

National World

National World features in a Sky flagship series

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Six of National World's newspapers and websites are about to feature in a flagship Sky series looking at the highs and lows of local journalism through the eyes of two comedians – Josh Widdicombe and Nish Kumar.

The series called 'Hold The Front Page' has been nearly two years in the planning and making with episode one The Blackpool Gazette transmitting at 9pm on Sky Max, on January 4, 2023. All episodes will be available On Demand.

Following Blackpool, the following newspapers will feature:

West Sussex Gazette
The Yorkshire Post
Farming Life
Northamptonshire Telegraph
The Scotsman

The project was co-ordinated by National World deputy editor in chief Gary Shipton who worked with the production company to produce a pilot 18 months ago followed by filming of the full series last spring and summer.

Sky's new series will follow the highs and lows of Nish and Josh as they travel across the UK working for a different local newspaper and its website each week on a mission to find real local stories strong enough to make the front page.

Their investigative journey around Britain will see them delve into local mysteries, take part in unusual events, cover the burning issues of the day and even involve themselves in the news or enlist a celebrity or two to help them out along the way. But with almost no journalistic experience the pair will have to rely on their quick wits and natural curiosity as they attempt to get to the heart of what makes each town or village tick – digging up some extraordinary scoops. This will be an eye-opening look at some of Britain's amazing local communities through the lens of their local newspaper. What could possibly go wrong?

Neil McIntosh, Editor of The Scotsman, is one of those taking part in the new series.

"It was a pleasure to welcome Josh and Nish. Arriving in the middle of the Edinburgh Festival, they dipped their toes in the full range of Scotsman coverage – from show reviews to rocket launches, via one of Scotland's most eminent politicians, and one of its most fearsome actors. It was quite the roller-coaster."

That roller-coaster ride started rather appropriately in Blackpool on the daily title the Gazette. Editor Nicola Adam said: "It's always great to have an extra pair of hands or two in the newsroom at the Blackpool Gazette and Josh and Nish were certainly willing to go the extra mile in pursuit of a front page byline – if not always in the right direction. Blackpool is a fantastic news patch and the lads certainly uncovered some of the resort's quirky characters and wonderful idiosyncrasies during their time with us – as well as being trusted with what's safe to say was a prime tip-off!"

“I really hope the show demonstrates the breadth of what we do across local news in the UK, it’s not all bad news as the vast majority of stories we tell is to showcase our wonderful communities and people as well as advocating on the issues which matter to them. We genuinely appreciate our readers and we welcomed this opportunity to shine a light on some of the work we do, day in and day out here in Blackpool and across the UK. Thanks to Josh, Nish and the entire team.”

James Mitchinson, Editor and Editorial Director of the Yorkshire Post, said: “In this, my 20th year in local journalism, Josh and Nish brought to my door a challenge like no other. News editing two minds more focused on how to chuck the next Malteser across the desk into the other’s mouth whilst whining about the word count is not something you ever see on the newsroom floor of The Yorkshire Post. Though, I’ll never forget the look on Josh’s face when I pulled up their hi-jinks and reminded him that whilst that sort of behaviour may have been acceptable at one of his previous employers – Dora the Explorer Magazine! – it would not do whilst on duty for Yorkshire’s National Newspaper.

“But, seriously; we feel very privileged to have worked with Josh, Nish and the whole production crew to whom we feel indebted for shining a light on the work we do for the betterment of Yorkshire. I cannot wait to see it for myself.”

In Northern Ireland, they tried their hand at agricultural coverage. Ruth Rodgers, Editor of Farming Life, observed: “Farming Life has been a ‘must read’ in the farming community here since 1963 and is a firm favourite on every kitchen table on a Saturday morning. It reflects the business end of things, but also highlights all the triumphs and trials of our livestock breeders, farmers and farm families.

“I hope the episode showcases the beautiful scenery in Northern Ireland and also introduces a new audience to some of our local personalities and people within our largest business sector.”

Alison Bagley, reporter for the Northamptonshire Telegraph, also welcomed the duo. “Nish and Josh fitted very well into life in the Kettering newsroom. It was a surreal experience having them on the team albeit for a week. They were thrilled to see how well their bee rescue story went online and they did work very hard providing original content for the live blog.

“If they wanted to come back for some more shifts that would be great. We are always striving to bring amazing, informative and relevant stories to our readers – hopefully viewers will see the hard work and dedication that goes into reporting the news.”

Gary Shipton said: “I know people will really enjoy seeing Josh and Nish getting to grips with the world of local journalism. Our job is much more than reporting the news and holding those in power to account. We are here to cheer on – and cheer up! – our communities, to celebrate their successes and to really bang the drum for the people we serve. I know how keen Josh and Nish have been, amidst the laughs and self-deprecating humour, to help convey that message.”

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