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# BBC Sport in Black and White

Richard Haynes



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# BBC Sport in Black and White

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*For Brian Haynes, who introduced me to the wonders of sport.*

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Writing a book about the formative history of BBC Television Sport has been an immensely enjoyable, if prolonged, experience. It has required many long journeys from Scotland to the reading room of the BBC's Written Archive Centre at Caversham. For preparing access to the BBC's written archives on television sport, I would particularly like to thank Jeff Walden, Matthew Chipping and their colleagues who have always been of greatest help. Any errors and omissions regarding the BBC material used in this book are the sole responsibility of the author and publisher. For access to papers on the early years of televised Test cricket, I would like to thank Neil Robinson at the MCC Library at Lords. For sending his meticulously documented research on the televising of golf, I would like to thank Peter Lewis from the R&A.

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in 2008. Sir Paul Fox, the creator and editor of *Sportsview*, offered his memories and insights on those he worked with, especially commentators. Former television producer and director of football coverage, Alec Weeks, also provided fantastic memories of working with numerous BBC commentators, especially during the coverage of the 1966 World Cup. Sadly, Alec died a few years after we met. I have been privileged over the years to interview a number of BBC commentators, but for this book I would particularly like to thank Bill McLaren (and his daughter Linda) for their hospitality in 2008. Again, sadly, Bill died within a year of our meeting. For his memories on producing cricket in the 1960s, I would like to thank Nick Hunter.

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# CONTENTS

|    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 1  | Introduction: Why BBC Television Sport?                     | 1   |
| 2  | Pre-war Television Sport                                    | 15  |
| 3  | Lobby, Dimmock and the Monopoly in Post-war Televised Sport | 41  |
| 4  | Innovation, Eurovision and the World Cup                    | 69  |
| 5  | Televising Test Cricket                                     | 91  |
| 6  | Paul Fox and <i>Sportsview</i> : Television's Sports Page   | 111 |
| 7  | Cowgill, Coleman and <i>Grandstand</i>                      | 137 |
| 8  | Prestige of the Nations: International 'Rugger'             | 161 |
| 9  | Negotiating the Grand National                              | 183 |
| 10 | Boxing on the Beeb  | 197 |

|    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
| 11 | <b>Golf: From Minority Interest to Commercial Megalith</b>                                     | 217 |
| 12 | <b>Today's Sport on Your Screen Tonight: <i>Sports Special</i> and <i>Match of the Day</i></b> | 237 |
| 13 | <b>From Eurovision to Global BBC Sport: The Rome and Tokyo Olympic Games</b>                   | 259 |
| 14 | <b>Wimbledon, Colour and The Open Era</b>  | 279 |
| 15 | <b>They Think It's All Over... 1966 and the New Era of TV Sport</b>                            | 297 |
| 16 | <b>Conclusion</b>  | 315 |
|    | <b>Bibliography</b>  | 327 |
|    | <b>Index</b>   | 337 |

## Introduction: Why BBC Television Sport?

In August 2014, the British Broadcasting Corporation celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its longest running sports programme *Match of the Day*. As one would expect the festivities included a profusion of platitudes from leading British football players, celebrity fans, former presenters and football commentators. Its then presenter and former England footballer, Gary Lineker, summed up what the programme meant to him. ‘For me,’ he remarked, ‘*Match of the Day* is more than just a TV show – it is a national institution. After 50 years, it is an established part of Saturday night viewing and the theme tune is synonymous with the game of football itself.’ Lineker’s sentiment neatly summarised what many across the UK would agree has become the cornerstone of the BBC’s sports coverage. For a television programme to celebrate half a century of its enduring heritage is rare in the contemporary world of television. Only the astronomy programme *The Sky At Night*, first broadcast in 1957, has greater longevity as a BBC television programme. Scottish Television’s *ScotSPORT* ran for 51 years until it was pulled in May 2008, and the BBC’s other flagship sports programme of the twentieth century, *Grandstand*, lasted 49 years before being pulled in 2007.

*Match of the Day* did go through various iterations throughout its history, and in some seasons was barely on the screen as the BBC lost rights to either edited highlights or live football, or on one occasion in 1983 endured an enforced blackout because of an industrial dispute with the broadcast unions. Moreover, it was not always available to the whole of

the UK, and in some cases was not shown in Scotland because Scottish football fans enjoyed their own BBC football highlights programmes *Sportsreel* and *Sportscene*. Nevertheless, it has become an enduring brand of BBC Sport, premised on a formula of edited highlights of the day's matches from the Premier League in England, which has more or less remained in keeping with the original conventions of the programme devised for BBC 2 in 1964. It has outlived other BBC television sports programmes including *Grandstand* and *Sportsnight* (formerly *Sportsview*), which were formats retired from the environment of televised sports coverage as dedicated niche sports channels opened up newer, more expansive ways for viewers to watch the sport of their choice.

From 1936 to 1968, the BBC Outside Broadcast Department went from televising sport in a thirty-mile radius of Alexandra Palace to the transmission of the Mexico Olympic Games in colour via satellite. In three decades, the transformation of sport by television contributed to one of the most popular forms of entertainment of the twentieth century. Today, television sport broadcasting is a global, multi-billion dollar industry that shapes the contours and lines the pockets of elite professional sport and entertains, and sometimes bores, millions of television viewers worldwide. TV sport is deeply embedded in twenty-first-century popular culture. It spans niche subscription-based channels to free-to-air mega-events. It engages the loyalties and passions of millions, from local to global audiences. In the age of digital technology, its televisual form is accessible in various formats and screens that include 3D television, internet streams and mobile applications. Although live spectatorship and active participation in sport are significant aspects of many people's leisure experiences, the everyday ubiquitousness of sport on television ensures the hegemony of mediated sport in how we understand and value sport. It would be unthinkable (or a major commercial faux pas) for any professional sport not to be televised in some form or other. Television's place in sport is both culturally omnipotent and financially assured. In sports like football, the rights to televise the elite leagues and competitions such as the Premier League and the UEFA Champions League seemingly transcend any broader economic conditions of nations. The financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent austerity of many European nations did not prevent the value of rights to the Premier League rising from £1.6 billion in 2011 to £3 billion in 2014 and £5.1 billion from 2016.<sup>1</sup> This arguably tells us more about the fierce commercial competition of television services Sky and BT Sport, now

converged with broadband and telecoms, than it does about any shift in the culture of football. But there can be no denying the money from television in the first two decades of the century have transformed the structural finances of the sport and the wealth of its players. The money circulating in specific domains of televised sport seems far removed from the experimental beginnings of the medium, but how we got here, why sport matters to television and why television matters to sport are central to this book.

How and why did television become so omnipotent in the world of sport? Although other media have influenced and shaped sport both before and after the advent of television—in its practices, rules and spectatorship—none have influenced sport with as much economic power and cultural force as television. The very fabric of many sports events—when, where and how they take place—is dictated by the demands of television. But has this ever been so? If not, when and how did this relationship change? The roots to this behemoth of contemporary popular entertainment belong in a culturally different era of sport, broadcasting and society. When televised sport first began in the 1930s, the medium had a much more benign influence on sport. Indeed, gaining any form of access proved a challenge, both institutionally and technologically, and television was in a queue of importance behind the press, the newsreels and even its sister service in broadcasting: radio. Over time as the austerity of the mid-twentieth century gave way to an emergent domestic consumerism and relative affluence of the late-twentieth century, television would mature to dominate public and domestic cultural life like nothing else before it. As media theorist John Corner once noted, this rested on television's centrifugal power to draw the whole of life, including sport, in to its own spheres of influence.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Corner also notes, television's centripetal power of infiltration and influence into the organisation of culture and society, including sport, should alert us that no history of the second half of the twentieth century would be in any way complete without acknowledging the power of television in our public culture and everyday lives. The historical confluence and synergies of sport and television as emergent aspects of cultural life in Britain are the focus of this book. Through exploring the cultural history of the BBC's development of television sport, when everything was played in black and white, the book provides an analysis of the BBC's engagement with sport and how the relationship has affected the histories of both aspects of our popular culture.

## STUDYING THE MODERN HISTORY OF SPORT AND TELEVISION

Sport and many of its competitions predate broadcasting by at least half a century, especially television, an important factor to remember when analysing the relationship between the two. Modern organised sport, as we know and understand it today, primarily developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Of course, most sports and games have much longer histories, but it is agreed that the culture and society of the mid-to-late Victorians codified and organised sport for the physical and moral health of individuals and communities of the period, and this had long-standing influences on how different sports continue to be played, albeit in quite profoundly different contexts.<sup>3</sup> The rules, institutions, practices and consumption of many sports—cricket, football, both rugby codes, athletics, horse racing—already had what could be considered a mass following at the end of the nineteenth century into the Edwardian period, so by the time television took an interest, sport had ingrained structures and cultures. Therefore, many of the tensions that arose between sport and television were born by the stubbornness and intransigence of the former to the frustration and incredulity of the latter. Mass spectator sport was modern in the sense that it was urban and had cast off and codified the paganism of folk sports, but administrators were, at the same time, weary of the new technological modernity of television, which threatened their sports' popularity and core source of income from paying customers. Television did and continues to change sporting practices. This has been particularly at the elite level, but these transformations were negotiated over time in social, cultural, political and, crucially, economic contexts. In this negotiation, we must also acknowledge that sport also changed television. Technologies, production ideologies, codes and conventions, creative ideas and practices of televising sport have been invented, innovated and refined to deliver sport to the small screen in people's living rooms. This was most notable in the challenge sport set for the producers of televised sport in both spatial and temporal terms. The places of sport were constructed for the benefit of competitors and spectators, not television cameras, production crews and facilities, and commentators.

Similarly, the timing of sport, its seasonal rituals and traditions of when a day's play could commence, did not always sit comfortably with television schedules. In time, as rights fees for access to sport inflated along with the power of television executives, sport would dance to the tune

of television and its audience. But during the period in question, moving sport to suit television was simply out of the question. As this history shall illustrate, outside broadcasting, as an industrial practice of television, has surrendered itself to the structures and institutions of sport time and time again. Such an argument seems counter-intuitive to the stereotyped view of television as all-powerful and transforming sport out of all recognition to traditional sporting ideals (whatever these may be). But as noted above, sport continues to hold a stubborn latent power in its negotiations with television. Sports administrators understand they hold the ‘crown jewels’ or the ‘king of content’ in their keep, and the commercial leverage this produces ensures sport in many instances can keep most of its traditions if it so chooses. Just witness the insistence on the whites worn at Wimbledon, the commercial blackout inside any Olympic stadium or the restrained rituals of The US Masters at Augusta National in golf.

### *Why BBC TV Sport History?*

The reputation of the BBC’s coverage of sport travels far and wide. As a pioneer of outside broadcast (OB) technologies and techniques the BBC is arguably one of the most influential organisations in the world of sports broadcasting. How and why did the BBC gain such a reputation and influence? What were the key moments, decisions and events that led to its pre-eminence in the post-war era? How did its evolution relate to coverage in other nations and, within the BBC, to other forms of programming? Who were the people behind these achievements in broadcasting history? What were their backgrounds and how did they influence innovations in televised sport? How important has the coverage of sport been to the public role of the BBC and how does this relate to the broader cultural politics of public service broadcasting in the UK? These are the questions raised by *BBC Sport in Black and White*, which seeks to tell the story of the formative years of BBC television coverage of sport.

In his book on the history of British television drama, Lez Cooke outlines the problems associated with writing a history of television. As he notes, writing a history that ‘unfolds chronologically’ is in danger of ‘giving the impression that history unfolds teleologically’, producing a narrative of television which moves from ‘simplicity’ to ‘sophistication’ in a seamless trajectory over time.<sup>4</sup> The problem with such histories is they miss other histories and moments which either influenced or impeded the development of television genres, and as this book will discuss, this

is certainly the case in sports coverage. Cooke also observes there is a danger of the 'great men of history' approach to television history, and in the world of television sport this is highly problematic because its history is dominated by men, and women's roles and voices are often made redundant or invisible.

This book therefore combines a loose chronological approach with a more detailed thematic analysis of individual programmes, coverage of particular sports and events and key individuals and personnel within the BBC. This structure allows the analysis to look at the organisation and culture of sports production, the evolution of a language and visual style of coverage and the wider relationships the BBC had with governing bodies of sport, events organisers and regulators. The thematic approach is necessarily selective and focuses on the areas of television production that either dominated the BBC's coverage of sport or represented key technological or cultural developments within the genre. The book is definitive in the sense that it tells the story of the most important developments and changes in how television covered sport in the middle part of the twentieth century, a period of intense innovation in the medium and one that arguably casts a shadow on the production practices and principles of today.

However, it is also necessarily selective in its approach, because the sheer volume of the BBC's coverage of sport has been so expansive. As well as covering the achievements and success stories of the BBC's approach to sport, the book also reveals the conflicts, rivalries and problems associated with the production process and the BBC's internal and external relations. What this book does not account for is the social and cultural impact televised sport had on its audience. Although evidence from BBC Audience Research is used to provide some context for decisions in television production, a wider understanding of how BBC televised sport was consumed and became part of the rituals of British family life is not dealt with in this study. This is partly an empirical issue—far more survives of the institutional practices of the BBC outside broadcast department that warranted a history of its own. Nevertheless, oral history and cultural memory studies of television viewing in the formative years of television remain relatively scarce, and histories of viewing televised sport even rarer. This history of BBC televised sport is, therefore, only part of the story of televised sport in Britain in the mid-twentieth century. Hopefully, it provides signposts for others to expand our knowledge about the history of audiences too.



The BBC is a unique and at the same stroke universal organisation. To call it a national institution would be a reasonable and general characterisation of its cultural role in British society for three quarters of the twentieth century and beyond. The BBC's practices and philosophies of what we continue to label public service broadcasting have had deep and far reaching consequences for society and culture in the United Kingdom, and have transformed the cultures and practices of other media organisations around the world. Most people who work in the broadcasting sector in Britain, at one time or another, have either worked for or had dealings with the BBC, and for many employees and former employees, there remains a fervent respect if not loyalty to its achievements and continuing cultural role. For most people born after the Second World War, it is so embedded in the British way of life that it is unimaginable for it not to exist, and yet for the last quarter of a century it has had to battle on various fronts for its very survival, and has adapted to these challenges.<sup>5</sup>

It is in this broader context of the BBC in British popular culture and society that this book aims to focus on the place of televised sports broadcasting in the Corporation's history. Sport, as a form of content and a cultural sphere in its own right, has played a part in the history of the BBC since outside broadcasting first began in radio in 1927. In television, the BBC has covered sport since 1937, although experiments and practices of televised sport predate this. Televised sport has a specific place in the histories of television genres, and the BBC's role in innovating, adapting and exporting its sport production practices and ideologies is, I would argue, a significant yet unrepresented part of British broadcasting history. Why unrepresented? Because although sports coverage is mentioned in histories of broadcasting, and in some cases may be afforded a whole chapter, there has not been a sustained social or cultural history of broadcast sport in Britain. There are two notable exceptions from within media and communications studies: Steven Barnett's *Games and Sets* published in 1990 and Garry Whannel's *Fields in Vision* published in 1991. Both books place television sport in a historical context, albeit to prefigure what were then contemporary analyses of television sport in a rapidly changing media environment precipitated by the rise of satellite pay-television sport in the early-1990s.<sup>6</sup> Popular histories of broadcast sport also exist, such as Martin Kellner's *Sit Down and Cheer*, and in many cases have drawn on similar material as this book to inform their narrative histories of the BBC and broadcast sport more generally.<sup>7</sup> What this book hopes to achieve is to place sport at the centre of the BBC's history in a way

never attempted before. It is central because, like today, sport plays a significant role in shaping the institutions of broadcasting, the technological innovations in coverage, and the cultural place of sport in society. The interrelationships between the worlds of television and sport also tell us much about sport itself, of how it is defined, administered, played and consumed. The finances of sport, as we know, are heavily tied to the economics of television, but precisely how this happened, and why, have not been extensively researched. As Raymond Williams once suggested in his seminal *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* first published in 1974, to understand television, its technologies, its cultural significance and its influence on society, we must first gather the evidence, the detailed empirical knowledge, to inform our knowledge and understanding.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the theoretical concepts that have emerged within a broad and disparate field of television studies require a recognition of sport's role in shaping television.

### APPROACHING THE HISTORY OF TELEVISION SPORT

As an academic field of enquiry and cumulative knowledge, the study and research into the interrelationships between television and sport are now well established. Large edited volumes on the advances of digital media into sport, including television, are evidence that critical inquiry of television sport have matured to a high level of sophistication.<sup>9</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, as media and television studies grew apace in both the UK and North America, this was not the case and if anything the study of sport was eschewed either for more creative and artistic television genres of drama, soap operas, documentaries and comedy or the standards, practices and ideologies of journalism in television news. One reason for the oversight may simply have been a lack of interest in sport by academics, more interested in the arts than populist spectator sport. Another view may be that for some academics their interest in sport was strictly part of their social and leisure lifestyles and not to be a focus of critical analysis. Either way, it is noticeable that sport received little attention through this period. As Garry Whannel has highlighted, the relative dearth of material on televised sport from within the growing field of media studies was also due to a schematic split within the academic analysis of television between textual or semiotic critiques, which drew upon film or literary theory, and socio-economic analysis, which focused upon production practices and the political organisation of the media.<sup>10</sup> The former approach is

most recognisable in the British Film Institute publication *Football On Television* edited by Edward Buscombe in 1975, which incorporated a series of textual readings on the televising of the 1974 World Cup. This exploratory work has proved very influential within subsequent research on televised sport, specifically related to the ideological components of sports broadcasts in particular.<sup>11</sup> Analysis of the structural aspects of the sport-television nexus provides the alternative trajectory within the media study of sport, which can be identified in the work of North American media sport studies. These studies investigated the transformation of sport by television, in particular how this is related to economic imperatives of television and sponsorship or the cultural policies of nation states in pursuit of public service criteria.<sup>12</sup>

Studying television history is problematic for a number of reasons. Most obvious is the issue of the survival of television broadcasts from the past, much of which was originally live, not recorded or has been subsequently destroyed. Even where they exist, access to surviving recordings of sports coverage is also fraught with problems; whether it be incomplete records of what survives and where it can be found, or lack of public access to view material which is locked away or embargoed by rights owners such as the International Olympic Committee, who maintain a global universal licensing policy for any footage taken from the Olympic Games. The only caveat to such intransigence are the occasional programmes that celebrate the history of sports broadcasting or a sports broadcaster, or some other form of sports-related history programming. Television retrospectives can unearth rarely screened footage from the archives—a BBC Four documentary in 2010 celebrating the life of rugby league commentator Eddie Waring being a case in point—but such selective use of archives has its own inevitable drawbacks. As a general rule, when television remembers its own history, effectively cannibalising itself, the celebratory undertone of such programmes produces linear historical narratives of technological progress and cultural development towards the modern world of sport. The constant retelling of the received history of televised sport produces a shorthand narrowing of the collective memories of British sport, at the same stroke diluting our understanding of the past and our interpretations of what it means. The reasons for this are simple and driven by production practices constrained by time, budgets, shorthand knowledge, availability, the survival of people and recordings and easy reference to a canon of ‘great sporting events’ from the past. Therefore, a quick flashback of late-twentieth century British sport on television would expect to include

footage from Roger Bannister's four-minute mile, Henry Cooper's right hook knocking down Muhammad Ali (then Cassius Clay) in 1962, Sir Geoff Hurst's final goal from the 1966 World Cup final, Lord Sebastian Coe versus Steve Ovett from the 1980 Olympic Games, cricketer Sir Ian Botham smashing a six during the 1981 Ashes Series, Dennis Taylor winning the World Snooker Championship in 1985, and Paul Gascoigne's tearful exit from Italia '90. There are many more of course but the point is that such sporting moments are replayed *ad infinitum* to produce a canon of British sporting history that is used to evoke an era of televised sport but which represents less than 1% of the televised sports action of their age. They are also, it has to be said, remarkably over-represented by male sporting moments, and arguably focused on English sports stars rather than other home nations, which share slightly different collective memories of great sporting achievements. One of the challenges to writing a history of BBC televised sport is moving against the grain of these dominant references to the past while recognising the iconic status such moments represent to the BBC and their audiences.

Institutional histories of television have been criticised for their narrow focus and traditional narrative approach to media organisations. One issue such approaches raise is a lack of engagement with other media histories and broader social and cultural histories *per se*.<sup>13</sup> In focusing on televised sport, this book aims to bring an interconnectedness between the history of the BBC as an institution and what we might call the lifeworlds of sport, which themselves are not monolithic, have conflicting histories but, like the media, are reflective of wider social, cultural, economic and political processes of any particular age. One fillip to researching the institutional history of BBC sport is the historic record keeping of the BBC itself, which from the 1920s onward was meticulous and expansive. The written archives of the BBC held at the Written Archives Centre, Caversham, have informed numerous histories of broadcasting, biographies, documentaries and more, and arguably represent one of the most important resources for historians of broadcasting. As with any archive, survivals are selective, are subject to particular methods of indexing and cataloguing, and must be interpreted in context. The BBC WAC contains a wealth of information on the televising of sport, predominantly focused on production processes, but also on departmental and interdepartmental matters, governance and policy, rights negotiations and sports relations, and biographical information on producers, commentators and reporters. The research for this book is largely based on the papers relating to

the BBC's television outside broadcast department from 1936 to 1967, which has been supplemented by other archival evidence, including from the Marylebone Cricket Club Archive held at the MCC Library at Lords.

The other major source of information for the book came from oral history interviews with those directly involved in producing television sport for the BBC from the late-1940s to late-1960s. These interviews included Peter Dimmock (C.B.E., C.V.O.), Sir Paul Fox (C.B.E.), Bryan Cowgill and Alec Weeks. One of the key objectives of this research was to interview these central figures from BBC Television Sport while they could still provide their version of events in order to flesh out the archival evidence and produce a more human interpretation of the BBC's coverage in contrast to the written archives. In conducting the interviews, the research has created an important oral archive of memories, reflections and analysis by some of the most influential people to work in British sports broadcasting. The value of conducting these interviews between 2008 and 2011 has been made all the more poignant given the subsequent deaths of a number of the interviewees, including producers Cowgill and Weeks, as well as the rugby commentator Bill McLaren.

Because sports broadcasting is a fairly high-profile occupation, particularly for commentators, there also exists a valuable historical collection of autobiographies of BBC sports commentators, which stretches back to some of the earliest exponents of the art. Although often tinted by nostalgia and selective memories of events, people and places, such autobiographies do provide useful insights on BBC practices and institutional relationships with sport.<sup>14</sup> Autobiography and memoir, as tools for historical research, raise crucial questions as to how memory is constructed, how memoir accommodates or competes with other discourses for public recognition and essentially how history and memory are connected to each other and to the present. With many first and second generation broadcasters now retired, many have placed on record their experiences and feelings about life in television and as prominent public figures.<sup>15</sup>

## NOTES

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2. Corner, J. (1995) *Television Form and Public Address*, London: Hodder Education.

3. There are many excellent social histories of British sport, for example see: Holt, R. (1990) *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Huggins, M. (2007) *The Victorians and Sport*, London: Bloomsbury; Birley, D. (1993) *Sport and the Making of Britain*, Manchester: Manchester University Press and Polley, M. (1998) *Moving the Goalposts: A History of Sport and Society in Britain Since 1945*, London: Routledge.
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11. See for example, Buscombe, E. (ed.) (1975) *Football on Television*, London: BFI; Nowell-Smith, G. (1978) Television – Football – The World. In Bennett, T., Boyd-Bowman, S., Mercer C., Woollacott, J. (eds) *Popular Television and Film*, London: BFI/Open University; Wren-Lewis, J. and Clarke, A. (1983) The World Cup – A Political Football, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 1(3), 123–132; Tudor, A. (1992) Them and us: Story and Stereotype in TV World Cup coverage, *European Journal of Communication*, 7, 391–413.
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14. See, Haynes, R. (2012) *Voices Behind the Mic: Sports broadcasters, autobiography and competing narratives of the past*, in Adler, N. and S. Leydesdorff (eds) *Evidence and Testimony in Life Story Narratives*. Rutgers: Transaction.
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## Pre-war Television Sport

### BRITISH SPORT BETWEEN THE WARS

Sport, like cinema, enjoyed a huge boom during the 1930s. As social historians of sport have noted, sport in the interwar period began to gain wider approbation as a key element of British public life.<sup>1</sup> In the Edwardian era and the immediate years after the First World War, sport as a recreational pursuit had prospered through the leadership and organisation of both the public schools and the Church, which conferred on activities like athletics, cricket and rugby union a sense of morality heavily wedded to wider Christian ethics and social purpose.<sup>2</sup> Sport was also strongly influenced by perpetuating Victorian middle-class attitudes, which manifested themselves in notions of ‘amateurism’, ‘sportsmanship’ and ‘team spirit’. Many of these wider cultural associations of sport were also carried forward into conceptions of, and pride in, nationalism, with major sporting events frequently receiving royal patronage, giving them approval and prestige.

