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DISCOVER OUR TITLES IN SPORTSCASTING

SPORTS ON TELEVISION
The How and Why Behind What You See
Dennis Deninger

TOTAL SPORTSCASTING
PERFORMANCE, PRODUCTION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

TELEVISION SPORTS PRODUCTION
JIM OWENS
5TH EDITION

THE TV PRESENTER’S CAREER HANDBOOK
HOW TO MARKET YOURSELF IN TV PRESENTING
KATHRYN WOLFE

ON CAMERA
HOW TO REPORT,Anchor AND INTERVIEW
Nancy Rearton

RADIO PRODUCTION
ROBERT McLISH AND JEFF LINK
6TH EDITION

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Introduction

This FreeBook is a primer for any aspiring student or professional, looking to break into the field of television and radio sportscasting. Whether you want to be in front of the camera, on the microphone, or work behind the scenes, this goes through the key roles and gives you the techniques and skills required to forge a successful career.

The book brings together excerpts from some of our leading titles, written by experts in the field of broadcasting and media communication. To obtain more details, make sure to check out the full text of the featured titles at Routledge.com/mediacommunication.

CHAPTER 1 - PRODUCING SPORTS ON TELEVISION

This chapter is taken from Sports on Television: The How and Why Behind What You See and provides a nuts-and-bolts, behind-the-scenes look at sports television production and the key roles. It discusses the value of research and study into potential sport stories and how to effectively use every tool of sight and sound at your command to present these stories in an entertaining manner that will leave viewers eagerly anticipating the next show.

CHAPTER 2 - CAMERA AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION

This chapter is taken from Total Sportscasting: Performance, Production, and Career Development. Cameras at sporting events are the eyes of the show. They provide a visual basis for viewers to see the action, up close and personal, in order to get a better sense of the action from the perspective of the players, coaches, and fans. This chapter covers what it takes to be a good cameraperson at an event or as part of an electronic news-gathering organization.

CHAPTER 3 - DIRECTING: TELLING THE STORY

This chapter is taken from Television Sports Production, 5th Edition. Directors must understand the way in which viewers watch television: how they think, feel, and want to be entertained. This means that the director must find ways to capture the viewer's interest. This chapter discusses how this is best done by doing thorough homework and proper storytelling: the two keys to better coverage.

CHAPTER 4 - SPORTS PRESENTING

This chapter is taken from The TV Presenter’s Career Handbook: How to Market Yourself in TV Presenting. This chapter is full of information and practical advice on what it takes to become a successful sports presenter, including insights from current
presenters on the essential skills you need and how to break into the genre.

CHAPTER 5 - INTERVIEWING
This chapter is taken from On Camera: How To Report, Anchor & Interview, 2nd Edition. This book teaches you how to become professional and effective on camera. Interviewing for television should appear to be a terrific conversation between you and your guest. In order to make your interviews conversations, you need to follow some simple rules, which are outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6 - COMMENTARY
This chapter is taken from Radio Production, 6th Edition. Radio commentary can create a breadth of vision much larger than the dimensions of a glass screen. This chapter covers the preparation required by commentators, explains how to convey sports action whilst maintaining listeners interest and dealing with unforeseen events.
Producing Sports on Television
Chapter 1. Producing Sports on Television

Sports is human life in microcosm. (Howard Cosell)

Every life is filled with stories. Stories of success and failure, of challenges and obstacles, of goals achieved or never met, of renewal and redemption, work done well or never well enough, of people who play by the rules and those who either push the limits or don’t play fair. In each life there are beginnings, middles, and ends. There is celebration and despair. And the optimist in us hopes that each life is enriched by love and at least one passion to pursue.

When lives intersect, where passions and goals come into confrontation you have drama, suspense, and more stories. To produce sports on television is to research and study all the potential stories that could play out in each contest, then use every tool of sight and sound at your command to present these stories from beginning to end in a manner so entertaining and informative that your audience will eagerly anticipate your next show.

TELLING STORIES

Every game, match, or event has many stories, big and small. It is the responsibility of the producers as journalists to uncover and report them. For example, a producer may be assigned to a boxing show whose headliners are unknown outside their home regions. Simply presenting each fighter’s record and the basic “Tale of the Tape” information like height, weight, and reach is not going to attract or hold an audience. But by spending the time to do some research on each fighter, the producer may find that “Boxer A” works full time in a warehouse, makes breakfast every morning for his three children before they head for school, and trains on nights and weekends because he just doesn’t make enough money in the fight game to support his family.

Now you have a story, and you have given your viewers a reason to root for this hard-working man. His name may not be famous, but the audience can relate to him as a human being. Anyone who has struggled to make ends meet, who has worked overtime to pursue his or her dream can identify with “Boxer A.” What happens to him, whether he succeeds or fails, now means something to the viewer.

People as social beings are always interested in other people. It’s part of what defines us as human. What else could explain our fan culture where stars become household names overnight and celebrity TV shows and magazines have millions of avid followers? Our interest in each other is what makes us want to know about the lives of our favorite players, what they did when they were growing up, how they got to the highest levels of their sport, and how they cope with the competition and the pressure
in their professional and personal lives.

The individual sports like boxing, tennis, and golf, as well as all the team sports, are over-flowing with wonderful stories of people pursuing goals they started dreaming about when they were children, of challenges and obstacles met and overcome, of rookies with unlimited potential and veterans struggling to keep their jobs or sharing their expertise with the younger generation that will replace them.

And yet the majority of sports telecasts live only in the moment. Their focus is that day’s performance, so they will tell you or show you a graphic with details like: a running back has 86 yards rushing, a batter is 1-for-3 with one RBI, or the point guard has made five assists and has scored nine points. Only the very best producers and commentators go deeper to bring players to life, to humanize them and make them more interesting. Adding a simple parenthetical phrase or a lowerthird graphic that gives the viewer just a little more biographical information can make a viewer care about an athlete who would otherwise be just another guy with a number on his back.

Tell me that a player’s hometown is in my home state and suddenly I care about how well he or she does on the field that day, and during the ensuing season. Tell me that the player graduated from my alma mater, and I’m a fan for life. Give me a quick note about personal triumph like “this is his first game back after two months of physical rehabilitation,” or “she’s the youngest of five girls who always had to beat her older sisters on the basketball court,” and I automatically want that person to succeed. Take the time to pre-record or do live interviews that will bring the athletes to life. If they share an insight into their success or just a smile, everyone watching has just gotten to know that player better, through his or her words, the tone of voice, facial expressions, and how they communicate with their eyes. If you make the audience care about the performers and the outcome, you will keep them watching and coming back for more.

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Every live sports event is a struggle that plays out before your eyes with the ending held in suspense. It is the producer’s responsibility to tell the viewer why it matters, why you should spend your time watching this event instead of doing something else. The key is to identify what’s at stake, what stories and matchups to watch for within the game, and how the team and individual players will be affected by the event and its outcome. To properly set up these stories, the opening of each show needs to clearly and succinctly define:

• The rivalries and history of the featured matchup or event.
• What victory or defeat will mean—a move up or down in the rankings, a spot in the
playoffs, an NCAA bid, a rematch with an old rival or a new contender in the next round, the continuation of a streak, a new beginning, or a final chapter.

• The games within the game—the veteran offensive line vs. the defensive line that has two rookies and two second-year players, the confrontation between two all-star basketball centers in the paint, the scoring prowess of a soccer player against the league’s leading goalkeeper.

• What the viewer will enjoy seeing—great power, precision, footwork, ball control, colorful showmanship. The best athletes in the world performing at the highest level, making moves the average person can only admire, never duplicate.

• What will change as a result of this competition. The impact on individuals, on team lineups and strategies, the tenure of a coach or manager, league standings, playoff chances, even the impact on communities and countries.

• The venue as the site of past glory or defeat, as home-field advantage or as antagonistic nemesis.

Television viewers armed with their TV remotes are a transient lot. So, even when all these stories have been properly introduced at the beginning of the show, regular resets are needed to help viewers who tuned in late to catch up. Returning from commercial breaks or during segments these resets serve as status reports. How are the stories defined at the outset playing out? Has the offensive onslaught that was anticipated turned into a defensive struggle, and, if so, why? Is the player who needed a stellar performance to keep his or her starting spot getting it done or falling short? If a loss means an early exit from the playoffs, what needs to be done to “seize victory from the jaws of defeat?” Adding quick story lines along with the score at regular intervals during each game or match gives meaning to the event and engages viewers who just tuned in as well as those who have been watching from the outset.

Producers who respect the sports they cover and share their passion with fans will always strive to show viewers something that they may not see on their own in order to heighten their enjoyment of the play:

• A tendency to be exploited, a move that telegraphs what’s coming next, slight shifts in momentum.

• The exquisite intricacies of a sport played at its highest level, like the change of speeds an all-pro receiver makes when he changes direction, the slightly dropped shoulder that changes the angle of a boxer’s next punch, or the deep knee bend that puts added power and speed into a tennis champion’s serve.

It is not enough to tell the viewer what has happened. What’s important is why and how plays, players, and teams succeed or fail. Once made aware of the factors that separate
success from failure and the nuances and intangibles that distinguish good performances from great, the viewers will start to pay attention to more of what’s happening before their eyes, not just the “down and distance” or “inning and score.”

During the course of a long season it is easy for production teams to fall into a rhythm with every new show looking and sounding just like the one from last night or last weekend. To avoid this numbing repetition the best advice is to never settle for the comfortable routine. Always look for new stories and angles to explore, and innovative ways to tell them. The best producers are inquisitive and creative, ot just at the beginning of the season, but leading up to and during every game or match.

THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF SPORT

The compelling nature of sport is its unpredictability. The heavy favorite doesn’t always win, so you have to watch to see what happens. Ask the Baltimore Colts who lost to the underdog New York Jets in Super Bowl III. Ask Mike Tyson who appeared invincible as world heavyweight champion until he was knocked out in 1990 by James “Buster” Douglas, a journeyman fighter with four losses on his record. You never know what’s going to happen, so the producer needs to prepare for every possible eventuality.

The team assigned to cover any sporting event starts out with a set of knowns, which provide story lines and production possibilities. In most cases these include:

1 The venue. The arena or stadium, indoors or out, in which the event will take place. Research will reveal any noteworthy events that have taken place there in the past, or if this is the first time it has hosted this sport or contest.

2 The competitors. The teams or combatants facing each other. Stories to develop include the backgrounds and histories of each team and player, and when they have met before. In the individual sports like golf or tennis, however, the big star could miss the cut or lose in the early rounds, putting lesser-known players into the spotlight. So that requires even more research, covering dozens of contenders.

3 What’s at stake? What will the outcome of this contest mean? Does the winning team move into first place or clinch a playoff berth? Will a winning streak or losing streak be broken? Is a starting player in jeopardy of losing his or her position if they don’t perform well? Is this the first opportunity for a rookie and how will he or she deal with the pressure?

4 The rules. How the sport is played, what’s legal, and what will be penalized.

5 The start time. When the event is scheduled to begin and how much time you have from the time you go on the air until the first ball or the start of each race or contest.
6 The scheduled length of the show. The total number of hours that are allotted for the event, along with instructions for what to do if the contest ends early or runs long.

7 Your personnel. You know who is assigned to your team in every role: producers and directors, play-by-play hosts and analysts, technicians, production assistants, statisticians, runners, and everyone in between.

8 Scheduled travel times. When the teams, players, your crew, and your production truck are scheduled to arrive. If the team or players are arriving from a great distance or from having just played an important or overtime game, there is another story to pursue.

9 The weather forecast. This affects all outdoor events, but is especially critical for golf tournaments, auto races, horse races, or tennis matches. The producer will want to know which competitors do best in the weather conditions expected: which horses run better on a sloppy track, which football teams have better records in freezing temperatures. And the threat of bad weather can also force changes in travel plans for the competitors and television crew members alike, all of which can affect the TV production.

10 Camera and microphone positions. In a site survey prior to the event, the producer, director, and operations manager will have scouted the venue to select the best places for cameras and microphones to provide the viewers with defining views of every critical action and the sounds of the game. Providing the TV audiences with video and sounds of everything that affects the outcome of a sporting event is the best way to tell its stories.

11 The content and length of pre-produced elements. Packaged teases and animations, features, interview segments, edited video from previous games or matchups, graphics panels with biographical or statistical information. These are all built to add context and interest to the telecast.

12 Total commercial time and number of breaks. How many times the show is required to take breaks in action and how long each break must be.

13 Sponsored features. The elements that must play in each show with sponsor identification and how each is to be executed. For example, "The Play of the Game presented by ____," or "The ____ Sky-Cam." Money has been paid to the network or station in advance, so these features must be incorporated into the show.

14 Promotional elements. The visuals and scripts for each upcoming program that must be promoted during the event, when these need to run (first half/second half/pre-game or post-game), and how often during the show.

15 The next show. On linear networks, the crew at each live event knows what program they precede. There are also guidelines explaining how that may change if an event
runs very short or very long.

These are the givens, the beginnings from which the producer works forward. Research and materials need to be gathered and prepared on deadline in order to be ready for what is required and expected. But just as much or more work goes into preparing for the unexpected, the unknowns:

1 Venue problems. The production team should know how to deal with technical, mechanical, or access problems at the venue. What do you do if the lights go out or the backboard breaks? How do you fill time if the game or match is delayed while problems are fixed? Do you have pre-recorded packages or a replay of the last game or match ready to go?

2 Who will emerge as the star? A player coming off the bench could be the hero, which means that the producer needs to have information and stats about every player who could possibly get into the contest, not just the starters. Graphics need to be built ahead of time for each player with details on his or her scoring average, batting average, best past performance, career highlights, and more.

3 The story of the game. The producer works with the entire broadcast team to anticipate every possible outcome. The contest could be an offensive exhibition or a defensive struggle, a ten-stroke victory or a “nail-biter” that goes down to the final playoff putt. If the underdog wins, how does that affect the standings, the coach and players, the losers? Each scenario requires preparation so that the audience continues to get information and entertainment regardless of who is winning or losing or what the margin of victory may be.

4 Rules violations. Dealing with a common penalty is easy, but information and expertise need to be ready if a rare penalty is called or if an official’s call is challenged. The last thing any network wants is for its commentators or shows to appear confused or uninformed.

5 The actual start time. A game may be scheduled to start at five minutes after the hour, but, if one of the two tennis players decides he or she needs to run to the bathroom, the start time is going to change. The pre-game pyrotechnics may leave behind too much smoke to start the game, so the producer has to be prepared to fill extra time before kick-off or first tip. And everyone on the crew needs to know in advance what to do if plans suddenly change.

6 The actual length of the show. When baseball games go into extra innings, football games go into overtime, golf tournaments end in playoffs, or tennis matches go past 6–6 in the fifth set, every production team needs to know how to continue. Do satellite or fiber transmission times need to be extended? How many more commercials will run? Do promos get repeated or are new ones added? How do you arrange bathroom
breaks for crew members who haven’t left their posts in three or four hours?

7 Personnel substitutions. Illness, family emergencies, canceled flights, or bad weather can prevent assigned crew members from making it to the venue. The producer needs to have options ready and available so that a local free-lancer or back-up commentator can be brought on in time for the show.

8 The weather. Even if the forecast was for sunny, cloudless skies, a thunderstorm or stray shower could affect an event staged outdoors. (I once had an indoor event that was delayed by rain: the roof leaked.)

9 Technical problems. One or more cameras could go down, so the best directors know how to cover an event with only one or two cameras functioning. Microphones stop working without notice, so spare microphones need to be at the ready with enough audio personnel to respond and repair. Recorded interviews may not play back, so notes on what the player or coach said should be ready so that important storylines are not abandoned just because of technical problems.

10 Impact on the next show. If the live event on the air runs well under its expected time, the network may require the production team to do post-game interviews and analysis segments, or it may call for an early throw to the next event for “bonus coverage.” The producers of both shows need to be ready. Or, if the first show runs past its scheduled “off-time,” the talent there may be required to start updating the audience on the progress of the game that is being preempted, or toss to short updates from the next venue. Planning for these possibilities will make the on-air execution seamless. Sitting at home watching television, it’s painfully obvious to everyone when this kind of planning hasn’t taken place.

ENGAGING AND SERVING THE AUDIENCE

All production decisions should be made on behalf of the viewer.

It’s a simple statement, but when applied it can make the difference between success and failure for any televised event or series. The viewer is the ultimate boss in sports television, not a room full of executives with impressive-sounding titles. Serve the viewers, give them entertainment and information, stories about people and teams that do extraordinary things. Add replays and analysis that will increase their enjoyment and improve their understanding of the sport’s “exquisite intricacies.” Do it without squeezing in over-commercialized sponsorship messages that distract from the story or take time away from game coverage. Do all these things and your show will be rewarded with strong audience ratings and loyal fans who watch for longer periods of time. If a producer makes a decision because he or she thinks the audience will like it,
not because he or she thinks the boss will like it, it will be the right decision more often than not. If viewers like the show, the higher audience ratings will translate into more advertising or subscription revenue, and then the boss will love the results.

