

BROADCASTING THE OLYMPIC GAMES

THE MEDIA AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES – TELEVISION BROADCASTING

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The Media and the Olympic Games – Television Broadcasting?

Information Sheet

Introduction

This information sheet presents the evolution of Olympic Games TV broadcasting, from its beginnings to the present day.

It serves as a companion to the Activity Sheet “**Broadcasting the Olympic Games**”, which suggests activities to perform in class based on the “goal-oriented learning” approach.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- TOM SCHOOLS Activity Sheet
“**Broadcasting the Olympic Games**”
(several documents available, depending on the age of the students)
- TOM SCHOOLS Information Sheet
“**Media and the Olympic Games
– Television Broadcasting**”

→ To be downloaded from www.olympic.org/education
> Teaching Resources

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Watching the Olympic Games: better on TV than in the stadium?



“The challenge of bringing the images and sounds of the Games to the world is nearly as Olympian as the challenges for the competitors”.

Broadcasting the Olympics, Lausanne, IOC, 1999.

A total of 4.8 billion people watched the London 2012 Olympic Games on television. That corresponds to 69 per cent of the world's population. The achievements of the world's athletes and the magic of the Opening and Closing Ceremony shows certainly explain this success. But the “total immersion” experience offered to viewers also has a lot to do with it.

The magic of the Games shown on television is the result of technological and human achievements which have made it possible to broadcast live to the entire world very high quality images. Result: today's television viewers can experience the Games just as, or even more intensely than if they were actually in the stadium.

This document presents the evolution of Olympic Games broadcasting, from its beginnings to the present day. Indeed, the history of television and of the Olympic Games is special, a kind of alliance in which both parties feed off, complement and inspire one another.

Some history



Before the 1920s, the public outside the stadium had only a very partial view of the Olympic Games, by means of newsreels or cinema films (official films), which they might sometimes wait months to see. The arrival of radio in people's homes allowed listeners to follow the Olympic Games in 1924, in some cases live, within their own private sphere. The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin saw the first television coverage, with three cameras on site. But watching these broadcasts was a public event, in specially equipped rooms a short distance from the stadium. These facilities nonetheless allowed more than 162,000 people to watch the competitions on television.

By 1948 in London, the Olympic Games were present in people's living rooms, with live coverage allowing 500,000 people to follow the competitions up to 200km away from the stadium. After that, the range just kept growing, now allowing the entire world to follow the same event. The first live international broadcast, from Rome in 1960, was an important step in crossing borders. The 1964 Games in Tokyo were broadcast by satellite to the USA and Japan, while the Games in 1968 reached three continents and 17 per cent of the world's population. In 1972, 98 countries on five continents could watch the Games. By 1984, 156 countries were showing the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, or more than half the world's population... And so it went on, reaching a total of 4.8 billion viewers (or 69 per cent of the world's population) by the time of the 2012 Games in London.

Filming the Games



In 2001, the IOC created **Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS)**, the body responsible for filming all the competitions at the Olympic Games and making these images, edited in real time and enhanced with graphics and animations, to the world's broadcasters (this is known as the "world feed").

During the Olympic Games, thousands of people work for OBS. They come from all over the world, to ensure maximum "neutrality" in the way the competitions are recorded. OBS is always at the forefront in terms of technology, and does everything to ensure that the broadcast quality is nothing short of excellent.

For the first Games broadcasts, in 1936 in Berlin, three bulky and cumbersome cameras were used on the field of play (and could film only in good weather conditions). By the time of the 2012 Games in London, there were more than 1,000 cameras and 4,000 microphones (sometimes with several dozen used for a single competition)!

The multiplication of original filming angles, with Steadicams, cameras on rails or in the air following athletes' every movement, on the ground or under the water, means that every moment of every competition can now be followed in minute detail. Careful use of editing, close-ups and music also help to make the sports event more spectacular, increasing suspense and suspending time through the use of slow motion.

Broadcasting the Games



The broadcasters from all over the world at the Games do not all show the same competitions. Every country naturally has its own champions, popular sports, etc.

Each broadcaster therefore chooses which images of which competitions it wants to show from among those provided by OBS. For example, at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, broadcasters could choose from among 44,000 hours of broadcast coverage. Anyone wanting to show all the images would have needed 24 hours a day for five years to do so – more than an entire Olympiad! With the 2012 Olympic Games in London and their record 100,000 hours, more than 11 years would have been necessary...

The quality of the visual information is then enhanced by commentaries by professionals: specialised or sports journalists who draw attention to different aspects by providing relevant information.

This information is also provided directly on the image, with infographics and animations which explain specific aspects of the sport being watched.

Watching the Games



The quality of the broadcast image has also improved enormously: from just 180 lines in 1936, it increased to 819 lines in the 1940s. A considerable improvement came with fibre optic in 1984, before moving to High Definition in 2008, and 3D in 2012.

The first television pictures were in black-and-white, with colour first appearing on Japanese screens in 1964.

→ Videos in colour on:

www.olympic.org/tokyo-1964-summer-olympics

Colour cameras, at first bulky and heavy, were refined and used outside the studio for the first time at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. But it was not until the 1972 Winter Games, in Sapporo, that the first live coverage in colour was available worldwide. 1984 saw the start of digital video and super slow motion. Subsequently, screens grew in size, and home cinema developed, offering more of an entertainment experience.

Today, 5.1 surround sound and giant plasma screens give viewers sitting comfortably in their armchairs the impression of being totally immersed in the show.