Spectator sport, which focused on both amateur and professional sports, generally grew in the 1920s and 1930s, although fluctuations caused by economic crisis and changing tastes did mean some sports struggled to remain financially viable. At the height of the depression in the early 1930s, horseracing, county cricket and association football all suffered economically in some shape or form. However, some sports, such as greyhound racing and motor sport, developed rapidly during the 1930s; both were commercially driven: the former by gambling, the latter by the interests of the burgeoning motor industry.



The media's focus on sport, in newspapers, cinema newsreels, and through radio 'eye-witness' reports and live outside broadcast commentaries, increased the public visibility and knowledge of sport and sporting stars. Major sporting occasions such as Wimbledon, Test cricket, the FA Cup Final, the Derby and the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race formed part of an increasingly ritualised national sporting calendar. Sport also created a new era of popular heroes: Fred Perry in tennis and Jack Hobbs in cricket, who stood out as the 'best of British' sport, although the idea of sporting celebrity—heavily associated with the commercial excesses of professionalism—remained vulgar to the upper-middle-class guardians of sport. It is also notable, as it is today, that the sports stars receiving most attention were male. Many women were socially and institutionally excluded from particular sports, although in some sports such as football, women enjoyed a popular following with mass media attention from cinema newsreels.<sup>3</sup>

The mediation of sporting events solidified the position of watching sport as a key characteristic of British popular entertainment, and while its impact on actual participation in sport is very difficult to gauge, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that people's passion for sport ran deep and wide. There were wider opportunities for leisure and recreation during the period, but also a more concerted effort by central and municipal authorities to provide amenities and opportunities for physical activity to improve health and general wellbeing.<sup>4</sup>

### JOHN LOGIE BAIRD AND THE DERBY

Horse racing during the interwar years was certainly one of the most popular mass spectator sports of the period.<sup>5</sup> This is probably why it became the focus of some of the earliest attempts at television outside broadcasting. In June 1931, hemmed in amid hordes of punters, many clambering atop motorcars and other precarious vantage points, and looking across from racing's aristocracy in top hat and tails enjoying the privileged view from Epsom's main grandstand, sat a wooden caravan housing a media revolution. Printed on the side of the caravan, the name of a cutting edge technology company: 'Baird Television Ltd.'. Inside the caravan, stationed up against the rail and near to the finishing line to one of the world's premier flat horse races, the Derby, was a television camera, the creation of the unassuming Scottish scientist and inventor John Logie Baird. Therefore, 3rd June 1931 should be recognised as an important date in

the association of television and sport: the thirty-line television picture, created by a rotating drum of mirrors and photocells, called a Nipkow Disc, was the very first attempt, anywhere in the world, to televise an outside broadcast from sport.

Baird had demonstrated the possibility of television in Selfridges store in 1925 and to assembled journalists at the Royal Institute early in 1926. In 1928, he established the Baird Television company and with missionary zeal promoted his innovative approach to mechanical television. Baird built his own studio at his home at Long Acre, where he regularly invited guests and representatives of the press to view his inventions and latest experiments. The BBC had agreed to transmit the outside broadcast on one of its medium-wave channels between 2.45 p.m. and 3.15 p.m.

In their revisionist biography of the television pioneer, Anthony Kamm and the inventor's son Malcolm Baird note that: 'Baird publicly pronounced himself satisfied with the transmission', however, the journalists 'were divided between those who criticised the reception and those who applauded the fact that anything had been achieved at all'.<sup>6</sup> Glasgow's *Daily Herald* gave the following report on the broadcast:

The result astonished us all. We heard the shouts of the bookmakers, and we saw the horses passing in file; we heard them named by the announcers as they passed.<sup>7</sup>

Whether or not it was truly possible to identify horses and jockeys, Baird's experiment with outside broadcasting clearly made its mark.

The BBC, with a monopoly on licensed broadcasting, had generally been reluctant to invest in television technology partly because BBC engineers remained unconvinced the technology was stable enough. But the main reason for the lack of conviction in the new medium was ideological. The Director-General Sir John Reith was not only frightened that television would begin to compete for resources, but more crucially, he believed the spoken word was a superior medium and where the BBC's energies should be focused.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Baird and fellow company director and former journalist Sydney Moseley, took every opportunity to promote both the company and the potential of television more broadly.<sup>9</sup> In 1932, they made arrangements to televise the Derby making the transmission available to a cinema audience on a large screen installed by Baird in the Metropole Theatre, London. The low-definition of Baird's 'mirror drum' mechanical

television technology meant the images from Epsom could be carried by telephone line. The image was amplified along three separate lines, which were brought together in the Metropole and via another mirror drum projected on to a 10 × 8 foot screen. A commentary by John Thorne was relayed simultaneously to the audience.

For many of those who saw the bold and ambitious experiment, which Baird later acknowledged as being one of the most nerve-wracking of his career, the cinema projection had been a success. When Baird stepped up on the cinema stage, the applause he received was deafening and left him virtually speechless. *The Times* reported that the televised race had been witnessed by 'a large and enthusiastic audience', and that the 'experiment had been reasonably successful considering the great technical difficulties involved'.<sup>10</sup> A subsequent report in the magazine *Television*, noted that 'the audience was rewarded by seeing the winning horses flash neck to neck across the screen', and subsequently, once the race had finished, 'it was possible to see the crowd moving on to the course, rather like a swarm of ants'.<sup>11</sup>

The television outside broadcast experiments from the Derby in 1931 and 1932 had, at the very least, provided evidence that television could capture live action from major sporting occasions. Studio experiments in the basement of Broadcasting House, involving engineers from Baird's company (D. Campbell and T. Bridgewater) working under the auspices of the BBC, included appearances by the most famous greyhound of the age, Mick The Miller, as well as Britain's tennis champion Fred Perry.<sup>12</sup> In August 1933, the BBC studio hosted a boxing match, and although the sound and image were reported as being clear, one journalist noted that the boxers looked so small on the 14-inch screen 'that one had the illusion of giant blows being administered by Lilliputian fighters'.<sup>13</sup>

In January 1935, as the likelihood of a more permanent television service became ever more probable, the Television Advisory Committee chaired by Lord Selsdon suggested a high-definition service should be developed (then defined as anything above 100 lines), and would be managed by the BBC. All thirty-line broadcasts were ceased in favour of the 240-line mechanical transmissions by Baird and 202-lines (interlaced to produce the effect of a 405-line) of the cathode-ray system by Marconi-EMI. Both Baird Television Company and Marconi-EMI would operate the service and have their equipment installed in BBC television's new home, Alexandra Palace. As part of the process, the Committee also thought it advisable for both 'to develop a more portable system

for outside broadcasts', where transmissions could link 'back to a central London station using short wavelengths'.<sup>14</sup> In February 1935, during preparatory trials for high-definition television, the Baird Company demonstrated their technology by staging a boxing match from a studio beneath the concourse in Alexandra Palace. The boxers were company staff, and the spectators were painted on to a backcloth to create the effect of an auditorium.

A trial period from early November 1936 to February 1937 would ultimately lead the BBC to adopt the Marconi-EMI system. The BBC's newly installed Director of Television, Gerald Cock, produced a report on both the Baird and Marconi-EMI 'dual' transmissions and was indignantly dismissive of the former and glowing about the latter. Comparing the Baird and EMI-Marconi system Cecil Madden, then a Television Programme Organiser, later argued, 'it was a bit like using the Morse code when you knew you could telephone'.<sup>15</sup> The BBC's assessment of the short-lived dual broadcasts no doubt had a significant bearing on the decision of the Television Advisory Committee to propose the adoption of the Marconi-EMI system, clearing the way for a standard form of transmission and design of receivers which, it was hoped, would boost take-up of the technology and provide a boon to manufacturers.<sup>16</sup>

### GERALD COCK AND SPORT FROM 'ALLY PALLY'

In 1936, the practice of television outside broadcasts was new, wholly untested and generally a great unknown. 'No one told us what to do', recalled Ian Orr-Ewing, later Lord and Baron Orr-Ewing, who was an engineering graduate and had worked in the gramophone industry before joining television outside broadcasts as a studio manager in 1938. 'We just had to make up everything as we went along'.<sup>17</sup> The sense that working in television was a true technological, organisational and cultural frontier was tangible to all those who worked in BBC television at that time. 'No one had got any forms,' Orr-Ewing noted, 'no one had got any costs, nobody knew about expenses or anything like that.'<sup>18</sup>

According to Orr-Ewing, it was Gerald Cock who 'told us all our jobs,' and an ability to adapt, innovate and think on one's feet was uppermost in the minds of all concerned, from cameramen to producers, commentators to sound engineers, lighting technicians to production secretaries. Cock was a formidable character: a slight man in his early forties, he had spent much of his young adult life in America, enjoying the contrasts of

a cosmopolitan lifestyle in New York, a career as an explosives expert in the prospecting districts of Utah, and a spell in Hollywood, as a managing director of a film company. He joined the BBC in 1925 and was soon given the role as Director of Outside Broadcasts, then exclusively in sound broadcasting. Alongside producer Lance Sieveking and chief engineer Henry Wood, he had innovated coverage of sport with running commentaries by people like Captain H. B. T. ('Teddy') Wakelam, George Alison (later to become manager of Arsenal) and John Snagge, who would commentate on the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race across six decades. According to Snagge, Cock was one of the pillars of innovation at the BBC, not only driving forward the coverage of sport, but also the emerging Reithian principles of public service broadcasting.<sup>19</sup> One aspect of this innovatory zeal was the development of formal relationships with the governing bodies of sport. In 1929, he famously lambasted the Football Association for not allowing coverage of the FA Cup Final between Portsmouth and Bolton Wanderers.<sup>20</sup>

Cock's innovations and management of outside broadcasts, including the King's broadcasts, had clearly singled him out as a man of ingenuity and ambition. After being offered the job to head up television, he took 48 hours to consider his position—his personal conundrum: whether to leave the regular programme service of radio outside broadcasts for the primitive technology of television. In an article written for the launch of the service, Cock noted, 'I have never been afraid of new things, but I did not want deliberately to commit professional *hari-kiri*.'<sup>21</sup> In spite of some reservation, Cock also had some visionary ideas of where the BBC might take the television service. 'The trend of television in an unpredictable future,' he wrote, would likely see an age 'when screens are enlarged and brightened, and the service area covers the country; when "outside" broadcasts by television are everyday occurrences, and when perhaps colour transmissions are practicable.'<sup>22</sup> It was a prophetic vision.

In August 1936, a decision had been taken to transfer a number of staff to Alexandra Palace, with a view to starting a television service in November 1936. However, the first producer of programmes Cecil Madden later recalled that he had no sooner left Broadcasting House for Alexandra Palace when the telephone rang and 'with some trepidation I crossed the room, picked up the phone and there he was, Gerald Cock. He said, "Cecil, wash out everything I said, everything has changed. The radio industry can't sell the stands, Radiolympia is a dead failure, and they say television can save it." So he said, "Now don't muck about, I want

you to know that television starts in nine days' time. So get on with it".<sup>23</sup> Madden, who had worked with Cock in outside broadcasting as well as being a senior Empire producer, took on the role of producing the first programme on 26th August 1936, producing two live shows a day for ten days to Radiolympia. The live broadcasts included the BBC's first, if brief, outside broadcast on 5th September when cameras captured comedian Leonard Henry leaving the entrance of Alexandra Palace and driving away after making a couple of gags to camera. Other similar broadcasts on the doorstep and surrounding parkland of Alexandra Palace would follow, including model airplanes taking off, sheep dogs rounding sheep into a paddock, English professional golfer Archie Compston chipping the ball round an Alexandra Park pitch-and-putt golf course (during which he holed his female opponents ball) and Major Faudel-Phillips demonstrating showjumping, a feat repeated by the BBC's pre-eminent female presenter Jasmine Bligh several months later ('viewers who expect her to fall off will be very disappointed' read a byline in the *Radio Times*).<sup>24</sup> Although outdoors, none of these could really be viewed as outside broadcasts in the sense it had come to be understood and fostered by radio. This form of programming remained constrained by the umbilical cord of the studio. 'Immediately below us lies a racecourse' wrote the BBC's first, and frustrated, outside broadcast producer Cecil Lewis. 'We could televise the horse-racing, but it requires 1,200 feet of cable, and that as yet does not exist.'<sup>25</sup>

In October 1936, the BBC suspended broadcasts in order to take stock of the Radiolympia programming. Cock, a determined publicist of the BBC, announced that as well as the 'informality and brightness' of variety and music, that television would not only 'operate films of news events, but later we will take the television eye to outdoor events such as the Derby, Cowes and theatrical first nights'.<sup>26</sup> Soon after, the official launch of the BBC television service began on 2nd November 1936 to an estimated 300 households with television sets limited to the London area.

Keen to make the service topical, sports enthusiast Cock was quick to see the virtue of inviting leading names of sport to the BBC studios. Before any formal outside broadcast from sport had taken place, people from the sporting world appeared on *Picture Page*, a topical programme introduced by Cecil Madden, who both devised and edited the programme. The names included, tennis star Kay Stammers, the Varsity rugby captains, Prince A. Obolensky of Oxford and C. D. Labore of Cambridge, and champion jockey Gordon Richards.

BBC Television made up for its lack of mobility by inviting competitive sport to the studio. This led to some formative examples of extreme ingenuity to get a ‘flavour’ of sport in to a studio environment. During the first week of regular broadcasts, Baird had imported a boxing ring into the studio to transmit a fight staged by the Alexandra Palace Boxing Club (APBC). In January 1937, leading English ice hockey players Art Child and Jimmy Chappell, both British Olympic gold medallists from the 1936 Winter Olympic Games at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, came to the Alexandra Palace studio to demonstrate aspects of the sport on a ten-foot square block of ice. Both had to be rushed away from the studio in time to perform in a charity match for Earl’s Court Royals. In the same month, members of the English Table Tennis Association played an exhibition match on the relatively cramped stage of the concert hall at Broadcasting House, a further match involving the Hungarian Viktor Barna and American Ruth Aarons.<sup>27</sup> W. J. Pope, Secretary of the ETTA, suggested the psychological drama of the sport would be visible on the screen.<sup>28</sup> This was an early allusion to the potential for television to provide an intimate portrait of sport. Close-up and personalised, the television camera could convey, through narrative suspense, the psychological intensity of individual competitive sport. However, the contrived nature of sport in the studio was sport as pastiche—imitating the realism of sporting competition rather than a genuine outside broadcast of competitive sport itself.

The most adventurous, and arguably first, true sporting broadcast came in February 1937 from Alexandra Palace Concert Hall, adjacent to the BBC’s television studios. In November 1936, Cecil Madden had approached Charles Burry, vice-president of the Alexandra Palace Boxing Club, with a view to televising one of their scheduled contests early in February 1937. The hall had the capacity for 3,000 spectators. A facility fee of five guineas was agreed and 400 feet of cable ran from the Marconi-EMI control room to the hall. Two cameras were made available, meaning two studio productions had to reduce their quota of cameras, and power was taken from the Alexandra Palace authorities and charged to the BBC. A key issue for the broadcast was lighting, and in January 1937, the BBC’s chief engineer Birkenshaw had last-minute jitters and proposed the broadcast be postponed while the issue of lighting was resolved. Madden insisted plans moved ahead and Cecil Lewis, who was appointed as organiser of outside broadcasts, wrote to the APBC with the suggestion that lighting was an issue to be remedied.<sup>29</sup> In order not to obstruct the spectators, the lights and the platform for the cameras were slung from

the roof of the Concert Hall and Lewis noted the lights would make the ring clearer in vision, 'though they may make it somewhat warmer for the boxers.'<sup>30</sup>

Once the technical arrangements had been arranged, the first fight televised by the BBC was between F. J. Simpson of England versus Corporal T. Bonham of Ireland. Simpson had been the lightweight champion of Great Britain and had represented his country in the 1936 Olympic Games; Bonham was lightweight champion of the Irish Army. Leslie Mitchell was asked to introduce the programme and provide some of the commentary, alongside former professional Harry Mallin, who was instructed by Madden to keep his comments during the fight to a minimum, indeed, 'preferably nothing at all'.<sup>31</sup>

Subsequent bouts were lined up in case of a quick knockout, and boxers were asked to be at the ready to quickly get in the ring when the previous bout finished. Cameramen were also given instructions to provide a general view of the ring during intervals, with the caveat that should a boxer be hurt, they should focus on his corner. As the broadcast began, Mitchell introduced the BBC's first proper, outside broadcast from sport:

For the first time the Television Department of the BBC is televising a public boxing contest. This is through the courtesy of the Alexandra Palace Boxing Club, from the Concert Hall here at Alexandra Palace. Over 3000 people are present. I should explain that we are sitting by the ringside just below and out of the range of the television camera. Mr Harry Mallin, the celebrated amateur boxing champion is here with us to give us the benefit of his expert knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

In a memorandum from Cock to Birkenshaw, the broadcast was celebrated as an outstanding success, in particular, 'the extraordinary accuracy and efficiency in handling' produced by the cameramen.<sup>33</sup>

Further demonstration sports followed in or around Alexandra Palace and included: the Women's League of Health and Beauty, whose leader, Prunella Stack, had studied the methods of women's physical culture in Nazi Germany<sup>34</sup>; *Archery* with members of the Royal Toxophilite Society; Weaponless Self-Defence, a programme on Ju-Jitsu featuring Bob Gregory; snooker, with exhibition play by Horace Lindrum and Willie Smith showcasing a sport that was beginning to challenge billiards as a dominant professional game; a cycling race around a circuit in Alexandra Park as part of the National Cycling Festival; 'pub games' including darts



and shove-ha'penny between two London hostelryes; and a filmed series called *Golfers in Action*, introduced by golf journalist Bernard Darwin and presented by Leslie Mitchell, which took professional golfers such as Charles Whitcombe, one of the famous trio of Whitcombe brothers who had represented Britain in the 1935 Ryder Cup, round the miniature course at Alexandra Palace. Original film from one of these programmes survives and shows Mitchell introducing Whitcombe from the tee, before the golfer, dressed in plus fours, illustrates various grips before demonstrating the drive, to which Mitchell instinctively remarks: 'a beauty!'<sup>35</sup>

A later programme included a demonstration from England's only female professional golfer of the age, Poppy Wingate, who ran a golfing school in London, as well as competing against male professionals, which the *Radio Times* remarked 'rather curtails her cup-winning chances'.<sup>36</sup> The broadcasts from Alexandra Park could draw a small crowd, and during an archery demonstration, one producer was reported to overhear the remark, 'Yes, I understand the television cameras all right, but how do they get the films to travel along that cable?'<sup>37</sup>

One further method for introducing sports content was through television talks. Studio talk programmes on sport included an eve-of-race discussion of Oxford and Cambridge university crews between BBC commentator John Snagge and rowing expert Tom Brocklebank, fully illustrated with models of the boats and course, and film highlights of previous races.<sup>38</sup> The use of edited film highlights also proved useful in the first regular sports programme, *Sports Review*, presented by well-known radio commentator Howard Marshall. The programme billed itself as 'a survey of outstanding sporting events' for each month and consisted of interviews with sporting personalities and 'short flashes of descriptive film'.<sup>39</sup> It was a taster for future sports magazine programmes to be developed by the BBC in the post-war era, but its run was short-lived.

While the appearance of well-known sportsmen and women on the screen from Alexandra Palace was all well and good, there were those who thought the BBC's programming on the whole was miserly. A television set cost the equivalent of a small car, so any complaints that programming was not meeting expectations for those wealthy enough to invest in the new technology were probably reasonable and fair. The television service provided three hours of programming in the afternoon, and a further three hours in the evening, leaving large periods of the day without programmes, the only other transmissions being demonstration films devised to showcase television for manufacturers and retailers.

Cock's experience in radio running commentaries would have confirmed that 'actuality' pictures of live sporting events would prove the ultimate attraction for new audiences to invest in television. Unlike radio, early television sports content was studio-bound and restricted in scale and scope. In an attempt to illustrate the promise of live television from sport it was decided to broadcast the radio running commentaries from both the Grand National and the Derby of 1937, accompanying the sound outside broadcast with photographs of previous races on the screen. The broadcasts may have captured the excitement of live racing with an unknown result, but were no substitute for moving images of the event themselves.

Although, looking back, we might consider programming on Ju-Jitsu, table tennis and the women's health and fitness movement commendable in terms of showcasing up-and-coming participation sports, such choices were due to necessity not choice. In the summer of 1937, the prospect of a major royal ceremony would transform what was possible, and introduce the mobility that would transform the nature of television outside broadcasting.

#### A YEAR OF FIRSTS: WIMBLEDON, TWICKENHAM, THE BOAT RACE AND THE DERBY

The financing of television was a significant bone of contention for those launching the service, and there was much criticism about the level of resources given to television to develop the service. In noting outside broadcasting equipment would be viewed as expensive in a broader context of uncertainty and restraint by BBC management, Cecil Lewis made clear the feelings of those involved in developing the television service: 'We who are closely associated with television believe implicitly in its future. For us there are no doubts.'<sup>40</sup>

Somewhat amazingly, £20,000 of the £180,000 budget allocated to television from the license fee was sidelined for the development of a mobile outside broadcast unit. Here, serendipity shone on the fledgling BBC outside broadcasting service, as the incentive to cover the coronation of King George VI in 1937 was in the sights of BBC management when the funds were allocated. A small sub-committee was formed by the General Post Office (GPO) and the BBC to oversee transmitting arrangements for television OBs. Suitable sites for transmission were considered to be Westminster Abbey, Victoria Railway Station, Wembley and Wimbledon.

The GPO would also supply labour and resources to lay cables in readiness for OBs from these key locations.

Laying cable for OBs cost approximately £1,000 per mile and the GPO developed the coaxial cable to ensure a high-definition signal could be transmitted. Marconi-EMI's research team led by Shoenberg calculated that the coaxial cable (manufactured by Siemens Brothers) could be used to transmit video signals up to eight miles from Alexandra Palace, double that with a link from Broadcasting House in central London. A GPO Film Unit film *What's On Today* directed by Robert McNaughton in 1938 revealed the remarkable lengths the post office went to in order to provide a communications infrastructure for Britain's sports media of the day.<sup>41</sup>

An essential feature of television outside broadcast equipment was, most obviously, a need to be mobile. But mobility in itself, outside the studio environment where technical apparatus and support services are more plentiful and readily available, does present significantly different technical and logistical problems for television compared to radio. For stability, Baird's cameras had to be fixed to the floor of the studio. The 'Emitron cameras' used by Marconi-EMI were more portable—although they took at least two men to carry—but perhaps more importantly, they carried greater light sensitivity and enabled OBs in the poverty of winter light.<sup>42</sup> Where studios could be brightly lit, outside broadcasts, in most cases, had to use the light afforded in whatever conditions materialised. Alternatively, portable lighting rigs had to be transported and set up for 'indoor' outside broadcasts such as snooker, or the BBC had to rely on the light afforded at the event itself, whether it be at an ice rink, swimming pool or gymnasium.

Marconi-EMI had quoted a figure of £14,000 to develop an OB unit and this included 'three Emitron cameras with associated scanning apparatus and a four ton lorry, but excluded sound and power equipment'.<sup>43</sup> Marconi-EMI's 'scanner van' had two racks of apparatus and weighed 8.5 tons. The engineers could view the transmission on a monitor in a compartment mounted above the drivers' head. The cameras could operate up to 1,000 feet from the scanner and two further vans were required to transport cameras, microphones and cabling. Marconi-EMI also supplied an ultra-short-wave link between the OB unit and Alexandra Palace. This required a further lorry to house the link apparatus, including a 100-foot telescopic ladder, much like those used by a fire tender, with an antenna mounted at its tip.

The scanner, which developed in sophistication over time, operated as a mobile control facility, basically mimicking a control gallery adjacent

to a studio environment, allowing enough space for a senior engineer, sound technician, a producer, production assistant or secretary. The three camera outputs were fed to monitors in the gallery, and a vision-mixing unit enabled the producer of the outside broadcast to choose which image to transmit to the audience. In time, as the vision-mixing technology improved, directors could not only cut from one camera to the next, but also cross-fade the images for a softer effect. The technology in the scanner had to ensure sound and vision were amplified correctly and stable enough for transmission from Alexandra Palace. The equipment was so heavy that the chassis of the van had to be reinforced, and as the BBC's chief technician Tony Bridgewater later noted, 'it was surprising that the thing moved at all.'<sup>44</sup>

All this technology also required an intensive amount of manpower: a senior television engineer to manage the overall planning of the OB; sound and vision control engineers; cameramen (in this period they were always men and, on the whole, they still are); drivers and riggers; and if needed, lighting supervisors and electricians. Once added to the production crew of producer (acting as a director), stage manager, production assistant, and not forgetting the commentator, an outside broadcast was a major undertaking.