THE TV SPORTS TOOLBOX

All television programs, including all sports programs, are a product of just four things:

• Time.
• Resources.
• People.
• Information.

If you have lots of lead time before your show, you can plan and develop new strategies, search for the best talent and give them ample training. A large budget will provide all the resources you need to produce the best possible show. That includes extra cameras and microphones in unique places, innovative technology to provide new, eye-catching ways of analyzing action, and additional editing facilities to improve the overall look of shows and how the stories are presented. Every telecast is made better by creative, hard-working, resourceful people. And every telecast is composed of information: team and individual records and histories, rivalries, biographies, anecdotes, scoring data and statistics.

If you are short on time and resources, don’t have enough people or people who are smart and creative, and your information is incomplete or inaccurate, your show will suffer. However, making the most with what you are given, and never settling for something you can’t be proud of, is the formula for success at any level.

Regardless of how large or small the budget, and whether there was a month to prepare or just a day, each sports event producer has a toolbox in which he or she will find everything needed to craft a compelling television product. Using each of these tools expertly will engage and serve viewers.

• Live pictures that are wide enough to show how plays develop, then tight enough to see dramatic moves and faces filled with emotion. Pictures tell us about the people, their families, the place, tradition, and community. As contests progress toward their conclusion, each play becomes more important and the pressure on each player builds, so camera shots should gradually move in tighter. Closeups capture tension and human drama, and they show viewers how each performer is handling the pressure or reveling in the moment.

• Replays show how and why something happened, and provide the viewer with the
best views of every game-changing play. Replays document the big moments from all the best angles. They can show the “games within the game” and the one-on-one matchups that good analysts use to educate the viewer to explain what worked, what didn’t, and why. Replays can show us how trends develop within each contest and provide insight into what may happen next. And they communicate human emotion in the reactions of victor and vanquished alike.

- **Commentary** leads the viewer through each event, setting up the story lines and what’s at stake, and then describing how that changes and evolves. We will look at the role and responsibility of television sports commentators in the next chapter on sports talent, but it is the producer’s job to define each commentator’s assignment, what type of information each should focus on, and when each is expected to speak or be silent.

- **Audio** from the arena, the court, or the field of play communicates in ways for which words will always fall short. You don’t need an announcer to tell you that “this place is rocking” if the producer and director have deployed enough microphones to catch the excitement and intensity of a sell-out crowd. The viewer can instantly sense by audio alone the importance of any event. If a winning serve or return is met with only a smattering of applause, it won’t matter who the players are and whether the picture is framed so you can see how many people are in the stands or not. The television audience knows that this tennis match doesn’t matter.

The sounds of players colliding, of pucks hitting goal posts, of foot against soccer ball, of coaches exhorting or consoling players, all add to the viewer’s comprehension of what is happening and why it has meaning.

- **Music** adds feeling, identity, and drama to sports television. It would be hard to imagine *Monday Night Football* without the theme music that has been an audio cue for the series for decades. It’s a signature that identifies the show from the beginning and welcomes you back from a commercial break, conjuring memories of exciting, enjoyable games from the past. Music underscores the action of edited highlights or the emotions of an edited profile, but it can distract attention from live action.

The use of popular music is strictly regulated by licensing agencies and the artists themselves, so very often the music you hear repeatedly on television has been purchased from composers as “works made for hire” in order that they may be broadcast an infinite number of times without the network paying a fee each time.

- **Interviews**, either done live or pre-recorded and edited for insertion into the telecast, can be used to advance story lines and explain what’s behind certain actions or reactions. Human beings are experts at reading what people really mean by what’s in their voices and on their faces when they respond to questions. By choosing which questions to pose, which answers to use, and when to show an interview subject’s face
or cut to video of what’s being discussed, the producer adds interest and another layer of information to the overall presentation.

- **Graphics** that are superimposed on the screen provide information about the competitors and help draw comparisons that give the viewer more to think about and a broader perspective. Well-researched graphics advance story lines, connect us with individual athletes, and add dimension to telecasts.

- **Scoring data** frames the action. The introduction of a constant score box during the ABC and ESPN telecasts of the 1994 World Cup of soccer changed the way Americans watch sport. No matter when viewers tune in, immediately knowing the score and how much time is left puts every action into perspective. A pitch thrown with a tie score in the bottom of the ninth inning can look just like a pitch thrown in the first, but it has far more meaning because of the timing and the score. A serve at 4–5 in the fifth set is far more important than a serve by the same player at 4–5 in the first. As data interface technology has improved and expanded, more instantaneous data is now available to add context to every pitch, pass, punch, or putt you may see.

- **Technological innovations** are developed and refined each year to enhance live television sports. From a simple “Telestrator” that allows the analyst to circle the player to watch in a replay, to computerized systems that track the speed and trajectory of a ball or allow the producer to rotate the field of play, technology can help improve a viewer’s understanding of the action. The key decision to be made by the producer and director however is whether the addition of new technology actually represents an advancement and not a distraction that diverts attention away from the real story and in so doing wastes valuable air time. The bigger the production budget, the more technology can be applied to a telecast, but adding “bells and whistles” doesn’t always translate into better audience ratings.

The best sports telecasts combine commentary and astute analysis with great pictures (live and in replay), audio from the field of play and participants, graphics that add context and information, and enhancements of sight and sound that add to the stories and entertainment value of the coverage. The telecast can be compared to a symphony filled with passion and excitement in which every instrument has its vital part, and the timing is critical. An orchestra only has one leader and one baton. For a sports telecast there are two. The producer and director work together to cue each instrument, get the most out of each section and blend them all together into a cohesive art form that communicates a multitude of messages to the intellects and emotions of each individual in the audience.

**WHO DOES WHAT?**
Every sports television production in the United States, from the local cable production of a high school football game to the Super Bowl, requires a core of professionals working in concert. The bigger the show the more people with a wider variety of specialties are added to the crew, but every sports telecast needs these basic jobs filled.

**Producer**

The producer is responsible for the content and the quality of the program. You can think of a producer as the “coach” of a team. He or she is the creative planner and administrative leader of the production crew, providing direction and guidance for all assigned personnel. The producer establishes the game plan, which includes a detailed rundown of which elements will be presented in what order and how the show open and every successive segment should be structured. He or she then assigns duties based upon the story lines that need to be developed and the elements that need to be built such as pre-produced interviews or highlight packages from past games.

The decisions that a producer makes will affect the perception of everyone in the viewing audience, which could be thousands or millions of people. The stories, words, and pictures chosen to document an event will define how it is perceived, and how every participant is perceived. The stories, words, and pictures that the producer chooses to omit are almost as important. If information is left out that could explain why a team or player failed to perform up to expectations, or why they exceeded expectations, the factors that go into molding the public’s perception will be incomplete or, worse, inaccurate. The producer is responsible to each and every viewer to make the best choices that will tell the full, unbiased story of that event.

During a live event the producer is the primary story-teller, leading the commentators to explain key points, selecting replays that will emphasize or analyze why and how plays succeeded or failed, and choosing when to insert graphics and all other pre-produced elements such as interview excerpts. These will add to the viewer’s understanding of what just happened, what it means as the game or season progresses, and who the players are who made it happen.

The producer is also accountable for the show’s budget. When problems arise he or she must make decisions based upon what is needed and what it will cost. For sports that have seasons running several months, additional expenditures one week can usually be offset by savings over the next few weeks. Budgets for onetime- only events tend to be less flexible.

**Director**

The director is responsible for the visual coverage and the look of a televised event. You can think of the director as the “quarterback” who is executing the producer’s game plan. The director plans where cameras should be placed to capture every action from
the best angles. Then he or she leads a meeting of all camera operators to present the coverage plan and explain what is expected in every situation. For example, each operator needs to know what to shoot when the football moves inside the near 20-yard line or the 20-yard line at the opposite end of the field. The director has specific assignments for each camera after a touchdown is scored: which cameras shoot the player who scored, the jubilant crowd, each of the coaches, or the defensive player who was beaten on the play, and how wide or tight their shots should be.

The director is the leader of the technical crew and as such works with the operations manager to set the production schedule leading up to the game and trouble-shoot any operational issues that arise. The director takes the producer’s rundown for the show and oversees the pre-production of all packaged elements, mixing video with natural sound, narration, music, graphics, and visual effects.

During the telecast the director instructs every camera operator as to the framing and/or movement of every shot, and then makes instantaneous decisions as to which cameras to take live to air. At the prompting of the producer, the director also calls for every replay and every graphic or packaged element. The director’s voice alone is what leads the technical director to manipulate the switcher, pushing the right button for every visual input and effect.

**Technical Director**

The technical director connects the director’s vision and creativity with the technology that puts video on television. It’s as if the technical director was playing the piano by listening to the composer tell him which keys to press, one after the other for hours on end. The technical director must know the capabilities of the switcher at which he or she sits in the television truck or control room, and have memorized the location of every input on every bank of switches. There are only eighty-eight keys on a piano. Most television switchers have many more than that.

**Operations Manager**

The operations manager is responsible for the survey of each sports venue, for the entire technical operation, and for the hiring, direction, safety, and payment of the technical staff. A survey is done at each venue to identify camera and microphone positions, the location of the mobile television truck(s), transmission facilities, and temporary office trailers. In many cases the survey requires an advance visit to the venue by the director and the producer along with the operations manager to plan the logistics of the production. The survey must also determine the length of cable runs needed, provide for crew accommodations, meals, and parking, find safe areas of refuge in case of a fire or other emergency, and locate or plan for the installation restroom facilities.
Once on site, the operations manager coordinates the set-up, installation, and testing of all technical facilities, solving problems and responding to the specific needs of each show as they arise. He or she works with the director and producer to schedule every technician's start time so that all the tasks needed to prepare for the live telecast can be completed in time for a quick rehearsal before the show goes on the air. The ops manager also coordinates the credentialing process with the home team or organizer so that each crew member can gain access to the areas of the stadium, park, or arena where their job function requires them to be.

*Associate Producer*

The "AP" tells the story of the contest through graphics displays. He or she takes direction from the producer on which stories to pursue. Then, using research and discussions with the analyst(s) assigned to that game, they support those stories with statistical, historical, and biographical graphics that can be built ahead of time in preparation for the live telecast. The best APs use their knowledge of the sport and their research to add new story lines that complement the work of the producer.

The graphics build for many events starts days before they are scheduled to occur. The sophisticated software and hardware that make multi-color, three-dimensional moving graphics possible can be interfaced with data stored on laptops or that come directly from official scorers at events. So the associate producer can be typing sets of graphics while he or she is on the plane bound for the event, or in the hotel room the night before.

During a telecast the AP is constantly offering graphics that are pertinent to the game situation at hand for the producer's consideration. Statistics are checked and updated using the scoring interface, and as new stories develop new panels may have to be built with the graphics machine operator to compare one player or team to another, or the current game or quarter to one in the past. Having prepared panels for every player and virtually every eventuality, it is rare that even 20 percent of the graphics that are built and stored ever get inserted on air.

Additional associate producers work with talent on interviews, edit and produce features and teases, and build the video elements that give each sports series its "look." Most producers were promoted from associate producer because they demonstrated strength as story-tellers, the ability to see a game as having multiple layers and factors at work, and the skills to smoothly coordinate the efforts of several people in pressure-packed situations.

*Assistant Director*

The primary job responsibilities for an "AD" cover the video elements used within each telecast and the timing of every segment. It is possible for one person on a smaller
production to handle all of these tasks, but very often the job is divided into two distinct roles: video AD and control AD.

The video assistant director works with camera crews to record interviews with coaches and players plus get shots of practice sessions, the host city, or campus. Then the AD works with editors and technicians to produce show opens, teases, bumps, and packages integrating the video shot at site with clips from previous games, animated elements, graphics, and music. (A “bump” is the short video piece used to roll into a commercial break, or which is played coming directly back from a commercial.) Directors regularly put the AD in charge of pre-production in the truck while they hold their camera meetings or do other planning or troubleshooting inside the venue.

During the live telecast this AD is usually in the video area of the truck helping the producer identify replay sequences, cueing the best interview excerpts or preproduced packages to use at a particular juncture, and editing new “bumps” to music using fresh video from the game.

The control AD is the link between the remote TV truck and the network or television station’s broadcast operations control room. Leading up to and during a live telecast the control AD keeps that communications link open, counting down to the scheduled start time of the show, counting the director into and out of prerecorded elements that are rolled into the show, and counting into and back from commercials. The control AD also has the list of all sponsored features and promos that must get into each live show. He or she works with the producer on the placement of these elements, helping to make sure that nothing that was paid for by a sponsor or was mandated by the network fails to get into the telecast.

Larger productions with upwards of fifteen cameras will regularly add a third AD as an “iso producer.” This AD serves as a second set of eyes for the producer, watching for which cameras feeding into which isolated replay devices captured the most defining looks of any particular play. The “iso producer” will quickly judge which replays should air in what order and deliver that sequence via headset to the producer. Also important in this role is the assignment and re-assignment of which cameras are being recorded at any one time based upon game situations. When action moves to one end of a football field, for example, the cameras at that end all have to feed into replay devices. That may cause cameras at the other end of the field to no longer be recorded. When possession changes and the ball starts heading back the other way, replay assignments will change accordingly.

The directors of sports television usually come from the ranks of the assistant directors or technical directors. These two groups learn how all the pieces of the director’s job fit together and how that job interacts with the producer, the operations manager, and
everyone else in the truck or control room.

**Production Assistant**

Every sports television production needs at least one strong, reliable “PA.” The production assistants provide the building blocks needed by the producer at each event. PAs are assigned to screen through video to find great shots for teases or other edited features and show elements. These shots are then “clipped” to assemble a tape or disk of highlights for use by associate producers, assistant directors, and video editors. PAs are assigned to do research and dig for facts that will assist the AP in building graphics panels for each event. PAs can be assigned to get logos and sponsorship information from the Commercial Services department and have them packaged with scenic shots as the “brought to you by …” billboards.

Many production assistants do not travel with the remote production teams. Instead they serve as a conduit for materials from the network or television station to the traveling crew. Their responsibility is to support the production in every way possible, and the best PAs are those who think beyond the tasks they are assigned and volunteer ideas and additional video or research material that they think will enhance the quality of the shows. When it’s time to fill an opening for an associate producer or assistant director, the PAs who have shown creativity and initiative will be the first to get promoted.

**Coordinating or Executive Producer**

This is the person who sets the overall goals for each series or set of shows. He or she is the creative and administrative lead who creates, plans, and designs new series and programs, or updates and revitalizes continuing shows that need to attract larger audiences. The coordinating or executive producer hires and/or assigns all producers, directors, APs, ADs, PAs, and talent. And the best ones provide their team members with continual feedback, constructive criticism, coaching, and ideas for innovation and improvement.

Coordinating producers interface with the programming and legal departments to ensure that what the network has agreed to in its contract with a league or event organizer can be done and will be executed. They work with the sales and marketing departments to protect the integrity of the on-air product while at the same time implementing sponsorships that produce revenue for the company. Working with the accounting and program finance departments they put together the annual budgets for each of their shows and series, and then allocate the money based upon a set of priorities that includes how large an audience will be reached and how complex or difficult each individual production will be. The coordinating producer must see each show or series as the product of a network, not simply as the work of one team of
people in one department. To complete the sports analogy, think of the coordinating or executive producer as the team’s “general manager.”

THE GAME IS OVER

When the game is over, the job of the production team is not done. In fact, the precious few seconds or minutes between the end of play and the end of the show are crucial. Ending strong is just as important as starting strong. Every story line that was set up at the top of the telecast should have been wrapped up by the time the event ends. As predictions came true or were turned upside down, the producer and commentators should have been explaining why.

A show should never raise a question that it doesn’t answer. If it tells you that the team now has the second best record in the month of June, that begs the question, “who has the best record?” If at the top of the show a star was introduced as “number three on his university’s all-time rebounding list,” has he now moved up to number two? The viewer deserves a finished product, so the best producers don’t leave any loose ends.

It’s vital for the successful sports telecast to put the result in perspective. What does the victory mean? What doors open as a result? Will the next fight be for the world title? Is the next match against an old rival or the defending champion? Is the team one step closer to the playoffs or to leveling their record at .500? What individual achievements did we see that may put an athlete into a whole new realm of recognition? And what does the defeat mean for those who lost? Is a successful season now out of reach? Will the starting lineup change, or is the coach or manager now in jeopardy of being fired?

In whatever the television sports production team does, it should never shortchange the viewer. The person who spent an hour or two or three of valuable time watching an event should always come away feeling that it was time well spent, that they were treated with respect, that they were entertained and informed. If they enjoyed the experience they’ll always come back for more.

