

“The Games must go on!”

—but with what kind of radio and television coverage?

by Jarle Høysaeter*

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As sure as the Olympic Games are arranged every four years, just as certain are the discussions which follow after the Games have been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. This autumn has been no exception.

There are two main themes which are brought up, and which are of interest to us as broadcasters. The first comprises the very position of the Olympic movement and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in the international sports picture, the political and economic problems connected with the Games, practical problems which are related to the actual organisation of the Games as they increase in scope, and the rules governing amateurs.

The other main theme is the radio and television coverage which takes place in the period just before and during the Olympic Games. A common element of this discussion is the question whether one contributes too greatly to the inflated interest which is created in advance, whether the Games themselves take up too much or too little transmission time, whether the coverage—especially on television—is satisfactory from a purely professional point of view, whether it steals too much interest and absorbs too high an investment at the expense of the real sports movement which faithfully and regularly works day after day throughout the year. Finally, the question is asked whether the media commit themselves too one-sidedly to the events that take place in the competitive arenas and that can be measured in centimetres and seconds, while

other interesting aspects of this fantastic spectacle are neglected.

The discussions often begin and end with the same question: How long can it continue?

We have been hearing this question at least as long as I have been working with sport for radio and television. But the Games are going on. New host candidates keep on applying. They obviously do not allow themselves to be scared off by the wretched economic situation of their predecessors. The political problems find their more or less acceptable solutions, the amateur regulations are causing constantly increasing problems, and national as well as independent sports organisations continue to recognise the authority of the IOC, which is in fact a body outside the normal structure of sports organisations. Indeed, Baron de Coubertin must have hit the nail right on the head when he dug up and recreated the Olympic spirit.

There is every reason to assume that the Olympic Games will also be organised in the foreseeable future. After the almost happy ending of the Montreal Games, they have already lowered their voices—many of those who earlier prophesied that nothing would ever come of Lake Placid and Moscow. Both hosts, both Organising Committees and both nations have difficult years ahead of them. We are going to read many a pessimistic account before the opening ceremonies are witnessed by a billion people. But they will very likely be able to view them in 1980, as well as in 1984 and 1988. “If Montreal could be brought off, then anything is possible!” appears to be a general view today.

* Head of the EBU/OIRT Operations Group for the 1976 Summer Olympic Games; head of Outside Broadcasts and Sports Department, Norsk Rikskringkasting (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation).

"The Games must go on!" declared Mr Avery Brundage, the then President of the IOC after the massacre in Munich in 1972. The quotation may appear to be prophetic.

The role of broadcasters in the Olympic structure

Where do we, as broadcasters, stand in this picture?

It may be said—and many people have done so—that our job is to transmit the Games as they are, not to take part in staging them. But there are those who also maintain that one should study individual aspects of the development more closely. The most negative critics pose questions which may be summarised as follows: Is this extremely expensive enterprise—staged under antiquated rules which do not take into consideration the political, social, economic and medical realities and facing a constantly expanding commercial influence and a rising number of cheating athletes—worth all this attention?

Transmitting the Olympic Games is already expensive, despite the fact that the coverage that was carried out was very simple. If the production—especially on the part of television—is to keep pace with the rapid development and sophistication of broadcasting at a national level, the expense would be considerably higher. It is not unlikely that EBU member organisations might wish for more modernised coverage of future Games.

If this is the case, an even greater share of the annual budgets will be allocated for this purpose. A question which may then be raised is whether so great an investment will lead to one-sided coverage of sport in general, because one must save in other areas. Is this in tune with the general policy vis-à-vis sport as a social factor?

The organisations pay for the right to transmit the Games on television. To a certain extent, the staging is based on this income, and the existence of the IOC to an even greater extent. The American investment, of course, is larger than that of Europe, but this is a question of principle for broadcasters throughout the world.

When one goes in as such a significant investor, one must almost be regarded as a co-organiser. Is it not natural, then, that one's voice should be heard?

Everyone may perhaps agree that we wish to be heard, at least at the purely practical

level. Catchwords such as accrediting, access to working areas, space for working purposes, accommodation, information, etc., involve a large number of problems which indicate that broadcasters find themselves in an almost humiliating position when the significance of their participation is taken into account. Not only the press, but the sponsors as well as authorised suppliers are, in practice, regarded as more important partners.

Within the Olympic apparatus there is an advisory committee for radio and television questions. There is also an IOC Television Commission whose reorganisation is now under consideration. But the mill is grinding slowly, while the Games are still going on.

Reactions after Montreal

In fact, the time has long since come to start planning the transmissions of the 1980 Olympic Games. How should they be planned?

Each time, one must start from scratch. From our point of view, the Winter Games at Lake Placid will have little in common with the Games we had at Innsbruck, and the point of departure for the Moscow Games is very different from that of Montreal. It is tempting to say that they are diametrically opposed, considering the difference in time and the geographical location which does not necessarily imply satellite costs.

However, one learns from experience every time.

In most countries, broadcasters have obviously been tolerably satisfied with the programme they presented from the Montreal Games. This is not necessarily synonymous with the fact that the programme was satisfactory when regarded through national eyes—rather, that it was as good as could be expected, all things considered.

Some organisations backed up this common programme with unilateral transmissions, and were thus able to compose a national programme which fulfilled the expectations of the public. Others made use of the possibility to a lesser degree, which is all well and good because there was no satellite capacity for very much more.