For the cameramen, the Emitron cameras were a challenge. The original cameras had one fixed lens for transmission, and the cameraman looked through a viewfinder where the optical lens was inverted, projecting a colour image that was both upside-down and back-to-front. The focal length of the cameras was also very restricted. As former BBC cameraman John Summers recalled, 'The depth of field was extremely short, as when taking a medium close up (MCU) at about five feet from a subject, the eyes would be in focus, but the tip of the nose would be blurred!'<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, the cameras were portable enough for use on outside broadcasts, and on 12th May 1937, eight miles of coaxial cable ran from the centre to north-west London to enable the coverage of the coronation of King George VI. It was the world's first major television outside broadcast. On the eve of the coronation, Leslie Mitchell, with a model of the scanner before him, gave viewers an explanation of how the BBC television service was able to transmit pictures from The Mall. An estimated 50,000 people watched the procession; the furthest, 63 miles from Alexandra Palace. The success spurred on negotiations to televise a range of high-level sporting events from central London.

An editorial comment in *The Times* gave the following summary of the state of television in June 1937:

As a practical possession, which the moderately well-off may have in their homes for about half the price of the cheapest motor-car, television is brand new. If it is to be popularized, it is essential that the public should realize as soon as possible what television is, and what are its limitations. Two attitudes of mind need dispelling – that modern television is a mere scientific toy, with a possible future but very little present attraction, and that it has already reached perfection.<sup>46</sup>

In June and July of 1937 the BBC's outside broadcast unit began experimental broadcasts from Wimbledon Tennis Championships. Three cameras were placed around the Centre Court and, for the first time, the transmission was carried from south-west London to Alexandra Palace via ultra-short waves, rather than coaxial cable. The coverage was not listed in the *Radio Times*, although the Television supplement did promote the fact that the experiment of televising play on the Centre Court at Wimbledon would continue through the week by means of a radio link. The broadcasts fell outside the standard broadcasting hours of the time, mostly consisting of half-hour programmes after four o'clock each day. These 'snap shots' of play, were accompanied by commentaries from Freddy Grisewood and John Snagge, and the successful use of a radio link showed that television could be truly mobile. A report in the *Daily Mail* prior to the coverage observed:

The BBC's new untried television transmission van achieved unprecedented success while standing in Wimbledon tennis ground car park yesterday afternoon. [ ] The tests succeeded beyond most people's hopes. Men could be seen walking about the car park and the courts. Cigarette smoke was visible. An Alsatian dog was seen running about. When actual plays begins, I am told, viewers will be able to see the ball.<sup>47</sup>

Further firsts followed early in 1938 including: women's World Championship table tennis from Wembley Empire Pool in January; women's international hockey between England and Wales from the Oval in February; Inter-Varsity athletics between Oxford and Cambridge from White City in March; international rugby with the Calcutta Cup from Twickenham; and rowing including the Head of the River Race involv-

ing 133 crews and the annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat race from the Thames. Coverage of the Boat Race, already being forged in to an annual mediated ritual by radio, consisted of an animated chart in the studio at Alexandra Palace, which accompanied the radio running commentary of John Snagge from the launch 'Magician'. The final stages were then transmitted live from the finish line at Chiswick where Howard Marshall described the climax of the race. When the BBC transmitted the race again in 1939, workmen digging a road near Alexandra Palace inadvertently severed the sound link to the outside broadcast unit. Producers in the studio made preparations to play music to accompany the race, until a young assistant Bill Ward rigged up a feed to capture John Snagge's radio commentary, thereby saving the day.<sup>48</sup>

In April 1938, the BBC announced it would be covering the Derby for the first time on 1st June. For Cock, who had orchestrated the negotiations, the agreement was a 'triumph of BBC diplomacy', and the race was billed as the 'biggest television broadcast of the year'.<sup>49</sup> 'Once again optimistic prophets retain their honour', wrote 'The Scanner' in the *Radio Times*, reflecting the view that the Derby was one of a long line of events being televised in the national interest.<sup>50</sup> Cock revealed that 'viewers will see glimpses of the crowd, complete with bookies and tipsters, the parade to the post in front of the grandstand, the race itself televised at ceremony.'<sup>51</sup> The promise reflected an interest in the wider social setting for the horse-race, with the formality of the well-healed spectators in the grandstand to the crowds that flocked to participate in the occasion. A camera was positioned atop of the Scanner van, placed between the unsaddling enclosure and Barnard's Stand, which would allow a varied range of crowd scenes.

Finally, experiments in the coverage of golf at Alexandra Park were expanded to Coombe Hill Golf Course in Surrey for a 72-hole match between Bobby Locke and Reg Whitcombe, then British open champion, for £500 prize money. According to Ross, 'The caddies had to help carry the cameras and cables around from hole to hole'.<sup>52</sup> It would be many years before the British Open could be covered, but the BBC's approach to major events happening in and around London did address an underlying desire to bring major sports to the screen. The three most popular spectator sports of the era were cricket, football and boxing, and how the BBC television service approached its negotiations and coverage broke new ground in relations and technical achievement.

## CRICKET

With a growing catalogue of successful outside broadcasts from sport in 1937 and early 1938, there was a sense the outside broadcast team were finding their feet. Wimbledon was covered once again in 1938, except on this occasion coverage of the fortnightly tournament was bifurcated by the BBC's first television outside broadcast from Test cricket at Lords. With only one mobile unit, the scheduling of the two outside broadcasts proved potentially problematic, but was resolved in a remarkably relaxed fashion. The conundrum: the Test match commenced midway through the Wimbledon tournament, and could potentially run on into the final stages of the tennis. Test matches in the 1930s were timeless, meaning they lasted as long as necessary for the match to reach a conclusion.

A key factor behind the broadcasts from major sporting events was how the BBC set them up and negotiated access. The BBC's Outside Broadcast Department, led by Seymour Joly de Lotbinière (known as Lobby), had established strong working relationships with many sports promoters and governing bodies. Cordial relations had been fostered over a decade of developments in running commentaries from sport, and the movement to secure televised outside broadcasts may well have seemed a natural progression. This was particularly true in the BBC's coverage of Test cricket, which the BBC had innovated under de Lotbinière with the mellifluous mellow voice of Howard Marshall proving very popular with listeners. Negotiations for televised coverage of the 1938 tour of England by the Australians, with its indomitable captain Don Bradman, began in earnest towards the end of 1937. Although the BBC's television operations at Alexandra Palace were kept quite distinct from the work of colleagues in radio, the written archives held at Lords reveal the MCC were keen to have what they termed an 'omnibus agreement' with the BBC, including radio and television.<sup>53</sup>

The Television Outside Broadcast Manager Philip Dorté, who had joined the BBC from the Gaumont-British newsreel company, conjoined forces with radio producer Michael Standing to conduct a reconnaissance of Lords and calculate the space required for commentators and cameras. From the early days of radio outside broadcasts, the BBC had settled on the notion of agreeing what was called a 'facilities fee' for access to broadcast from sporting arenas. The fee basically covered the estimated loss of revenue caused by the use of seating and other facilities. It was never considered, at least by the BBC, as a right to broadcast. A combined fee of 100 guineas was agreed with the MCC for coverage of the Lords and

Oval Tests of 1938. Television, introduced on an experimental basis, only made up 30 % of the cost.

On 28th June 1938, the first televised coverage of cricket went on air, and the BBC transmitted up to three hours of each day's play. The televised broadcast was produced by Orr Ewing, who had positioned two cameras on a platform raised at the Nursery end near the Mound Stand and a third positioned at the Tavern near the pavilion.<sup>54</sup> It was later noted the three Emitron cameras gave a poor and oblique view of play, mainly because the BBC was unable to position its cameras directly down the wicket. However, one innovation did enhance the coverage. The Emitron cameras were mounted with a telephoto lens for close-ups, which the *Radio Times* claimed would 'show things as intimate as the expression on a bowler's face when Bradman is missed in the field'.<sup>55</sup>

In August 1938, the BBC had acquired a second mobile unit, which reduced the headache of trying to schedule coverage of two simultaneous events and allowed extensive transmissions from the Test match at The Oval, as well as coverage from Radiolympia. The *Radio Times* noted that 'it will be possible to televise the whole of the Oval Test match, however long it lasts,' and the timeless Test match went on to produce a record-breaking innings of 364 by Yorkshireman Len Hutton.<sup>56</sup> With three-hour transmissions of each day's play, a significant proportion of Hutton's 13-hour innings was captured live on television.

Cameras were positioned on a rostrum erected near the Vauxhall gate entrance of the ground, with a third camera next to the commentary positions on the balcony of the pavilion. The BBC clearly hoped this would produce a more favourable picture, noting 'With these arrangements head-on 'shots' will be obtained of the ball travelling down the pitch, and with a slow bowler viewers will probably be able to see the break of the ball'.<sup>57</sup> The impoverished image of the ball on a 405-line transmission on a small screen would have made this unlikely, but the concept of viewing the movement of the ball from behind the bowlers arm would ultimately become the standard perspective of televised cricket.

As the BBC made plans to cover the 1939 Tests at Lords and The Oval, the MCC pushed for a higher fee. Its chairman, Colonel Rait-Kerr, forcefully recognising the growing attraction of television, wrote to de Lotbinière to suggest:

In 1938 Television of sport was experimental. The situation has now changed. The number of sets in use has increased enormously, and it is



thought that the fee for televising the Test Match should not be less than 50 guineas, and for Eton v Harrow 20 guineas.<sup>58</sup>

It was not clear how much things had changed in only a year, but television was now considered established enough to be competing with other sports media, particularly the newsreel companies. The BBC grudgingly conceded to pay £52 but dropped its plans to cover the Eton versus Harrow game at Lords. In spite of Dorté's claim that 'Television caters only for some few thousand viewers' whereas radio broadcast to the millions, it was plain that governing bodies of sport saw a more powerful threat to their gate receipts from the immediacy of a visual medium.<sup>59</sup>

## FOOTBALL

The perceived threat of television to sport was most tangible in the BBC's dealings with football. The BBC's relationship with the football authorities had been strained from the off, particularly with the northern-based Football League. The FA Council were also intransigent to the idea of opening up football to live television coverage, the only ally being the Secretary of the Football Association (FA) Stanley Rous. Cock had approached Rous in December 1937 with a view to agreeing terms for coverage of England internationals and the FA Cup. In an attempt to persuade the Council, Cock wrote to Rous setting out his grand vision for the coverage of the sport: 'Television is on trial', he said, 'Here is the beginning of a great industry, the progress of which depends to a great extent on the co-operation of institutions such as the FA.'<sup>60</sup> The letter was published in the *Radio Times*, presumably as a way of appeasing any public anxiety that the BBC were not doing all they could to get major football matches on the screen. The Council relented, and an agreement was struck to televise both the international between England and Scotland (9th April) and the 1938 FA Cup Final between Preston North End and Huddersfield Town (22nd April). The Wembley international went well, and as the Cup Final neared, the BBC continued to blow its own trumpet through the *Radio Times* noting, 'To me and, I expect, to you, the transmission seemed perfect.'<sup>61</sup> During the Cup Final, the BBC's coverage gained notoriety for the comments of its commentator Tommy Woodroffe, who, with only a few minutes remaining remarked, 'If Preston score now, I'll eat my hat'. Preston, duly awarded a penalty, scored in the last minute of the game, their captain Mutch crashing the ball into the net off the underside of

the crossbar. Later that month, Woodrooffe, true to his word, appeared on television with presenter Leslie Mitchell to chew on part of his straw boater.

Arsenal FC, not averse to self-publicity under the management of George Allison, featured strongly in several of the earliest television broadcasts. Indeed, the BBC had used two Arsenal teams while conducting private experiments in televising outside broadcasts in 1937, several months before they broadcast publicly from Wembley in April 1938. BBC publicity photographs of the experiment show players peering into the lens of the camera, playfully reveling in their curiosity of television technology. Two games were also broadcast from Highbury Stadium later in the year, the BBC transmitting second-half action from both the FA Charity Shield between Arsenal and Preston North End (26th September 1938) and England's 3-0 victory over the Rest of Europe (26th October 1938), which gave BBC viewers an early experience of two young rising stars of the English game, Stanley Matthews (aged 23) and Tommy Lawton (aged 19). Both would feature prominently in the growth of television after the war.

## BOXING

The BBC's good fortune in sharing Alexandra Palace with a boxing club, and its opportunism in experimenting with coverage of the sport, meant the transition to a full-blown outside broadcast of boxing was relatively straightforward. The main issue remained lighting the arena for the cameras. After its first attempt at televising boxing by a coaxial link to the Concert Hall in February 1937, a second amateur boxing event involving a match between Repton Amateur Boxing Club and Alexandra Amateur Boxing Club was televised on 2nd December 1937, on this occasion using the BBC's newly acquired mobile OB unit and improved Marconi EMI-Emitron cameras. However, the coverage caused controversy. The Amateur Boxing Association Council, which met on 6th December 1937, were unhappy with the possible impact the coverage was having on the boxers: the heat from the 38-kilowatt lighting rig hung over the ring was insufferable, and the Association issued a circular to other amateur club secretaries instructing them not to allow television for competitive boxing until 'the conditions for same are improved'.

Surprised at the ABA's edict, Cock wrote to their Secretary, H. W. Fowler, on 14th December 1937, arguing that this was the first complaint he had received and to his mind televised boxing had 'created great

public interest.’ A meeting between BBC representatives and the ABA was smartly arranged, and Cock returned to announce a temporary lifting of the ban and for future plans to televise boxing to ‘go ahead as if nothing had happened.’<sup>62</sup> The brief episode reflected a certain dubiety from the governing body as to the impact of television on the sport itself, and although its initial decision to ban television had been speedy and excessive, it revealed a need for the BBC to provide assurances. As television evolved, and relations with governing bodies of sport grew with it, claims and counterclaims that television transformed or threatened sport in some way became something of a game itself.

Further Alexandra Palace events were televised in 1938, and the BBC experimented with their production practices, trying different presenters and commentators including Leslie Mitchell, former boxers Harold Cox and Lionel Seccombe (a former heavyweight boxer and Oxford blue) and radio broadcaster John Snagge. Programmes were introduced with a caption showing a pair of boxing gloves and the faces of boxers superimposed, accompanied by popular gramophone recordings of the 1930s such as ‘I saw stars’ (a rather whimsical choice, written by Maurice Siegler, Al Goodhard and Al Hoffman) or ‘The eyes of the world are on you’ (also written by Goodhard and Hoffman, along with Sam Lerner, taken from the 1937 British film *London Melody*). The Super-Emitron cameras were fitted with different lenses (2 and 6 inches) to provide contrasting views of the boxers, although because they were fixed, there was an element of trial and error in obtaining the optimum distance from the ring. After a broadcast on 1st December 1938, a programme report noted that at 29 feet from the centre of the ring the 6 inch lens ‘gave a shot which was definitely too big’, with the result that ‘the cameramen seemed quite unable to follow the boxers’.<sup>63</sup> The decision to build a camera platform suspended from the roof also caused concern. The BBC had to take out additional third-party insurance and gain approval from Middlesex County Council’s Civil Engineering Department. At the time, this form of camera cradle was unique, and ‘if it did collapse’, wrote one engineer, it ‘would probably kill or severely injure those members of the public underneath it’.<sup>64</sup>

Amateur fights would become a mainstay of BBC television coverage of boxing. They provided regular fixtures, and localized, regional and occasionally international interest. Television helped popularise the existence of amateur clubs, as well as promote a particular form of amateur ideal in sport more broadly. However, during the 1930s, radio audiences had become accustomed to listening to professional championship fights, and it was not long before television turned to prizefighting to

capture the popularity and excitement around major contests. The BBC's first televised coverage of a professional championship fight came in April 1938 with a transmission of the British light-Heavyweight championship between Len Harvey and Jock McAvoy (postponed from 23rd March to 7th April 1938). The broadcast carried sound commentary of the fight by Howard Marshall and Tommy Woodruffe. The BBC reported that transmission of the fight was seen as far as Kettering and Harwich, and 'viewers were able to see long and close shots of the boxers in action' made all the more visible by a ring made with a golden yellow floor and blue ropes.<sup>65</sup>

Although amateur boxing dominated the BBC's coverage from Haringay, the BBC also introduced a series of professional boxing events from the Empress Hall, Earl's Court organised by the National Sporting Club on Monday evenings. Among the boxers from the first programme were Harry Mizler, Benny Lynch and Arthur Danahar. The latter would be involved in one of the most celebrated British fights of the era, which also broke new territory in terms of the public access to television. In February 1939, the BBC agreed to transmit live coverage of the British Lightweight Championship between Eric Boon and Arthur Danahar from Haringay Arena to the Marble Arch Theatre and two other cinemas in London. Using projection equipment devised by Baird, the Theatre charged an entry fee of one guinea, which received strong objections from the Variety Artists Federation, who argued this was unfair competition from government-supported entertainment. The public scramble to watch the fight at the Monseigneur News Theatre in Leicester Square led for the call for police reinforcements to quell those storming the doors, and all three cinemas had people sitting in the aisles.<sup>66</sup> The BBC regarded the rediffusion of the fight an experiment but were mindful of the need to regulate permission to use its broadcasts in this way. The fight itself was a bloody affair, with several knock-downs, until a crunching body blow by Boon floored Danahar in the 14th round. The issue of rediffusion would resurface in the immediate post-war period, and the impact of the Boon-Danahar fight would be used as the worst example of television's potential impact on other entertainment venues.

### OUTBREAK OF WAR AND THE SUSPENSION OF TELEVISION

In September 1938, when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich and held aloft a supposed peace agreement with Hitler at Heston Airport in Hounslow, the BBC's Outside Broadcast cameras were

there to capture a significant moment in political history. He ended his ‘Peace in our time’ speech, with the words, ‘Go home and get a nice quiet sleep’, but twelve months later Chamberlain would announce the outbreak of war, and television would be suspended. The Emitron cameras were mothballed in a South Wales coal mine until the service returned in 1946. In the short time a television service had been on air, the BBC had experimented with ways of introducing sport to a select small audience, and had innovated a number of techniques—in terms of developing mobile facilities, microwave links, camera positioning, commentary and direction. It had largely been an ad hoc approach, was limited by resources, technology and reach, and did not produce any hard-and-fast presentational style or format. The relations the BBC had developed and fostered in radio were rolled over into television, with major events such as the FA Cup, Wimbledon, the Derby, the Boat Race, Test cricket and major rugby, boxing and athletic events the target of the television cameras. Unlike radio, television was not anywhere near an established medium, nor had the majority of the population managed to view the BBC’s transmissions. Although the cost of television sets had gone down—in 1939 HMV sets could be bought for less than 40 guineas—they remained a luxury item, but much sought-after by upper-middle-class households in and around London. As with any new technology, there is a ‘wait-and-see’ mentality before adoption, but come the re-emergence of television after the war, coverage of sport would be the focus of a reason for households to invest in their first set.

## NOTES

1. Huggins, M. and Williams, J. (2005) *Sport and the English, 1918–1939*, London: Routledge.
2. Huggins and Williams, *Sport and the English, 1918–1939*, 4.
3. Huggins, M. (2007) ‘And Now, Something for the Ladies: Representations of women’s sports in cinema newsreel, 1918–1939. *Women’s History Review*, 16 (5) 681–700.
4. The establishment of voluntary sports and leisure organisations such as the National Playing Fields Association, the Youth Hostels Association, the Ramblers Association and the National Cyclists’ Union, to name but a few, did much to promote outdoor recreation. Almost all of these organisations were middle-class institutions that attracted a cross-section of society. But some sports and recreations were firmly based in working-class culture and organisations, and much of this activity centred upon the Working Men’s Club and Institute Union, an affiliation of working men’s

- clubs. See, Jones, S. G. (1986) *Workers At Play: Social and Economic History of Leisure, 1918–1939*, London: Routledge, 90–91.
5. Huggins, M. (2003) *Horseracing and the British: 1919–39*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
  6. Kamm, A. and Baird, M. (2002) *John Logie Baird: A Personal Biography*, London: NMSE, 163.
  7. Cited in Ross, G. (1961) *Television Jubilee: The Story of Twenty-Five Years of BBC Television*, London: W. H. Allen, 22.
  8. According to Kamm and Baird there was also a sense of jealousy in the personal relations between Reith and the inventor. Kamm and Baird, *John Logie Baird*, 110–111.
  9. Television receivers were installed by Baird in Downing Street for the Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald, and in the Caledonian Club where he gave a demonstration to the Prince of Wales. See, Ross, *Television Jubilee*, 16.
  10. *The Times*, 2 June 1932.
  11. Cited in Kamm and Baird, *John Logie Baird*, 218.
  12. Ross, *Television Jubilee*, 24.
  13. *The Times*, 23 August 1933, 10.
  14. Burns, R. W. (1984), *British Television: The Formative Years*, London: Peter Peregrinus, 408.
  15. Producers and performers alike hated the Baird system in Studio B of Alexandra Palace, which scanned film that had been passed through a bath of cyanide to fix the image, the solution occasionally leaking on to the studio floor. See, Cecil Madden interviewed on ‘The Magic Rays of Light: The Beginning of Television’, BBC 1, 1981.
  16. For the Baird Television Company the decision was a bitter blow, causing more heartache soon after a major fire at the Crystal Palace had destroyed much of their offices and equipment in November 1936. Baird would move on to other projects, including early innovations in colour television, nearly thirty years before it reached the British public, television recording on vinyl disks, and near sci-fi experiments with the potential to transmit 3-dimensional images—a technology that only came to fruition in the second decade of the twenty-first century.
  17. Lord Orr-Ewing interviewed on ‘The Magic Rays of Light: The Beginning of Television’, BBC 1, 1981.
  18. *Ibid.*
  19. Snagge, J. and Barsley, M. (1972) *Those Vintage Years of Radio*, London, Pitman.
  20. Taking a leaf out of the pirating antics of contemporary newsreel companies, Cock managed to obtain tickets for Wembley, and had a procession of BBC staff to leave the game at pre-ordained intervals to provide an eye-witness account of what was happening. The stunt embarrassed the FA chiefs, who yielded to public pressure the following year, and the BBC

- returned to Wembley to provide a full commentary on the 1930 Final. See, Haynes, R. (1999) 'There's many a slip 'twixt the eye and the lip': An Exploratory History of Football Broadcasts and Running Commentaries on BBC Radio, 1927–1939, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34 (2) 143–156
21. *Radio Times Television Edition*, 25 October 1936, 6–7.
  22. Ibid.
  23. Cecil Madden, *The Magic Rays of Light*.
  24. *Radio Times Television Supplement*, 5 February 1937.
  25. *Radio Times Television Supplement*, 8 January 1937.
  26. Ross, *Television Jubilee*, 44.
  27. *Radio Times Television Supplement*, 22 January 1937, 4; and 12 February 1937, 3.
  28. Ibid.
  29. Lewis to Kingston, 4 December 1936, BBC Written Archives Centre T14/34.
  30. Ibid.
  31. Madden to Mitchell, 8 January 1937, BBC WAC T14/34.
  32. Script for Boxing at Alexandra Palace, February 1937, BBC WAC T14/34.
  33. Cock to Birkinshaw, 5 February 1937, BBC WAC T14/34.
  34. Obituary, *The Independent*, 28 February 2011.
  35. Original clip made available at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/resources/tvhistory/audio\\_video.shtml#six](http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/resources/tvhistory/audio_video.shtml#six).
  36. *Radio Times*, 4 June 1937.
  37. *Radio Times Television Supplement*, 2 April 1937, 1.
  38. *Radio Times Television Edition*, 19 March 1937.
  39. *Radio Times Television Supplement*, 23 April 1937, 6.
  40. *Radio Times*, 8 January 1937, 5.
  41. Haynes, R. (2011) The GPO At Play: *What's On Today* and *Spare Time*, in Andrews, S. and Mansell, J. (eds) *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit*, London: Palgrave BFI, 254–262.
  42. Ross, *Television Jubilee*, 36.
  43. Burns, *British Television*, 448.
  44. Anthony Bridgewater interviewed in *Birth of Television*, BBC 1, 1 November 1976.
  45. John Summers, My Working Life, <http://tech-ops.co.uk/next/2010/08/john-summers-my-working-life/>, posted 28 August 2010.
  46. *The Times*, 11 June 1937, 17.
  47. *Daily Mail*, 20 June 1937.
  48. Memoir of television engineer Gordon Waters at <http://www.bbctv-ap.co.uk/gwaters.htm>.
  49. *New York Times*, 29 May 1938.
  50. *Radio Times*, 22 April 1938.
  51. Ibid.

