The Media and the Olympic Games – the major Stages

Introduction

This sheet summarises the major stages in the dissemination of the Olympic Games through broadcasting. 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

In summary ...

What would the Olympic Games be without the media?

• Written press
• Newsreels
• Full-length features
• Radio
• Television
• The Internet
From 1896 to the 1960s – Newsreels

Starting with the first modern Olympic Games, short cinematographic sequences (newsreels) were shown in cinemas. The public could thus get a glimpse of this event outside the stadium. Initially very brief and recorded several weeks before, these animated sequences would, little by little, show the competitions more fully. As early as 1912, the events of the Olympic Games in Stockholm benefited from excellent coverage for their era, and could be viewed only a few days after being recorded. These newsreels, initially silent and in black and white, would profit from technical progress such as the invention of more manoeuvrable cameras, live sound and colour. All the Olympic Games were recorded in the form of newsreels until the decline of this medium in the 1960s.

What would the Olympic Games be without the media?

“The IOC takes all necessary steps in order to ensure the fullest coverage by the different media and the widest possible audience in the world for the Olympic Games.”


Since the revival of the Olympic Games by Pierre de Coubertin in 1896, the Olympic Games and the media have inspired and stimulated each other, making the Olympic experience even richer than it is within the stadium itself. In line with the Olympic Charter, everything is done to thrill the audience through the exploits of the athletes, and to spread the Olympic spirit throughout the world.

Below are the main stages of how the media have contributed, and continue to contribute, to spreading the Olympic spirit throughout the world and among every generation.

From 1896 – Written press

The international press followed news linked to the Olympic Games from the outset, disseminating the running of the competitions and the results of the events by means of articles illustrated with etchings, and later photographs. Despite the arrival of moving images and more rapid means of dissemination, the press has never stopped devoting a great deal of editorial space to sport.

In 1894, Pierre de Coubertin declared to the press:

“We are rebels; that is why the press, which has always supported positive revolutions, has understood and helped us; for this, I thank them with all my heart.”

From 1896 to the 1960s – Newsreels

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From 1912 – Full-length feature films (official films)

From 1912 onwards, numerous official films and fictional films based on the Olympic Games were screened in cinemas. The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin were immortalised by a full-length feature film, “Olympia”, produced by Leni Riefenstahl. This film used many technical and formal innovations which would go on to be widely used in the future, such as the moving image, underwater camera, tracking shots along the side of the track, aerial images, multiple viewpoints, etc.

Thanks to technological progress such as live sound recording, colour, or, more recently, 3D or High Definition, the official films have continuously evolved, both in form and in content. They have, however, retained the characteristics that set them apart from traditional broadcasting: the filmmaker’s more personal angle and more aesthetic approach to the image. This is probably why they still exist today.

From 1924 – Radio

Partially live radio coverage was produced on the occasion of the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924. At this time, organisers feared that radio would have a negative impact on the sale of entry tickets, so its beginnings were therefore hindered. The fears were unfounded; radio broadcasting of the Games developed; and the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin were covered in 28 languages in 2,500 broadcasts.

By 1948, the radio coverage of the Olympic Games spanned the whole world. The history of these broadcasts is marked by the voices of famous commentators who delighted the listeners, such as Frenchman Edmond Dehorter, one of the very first of them, who commentated on the Games in 1924; Britain’s Harold Abrahams, an Olympic medallist, who commentated on the Games in Berlin in 1936; or the Italian, Sandro Ciotti, in the 1960s, whose voice became hoarse in a broadcast lasting over 14 hours at the Olympic Games in Mexico City. Radio gave prominence to the imagination of the listener and, despite the advent of television and the attraction of its images, lives on today.
From 1936 – Television

In 1936, the Olympic Games in Berlin benefited from the first television coverage. These broadcasts could be seen in specially equipped rooms, allowing more than 162,000 people in all to follow the competitions outside the stadium, but in close proximity. At the 1948 Olympic Games in London, television came into people’s living rooms, allowing 500,000 people to follow the competitions up to 200 km away from the actual event. Subsequently, the broadcast radius would increase, little by little reaching people throughout the world, giving everyone the opportunity to participate in the collective experience of the Olympic Games.

Numerous improvements accompanied this progress, such as the arrival of colour in the 1960s; the improvement of image definition, cumulating in High Definition in 2008; or the over-230 hours of live 3D broadcast in 2012. Sound has also improved – today, you can hear the slightest brush and even the athletes breathing, which allows us to share their every emotion in 5.1 surround sound, for a fully immersive experience. The commentary of professionals from the world of sport, specialised journalists or former athletes underlines the action, adding pertinent information.

From 2004 – The Internet

The IOC created its first website in 1996. The same year, the website launched by the Organising Committee for the Olympic Games in Atlanta had 185 million hits during the period of the Games. The number of fans of and subscribers to the various websites set up in the framework of the Olympic Games has continued to increase. The Olympic Games in Athens in 2004 were the first to be streamed on the Internet. With the YouTube channel and the IOC’s official websites, Internet users now have the possibility of finding all the information they need and of discovering or seeing again extracts of their favourite competitions. They also have access to a large number of photos on the Internet.

In 2012, on the occasion of the Olympic Games in London, digital coverage exceeded televised coverage.

Today, thanks to laptop computers, tablets, smartphones and other equipment with integrated browsers, the Olympic Games are “accessible” at any time and in any place.
From the very first decades of the existence of the modern Olympic Games, the press, cinema and radio quickly gave a glimpse of the Games to the public outside the stadiums.

Thanks to television, which became widespread from the 1950s, the visual experience has become more intimate, as everyone can follow the Games from their living room, as well as collective, as the whole world can follow the same competitions at the same time.

With technical progress for improving sound, now available in 5.1, and the improvement of images to the point of HD or even 3D, today’s television viewer experiences full immersion.

With the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, and especially of tablets and smartphones in the 2010s, the whole world is interconnected. Anyone can share their own images, exchange and interact via social networks, and, even if they cannot cheer in the stadium, they can share the buzz and thus participate in one of the 20th and 21st centuries' greatest sports and media events.