

The Worldwide Leader in Sports *en español*: Lino García, Director of ESPN Deportes

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ESPN Deportes is the undisputed leader in Spanish-language sports coverage in the United States. Through a variety of digital, broadcast, and print mediums, ESPN Deportes blankets the US with sports coverage *en español* that's tailored specifically for Hispanic sports fans who reside in this country.

Last month, I had the pleasure of speaking with the leader of the "Worldwide Leader in Sports *en español*", Mr. Lino García.

ESPN Deportes serves Hispanic sports fans in the U.S. through a diverse portfolio of Spanish-language media properties.



Seth Mason: Please tell the readers of *Vida Latina* a little about your background. Where are you from? What did you do before becoming *el jefe* of ESPN Deportes?

Lino García: I was born and raised in New York, and my parents are from Puerto Rico. I've been in the cable and satellite industry for decades, and I've always focused my efforts on marketing to the Hispanic community.

Prior to joining ESPN, I served as Vice President and General Manager of Sales and Hispanic Marketing for Universal Television, and as Vice President and General Manager of Sony Entertainment Television, where I was responsible for all aspects of the television operation in Latin America.

Earlier in my career, I held several positions with HBO en Español.

SM: Tell us a little about the history of ESPN Deportes.

LG: ESPN Deportes is the culmination of years of efforts to serve the Hispanic sports community in its own language. In the 1990's, then ESPN Vice President George Bodenheimer (now President of ESPN and ABC Sports) began exploring the idea of offering programming in Spanish. George instinctively knew what the 2000 Census would reveal: that the Hispanic community was a rapidly-growing market segment that was undeserved in terms of sports coverage.

Despite the fact that the U.S. Hispanic population has been growing rapidly for years, it was largely omitted from national sports coverage before the arrival of ESPN Deportes.



Just as George predicted, the 2000 Census revealed a staggering increase in the number of Hispanics residing in the US. The results forced American media companies to, for the first time, formulate strategies to serve the Spanish-speaking community. Due to George's foresight, ESPN had a head start.

That year, ESPN began to simulcast some of its Major League Baseball coverage in Spanish, with commentary, interviews, and even commercials in Spanish.

In 2001, ESPN took a step further, producing Spanish-language simulcasts for broadcasts of all kinds, year-round, on a new network called "ESPN Deportes". In 2002, ESPN Deportes became a 24 hour network like ESPN.

In 2003, ESPN Deportes was given its own website, its own radio network, and even its own magazine. Today, ESPN Deportes is a multimedia giant that serves the Hispanic community through a wide range of Spanish-language media properties that are driven by Latino sports fans.

ESPN Deportes features special Hispanic/Latino coverage that can't be found on ESPN's other properties.



SM: ESPN Deportes filled an unmet market need for Spanish-language sports programming in the US, was a first mover in national Spanish-language sports programming, and broke into the US Spanish-language sports market with the goodwill of the ESPN brand behind it. I'd say that's a slam dunk business move.

But how does ESPN Deportes address differences in programming preferences between first-generation Latino immigrants and subsequent generations of Hispanic-Americans, who may have grown up "Americanized"?

LG: ESPN Deportes is proud to employ a diverse staff that consists of people from a variety of backgrounds. Some of our employees are relatively-new arrivals to this country, and some of our employees have never left the US. The diversity of our staff reflects the diversity of our programming.

SM: According to some recent demographic studies, there exists a phenomenon in the United States called the "digital divide". According to the "digital divide", only a small percentage of Spanish speakers in the US have internet access at home.

Despite this fact, ESPNDeportes.com is now one of the 100 most-popular websites in the US. Do you think the site's popularity is an anomaly, or do you think it suggests that the "digital divide" has been exaggerated?

LG: In some poor communities—Latino and non-Latino—there is less access to the internet. Nevertheless, Hispanics are gaining internet access throughout the country at a rapid pace. In some parts of the country, Hispanics have been adopting broadband internet access at a faster rate than other demographics.

Additionally, there exists a sufficiently large (and continuously growing) Latino user base that makes ESPNDeportes.com a success.

SM: How could you summarize how ESPN Deportes differs from ESPN, apart from the language difference?

LG: ESPN Deportes is tailor-made for Hispanic sports fans, by Hispanic sports fans. It features Latin American sports coverage that you don't see on ESPN (Dominican baseball, Mexican soccer, etc.). It also produces its own "Hispanicized" versions of ESPN shows such as "SportsCenter".

NFL football is the second most popular sport among Latinos in the US...ESPN Deportes offers the most NFL content of any Spanish-language media outlet in the US.



SM: Speaking of product differentiation within the same company, what's the difference between ESPN's and ESPN Deportes' coverage of the same event, such as the World Cup? Apart from the obvious difference in language, are there differences between the two in terms of tone, style, or focus of commentary?

LG: For the most part, ESPN Deportes produces its own content with little input from ESPN. We focus more on Latino players and teams from Latin America, and we deliver content in a manner that's more appropriate for Latino sports audiences. For soccer, that means a higher level of emotional intensity, especially during the World Cup.

That said, ESPN Deportes is an ESPN brand. Like the original ESPN brand, we provide some of the best coverage and analysis in sports. We're a "worldwide leader in sports" as well.

SM: How does ESPN Deportes' online presence differ from that of other Spanish-language sports websites?

LG: Like ESPN.com, ESPNDeportes.com offers some of the best sports content in the world. We have some of the best writers and analysts in the industry producing content for the site, and we tailor our content to US-based Hispanics. No other Spanish-language sports website does exactly what we do.

SM: NFL football is now the second most popular sport among Latinos in the United States. Have you noticed a spike in demand for NFL coverage at ESPN Deportes?

LG: We've always provided NFL coverage, and we've expanded it in recent years to meet the growing demand from the Latino community. Recently, some of our NFL specialty coverage had ratings on par with those of ESPN.

"Dream Job: El Reportero" will offer ESPN Deportes fans from all over the US the opportunity to work with Worldwide Leader in Sports.



SM: Finally, what would you say to the readers of *Vida Latina* who dream of following your career path?

LG: I would tell them to watch "Dream Job: El Reportero", on ESPN Deportes. It's a show in which people who dream of being reporters compete for the opportunity by covering the 2006 World Cup in Germany. The show will provide Latino fans from all over the country the once-in-a-lifetime chance to work with Worldwide Leader in Sports at the largest sporting event in the world.