SUMMARY

Producing sports on television is first and foremost telling stories as they happen about people and teams, their successes and failures, and how they react to each. The best way to get viewers interested in an event that is about to happen is to tell them about the competitors, the rivalry, what’s at stake in the contest that’s about to occur, and why it’s important. During the action, the television production team uses all of its cameras, microphones, technical equipment, and collective expertise to analyze what is
happening, show why plays succeeded or failed, point out the “exquisite intricacies” of the sport, entertaining and informing the fans who are watching.

Every television show is the product of 1) the time available to plan leading up to the event, 2) the extent of the resources that the budget will allow that can be applied to the production, 3) the people assigned to or hired for the project, their creativity, knowledge, and resourcefulness, and 4) the information that is gathered and presented that adds meaning to each contest.

Games and matches that are televised live are unpredictable, which creates drama and suspense, and forces everyone on a TV crew to prepare as much or more for the unknown factors of the event as they do for what is known. The crew is led by the producer, who can be compared to the coach of the team, and the director, who is like the quarterback who executes the game plan. When they are at their best they will involve each crew member and every resource at their disposal to produce sports programs that show fans how and why things happened, tell them about the people who are making the plays, answer every question that arises, put the results into context, and leave their viewers happy that they spent their time watching and anticipating the next game.

DISCUSSION TOPICS/ASSIGNMENTS

1 Interview any member of a sports production team and ask what they do for the fan watching at home. How much preparation goes into each telecast? How do they interact with the other members of the team?

2 Check the upcoming sports schedule and select any event. Then make a list of the specific “knowns” and “unknowns” for this event. If you were the producer, what would you do to prepare for each?

3 Watch a sports telecast and make notes on what story lines were presented in the first two segments of the show. Put these in one column on the left of your document. Then in the right-hand column make notes on how each story line was followed or wrapped up.

4 Discuss what each class member considers to be the best sports story of the year. How did television tell the story? What made it memorable? Can you remember who the commentators were? Does it matter which network it was on?

5 Do a critical comparison of two telecasts of the same sport on different networks. How did each use the following elements to tell the stories of the event, and which network did the better job in each category?
a Live video.
b Replays.
c Audio: natural sound and music.
d Commentary.
e Interviews and features.
f Graphics.
g Scoring data.
h Technological enhancements.
CHAPTER 2

Camera and Visual Communication
THE EYES OF THE SHOW

The history of sportscasting features a long lineage of images that capture not only the moments of a particular game, but encapsulate life-altering moments for generations of fans. Consider Michael Jordan. His legacy can be firmly explained by opening an NBA stat book and pointing to his massive volume of work in terms of points per game and NBA championships. However, his legend is undoubtedly cemented by the myriad of images available that showcase the highlights of his career. An Internet search can easily turn up his best games and key moments and even fan-produced videos that show their picks for his top ten achievements. For each moment, a camera was close by to capture the action and bring his exploits to the eyes of millions of fans. Cameras at sporting events are the eyes of the show. They provide a visual basis for viewers to see the action, up close and personal, in order to get a better sense of the action from the perspective of the players, coaches, and fans.

ANYONE CAN BE A CAMERAMAN

That is not the most auspicious headline for people who make operating a camera their living, but it is the truth. Cameras are, for the most part, user-friendly in capturing an image. And most consumer models have an “auto” feature that relies on the engineers who designed the camera to help you make a nice picture. However, there is a major difference between the home movie of Abbey learning to ride a bike versus the latest Hollywood blockbuster with the dashing face of Leo or Jack. Some of that is the quality of the equipment and some of that is the skill and artistry of the people behind the lens.

Part of the challenge in describing the role of a cameraperson is that most people think operating a camera is relatively easy. We have all picked up a camera at some point and clicked a picture or recorded a video of Aunt Alice carving the Thanksgiving turkey. Knowing how to put a camera into record mode does not make one an expert. The skills of a cameraperson are a detailed combination of the technical skills needed to set the camera up and record a technically proficient image as well as the craft of being a visual storyteller who understands aesthetics and the basics of visual language. On top of those traits, a cameraperson needs thousands of repetitions to know how to get a certain shot or, at the very least, have the ability to figure out and troubleshoot visual riddles on the fly.

To put it another way, consider a ballpoint pen. If you hand this to anyone, they can figure out how to make marks on a piece of paper with the ink in the pen. No big deal.
However, ask someone to draw an apple or to write a poem with that pen and the game instantly changes. Similarly, a cameraperson needs to be able to draw with their lens and write with the pictures they capture with their camera. The fine art and poetry created by a cameraperson provide the currency that helps make sportscasts successful.

In this chapter, we will discuss the technical and theoretical side of the camera in and around sporting events. While we will cover most of the basics, keep in mind that they are just that, the basics. To truly understand and become proficient at running a camera, nothing can replace hands-on training, thoughtful critique from a professional with experience as well as deeper study of the equipment and theory through trade publications, books, and articles.

In addition to those nuts and bolts, the successful camera operator brings a certain degree of artistry to the production. Throughout this chapter we will be hearing from Greg Farnese and Todd Palladino. They are two very accomplished camera operators who have worked on hundreds of sporting events all around the world. In addition to a thorough understanding of the camera, lenses, and technique of camera operation, they also bring a strong sense of the philosophy of camera operation. This includes preparing for shoots, working with fellow camera folks and relating to the director, among other intangibles.

Farnese values the ability to have an eye for a shot. When you can understand the storyline outside the field of play and know what is happening around the game, that information can inform your shots. Anticipating your next shot can help educate the audience with a visual. In essence, you are thinking like a director. This means paying attention to the previous shot knowing what will complement that shot. If a player just made a key play, perhaps there is the shot of a coach or a teammate that can augment that shot. If you pay attention, do your homework, listen to the director and the announcers, you can help make the show better.

Todd Palladino is also a freelance camera operator with many professional events under his belt. For Palladino, knowing the basics is very important. Modern cameras will do a lot of the “thinking” for you, but understanding how to take control of the camera will allow you to own the finer points of composing a shot. Palladino talks about having the ability to stay relaxed, but also very focused and able to block out the crazy situation around you, whether that is the crowd, the exciting play, or the weather. The basics of camera operation are easy, Palladino says, but having an instinct about the type of shot needed at a moment’s notice will make a huge difference in your development as a camera operator.
RELATING TO THE DIRECTOR

During a live event, a camera operator will have a specific set of shots they will be responsible for getting. The director most often conveys the camera operator’s responsibility during various parts of the event. Depending on the sport and the number of cameras, these roles can be anything from very specific and situational to very vague and up to the creativity of the person running the camera.

For example, the game camera at a basketball game will have the important responsibility of covering the action from baseline to baseline. This will be a wide shot that might zoom in slightly as the team sets up in the half-court. In some situations, this camera might go in tighter for an iso shot of a coach or player, but during game action, this is the safety camera that always shows the game. In comparison, there might be another camera with the task of recording only color shots of players, coaches, and fans. They might be specifically directed to not worry about game action and instead find a group of players and wait for the reaction to the big shot. Or this camera might be tasked with finding a player’s family and wait for a reaction to that player’s triumphant return from an injury.

In all cases, a director will have told the operators of those cameras what is expected from them. For Todd Palladino, on every shoot, he gets a feel for a director very quickly.

View from Behind the Len

Greg Farnese has interacted with many different directors as a freelance cameraman. Any production he encounters is about relationships between members of the crew. A very important relationship is camera operator to director. The more you work with a director, then the more you can know what they are expecting. How does he approach directors he hasn’t worked with before? Farnese relies on the pre-show camera meeting to begin communication and he will ask questions to help him clarify expectations. With a director he has worked with many times, the camera meeting might not be too extensive because the camera crew will have a working knowledge of their assignments. Farnese will take the camera meeting as a chance to refresh the role he needs to fill for his director.

In the end, the key to having a good relationship with a director for Farnese is having a rapport that reflects clear communication of expectations as well as the trust that will allow Farnese to try new things and offer interesting shots in the heat of a live moment that will enhance the overall show.

For Todd Palladino, on every shoot, he gets a feel for a director very quickly. Palladino tries to understand if this is a seasoned director or someone early in their career. The relationship of director to camera operators is very important to Palladino. If there is
a respect from the director to his camera crew, they can work as a team. The
camera operators will fight for shots and do as much as possible to make a show
better. The bond of a crew can be very strong and, Palladino’s experience, allows
for folks to anticipate the needs of a director and follow their lead almost without
words. This also creates a positive environment for people to offer new ideas and
take chances that can greatly improve a show. A good director will know and
understand the potential of the crew as well as logistical limitations of their crew.

CONTROLLING LIGHT—THE ESSENTIALS OF CAMERA

Expert camera operation can be discussed in terms of the amount of light getting
through the lens of the camera. If you learn to control light getting into a camera, you
can create beautiful images. We generally control light in three major ways on video
cameras: gain, shutter speed, and the aperture.

Gain

If you have ever used a still camera, you might be familiar with ISO (or ASA if you go
back to putting actual f/stop in a camera, in which case you might also remember dials
on the television and a world without cell phones … but we digress). In a digital still
camera, ISO will determine the sensitivity of a camera to light. The higher the ISO, the
more sensitive the camera will be to light. On a video camera, this is a control called
gain. If you are in a dark lighting environment, by turning up the gain on a video
camera, you can capture an image without much light. Sounds good, right? However,
when you juice up the gain, you tend to give back some of the quality of the image in
the form of digital noise. So, while high gain isn’t perfect, sometimes you might not
have any choice. But remember that using gain often brings grain to your images.

Shutter Speed

Another parameter that controls light is shutter speed. This measures how long it takes
for the shutter to be open for each frame of video that is captured. This is usually
measured in parts of a second—1/60th, 1/30th, 1/24th—all the way up to really fast
shutter speeds on some cameras to 1/10,000th of a second for some high speed shots.
The quicker the shutter speed, in other words the shorter amount of time you have the
shutter open to capture each frame of video, the less light can get through the lens. In
sports, oftentimes the action is very quick, so you want to be able to see every move,
dive, and score very clearly. Therefore, sports video often uses a higher shutter speed.
So what do you think is the impact on light? You need more light to compensate for the
faster shutter speed.

Aperture

Technically speaking, the aperture is the opening that allows light into the lens. This
opening is controlled by the iris, which is a move-able ring of metal pieces that open and close. OK, so that is a very technical way of explaining the simple fact that something in the lens opens and closes and allows light into the lens. Whether you want to think of this in a complicated or easy way, the fact remains that this is the third way to control light getting into the lens. We measure the amount of light getting through the iris in terms of f-stops. In photography, f-stops are marked on the lens to let you know how much light is getting through. On most video cameras, a knob or wheel labeled “iris” will give you some measurement of an f-stop that is displayed on your viewfinder or screen. The higher the f-stop number, the smaller the aperture, thus the less light gets through the lens. In contrast, the lower the number, the larger the aperture, the more light will get through the lens.

The Relation of Gain, Shutter Speed, and Aperture

OK, you might be saying, so what? Gain, shutter speed, and aperture control light. This is true. But the key part of understanding their relationship is how they can help each other in getting you the image you want.

Let’s use an example to illustrate this. Let’s say you are recording a football game on a bright sunny afternoon. People are running all over, and you want to use a fast shutter speed to capture the distinct movements of the players, the ball, and everything that is flying all over. So, you go into the settings of the camera and set your shutter speed to 1/1000th of a second. And bang . . . your image gets kind of dark. Because you understand shutter speed, you know that the fast shutter speed you chose is going to let in less light. But, you also know that there are two friends of shutter speed—aperture and gain—that are going to allow you to let more light in. Your choices would be to bring up the gain, to make the camera more sensitive to light. But, by doing this, we might risk adding some digital noise to our image. Since we are recording on a bright day, our better option will likely be to open the aperture to a lower f-stop number and thus allowing more light into the camera.

The key parts of a video camera are the lens and the charged coupled device (CCD). Without getting too technical here, the lens controls the amount of light getting through the lens (as well as focus and in most cases allows for zooming in and out) and the CCD is the fancy plate inside a camera that takes the image getting through the lens and turns it into an electronic signal to be saved on your record material. You might be recording on a memory card (such as SD or Compact Flash) or something old school like a videotape.

■ Fwigs

No matter what camera you pick up, you will need to learn the basics of operation
for that camera. While each camera will have its own particular sets of parameters, menus, and functions, all cameras essentially perform the same tasks. Therefore, no matter what make or model you pick up, there are some basic things you need to know. One common mistake a student or novice operator will make is to become very familiar with camera model XYZ-50. They know the buttons and zoom controls and menu inside and out. And that is wonderful as long as you only ever need to use camera model XYZ-50. However, invariably, you will grow up and move out of the house you grew up in and someone will hand you a camera with model number ABC-100. Now what? You know how to hit the little button on the front to make the picture the right color, but on the ABC-100, you can't figure out anything! Where do you start? What do you need to know? What are the questions you should be asking to know the basics of any camera someone hands you? Never fear . . . FWIGS is here!

To help you remember the basic questions of operating any camera, we offer a simple acronym, FWIGS. For each of these items, sometimes you will have the ability to go between manual and automatic, and you will need to know when each of these items is useful to create a compelling and technically proficient image. (And we even cheat a little by having the last “S” count for two things, but hey, it’s our acronym, we can do what we want.)

FWIGS stands for:

Focus: Understanding how to work the controls to focus the lens is very basic, but critical for you to understand. Controlling focus allows you to guide a viewer towards different parts of the screen by having parts in focus and parts less in focus.

White balance: Knowing how to make a camera sensitive to different lighting environments is important. Setting the white balance tells the circuits of a camera what type of light is hitting the lens. For example, sunlight is more blue and indoor lighting tends to be more orange. By setting the white balance, an image recorded by the camera will have the correct color.

Iris: The iris controls the amount of light getting into the camera. This is often measured in f-stops. The higher the f-stop, the less light enters the camera.

Gain: Sometimes you are recording in an environment that is a little too dark. Gain allows a camera to be more sensitive to light in those darker lighting situations. One word of caution, by adding more gain into an image, you tend to add digital noise or grain to your recording. Sometimes, you need to sacrifice the quality of the video in order to get a particular piece of video.
**Shutter speed:** How fast a shutter opens and closes will impact the type of action you can see. For very fast movements, you will tend towards a faster shutter speed. This will allow you to see distinct movements with more clarity, but will also require you to have more light in a particular environment. Conversely, a slower shutter speed will allow more light into the camera, but will be subject to motion blur if a person or object moves too fast.

And then we also reference 'S' in a second sense, sound. I know this means we should be calling it FWIGS-S, but that is not as elegant! Also, generally, the first parameter you will set is white balance, but then we would be calling this mnemonic Wh-FIGS-S, which is really messy!

In the end, you should try to get your hands on a camera before you need to use it for an official recording. Using FWIGS can guide you towards the basics of any camera you might have to use. By asking how to do those five things, plus audio, will point you towards answers that will allow you to properly operate a camera.

**KNOW MORE THAN THE BASICS**

The first step in learning how to use a camera is to understand its basic operations. Utilizing a strategy as laid out with FWIGS in order to learn focus, white balance, iris, gain, shutter speed and sound is a great way to get familiar with any camera. Beyond those concepts, to take advantage of the powerful impact of images, you need to get beyond those basics to more advanced concepts. The following is an introduction to more advanced camera techniques and theory that an expert camera operator will understand and be able to control whenever they pick up a camera.

**Composition and Aesthetics**

Learning the jargon associated with camera shots is important because you can speak the common language among professionals. This allows folks to be on the same page to communicate expectations as well as label shots for editing. The three main compositions for a camera are long shot (LS), medium shot (MS), and close-up (CU). Different directors and camera operators might have slightly different framings for each of these terms, but generally they are full shots of the entire body (LS), half of the body (MS), and the top part of the body from the shoulders to the top of the head (CU). We can further refine close-ups by adding medium close-ups (MCU), which is the chest to the top of the head, and extreme close-up (XCU), which is an extremely tight shot, for example, of an eye. In addition, we can add additional identifiers such as two-shot, to show two people in the same shot, or extreme long shot (XLS), which is a wide master shot of an entire scene. Using these terms as guides allows crew members, producers, and talent to speak a common language.

**Depth of Field**
When we describe the area of an image in clear focus, we call this the depth of field. A deep depth of field indicates most of the image is in clear focus, while a shallow depth of field has only part of the image in clear focus. Depth of field is a powerful compositional tool because it helps to guide a viewer towards parts of the screen where you want to point their attention. Controlling depth of field is a function of three main criteria: amount of light, focal length, and distance to the subject. Each of these can impact the amount of an image in clear focus. These are not the only factors but, in general, these are the main factors at your disposal.

