrative of Klüft as an innocent child of nature, a new narrative came to the fore of an aware, young, and strong woman. Klüft's change was interpreted as her having accepted her role as a sports star, and the general perception in the media was that Klüft's more mature approach was better suited to her new role (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 6th August 2003; Olsson, *Expressen*, 22nd August 2003). Secondly, the heroic narrative about Klüft needed a sporting challenge that could test her heroic abilities. This challenge was found in the French athlete Eunice Barber. Barber was nine years older than Klüft and had most of her career behind her. She was the world heptathlon champion as early as the World Championships in Seville in 1999 and had since then had injury problems. Injuries had kept her out of the European Championships in 2002, but she was now back and, in her comeback in spring 2003, she had impressed with a result that was better than Carolina Klüft's total points when she won in the European Championships in 2002. In the weeks preceding the World Championships, the Swedish sports journalists built up Barber as Klüft's foremost challenger (*Aftonbladet*, 19th August 2003; *Expressen*, 9th May 2003).

Thanks to Eunice Barber, the media could replace the narrative of Carolina Klüft as the Pippi Longstocking of athletics with one of the classic stories of sports journalists, a sporting duel with clear moral undertones: the good guy against the bad guy. Barber was described in Swedish media as an aggressive loner who only focused on herself. She was considered to be a bad loser who was unable to appreciate Klüft's talent and good personality. A statement from Barber, where she was reported as saying that she did not want to be friends with Klüft, made headlines in several Swedish newspapers (*Expressen*, 19th August 2003; *Göteborgs-Posten*, 20th August 2003). The moral tension between Klüft and Barber gave their rivalry an extra edge, but it also served to strengthen the story of sport as a fight between nations, where Sweden was pitted against France.

A third theme that gave the narrative about Carolina Klüft greater depth occurred by chance during the 2003 World Championships. After the first day of competition, it was clear that the expected duel between Klüft and Barber had failed to materialize. Klüft was far superior and looked as if she was on her way to an easy victory. It was then that the drama struck with full force. In the long jump discipline, Klüft started with two no-jumps and, before her final attempt, risked not recording a result if her third attempt was also a no-jump. After the first two no-jumps, experts expected a safety

jump, but instead Klüft gave it her all and recorded the longest jump of the competition. Instead of dropping points to Barber, she extended her lead. The tension thus evaporated and she could relax and secure an overall victory by a good margin, ahead of Barber in second place. The drama in the long-jump discipline in the 2003 World Championships was just a small part of the long heptathlon event, but for the media it was the most important moment in the competition. It is moments such as these, where all the pent-up tension finds release in a concentrated sequence, that make some sporting events live on in the collective consciousness while others do not. It was the drama of the long jump more than the victory itself that led to Carolina Klüft becoming part of Swedish sporting history (Anrell, *Aftonbladet*, 25th August 2003).

The importance of drama becomes especially clear when comparing the reporting of the 2003 World Championships and the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. There was no Eunice Barber at Athens, because of an injury, and Klüft was thus able to win the heptathlon by the greatest winning margin ever in an Olympic final. The media were full of admiration, and Klüft was hailed as one of the greatest Swedish athletes ever. The feeling that was conveyed was that Klüft needed new challenges so that her superiority would not kill interest.

Deconstruction of a national hero

After the 2005 World Championships, the picture of Carolina Klüft in the media changed and became more complex. The period between the breakthrough in 2002 and the Olympic gold in 2004 had been one long love story between Klüft and the Swedish sports journalists. So far her career had followed an ideal heroic narrative, from the point of view of the media. The narrative had just one problem – what could surpass what had already happened? How could the narrative be further developed when she had already won everything there was to win? It soon became clear that the chasing of new victories was a stronger driving force in the heroic narrative than the repetition of old ones.

Following the 2005 World Championships, the feeling of sensation and drama that had previously made Klüft's competitions a national concern was missing. Despite easy victories in the European Championships in Gothenburg in 2006 and the World Championships in Osaka in 2007, the euphoria had given way to a feeling of saturation in the sports media. This was a feeling that had not been there before. After the European Championships in 2006, where Klüft had won easily without recording top results.

It was not that the value of Klüft's victories decreased in the eyes of the media. After the victories in Gothenburg in

After her third world title, Carolina Klüft sought new challenges, but at the 2008 Olympic Games she fell short of previous achievements. In the long jump she was ninth, in the triple jump she failed to qualify.

Photo: Jack Mikrut/Swedish Olympic Committee



2006 and the World Championships in Osaka in 2007, she was hailed in several newspapers as Sweden's greatest athlete ever. What was missing was not admiration for her performances, but enthusiasm for them.

Another example of the changed attitude of sports journalists to Carolina Klüft is that, from the World Championships in 2005, she was subjected to criticism. An important part of the media's construction of sporting heroes is that negative news is not published about them. Between 2002 and 2004 the relationship between the Swedish media and Carolina Klüft was unequivocally positive, but from 2005 the picture of her in the media was more ambivalent.

Klüft had already previously expressed irritation about what journalists wrote about her. Amongst other things, during the 2004 Olympics she had refused to answer questions about what she wore when she was asleep in bed (*Aftonbladet*, 13rd August 2003). This irritation, however, would bloom into an open conflict during the 2005 World Championships, when a columnist described her boyfriend, the pole vaulter Patrik Kristiansson, as "Carolina Klüft's most serious injury" (*Expressen*, 28th July 2005). That is about all it was, but Klüft and Patrik Kristiansson had previously felt poorly treated by the newspaper, and now their patience was at an end. They refused to advertise for the newspaper, which was the official sponsor of the Swedish athletics team, and they were given permission by the Swedish Athletics Association to take off the newspaper's logotype from their national sports clothing. It ended up with *Expressen* terminating the sponsorship agreement with the Swedish athletics team.

