Imagine the following scenario:

Eduardo Perez is the General Manager for a professional football club. Eduardo has recently been promoted from the club's finance department and on this particular day, as he walks into the office, he notices his cell phone is buzzing frequently. As he takes out his phone and opens his text messaging application, he sees a message from Felisa Garcia, the team's public relations director. She informs him that one of the team's star players took a nude photo of himself and thought he was sending it via private message on Snapchat, but it ended up being sent to the wrong person, and now the image has been captured and spread across the Internet. Felisa informs Eduardo that the local media are already criticizing the player and she is overwhelmed with requests for comment from the club. Felisa asks Eduardo how the club should respond and Eduardo tells her to meet him in his office immediately and they will discuss a response.

As soon as Eduardo walks into his office, his phone buzzes again. As he picks it up, he notices that one of the team's assistant coaches is calling. Eduardo is informed that on the last road trip, two of the athletes were out at a local bar and ended up taking some women back to their hotel. One of the players apparently recorded some of the activities in the hotel room and sent it to the other player's wife. The assistant coach tells Eduardo that the player's wife is very upset and both players have been exchanging hostile text messages and he is worried about an altercation happening. He asks Eduardo to call the agents for both players and see if a solution can be reached.

Eduardo makes a note to call the agents and arrange a meeting after he meets with Felisa. Eduardo recalls reading an article online about social media policies used by sports organizations, and he makes a note to ask his assistant to look into this topic more and research vendors who can provide training on social media for the players as well as team employees.

As Felisa enters Eduardo's office, he remembers that when he worked in finance, he didn't have to deal with social media, just numbers, which were much more predictable!

Eduardo's scenario above reflects just some of the ways that social media has had a profound effect on sport organizations. While previous modules have touched on the strategic application of social media for sport organizations, and the importance of understanding its audience, using social media to reach those audiences and obtain organizational goals, social media can also become a complicated issue for sport organizations. In a previous module, the potential of social media as a public relations tool

was addressed, and this module goes into more detail on how social media use by internal stakeholders such as athletes, team employees, and even family members can affect sport organizations. Additionally, sport organizations, like most other organizations, are looking for ways to minimize risk from social media, and integrating organizational guidelines, policies, and training are some of the ways sport organizations are working to manage risk with those inside the organization using social media.

3.1 Understanding Internal Stakeholders and Social Media

As we have discussed, social media has exploded across society, and many people are active on multiple social media platforms, and accessing these platforms from their mobile devices. Many celebrities, including athletes have been early adopters of social media, and consequently, sport organizations have often been a position of trying to play *catch-up*. That is, not only do sport organizations have to stay on top of social media trends for strategic use by the organization, but they also must be aware of how people within the organization (such as athletes and high-profile team employees who have a very visible presence on social media) are using these platforms. Indeed, many sport reporters now use content posted on social media as a *source* and given how easy it is for content to be posted, sport organizations cannot control or prevent issues from happening as they could with traditional forms of media. As a result, the risk for negative public relations issues has intensified, and sport organizations must not only be concerned about social media use by athletes, but also their family members, friends, and others in the athlete's network, along with the potential for team employees, such as coaches to also cause issues. Consequently, sport organizations have taken a variety of approaches to try and reduce the risk emanating from social media, and this module will discuss some of those strategies. To be certain, the latitude to which an organization can go depends on many factors, including whether athletes are unionized, organizational culture, and risk-tolerance.

3.1.1 Social Media Use by Athletes

Athletes have arguably, been impacted more significantly by social media than any other sport stakeholder. Athletes have now the ability to actively produce media content, which in ways, puts them in competition with sport reporters, as athletes can break their own stories, and fans no longer need the press to filter the relationship between themselves and athletes. Additionally, athletes can now share more of their identity and personality and to circumvent the organization in sharing information. Perhaps most importantly, while fans have very limited access to athletes in physical contexts such as stadiums, via social media; fans have nearly unprecedented access to athletes which, as discussed in previous modules, has created both positive and negative outcomes. A summary of the benefits and drawbacks are consolidated in the list below:

ATHLETES' SOCIAL MEDIA USE: BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

Benefits:

- Makes athletes appear more approachable and likeable.
- Allows athletes the ability to interact and engage fans.
- Enables athletes to express more of their identity (e.g., popular culture preferences, favorite foods).
- Provides an opportunity for corporate sponsorship.
- Offers platform for athletes to share first-person view of their experiences.
- Offers space for athletes to share their community and charitable work.

Drawbacks:

- Potential for athletes to divulge confidential information.
- Opens athletes up for criticism and hateful messages from fans and the public.
- Potential for athletes' private behavior to be captured and disseminated.
- Social Media use may become a distraction.
- Potential for athletes to post content that creates public relations issues.

Additionally, the athletes who play for a sports organization are often the most visible public face of the sports organization and as such, their social media activity is likely to be intensely followed by fans, the community, and the sport media. Thus, it is important that sport organizations understand what the athletes employed by their organization are doing on social media and assess the potential for risk, as well as how those athletes who are doing good things on social media can have their content integrated into the organization's social media strategy. Whether the athlete is engaging in positive or problematic social media use, it is important to remember that efforts to shape an athlete's social media presence should be collaborative. For professional athletes who have paid representation, working with agents and/or the athlete's public relations team may be advisable. For amateur athletes, or professional athletes who do not have representation, it may be advisable to have the club's media or public relations staff work with the athletes. It is also important to ensure that organization communicates about social media to its athletes, athletes know where the organization stands on social media, and that the organization is invested in making social media a harmonious, rather than contentious endeavor.