By decreasing the amount of light getting through the lens, you will lessen the amount of an image that will be in clear focus, in other words, a more shallow depth of field. Increasing the amount of light will allow more of the image to be in clear focus and thus a deeper depth of field. To think of this in a concrete example, imagine you are in a packed classroom and trying to capture a single student in the front row. If you have all the lights on in the classroom, and thus have a lot of light, you will see most of the students in class. By turning off the main light, and either using ambient light or adding a small artificial light, thus greatly reducing the amount of light, you will control the amount of the image you will be able to see in clear focus.

Technically speaking, focal length is a measure from the focal or optical center of a lens to the focus point. That is a very fancy explanation, right? In terms of depth of field, we can understand focal length by relating that measurement to zooming a lens in or out. When we zoom out, or get wider, the focal length will decrease and we will allow more light into the lens. As we zoom in, or get a tighter shot, the focal length will increase and we will let less light into the lens. Guess which way will help make a more shallow depth of field? If you guessed a longer focal length, go to the head of the class. A longer focal length, in other words zooming in, can help you make the depth of field shallower.

The last parameter, distance to the subject, is simply how far or close you place the camera from the subject. By getting closer to the subject, you will be able to have a shallower depth of field. Moving away from the subject means you will be able to see more of the background, allow more light into the lens, and generally have a deeper depth of field.

Thus by combining all of these elements, you can control what is in clear focus in a scene. Less light, zooming in, and getting closer to the subject will give you a shallower depth of field than more light, zooming out, and getting farther away. Understanding and practicing these techniques will give you a powerful compositional tool to use.

**Pans, Tilts, Zooms, Pedestal, Dolly, and Truck**

To become a proficient camera operator, you will also need to know about movements
associated with the camera. Some moves involve moving the entire camera, some only pivot the camera on its mount, and others take place within the lens.

To *dolly* or *truck* a camera means you are moving the entire camera along with the tripod or pedestal the camera sits on. If you move the camera up or down in space, this is called a *pedestal move*. If you move directly towards or away from your subject, you are *dollying in* (getting closer) or *dollying out* (getting further away). When you truck with your camera, you are moving the entire camera and mount left or right parallel to the subject.

*Panning* and *tilting* involve moving the camera on the tripod or mount, but not the mount itself. To pan means to move the camera left or right. Tilting involves pivoting the camera up and down on the mount.

*Zooming* is a function of the lens and involves moving the glass parts inside the lens. When you zoom out, you are decreasing the focal length of the lens and show a wider angle of view. To zoom in, you increase the focal length and move in towards a particular part of a scene.

**LIVE EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY**

During a live event, a camera operator is a crucial element in the production. However, their creativity and vision must fit into the overall plan for the production. This vision and plan is most often set by a director, but can be heavily influenced by the producer and on-air talent, as well as the event itself.

**Utility: Probably Your First Job**

If you are interested in becoming a camera operator, or basically any technical position on a crew, the place you are likely to start is as a utility. Utility is a position on the crew that is hired to help out various member of the crew. During an event, they might be there to make sure a camera operator's cable doesn't get tangled as they walk around, or hold a parabolic microphone for the audio department, or maybe run different items such as stat sheets, bottles of water, or coffee around to people on the crew. This is not a glamorous position by any means; however, it often affords you the opportunity to meet folks on the crew and ask technical questions and, after developing a relationship over several shows, perhaps get some hands-on time with professional grade equipment.

If you are interested in learning about the cameras used during live sporting events, the only way you will have a chance is during the setup of a show. We will talk more about the utility position and how to approach your career through this position in Chapter 17 (of the featured book).
Before the Show: Setup and Camera Meeting

Obviously, the first job task for camera operators is to set up their cameras. Often, the camera department, along with the utilities for a show, will work as a team to set up the cameras. Once they are set up, operators will be responsible to "fax" out their camera. Fax is a chance for an operator to make sure they can hear the people they are supposed to hear (for example, the director and perhaps program audio) and check that all their equipment is functioning properly.

Most live events have a camera meeting as part of their preparation. This is a meeting where a director will lay out the visual coverage plan for an event. The director will go over each camera and the coverage plan for that specific camera. For example, one camera might be responsible for nothing but the main action of the game or event. Even when the production is in a commercial break, this camera has to be focused on the overall field of play. While this might be the most creative position, the game camera is a critical piece of the puzzle because that is the camera that is most often viewed by the folks at home trying to watch the action. Another camera might be a handheld camera with the sole assignment of getting shots of the crowd, coaches, and players. Another camera might be assigned as a wide shot used for use by a color analyst or for video review by an official. This camera meeting is very important to get all the camera operators and the director in sync. This is also where a camera operator can ask any questions they might have about the production.

During the Show

Once the show begins, a camera operator should have an idea of the coverage expected from their position. He or she could be isolated on a particular player or coach, or an area of the field, or maybe hunting through the crowd for different shots. For example, in a football game, a camera operator might be assigned to follow a particular wide receiver when the home team is on offense, and on a running back for the other team. They will follow that player no matter what.

On occasion, a camera operator might come up with a shot or go find a shot that a director might call for on the spur of the moment. For example, the announcer might be telling an off-the-cuff tale about a retired player, and the camera operator might remember a retired jersey up in the rafters, go frame it up and sell that shot to the director. Listening to the telecast and carefully following the flow of the game can help a good camera operator become an integral part of the show by adding and selling visuals to the director.

- After the event, but sometimes before signing off the air, a camera operator might have post-game responsibilities such as recording interviews, post-game press conferences, or other production elements that need to be recorded. For example, an
announcing team might need to record a post-game "hit." By "hit" we mean a recorded segment featuring the talent for the game that is shown later in a sports news show on the network the game aired or on the Internet or as part of a different production.

**After the Show**

When the show ends, the camera operators will be responsible for striking and putting away their camera. The term “strike” means to break down all the equipment and put it back in a storage location. If you are working on location, this would mean packing the mobile production unit. Sometimes, a show will be set up for several days, for example at a golf tournament, but in many instances, a show will setup, shoot the event, and strike in the same day. If you are working in a studio or at another venue where the equipment might be installed on a more permanent basis, then the strike might be just putting equipment into a standby position.

**ENG CAMERA**

ENG stands for “electronic news gathering.” This style of camera usually means you are recording all the video and sound by yourself. You will not have a studio or truck with you. You might have a camera assistant or an audio person with you but oftentimes it is just you. You might be assigned to go out to a high school football game or a college basketball game to get enough footage to cut a highlight. Or you might go out and setup an interview with a coach or player, with lights and a nice background setup in a locker room.

No matter the situation, you will need to prepare. In the case of a live sporting event, the type of sport will dictate decisions such as your location at the venue and the equipment you might need. Most often you will bring along a tripod for the camera and headphones to monitor your audio. In terms of location, think about the goal of the shoot. Are you there to focus on the star quarterback? Then you might think about being a little ahead of the offensive line of scrimmage to allow him to throw towards you and see his face or at least the front of his helmet. If you need to capture the state's leading softball pitcher, do you set up behind home plate or up in the stands to get the best shots? Perhaps you will need to move around to get some different angles for the package. Remember to grab a roster, especially if it is a smaller sport without a lot of information available, and shoot the scoreboard throughout your recording to make sure you know the game situation when you go back to the station or editing room.

**STUDIO CAMERA**
In the studio, a camera operator generally has their camera already in place and set up. In this environment, a camera operator might be asked to change set pieces or set up a studio for a particular show. In addition, shows might need to pre-record certain elements or other items of production.

While some studios still employ full crews to run the in-studio cameras, the trend is towards robotic cameras. This has resulted in the need for more specialized skills in order to operate these cameras, as well as impacting the number of studio camera operator positions available.

**SPECIALTY SHoots AND EQUIPMENT**

For sporting events, the types of specialty cameras are growing in number and complexity. While these cameras and their rigs often require specialized training, they also provide opportunities to work on shows. Some of the newer technologies are only run by people employed by the company themselves. Some examples of these specialized cameras are Jibs, Steadicams, Robotics cameras (Robos), and POV cameras (such as GoPro).

**SHADING VIDEO**

Also related to the camera department, but living in their own section of the production workflow, are video operators. Folks who work in video are responsible for the technical quality of the video coming into the truck or studio.

Video operators perform a function called shading. This involves remote control of the iris of a camera as well as making sure all the cameras have the same color regardless of their make or model. This job often involves using high quality monitors and video scopes to match these signals.

While they are not seen, without their expertise in the world of video signals, the pictures that make it to viewers’ homes would be less spectacular.

**GETTING BETTER AT WHAT YOU DO**

So here we are near the end of the chapter. You have been reading a lot about theory and technique, the heart and soul of starting your journey to being a sought-after camera operator. However, if you just read about doing camera, you would be missing a key component: actually picking up a camera and recording some video! Imagine if all you did was read recipes about making a cake, but you never fired up the oven, cracked
an egg, or tried your hand at frosting. Reading from a cookbook doesn’t make you a
cook, just like reading about camera technique won’t make you a cinematographer.

Greg Farnese says the best way to break into the industry is to get your hands on
equipment. And after a lot of practice and critique from trusted friends and
professionals, you will be ready when the call comes in. When Farnese has an idea for
an interesting shot, he will find time to practice that shot, whether during batting
practice, warm-ups, or any time before a game. When his confidence gets high enough
that he can perform the shot in a live situation, he will alert the director or the replay
operator and, when the situation appears, his camera will launch into action. He is
always thinking about coverage and new ways to tell a visual story without being too
complicated.

For Todd Palladino, he improved his skills by doing any job he could on his way up the
ranks. He did it all, he says, because he wanted to see the big picture. Whether he was a
utility, assistant camera, or directing a small commercial shoot, he learned about how
all the pieces fit together. Those experiences helped when he became a full-time
camera guy to understand his role and how he fit together with the rest of the
production.

So, get out there and start recording! You can find a lot of opportunities to get reps
with a camera. Record a friend’s intramural team, offer to be the team videographer for
a summer swim team, or look for a local rec league. Someone will welcome your efforts
to record themselves, kids, friends, or teammates and you will get repetitions on the
equipment. Think about how you can get thoughtful feedback from folks in the industry,
read books about cinematography, and practice, practice, practice. If you take the time
to thoughtfully go after your passion to use a camera, over time your skills will
improve.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION/ACTIVITIES

1. Make a list of five to ten memorable sports moments. See if you can find video of
those moments. How do you think the visuals helped cement these moments in
history? Would these moments be as memorable without video?

2. Why do people think operating a camera is easy? How could you make an argument
that operating a camera is actually quite difficult and requires a great amount of skill?
Can you think of a few examples of activities that on the surface seem very simple, but
in fact are quite difficult to master?

3. Why is the relationship of a camera operator to a director so important? What are
ways a camera operator can help to make this relationship better?
4. What might be a few differences between an experienced director and a novice director in terms of how a camera crew might help them?

5. What are three main ways you can control light on a video camera? Why is it important to understand how these controls work? Why not just use “auto” mode? What is a situation where “auto” mode might be the best choice?

6. What does “FWIGS” stand for? (Remember the last “S” stands for two different things!)

7. What does the term “depth of field” mean? What are three main ways we can control the depth of field of a shot?

8. What are the different terms we would use to talk about moving a camera? Why is it important to know and use these terms?

9. What is a “utility” on a TV crew?

10. Using a video camera, record a sporting event and edit your footage into a 60-second recap of the event. Challenge yourself to not use any camera movement. No pans, tilts, zooms, or any moving of the lens or camera. This will force you to trust you can compose a nice shot in the frame.

11. Without a tripod, record footage of a sporting event. How can you make the camera stable on your shoulder? How would a larger, heavier camera versus a smaller, lighter camera change your strategy for recording? What would you do to plan your coverage of the event?

12. Go to a sporting event and instead of recording just the action of the sporting event, focus on the crowd, color, and pageantry of the event. How does this change your approach to recording?

13. Record an interview with an athlete. Go to a practice or a game and record B-roll. Edit together the interview using the B-roll to cover transitions between sound bites.

FURTHER READING

Television Production Handbook by Herbert Zettl

Cinematography: Theory and Practice: Image Making for Cinematographers and Directors by Blaine Brown

The Five Cs of Cinematography: Motion Picture Filming Techniques by James Mascelli

The Shut Up and Shoot Freelance Video Guide: A Down & Dirty DV Production by Anthony Q. Artis

Video Production Handbook by Jim Owens and Gerald Millerson
Directing: Telling the Story
Poignant storytelling will drive the production of sports entertainment programming for years to come. The fact of the matter is that the industry will only thrive if the programming sets the bar as high as humanly possible. You have to have the sense to know when you have a dramatic, emotional story, because, if it is going to tug at your heart, chances are that it is going to tug at the masses’ heart. And that’s how great programming happens.

Ross Greenberg, longtime President of HBO Sports

Storytelling is an integral part of today’s television sports. Storytelling really began in 1936 when Leni Riefenstahl decided to cover the Berlin Olympics the way a dramatic film is shot. Using multiple cameras from all different angles, she told the story of the Olympics. Previous to 1936, the Olympics were pretty much shot by a camera in the stand that just documented the event, without trying to create a story that resonated with the audience. Here, work at the Olympics basically changed the way television sports were shot and significantly impacted how we see sports today.

That does not mean that the importance of story is not still being debated. For example, some directors who utilize 3D advocate for fewer cameras. They believe that directors should not cut quickly in 3D; the wide shots communicate their own stories, let them stay on the screen longer, let the action occur on screen instead of trying to do a lot of cuts to show action.

Some Ultra HD (8K) users have stated that one or two cameras can be used to cover sports. Ultra HD cameras are such high quality that viewers will feel as though they are sitting in the stadium. While this may be true, it could be more documenting the event instead of building a story. Steve Mitchell, Broadcast Consultant to ITV and TEN-Australia, says: “It all depends on the experience you want the viewer to have. It comes down to what your goals are. If you are storytelling, instead of just letting the audience take in the event, you are going to need more cameras. They are two different perspectives of the event.”

Bottom line for both 3D and Ultra HD, the director has to decide whether to document the event or tell a story.

The same type of discussion is happening with the second screen. Advocates state that the viewer should be able to create their own experience, choose their own cameras to view, decide the types of graphics, and even choose their own audio track. That television storytelling will be a thing of the past in the future. However, most directors today cannot imagine a non-storytelling coverage of television sports.
Understanding Story
by Sarah Leckie

A story is broken down into three segments: the beginning, the middle, and the end.

The beginning establishes everything the audience needs to know about the story. For example, it will give context of who, what, where, when, and why. It gives audience members the tools they need to follow the story that is unfolding and, more importantly, it allows them inside the story. The trick is not to give too much away too soon, and at the same time not to withhold information that is necessary. The beginning also provides a dramatic action that gets the story going.

After the beginning occurs, the story begins by exposing the audience to a challenge that must be overcome. This can be anything from the training process, personal difficulties that must be overcome, or the actual competition.

Once the story is established and the action started, the story becomes more complex. This is called the middle of the story. There is a rise in action and conflict, which affects the main character and gets in the way of fulfilling his or her main goal. There is no story without some kind of conflict! If a random series of things happens and it is not a source of conflict for the main character, it is not a story. It is just a narrative of events.

When people hear the word conflict, they immediately think of some type of competition. Competition is a type of conflict, but it is not the only type of conflict. Conflict is when a character or team wants something and someone or something prevents him from getting it. This is the journey of the story. An audience loves to watch someone try to overcome obstacles; they want to see the expressions, shots that show the obstacles, and then overcoming them.

At its core, a story is about a character or characters who want something and overcomes conflict to get it. As the audience listens to this journey, they ask: "Will this character get what he or she wants?" That is why we stay to listen. We wait to see if they reach that goal. Even if we know the outcome, we keep watching.

The point of a story is never about the end. It is more about your character being changed by the hard work through the conflict in the middle. Without conflict and obstacles, stories become dull and uneventful.

“We are Going to Add Show Business to Television Sports”

In 1960, when television sports were more documentary than story, a 29-year-old assistant producer at ABC Sports, Roone Arledge, wrote a memo to his boss that outlined his ideas for covering American college football. The excerpted document
below became a blueprint for ABC’s coverage of sports:

*Heretofore, television has done a remarkable job of bringing the game to the viewer—now we are going to take the viewer to the game!!*

*We will utilize every production technique that has been learned in producing variety shows, in covering political conventions, in shooting travel and adventure series to heighten the viewer’s feeling of actually sitting in the stands and participating personally in the excitement and color of walking through a college campus to the stadium to watch the big game. All of these delightful adornments to the actual contest have been missing from previously televised sports events . . .

To improve upon the audience . . . we must gain and hold the interest of women and others who are not fanatic followers of the sport we happen to be televising.

*We will utilize six cameras for our basic coverage of the game . . .