In the individual organisations, the post-Olympic discussions usually start with the question whether too much or too little was

transmitted. Roughly speaking, the situation appears to be the same in most countries: too many events were transmitted for which there was no great national interest, or which may not have had any national participants at all. And too little was seen of the participants from one's own country, even if they were not among the best.

When planning programmes, it may be a debatable point how much attention should be paid to this reaction, which has somewhat chauvinistic undertones. One may also defend the widespread coverage of every sport by saying that this provides the correct, total impression of the gigantic spectacle that the Games really are. Besides, there is far too great a tendency to comply with a general sports interest without specification. The same people who are interested in swimming are not necessarily interested in boxing, and volleyball may have a completely different following from gymnastics.

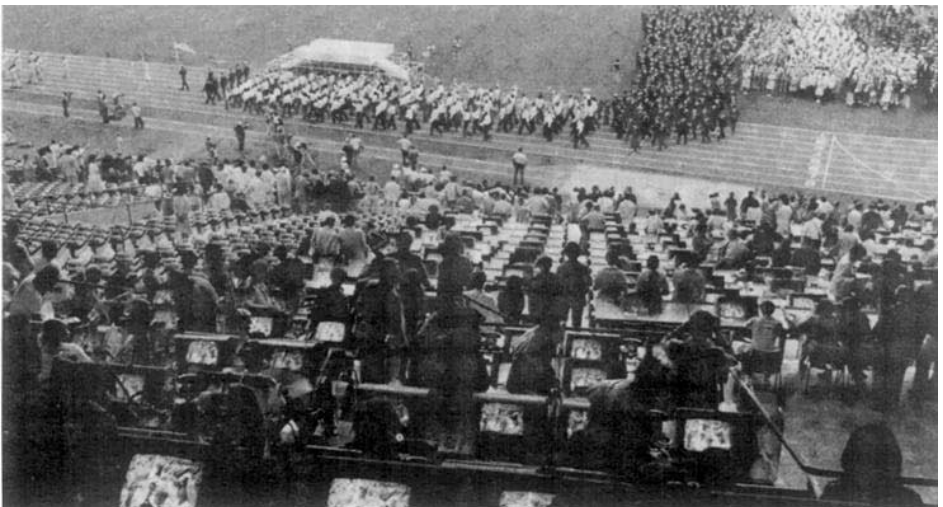
What should we plan?

Nonetheless, there is every reason to take seriously the question whether it is possible to compose the multilateral programme blocks with greater flexibility, so that the individual member organisations may have a greater freedom of choice, and, to a greater extent, may build up their total programme to conform with national interests.

With a starting point in the schedule for the Moscow Games, and concrete priority lists from the member organisations, it may appear possible to create alternative programmes with a multilateral stamp, but in such a way that all the organisations would still have access to each event live, or, as an alternative, in a long or short edited version.

In a system like this, it may also be natural to take up a question which, up to now, has been little discussed: should the multilateral programme include reports of a more

The main Olympic stadium showing some of the commentator positions of the 76 participating television organisations. The monitors not only show what is happening in the stadium but can also be switched to other venues.



general nature? The programme has always been limited to the competitions alone, and to the opening and closing ceremonies, while the general news or documentary coverage has been produced unilaterally—with some exchanges, of course, but quite by chance.

As far as the Moscow Games are concerned, the first task of the coordinating group will be to determine what is technically possible. It is not unlikely that alternative solutions will crop up by themselves, in that one or more of the larger organisations may decide to prepare their own programmes from Moscow, independently of, or in addition to, the common programme.

The Winter Games at Lake Placid could well be a test of the system. It is known that a number of organisations have a primary interest in the Nordic events like cross-country skiing, biathlon and speed skating, while others have a greater interest in bob and toboggan. Ice hockey will probably be another object of divided interest, as far as live/delayed transmission and duration of programme are concerned. This will also be a natural trial project because the difference in time and the cost of satellites enter seriously into the picture.

The instructions given to the EBU/OIRT Operations Group for the Montreal Games were unambiguous; the total transmissions to Europe would be so expensive that everyone was considerably worried, and a number of organisations were on the verge of withdrawing. We were ordered to economise wherever possible.

We made it our policy that each requirement—even the very latest—should be met as far as was technically possible, because no one likes to be responsible for the fact that nothing came of a transmission. Today, after having experienced the extent of the staff's exhaustion, I am inclined to believe that we should have drawn the line earlier. I am seriously afraid that too many of my excellent colleagues who worked for the Operations Group in Montreal will refuse the next time they are asked.

This is written in order to emphasise four things. First: that internal information between the various links within each individual member organisation leaves a great deal to be desired. Second: that deadlines must be respected to an even greater extent than was the case this time, even if we naturally



The EBU's mobile master control equipment was used in Montreal for the first time.

ought to show a degree of flexibility and have an outlet for decisions which, of necessity, must be made on the spot and on the spur of the moment. Third: that a number of organisations during the Games were able to spend relatively large sums on new unilateral transmissions—money they claimed they did not have when financial decisions were being made. And fourth: that one must count on considerably greater operational expenses next time. I base this latter claim on my experience that the demands increase, so that the money *must* be found in the end.

Now that we have encountered an increase in the number of unilateral transmissions from Montreal as compared with Munich, despite the fact that the satellite expenses had to be added on, what can we expect from Moscow when satellite costs may again be ignored?

J. H.