52. Ross, *Television Jubilee*, 62–63.
53. Rair-Kerr to Cock, 10 December 1937, BBC WAC B12/F1.
54. Broad, C. and Waddell, D. (1999) *And Welcome to the Highlights: 61 Tears of BBC TV Cricket*, London: BBC.
55. *Radio Times*, 10 June 1938, 16.
56. *Radio Times*, 22 July 1938, 16.
57. *Radio Times*, 12 August 1938, 15.
58. Rait-Kerr to de Lotbinière, 14 March 1939, MCC Archive B12/F2.
59. Dorté to Rait-Kerr, 28 April 1939, MCC Archive B12/F2.
60. Barnett, *Games and Sets*.
61. *Radio Times*, 22 April 1938.
62. Cock to Fowler, December 1937, BBC WAC T14/34.
63. Programme Report, 2 December 1938, BBC WAC T14/34.
64. A.E.i.C, London Television service to Tel. Ex., 16 December 1938, BBC WAC T14/34.
65. *The Times*, 8 April, 1938, 18.
66. Moran, J. (2013) *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV*, London: Profile Books, 40.



## Lobby, Dimmock and the Monopoly in Post-war Televised Sport

Reporting on the Second World War and upholding the spirits of the ‘home front’ had enabled the BBC to expand its mandate as Britain’s public broadcaster. The audience for radio was its strength: nearly ten million households had radio licences by the end of the war and the BBC as a monopoly had a central role in the cohesion of the nation. Television, conversely, had been suspended during war, and on its reintroduction in 1946 had a meagre audience in the London area, with a mere 14,500 households with a joint radio and TV licence.

From the outset, television was considered a fad. This proved something of a paradox for those managing the development of television as a public service. As John Hartley has noted, ‘Not only did the managers running the BBC see television literally as a sideshow, but they actively and deliberately downgraded it as a broadcasting priority’.<sup>1</sup> Reviewing the state of public service broadcasting in the *BBC Yearbook 1949*, Francis Williams, journalist and adviser to Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, praised the impartiality of the BBC and its delivery of serious content on its new service the Third Programme, but argued the BBC had ‘a responsibility also to find means whereby the general interest can be attracted and held’.<sup>2</sup> His comments summarised the challenge the BBC faced in terms of how it delivered popular, entertainment programmes. The cultural tastes of BBC management tended to reflect the social values and traditions of British upper-middle-class life. Culture and entertainment in this context were viewed as polar opposites, and middle-class attitudes

to the latter, which included spectator sport, were institutionalised in the Reithian-inspired BBC. Social historian Arthur Marwick argued the BBC's serious approach to programming reflected a 'mannered pedantry'<sup>3</sup> and it is reasonable to suggest the Corporation which had done so much to bring the nation together during the war was, nevertheless, still widely perceived as a particularly 'haughty' institution. Those managing sport on television had to cope with this institutionalised tension: the BBC's desire to broaden the appeal of high culture at the same time pandering to the populism of mass spectator sports.

Post-war sport was riven with social difference and social tensions of its own. For large sections of society, sport was central to leisure lifestyles, and following professional or top-flight sport (much of which remained amateur during this period) was part of an established sphere of entertainment. In this sense, sport was not considered serious. However, sport did matter and engaged the emotions and passions of a broad constituency of the population. Although the popular appeal of sport spanned across different social groups, discourses around sport continued to construct particular ideas of class and gender difference.<sup>4</sup> Football and boxing were heavily associated with working-class cultures, whereas cricket and rugby union were strongly aligned with the middle-class. However, such distinctions were problematic, and in each sport the way the values and practices of class difference played out was contingent on a range of circumstances and processes. Sports like horse racing had broad mass appeal, but for working-class punters this was driven by gambling whereas for the upper-class racing was linked to a specific set of social relations and networks which were about sociability and the display of conspicuous consumption.<sup>5</sup> The success of Irish trainers at British festival races, such as Vincent O'Brien at Cheltenham, brought a broader audience to the sport, and transformed the social mix of post-war horse racing.<sup>6</sup> In the immediate post-war era, cricket retained its 'gentleman amateur' and professional distinction, which had divisive class-based undertones, but its appeal as a national spectator sport was very broad.<sup>7</sup> The two codes of rugby, union and league, remained symbolic of different class and regional differences—the former promoted a culture of self-control and restraint 'as the quintessential characteristic of the gentlemen', while professional clubs in the north were, first and foremost, self-interested and focused on their popularity.<sup>8</sup> The general sporting malaise of the immediate post-war era was therefore characterised by increased interest across different strata

of society, but with divergent social and cultural meanings associated with it dependent on social background.

There remains historical debate as to whether women's sport declined after the war. There was certainly a revived ideology of female domesticity as men returned from the front to the factory floor displacing many women from both skilled and manual jobs, but as Joyce Kay has illustrated, British sporting heroines flourished in areas such as athletics, swimming, tennis, table tennis and showjumping.<sup>9</sup> Although women's sport did not receive as much attention as men's sport in the media, Kay's evidence suggests British women's sport was far more prominent and publicly celebrated than previous histories have suggested. That sport was male-dominated did not mean it was exclusively so.

These general observations raise the question as to how the BBC covered sport, and the extent to which it reflected, contributed or challenged such social and cultural distinctions? Evidence from the *Radio Times*, which is by no means a wholly accurate source of what was actually broadcast, suggests coverage of women's sport was very sparse. The women's keep-fit movement was represented in a one-off demonstration by the Women's League of Health and Beauty in July 1947 and women may well have featured in the Amateur Athletic Association meeting from White City in the same month, as well as a swimming gala from Kingsbury open-air pool a month later, but sports programming with specific coverage of female athletes was negligible.<sup>10</sup> However, exceptions do exist and to contemporary eyes in unexpected areas. Joyce Gardner and Thelma Carpenter were leading billiard players of the 1930s and 1940s, and both appeared in demonstration matches on BBC Television in August and December 1947 respectively.<sup>11</sup> Although great rivals, they were not filmed in competition against each other but with a leading male billiard player of the time Sidney Lee. Both Gardner and Carpenter were familiar with performing demonstrations in front of the camera and both appeared in numerous billiard demonstration newsreel films in the 1930s.<sup>12</sup> By 1947 both had turned professional and the popularity of billiards in contrast to snooker enabled them to make a living by touring clubs across the country to showcase their talents. Each BBC demonstration, thirty and twenty minutes long respectively, would have given viewers a brief illustration of their broader repertoire of shot making.

If women's sports were a rare sight during the formative period of television, the use of female commentators was even rarer. Limited attempts to introduce female commentators in radio outside broadcasts were con-

sidered unconvincing, and the practice of using BBC staff producers, who were all men, as commentators where possible, further negated the use of female presenters of sport. Again, scarce exceptions exist, such as the use of former British figure skating champion Cecilia Colledge in the coverage of the Richmond Trophy in November 1951.<sup>13</sup> Colledge was an Olympic silver medallist in 1936, and had developed a professional skating career from 1947 having emigrated to Boston in the USA. The rare, intermittent use of female professional sports stars of the era gave some evidence towards the gradual acceptance of women's authority in sport as coaches and administrators, but the evidence from the BBC's coverage does suggest an extreme marginalisation of women's sport in the immediate post-war period.

The BBC's attitude to sport was framed by its public service tradition, which Reith famously believed would educate, inform and entertain its audiences in equal measure. The role of the BBC was to act as 'social cement', producing a common culture shared by all.<sup>14</sup> Reith's approach focused on the need for high standards and an overarching policy in which all employees of the BBC were signatories. In practice, the BBC frequently had to balance and compromise the pull of entertainment and the ideals of seriously informing its audience. Television sport, as a visually led medium lent itself to entertainment values, but the BBC's pre-war instructional approach to sport proved hard to shake off. The desire for new thrills was palpable. Post-war football and cricket grounds swelled to the brim breaking all records, as did cinemas up and down the country. Even the Director-General of the BBC, William Haley, recognised television was entering an age of heightened entertainment, but for him, television would never 'be a substitute for the sports ground', instead, 'it will lead more and more people to the sports ground'.<sup>15</sup>

In 1946, the Corporation's senior managers and the general public could not possibly conceive of television's dominance over late twentieth-century popular culture, including sport. But there were signs of change and the portents were enthusiastically picked-up by those seeking new careers. The pains of the 1930s depression and the devastations of war were, as Peter Hennesy recalled, 'blending' with 'aspirations of emerging affluence, consumerism and exciting advances in technology, of which television was a significant part'.<sup>16</sup> Television production in the late-1940s was characterised by another blend of old and new: those steeped in the Reithian traditions of broadcasting and others new to the brash young world of the medium for whom ideological boundaries of public service

were there to be stretched, pushed and broken. The two sets of values were embodied in two senior managers of outside broadcasting during the immediate post-war era: Seymour Joly de Lotbinière (Lobby), and Peter Dimmock. Both, at different times, were head of television outside broadcasts, and both in different ways, had lasting legacies for how the BBC built its relationships with sport, and ultimately how television sport was produced.

### LOBBY AND THE REITHIAN TRADITION

A giant of a man at six foot eight inches but with a genteel almost academic demeanour with circular rimmed Windsor glasses, Seymour Joly de Lotbinière, was undoubtedly one of the most important figures in the development of outside broadcasting at the BBC. His analytical approach to broadcasting had led him to devise the exposition of sports commentary, mentoring a whole string of radio and then television commentators in their craft.<sup>17</sup> His status and esteem among contemporaries at the BBC was outstanding, and he was a highly respected negotiator among the sporting community.

De Lotbinière had trained as a lawyer having graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge. Educated at Eton, de Lotbinière would have been exposed to the cult of ‘athleticism’ promoted in the English public school system of the early twentieth century. Privilege and the associated connections would have opened the way for de Lotbinière to gain his first job at the fledgling BBC in 1932, and he soon climbed the managerial ranks, becoming Head of Outside Broadcasts in 1935. In the late-1930s and into the early period of the Second World War, de Lotbinière oversaw innovations in new techniques for sound outside broadcasting, working with emerging household names such as Howard Marshall, Richard Dimbleby, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, and John Snagge. All credited de Lotbinière with helping them develop their commentary styles, professional techniques and meticulous detailed planning prior to broadcasting live events, euphemistically known as ‘homework’. His analysis of first radio, and subsequently television, commentary techniques can still be found in the BBC Written Archives, and reveal the depth to which de Lotbinière thought about every aspect of commentary. Every Monday, de Lotbinière summoned his team of producers to Lime Grove where he dissected the coverage of outside broadcasts, sharing his critiques and offering resolutions to any issues that arose. It was a ritual that worked

with emphatic effects, and before long the codes and conventions of commentary on different sports were beginning to be formed. Television brought new challenges for commentary, and the edict, ‘if in doubt, say nowt’, is most likely to have derived from de Lotbinière’s analysis of the medium, with the obvious suggestion that if the viewer can see what is happening on screen the commentator does not need to remind them.<sup>18</sup> De Lotbinière innovated some golden rules for television commentary, later explained by football commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme, which focused on the size and composition of the audience. Commentators were asked to think of a pyramid, with a small group of experts represented at the top, a slightly larger group of specialist and general sport fans occupying the centre, and the majority of ‘marginal viewers’ who have no interest in sport but are looking to be entertained at the bottom. The job of a commentator was to make the broadcast interesting to this last group in the hope that they might ‘climb the pyramid’ of sports knowledge in the future. Wolstenholme concluded:

The truth of Mr Lotbinière’s advice soon dawned on me, and I realised that if the televising of a soccer match only attracted the soccer fans, there would not be an audience large enough to justify any television organisation spending the time and the money necessary to put soccer on to the screens. This applies to every television programme which seeks a general audience, not just to soccer matches; so the television commentator must always have the marginal viewer in the forefront of his mind.<sup>19</sup>

The purpose of sports commentary reflected a broader philosophy of broadcasting to reach as broad an audience as possible. De Lotbinière both advocated and cultivated the necessary edicts of commentary—blending excitement and interest while letting the television pictures ‘tell the story’—across the outside broadcasting department, much of which was carried forward by his successors including Ian Orr-Ewing, Peter Dimmock and Brian Cowgill.

The thoroughness with which de Lotbinière approached every outside broadcast under his charge was symbolic of the bureaucratic culture that had shaped his early career in broadcasting. The BBC was smothered in bureaucracy. While historians of the BBC will forever be in the debt of the meticulous way in which it conducted its affairs and kept records, it was an organisational culture that benignly shaped almost everything the BBC did. This was especially so in de Lotbinière’s dealings with sports admin-

istrators, with whom he spent a significant amount of time and effort in order to bring them round to the BBC's way of thinking. Meetings were often informal, discussed over a glass of sherry or lunch, without formal minutes and usually only reported back to BBC colleagues if essential or followed up with a formal letter to confirm what had been verbally agreed. One of the key problems for de Lotbinière was any sniff of commercialism or 'vulgarity' in the coverage of sport, which was institutionally frowned upon and could stop negotiations in their tracks, particularly around sports which were overtly commercial such as boxing, or were founded on gambling, such as greyhound racing. The ideological underpinning of everything the BBC did in relation to sport reflected the core principles of John Reith's interpretation of public service, which led the BBC to think of itself as a national service in the public interest. The BBC would give a moral lead to the nation's cultural tastes and not pander to it.<sup>20</sup> How these principles carried through from radio into television was not necessarily straightforward. Television was a different medium with different needs and employing a different breed of broadcaster.

In 1945, de Lotbinière returned from a period as the BBC's representative in Canada to take up the role as Head of Outside Broadcasts for the third time. In a radio interview in the early 1960s, he reflected on his return to London, and especially his working relationships with senior management and Director-General William Hayley. Most interesting in this respect was the sense that in spite of Hayley's habit of interfering in BBC programming—due to his editorial background—Outside Broadcasting was largely untouched. 'I don't know that I got to know him very well in O.B.'s.' recalled de Lotbinière, 'It was an area that didn't have many troubles with policy and politics.'<sup>21</sup> Post-war austerity and a desire to ensure the BBC maintained its status as the national broadcaster were at the forefront of Hayley's policy at the time, so it is intriguing to note outside broadcasts were largely left to their own devices. As sport boomed in the post-war period, the BBC's role in taking audiences to such venues became clear, as de Lotbinière pointed out:

After the war people were resuming to normal life. The O.B. department in a sense came in to its own again as it was one of the departments that was able to bring people to what was happening, and things were starting to open up again all over the country...O.B.'s always had a uniquely easy position in programming. They weren't the department that was making up clever, clever, things... they simply had to say what are the things that people

want to feel they wanted to be present at, and let's try and take them there by way of the microphone, and do the job as best we can.<sup>22</sup>

When television started up after the war, de Lotbinière became the head of all outside broadcasts across both mediums, with each service having its own assistant head, Charles Max Muller looking after radio and Ian Orr-Ewing television. Not all those who blazed a trail in radio, such as de Lotbinière, were as comfortable with the visual medium of television.

In his autobiography, commentator and presenter Cliff Michelmore reflected on the issues raised during a transitory period in the early 1950s when in order to get employment, new freelance presenters worked across radio and television in order to earn a decent living. 'The hostility of some radio producers at Broadcasting House was such', he wrote, 'that they saw those who worked for both services as being almost traitors.'<sup>23</sup> Television required different skills and knowledge, and arguably a different mentality. It brought a new generation of people to the BBC and in the domain of outside broadcasting, some of British television's greatest pioneers of programme production. One such individual was Peter Dimmock, and his early professional biography in sports broadcasting reveals the post-war pioneering spirit of the age, and the ways in which new recruits in to the BBC were transforming the ways in which the principles of public service were interpreted and practised.

#### PETER DIMMOCK: COMMENTATOR, NEGOTIATOR AND GENERAL MANAGER

Reflecting on the key individuals of sports broadcasting, Brian Johnston, the cricket commentator and presenter of *Down Your Way*, stated: 'Television OBs owe as much to Peter Dimmock as Radio OBs did to Lobby.'<sup>24</sup> If there were a British book of firsts in television, Peter Dimmock's name would sit alongside many of the items listed: first trans-continental television transmission; first outside broadcast from the air; first international satellite transmission; first presenter of regular sports magazine programmes; first to use a 'teleprompter' (autocue); and the first to cover the Grand National and many other sporting events on television. He became one of the most experienced and arguably most powerful heads of a BBC television department. He wooed, persuaded and prevailed over many sports administrators, blazing a trail in the potential for television to capture the panopoly of British and international sports



events to a multitude of viewers. He is, without doubt, one of the most influential people in the formative history of British and European television. This influence was recognised by American networks where, after a brief spell as manager of BBC Enterprises in the 1970s, he spent the rest of his career as a lead rights negotiator with NBC for coverage of major events, including the Olympic Games.

Dimmock went to school at Dulwich College in south London, following in the footsteps of other distinguished Old Alleynians including Sir Ernest Shackleton and P. G. Wodehouse. He subsequently studied in France before the outbreak of war. As a member of the Territorial Army, he was called up for service in 1939 but in 1941 transferred to the Royal Air Force as a pilot for Army Co-operation Command. In 1942, he became a flight-lieutenant flying instructor, and by the end of the war was a staff officer in the Air Ministry working for the Directorate of Flying Training. It was here, as a strident young firebrand officer, that he learned how to manage other young men, and foster his own style of charismatic leadership.

On demobilisation, Dimmock weighed up his options and took inspiration from his journalist mother.

I was in the Air Force, came out of the Air Force, and couldn't decide whether or not to get a job or go to university. My mother had been a writer, she wrote for *The Strand* magazine and she was a very good writer. I must have ended up with some of her genes. I wanted to be a journalist so I joined the Press Association straight from the Air Ministry.<sup>25</sup>

He became a junior racing correspondent for the Press Association (PA). Dimmock sat across a desk from another young aspiring journalist Peter O'Sullivan. O'Sullivan recalled in his autobiography: 'Neither his comprehension of the subject nor his reverence for accuracy commended him as ideal material.'<sup>26</sup> Racing had managed to continue during the war, and some even maintained their involvement, avoiding close contact with the conflict. According to O'Sullivan this led to tensions between ex-servicemen returning to 'The Game' and those who had sustained their role in the sport. Nevertheless, in the immediate post-war period, racing was booming—the twin appetite for sport and betting ensured horse racing maintained a healthy economy. In the aftermath of war, O'Sullivan noted, 'the appeal of the horse, uncontaminated by human trivia and with his graceful capacity for impartial redistribution of wealth between

the post-war credited, and sometimes less creditable, resulted in packed grandstands.<sup>27</sup> However, racing was not immune to the weather and both the 1946 and 1947 seasons were effected by two severe winters, including the 'Big Freeze' of 1947 which basically closed down racing from mid-January to the end of March.

In the spring of 1946, Dimmock had not long been in post before a meeting with a former American pilot and friend, who was visiting the UK, persuaded the young journalist that the future was not in journalism but television.

While I was a journalist an American friend of mine came over and said, 'Peter, what are you doing wasting your time being a journalist?' I said, 'Well, I might be editor of a newspaper one day'. He said, 'No, no, no, get into television.' I said 'But television has barely got started.' He said, 'Exactly! Try and get in even as a tea boy, get in to television'.<sup>28</sup>

O'Sullivan recalls Dimmock was: 'Restless, ambitious and not over-absorbed in the thoroughbred'<sup>29</sup> and therefore it came as little surprise that after less than a month with the PA he was looking to move on.

By a stroke of luck and fortuitous timing, the BBC were recruiting staff in time for the return of television in 1946 and Dimmock applied for the post of Outside Broadcast Manager. Demobilisation, reinsertion and reintegration of former servicemen into society had a great impact on large and rapidly expanding organisations such as the BBC. The transformation from war to peacetime was particularly acute for the BBC who had been operating as the propaganda mouthpiece of the British government under the direction of the Ministry of Information. Its post-war focus was servicing peacetime and renewal, which it mainly did through its drive to expand the provision of entertainment: drama, music, quiz shows, light entertainment and sport. This required new staff at all levels of production and there was a momentous recruitment drive between 1946 and 1950. The corridors, offices and studios of Broadcasting House and Alexandra Palace grew busier and busier, virtually becoming an unofficial cantonment of ex-servicemen and women.

It was in this environment that Dimmock was shortlisted for interview and soon found his service history in the RAF working to his advantage.

Of the four of us called to the final interview, two of us had been in the Air Force, the other two hadn't. Of the three people doing the interviews two

had been in the Air Force, so guess who got the jobs? I and Keith Rogers who was the other chap. He and I got the jobs. That's how I got into television.<sup>30</sup>

Dimmock first had to extricate himself from his contract with the Press Association, but following an amicable agreement, by May 1946 was working as an OB television manager. The two interview panellists were the then head of television outside broadcasts Ian Orr-Ewing (who soon left broadcasting to become a Conservative MP, and later, Lord Orr-Ewing) and Philip Dorté, then head of the BBC's film unit. Dimmock would soon work closely with both men to piece together the remnants of pre-war outside broadcast equipment, which was nearly ten years old. One of his first jobs was to lie on the ground facing up some steps ready to cue in presenter Jasmine Bligh, whose face was the first to greet post-war television viewers on the resumption of the service on 7th June 1946.

She said 'Welcome back after a slight interruption.' She was very good. That was my introduction to television. It was very exciting. But of course we were totally looked down on by radio. Radio didn't give us any money. They thought we were just a stupid lot of peep show boys at Alexandra Palace. They thought of us as the film world, nothing at all to do with radio. Radio was respectable.<sup>31</sup>

This tension, between radio (serious and with gravitas) and television (populist entertainment) would constantly resurface in the immediate post-war years, forcing television to work with limited resources and limited support from BBC executive management. The main impact on outside broadcasting was the quality of image the old equipment produced, as well as the constant fear that at any time the cameras would fail.

I was fighting our engineers all the time, saying, 'We've got to get rid of this British equipment. I'm sorry, I'm very British, I'm very loyal, but it doesn't bloody work!' The moment the light went down the picture would peel off from the left hand corner. When we used to do rugby from Twickenham, say I was doing the commentary with Peter West or something, we'd have to say about half an hour before the end of the game, 'Well I'm afraid it doesn't look as if the light is going to hold up, so you may lose your pictures.' The moment the light went to a certain extent the picture just peeled off. It was the CPS tube, which was British, and the engineers, understandably, wanted to be loyal and said 'these damned Americans why should we buy their

equipment?’ Of course they had been using it all through the war, that’s what people forget. That’s why this friend of mine told me to get into television because he’d seen it in America.<sup>32</sup>

### *Staff No Fee: The Rise of the Producer-Commentator*

Unlike the more technical areas of broadcasting, commentators did not receive much in the way of training. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, the BBC had refined the techniques of radio commentary, but television presented a new proposition of blending sound with image, which also meant understanding the capabilities of cameras to capture the action and how coverage might look to viewers at home. Knowledge of best practice was passed down from senior managers to new commentary recruits, many of whom had already been spotted as having a talent for producing a mellifluous narrative or had expertise in their field. Most new commentators had limited experience of television, even as viewers, and it was therefore the job of senior BBC outside broadcast staff to show the way and set the benchmarks for how commentary should be done.

Employing freelance commentators was expensive and the BBC economised through multitasking: producers were asked to commentate, and staff commentators were asked to produce. As Dimmock explains: ‘We did a lot of commenting on each other’s shows because we were SNF – Staff No Fee – so that was a way of keeping within the budget, because we had no money from radio.’<sup>33</sup> This approach proved successful throughout the 1950s, not least because producer-commentators had the ability to swiftly change their roles when the need arose, particularly if things went wrong.

We always used to have a staff commentator. If we employed outside commentators we always had one of us, producers, as assistant commentator because we knew how to handle breakdowns. A lot of it was pre-War equipment, which we were still using. So it kept on breaking down. We knew how to cover it, and we knew what had happened or what was likely the consequences. We knew how to handle it and not get into a mess.<sup>34</sup>

The technical knowledge about television broadcasts also applied to the technique of commentary. Under the initial guidance of Lobby, general guidelines on television commentary were disseminated throughout the outside broadcasting department. Unlike radio, viewers of television could obviously see what was happening before them and this meant

commentators had to speak less but add to the picture. The general rule was ‘if in doubt, say nowt’. Another golden rule introduced by Lobby was never to let five minutes go by without giving the score. This was because viewers would be joining all the time and, in an era when it was not possible to add a caption with the score overlaying the broadcast, they needed to be reminded at regular intervals. As Dimmock recalls, this was not always adhered to, much to the annoyance of BBC producers:

We had Percy Fender once doing cricket for us, and the producer said [laughs] ‘Percy you forgot to say the score’. ‘Don’t tell me what to do I know perfectly well what the score is and if anyone is not intelligent to know then it’s their fault!’ He said this on the air! [laughs] We had so much fun in those days.<sup>35</sup>

Dimmock’s own baptism in commentary came out of the blue. Although the BBC’s television coverage of horse racing was patchy and intermittent during the first few years back on air—far less than was transmitted on radio—it had, nevertheless, employed a regular freelance commentator Frank More O’Ferrall (who had done radio commentaries during the war and was described as ‘charming’ and ‘urbane’ by O’Sullivan) to provide commentary from Ascot and Alexandra Park.