In addition to our fixed cameras (using the term advisedly) we will have cameras mounted in jeeps, on mike booms, in risers or helicopters, or anything necessary to get the complete story of the game. We will use a [miniature] camera to get the impact shots that we cannot get from a fixed camera—a coach’s face as a man drops a pass in the clear—a pretty cheerleader just after her hero has scored a touchdown—the referee as he calls a particularly difficult play—a student hawking programs in the stands—two romantic students sharing a blanket late in the game on a cold day—the beaming face of a substitute halfback as he comes off the field after running seventy yards for a touchdown on his first play for the varsity—all the excitement, wonder, jubilation and despair that make this America’s number one sports spectacle and a human drama to match bullfights and heavyweight championships in intensity.

*In short—WE ARE GOING TO ADD SHOW BUSINESS TO SPORTS!*

In addition to the natural suspense and excitement of the actual game, we have a supply of human drama that would make the producer of a dramatic show drool. All we have to do is find and insert it in our game coverage at the proper moment. And this we will do!

The moment we take to the air, we will start making the viewer feel he is at the game. Instead of the hackneyed slide to introduce the telecast, we will attempt to video tape a college cheering card section or a great college band spelling out NCAA FOOTBALL on a football field; and after our opening commercial billboards . . . we will have pre-shot film of the campus and the stadium so we can orient the viewer. He must know he is in Columbus, Ohio, where the town is football mad; or that he is part of a small but wildly enthusiastic crowd at Corvallis, Oregon . . .

Then the viewer must meet the players, but he will meet them as he would if he were at the game. This will be accomplished by using a blowup of the cover of the actual game program
and introducing the individual players by means of pictures of them in their normal street attire . . .

The announcers will be as familiar with the college town, the players on the two teams, the relative merits of the teams involved, the traditions surrounding the game and the type of people involved in it as the most enthusiastic undergraduate actually present at the game.

We will use video tape recorders to enable us to replay the decisive plays of the first half during the half-time break . . .

Arledge's storytelling game plan was adopted quickly by ABC Sports, and many networks around the world followed suit. While working as a producer at the 1968 Grenoble Olympics, he added this:

The goal of television coverage is simple. What we have to do is to make people, in a very brief period of time, know enough about an athlete: whether he's likely to succeed or not; whether what he's doing is particularly difficult; how he has to do it; and then whether he did it and his reaction.

Today's television sports is no different. Story still rules. During the 2012 London Olympics, NBC emphasized story by creating what they called the "Five Rings of Story - telling":

1. Make the audience care.
2. Explain your sport.
3. Tell it like it is.
4. Let the moment happen.
5. Communicate.

NBC Producer Andy Tennant says that "when it comes down to it, a good story is a good story, and it starts with something with heart, soul, and drama."

The Sports Director's Role as a Storyteller

(Adapted from Kalevi Uusivuori and Tapani Parm, Producers/Directors, YLE Television Network, Finland)

Directors must understand the way in which viewers watch television: how they think, feel, and want to be entertained. This means that the director must find ways to capture the viewer's interest. This is best done by doing thorough homework and proper storytelling: the two keys to better coverage.

Homework
By homework, we mean not only getting acquainted with the venue, the organizers, and the tools of television production, but also exploring the sport itself. The director's preparation should include in-depth research into the key players: the athletes. Beyond the athletes' names, it is crucial to identify them and their potential. The director must know not only the favorites and the defending champions, but also those athletes with their last shot at a win, recovering from an injury, or showing exceptional nerve at a major event.

All of this forms the most important part of production planning, because it hints at, or even reveals, how the event will unfold during the competition. Only then do the start lists begin to make sense. Only then there is solid ground to draft the potential story and decide how to tell it with cameras and microphones.

**Storytelling**

The viewer expects and demands to be entertained. To do this, we must touch his or her feelings. We must realize that only when a viewer chooses an athlete as a favorite, and identifies with him or her, do the athlete's rivals become a threat.

In his book Poetics, Aristotle (384–322 BC) explained the fundamentals of storytelling. In order to capture the viewer's emotions, he said, a story should contain three parts: the beginning, the middle, and the end. This formula perfectly suits athletics. In athletics, the beginning includes the heats of the track events and the qualifications for field event. Here, the favorites must be highlighted so that the viewer can recognize them. This is achieved at the cost of other athletes, who appear less in the pictures. This is very important, because, as Aristotle puts it, if we do not know the player, what may happen to him later makes no difference. In the first part of the story, the ingredients are planted in order to evoke expectations. The viewer enjoys the feelings of excitement and suspense that are connected with this anticipation.

The middle part includes the semifinals and finals of track events and the finals of field events. These are the highlights of the event: the battle for the medals. The competition should be filmed in an intelligible way, without missing any essential incidents. A viewer anywhere in the world must be able to comprehend both the competition itself and the storyline. The middle part ends with a climax: as the final of each event concludes, everything becomes clear.

The third section, the end, covers the euphoria of victory and the disappointment of defeat. This part also includes a motivated step back to analyze the race or field event final.
The Viewer’s Position

In watching sporting events, particularly athletics, the viewer looks into the depth of the picture. He or she picks out objects of interest from this depth, normally the key athletes of the event. The viewer is reluctant to lose visual contact with his or her favorite. The viewer also participates in the coverage, in effect using the mind as a camera. There is pleasure in mentally zooming, panning, and tilting in the view of a camera shot. The producer and director need to understand this when cutting between cameras. Rapid cutting without any clear motivation irritates the viewer, as visual contact with a favorite competitor may be lost and has to be re-established. Unnecessary slow-motion replays have the same effect. Furthermore, the filming plan should allocate the viewer the best seats in the stands. These angles should be maintained through the event. The cutting must answer three questions for the viewer. First: where are we or which event? Second: which athlete? Third: how is this athlete doing in relation to his or her rivals?

This approach to directing sports leads to good storytelling, as the reality of the competition becomes entertaining. The target should always be the viewer’s mind.

Equipment Enhancement

Equipment has played a very large role in storytelling. However, it is important to remember the priorities. “We are still in a business about content,” said Craig Silver, Coordinating Producer for CBS Sports. “The content has to be enhanced by the technology, not the other way around. We can’t just do this stuff because we can. Any good production is ruled by making those decisions: when is the right place and right time to use these tools? You always need to be looking to push the story forward.”

Fox Sports Producer David Neal echoes those sentiments: “You have to use the technology as a tool for storytelling, first and foremost. Don’t let the equipment get in front of you, but, instead, use it as a powerful tool to be a better storyteller.”

Directing is Like Conducting a Symphony

Michael Narracci is the Coordinating Director of Red Sox broadcasts on NESN and has spent 14 seasons with the network. This is his behind-the-scenes look at NESN’s Red Sox game coverage.

*I’ve been the director of Red Sox baseball at NESN since June 1, 2001. When I meet new people, and they ask what I do, the next question almost always is: “So what do you actually do?” I usually laugh and say, “What ever the producer, talent and host of others tell me to*
do.” There are many types of directors. There is the most recognizable motion-picture director, but then there are live-event entertainment directors, entertainment serials, nightly news directors, and the group I belong to: sports directors. I like to think we’re a special group of television professionals who are reliant on instinct, adaptability, and ability to deal with stressful situations. Most of the other directors are able to block their shows, rehearse, and—in some cases if something goes wrong—“fix it in post.” But live events are non-scripted, and there is no margin for error. It’s a nightly adrenaline rush, and that’s what makes it fun. So, getting back to the original question: What exactly do I do? I usually use the analogy of a symphony. The producer is the composer—he comes up with what we want to do—and I am the conductor. I try to get our orchestra (crew, cameras, audio, replay people) to make beautiful music (great TV).

My job starts with camera placement. I have to decide where in the park I want to put my cameras in order to make a great broadcast. This really isn’t as complicated as it seems. We

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**What Makes a Good Director?**

A group of seasoned sports broadcasting professions contributed their views on what makes a good director. Here were their responses:

A good director has to:

- be serious about getting the job done, doing it well, and having a good time while you were doing it;
- be incredibly creative;
- always want to talk about how to make the coverage better;
- be a risk-taker;
- be a real student of the game;
- be passionate about television and directing;
- be able to communicate clearly with talent and open to their input;
- push the camera crew to seek out the less obvious;
- never be satisfied with the status quo;
- respect the competition and the viewer; and
- take pride in their work.

(Contributors to this list were CBS Sports Executive Vice President Ken Aagaad, NFL Vice President Glenn Adamo, News Corp Senior Vice President David Hill (Fox), FOX Producer Richie Zyontz, and CBS Sports Director Bob Matina)
have in the industry the “basic six or seven” cameras. They are:

- Camera 1: Low third
- Camera 2: High home
- Camera 3: High first
- Camera 4: Center field
- Camera 5: Low first
- Camera 6: Tight center field
- Camera 7: High third

After the basic seven, you place cameras where you think they will most benefit viewers. At Fenway Park, those positions are mid first, mid home, bullpen robotic, high right field, and an RF (wireless) handheld. We also have a mid third camera for select broadcasts.

Next, I have to come up with a coverage plan. Each camera has its individual coverage responsibility that it must follow in order for the broadcast to have a chance to succeed. I have a camera meeting with my crew about four hours before first pitch to explain what I expect them to do. For the most part, coverage is the same from director to director, but each adds his or her own subtle nuances. For instance, one thing I insist on is when we first see the batter, I really like to see him head to toe with the catcher and a bit of the umpire in the shot, before the camera zooms in to his face. Below are some brief, routine coverage shots for my show. It’s extremely important that everyone follows his or her camera assignments. If they don’t, when a complicated play develops, I will have no chance presenting it to the viewers.

**Camera 1**

- Left-handed batters
- Right-handed pitcher or low right infield defense on right-handed batters
- Trail runner

**Camera 2**

- Follow the ball loosely

**Camera 3**

- Follow the ball tightly
- Infield and outfield heroes
- Shoot anybody the announcers are talking about

**Camera 4**
• Pitcher/batter
• Pull on stolen base
• Follow batter to first base on a walk

Camera 5
• Right-handed batters
• Lead runner, score all runs
• Pitcher (tight) or right defense on left-handed batter

Camera 6
• Batter

Camera 7
• Ball follow tightly
• Cover right field corner

Cameras 8 and 9
• Ball follow loosely with relativity to runner

Before the season begins, I work with our creative services department to develop a variety of animated wipes (also known as “eye candy”) that we use for replays and transitions to elements such as lineups and full-page graphics. It adds a little more energy to the broadcast than just cutting or dissolving to these elements. When we get to a ballpark, I sit with the technical director (or TD) and explain our effects to him or her, so they can build the show on the switcher and other peripheral devices that we use to make the show work.

Next, I lay out my monitor wall in the truck, which is a rolling TV studio. Generally, there are between 75 and 100 monitors in the truck that we put all of the video sources available to us in. This would include cameras, tape machines, graphics, transmission router, and the other team’s broadcast (we like to look in on what they’re doing, in case our camera guys miss something). Our camera guys are our eyes in the park, so if they don’t shoot something that’s happening, we can’t see it. Our other eyes are Don Orsillo and Jerry Remy in the booth. Everyone lays out their monitor wall a little differently. I lay mine out so that the cameras on the left side of the field (third base) are on the left side of my bank of monitors, and the cameras that are on the right side of the field are on the right side of the monitor wall. The engineers can store these monitor wall settings for us so the next time we use the truck, our setup will be quicker. Time is a precious commodity on remotes, so any way we can save some is greatly appreciated.

Any bump in the road—such as a camera that won’t work, or a graphics machine that
malfunctions—has pretty big consequences physically, mentally, and financially. Once we’re on the air, it’s my job to tell the story that the producer develops with my crew and talent. If Don is talking about the pitcher, I want to show the pitcher to reinforce the story. I also might want to cut to a shot of the pitching coach if he’s a part of the story (such as if he’s going to the phone to call the bullpen), then show the bullpen if a guy is getting up to warm up. We call that enhancement. Producer Jim Daddona does the same thing I do, but with our replay sources. He listens to Jerry and uses his judgment as to what’s the most comprehensive and educational sequence of replays. At very exciting points in the game, I start talking like an auctioneer, moving camera shots around and instructing the TD what source I want on-air to tell the story, because there is a finite amount of time between pitches and I want to be comprehensive (pitcher, batter, runners, crowd, managers, etc.). It’s a big responsibility that I have to bring the sights and sounds of Red Sox baseball to fans everywhere. We are, of course, on cable and satellite in New England, but we often are on in Japan with our partners from NHK and other parts of the world with MLB International. It has been a blast doing this job for the past 14 seasons, and I have been fortunate to be here in what has been a very successful period for the team. I hope to continue to do this for a long time to come.

(Courtesy of NESN.com)
CHAPTER 4

Sports Presenting
Chapter 4. Sports Presenting

Football to Formula 1, weightlifting to wrestling, boxing to beach volleyball – sports coverage is big business. BT Sport, launched in August 2013, is a major player, spending hundreds of millions of pounds on Premier League matches and Premiership Rugby, as well as acquiring sports channels such as ESPN. Rival Sky Sports has six HD channels viewable on TV, mobile phones and tablets; BBC Sport broadcasts on TV, radio and online; plus Channel 4, Channel 5 and hundreds of Internet sports channels create a huge array of choice for the sports enthusiast.

Sports programming consumes presenters – BBC’s broadcasts of the London 2012 Olympics were the most comprehensive ever, with live transmissions of every sport from every venue throughout the day. Their presenting and commentary teams covered archery, diving, equestrian, gymnastics, hockey, rowing, sailing, table tennis, water polo, wrestling and much more. Channel 4 scheduled more than 500 hours of sport during the 12-day 2012 Paralympic Games and 50% of the presenting team were disabled, including former Paralympic wheelchair basketball medallist Ade Adepitan, middle-distance runner Danny Crates, and swimmer Rachael Latham.

Former professional tennis player Sue Barker, former footballer Gary Lineker and former cricketer Phil Tufnell started out as competitors before becoming sports personalities and quiz show hosts. What does it take to become a successful sports presenter?

**Being a sports presenter**

Graham Miller was Senior Sports Correspondent for ITN on ITV. He says:

It has to be the best job in the world. I was paid to travel the planet, covering all the major sporting events. It gives you a real insight into the world of sport at the highest level. And as a keen observer of human behaviour I learned an awful lot about the importance of confidence, attitude and performance under pressure.

Matt Lorenzo’s sport presenting credits include the World Cup, Champions League, Formula 1, UEFA and Soccerex. Matt created *Off the Bar*, the first ad-funded show on Sky Sports, hosted the Olympics for the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and is now the face of *The Times* and *Sunday Times* online Premier League service. He says: ‘If you can’t play a sport well – and I can’t – it has to be the next best thing. You don’t feel like you’re working half the time because you’re working at a subject you enjoy. You meet your heroes and you end up counting some of them as friends.’

Annie Emmerson is a former world number one Duathlete turned sports writer and
presenter. Her sporting highlights include being a seven-time European Triathlon Cup winner and winner of the UK Half-Ironman. Annie is now a sports commentator and presenter for the BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky. She says: ‘Being a sports presenter is a lot of fun. The live commentary work can be nerve-wracking at times, but it gets easier with experience and time. I love the buzz of filming, it reminds me of the excitement I used to get when I was racing; exhilarating at times and challenging at others.’

What skills do you need?

Experts agree it can be a lot of hard work, but it is worth it. The key skills that are emphasised again and again are knowledge and research. Do you need to be a journalist? Graham Miller says:

Experience of journalism is crucial. A journalistic training teaches you to ask the important questions that the audience want answered. It gives you the understanding of what things mean. And it allows you to dig out the most important aspect as you see it. The current fashion is to have ex-sports stars in the job. Now I don’t question their inside knowledge and personal take on things. But I do question their lack of journalistic ‘nous’ to ask the right question at the right time. They sometimes miss the main story of the day. It needs a journalist in there to identify the news.

What if your experience of sport is at amateur level? Annie Emmerson says: ‘Enthusiastic amateurs can make great presenters because they do tend to be very knowledgeable and passionate about sport so it is by no means essential to have raced at the top level. You don’t have to have participated in high-profile sport, but some experience at any level is pretty important.’

Presenter Christina Nicolaides has credits on Sentra FM, a dedicated sports radio station in Athens, as well as on Eurosport and Best of the Bets on Sky, previewing the Premier League, European Games, Champions League and Europa League. She recommends:

Research! The more knowledge you have on your event, the more prepared you are to handle anything that comes up. It is very different from presenting in a studio environment. Make eye contact with the crowd and smile, even if they are yards away because you are normally being broadcast on large screens all over the event.

Annie Emmerson agrees:

Knowledge is so important, you can get away with quite a lot if you know your
facts and have lots of information on the athletes and sports you’re presenting on. I think a big personality is a good thing as sport is meant to be fun and entertaining, so the presenter needs to be able to deliver in a fun, knowledgeable and positive manner.

