



Front page news

Media coverage on an Olympic scale

Freelance journalist and media consultant [Steve Butterick](#) considers the media challenges facing the IOC, and the BBC, in advance of the 2012 Games.

It is the media coverage, and the increased cost of broadcasting rights, which has led to an unprecedented increase in revenue for the IOC over the last 20 years. Even now, the IOC is poring over the media coverage of the Turin 2006 Winter Olympics, adding up the millions around the world who tuned in, and soon they will be turning their attention to the media operation for the Beijing Games.

At the London Games in 2012, the BBC will be the host broadcaster, and covering the Olympics will be the biggest outside broadcast operation in its history. Consider the numbers from Athens: there were over 4,000 hours of live sport broadcast; 300 events were televised; 1,000 cameras and 450 video editing machines; and some 3,700 people working on the

coverage. Overall, the IOC accredited 12,000 journalists and media workers at the Athens Games. In 2012, all those figures will be higher.

One dilemma for the BBC is that, as things stand now, committed to moving the whole of sports department (radio and TV) to Manchester. Radio Five Live is also due to head north as well. When the winning announcement came last July, rumours swept around TV Centre in Wood Lane that all moves to Manchester were off. How crazy would it be to move whole departments to the north of England, only to have to move thousands of them back to London to cover the Olympic Games?

The final decision to move to Manchester was based on the size of the licence fee settlement. The government has announced the new settlement recently, so there will be number crunching on a vast scale to see firstly whether the BBC can afford to spend hundreds of millions of pounds to move to the north.

Media mix

But the BBC will certainly be covering as many facets of the 2012 Games as it possibly can, from the opening ceremony to the beach volleyball in Horseguards Parade to every bout in the wrestling – be it freestyle or the good old Graeco-Roman version.

In a sense, we can already envisage how we will be able to turn on our televisions during the 2012 Olympics and enjoy non-stop coverage of all the sporting events through the four BBC TV channels. Radio Five Live will turn into an Olympic station, with news presenters and sport presenters working alongside each other. Five Live has perfected this approach during its coverage of the Football World Cup. You will notice that several of the mainstream presenters have also been in Germany along with the football experts.

What is more difficult to predict at this stage is the role that the Internet will play in 2012. At the moment, most big sports events, like Wimbledon and the World Cup, will sell off their rights,



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with TV companies the highest bidders. So for Wimbledon, say, the sports channel ESPN has bought the broadcast rights for the US. What would happen if some internet broadcaster got hold of pictures from Wimbledon and broadcast them in the US? Obviously, that

Sport on the front pages

One of the things that really impressed the IOC about London and its bid was the evidence that British fans love watching sport. The stadia at the 2012 games will be full to bursting, rather than half empty. You only have to look

(I am knocking on a bit, but was 15 at the time.) I have to say that my memory of the 1966 World Cup is that it was a bit of a well-kept secret. At that time, there were no 24-hour news outlets, and football tended to stay on the back pages.

Now, at major sporting events, it isn't only the sports journalists who go to report the action. The news journalists are there in force as well. What they need is not the action on the pitch - but the scandals and outrages off it. So the drug scandals, the out of hours drinking and the security lapses will all feature heavily in the Olympic coverage. I wonder how many newspapers are going to send a reporter to get a job in the Olympic village, allowing them later to do a story about how a terrorist could have got one? By 2012, sport will be on the front pages as well as the back.

Of course, it may be that by 2012 we will all be watching the Olympic games on our mobile phone, Blackberry or other handheld device. Conventional TV may have taken a back seat by then. But there is no doubt that the London organisers will be hoping to reach record numbers of people, and they will hope to measure the audience in billions rather than millions.

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would undercut the market for ESPN's pictures. Why should they pay millions of dollars for pictures that can be found every day for free on-line? It is up to the All England Tennis Club to police the internet during the championships, and to take action against any website broadcasting material that has not been legitimately paid for.

back to the Ashes series last year to see how the whole nation was gripped by sport. We have seen another example of everyone pulling out the stops this summer, as England headed to Germany for the World Cup.

It is, of course, 40 years since England triumphed at Wembley in the World Cup, and I have to admit that I was there at the final in 1966.