Frank rang up in the morning and said: ‘I’ve got flu. Can’t come.’ So Orr-Ewing said to me: ‘Peter, you worked in the Press Association in the racing department.’ I said, ‘Yes, for a very short time.’ He said, ‘It doesn’t matter, you know a bit about racing and you’ve got a good race reader in Mr Trout from the *Sporting Life* so you’d better do it.’ So I went down from Alexandra Palace and you couldn’t even see the start because it was from behind trees. Trout said, ‘It doesn’t matter, I’ll tell you what Frank always does Peter, you just make it up for the first couple of furlongs [laughs], I’ll sort it out for you by then and we’ll know who is in front. Just make it sound right but don’t name the same horse twice. You mustn’t do that.’ So I did that and it worked fine. Then Ian, I think being budget conscious and Frank More O’Farrell, who wasn’t a chap who really wanted to be a professional commentator, he was quite well off [he established and managed the Anglo-Irish Bloodstock Agency], I didn’t cost anything so Ian said, ‘well you better do the racing.’<sup>36</sup>

The BBC constantly sought to innovate new technologies to assist their commentators in delivering a clear and mellifluous commentary. In an

edition of *Television Weekly* from September 1950, there is an image of Dimmock dressed in a suit, smiling to camera as he shows off the BBC's latest lip microphone for race commentators. The microphone is mounted on a harness that hangs from his neck and rests on his chest and upper stomach, thus allowing his hands to be free to hold his binoculars to follow the horses round the track. Dimmock would prove to be versatile behind the microphone, going on to commentate on a wide range of sports, including ice hockey, a sport at which he personally excelled.

### *The Negotiator*

As Dimmock embarked on his career in television, the self-confidence born of his schooling and RAF service brimmed in to an assuredness that at times could have appeared brash and impudent. Dimmock was sociable and erudite, always impeccably dressed (he was once voted Britain's best dressed man), and brimmed with flirtatious charm as well as being a 'man's man'. It was these characteristics that made Dimmock such a powerful force behind the BBC's attempts to develop televised sport and persuade, sometimes forcefully cajole, sports' administrators in to the value of television for their sport. As Brian Johnston noted: 'it was as an administrator that he really made his name.' Moreover, his youth and conviction in the pioneering spirit of television made him 'supremely confident', never believing 'in taking "no" from anybody.'<sup>37</sup> Johnstone was of a similar age and had also joined the BBC after demobilisation. He therefore observed the rising profile and standing of Dimmock, both among his peers in the BBC and in his relations with leading administrators in British, and later international, sport. In his memoirs, Johnston's biographical assessment of Dimmock's career is worth citing at length:

From 1954 to 1972 he was Head of Television OBs, later on adding the impressive title of General Manager. He was a man of tremendous drive and enthusiasm. Nothing was impossible. No one was inaccessible. He would fight to the last ditch for anything he wanted and he usually won. Peter undoubtedly made the BBC supreme in television sport, and determined to get all the big events in every sport on to the BBC screens. He could be ruthless, tough and overriding, which all sounds rather intimidating. But although a lot of people felt they had been 'done' by him, it was difficult not to laugh and forget after it was all over. This was because Peter himself had

a quick wit and a good sense of humour and especially in the later years he was able to take a joke himself, and laugh.<sup>38</sup>

This summary of Dimmock's career and character make him seem quite formidable. But his catalogue of major achievements in outside broadcasting, which stand out within any history of British television, is complemented by more detailed and nuanced evidence within the memoranda and letters he wrote and received during his period in charge. His greatest foe became Independent Television (ITV), a rivalry that would sharpen his strategic thinking and shape more than two-thirds of his career in television. From the introduction of commercial television in Britain in 1955, he fought to keep the BBC's pre-eminence in the coverage of sport intact. Nevertheless, the BBC's monopoly over televising sport was thought to be harmful to both sport and viewers, and politicians and regulators soon imposed new pressures on the BBC's operations in sport and its commitment to public service. However, it was a battle over the legal rights to television sport, including its retransmission to cinemas—then called rediffusion—that had the BBC fighting to persuade the administrators of sports to open their doors to television. But there was one sporting event which aligned neatly with the BBC's core principles: the London Olympic Games in 1948.

### THE 1948 LONDON OLYMPIC GAMES

The role of television in connecting the wider public to international sporting rituals like the Olympics is now embedded in our popular culture. Today it is driven by commercial and entertainment concerns; in 1948, it was largely driven by the ideology of the games itself, a desire to prove Britain could host the Games in spite of the austere environment and the public service ideology of the BBC—something it continues to draw upon in its rhetoric regarding the license fee and its continuation as a part of British cultural life. In their social history of broadcasting, Cardiff and Scannell argue that at times of public ritual, such as royal ceremonies or sporting occasions, television can 'provide a fragmented audience with a common culture, an image of the nation as a *knowable community*'.<sup>39</sup> In 1948, one could have certainly made this argument for radio but not television.

In 1948, television still played second fiddle to radio by some margin. It received only one tenth of the budget that radio enjoyed, and even senior managers were not convinced of its strengths. Dimmock reflected on television's status at this time:

It was very exciting. But of course we were totally looked down on by radio. Radio didn't give us any money. They thought we were just a stupid lot of peep show boys at Alexandra Palace. They thought of us as the film world, nothing at all to do with radio. Radio was respectable.<sup>40</sup>

The perception that television equated with film did pose problems for the BBC. Newsreel companies, whose magazine approach to the coverage of sport had become very popular during the interwar years, now faced competition.<sup>41</sup> The Rank Organization had bought rights to film the Games for £20,000 and was highly protective of their exclusive agreement. Orr-Ewing's initial meetings and reconnaissance of the stadium had been conducted in March 1947 when the thorny issue of rights fees had been raised. Led by de Lotbinière, the BBC were in charge of all broadcasting arrangements, including the development of a Broadcasting Centre at the Palace of Art near Wembley. In the context of spiralling costs, de Lotbinière was scathing of the idea and criticised the notion that additional fees for television would be levied on top of its main broadcasting facilities.<sup>42</sup>

The issue rumbled on and by November 1947, B. E. Nicolls reiterated the point that Wembley had no rights over the television image and that any payment would be for 'goodwill and access.'<sup>43</sup> The BBC had maintained the view that paying a facility fee was acceptable on the grounds of lost revenue from gate receipts. But a 'rights fee' suggested a different kind of commercial relationship and a grey area as far as the law of copyright was concerned.

The Organizing Committee had no objection to live television, but filmed material relayed by television was a different matter. For 'if the public can at their convenience see television versions of the Games', Holt wrote to Haley, 'they will not leave their homes and go to the cinema to see the feature film.'<sup>44</sup> The edict was perceived as damaging to a fledgling technology. The BBC had also made arrangements with NBC in the United States to distribute television newsreels across the Atlantic. The news of the rights wrangle had reached the Americans, who threatened to make a formal diplomatic protest against the exclusive deal. In a plea



that made great play of the world's perception of Britain, the Head of Television Service, Norman Collins, drafted a response on behalf of the Director-General that recognised some private sports events may wish to exclude BBC Television but submitted that the Olympic Games were different, could not be privatised and were 'international in character and representative of Britain'.<sup>45</sup>

The statement was a precedent to future arguments between the BBC and the governing bodies of sport over the coverage of major sports events that would ultimately lead to non-exclusivity clauses around a series of 'listed events' that would include the Olympic Games. Haley lobbied the Commonwealth Relations Office, laying emphasis on the importance of television newsreel to the BBC's 'social developments in the field of broadcasting'.<sup>46</sup> By the end of January 1948, the matter had been resolved in a meeting between Haley and Lord Portal, with the BBC agreeing to present newsreels simultaneously with Rank's cinematic release and a 'gentleman's agreement' that any recordings 'off tube' would remain private to the BBC and not publicly available. A fee of £3,000 was agreed but it is unclear from the archives whether or not this payment was ever made.

The BBC transmitted 64 hours of programming, including one seven-and-a-half hour stretch on one day. In spite of the technological limitations of the CPS Emitron cameras, the live action and drama on screen was revelatory, as was the ability to pull athletes straight from their events in front of the cameras for an interview. Both British athletes Maureen Gardner and the Dutch sensation Fanny Blankers-Koen were brought to the cameras immediately after their duel in the 80 metres hurdles, both having broken the Olympic Record. In the pool, 40 swimmers faced the cameras, including Britain's Cathy Gibson, 'who made an astonishing television picture in the 400 metre free-style race as she battled from seventh place to third'.<sup>47</sup> The BBC report made great play of the fact that many of the swimmers 'were televised while still wet', a sign that the immediacy of television: to graphically reveal sporting events as they happened was revelatory, not only for the audience, but for the BBC too. Television monitors had been strategically placed in the Radio Centre and the athlete's village. According to the *Radio Times*, it was not only those viewing television for the first time who were impressed, 'seasoned viewers were also astonished by the results achieved'.<sup>48</sup> Although television would not truly make its mark until the coronation in 1953, the hegemonic grip of radio had been loosened. One year after the Games, the BBC innovated microwave radio links for television outside broadcasts, vastly extending its range of outside

broadcasts. The lightweight radio link supplied by Marconi's concentrated the radio waves into a very narrow beam with a mirror, meaning only a small transmitter was needed to cover a considerable distance. The innovation revolutionised television outside broadcasts and opened up new fronts of negotiations and access battles with sport.

### THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROTECTION OF COPYRIGHT IN SPORT AND ISSUES OF REDIFFUSION

British sport in the late-1940s and 1950s remained heavily wedded to administrative traditions in keeping with many enduring values developed in British sport during the 'long nineteenth century'. Sport was organised on paternalistic lines, was characterised by divisions of amateurism and professionalism and had a marked resistance to the potential inroads of commercialisation.<sup>49</sup> The BBC's desire to televise sport to build its audience provided an ideal opportunity for sports administrators to supplement the revenue of their respective sports and affiliated clubs. Spectator sports such as football, cricket, athletics and rugby were popular entertainments, but their economic stability was being threatened by undercapitalisation, which was wedded to the 'amateur paternal-benevolent ideology' of its administrators.<sup>50</sup> In 1947, the prospect of television in households affecting the gate receipts of sport was slim, but an interest by cinema owners in screening live televised sport in their auditoriums to mass audiences had more serious economic consequences. The issue of who could license public screenings of televised sport, and who ultimately had the legal rights over such broadcasts, prompted sports administrators to establish a new collective organisation to protect their interests – the Association for the Protection of Copyright in Sport.

Formed in 1944, at its peak the APCS had 94 member sport associations and promoters.<sup>51</sup> *The Report of the Hankey Committee on Television* (1944) had called attention to concerns regarding the public showing of televised events by third parties, a finding premised on pre-war screenings of horse racing in cinemas. The first secretary of the APCS, Herbert Perkin of the Racehorse Association and proprietor of Epsom Grandstand Association, the home of The Derby, had witnessed an impact on gate receipts following public screenings of the Derby in 1938 and 1939. However, the leading protagonist of the organisation was Frank Gentle, the manager of Harringay Stadium. Gentle was also President of the Greyhound Racing Association, originally formed in 1925 by his father Sir William Gentle,

a retired chief constable. Harringay was home to the popular working class sports of greyhound racing and speedway. Gentle therefore presided over access to one of London's major sporting venues, ideal for BBC outside broadcasts. In 1947, he became the vice-chairman of the APCS, and became the public spokesman for the organisation, including negotiations with the BBC, presentations to government committees and the Postmaster General (PMG).

The central concern was protecting the rights of promoters from third party interests, who sought to exploit the public screening of sport events for commercial purposes. Whether in hotels, pubs, halls or cinemas, sports administrators argued any rediffusion of the BBC's (or any other) television service would undermine their commercial interests. In his evidence to the Board of Trade's Copyright Committee, Gentle recounted a story of how, when a boxing event in Birmingham was being televised, men roamed the streets searching for television aerials, in some cases paying 2s 6d for the privilege of entering private residences.<sup>52</sup> Obtaining legislated rights over the control of sporting events through an amendment in copyright law—effectively a performance right in sport – was the *raison d'être* of the APCS. The reasoning went that sport as a form of entertainment, with vested commercial interests, was due the same rights enjoyed by authors and composers over their work, effectively recognising an intellectual property in the sporting performance itself. In a pamphlet prepared by copyright lawyers K. E. Shelley and F. E. Stone James for Perkin and the Racecourse Association in June 1944, the acute state of affairs over copyright and television broadcasts was explained. 'As the law now stands,' they wrote, 'no one at all can get any effective monopoly in the nature of Copyright in television broadcasts of spectacles.'<sup>53</sup> The premise here was that unlike film, television broadcasts had no permanent picture. In other words, it did not meet the tangible, fixed nature of a 'work' underpinning the laws of copyright.<sup>54</sup> A further consequence of the intangible nature of television was that the BBC could not enforce a monopoly right over any broadcast, leaving it open season for third parties to 'rediffuse' the broadcasts to the public, even as a commercial enterprise. 'There is a real danger', the report went on, 'that, as the law now stands, the promoter of a spectacle will have to embark on a war against pirates in order to preserve the value of the meagre right that the land gives him.'<sup>55</sup>

Senior BBC management were well aware of the brewing issue of copyright in sports broadcasts, and were in agreement with the APCS that new legislation was needed to clarify the issue. However, a right in the sport

event itself was problematic and ran counter to the BBC's view that it was the broadcast not the event that required protection. The negotiations over televised sport and the ramifications it had for new legislation on copyright was a landmark moment in British broadcasting. The amendment to copyright would set the premise for the future of rights in television broadcasts, which today underwrite the economics of the industry. The political struggle for authority of where the *droit d'émission* should reside – in the spectacle or television image – ultimately came down to practical as well as philosophical implications. Basil Nicolls, then Director of Home Broadcasting, noted a right in the event would mean 'that if you looked at the Boat Race while in the bus passing over Putney Bridge you would infringe copyright.'<sup>56</sup> Although it was a rather ridiculous scenario, it hinted at the depth of feeling over the issue, and the financial ramifications at stake.<sup>57</sup>

For those in outside broadcasting, the battle was as much about building bridges between sport and television as it was about gaining definitive answers about the law. De Lotbinière's experience and network of acquaintances in sport from his days in radio proved invaluable in the ongoing talks. In 1949, he received an invite to the APCS committee meetings and was able to keep both Norman Collins, the Controller of Television, and Haley informed of what the governing bodies of sport were discussing. Both Collins and Haley organised meetings to discuss mutual interests, and took Perkins, Gentle and other leading promoters to lunch. The BBC would keep the APCS informed of any discussions they had with cinema interests regarding rediffusion, but in return asked that any ban on television be lifted.

The matter of rights to televise sport had become so entangled in the revision of copyright law that negotiations between the BBC and sport reached an impasse. In April 1950, the PMG, Ness Edwards, organised a meeting to discuss the effect of television on the attendance at sporting events. The meeting included representatives from the BBC—Collins and de Lotbinière—with a selection of sports representatives. Prior to the meeting, de Lotbinière had drafted a complete list of televised and scheduled broadcasts for the twelve months from 1st July 1949 to 30th June 1950 that revealed the BBC had transmitted 133 outside broadcasts from sport. Cricket accounted for 32 of these transmissions, by far the largest televised coverage of any single sport (horse racing was next with 20 broadcasts). An agreement was struck with the PMG for an experimental period of one year whereby the BBC could televise up to 100 events of various sports. This allayed immediate fears of an outright ban and also

allowed a new Sports Television Advisory Committee set up by the PMG to monitor developments.

On the matter of piracy, the BBC reiterated their conviction the threat was minimal: there was a scarcity of appropriate technology, cinemas were enjoying unrivalled popularity and had no pressing need to show sport to boost audiences. Given the expense of film and the delay in exhibition, cinemas would only show certain portions of any event and further protection could be sought from copyright in sound: for example, the voice of the commentator. Nevertheless, the APCS knew that cinemas were lobbying parliament to license a dedicated television wavelength exclusively to cinemas. Rank had been successful in screening the 1950 Cup Final in selected cinemas and stories of sports lovers hunting for television sets in public bars and private dwellings were constantly being circulated. This included a BBC radio news story about a Scotsman paying ten shillings to watch England play Scotland at Wembley and in May 1951 short periods of the MCC v South Africa match were broadcast to the Festival of Britain on London's South Bank to showcase the innovation of 'tele-cinema' and the place of sport in the 'British way of life'.

While instances of rediffusion continued to crop up, the APCS remained resolute in their conviction in a right of copyright or some analogous right in respect of any sport or spectacle, but were frustrated at the lack of progress of various parliamentary committees, which either deferred the decision to another government department or dragged their heels in reporting to the public. The matter of televised sport had been chewed over by a number of parliamentary committees with little definitive progress.<sup>58</sup> The Postmaster General, Ness Edwards, also came in for criticism for not helping to find a resolution. The MP for Wallasey, Ernest Marples, responded to a statement by Edwards in the House of Commons to suggest the government should keep in mind that 'sporting events are at the moment the most effective spectacle on television, and secondly, that we must have an efficient home industry in television if we are to have a successful export industry'<sup>59</sup>

The various episodes involving the APCS, issues over the control of copyright and fears of rediffusion and piracy, brought to light the sensitivity of governing bodies to the BBC's desire to televise the sport and the confused malaise to the whole issue. The BBC therefore had to hunt down any sports promoters who were willing to play ball. In 1950, Collins had requested a list from de Lotbinière of the events the BBC could anticipate as being 'certainties', 'moral certainties' and 'possibles'. Dimmock,

similarly, was to explore his contacts in the world of horse racing with the possibility of gaining horse racing coverage. Although Ascot, Hurst Park and Kempton Park gave some indication of interest, Dimmock reported that ‘all does not augur well for the future.’<sup>60</sup> Reflecting on this period, Dimmock remembered:

In those days you see the BBC was a monopoly, and therefore in a sense they had no competitor to go to, the sports people, so the BBC were in a very strong position. It was a more or less ‘take it or leave it’ position. Not quite, but very nearly. But then of course, first of all when commercial television came in it changed the picture. But the big problem I had was the dyed-in-the-wool feeling that ‘oh, but it will kill our gates’. In fact, it could have affected them 20%.<sup>61</sup>

The television environment was soon to change. Firstly, in 1954, the revised Copyright Act meant broadcasters owned the rights in the television sports broadcast, not the sports promoters. The long-waged campaign by the APCS basically dissipated, but individually the governing bodies of sport, especially the Football League, entrenched their uncooperative policy on television further. Secondly, in the same year as the change in copyright, the Conservative government introduced the Television Act (1954), which ushered in commercial (sponsored) television, based on a competitive regional franchise system and funded through advertising. With its monopoly broken from September 1955, the BBC’s bargaining position with sport changed overnight.

One immediate consequence was the threat of losing showjumping, which had become incredibly popular on the BBC following the relaunch of post-war television. *The International Horse Show* from the White City Stadium, the *Richmond Royal Horse Show* and the *Horse of the Year Show* at Harringay Arena, had become annual features of BBC coverage since July 1947, with Peter Dimmock producing and commentating on the jumping alongside Bill Allenby and from 1952, Dorian Williams. Williams had been brought in to commentary by Dimmock after hearing him as the stadium announcer at Harringay.<sup>62</sup> Part of the reason for the successful coverage was the deal Dimmock had struck with Mike Ansell, chairman of the newly formed British Horse Society, which had amalgamated the National Horse Association with the Institute of the Horse and Pony Club. As Dimmock recalled:

The only people one could reason with was showjumping. Now showjumping took an entirely different view. Mansell said to me, ‘Peter, I want to increase the number of pony clubs after the war and one of the ways I

could do it is getting showjumping on to television. So I'm not really too concerned about the fee. I want the coverage. So I was able to do very good contracts with them until a chap called Dean, a member of the pony club and a partner in the ad agency Pearl and Dean, said 'we're not getting enough money, commercial TV is here'.<sup>63</sup>

Showjumping was the surprise hit on television: much like *Pot Black* launched snooker in to millions of households in the 1970s, so the *Horse of the Year Show* brought characters such as Harry Llewelyn, Pat Smythe and Wilf White and their exceptional horses Foxhunter, Tosca and Nizefela into people's living rooms. According to Dimmock, Ansell tried to persuade Dean to relent but in the end a deal was signed with ATV for what Dimmock recalls as 'a ridiculous amount of money'.<sup>64</sup>

Then I was damn lucky, sheer luck, Harry Llewelyn on 'Foxhunter' was in the jump-off over 'The Wall' at Harringay and the last round whether he could win or not began at one minute to ten. ITV, just as he was setting off, cut it off to go to the Ten O'Clock News. Of course, there was absolute uproar. Ansell rang me up and said 'Peter, we can't get out of this stupid deal Dean has done with ITV quick enough'.<sup>65</sup>

The episode confirmed the BBC were facing stiff opposition, but that they could also draw on a rhetorical device that suggested they cared about sport, were not commercial and therefore cared about their coverage.

## CONCLUSION

Debates about television as it became a, if not *the*, popular leisure and cultural activity amongst Britons in the 1950s and 1960s, were fixated with the content of programmes, their impact on audiences and the act of televiewing. In this were disclosed assumptions and readings of cultural quality and perceptions of television's audience. The scale of the audience itself was set to rise rapidly, from 555,000 households with a television license in December 1950 to more than three million in 1954. The televising of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 had produced a major fillip in television licenses, with more than two million households having a set, but television's reach was much broader, if not the 85% of the population envisaged by Haley in 1950.<sup>66</sup> 'We believe that responsibly handled it can become one of the greatest social benefits of our time', Haley had confidently announced in 1950, but this statement

belied the impoverished resource the Corporation apportioned the new technology, and the cultural snobbery that some senior BBC radio managers held against the development of television.<sup>67</sup> George Barnes, Director of Television in 1950, believed the BBC's focus on television needed to be on quality rather than length of weekly transmissions (then 30 hours). The constraining hours of transmission did, however, have an impact on the BBC's ability to negotiate a settlement with sport. Barnes expressed his disappointment that governing bodies of sport had placed numerous restrictions on outside broadcasts and suggested that this was a matter for patience and negotiation. De Lotbinière and Dimmock, closer to the coalface of negotiations on sport, were conciliatory to the needs of sports administrators, always keen to avoid upsetting them. However, the steely resolve that television would ultimately benefit sport, as well as the BBC and the public, underwrote their dominant ideology of television sport.

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13. *Radio Times*, 2 November 1951.
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44. Holt to Haley, 30 December 1937, BBC WAC R30/2,066/1.
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50. Whannel, The unholy alliance, 132.
51. Briggs, A. (1978) *A History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Sound and Vision. Volume 4*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 871.
52. *The Guardian*, 'Sporting events on television', 26 September 1951, 2.
53. The Racecourse Association Ltd and Television, 12 June 1944, BBC WAC R12/16/2.
54. The BBC innovated 'telerecording' in 1949 which enabled the filming of live broadcasts, which effectively produced a 'fixed' form of television which could be used as evidence of copyright.
55. Ibid.
56. Dir. Of Home Broadcasting to Head of Television Production, October 1948, BBC WAC, R12/16/2.
57. In mounting a case for the BBC, the Corporations' solicitor Edgar Robbins had investigated the resolution of similar issues in the United States. There, an injunction to prevent a Philadelphia hotel charge access to watch the televised fight between Joe Lewis and Jersey Joe Walcott raised awareness of competing business interests, although had not resolved ownership of copyright per se. Studies had been carried out on the impact of televised sport on gates without conclusive evidence either way, and there was a broader sense that pressures were mounting among American interests that 'will induce some form of legal internationalisation'. Briggs, 875.
58. The Hankey Report (1944); the Television Advisory Committee chaired by Lord Trefgarne; the Sport Television Advisory Committee chaired by Lord Beatty; the Beveridge Committee that reported in 1951; and finally the Copyright Committee chaired by the Marquess of Reading which eventually reported to the Board of Trade in October 1952 after nearly 12 months of deliberations had all looked at the issue of television sports rights.
59. Hansard, Television (Sporting Events), HC Deb 17 May 1950, Vol.475, cc1197–9.
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## Innovation, Eurovision and the World Cup

### TELEVISION'S EXPANSIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Technological innovation in television has consistently sought to both expand the reach of television technologies to as broad an audience as possible, and also to improve the quality of the programme form and transmission to the viewer. From the early 1950s through to the late-1960s, innovation discourses in television were driven by a sense of cultural modernity and progress.<sup>1</sup> The post-war austerity of the late-1940s began to give way to a more aspirational culture and consumerism that Hobsbawm characterised as a 'Golden Age' of transformation in British society.<sup>2</sup> The prospect of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953 produced an overwhelming motivation and desire to expand the BBC's television service across Britain. The major technological challenge of the time was to ensure the expansion of transmission was inclusive enough to reach the majority of the population. Beyond London, five high-power, 405-line television transmitters had been introduced by 1950 in Sutton Coldfield (Midlands), Holme Moss (Pennines), Kirk O'Shotts (Scotland) and Wenvoe (South Wales) connecting the BBC Television service to the major UK centres of population, excluding Northern Ireland. The broadening of television's reach was also accompanied by expansionist policies on programming, including the regionalisation of programme production. As part of this process, regional BBC sound technicians and producers were being retrained for television at the BBC's Television Staff Training School in London. Norman Collins, Controller of Television

from 1947, had driven both expansion and competition in regional BBC television. Innovations in programming, such as the extensive coverage of the 1948 Olympic Games, were also key to television's progress and appeal. However, in 1950 Collins resigned from the BBC on a matter of principle bemoaning 'the apathy, disinterest, and often open hostility towards the new medium, which exists in some quarters of Broadcasting House.'<sup>3</sup> Although the political and institutional drive to expand the television service was evident, the 'colossus of sound broadcasting', according to Collins, starved television of resources, such as lack of outside broadcast technology, which ultimately hampered its development. 'It's a familiar story', wrote journalist Tony Goss in November 1953 in the magazine *TV Mirror*, 'of progress in radio and TV held back, not for want of enthusiasm or ideas, but for the lack of suitable equipment. It won't be for long now.'<sup>4</sup>

Goss's hopeful parting shot hints at the progressive expectations of television critics and programme makers of the age. Processes of professionalisation and rationalisation of programme production were beginning to emerge, as television also materialised as a new, highly modern communications and technology industry. The sense of 'the modern' infused the spirit of those working in BBC television through this period. If there were barriers to overcome, then the foresight of television producers, and the pioneering spirit of engineers, would find a way to resolve the issue through the creative use of technology.