Matt Lorenzo’s credits also include Sky Sports News Breakfast Show and Goals on Sunday. His invaluable top tips are:

- Be relaxed in front of a camera and lucid on and off it.
- Do your homework – you can become an expert on anything if you put the hours in.
- Make sure you know what you are talking about – what if the prompter breaks or someone asks you a question about what you have just read.
- Sport is generally not hard news, so you can enjoy talking about the game with your interviewee.
- When reporting from an event, learn your intro and outro, and try to work out when you need to start the latter.
- Treat the camera as your mum and forget that a couple of million others may be tuning in.
- If you’re comfortable on camera it will look that way at home and half of your battle is won.
- If you can ad lib or think of something apposite to say if you’re given 30 seconds to fill then you’ll do very well.

Breaking in

Sport, like many other genres, offers new opportunities with the growth of niche online programming. Football clubs such as Manchester United and Arsenal have their own TV channels showing live coverage, interviews, under-21s and under-18s matches, highlights, replays and features. Sports presenting has always been one of the most sought-after jobs, and there are more opportunities than ever before, but that has only raised the competition. How did Christina Nicolaides, Matt Lorenzo and Annie Emmerson break in?

Christina Nicolaides always had a strong interest in sport through her father who was a professional footballer. A friend introduced her to Eurosport who were looking for a multi-lingual presenter. Her CV and video clips were sent to the bosses of the IRC Rally and she got the job. How can you shine in a screen test? Christina advises: ‘Watch as much sport as possible. You have to live and breathe sport and really know your stuff – especially if you are female. If you are not passionate about sport, choose another niche. Be authentic. Do what you love. It will make you a better presenter.’
Matt Lorenzo's interest also stemmed from his father who was the first football commentator on ITV. Matt worked his way up through local newspapers as a journalist working on rock music columns, becoming sports editor, film reviewer, motoring correspondent and working on Saturdays as match reporter for LBC before joining Radio Solent as a reporter. He joined the BBC as a sports assistant producer on *Match of the Day*, *Grandstand* and *Breakfast Time*, and became the first sports presenter to appear on Sky TV.

As with all genres of presenting, it’s important to network and build up your contacts with potential employers. Luckily for Annie Emmerson she got to know the TV production company who filmed most of her UK races for Channel 4 during her career as a professional athlete. When she retired, they asked her to commentate for them and her TV presenting career grew from there. What advice does Annie have for those wanting to break in?

Make as many contacts as possible and, without being too pushy, you need to constantly be emailing people and sending your showreel off. Every day some time must be spent on keeping up with the news and doing research – like any news, sports news is always changing!

**To do list**

- Watch sports programming.
- Research your subject.
- Record some sports presenting items at matches and games.
- Shoot interviews with accessible players.
- Start a sports blog.
- Get experience in sports journalism, in print, online or radio.

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CHAPTER 5

Interviewing
Chapter 5. Interviewing

Interviewing for television should appear to be a terrific conversation between you and your guest. It might be a boisterous conversation, even an argumentative conversation, or a tender conversation ... there are all sorts of conversations you can have. And just as there are all sorts of conversations, there are all sorts of interviews you may be conducting. We are talking here about in-depth interviews, not on-street reporting interviews. We'll discuss those in detail in the chapters on reporting.

First, there are different styles of interviews and you will approach them differently. They fall into two basic categories: hard news interviews and soft interviews. The hard news interviews tend to be direct, informational, objective, and almost always recorded ... not live. Soft interviews are conducted with live guests or recorded features. These tend to be non-confrontational, emotional, and comfortable: more on this in a bit.

All interviews are conversations with some basic rules. In order to make your interviews conversations, you need to follow some simple rules. We'll call them Nancy's rules. So let's get started with our first set.

Prepare, Communicate, Listen.

Prepare

In all cases, you must prepare. You must do your homework about your guest and be prepared to discuss any aspect of your subject's interest or life. If he or she wrote a book, read it. If someone wrote a book or article about your guest, read that too. You will be ready if the conversation takes an unexpected—and often very interesting—turn.

It's not enough to breeze through the research. Read it to understand it. As you work through the information, questions will start to form in your mind. Have a note book handy to jot your thoughts and questions down as you have them. I guarantee you will not remember all those thoughts later. Even more important, by writing down the questions when reading your research you will remember the WAY to ask them.

Someday, you may have the luxury of having a staff to gather your research. You should ask for lots of it. But until you get to the exalted position of having a staff, you must do your own research. It helps. You will understand the subject and your interview guest better.

Your confidence will show through, not only to your interviewee but also to your audience. Think of interviews you have watched as a viewer. You can tell when someone is prepared and when they are not. You have questions in your mind that
seem so obvious but aren’t asked, right? That interviewer might be unprepared.

On the other hand, you have seen interviews where the reporter zaps just the right question at the right time—something the guest hadn’t expected and which takes the interview to another level. That’s preparation showing through.

Rarely are 60 Minutes correspondents tripped up by the guest. They do their homework even though they don’t do the preliminary research. They have “the bible,” a huge binder of notes, quotes, and background material. It’s prepared by the producer and includes a paragraph on each person to be interviewed and questions for the interview. So until you have a producer to do that for you, it’s not a bad idea to prepare your own bible. Unprepared interviewers can have embarrassing moments. It can be worse. They have lost interviews completely.

Report from the Trenches

There is one story floating around the networks that tells of the time that a young Bill Gates of Microsoft had consented to a rare TV interview. This was a big coup at the time. It was to be taped and the crew put the final touches to the set. It was a two-camera shoot (one on Gates, one on the interviewer). Gates was seated in his chair while the soundman was working on his microphone. The interviewer was seated across from him and looked at the questions that had been written on cards. The interviewer scowled, looked around, and shouted to the producer, “Who is this Miss Dose?”

The producer approached and began whispering in the interviewer’s ear as Mr. Gates stared at them. The interviewer, sensing there was a problem, snapped at the producer. Gates pulled off his microphone and left it carefully on his chair. As he started to leave, he said, “It’s not Miss Dose, it’s MS DOS ... it’s my invention. That’s the operating system behind Microsoft.” Because the interviewer didn’t know that, Gates assumed the interview wouldn’t be any good. The story illustrates the value of preparation.

Research

Where do you do your research? Where do you dig up the information you need? There are the obvious places: written research can be found on the internet or in magazines or books. But inside those resources, you can find harder-to-find places for information. By a close read of the magazine, book, or internet research, you might get more ideas for further contacts and consequently different ideas, stories, and information.

Always read the entire article so you can understand the context. Always try to be
aware of the largest possible picture. In this way you will pick up tidbits of information that spark the guest and the listening audience.

**Communicate**

In all cases, whether a live interview or a recorded one, whether hard news or soft, communication must take place. You must connect with your subject. You should keep eye contact and stay interested.

In our daily lives, we communicate all the time. It’s called having a conversation. This does not mean a leisurely chat. Keep your energy up and your guest will also. Keep your pace up and your guest will. Keep your interest up and your guest will too – you will communicate.

**Listen**

How will you become a great interviewer? Become a great listener. There is no greater compliment you can give a person than to listen to what he or she is telling you. Listen with enthusiasm and interest—this is called active listening. You do it already when someone is telling you something you care about.

In all cases, live or recorded, hard news or soft, listen to what your guest is saying. You can check your notes but don’t dwell on them because it can be disconcerting for your guest if you are looking somewhere else. It’s like life in general, when you aren’t listening, I mean really listening, you can miss the most important thing your guest said. For example, it might happen that when you are looking for your next question and not listening, your guest said, “Yeah, I did feel bad when I killed him…” Maybe not that dramatic but you get the idea. You don’t want to miss what’s being said.

By listening and undertaking proper preparation, you will pick up that newsworthy item. Whether it’s the confession of an actor or the admission of a businessman, when you hear it alarm bells should go off in your head. Be sure to follow up.

This you know, but it’s worth repeating here: not all language is verbal. Not only must you listen to the guest’s words, but you must also read his or her body language. It speaks volumes. And it might be giving you (and the audience) a different and more honest answer to your question. If it becomes pronounced, address it.

For example, you have been asking the corporate officer about documents that show illegal acts.

Corporate officer: I can tell you honestly, no one in our company did anything of the sort.
You: You’ve broken out in a sweat sir...

**Intonations and Silence**

The intonations of the interviewee can be as important as body language. Listen for the hesitations and silences.

Speaking of silence, it can be a very useful tool for you in an interview. This works well in either recorded or live interviews. At times, you get a sense that the person you are talking to is holding something back.

Try this: Shut up and listen very intently. Let the silence reign. Often, your guest’s response will be to fill the void by starting to talk. It is often something interesting, and it may be the thing he or she was holding back. It might be a fact or something of substance in your hard news interview. If it’s an emotional moment, your silence will allow the guest to complete his or her emotion. It may be a quivering lip, tears, or a thoughtful pause. That can be far more telling and compelling than what is said.

**To Pre-interview or Not to Pre-interview?**

This is a very good question that many people argue about. So here are the two schools of thought. Let’s examine both YES and NO on whether to pre-interview.

YES, you should meet and chat with the guest before the cameras roll. There are very good reasons for this.

- You will hear and know what the guest has to say. You will know what he or she will say well, with passion, with feeling, with interest. And you will know what he or she doesn’t say well or won’t talk about at all. So when the cameras are rolling you won’t be wasting time by asking those questions.
- You will already have a relationship with the guest. So when the cameras roll, you will be able to build on the comfort zone you have built in the pre-interview. The preliminary and awkward get-to-know-you is out of the way.
- You have more time to cover material in a pre-interview than you ever will have on camera. This gives you the opportunity to dig where it might not be fruitful and come up with anecdotes and stories that you might not otherwise have learned.

NO, you should not meet or chat with the guest about the substance of the interview beforehand. There are very good reasons here, too.

- You will lose spontaneity. There is nothing like the first meeting and it cannot be re-created. There is an energy to the discovery of information and to your
interaction with each other. It will seem like a fresh conversation because it is. If you have gone over this all before, the interview could sound stale and come out like a rehash of facts.

- You won’t always get the same answer again. Remember, most of the people you will interview are not professionals at this. Just because you heard it before does not mean you will get it again or with the same passion. Often you hear interviewers say, “You said before…” — the interviewer telling the audience what the guest said, and probably said well, in a pre-interview. That’s no good.

How do I vote? I acknowledge that by pre-interviewing you are vulnerable to a staler interview rather than a totally fresh one. You aren’t as daring out there like a tightrope walker without a net.

But I do vote YES to the pre-interview, especially when you are just getting started. This way, you won’t miss a point or a good story that comes up in an extended pre-interview. Plus there will be a comfort factor with your guest that will help.

But you decide what is better for you. You decide if the risk of not pre-interviewing is worth the reward.

Be Polite

Even in the most aggressive confrontational interview you have, be polite. Even if your guest is being rude to you or others, be polite. You are a professional and you should conduct the interview that way You are not the story and shouldn’t become it. The light should be on your guest and the information you draw from your guest. What if your guest becomes rude? Do not take the bait. Always stick to the point of the interview.

For example, you have just shown your guest documents that prove he has done something wrong.

Him: “You’re a jerk.”
You: “I’m not the issue sir. What can you say about…”
Him: “You’re full of s–t!”
You “Sir, may I point out these documents show your company...”

His bad acting will reflect badly on him. If you respond badly, that will reflect badly on you. And you haven’t gotten the response to the matter at hand, have you?

That is an example of a category of hard news interview called a confrontational interview. There are subsets in hard news and soft interviews, too.
**Hard News Interviews**

A confrontational interview is a news interview, usually a sit-down one, conducted politely (note above) but with a strong point of view. Think 60 Minutes' investigative report. It is almost always recorded, rarely live. In fact, don't ever offer to do such an interview live. You can lose control quickly.

An example of a live confrontational interview took place during the 1968 Democratic convention. It was a live broadcast that was called gavel-to-gavel coverage at the time. Many confrontations took place between the Chicago mayor's henchmen and reporters on the convention floor and outside on the street where reporters were covering anti-war demonstrations. It was very dramatic but the interviews didn't amount to much. Certainly, in these circumstances, you have no choice.

An ambush interview is a confrontational interview when the subject will not agree to be interviewed and has been avoiding you. You catch him or her where you can. Not the best journalism to be sure, but at times necessary.

A headliner interview is usually a live interview that tends to be longer than most hard news interviews. Think of the Sunday Morning news broadcasts involving politicians, and also late-night news broadcasts or Charlie Rose interviews.

**Soft News Interviews**

A soft newsmaker interview features newsworthy people not ordinarily in the news such as a firefighter hero, or people connected with newsworthy events such as trapped miners. Think of morning news broadcasts (usually live) or prime-time magazine profiles (usually recorded) interviews.

A celebrity interview is almost always conducted live. Oprah, Diane Sawyer, and Barbara Walters are among the best ever at the celebrity interview. They get the guests to say things by cajoling them, teasing them, and sympathizing with them. They tend to be more emotional and the interviewer is almost completely supportive of the guest. Also, don't forget the night-time comics; think Jimmy Fallon, Jon Stewart, Colbert, or David Letterman.

**Hard News Interview Techniques**

No joking around here. A good way to start is to make sure the guest knows the camera is rolling then ask the guest his or her name and title. You might also ask how the person would like to be referred to in the piece. Some Jims would like the more formal James while others prefer Jim. It's a professional start and gives you useful information.
One correspondent I know always states for the record, “You know this is an on-the-record interview for XXX News.” Every once in a while, that statement will be handy if the guest tries to claim he or she didn’t know the cameras were rolling. In all cases, it is professional and sets a hard news tone.

**Soft News Interview Techniques**

There are techniques you will use in a soft news interview that you wouldn’t use in a hard news interview.

The hardest thing is to put a person at ease so that they will trust you. In order to have a great interview the interviewee must feel comfortable, and open up to and trust the interviewer. A smart way to gain this trust is to talk about something at the beginning that will comfort them.

Relax the guest. You are having a conversation with a friend. Relax your friend. In a morning news interview, a celebrity interview, an author interview, you want your guest to feel you are in this together—a partnership, a team. You are on his or her side and you should build a trust. Most guests will not be as comfortable as you are, so it is up to you to take control in a firm and friendly way.

To make this partnership between you and your guest work best, it is a good idea to first set your guest at ease. The more relaxed the guest is the more open he or she will be and therefore you will get a stronger and more riveting interview.

To begin with you might ask a question about something physical. It tends to relax the interviewees when you ask about something they can see and touch that’s right in front of them. For example, before the cameras roll, you might make note of their new hairdo, dress, or tie. You can ask this at the start of your airtime. It’s fun and both the guest and the audience tend to like it. People tend to drop their guard and to laugh a bit.

In this way the interviewees will feel you are not confrontational, that you are helpful, on their team, and that you will help them tell their story. In some cases, you might start the interview on camera this way. The viewers seem to really love this intimate peek, too.

Other suggestions to open the conversation include talking about something that both of you know. Of course, you are thinking, “If I’ve not spoken to this person before, how can I find some common ground?” Easy. Talk about the weather outside. Is it hot or cold, snowy, rainy, or windy? This is always relatable between two people. Is there a holiday nearby? How about Thanksgiving coming up or just past, the fourth of July, or Memorial Day? Or family. Any kids? Everyone likes to talk about the kids, though not on always camera.
Chat Up Your Guest

One trick I’ve seen used to good effect is to chat with your guest before the cameras roll, while the crew is setting the lights or putting on the microphones. Introduce your guest to the crew by name. Then tell the guest that he or she should ignore these wonderful people, they are used to it. It’s an ice breaker, a friendly way to have everyone meet each other, and can even get a giggle from the guest.

All of this will help to relax the guest. Furthermore, this little trick will remind the guest that you two are going to have a conversation. You want to make sure the guest talks to you and doesn’t look over at the camera.

There is one host who it is said refuses to allow some guests back on the show because they did not look at her during the interview but stared at the camera. (So if you are ever a guest, take note.)

The All-Important First Question

The first question you ask after putting the person at ease should be a poignant, great first question. If it is boring, the audience will turn to a different channel and the interviewee will turn off.

If the thrust of the interview revolves around an incident and there is a story that is needed to set up the forthcoming questions, then be smart. Let the story unfold. Don’t tell the story yourself. It’s always more gripping to hear it from the interviewee.

For example, don’t say, “You were in the office in the morning and one of your bosses walked in and spoke rudely to you.” You want the story from your guest. It will be much more powerful, and you won’t get it wrong.

Report from the Trenches

Here is a good example. Some years back, Connie Chung was doing an interview with the Captain of the Exxon Valdez. You may remember this was the oil tanker that ran aground in Alaska creating a devastating oil spill for many miles.

Finally, when the captain returned to his family on Long Island, Chung snagged the first interview with him. Her first question was, “How does it feel to be home?” This was a comfort question. She opened with this to put the Captain at ease, to gain his trust. The word “home” has a comforting resonance for everyone.

You could see the Captain relax. After that first question he trusted her. He felt she was
on his side. He felt she was on HIS TEAM. And once that trust is there, you can ask almost anything. Your guest knows that you won’t throw him in. This is essential for a great interview.

