

**THE OTHER PRO SOCCER**  
Gabriel Escobar  
The Washington Post

## Analysis

Gabriel Escobar reminds readers that good stories are often hidden in plain sight. A season in the life of Latino soccer teams ringing the Washington, D.C., area could mean a wealth of feature stories on the immigrant team members, owners, and fans. But Escobar dives deeper into the history of the competition and returns with a narrative filled with complexity.

The piece finds and explores truths about the teams' talent, the owners' cash-only deals, and the loyal fans who bring their old-country allegiances to the transplanted sport "a crumpled dollar at a time" (**Text: p. 316**). But this story is not just about soccer.



Raqaef Billatoro, of team Mogotillo, played in the opening game for this year's Taca Cup. The team's support comes from about 4,000 immigrants from El Salvador. (Photo: John McDonnell, The Washington Post)

Pointing to the sponsorship of teams, the budding enterprises surrounding the league, and the overall rise in outside interest, Escobar equates the growth of Latino soccer leagues with the progress of the Latino business community (**DVD: Escobar interview, 2:23**). A soccer story, then, becomes a way to show immigrant assimilation in its smaller, less obvious, more telling details (**Text: p. 317**).

The underside of the story, the notion that some owners pay players and operate for-profit enterprises using public parks, gives the piece its edge. Reporting the negative side of a story requires precision, especially if the story is about under-covered communities, where so much of the media's storytelling already focuses on pathologies (**DVD: Escobar interview, 8:43; Text: pp. 326–327**).

Escobar gets candid interviews and borrows from his experience as an immigrant to write authoritatively about the struggle to assimilate without disappearing (**DVD: Escobar interview, 00:37**). His choice to conduct the interviews in Spanish may have raised the comfort level for the Spanish-speaking interviewees (**DVD: Escobar interview, 6:12**). But it's instructive to hear how Escobar guards against being perceived by his sources as something other than a fair, independent reporter (**DVD: Escobar interview, 4:24; Text: pp. 328–330**).

## In the Classroom



Goalkeeper Melvin Barrera, from El Salvador, warms up before the finals of the Taca Cup, which pitted Barrera's team, Mogotillo, against Alianza, a team of Hondurans. (Photo: The Washington Post)

Escobar spends some time in the interview and essay discussing the potential for sources to see journalists as allies rather than simply as reporters. It's very easy for the classroom discussion to stay narrowly focused on the possibility that a Latino reporter will get co-opted by sources simply because he shares a culture or language.

Urge students to consider the larger question of what, if anything, sources might assume about them because they share a common characteristic. Have them view the problem through the prism of what Dori Maynard of the Maynard Institute describes as fault lines—the perspectives of race/ethnicity, class, gender, generation, and geography. Help students to see how universal a challenge it is to maintain independence from sources. Explore with them strategies they might use to build trust with sources without surrendering their independence.

## Writing with Authority

The voice of authority in storytelling tells readers, listeners, and viewers that the journalist has a command of the subject. It frees the storyteller from the shackles of cumbersome attributions. But this has its share of peril.

Writing with authority requires a thorough knowledge of the topic gathered through experience, observation, research, and skillful interviewing. A reporter who is also a golf pro might produce a very different story about Tiger Woods from someone who only plays tennis. A reporter born in another country might understand the nuances of immigration much better than someone who is native-born.

Gabriel Escobar's status as an immigrant, his familiarity with Spanish-speaking cultures, and his skills as a writer and reporter gave him the confidence to speak with an authoritative voice (**DVD: Escobar interview, 00:37**). Likewise, reporters Anne Hull (**DVD: Hull interview, 6:56**) and Elizabeth Llorente (**DVD: Llorente interview, 00:01**) point out how careful, thoughtful observation lends itself to speaking with authority about a subject.



Gabriel Escobar

Journalists are most apt to go astray—making sweeping claims after minimal reporting; attributing motives or actions to large groups based on the actions of a few—when they've not done enough reporting. An important rule of journalism applies here: when in doubt, attribute.

## Also in the DVD Topic Index

Besides Writing with Authority, the interview with Gabriel Escobar has entries listed in the Topic Index in the following categories:

**Covering People Like You**  
**Describing People by Race and Ethnicity**  
**Doing Your Homework**  
**Ethics: Dealing With Stereotypes**

**Framing the Story**  
**Reporting through Observation**  
**Writing with Authority**

## Assignments

1. Gabriel Escobar shared a common language with the players, team owners, and fans, but he differed from them in socioeconomic status, in length of U.S. citizenship, and in his access to the media. Choose a group to which you belong. Discuss the possible diversity within your own group and how your knowledge of that diversity might help you develop story ideas.
2. Report on an observance or celebration in a community different from your own. Do a story on the event, accompanied by a one-page report detailing how you prepared yourself to report with authority on the subject.
3. In his interview, Escobar says, “I think all media should over the course of time—whether it’s a year or maybe longer—aim to produce as accurate a portrait of a community as possible” (**DVD: Escobar interview, 8:43**). Select a racial or ethnic community in your area and do a content analysis of how the leading television station or general circulation newspaper covers this community, looking back over the course of six months to a year. Answer the question: Has this community been depicted in a balanced way and “not always in the worst possible light?” as Escobar says (**DVD: Escobar, 9:47**). Include in your report the views of the newspaper’s metro editor or the station’s news director, as well as members of the selected community. Do they feel they painted an accurate portrait with their coverage?