Constructing a Traitor: How New Zealand Newspapers Framed Russell Coutts' Role in the America's Cup 2003 (2007)

This thesis investigates how the news media constructs reality through newspaper representation of the role of a hero in society and a hero's loyalty to the nation. The research is based on a case study of New Zealand newspapers and how they framed Russell Coutts' role in the America's Cup 2003. Russell Coutts was the leading figure of "Team New Zealand" in 1995 and in 2000 when his team won and defended the America's Cup. He was praised by New Zealand newspapers as a hero during the time he led "Team New Zealand" from one victory to another. But, after the victory in 2000, Russell Coutts signed a contract with the rival team "Alinghi" and the framing of his heroic role in the New Zealand press changed. He became a defector from his team and he was framed as a traitor to his own country. Using discourse studies and semiotics as the main theoretical and methodological background, this thesis analyzes how the process of news framing is influenced by the rules of journalistic practice and by the wider social environment. The thesis explores how news values blend with mythological narrative in journalists' daily routine of producing news stories that both construct reality and reaffirm society's dominant values. The study reveals that the re-presentation of the nation in the news media is a simplified construction of an ideal and transcendental
This thesis investigates how the news media constructs reality through newspaper representation of the role of a hero in society and a hero's loyalty to the nation. The research is based on a case study of New Zealand newspapers and how they framed Russell Coutts' role in the America's Cup 2003. Russell Coutts was the leading figure of "Team New Zealand" in 1995 and in 2000 when his team won and defended the America's Cup. He was praised by New Zealand newspapers as a hero during the time he led "Team New Zealand" from one victory to another. But, after Sir Russell Coutts had told Scuttlebutt how the 2013 America's Cup would be his last, but when he remained involved after his Oracle Team USA defended in the 34th edition, we suspected it was the grass that was greener (if you know what we mean). However, perhaps Coutts' vault is now full, as Yachting New Zealand reports how Coutts has gone from running the 2017 America's Cup to running a small yacht club on Auckland's North Shore. Coutts recently took over as commodore of the Manly Sailing Club and, according to long-time friend and vice commodore Harold Bennett, has been like a "big dog with Coutts won the America's Cup three times as a skipper - for two different countries - and twice as CEO of Oracle Team USA, which is owned by Larry Ellison, one of the world's richest men. Coutts remains CEO of Oracle Team USA, although he said his role is limited to overseeing the team's budget while general manager Grant Simmer and skipper Jimmy Spithill run the day-to-day operations. In a departure from America's Cup tradition, Oracle will sail against challengers in the round-robins even though it is guaranteed a spot in the America's Cup match beginning June 17. Has Oracle been sandbagging in the practice racing? Coutts, a New Zealander, considers Team New Zealand helmsman Peter Burling one of the world's best sailors. After the America's Cup victory and a hero's welcome in a country where sailing was a leading sport, Coutts remained in the spotlight by joining his design-team leader, Tom Schnackenberg, and tactician Brad Butterworth in taking over the administration of Team New Zealand, replacing yachting legend Sir Peter Blake. Securing and paying a team of yacht designers as well as a crew of sailors, negotiating broadcasting rights, finding sponsorship, and otherwise attending to the details of operating Team New Zealand became the responsibility of Coutts and his two partners. An even...