Charlie Rose has this ability. He makes all his guests feel he is on their side, on their team. It is a fact that guests simply will not open their hearts to you if they don’t feel you are on their side.

**People relate to people.**

Your audience will want to relate to your guest. The way to build this relationship is through emotion. To steal an idea from Robert Penn Warren’s All the King’s Men, ”make ‘em cry or make ‘em laugh … pinch ‘em in the soft place.” In other words, go for the emotion in the interview and the audience will come back to you for more. That speech in All the King’s Men ends with another thought that’s worth repeating, ”For sweet Jesus’ sake, don’t try to improve their minds.” You can teach the viewers, but they will absorb the information better when it is riding on an emotion, the same way medicine goes down with syrup.

**The Shape of an Interview**

If you could put the shape of an interview into a picture, what would it look like? It would look like an inverted triangle.

You must ask the most specific questions at the beginning. You don’t want to ask general questions at the start of the interview. The reason for this is that the general questions take too long to answer, and are not as interesting. The more specific your questions, the more specific the answers will be. The fact is that just as in any conversation, the answers are more interesting when they are not general answers.

Examples of general questions are: “Tell us, what is your book about?”, “What is your day like?” or “What is Greece like?” These questions are too general. You will get general responses. You won’t get the best stuff because the best stuff consists of anecdotes and stories. As the interview progresses and you feel that some more general background is needed, then you can ask the more general questions.

Remember this: there is no reason to say, “Tell us…” because that’s what your guest is there to do and what he or she is obviously doing.

**Time Is of the Essence**
Especially in television. So don’t waste it. If your guest is answering your question with a very long answer you must find an appropriate time to cut in. Often the guest is trying to fill the airtime because of nerves. Sometimes it’s because the guest is trying to find the answer, simply forgot the question, or was pre-programmed with the message. In any case, you have to politely but firmly butt in. Get the interview back on track and back to the crisp give-and-take of a conversation.

**Answers That are Toooo Long**

The other danger of allowing a run-on answer is you run the risk of letting the guest control the interview.

hose show is it anyway? My students ask me, “How do you cut guests off if they are talking on and on, or if they get on a band box to espouse their views?” You do it as you would in normal conversation. Some people keep talking by never completing their sentences. There are obvious clues, and you should be aware of them. These people keep saying, and... and... and... which... um... well... but... You need to jump in fast. You sense a slight hesitation and you're in like Flynn.

You’ll start to recognize this syndrome after only one usually horrible experience. Once will be enough, I guarantee it. Better however to avoid even one. In a real-life conversation you never think about when you interrupt the person with whom you are speaking. You do it all the time. And it’s not rude, is it?

**Questions That Are Toooo Long**

Just as answers can be too long, so can questions. Ask tight, strong questions. People usually understand what you are asking. If you keep running off at the mouth, it’s often because you can’t figure out how to end the question or you’ve forgotten it. Not only will the viewer be annoyed and bored, so will your guest. So, be careful of questions that go on and on and...

Be aware of the questions that don’t quite finish: “Were you frightened and scared and umm uh or were you...?” Finish your thought.

Also be careful of asking more than one question. Don’t ask, “Did you think you would survive, and how’s the family doing?” In addition, don't limit the question: “Were you frightened or just angry?” Here you are giving your interviewee only two alternatives. On his or her own, your guest might come up with a more striking and original answer. So make sure that you don’t box in your interviewee.
**Yes or No Questions**

Should you ask questions that will get you an answer that is "yes" or "no"?

“No.”

Do you know why you shouldn’t?

“No.”

Because you get a one word answer ... see?

“Yes.”

Do you agree the viewer doesn’t get much out of it?

“Yes.”

So don’t. OK?

“OK.”

Is that a yes?

“Yes.”

**Anecdotes and Stories**

Anecdotes and stories are the soul of a great interview. You must get them. Without anecdotes an interview is dull. Stories will rivet your viewer. When we are let into some of the specific stories of subjects’ lives, they become fascinating. We emotionally hook up with them.

Do you remember the movie Schindler’s List? The entire film was shot in black and white. There was a scene where hundreds of dead bodies lay on the ground. One was a little girl in a red coat. The red coat was the only thing in color. And it stood out. It gave us the specific. It was moving. The red coat is the specific anecdote. It reveals something vivid about the individual telling the story.

These specific stories, told by the interviewee, bring the viewer to an empathetic understanding of your subject’s situation. The anecdotes give the guest credibility, and the viewer can hook up with the interviewee on an emotional level.

Everyone loves a story. Don Hewitt who created 60 Minutes and ran it for decades had a basic rule for the pieces in that broadcast. It wasn’t to investigate some big-deal wrongdoing or get the most important person to interview for the piece. None of that. Don’s rule was: “Tell me a story.” That’s from the creator of the hardest of the hard news broadcasts ever shown on television: “Tell me a story.”
Every person is different from everyone else, but we also have many similarities. It is the sharing of these specific stories that bring us together and keeps us breathlessly watching an interview.

**Have More Questions Than You Think You Will Need**

You never know when you will have time for an extra question or two, especially in a feature report. Always have a couple in your back pocket, just in case.

**Report from the Trenches**

There’s a story about a network anchor whose job that day was to interview Prince Charles. The prince was having a jolly good time during the interview, which lasted about ten minutes. During the commercial break, Charles said to the interviewer, “I’d be happy to continue this wonderful interview with you!” But the interviewer responded, “I’m sorry, but I don’t have any more questions.”

If you are a good interviewer, don’t be surprised if the guest would like to stay. Make sure you always have more questions than you need.

**Where Do You Look When You Are Interviewing?**

Do you look at the camera or at the interviewee? When you ask a question you should always look at the interviewee. Do not look at the camera. If it’s a two-camera shoot with one camera on the interviewer and one on the guest, it should be set up like this: there will be one camera placed over the interviewee’s left shoulder, shooting you, the interviewer. Another camera will be aimed over your left shoulder shooting the interviewee.

The rule is: be sure to START the question directly to the interviewee, and to FINISH the question directly to the interviewee. You might need to refer to your notes to read an exact quote or read a law or regulation exactly. But if you don’t pay attention to the guest, this will affect the guest’s answer. Furthermore, not only will the guest lose focus, so will the audience. If it looks as though you are not interested in the answer, why should the audience be?

Usually, you will have only one camera, placed next to you shooting your guest. At times, the cameraperson should pull out to a two-shot with you in the picture asking the question. As with a two-camera shoot, you should keep your focus on your interview subject.
Your Voice

Use your voice. This is a huge part of what you have to offer. We will discuss more about the voice in the chapters on vocal and physical technique. But because this is so important I want to just touch on it now.

The things about your voice you should be working on are:

- expanding your range
- articulation
- modulation
- speech impediments
- regional accents
- how to be intimate
- how to talk intimately.

And listen quietly. By this I mean don’t make extraneous sounds: paper rustling noises, smacking your lips, or over-talking. Just listen quietly.

Whose Interview Is It Anyway?

When you’re interviewing someone don’t show how funny you are (unless you are Jon Stewart or David Letterman, of course). Don’t show how smart you are. Be there for the guest. Many people feel the need to show everyone how smart they are. The place NOT to do that is in front of the camera.

Report from the Trenches

During Phil Donahue’s talk show some years ago, he would occasionally have a guest talking about a complicated subject or one that was very technical. Donahue did a very cool two-step. He’d be holding his mike and standing with the guest. The guest would be chatting and Donahue would start stepping a bit backwards, and saying, “I don’t quite get this. Could you explain it to me further.” Or, “What do you mean by that, I don’t quite get it.”

Donahue is smart. He probably understood it very well. But he was concerned that the viewers might need more explanation. He didn’t need to prove anything to anybody. He was terrific. He helped make the interviewee look great and he made the audience feel smart. They were thinking, “Oh, yeah, I get this now, I can follow this technical complicated stuff.”
What he was doing really was listening to his guest. It shows you once again how important listening is during an interview. Listen actively and you will make the right choice from the millions of choices that you need to make as the interview unfolds.

**The End of the Interview**

Generally, you don’t want to end an interview with “We are nearly out of time...” or “We have 15 seconds left, how do you explain that your company lost 12 billion dollars?” It’s not fair to your guest, and your viewers will not like you for it. I just don’t think it’s a good idea to show the underpinnings of an interview. Remember, this is a conversation. Do you ever recall saying to someone at a dinner: “Here’s my last question...”? No. Just ask your last question.

If you are running out of time, be aware of that. Don’t ask a complex question. If you are really running out of time, don’t ask any more questions but wrap it up gracefully. In all cases, you should end your interview with something polite like “Thank you” or “Good luck.”

**The Difference Maker**

My students ask, “What do I need to become a great interviewer?” Curiosity. No one can give you that. It’s the one quality that makes for a great interviewer as well as a great reporter. People are interested in people. You have to want to know what makes people tick. What makes them do what they do and how they do it. Why do people make the gazillion choices they are constantly making? It’s often the same old story but it’s always different. That’s what makes it interesting: the difference!

You must always be open and flexible. You must be ready to change gear in a split second. You must be ready, willing, and able to throw out some or even all of your prepared questions if the interviewee gives you something more interesting than what you’d planned to talk about.

Always be specific in your thoughts, and in your choices. To become a great interviewer, the important words are “to become.” It doesn’t happen all at once. It’s like any skill, the more you do it the better you will get.

**Are There Any Exercises I Can Use?**

Yes, you can practice. Take risks. People can always refuse to answer you.

If possible, practice with a video camera. The pressure will then be on, and it is much
more like a real broadcast situation. The closer you can simulate the real situation the more you will get out of your exercises.

**Exercise for Interview Variety**

This is a stretching exercise. Stretch your interests. Just because you do not like baseball, you will someday have to find a baseball player or owner interesting.

Choose a guest who does something you care little about. Choose a variety of fields. As practice, interview a friend who is a jock then one who’s doing the school play. Choose a motorcycle mechanic or a grocery store stocker. They all have stories to tell if you are doing your job well. Dig and draw out the specialness of each person you interview. Use several different people to stretch your skills. Be imaginative. Get your curiosity going. Get the viewers’ curiosity going.

**Exercise for Questions**

Choose two serious newsmakers who are in the news. Write up ten questions you would ask this guest if he or she were on your show.

Try asking each question two different ways. Ask yourself: how tight can I make the question and still keep it strong? The words you choose should fire the imagination of the interviewee. An example is: "What do you like to do?" or "What is your passion?" Words like “passion” excite the listener and will elicit a stronger response. Another example is: "Could you tell me what you’d like to do if you had your choice of anything in the world?" or "Imagine..." This is another word that fires up the interviewee. So choose the strongest words. Be creative. Don’t take the boring way out. Are you teasing the interviewee, trying to excite the interviewee, challenging the interviewee? Are you inviting them on a journey into the past?

**Exercise for Asking the Challenging Question**

Here’s an observation: I’ve noticed in interviews during the past ten years that people are much more willing to talk about their sex lives or what crimes they have committed than tell you their actual salary. Money is off limits. So this one is very high on the list of grabbers. If you have someone who is willing to put up with anything and won’t knock your block off if you ask an embarrassing question, try this. Ask the person you’re interviewing how much they make, or how much they’ve lost in the market. But be ready for the reply, "I’d rather not discuss that” or "I can’t recall." However, if the interviewee believes you’re on their team and on their side, they just might tell you.
Exercise for Listening

Stop laughing right this minute! I know you know how to listen. But you need practice listening as an interviewer. Listen up! For practice, go out with a friend to the park, a bar, or somewhere else you two can talk. Ask a question and then listen. Do not interrupt, keep on listening until it’s too long. That will give you an idea of just how much people will say.

Another thing. As your friend is talking, you will think of things to say, things that happened to you for example. Stifle yourself. What you want to say may be interesting, may even be more interesting than what your friend is saying, but this interview is not about you. This is not as easy as you might think.

So practice until you can control yourself. Become a secure listener.

Exercise for Flexibility

You need flexibility in your interviews: you have to be nimble and quick on your feet. By doing some improvisation, you can get better. Work with a friend. Have him or her be the guest and throw you a curveball, some surprise that you don’t know is coming. Then deal with it.

What would you do if someone you were interviewing said:

“No, I was just released from prison where I’ve been for 25 years after I killed my mother.”

“Nice to meet you, too; most people don’t talk to me because I’m the King of Europe.”

“I don’t talk to strangers.”

“I’d like to talk about the senator. He’s an ass and corrupt. He’s a thief.”

One Last Exercise

Interview a friend, or perhaps more of a challenge is to interview a family member. But really do it. Be sure to ask the daring questions like what they earn.

Really try to get it out of them. Ask about that family funeral, the sibling rivalry, the difficult relationship with the daughter that no one mentions. Take risks. People can always refuse to answer you. Sometimes you can even ask them about subjects they have told you beforehand that they don’t wish to discuss. You have to be sensitive about this. Sometimes things are going well and you feel this is a great interview and
you can ask anything. Even when it's harder and you keep struggling for the stories and anecdotes keep going and try a different approach. Go at it from a different angle.

Don't keep asking the same question in exactly the same form with the exact same words. A sense of humor, a joke, some playful teasing or really being sympathetic are all ways that will get a strong and helpful response from the interviewee and can turn the interview around. It's HOW you ask the question.

**Practice, Practice, Practice**

Challenge yourself.

Have fun.

Be brave and imaginative.

Naturally, if you're smart, sensitive, ambitious, driven, and sharp you've got a lot going for you.
CHAPTER 6

Commentary
Chapter 6. Commentary

Radio has a marvellous facility for creating pictures in the listener's mind. It is more flexible than television in that it is possible to isolate a tiny detail without waiting for the camera to 'zoom in' and it can create a breadth of vision much larger than the dimensions of a glass screen. The listener does more than simply eavesdrop on an event; radio, more easily than television or video, can convey the impression of actual participation. The aim of the radio commentator is therefore to recreate in the listener's mind not simply a picture but a total impression of the occasion. This is done in three distinct ways:

1 The words used will be visually descriptive of the scene.
2 The speed and style of their delivery will underline the emotional mood of the event.
3 Additional 'effects' microphones will reinforce the sounds of the action, or the public reaction to it.

**Attitude to the listener**

When describing a scene, the commentator should have in mind 'a blind friend who couldn't be there'. It is important to remember the obvious fact that the listener cannot see. Without this it is easy to slip into the situation of simply chatting about the event to 'someone beside you'. The listener should be regarded as a friend because this implies a real concern to communicate accurately and fully. The commentator must use more than his or her eyes and convey information through all the senses, so as to heighten the feeling of participation by the listener. Thus, for example, temperature, the proximity of people and things, or the sense of smell are important factors in the overall impression. Smell is particularly evocative – the scent of newly mown grass, smoke from a fire, the aroma inside a fruit market or the timeless mustiness of an old building. Combine this with the appropriate style of delivery and the sounds of the place itself, and you are on the way to creating a powerful set of pictures.

**Preparation**

Some of the essential stages are described in Chapter 18, but the value of a pre-transmission site visit cannot be overemphasised. Not only must the commentator be certain of the field of vision and whether the sun is likely to be in their eyes, but it is important to spend time obtaining essential facts about the event itself. For example, in preparing for a ceremonial occasion, research:

1 the official programme of events with details of timing, etc.;
2 the background of the people taking part, their titles, medals and decorations, positions, relevant history, military uniforms, regalia or other clothing, personal anecdotes – for the unseen as well as the seen, for example organisers, bandmasters, security people, caretakers, etc.;

3 the history of where it's taking place, the buildings and streets, and their architectural detail;

4 the names of the flowers used for decoration, the trees, flags, badges, mottoes and symbols in the area. The names of any horses or make of vehicles being used;

5 the titles of music to be played or sung, and any special association it might have with the people and the place.

It adds immeasurably to the description of a scene to be able to mention the type of stone, carving, architectural history or usage relating to a building, or that 'around the platform are purple fuchsias and hydrangeas'. The point of such detail is to use it as contrast with the really significant elements of the event, so letting them gain in importance. Contrast makes for variety and for more interesting listening and mention of matters both great and small is essential, particularly for an extended piece. An eye for detail can also be the saving of a broadcast when there are unexpected moments to fill. There is no substitute for a commentator doing proper homework.

In addition to personal observation and enquiry, useful sources of information will be the Internet, reference section of libraries or museums, newspaper cuttings, back copies of the event programme, previous participants, specialist magazines and commercial or government press offices.