However, there was also a sense of the unknown, of precisely where television as a medium was going, not simply in terms of an institutional technology but also in terms of its place in the everyday leisure practices of households.<sup>5</sup> By 1953, the coronation had revealed the appetite not only to access television but also to share a broader sense of being part of a nation of viewers. Purchasing one's first television set was a major undertaking and focus of investment for any household. As Sullivan's reminiscence interviews with those who had bought their first set in the 1950s suggest, buying a television was viewed as a 'sign of progress, a visible sign of joining, or at least of not being left out of "the new".'<sup>6</sup> The coronation created a large fillip in the purchase and renting of sets and television licenses increased by more than 400,000 in 1953–54. The coronation also broadened general awareness of television itself, with many people sharing their first televisual experience among family, friends or in other social settings. BBC Audience Research estimated more than 20 million people watched the live pictures of the coronation, and it remains an early example of television galvanising collective engagement around a national

event. Key to the success of the broadcast was Dimmock's insistence that cameras be allowed in to Westminster Abbey, but some senior establishment figures, including Winston Churchill, did not like the idea. 'He said to me across the table, "Peter, why should the public see more than I when my own view is not that great?"' Churchill's view was all about privilege. But Dimmock persevered, using the press to win over public opinion on the matter. 'My greatest ally was George Campey of the *Evening Standard*', Dimmock recalled, 'I kept feeding him all manner of things, which I probably shouldn't have done. But he was very important in getting cameras in to the Abbey.'<sup>7</sup> Campey, who was the *Evening Standard*'s television editor from 1950,<sup>8</sup> would become an excellent public relations outlet for BBC Outside Broadcast department, and he would eventually succeed Huw Wheldon as the BBC's television publicity officer in 1954.

The appropriation and incorporation of television into the household—why one had a set and what it meant—was part of an increasingly common experience. The coverage of sport played a significant role in motivating households to invest in television. Television set manufacturers alluded to sport as a key form of content, aimed at the main purchaser of technology in the house, men. Sport brought a ready-made audience, who were predominantly male, and it was mainly men who paid for and installed the new technology. Once the set was in the home, early television households soon discovered that daily hours of television were very limited. The BBC were keen for households to manage their viewing. Too much television would distract from other activities. Collins referred to the 'honeymoon' period, where viewers watched anything and everything on their sets.

### TELEVISION'S 'FRONT SEAT VIEW'

How did the BBC's coverage of sport respond to this emergent demand? What innovations were developed to present sport in a way that drew in the viewer and gave them a 'front seat view' at major sporting events? Before moving on to discuss the particular nature of the BBC's innovations and the first coverage of the football World Cup via Eurovision, it is worth reflecting on why the study of technology—its meaning, its discursive formations, its relationship with culture and society—is of importance. Raymond Williams' analysis of television revealed how technology is etched within the institutional history of British television broadcasting.<sup>9</sup> In turn, he argued, we can also see how broadcasting institutions like the BBC were also etched in the economic and political structures of

the state. The coverage of international sport, particularly events like the Olympic Games and the football World Cup would become central features of the BBC's institutional role and history. The BBC became a key player in the endorsement of major sporting events, and why they were of importance to the British public. New technological advances in television, as well as collaborative cultural alliances with international partners, married the public's perception of international sport and prestige with a sense of modernity and new forms of cultural consumption. With regard to televised sport, the promotional rhetoric of government, broadcasters and set manufacturers all focused on television's advancement, both in terms of technological development and the social transformation the new technology could provide.

The 1950s and 60s represented something of a lifestyle change in many European countries. Much of the new modernity was predicated on changes to consumer culture happening in North America, where technological research and development, new modes of production and cultural consumption grew at breakneck speeds. Although the economic and social recovery from war had been slower in Britain (some forms of rationing continued well in to the late-1950s), the ideological shift towards a spirit of change, or a new mood of optimism, certainly began to take hold of the nation as the influence of American popular culture was accommodated into British everyday life. Television was a sign of modernity, and as John Ellis has noted, the development of television as a domestic product went hand-in-hand with changes in consumer society.<sup>10</sup> It was their novelty as technologies, and the embodiment of the desire for 'the new' that captured the imagination of people in the middle period of the twentieth century.

Television was at the vanguard of modernity, but its initial impact on society was slow. The cost of a television set, the quality of the technology in comparison to other forms of entertainment, both in and outside the home (for example, cinema) and the limited popular pleasures available on television were all mitigating against investing in television. Sport and access to live events was one form of content that had the potential power to draw in new viewers. The prospect of watching football on television was certainly uppermost in the minds of those selling television sets. For example, a 1953 advert in the *Radio Times* for the American brand Philco used football imagery as its main selling point. The strap line, 'DEEP picture television' accompanied an image of a forward striking a ball through an imaginary TV screen with a goalkeeper diving to save the ball on the

other side, suggestive of a 3D effect to illustrate the game would literally come alive through the television screen. ‘Here is television in depth’, the description explained, ‘You feel right in the picture – joining in with every event.’<sup>11</sup>

With regard to the consumption of television technologies in the home, Roger Silverstone highlights the need for first-time buyers of television technologies to imagine what the new technology might do for them before processes of appropriation and incorporation of television into the everyday can eventually happen.<sup>12</sup> The conversion of new viewers in the early-1950s therefore relied on a series of processes, which required an imagining of the benefits of investment in the new commodity. These processes become interesting when one considers the role of televised sport in the accommodation and assimilation of new television technologies. More specifically, they dictate the terms on which individuals and households ‘buy in’ to particular technologies, often premised on access to sport, and frequently timed to coincide with major sporting events such as the World Cup.

### PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF OUTSIDE BROADCASTING

The adventurous nature of the BBC’s outside broadcasts during the early-1950s was symbolic of the Corporation’s increasingly expansive approach to television and what was possible. As the instigator and manager of many of these projects, Peter Dimmock began to receive wider recognition for his and the OB unit’s endeavours. By 1950, Dimmock had progressed from being an OB manager to succeed Orr-Ewing as Assistant Head of Outside Broadcasting (Television). Not yet thirty, Dimmock was by far the youngest head of any BBC department and his youth and exuberance may at times have given the impression of someone overly ambitious and slightly rakish. As Dimmock himself reflected:

Because I was so young, they said, ‘Well we can’t make you head of outside broadcasts at your young age, and you’re a bit of a tiger anyway, we don’t know what you might do next, so we’ll make Lobby, technically, Head of Television and Radio Outside Broadcasts.’ And I ran the television side and he ran the radio side.<sup>13</sup>

In this role, Dimmock became responsible for overseeing a number of firsts in outside broadcasting, which today are rarely acknowledged, but



were revered at the time. For example, the prospect of transmitting live transcontinental television signals was always likely following the success of radio outside broadcasts during the war. European broadcasters had collaborated since the 1920s, but in 1946 a more formal agreement was signed to form the Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion (OIR) based in Brussels. The BBC, who had previously helped form a short-lived International Broadcasting Union did not join, and following the increasing political division caused by Soviet-led nations across Central and Eastern Europe, France and then other Western nations left the organisation, soon to form a new collective, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which the BBC did sign up to in February 1950. Technical issues, especially the standardisation of television frequencies proved a major challenge. Different nations had differing views on which frequency would produce the most effective broadcast, and there was a sense of ‘a hidden techno-political conflict’ which was masked by any apparent sense of *entente cordiale* developing in the new post-war world of transnational television.<sup>14</sup> The BBC stuck by the use of a 405-line system, whereas Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF) in France used 819 lines. The Americans were using a 525-line system, and were aggressively marketing their television sets in to Europe. British manufacturers were keen for the BBC to work with European partners, helping ensure their interests were well served, and making British television sets more competitive in comparison to their American rivals. Agreement over systems to be used was a key aspect of this commercial battle, but so too was the prospect of programme exchange, which would build alliances between EBU members and, from a British perspective, made the BBC the standard-bearer of television production. Considerable investment was therefore made converting the different television standards to enable transcontinental television broadcasts to exist. As Fickers and O’Dwyer have critically suggested, the early history of transnational television was characterised by strident attempts ‘to instrumentalise the new medium of television as a means of techno-political bargaining, protectionist industrial policy, and vehicle of cultural propaganda’.<sup>15</sup> For the BBC, the Franco-British experiments were fraught with conflicting practices, technological challenges, resource imbalances and general cultural differences. But the overarching aim of linking up television across the Channel worked, and paved the way for future collaborations.

By 1950, new portable radio links stationed across the south coast of England enabled BBC engineers to transmit a television signal from Calais. It was viewed as a poignant moment in the history of Anglo-French

relations and a landmark in communications, 100 years after the first submarine telegraph cable was laid under the Channel. Amid the rebuilding of the town still recovering from the devastation of the war, Controller of Television Programmes Cecil McGivern remarked, 'Calais for this one night is forgetting its immediate past'.<sup>16</sup> In equal measure, the French press were excited at the prospect of 'Une Grande Fete Du Folklore' being televised by the BBC, with the celebrations of the town's people being shared in a most dramatic fashion.<sup>17</sup> A further extended exchange between the BBC and the French was planned for July 1952 called 'Paris Week', with a whole week of programming from the French capital, which included cycling from Velodrome d'Hiver in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.

Dimmock, as Assistant Head of Outside Broadcasting, was central to the foresight, planning and delivery of the broadcast along with McGivern, Imlay Newbiggin-Watts, the BBC's manager of Special Projects, and Jean d'Arcy of RTF. D'Arcy was a television visionary, with a strong passion for developing a broader international role for the medium. In their analysis of d'Arcy during this period of innovation, Fickers and O'Dwyer concluded that he 'clearly saw the potential of television as a tool of rapprochement between people and nations and developed into an ambassador of this vision all around the world'.<sup>18</sup> It was the seed of television's future role in transnational media events and media culture.

### EUROVISION AND THE 1954 WORLD CUP

The World Cup, like television, began in the 1930s. In Britain, all four of the UK's 'home' nations abstained from participating in 1930, 1934 and 1938. The reasons were political and premised on an ethnocentric view that British football was naturally superior and need not subject itself to 'foreign' scrutiny. None of the 1930s tournaments were televised, although all were filmed and appeared in cinema newsreels across the world. The finals in 1938 were extensively covered by radio across Europe but, unlike the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936, were not televised. As Alan Tomlinson has observed, by the middle of the century, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) had staved off bankruptcy in its formative years, had negotiated the UK nations back into its fold in 1946, and had begun the process of turning the men's World Cup competition into its showpiece event that would eventually become a genuinely global enterprise.<sup>19</sup> In 1950, the British nations entered the competition, although Scotland withdrew from the finals as they felt they had not earned their place after losing out to England in the 'Home International' tourna-

ment, which effectively operated as a qualifier for the World Cup in Brazil. Although Brazilian media mogul Assis Chateaubriand had plans to launch the first television service in Latin America immediately after the war, his two television services in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro did not begin broadcasting until September 1950, two months after the World Cup. The BBC did carry some radio commentaries and eyewitness reports by Charles Buchan from England's games, which included a humbling defeat to a team of amateurs from the United States, a result so surprising that Kenneth Wolstenholme wrote some years later, 'that the *New York Times* refused to print it until the agency message had been checked!'<sup>20</sup> Only grainy newsreel of the defeat survives, and brief filmed highlights of the event screened by the BBC passed by with little fanfare.

Being live was a key characteristic of early television, setting it apart from the experience of watching film and making it more immediate than press coverage of sport. Live coverage of sport, therefore, as John Ellis has observed, had 'an important role in television's aesthetic development by maintaining and renewing television's powerful impression of co-presence with the audience'.<sup>21</sup> This did much to create a sense of co-presence between those on television and those watching. By the time of the coronation, sport was starting to become a mainstay of the BBC's television schedule. The televising of 1953 FA Cup Final between Bolton Wanderers and Blackpool, commonly referred to as the 'Matthews Final'—following Stanley Matthews's only cup win for Blackpool—illustrated the power of television to transport viewers to the drama and sense of occasion at one of England's premier sporting venues, Wembley Stadium. The 1953 Cup Final was telerecorded, and extensive highlights survive, including Matthews's dribble and cross for Bill Perry's winner for Blackpool, later to become one of the BBC's most repeated clips from the era. What they reveal are some recognisable features of 'televsual language'—the blended use of long and mid shots of the game from the half-way line—however, some of the camera work is incredibly shaky and the framing of the play is often overly tight so as to miss the wider passage of play. Nevertheless, the conventions of covering football were advancing with practice, and a couple of years later, Chivers, who pioneered the techniques and had covered every Cup Final from 1947, reflected on the core principles for live transmissions from football in the *Radio Times* in February 1955. The main fear of the producer of football was missing a goal by cutting at the wrong time or through poor camera work. The half-way line camera position was key, and proximity to the pitch dictated whether panning was too

uncomfortable for viewers (too close) or obstructed by pillars and girders (too high and deep). The zoom lens gave an impression to the viewer of moving in and out of the field of play. Chivers concluded:

An experienced cameraman, and one who knows and enjoys football, can simplify the producer's life enormously. He will anticipate play and move in the direction the ball will eventually go. Sometimes – like a footballer – he is fooled by the player with the ball, and momentarily pans in the wrong direction. This suggests another problem: how much of the field should be shown? Viewers with large screens like the wide shot, but we have to remember that most screens are comparatively small and if we give a very wide picture those viewers will lose the ball completely.<sup>22</sup>

By the time of the 1954 World Cup, Chivers was probably the most experienced and skilled director of televised football in the world.

### *Television Continental Exchange*

The first televising of the World Cup came in 1954 from Switzerland from 16th June to 4th July. By 1953, with the prospect of the finals in Switzerland, the possibility of linking up a number of European countries as part of a 'Television Continental Exchange' was being discussed by the EBU. A series of programmes were transmitted between June and July 1954, and the Swiss contribution from Berne included ten matches from the World Cup Finals. This represented the largest contribution to the exchange by any single country. The EBU exchange relied upon some 4,000 miles of connecting landlines, with 44 transmitters spread across the continent. The ideological motivation for the exchange, at least from a British perspective, was identified by the BBC's chief engineer Michael Pilling as universalising the television picture as a means to overcome European language barriers.<sup>23</sup>

The modern rhetoric of 'universality' represented a cultural politics cast in the shadow of the post-war international relations, cemented in organisations like the United Nations, but also identifiable in collaborative schemes to share knowledge and resources in organisations like United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the EBU. Each participating national broadcaster—many of them less than one year in operation, many borrowing equipment and expertise from the BBC—had their own commentator for the same pictures, situated either at the stadium or in a remote studio. The technique of

segregating background sounds or ‘effects’ from commentary had first been used during the coronation in 1953 when the BBC’s live broadcast had been successfully transmitted to five nations across Europe, with telerecordings exported to North America and Australia. British manufacturers supplied much of the technical apparatus to European broadcasters: for example, Pye sold outside broadcasting units to Belgium and Switzerland, and Marconi sold microwave links to enable transmitters to link up across national boundaries.<sup>24</sup>

The ‘Eurovision’ experiment—a phrase coined by journalist George Campey in 1951—represents the beginning of a now standard broadcasting format for the delivery of global sporting events, which later combined unilateral and multilateral feeds (see Chap. 7 for how this benefitted the coverage of the 1960 Rome Olympic Games). In September 1953, EBU members met in London to discuss the 1954 summer season of television exchanges, which would act as a prelude to regular Eurovision programming.<sup>25</sup> The concept of Eurovision made most sense to small nations, who would struggle to sustain a regular television service for a small audience. The EBU’s guiding principles for the exchange were that programming was reciprocal, selected independently by each national broadcaster, and voluntary.

For the BBC, planning for coverage of the World Cup began in December 1953, following the circulation of information on the likely structure of the tournament, its venues and specific matches to be played in Switzerland.<sup>26</sup> The final 16 nations were drawn in to four groups, but early press reports of the matches England and Scotland might play were viewed as premature as the qualifying phase had yet to be completed. Sir Stanley Rous, chairman of the Football Association and a trusted ally of the BBC, revealed to de Lotbinière that FIFA would meet on 14th April to discuss broadcasting matters regarding the World Cup.<sup>27</sup>

The BBC’s premier producer of televised football was Alan Chivers, who had been a member of Fighter Command during the war and joined the BBC in 1946. The football commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme once explained Chivers’s senior position in the coverage of football:

He knows his soccer. He loves his soccer. He knows his television and he loves his television. He has, therefore, just the qualities necessary to handle the difficult job of leading an O.B. team at a big match.<sup>28</sup>

Today, such attributes would place thousands of people in the running for an OB television producer. In 1954, they may have been qualifications

enough. Chivers was asked to travel to Switzerland for a couple of weeks in May in order to conduct reconnaissance on the state of the Swiss television service and football stadiums, but most crucially to advise the Swiss on their coverage of the World Cup. By 1954, the Swiss had only produced one outside broadcast of any note, so the European link-up from the World Cup hosts came with considerable risk.<sup>29</sup> Dimmock, worried about the length of time Chivers would be away due to the OB department's pressing commitments at home, emphasised the need for his producer to be used sparingly by the Swiss. June was the BBC's busiest period for outside broadcasts, and the front cover of the *Radio Times* promoted a whole gamut of sporting events being covered that month.<sup>30</sup> But Chivers was mainly wanted to produce Royal Ascot, which was also planned to be part of the BBC's exchange with France. As Dimmock recalled, 'The tic-tac men from the racecourse were shown at special request from the French. The French did not have the tic-tac system because they did not have any bookies.'<sup>31</sup> Dimmock agreed that Chivers would help explain the technique of covering football on television to the Swiss outside broadcast producers, including best camera positions in each venue. Dimmock noted to de Lotbinière that Chivers could prepare the Swiss to cover the opening matches of the tournament, return to London to work on Ascot before assessing whether he was needed to produce coverage from the quarter-finals onward.<sup>32</sup> But given the language barrier, Dimmock thought it best a Swiss production team, having been 'shown the ropes' by Chivers, did as much as possible, because 'the quick coverage of football depends on teamwork between the producer and cameramen'.<sup>33</sup> Dimmock met Swiss producer (Regisseur) Frank Tappolet, and it was agreed Chivers would not need to be there for all the games. Instead, Chivers produced coverage of a friendly international between Switzerland and Holland on the 30th May, the match being relayed live to audiences in the Netherlands. The coverage of the World Cup was an early experiment in production knowledge exchange, with the BBC sharing both equipment and, perhaps more crucially, its experience of outside broadcast production techniques. Production of the World Cup coverage was handled by the Swiss following Chivers's tuition. The only exception being the main camera operator Bill Wright from the BBC, who, as an experienced hand with the zoom lens, was brought in to provide the close-up shots of the players. Ironically, according to Wolstenholme, one television critic gave the Swiss a glowing review with the exception of their use of the zoom lens which, he claimed, was not as good as the BBC's, unaware that Wright was the cameraman behind both.<sup>34</sup>

The *Radio Times* previewed the broadcasting experiment under the heading 'Television in Europe Today' noting that 'between June 6 and July 4 viewers in Britain will be able to see a series of programmes relayed from seven European countries.'<sup>35</sup> Newbiggin-Watts oversaw logistical arrangements, having visited the television services of each European partner, circulating a brief description of the nature and extent of television broadcasting in the eight countries involved. Alongside British television were France (launched in March 1945), Holland (October 1951), West Germany (December 1952), Belgium (October 1953), Switzerland (November 1953), Italy (January 1954) and Denmark (January 1954). Watts praised the visionaries of the project, Jean D'Arcy of RTF and Cecil McGivern, arguing the international exchange was 'potentially one of the most exciting ideas of our time'.<sup>36</sup> In order to publicise the BBC's involvement in the venture, the BBC Press Officer, Douglas Ritchie, organised a British press visit to Switzerland in May 1954 to the La Pontaise stadium in Lausanne and the Wankdorf stadium in Berne, followed by a candle-light dinner in the King's Hall of the Chateau de Chillon, the island castle in the centre of Lac Léman. The party included journalists L. Marsland Gander from the *Daily Telegraph* and George Campey of the *Evening Standard*.<sup>37</sup> Here, for the British journalists concerned, was evidence of how much prestige the BBC placed on the venture, keen as they were to promote the European exchange as another staging post in the exciting growth of television.

The BBC transmitted eight live games in total, starting with France versus Yugoslavia from La Pontaise Stadium, Lausanne, subsequently followed by England's opening group game against Belgium and Scotland's second group game against the then World Champions Uruguay. Scotland had entered the World Cup Finals for the first time following the Scottish Football Association's principled decision to forego their place at the 1950 finals in Brazil. However, they travelled to Switzerland with a depleted squad of thirteen players, with star names from Rangers withheld by the club, who were on an American tour, and only three players from Celtic released. The Scots' opening game in Basle against Austria ended in defeat by a single goal, and in spite of a good performance, their manager Andy Beattie was so disillusioned with the state of affairs he resigned.<sup>38</sup> Things got much worse during their first live televised game on 19th June 1954, with ignominious defeat to Uruguay by seven goals to nil in Basle. Wolstenholme's commentary was highly critical of the Scotland players and the manner of their defeat. 'Scotland were a team without fight', he

later remarked, 'let alone without skill.'<sup>39</sup> Following the Hungarian mauling of England prior to the World Cup and Scotland's capitulation against Uruguay, Wolstenholme did not hold back from his post-mortem of the British style of play. His own version of events placed emphasis of the revelatory power of television to open the eyes of British viewers to the new styles of play and skills which other nations had developed to take the game to new levels:

For too long we had lived in a fantastic wonderland, thinking we were so good. Now was the time for the great disillusionment, and as television was giving the British public its first real view of the might of world soccer, I felt it was my duty to state in no uncertain terms that the game we had been watching Saturday after Saturday bore no relation to association football.<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to Dimmock, Wolstenholme reflected on his commentary for the Scotland game, noting: 'I didn't want to rub salt in anyone's wounds, but the Scottish performance was humiliating.'<sup>41</sup> Wolstenholme's comments had caused controversy back in the UK, with some television critics suggesting his role was to 'comment and not to criticize'.<sup>42</sup> In Scotland, the Glasgow newspaper the *Evening Citizen* published an open letter from Wolstenholme on its front page under the headline 'Stop Your Crying, Scotland' explaining why his commentary had been so disparaging. This further fanned the flames of criticism of the BBC's coverage, but McGivern sent a telegram to Wolstenholme congratulating him on a 'first-class job'. The episode revealed the way in which television was not simply a 'window on the world' of international sport, but increasingly engaged within its discursive cultures. Television became part of the national conversation on football, and as future World Cups would reveal, the passions associated with the tournament ran deep for all nations involved. Television evolved to play a compelling role in fostering strong nationalist sentiment and emotion.