The interesting point about the criticism of Klüft was that it was aimed at her personality. As an athlete she was praised for being able to perform at her best under pressure. Not even her fiercest critics ever questioned her performances. The problem was that the glow of sensation that surrounded her in Munich in 2002 could not be maintained over time. Then she had represented

something totally new in international sport, and sports journalists were fascinated by her special combination of disarming playfulness and sporting performance at the very highest level. When she was then established as a hero, and she lost her innocent quality, she was perceived to be not as exciting. It was as if Klüft did not have a real personality without her crazy gestures and spontaneous expressions of joy in front of the TV cameras. Expressions such as unhuman and machine-like crept into the columns of several journalists.

It is clear that Klüft's development from girl into woman did not favour her heroic status. Media's representation of Carolina Klüft is in line with research which shows that the differentiation of male and female sport has led to the media developing different ways of relating to male and female sport. The boy's development into a man is a principal theme in the male heroic narrative. It is only the fully grown man who has the qualities necessary to shoulder the role of the nation's hero. But there is no corresponding development in the female version of the same narrative.

After the gold in the World Championships of 2007, Klüft decided to finish her heptathlon career and, instead, go in for the triple jump and long jump. The reactions in the media reflect the disappointment that Klüft was no longer chasing the most valuable medals. The continuation of the heroic narrative was the final deconstruction. The results in Beijing were interpreted as a failure (*Aftonbladet*, 16th August 2008). Interviews with Klüft make clear that it was injuries, the search for new challenges, and the constant pressure to win that led to her finishing her heptathlon career.

Her career continued until the summer of 2012, but in journalists' eyes the heroic narrative ended after the 2007 World Championships in Osaka. Everything that happened after 2007 was part of another story, a story where Carolina Klüft was degraded from being a national hero to one more in the line of Swedish athletes who, at best, could fight to achieve a place in the final in international championships.

Discussion

When Carolina Klüft made her breakthrough, it was as if Swedish journalists were hit by a shock wave. Klüft's outward-going and charismatic personality defied all preconceptions of and broke all conventions about how a female Swedish sports star should be. She was described as a child of nature, brought up in the Swedish sports movement and with the countryside as a given part of her life. She quickly became beloved by the columnists of the sporting press, who hailed her personality and her ability to perform her best when the stakes were highest.

There is a clear ambivalence in media's representation of Klüft during the first years of her career. As an athlete she was hailed as a traditional Swedish sports hero when her achievements were focused on. She was compared with names like Björn Borg, Ingemar Stenmark, and it was discussed whether she was the foremost Swedish track and field athlete of all time. But the comparison with former male heroes only stretched as far as her sporting achievements. As a person, Carolina Klüft was presented as a heroic role model created for young Swedish sportsgirls, with innocence, spontaneity and childlike joy as key elements.

Media's infantilization of Klüft did not mean that she could not be hailed a national hero. On the contrary, it was a precondition of her heroic status. Media's narrative about Carolina Klüft was without doubt a heroic narrative. As long as she was associated with childish pranks and generally dizzy behaviour, she acted as a symbol for qualities with which many Swedes seemed able to identify. She became a youthful type of hero who, exactly like traditional heroes, carry out achievements of great importance, but had other qualities than the traditional, male sporting hero. Where traditional heroes are associated with strength, stamina, courage and decisiveness, the narrative about heroines is instead based on the natural joy of exercising the body, innocence, and purity.

Toni Bruce (2016) believes that women sports stars are increasingly met with respect and seriousness in the media on their own terms, without being compared with male sports stars. Carolina Klüft was described in a way that sportsmen would never have been described. But it did not reduce her potential of becoming a national hero. On the contrary, she became a hero with the qualities that she actually displayed. The problem was that she could not develop. A central theme in media's narratives about traditional sporting heroes is the development from boy to man, where one's sporting ability to harden and develop is an important part of the process. While boys' maturing into men is seen as a natural aspect of sport, Klüft's development from girl into woman was not met with the same appreciation in the Swedish sports press. Several columnists considered that Klüft became boring and machine-like when she no longer showed her feelings openly. The fact that she continued to win was of little help. When she no longer fitted into the narrative that the media had created for her, she became uninteresting in the eyes of several journalists.

Media's reporting on Carolina Klüft demonstrates how the male hegemony in sport is maintained. By presenting Klüft as naive and innocent and, at the same time hailing these qualities in her, a female heroic ideal was reproduced that describes the female sporting hero as young, inexperienced, and dependent on the

support of a man. At the same time, it is becoming clear that opportunities are being opened up for sportswomen to become national heroes in their own right. The increased media interest in women's sport is not just a change of a purely quantitative nature. The praise Carolina Klüft received shows that traditional norms for national sporting heroes are being challenged by new ideals. The Swedish sporting hero no longer needs to be a strong man. It can also be a young woman.

Like Bruce (2016) we see the need to analyze women sports stars using new perspectives. By abandoning the point of view that the differentiation between male and female is automatically negative for women's sport, opportunities are opened up to identify different types of women heroes. Carolina Klüft is an example of a female sporting hero who was associated with youthfulness, playfulness, and innocence. These are qualities that would hardly be associated with the tennis player, Serena Williams, for example. The mediafication of women's sport is changing. It is not an unproblematic development, as the media's reporting on Carolina Klüft demonstrates, and more analyses are needed to show how the conditions for women sports stars are impacted by this development. ■

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