Having obtained all the factual information in advance, the commentator must assemble it in a form that can be used in the conditions prevailing at the OB. If perched precariously on top of a radio car in the rain, clutching a guardrail and holding a microphone, stopwatch and an umbrella, the last thing you want is a bundle of easily windblown papers! It might be easiest to have your script notes held on a tablet or smartphone. If you are using paper, use as few sheets as possible, held firmly on a clipboard. Cards can be useful since you can quickly change the order and they are silent to handle. The important thing is their order and logic. The information will often be chronological in nature, listing the background of the people taking part. This is particularly so where the participants appear in a predetermined sequence – a procession or parade, variety show, race meeting, athletics event, church service or civic ceremony. Further information on the event or the environment can be on separate pages so long as they can be referred to easily. If the event is non-sequential, for instance a football match or public meeting, the personal information might be more useful in alphabetical form, or better still memorised.
Figure 19.1 Rehearsing the commentary for a stone unveiling, the day before the event (Courtesy of BBC Radio Nottingham)

Working with the base studio

The commentator will need to know the precise handover details. This applies both from the studio to the commentator and at the end for the return to the studio. These details are best written down, for they easily slip the memory. There should also be clarity at both ends about the procedures to be followed in the event of any kind of circuit failure –

the back-up music to be played, and who makes the decision to restore the programme.

It might be necessary to devise some system of hand signals or other means of communication with technical staff, and on a large OB whether all commentators will get combined or individual 'talkback' on their headphones, etc. These matters are the 'safety nets' that enable the commentators to fulfil their role with a proper degree of confidence.

As with all outside broadcasts, the base studio should ensure that the commentary output is recorded. Not only will the commentator be professionally curious as to how it came over, but the material might be required for archive purposes. Even more important is that an event worthy of a 'live' OB will almost certainly merit a broadcast of edited highlights later in the day.
Sport

First and foremost, the sports commentator must know his or her sport and have detailed knowledge of the particular event. What was the sequence that led up to this event? What is its significance in the overall contest? Who are the participants and what is their history? The possession of this background information is elementary, but what is not so obvious is how to use it. The tendency is to give it all out at the beginning in the form of an encyclopedic but fairly indigestible introduction. Certainly the basic facts must be provided at the outset, but a much better way of using background detail is as the game, race or tournament itself proceeds, at an appropriate moment or during a pause in the action. This way the commentator sounds much more a part of what is going on, instead of being a rather superior observer.

Traditionally, for technical reasons, the commentator has often had to operate from inside a soundproof commentary position, isolated from the immediate surroundings. It’s easy to lose something of the atmosphere by creating too perfect an environment, and there is a strong argument in favour of the ‘ringside seat’ approach, provided that it is possible to use a noise-cancelling microphone and that communication facilities, such as headphone talkback, are secure.

Sports stadia seem to undergo more frequent changes to their layout than other buildings and unless a particular site is in almost weekly use for radio work, a special
reconnaissance visit is strongly advised. It is easy to forego the site recce, assuming that the place will be the same as it was six months ago. However, unless there are strong reasons to the contrary, a visit and technical test should always be made.

Where the action is spread out over a large area, as with horse racing, golf, motor racing, a full-scale athletics competition or rowing event, more than one commentator is likely to be in action. Cueing, handovers, timing, liaison with official results – all these must be precisely arranged. The more complex an occasion, the more necessary is observance of the three golden rules for all broadcasts of this type:

1 meticulous production planning so that everyone knows what they are likely to have to do;
2 first-class communications for control;
3 only one person in charge.

Communicating mood

The key question is ‘what is the overall impression here?’ Is it one of joyful festivity or is there a more intense excitement? Is there an urgency to the occasion or is it relaxed? At the other end of the emotional scale there may be a sense of awe, a tragedy or a sadness that needs to be reflected in a sombre dignity – soldiers’ bodies being brought back from a war zone. Look at people’s faces – they will tell you. Whatever is happening, the commentator’s sensitivity to its mood, and to that of the spectators, will control matters of style, use of words and speed of delivery. More than anything else this will carry the impressions of the event in the opening moments of the broadcast. The mood of the crowd should be closely observed – anticipatory, excited, happy, generous, relaxed, impressed, restive, sullen, tense, angry, solemn, sad. Such feelings should be conveyed in the voice of the commentator and their accurate assessment will indicate when to stop and let the sounds of the event speak for themselves.

Coordinating the images

It is all too easy to fall short of an overall picture but to end up instead with some accurately described but separate pieces of jigsaw. The great art, and challenge, of commentary is to fit them together, presenting them in a logically coordinated way that allows your ‘blind friend’ to place the information accurately in their mind’s eye. The commentator must include not only the information relating to the scene, but also something about how this information should be integrated to build the appropriate framework of scale. Having provided the context, other items can then be related to it. Early on, it should be mentioned where the commentator’s own position is relative to the scene; also giving details of distance, up and down, size (big and small), foreground
and background, side to side – left and right, etc. Movement within a scene needs a smooth, logical transition if the listener is not to become hopelessly disorientated.

**Content and style**

The commentator begins with a 'scene-set', saying first of all where the broadcast is coming from, and why. This is best not given in advance by the continuity handover and duplication of this information must be avoided. The listener should be helped to identify with the location, particularly if it is likely to be familiar. The description continues from the general to the particular noting, as appropriate, the weather, the overall impression of lighting, the mood of the crowd, the colour content of the scene and what is about to happen. Perhaps two minutes or more should be allowed for this 'scene-setting', depending on the complexity of the event, during which time nothing much may be happening. By the time the action begins the listener should have a clear visual and emotional picture of the setting, its sense of scale and overall 'feel'. Even so,
the commentator must continually refer to the generalities of the scene as well as to the detail of the action. The two should be woven together.

Time taken for scene-setting does not, of course, apply in the case of news commentary where one is concerned first and foremost with what is happening. Arriving at the scene of a fire or demonstration, one deals first with the event and widens later to include the general environment. Even so, it is important to provide the detail with its context.

Many commentaries are greatly improved by the use of colour. Colour, whether gaudy or sombre, is easily recreated in the mind’s eye and mention of purple robes, brilliant green plumage, dark grey leaden skies, the blue and gold of ceremonial, the flashes of red fire, the green and yellow banners, or the sparkling white surf – such specific references conjure up the reality much better than the shortcut of describing a scene simply as ‘multi-coloured’.

In describing the action itself, the commentator should proceed at the same pace as the event, combining prepared fact with spontaneous vision. In the case of a planned sequence, as a particular person appears, or slightly in anticipation, reference is made to the appropriate background information, title, relevant history and so on. This is more easily said than done and requires a lot of practice – perhaps using a recorder to help perfect the technique.

![Figure 19.4 London’s Notting Hill Carnival, illustrating the need to convey width, height and depth](image-url)
News action

With little or no time for scene-setting it’s important to answer the central questions, what’s happening, where and why? Here, mood is especially important. Are people in a demonstration angry, dignified or relaxed? Read the banners and placards, describe any unrest or scuffles with police. How are the police reacting? Above all, get the event in proportion – how many people are there? How many stone-throwers? What is their age? Very often at such gatherings there are many inactive bystanders, and these are part of the scene too. At a large riot take a wide view, describing things from the edge not the centre of the action – keep out of the way of petrol bombs or water cannon.

At the scene of an accident, again it’s important that you report what you see. This is not the time for analysis as to causes, blame or speculation on outcomes. Whether this is a two-minute piece for a bulletin, or a half-hour actuality programme, leave me, the listener, with an accurate picture of the event so that I can really appreciate what has happened.

Sports action

The description of sport, even more than that of the ceremonial occasion, needs a firm frame of reference. Most listeners will be very familiar with the layout of the event and can orient themselves to the action so long as it is presented to them the right way round. They need to know which team is playing from left to right; in cricket, which end of the pitch the bowling is coming from; in tennis, who is serving from which court; in horse racing or athletics, the commentator’s position relative to the finishing line. It is not sufficient to give this information at the beginning only; it has to be used throughout a commentary, consciously associated with the description of the action.

As with the ceremonial commentator, the sports commentator is keeping up with the action but also noticing what is going on elsewhere, for instance the injured player, or a likely change in the weather. Furthermore, the experienced sports commentator can increase interest for the listener by highlighting an aspect of the event which is not at the front of the action. For example, the real significance of a motor race may be the duel going on between fourth and fifth place; the winner of a 10,000-metre race may already be decided but there can still be excitement in whether the athlete in second place will set a new European record or a personal best.

With slower games, such as cricket, the art is to use pauses in the action interestingly, not as gaps to fill but opportunities to add to the general picture or give further
information. This is where another commentator or researcher can be useful in supplying appropriate information from the record books or with an analysis of the performance to date. Long stretches of commentary in any case require a change of voice, as much for the listener as for the commentators, and changeovers every 20–30 minutes are about the norm.

If for some reason the commentator cannot quite see a particular incident or is unsure what is happening, it is better to avoid committing oneself. ‘I think that . . .’ is better and more positive than ‘It looks as though . . .’. Similarly it is unwise for a commentator to speculate on what a referee is saying to a player in a disciplinary situation. Only what can be seen or known should be described – the red or yellow card. It is easy to make a serious mistake affecting an individual’s reputation through the incorrect interpretation of what might appear obvious. And it must be regarded as quite exceptional to voice a positive disagreement with an umpire or referee’s decision. After all they are closer to the action and may have seen something that the commentator, with a general view, missed. The reverse can also be true but in the heat of the moment it is sensible policy to give match officials the benefit of any doubt.

Scores and results should be given frequently for the benefit of listeners who have just switched on but in a variety of styles in order to avoid irritating those who have listened throughout. Commentators should remember that the absence of goals or points can be just as important as a positive scoreline.

**Actuality and silence**

It may be that during the event there are sounds to which the commentary should refer. The difficulty here is that the noisier the environment, the closer on-microphone will be the commentator so that the background will be relatively reduced. It is essential to check that these other sounds can be heard through separate microphones, otherwise references to ‘the roar of the helicopters overhead’, ‘the colossal explosions going on around me’ or ‘the shouts of the crowd’ will be quite lost on the listener. It is important in these circumstances for the commentator to stop talking and to let the event speak for itself.

There are times when it is virtually obligatory for the commentator to be silent – during the playing of a national anthem, the ‘Last Post’, the blessing at the end of a church service, or important words spoken during a ceremonial. Acute embarrassment on the part of the over-talkative commentator and considerable annoyance for the listener will result from being caught unawares in this way. A broadcaster unfamiliar with such things as military parades, church services or funerals must be certain to avoid such pitfalls by a thorough briefing beforehand.
The ending

Running to time is helped by having a stopwatch synchronised with the studio clock. This will provide for an accurately timed handback, but if open-ended, the cue back to the studio is simply given at the conclusion of the event.

It is all too easy after the excitement of what has been happening to create a sense of anti-climax. Even though the event is over and the crowds are filtering away, the commentary should maintain the spirit of the event itself, perhaps with a brief summary, or with a mention of the next similar occasion. Another technique is radio’s equivalent of the television wide-angle shot. The commentator ‘pulls back’ from the detail of the scene, concluding as at the beginning with a general impression of the whole picture before ending with a positive and previously agreed form of words which indicates a return to the studio.

Many broadcasters prefer openings and closings to be scripted. Certainly if you have hit upon the neat, well-turned phrase, its inclusion in any final paragraph will contribute appropriately to the commentator’s endeavour to sum up both the spirit and the action of the hour.

An example

One of the most notable commentators was the late Richard Dimbleby of the BBC. Of many, perhaps his most memorable piece of work was his description of the lying-in-state of King George VI at Westminster Hall in February 1952. The printed page can hardly do it justice; it is radio and should be heard to be fully appreciated. It is old now, but nevertheless it is still possible to see here the application of the commentator’s ‘rules’. A style of language, and delivery, that is appropriate to the occasion. A ‘scene-set’ that quickly establishes the listener both in terms of the place and the mood. ‘Signposts’ which indicate the part of the picture being described. Smooth transitions of movement that take you from one part of that picture to another. Researched information, short sentences or phrases, direct speech, colour and attention to detail, all used with masterly skill to place the listener at the scene.

It is dark in New Palace Yard at Westminster tonight. As I look down from this old, leaded window I can see the ancient courtyard dappled with little pools of light where the lamps of London try to pierce the biting, wintry gloom and fail. And moving through the darkness of the night is an even darker stream of human beings, coming, almost noiselessly, from under a long, white canopy that crosses the pavement and ends at the great doors of Westminster Hall. They
speak very little, these people, but their footsteps sound faintly as they cross the yard and go out through the gates, back into the night from which they came.

They are passing, in their thousands, through the hall of history while history is being made. No one knows from where they come or where they go, but they are the people, and to watch them pass is to see the nation pass.

It is very simple, this lying-in-state of a dead king, and of incomparable beauty. High above all light and shadow and rich in carving is the massive roof of chestnut that Richard II put over the great hall. From that roof the light slants down in clear, straight beams, unclouded by any dust, and gathers in a pool at one place. There lies the coffin of the King.

The oak of Sandringham, hidden beneath the rich golden folds of the Standard; the slow flicker of the candles touches gently the gems of the Imperial Crown, even that ruby that King Henry wore at Agincourt. It touches the deep purple of the velvet cushion and the cool, white flowers of the only wreath that lies upon the flag. How moving can such simplicity be. How real the tears of those who pass and see it, and come out again, as they do at this moment in unbroken stream, to the cold, dark night and a little privacy for their thoughts.

(Richard Dimbleby, Broadcaster, pub. BBC 1966)

**Coping with disaster**

Sooner or later something will go wrong, sudden and quite unexpected. The VIP plane crashes, the football stadium catches fire, terrorists suddenly appear, a peaceful demonstration unexpectedly becomes violent or spectator stands collapse. The specialist war correspondent or experienced news reporter sent to cover a disaster knows how far to go in describing death and destruction. Sensitivity to the reactions of the listener in describing mutilated bodies or the bloody effect of shellfire is developed through experience and a constant reappraisal of news values. But the non-news commentator must also learn to cope with tragedy. From the crashing of the Hindenburg airship in 1937, the 1986 explosion of the Challenger space shuttle and the 2005 flooding of New Orleans, to the 9/11 destruction of the Twin Towers, commentators are required to react to the totally unforeseen, responding with an instant transition perhaps from national ceremony to fearful disaster. Certain kinds of events such as motor racing and airshows have an inherent capacity for accident, but when terrorists invade a peaceful Olympic Games village, commentators normally used to describing the excitement of the track are called on to cope with tensions of quite a different kind.
Here is an example of BBC sports commentator Peter Jones covering a football match at Hillsborough Stadium, Sheffield in 1989. The game had only just begun when more people crowding into the ground suddenly caused such a crush in the stands that supporters were climbing the fence and invading the pitch. The match was stopped and a few moments later:

At the moment there are unconfirmed reports, and I stress unconfirmed reports, of five dead and many seriously injured here at Hillsborough. Just to remind you what happened – after five minutes, at the end of the ground to our left where the Liverpool supporters were packed very tightly – and the report is that one of the gates in the iron fence burst open – supporters poured on the pitch. Police intervened and quite correctly the referee took the police advice and took both teams off. Since then we’ve had scenes of improvised stretchers with the advertising hoardings being torn up, spectators have helped, we’ve got medical teams, oxygen cylinders, a team of fire brigade officers as well to break down the fence at one end to make it easier for the ambulances to get through and we’ve got bodies lying everywhere on the pitch.

(Courtesy of BBC Sport)

Remembering that his commentary was being heard by the families and friends of people at the match, it was important here to describe the early casualty reports as ‘unconfirmed’ and also to avoid any attempt at identifying the cause of the situation, or worse, to apportion blame. Commentators do well to report only what they can personally see.

So what should the non-specialist do? Here are some guidelines:

• Keep going if you can. A sense of shock is understandable, but don’t be so easily deterred by something unusual that you head back to the studio. Even if your commentary is not broadcast ‘live’ it could be crucial for later news coverage.

• There’s no need to be ashamed of your own emotions. You are a human being too and if you are horrified or frightened by what is happening, say so. Your own reaction will be part of conveying that to your listener. It’s one thing to be professional, objective and dispassionate at a planned event, it is quite another to remain so during a sudden emergency.

• Don’t put your own life, or the lives of others, in unnecessary danger. You may from the best of motives believe that ‘the show must go on’, but few organisations will thank you for the kind of heroics that result in your death. If you are in a building which is on fire, say so and leave. If the bullets are flying or riot gas is being used in a demonstration, take cover. You can then say what’s happening and work out the best vantage point from which to continue.
• Don’t dwell on individual anguish or grief. Keep a reasonably ‘wide angle’ and put what is happening in context. Remember the likelihood that people listening will have relatives or friends at the event.

• Let the sounds speak for themselves. Don’t feel you have to keep talking; there is much value in letting your listener hear the actuality – gunfire, explosions, crowd noise, shouts and screams.

• Don’t jump to conclusions as to causes and responsibility. Leave that to a later perspective. Stick with observable events; relay the facts as you see them.

• Above all, arrive at a station policy for this sort of coverage well before any such event takes place. Get the subject on the agenda in order to agree emergency procedures.