In relation to the home nations in the World Cup, the controversy revealed the tensions apparent for television when navigating the cultural politics of Britishness, Englishness and Scottishness. On returning to the UK, Wolstenholme was invited on to a sports forum organised by the *Scottish Daily Express*, which toured Scotland with a panel of sporting experts. His summary of the experience was that he found Scots to be 'charming folk', but overly sensitive to criticism especially from non-Scots. It leads them, he suggested, 'to the mistaken view that most



people have an anti-Scottish bias'.<sup>43</sup> Whether or not this was the case, it is a tension that runs throughout the history of English-based BBC coverage of Scottish sport, which emerges because BBC commentators have tended to address their audience from a London-centric view. This is only averted when BBC Scotland, BBC Wales and BBC Northern Ireland take the opportunity to opt out of the network broadcast and employ their own commentary team. In the 1950s and 60s, opportunities to opt out were more likely to occur in radio than television. One simple reason was cost and lack of resources, but there was also a sense among BBC hierarchy that opt-outs were unnecessary because the BBC's commentators were well drilled on being impartial. As the 1954 experience revealed, audiences in the smaller nations of the British Isles did not always concur.

### *England's National Game?*

Not all the BBC's coverage of the World Cup was live. The Swiss also made edited film highlights of the 1954 World Cup for inclusion in BBC broadcasts, a cheaper if less immediate way of covering the finals. Limited to ten minutes in length, the filmed games included Switzerland v England (20th June), two quarter-final games (26th and 27th June) and one semi-final (30th June). The mute films were edited, dubbed in England by Paul Fox and transmitted two days after the actual game. Late notice on the films coming to the BBC caused some disruption to the BBC Newsreel team, not least because they were producing daily films of Wimbledon at the same time.<sup>44</sup> The dates were then displaced, with Switzerland versus England moved to 23rd June and only the semi-final being screened on 3rd July. Fox sought a film editor and apologised to the Supervising Film Editor for the late request adding meekly, 'the whole thing has been rather involved.'<sup>45</sup> The BBC took four films from Swiss TV at a cost of 4,400 Swiss francs.<sup>46</sup>

The script for the film commentary of England's game against the hosts Switzerland provides an insight into the discourse on England's tainted international aspirations of the period. The commentator, presenter Alexander Moyes, introduced the idea that England had been publicly criticised for their poor performance in their first game against Belgium and therefore 'needed a victory badly', not only to 'restore confidence', but also 'to deride the many critics who had written them off as failures'.<sup>47</sup> The comment reflected a broader context of England's

‘tottering prestige’, as the *Manchester Guardian* had called it, which had been brought in to crisis following two successive humiliating defeats to Hungary in November 1953 and May 1954, including a 6-3 defeat at Wembley. The second half of the Wembley game in coronation year had been transmitted live on BBC television. During the game, BBC commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme had whimsically observed how some of the ‘tricks’ the Hungarians were doing would not have looked out of place in the circus, but his inability to fully describe, let alone comprehend, what was happening on the Wembley turf reflected the tactical and technical superiority of the Hungarians with stars such as Ferenc Puskás and the deep-lying forward Nándor Hidegkuti. *The Times’s* football journalist Geoffrey Green perhaps captured the bewilderment of the English team when he described Puskás’s goal where he dragged the ball back with the sole of his left foot, wrong-footing the England captain Billy Wright, before firing the ball into the net. ‘Billy Wright’, Green wrote, ‘rushed into the tackle like a fireman racing to the wrong fire.’<sup>48</sup> The subsequent defeat in the return fixture just prior to the World Cup in Switzerland destroyed any lingering notion that the English game, with its WM formation, remained a dominant force in world football. Its isolationist stance in the interwar years, followed by a reluctance to accommodate new ways of playing football that emphasised preparation, fitness, ball mastery and tactical awareness, had left England and other British home nations far behind the new leaders of international football.

The BBC paid a relatively low £681 to the Swiss for the live relays of matches via the EBU, although the overall cost of the Eurovision infrastructure was considerably more in the region of 200,000 Swiss francs.<sup>49</sup> Wolstenholme’s general impression of the finals and the Eurovision experiment were largely complimentary. Praising the organisation of the coverage he spoke highly of Frank Tappolet and the Swiss TV production staff, for ‘they have fallen over backwards to make everything available to us and we haven’t met a single snag.’<sup>50</sup> Hospitality by the Swiss was so good that Chivers was ‘rather embarrassed by it all’ and when press journalists struggled to gain access in to the England match in Berne, Tappolet had personally collected the passes for television personnel without any hiccups. The BBC too had contributed to the meticulous planning and detail of ensuring the Eurovision experiment had run smoothly, particularly for its principal football commentator Wolstenholme, who later reflected it had been organised like a precision holiday tour. Newbiggin-Watts was for

many years ‘Mr Fixit’ when it came to Eurovision exchanges, and again, as Wolstenholme observed, ‘By the time the commentator is called in to cover any event he finds that everything has been fixed.’<sup>51</sup>

But concluding his remarks on the tournament Wolstenholme returned to a nationalist frame of reference with a note on England whose ‘fighting spirit won back our respect on Saturday’, followed by extended praise of English referee Arthur Ellis who ‘made us the most popular nation here by his handling of the Hungary v Brazil brawl, after that game I feel I could commentate on any riot for you!’<sup>52</sup> The quarter-final game at the Wankdorf Stadium in Berne between the fancied Hungarians and the emerging talent of the Brazilians would later be labelled ‘the Battle of Berne’, for the violence of the play and the sending off of three players by the English official. A penalty awarded to Hungary prompted Brazilian match officials and journalists to storm the pitch in protest, and they had to be removed by police. This triggered violent conduct by the players as the game descended in to farce. Ellis later remarked that both teams ‘behaved like animals’, but neither FIFA nor the respective national governing bodies disciplined those involved. There were also political undertones to the rivalry—the Brazilian state was staunchly anti-Communist, while Hungarian leaders viewed the Brazilian president Getúlio Vargas as a right-wing sympathiser to the fascist Integralists. As the running battle on the pitch proceeded, one of the EBU switching stations in the Swiss mountains was hit by lightning and the picture went down, many thought it had been intentionally switched off.<sup>53</sup> Wolstenholme spent the evening with Ellis and his family and witnessed local Swiss people proclaiming him to be the hero of the day. Wolstenholme’s focus on Ellis, in his commentary and recollection of the events, hint at the lingering superiority still felt by the English football community. Hungary may have humiliated England prior to the tournament, but there remained deeper values of sportsmanship and fair play that still separated the British players from their international counterparts.

England’s quarter-final defeat to Uruguay was shown live, but following their shaky start in their opening draw against Belgium, this was viewed as modest success. Uruguay would ultimately fall to Hungary who by now were overwhelming favourites to be crowned world champions. Indeed, in the filmed highlights of the semi-final screened one day before the final, the BBC’s Wensley Pithey—a South African character actor—announced that Hungary ‘had shown themselves to be soccer masters that many critics had awarded them the World Cup already’.<sup>54</sup>

The final between the fancied Hungarians and West Germany illustrated how unexpected outcomes produced great television, with the Germans overturning a 2-0 deficit into a 3-2 victory.

### THE NEW BOUNDARIES OF BRITISH TELEVISION SPORT

The Eurovision summer festival of television had created many challenges and at times strained international relations. But the Swiss broadcasts from the World Cup were incredibly well received. Dimmock wrote a letter to Tappelet to say congratulations for his excellent handling of the coverage which had been widely praised in the British press and established a new benchmark for international television sport.<sup>55</sup> Behind such sentiments lie issues of prestige for broadcasters that have remained an important motif and motivational force behind their desire to cover major international sporting events such as the World Cup. The England captain, Billy Wright, some years later reiterated the impact Eurovision had on television audiences:

When the World Cup Finals were televised on Eurovision in 1954 millions of people in England saw teams – and, let’s face it, quality – of a far higher standard than they’d seen at home, which increased their interest in the game. People who are not normally interested in soccer, after watching it on screen, began to talk about the game. I’ve heard a dozen instances when wives asked their husbands to take them to watch a League match as a result of this and in every possible way television acted as an incentive to interest.<sup>56</sup>

The extent to which there was widespread public engagement with the World Cup is open to interpretation, but the sentiments of Wright echoed a popular discourse of the time among those in both broadcasting and sport that television had a crucial role in promoting major events like the World Cup to British audiences and thereby amplifying awareness of spectator sport. The World Cup brought exotic locations and the unfamiliar names of colourful players into people’s living rooms. The hope was that exposure to ‘continental football’—a particularly British point of view of the world game—would act as a catalyst to better play ‘back home’. As a number of social historians of British football have pointed out, the defeats sustained by England and Scotland in 1953 and 1954 had a broader resonance with the state of the nation.<sup>57</sup> A popular media discourse emerged that yoked national football prestige with the health

of the nation more broadly. Political crises, such as Suez in 1956, formed part of a broader dismantling of Britain's imperial status in the world, and the lacklustre performances of British teams against international opposition became symbolic of the demise of empire. International football, and the World Cup in particular, became a new stage on which prestige could be regained, and the rise of transnational television connected national communities in ways never before realised.

The Scots had not taken the 1954 finals seriously, but by the end of the 1950s, this mood had changed. In January 1958, Scotland briefly appointed Matt Busby of Manchester United as Scotland team manager. It was a sign of more expansive thinking, drawing on Busby's experiences in European football. Unfortunately, Busby did not take up the role after being severely injured in the Munich air disaster the following month. This more concerted effort to compete at international level also grew from Scottish club football. In the 1955–56 season, Hibernian had bucked the insular trend when they entered the inaugural European Cup—a year before Manchester United became the first English club to do so. The Football League had persuaded Joe Mears, the chairman of First Division champions Chelsea, not to enter the competition for fear of damaging the integrity of English club football. However, the BBC televised the second half of the first European Cup Final between Stade Reims and Real Madrid in June 1956, although missed the opportunity to screen any of the Edinburgh club's three ties including the semi-final against Reims. In the mid-1950s, Hibs were also amongst the clubs who trialled the use of floodlit stadia, which had enabled the BBC to televise a number of friendlies between Scottish and English clubs, as well as visits from eastern European teams such as Spartak Moscow from the Soviet Union and Honved from Hungary. Floodlit matches were a boon for the BBC, whose struggles for access with the Football League and Football Association were circumvented by floodlit games, played beyond the auspices of the authorities, an issue discussed in more detail in Chap. 11.

Wolverhampton Wanderers' match with Honved in December 1954 held a powerful place within the formative years of television broadcasts of European football. Avenging the Hungarians, so soon after England's defeats, and with six of the national team playing for Honved including Kocsis, Czibor and Puskás, television, perhaps for the first time, focused the attention of the wider viewing public on the significance of club football to the health and status of the nation. Wolves, 3-2 victors, were heralded unofficial 'Champions of the World' by the *Daily Mail*. The coverage of

the Wolves victory under the murky lights of Molineux and its subsequent plaudits proved to be a portent of television's future love affair with mid-week European football.

## CONCLUSION

The BBC's approach to the World Cup in 1954 reveals both material and symbolic dimensions of television technology and the role of sport within it. There were technical challenges: the logistical problems of transmission across the continent; the incommensurable technical standards and capacities of different EBU partners; the limits of technology to provide live coverage from every location; and innumerable resource constraints of material and human kinds. But there was an optimistic, pioneering will to overcome these challenges, even in the face of cultural differences that got lost in translation or political nuances with state protectionism of a new consumer industry. Televising the World Cup also had symbolic meaning, which transformed over the decade from near ignorance and willing indifference, through to greater public awareness and mass appeal to share the World Cup televisual experience. This sense of the World Cup as a mediated experience was still new, contested and unstable. For example, FIFA remained a paternalistic, fairly insular organisation with little concern in television as either a communicator of its premier tournament or as a potential source of commercial revenue. All money from rights fees went to the host nation's association. Nevertheless, the BBC's coverage helped install the World Cup as a key feature of Britain's sporting calendar in a broader context of increased internationalism in sport. Throughout the 1950s, as television sought to expand its reach into football, the constraints of rights disputes created by the Football League were overcome by new technological and international opportunities. Club friendlies with international sides, usually under floodlight, later became accepted as part of regular European club football. The Munich air disaster in 1958 possibly helped galvanise rather than undermine the sense that British clubs had a role to play in the new Europeanisation of football. At a time when international travel remained the preserve of the economically privileged, television, through the likes of the World Cup and European club competition, brought a sense of the exotic, otherworldliness of international sport into the living room. The BBC, especially those with strong associations with sports journalism, began to understand their role in making international sport not only available but also relevant to a British

sports audience. The BBC therefore pushed the technological, logistical and professional boundaries of television to their maximum. By the time of the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, Eurovision and World Cup television symbolised both an emergent era of modern sport and, through the co-presence of the audience, new boundaries of where television could take the viewer beyond the shores of the British Isles. Reviewing the success of Eurovision at the end of 1954, Maurice Wiggin, the *Sunday Times* television correspondent, concluded that broadcasts had been ‘stumbling, halting, groping’, but, more crucially, ‘most deeply significant’.<sup>58</sup>

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## Televising Test Cricket

More than any other sport on television, cricket broadcasting has a rich and full literature that reflects on the memories of those involved, the great matches covered and the wider impact television has had on the game. In the mid-1950s, the BBC produced a small book called *Armchair Cricket*, which was published to aid the listener and the viewer understand not only the rules and main features of cricket, but also how and why the BBC went about covering it. There was no similar book for football, rugby, athletics or tennis (although as new television sports, both snooker and darts did get their own BBC guides in the 1970s). One reason why this might have been the case is that cricket is a very technical sport, and many viewers not being aficionados of the sport may have needed some additional support to appreciate precisely what was happening on the screen. The book's editor, the BBC's principal television cricket commentator Brian Johnston, summed up his own thoughts about who the book was for: it was an 'arm-chair' guide for listeners and viewers who had started to follow the game on radio or television but still had 'rudimentary knowledge of the game'.<sup>1</sup>

Johnstone's book alludes to the role broadcasting was starting to fill in the post-war period: it championed sport to a broader audience but was also rooted in delivering access to a ready-made audience of followers keen to see their heroes at work. In the immediate post-war period, cricket was incredibly popular. In this sense, cricket did as much to popularise television, as television enticed new audiences to the medium with live images of the great players of the day such as Denis Compton, Bill Edrich

and, in 1948, Don Bradman in his final Ashes series. Both Compton and Edrich drew huge crowds to see them help Middlesex conquer all before them to take the 1947 County Championship. More than 54,000 came to see Middlesex play Surrey at The Oval, with many thousands locked out of the ground on the Saturday.<sup>2</sup> However, even by the early 1950s, there is evidence that the sport was facing the early stages of financial crisis. From the mid-1950s, there was a steady decline in attendances and economic stability that blighted the game into the early 1960s.<sup>3</sup> In April 1952, the BBC radio scriptwriter Joe Burroughs asked what could make for ‘brighter cricket’ in the context of the financial concerns of the county game. ‘There is little doubt that the game can be improved,’ he wrote in the *Radio Times*, ‘and improved in a comparatively short space of time. It will need to be if certain counties are to continue playing in face of mounting expenses and declining receipts.’<sup>4</sup> In the same issue of the *Radio Times*, the outside broadcast producer Antony Craxton revealed the new technology that had been installed in all Test cricket grounds, including Headingley and Old Trafford, which would enable all the summer Tests to be covered by television. With television going to the county grounds at Worcester, Yorkshire and Lancashire for the first time, Craxton expected coverage of the game to grow, and not just at the professional grounds. What was clear, in this particular conjunction of a sport facing financial woes and a young medium seeking drama to attract a new audience, was that televised cricket offered some new possibilities to both halves of the equation. Although gate receipts remained the key income stream, fees from television opened up a new income stream to the sport, which began to find a new lease of life through the innovation of the limited-overs game in a new era of television and sponsorship in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter focuses on both the evolution of institutional and personal relations between cricket and television, before moving on to consider the innovations in television coverage of the sport, which combined to marry cricket and television. The negotiations for cricket are mainly held in the respective archives of the BBC and the MCC at Lords, and work by Jack Williams has also found extensive records of television contracts in the archives of the English Cricket Board.<sup>6</sup> Williams’s work on cricket broadcasting in radio and television is the most comprehensive historical analysis of broadcasting a single sport, and is therefore the major reference point for any discussion of cricket on television.

The second half of the chapter deals in more detail with the codes and conventions of televised cricket as they were innovated and developed by

the BBC. Aspects of production and presentation were arguably relevant to the negotiations and relations between the broadcasters and the MCC and the chapter constructs a narrative of how the MCC grew to understand and respond to television as a new popular cultural form. In a wider context, it helps us understand the processes of commercialisation that grew in most spectator sports during the interwar and immediate post-war years. As Williams has noted, profiteering from cricket was considered pernicious and generally against the moral code of the sport.<sup>7</sup> Broadcasting began to challenge this hegemony, not least by providing a new source of revenue and promoting the sport to a wider audience. Professionalism grew apace after the war with leading players earning a comparatively 'comfortable living from cricket'.<sup>8</sup> The advent of commercial broadcasting in 1954 brought further pressure on the game to capitalise financially from competition for television coverage. As the following narrative suggests, it set in motion a series of economic and moral dilemmas for cricket's hierarchy to resolve and ultimately led to the development of shorter forms of the sport specifically devised for the television cameras.

#### POST-WAR: THE THREAT OF REDIFFUSION

In April 1946, BBC film producer Philip Dorté wrote to the Chairman of the MCC, who effectively governed the English game, Colonel Rait-Kerr, to announce BBC television would be reopened on 7th June 1946. The Indian tour and first Test from Lords were targeted for coverage. Experiments of televising cricket in 1938 and 1939 had proven the sport could be televised successfully but had also raised the spectre of a challenge to the MCC and the counties: the effect of broadcasting on attendances. The BBC accepted the return of televised cricket should proceed conservatively. Although they did not concur that television could affect the gate, from the outset the BBC agreed not to transmit any footage before 3.00 p.m., thereby off-setting any possibility of dissuading fans from going to cricket. Even though entrance fees to the Lords Tests had considerably increased from pre-war gate charges of 2/- (two shillings) in 1939 to 3/6 (three shillings and sixpence) in 1946, Dorté was adamant that 'sound and television broadcasts never keep true enthusiasts away from Lords but, on the contrary, serve a useful purpose in creating and maintaining enthusiasm amongst a wide public'.<sup>9</sup> Dorté delivered the 'Corporate line' but his insistence that the BBC had the 'desire to give this country the best television service possible'<sup>10</sup> probably fell on deaf

ears at the MCC. It was not the job of cricket to make television a success. Orr-Ewing eventually settled the contract over the phone, agreeing to pay 125 guineas for three days of the Test and vowed not to show more than three hours of cricket per day starting no earlier than 2.30 p.m. Ian Orr-Ewing, then head of television OBs, remained unhappy with the camera positions afforded at Lords—‘too high with the result that one tended to get a slightly ‘birds-eye-view’.<sup>11</sup>

Fees and camera angles would prove the least of the BBC’s problems and their rhetoric to push for ‘the public interest’ in cricket coverage could do nothing to allay fears within the game that television could impact on their income. As early as 1939, rediffusion had been raised as a potential issue. At this time, de Lotbinière had refuted any suggestion of the possible rediffusion of cricket in cinemas as the television coverage was so intermittent. Cinema screenings were limited in the time they could afford live broadcasts and, unlike boxing or football, cricket would not be shown in its entirety. The immediate post-war years saw record crowds for cricket (2,300,910 paid to watch first-class cricket in 1947)<sup>12</sup> and boom time in the cinema (1.6 billion admissions in 1946)<sup>13</sup>; the issue of the impact of broadcasting and rediffusion on attendances resurfaced with a vengeance as the desire for entertainment boomed in the austerity years.

Much of the pressure on the BBC came from the APCS. The MCC were one of 20 founding members of the Association. However, in contrast to the APCS ringleaders, Rait-Kerr was highly sceptical the sports industry could ever persuade Parliament there were underlying rights associated with the spectacle of spectator sports. He did not concur that the best way to force the arm of government to side with sport was to pursue an outright ban on television. In May 1949, during a private lunch with the BBC’s Controller of Television, Norman Collins, Rait-Kerr revealed he was the only member of the APCS who had voted to continue with television contracts in the absence of clarification on copyright and, if necessary, he would resign from the Association if the policy of an outright ban persisted.<sup>14</sup> For their part, the MCC urged the BBC to make clear the need for copyright in the television broadcast and to make an undertaking to prevent any unauthorised screening of their sports coverage by third parties. The message was conveyed to the Director-General and added to the Corporation’s quest for copyright legislation to be reformed in their favour.

Fears of rediffusion of live cricket did, however, agitate MCC members. Rait-Kerr caught wind of the public transmission of the televised

match between the MCC and South Africa in May 1951 at a ‘tele-cinema’ installed in the South Bank Exhibition in London as part of the Festival of Britain. Clips of cricket had been shown to illustrate the potential of ‘tele-cinema’ and the place of sport in the ‘British way of life’. Rait-Kerr wrote to de Lotbinière demanding an explanation with a threat to withdraw from television for the remainder of the season ‘unless we can receive a definite assurance that this will not recur’.<sup>15</sup> De Lotbinière admitted he had been approached by the Festival organiser J. P. Ralph but had referred them to the APCS to gain approval that, he had to concede, may have been ‘an error of judgement rather than a breach of faith’.<sup>16</sup> He had also written to the exhibitors to ask them to desist. The involvement of the APCS, and the lack of objection from its secretary Herbert Perkins, without sanction from the MCC annoyed Rait-Kerr. He was clearly perturbed and announced he was not tied to the opinions of the APCS and suggested the news the exhibition charged 2/6 (two shillings and sixpence) for entry represented ‘a very disturbing situation’.<sup>17</sup> The actions of the BBC, APCS and the Festival were viewed as being ‘entirely antagonistic to the clauses in our contract with the BBC’.<sup>18</sup> It subsequently transpired the Exhibition was exempt from the television license and the MCC conceded to short excerpts of ten minutes in any one day for exhibition purposes.

The various episodes involving the APCS—issues over the control of copyright, fears of rediffusion and piracy—brought to light the sensitivity of the MCC to the BBC’s desire to televise the sport and the confused malaise to the whole issue. Confiding his concerns about the APCS to Brian Castor Secretary of Surrey, Rait-Kerr wrote:

I find the attitude of the Association extremely hard to understand; on the one hand they are continuously talking about bans on home viewing while on the other they are presenting opportunities for commercial showing on a velvet cushion.<sup>19</sup>

Castor agreed that the APCS had an attitude that was ‘casual to the point of insolence’ and that ‘it almost makes one feel that cricket should leave the Association’. The depth of the MCC’s suspicion of the Association’s motives endured throughout the mid-1950s to the point where they undermined most of its actions to build solidarity around collective licensing, which never proved workable.

In spite of such fears and grumbings on rediffusion, cricket’s relationship with the BBC seemed to benefit the sport, certainly financially,

through the new exposure it received from television. The BBC had paid what it thought was a premium for Test cricket and had tried to help promote the game by covering county matches. But negotiations in 1952 brought to a head once more the prickly issue of just how much the sport was worth. With the onset of new transmitters across the country and the consequent rapid expansion of television licenses (1.5 million by the end of 1951), the MCC believed in an index-linked facility fee related to the number of viewers. In the first day's play from Lords in 1950, 450,000 viewers had watched England against the West Indies; 475,000 for the first day of the Oval Test.<sup>20</sup> The suggestion rankled with the BBC and in January 1952, de Lotbinière wrote:

From all that you say it really looks as though the Cricketing Authorities are not too anxious for broadcasting and still less for television, so that their chief concern is to get as much money out of the BBC as they can, i.e. In the words of the economist they want to 'charge all that the traffic will bear and rather more'.<sup>21</sup>

The BBC were happy to pay a fee of £50 per day for Test cricket, but any more would mean reduced coverage, as the cost of the BBC's total television output had risen to £2.5 million in 1951 and yet income earned from television licenses was only £750,000. Rait-Kerr and his ally Castor took great exception to the charge of greed and, contrary to the usual image of de Lotbinière as 'the politest man in the BBC', it was suggested his letter 'might be Gilbert Harding writing'<sup>22</sup>—considered by many 'the rudest man in Britain'. Other counties were consulted and while most concurred with the MCC's view, the secretary of Yorkshire, John Nash, felt 'it would not be in the best interests of cricket if any disagreement over the fees should lead to the non-televising of Test Matches'.<sup>23</sup> Rait-Kerr responded to de Lotbinière questioning why 'those organisations who have helped the BBC in the past should now be frozen under conditions which are constantly changing'.<sup>24</sup> The MCC ultimately settled for a facility fee of £50 per day but also introduced a new charge called a 'programme fee' of £15 for every hour of programming. Cordial relations ensued and the BBC appeared to be winning the battle in persuading the cricket authorities to help foster televised sport where other governing bodies still ran scared. Rait-Kerr stepped down as the secretary of the MCC later in 1952 and as his successor, Ronnie Aird, took control, another era of television lay on the horizon.