Certainly, every organization will have a different set of circumstances with its athletes. Some will have athletes with an audience of millions, while others may have athletes with an audience in the hundreds or thousands and some organizations may have stronger media intensity than others. Regardless of the circumstances, it is crucial to understand what a sport organization's athletes are doing on social media, and to assess the probability of risk. To help you better understand this process, using the table below, select three athletes who are affiliated with your organization and investigate their content on two social media platforms over the past 30 days. As you do so, make notes of what content is commendable, and which could be an asset to the organization's social media strategy; and what content might potentially cause negative outcomes:

Table 1: Athlete Social Media Analysis

Athlete Social Media Analysis		
Social Media Platform		
Athlete #1		
Athlete #2		
Athlete #3		

Source: prepared by the author

How athletes are using social media is an important topic for sport organizations to understand and address. Nevertheless, athletes are not the only internal stakeholders who an organization needs to be concerned with. Coaches have increasingly become visible social media users as well.

3.1.2 Social Media Use by Coaches

Just as athletes are very visible representatives of the organization, so are coaches. In fact, coaches can often rival athletes in terms of public visibility and commercial endorsements, particularly at the amateur level, where a coach tends to be a more permanent presence than the players. Additionally, although being later adopters than athletes, coaches have started to realize that social media can be a valuable branding tool, a way to connect with their players, and for coaches at the amateur level, an asset in player recruiting. As athletes tend to be younger and, perhaps, more technologically savvy, it is important that coaches make sure they understand the technical nuances of each social media platform they use. For instance, there have been several coaches who have sent messages on Twitter, thinking they were using the *Direct Message* function, but instead ended up posting a public message. Accordingly, it is important that sport organizations work with coaches (or their representation who often runs the coach's social media account) to make sure that there is an understanding of the nuances of each social media platform the coach will be using.

Additionally, just as an organization will need to address boundaries with athletes, so it will need to do with coaches. This is particularly evident when an organization is governed by a legislative body, such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) that has rules about when a coach can and cannot use social media to contact recruits. Moreover, coaches should also be cautioned on proper boundaries on social media, particularly with private messaging. For instance, there have been several coaches, at the amateur level, who have been arrested for the content they sent via private message on social media, which creates a serious public relations issue for the organization. Thus, while social media can be a great asset for coaches, it also contains risk, and making sure coaches have the proper training and understanding of social media and are aware of boundaries is a vital priority for sport organizations.

Although coaches and athletes are very visible public figures for sport organizations, it is important to be aware of what other organizational employees are doing on social media too. Again, sport fans have an insatiable appetite for information, and can use social media to track down a variety of organization employees.

3.1.3 Social Media Use by Team Administrators and Employees

While team employees and administrators may be less of a risk to initiate a public relations issue for the organization, it is nevertheless important to provide a consistent message about social media across the organization. Consider that many organizational employees have access to confidential information (e.g., that an organization is about to trade a player, or fire a coach) and what might be an innocent comment on a personal social media platform, can instantly create a media firestorm, prompt consternation amongst the fans and put the organization in a reactionary position. Whereas later in the module we will cover social media policies and guidelines for organizational employees, it is important that sport organizations assess which employees have access to confidential or sensitive information and stress the importance of keeping that information private and not divulging it on social media. To help you better understand this concept, use the following table to assess two employee job titles which might be at risk for revealing confidential information and assess the kinds of private information that could be released:

Table 2: Social Media Risk Assessment

Social Media Risk Assessment	
Job Position	Risks

Source: prepared by the autor

While it is important for organizations to be aware of how people inside the organization are using social media, this is not the end of the problem. In fact, given the public nature of social media, and the plethora of people seeking information about sport organizations, the family members and relatives of athletes, and other team employees can also create issues for a sports organization on social media.

3.1.4 Social Media Use by Family Members and Relatives

Although organizations have a good deal of influence with team employees, even athletes, when family members and relatives of athletes and team employees enter the picture, the equation becomes more complicated. For instance, through a social media policy, an organization can influence how an employee uses social media, but there is little an organization can do to curtail social media use by family members and relatives of athletes and team employees. While the reach of the organization is somewhat limited with this stakeholder group, it is still important to be aware of potential risk. Thus, just as an organization might assess which athletes and team employees may put the organization at greater risk with social media content, so can an organization make these evaluations with family members and friends. To be certain, this can be a delicate process and one that is better handled with care and transparency. In a situation where an athlete has professional representation, raising concerns about the way a family member or friend is using social media and how this behavior might negatively impact the athlete, could be raised with the athlete's representation. In other scenarios, a conversation with the athlete may be warranted, and may be better undertaken by someone who has a good relationship with the athlete. In any event, when such conversations occur, they should be done with empathy rather than condescension.

Even though the social media content posted by friends and family members can be something that a sport organization has little control over, with athletes and internal team employees, there are more concrete steps that can be taken to manage the risk of social media. However, there are still areas which organizations need to be careful about, such as being perceived as impinging on freedom of speech. The ways in which an organization can manage social media is the subject of the next section.