## ITV AND THE COMPETITION FOR TELEVISED RIGHTS TO CRICKET

The BBC's monopoly on television was broken by the Conservative government of the early-1950s. The Television Act (1954) established the first commercial television franchises in Britain. The arrival of commercial operators, to be heavily regulated by the newly formed Independent Television Authority (ITA), posed some serious but altogether different issues for both the BBC and governing bodies of sport. Flush from the success of televising the coronation in 1953—orchestrated by de Lotbinière and Dimmock—the BBC OB department were confident of their ability to maintain strong links with sport and determined to ensure they had access to the key sporting events. The OB department's proactive approach to the threat of ITV ran contrary to other parts of the BBC that were more complacent in attitude. Dimmock, in particular, was adamant the BBC should seek to extend their contracts with sport, where possible up to three years. For the MCC, the expected arrival of commercial television and a new competitor to the BBC delivered an incisive bargaining tool with which to negotiate higher fees. In 1954, county games had cost the BBC a facility fee of £20 per day with the additional programme fee of £15 per day. In 1955, with ITV on the horizon, the MCC advised counties to look towards an aggregate fee of £60 per day. More broadly, the MCC's thinking about the new television environment was upbeat. Prior to an executive committee meeting of the APCS on 7th February 1955, Aird prepared a statement on the MCC's policy on televised cricket, in which he expressed the view that the existing practice of restricting hours of coverage may not be the best way forward and relaxing this policy could 'pay dividends'. But the economic benefit was not the only consideration: there was also the realisation that 'the shop window advertisement and publicity do in fact bring in the customers'.<sup>25</sup> Aird now found himself in the thick of the new era of television. He had been invited by Lord Aberdare to join a new ITA Sports Advisory Committee to advise the new commercial franchises on sporting matters, as well as acting as the MCC's representative on the APCS. But his main concern remained the good of cricket:

While the more money we can get from the BBC for televising cricket the better, I have always maintained that money from the BBC is not the answer to our problem and that it is the spectators in the County Grounds that



we want and that is what is good for the game. I still hold this view and believe that this can only be obtained by publicity and the building up of personalities.<sup>26</sup>

The winds of commercialisation in cricket had taken a new turn in the post-war years with new agents like Bagenal Harvey negotiating endorsements for sports stars, such as Dennis Compton's association with Brylcreem. However, not all cricketers had the modern approach. On being invited to appear in an ITV programme on the history of Lords, the self-effacing former England batsman Jack Hobbs, then 73, declined, explaining 'I dread all the fuss etc. connected with a television broadcast.'<sup>27</sup>

In March 1955, Harvey, in partnership with the Hulton Press, had approached the MCC with a view to becoming the intermediary between the programme contractor (BBC or ITV) and the sports promoter. His new company, Hulton Visual Productions, was a visionary idea, possibly ahead of its time, and provoked a defensive response from the APCS, which wanted to establish its own company to negotiate with broadcasters. Aird was not impressed by either. The value of television revenue was becoming too great to relinquish any rewards to a third party. Nevertheless, in a letter to the Lancashire secretary, Geoffrey Howard, he revealed the personal stress and overpowering sense of responsibility imposed by television negotiations:

I spend a great deal of time and have sleepless nights over the problem of television and the entry of the ITA into the field will obviously complicate matters a good deal and the idea of a full cricket liaison officer would at any rate be welcomed by me.<sup>28</sup>

By the end of the century, commercial managers were commonplace in governing bodies of sport. Howard had suggested Aird consider employing a negotiator on a salary of £50 a year but in the mid-1950s, the MCC Committee were not convinced the role was necessary or appropriate.<sup>29</sup>

As early as autumn 1954, the MCC began to receive notifications of intent from the new ITV franchises. Philip Dorté, had left his job as a television manager with the BBC and now spearheaded contractual negotiations for the Associated Broadcasting Development Company that had been set up by the BBC's former Controller of Television, Norman Collins, and was chasing the ITA weekend franchise for the London area. Collins would ultimately join forces with impresario Lew Grade to form

the franchise Associated Television (ATV) but not all the new commercial companies could draw on such talented and experienced broadcasters. The weekday franchise was held by Associated Rediffusion (AR), formed by Associated Newspapers and the transport company British Electric Traction. AR soon clumsily handled their public relations with various governing bodies by announcing to the press they had secured coverage of certain sports, when in fact no contracts had been signed. Among the announcements for agreements to athletics and boxing, Ken Johnstone, their Head of Sports, also revealed extensive plans to cover the 1956 Ashes series in England. This was news to Aird, who told *The Observer* he had seen 'some AR people, but we haven't negotiated with them so far'.<sup>30</sup> The premature and over-eager pronouncements vindicated the view held by Aird that 'the majority of those acting for the new commercial companies are completely new to the job and are generally unaware of the situation so far as the television of cricket is concerned'.<sup>31</sup> ITV representatives had also begun to approach counties in the south east, the midlands and the north west. The MCC were happy to let counties negotiate individual deals but proffered advice on previous dealings with the BBC and suggested club chairmen come to an agreed policy on the way forward.

The MCC's initial dealings with ITV companies were anything but sanguine when compared to the BBC's key negotiators, de Lotbinière and Dimmock. In August 1955, Dimmock was confident enough to pronounce the BBC's 'cordial relations with sporting authorities are now beginning to appear as important factors in the battle for sports coverage'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed by 1956, it would be fair to suggest the MCC had nothing but disdain for the annoyance some ITV representatives had caused. Aird referred to them as 'these wretched people'.<sup>33</sup> The assessment may have been harsh and was more a reflection of the social and cultural divisions of the executives of the MCC with the brash, young producers of ITV. But it also reflected the genuinely confused state of ITV's approach to sport, where on occasion relatively vast sums of money had been promised, only to be changed or reneged the following week. On one occasion in 1956, Graydon of ATV offered £500 a day for coverage of the Australians in their warm-up matches against the counties only for the offer to collapse to £50 the day before settling on £80 per hour.<sup>34</sup> The franchise structure of ITV also confused matters and when the MCC looked at imposing a limit in the radius of transmissions in order to safeguard attendance at matches not covered by certain regions, it soon transpired some viewers were able to pick up signals outside their notional regional boundaries

(viewers in Bristol could watch programmes from the south east from the Croydon transmitter).<sup>35</sup>

### THE 1956 ASHES SERIES: ISSUES OF EXCLUSIVITY

Negotiations for county games were of minor consideration when compared to the broadcaster's desire to televise the Test matches. The negotiations for the 1956 Ashes series against the Australians would prove pivotal in the future shape of televised Test cricket, which, until the arrival of interest from satellite television in the 1990s, gave the BBC a near 40-year monopoly on the coverage of the game. Ironically, the BBC's dominance of televised cricket for the latter half of the twentieth century began with government intervention to prevent exclusive contracts for major sporting occasions. The 1954 Act had reserved the right of government to ensure non-exclusivity for national sporting events. But until negotiations for the 1956 Tests, began the ruling had not been tested and there was no clear and precise definition of what was considered a national event. In February 1955, Dimmock had written a personal letter to Aird while on holiday in Switzerland, suggesting the BBC were agreeable to a non-exclusive, three-year deal but would 'entertain the idea of a *very* much larger fee in return for no restrictions on the hours' of coverage.<sup>36</sup> The BBC had paid £1,000 per Test in 1953 and £2,000 per Test in 1954 and were prepared to go to £3,000 per Test in 1955. After the Test series with Pakistan in 1955, the option of a three-year deal with the BBC remained and Aird wrote to the PMG, Dr Charles Hill, in October 1955 seeking clarification on the question of 'national events'.<sup>37</sup> The MCC's fears were confirmed by the PMG that Test cricket would be considered a 'national event' and should be made available on a non-exclusive basis. The PMG had delayed his decision until after taking council from the APCS. Aird believed this would severely reduce the value of rights fees, a concern that prevailed for decades in cricket's hierarchy and ultimately led the England and Wales Cricket Board to successfully lobby for the removal of Test cricket from the 'listed events' under the 1996 Broadcasting Act. Aird summarised dealings with the PMG, the BBC and ITV to county secretaries in a memorandum later that month to suggest the MCC Committee agree to a three-year deal with the BBC. Castor of Surrey, who had hoped competition and the prospect of inflated hikes in the value of fees for Test matches were on the horizon, wrote exasperated at the news and, as he perceived it, the general lack of clarity in the matter.<sup>38</sup>

Shortly after the ruling, on 2nd November 1955, Sir William Becher of AR offered the MCC an unprecedented £1,500 per day for exclusive rights to all five England Tests against the Australians, a total of £37,500. The fee, unprecedented in any sport at the time, would have been incredibly tempting, not least because of rising salary and bonus demands from leading players like Jim Laker and Alec Bedser.<sup>39</sup> The offer was also higher than the combined gross gate receipts of all county clubs.<sup>40</sup> The balance of commercial power was changing. However, within days of receiving the offer from AR, Dimmock produced the BBC's offer of £30,000 per annum at £6,000 per test. The MCC Committee decided to enter into a three-year exclusive deal with the BBC with the proviso that there could be possible simultaneous transmissions with ITV, thereby conforming to Section 7 of the 1954 Act.<sup>41</sup> Aird wrote to Becher confirming the unfortunate news their bid had been rejected. Although the deal was considered exclusive, it did not preclude ITV gaining coverage outside the hours of BBC transmissions. The reason for the MCC's unusual decision to take the lower offer was twofold: (1) anxiety regarding the duplication of equipment; and (2) it was considered a 'duty to viewers to ensure that during the times when the television of a Test Match was taking place a nation-wide coverage would be effected'.<sup>42</sup> The federal structure had undermined ITV and the BBC's insistence on serving the nation had won out. Not bowed by the news, ITV's Robert Fraser questioned the MCC's exclusive contract, alluding to discussions in Parliament on the matter and gesturing complete surprise at the decision.<sup>43</sup> ITV moved on other fronts: Lord Aberdare of the ITA Sports Advisory Committee wrote to Aird expressing his sorrow at the 'lack of certainty' regarding 'national events'<sup>44</sup>, to which Aird responded:

I think what has arisen out of the negotiations for the televising of Test Matches will turn out to be a good thing because it has brought to a head something about which there seemed to be uncertainty, and although it is causing a certain amount of trouble for ourselves I feel it may be helpful to others in the end.<sup>45</sup>

In December 1955, the PMG confirmed his decision after further meetings with the APCS and consultation with the BBC and ITA. His conclusion on the Tests was that 'the public will expect them to be broadcast by both the BBC and ITA'.<sup>46</sup> Aird wrote back thanking the PMG for clarifying the matter but felt mystified that the restricted audience of the ITV

regions could be seen to be in the public interest. The BBC was ‘national’ but ITV, at this time, was not.<sup>47</sup> The upshot was the negation of the BBC contract and new suggestions as to how much both the BBC and ITV were prepared to pay. Aird had various meetings with Dimmock and ITV representatives early in 1956 before de Lotbinière, now Assistant Controller of Television Programming, complained the BBC could not pay £30,000 for a non-exclusive contract; neither would it entertain the idea of a joint fee with a commercial television company. His view remained the BBC had the public’s genuine concerns at heart and ITV were at fault for what had occurred. Aird met Lobby on 8th February 1956, and on the same day recommended to the Test Match Ground Secretaries they accept the BBC’s original offer as no resolution to the issue of sharing coverage, both in principal and logistically, seemed possible. On 14th February, Aird wrote to ITV with an ultimatum that informed of the MCC’s decision to go with the BBC but with a suggestion a joint fee of £40,000—to be haggled out by the BBC and ITV independently of the MCC—was a possibility.<sup>48</sup> ITV declined and effectively lost its first love match with sport on Valentine’s Day.

### THE CODES AND CONVENTIONS OF TELEVISED CRICKET

Because of the expansive nature of post-war coverage of cricket, at least in comparison to other sports, the BBC had time to evolve and develop concise techniques for televising the sport. As Jack Williams has pointed out, ‘televised cricket provided viewers with a better view of the action on the field than all but a tiny number of spectators present at a game could obtain’.<sup>49</sup> Achieving this view and the accepted conventions of how to televise cricket was primarily developed in the 1950s, but actually started from the initial opinion by producer Antony Craxton that cricket on television was ‘second best to being on the ground’.<sup>50</sup> In time, this view would change, but initially the main challenge for the producer of cricket was ‘transferring a game played on an area some 150 yards in diameter to a screen a few inches square’.<sup>51</sup> It was a familiar issue for sports coverage in general, but cricket had some specific dynamics that made making it intelligible to viewers harder than other sports. Principal among the issues was the view that television cameras could not capture all the action that took place on a cricket field at any one time. Solving this conundrum was the job of Craxton, who was the key individual behind the innovations and finessing of cricket coverage during the 1950s.

Craxton had joined the BBC in 1941 as a radio programme engineer before becoming an announcer on the Home and Overseas services. The son of an eminent pianist Harold Craxton, he was educated at the Royal Academy of Music and Gordonstoun in Elgin, where he developed a strong affinity with cricket, as well as his other passions for rugby, golf and classical music. He joined BBC television outside broadcasts in 1950 and, as well as producing sport, began to specialise in the coverage of royal events, including the first ever Queen's Christmas message in 1952.<sup>52</sup> Throughout the 1950s, Craxton continually put down on paper what he believed were the core principles and standards for televised coverage of cricket. In a five-page report on 'Cricket Production' written in 1952, he set out the mission for the BBC's coverage, which emphasised a requirement that any producer of televised cricket should be both knowledgeable and passionate about the sport. Covering cricket required a 'pliable plan' that captured the game 'faithfully' but accepted not all action could be covered. A producer who knew the game, and was a cricket enthusiast, could also anticipate the unfolding action and, through the selection of images, could guide the interpretation of events by the commentator. 'There is no doubt', he prophesied, 'that an enthusiastic producer can make a rather dull game into enthralling viewing by the clever use of his cameras—not only on the field of play.'<sup>53</sup>

Within this statement resides a series of professional ideologies of cricket broadcasting, many of which endured throughout the history of its televised coverage. First, not missing any action and being faithful to the game, and therefore its traditions and ethics, emphasised the requirement for realism. Second, the references to anticipation of play and guiding the thoughts of commentators placed an emphasis on the construction of a consistent and coherent narrative of play, which the viewer could follow. Thirdly, the acknowledgement that adding entertainment value could at the appropriate times save cricket coverage from its dull or slow moving moments, which could be enhanced by clever use of cameras and off-field activity, albeit tempered by a need to focus on the actual play.

Craxton also thought the main camera operator, situated directly in line with the two wickets 30 to 40 feet high, should be 'someone with a knowledge of the game', for they needed to anticipate where the ball might go. For most of the 1950s and 1960s, the BBC used three cameras to cover cricket. In addition to the main camera set in line with the wicket, the BBC used one camera set just off the centre, which followed the ball to show the fielders in action. A third camera was positioned at

extra cover, out on the boundary centred on the side of the wicket, and was used to provide close-ups of players, the crowd and the scoreboard. Large lenses were reserved for the main camera, which kept a tight view of the wicket, and the third camera, which provided close-ups. The second camera used a wide-angled lens to provide a broader image of the field of play. In the hands of a skilled director, who combined the correct balance of the specific and wider views, the three cameras could produce an effective representation of the action. Summarising his thoughts, Craxton concluded:

From the producer's point of view I think there are three golden rules. One, never relax your concentration for a moment; two, don't become 'button happy' just for the sake of something to do; and, three, never for one moment stop listening to your commentator. You can often follow his train of thought with suitable pictures and vice versa.<sup>54</sup>

With conservative use of cameras—slow, restful pans, limited switching of cameras and intermittent, sparse use of close-ups—the resultant coverage of cricket often seemed to resonate with the slowly unfolding nature of the game itself. Nick Hunter, who began producing cricket for the BBC in 1965, confirmed the constraints of what was possible with cameras:

The cameras were so cumbersome in those days there was not a lot you could do with them other than stick them up the scaffolding. They weighed half a tonne and we had a great thick piece of cable, which tied them up to the scanner. Handheld cameras, lightweight this and that, and cameras you could put on wheels and move around, weren't even a figment of our imaginations, really. They had swing lenses too. So you had four turrets, various different type lenses—wide angle, close up or whatever—and there was a very limited range. And they broke all the time of course. If you had four cameras that worked all day you were having an extremely good day. Because they tended to break, or things would go wrong all the time with them. But you were used to that somehow. You coped with it. By and large there are different rules as to what cameras do. Some cameras follow a ball, some cameras don't. Some cameras will follow a ball in wide angle, and others in tight. You have a sort of moving jigsaw that the producer-director's role is to put together. A knowledge of the game is absolutely essential.<sup>55</sup>

Hunter had experienced a rapid rise to the role of outside broadcast producer of cricket having joined BBC radio in 1962 working for Angus

McKay on *Sports Report*. Realising his chances of a career in radio sport were limited without any journalism training, Hunter moved in to television in 1963 working as a stage manager for senior outside broadcast producer Philip Lewis in the midland region in Birmingham. His television career really took off when he started working on cricket, as Hunter remembered:

Because, from the stage management side of things, nobody liked working on cricket, they thought it was a boring game. They didn't want to know about it. So to my astonishment and delight I got put on the cricket. And to their astonishment and delight, they actually had someone who actually liked working on the cricket. So I started stage managing the cricket.

By the time of the launch of BBC 2 in 1964, Craxton had begun to concentrate on producing music outside broadcasts, leaving the main producers of cricket in the regions. Ray Lakeland in the north and Philip Lewis in the midlands shared responsibility for producing cricket across the country. In 1965, both had booked leave at the same time, and Head of Sport Bryan Cowgill contacted Hunter and asked if he would be able to produce the coverage of England's Headingley Test against New Zealand. Hunter agreed, but it was a make-or-break moment in his career:

Typically, Bryan Cowgill said 'I'll give you a one-way ticket, and I'll let you know if you can come back.' So I went up and did the Test match, and it was alright. I got my phone call saying I could come back. Then there was a vacancy in the north of England for a broadcast producer, number two to Ray Lakeland. I put in for it because I'd been cut to pieces on other boards, and this producer board I thought the more experience I can have the better. And I got the bloody job! So I went from a radio studio manager to a television outside broadcast producer in the space of three years. I was absolutely astonished.<sup>56</sup>

Hunter recalled that he became a producer of cricket at a time when producers in the BBC were beginning to specialise. Where previously producers of outside broadcasts in the regions would have been expected to do everything, now they could employ specialists in sport, events, concerts, elections and so on. 'People began to realise that you couldn't be the jack of that many trades, you know, not really,' Hunter suggests. 'So people were beginning to specialise.' It was a form of coverage that would eventually be criticised for being stale and lacking dynamism, but in many



ways, the core images produced for televised cricket remain similar to those crafted by Craxton and his team in the 1950s.

Innovations and enhancements were introduced from an early stage. The introduction of zoom lenses in the early 1950s was a case in point. Initially in his report from 1952, Craxton was suspicious of the usefulness of the zoom lens, claiming it lacked the necessary range required to capture the players in close-up. The weight of the early zoom lens also made fast panning to follow the ball difficult with a resulting loss of focus and stable image. However, only a few years later by the mid-1950s Craxton was extolling the virtues of the zoom lens in his guide to viewers, describing it as ‘a remarkable invention’, which enabled the producer to ‘swoop in on the batsman as the bowler runs up to bowl and keep the picture in perfect focus all the time’.<sup>57</sup> It suggests the expertise of camera operators improved markedly over a short period as they assimilated the new technology into the coverage of cricket.

Craxton also reviewed arrangements for the coverage of cricket at various county grounds, with suggestions as to how camera positions and accommodation of commentators could be improved. In time, as negotiations for cricket evolved, cricket grounds would alter existing building works and develop new structures to accommodate television. Some counties were obviously more accommodating than others in this respect, and it was quite often the needs and traditions of club members that made life difficult for television producers. This was most evident at Lords, where MCC members held tradition more dear than most. During the formative period of televising from Lords, the main camera had been perched high up on the pavilion—‘too high’, claimed Craxton, producing a heady perspective on the play for the viewer. His preferred position, directly in line with the wicket, required taking up a balcony on the Pavilion. ‘I think this could be done,’ he wrote, ‘provided the MCC would co-operate rather more than they have done in the past.’<sup>58</sup> The issue of camera positions at Lords would continue for more than a decade, as Hunter confirmed:

The most difficult ground in the country was Lords. Because they put a lot of difficulties in the producers way. It seemed that they really didn’t want us there. If they could have washed their hands of us, cleared us out of the Grace Gates, I think some of them would have done. I make no bones about it. The authorities at Lords were a right royal pain in the arse sometimes.<sup>59</sup>

## CONCLUSION: THE RISE OF LIMITED-OVERS CRICKET

Cricket's early dalliance with television was uncertain and tentative, but relations were cordial and urbane. There were some key issues to be resolved as the courtship blossomed. As an emergent cultural form, it took time for television to formalise its grammar of the sport. Cricket was invariably live and unpredictable in terms of play and technology. Evidence from the MCC archives suggests the shared social and cultural background of the key protagonists (Old Etonians and Oxbridge-educated) enabled a relationship to blossom between the BBC OB Department and senior management of cricket. Although there were occasional differences of opinion, the BBC did much to foster these relationships.

The BBC's insistence on making fees correspond to the quality of the fixture awoke the MCC to the commercial value of cricket to television. This was a business opportunity that hitherto did not exist. Some of the advice the MCC received from the county Test grounds, especially Surrey's Brian Castor, who managed The Oval, pushed for a maximalist approach to valuing the facility and programme fees. This was a significant departure in attitude to the commercialisation of the sport. However, it would take expanded coverage, long-term exclusive contracts and competition from commercial television for the facility fee to rise to a significant commercial level.

By the 1960s, the lure of money from television would begin to change the nature of the game for good. The other significant transformation in the sport was the evolution of limited-overs cricket, which was ideally suited to television. Cricket journalist Denzil Batchelor was one of the more prominent critics of the structure of English cricket and its need to reform. Writing in May 1956 on the opening day of the County Championship, his article in *Picture Post* was accompanied by a large landscape image of empty stands at Lords: 'The cricket county championship as we know it today', he wrote, 'is a financial millstone round the neck of the greatest game in the world and a horrible handicap to our international sporting aspirations.'<sup>60</sup> His polemic emphasised the public's disinterest in the format, which created monotonous play, stultifying mediocrity and took up one third of the year's sporting calendar. Batchelor considered the options then in circulation to change the county game. Some, like Godfrey Evans, suggested county games were reduced from three- to two-day matches; others, like Trevor Bailey, were advocating Sunday cricket, hitherto taboo in professional cricket on religious grounds.

By 1962, the distinction between amateur and professional players had gone, and the sport became professional in outlook and approach. Following some brief experiments in one-day cricket in the midlands, in 1963 the MCC introduced the Gillette Cup, a 50-over, knockout competition sponsored by the American razor company. The BBC covered the competition and in 1965 its cameras were there to cover Geoffrey Boycott's match winning innings of 146 runs to defeat Surrey. The short-format game gained success and drew a new following to cricket. The faster-paced game, with constant action, brought outside interest from sport agent Bagenal Harvey, who fashioned a bespoke team of leading international players called the Rothman Cavaliers. The tobacco sponsorship was significant given the introduction of a ban on cigarette advertising by the British Government in 1965, and Harvey's existing links with players such as Ted Dexter, Denis Compton and Jim Laker ensured access to other stars of the game who came to play, including Gary Sobers and Graeme Pollock.<sup>61</sup> In May 1965, the International Cavaliers XI played a Worcestershire XI in front of BBC 2's cameras, with commentary from Brian Moore. Crucial to the success of the Cavaliers project, which lasted until 1969, was the decision to allow live cricket on Sunday afternoons. The BBC had a commitment to broadcast one hour of religious programming and Cowgill managed to persuade the BBC's Religious Advisory Council to push back the timing of the slot to enable four and half hours of cricket to be scheduled on a Sunday afternoon.<sup>62</sup> This allowed a 40-over game to be played in full and the new television sport tradition of limited-overs Sunday cricket was born. In 1969, the MCC introduced their own 40-over competition for the counties, again sponsored by a tobacco company, John Players. The competition frequently produced thrilling climaxes in the final overs of a match, and it gave a new invigoration to the sport which was financially on its knees. The first limited-overs international was in Melbourne, Australia in 1971 and in combination with television and sponsors, the one-day game became ever more successful and popular with audiences. Cricket's dependency on television income and exposure has ultimately transformed the sport: its format, the equipment and the stadia, which are now fixed with floodlighting and large media centres to accommodate the world's media.

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## Paul Fox and *Sportsview*: Television's Sports Page

### THE PROSPECT OF COMPETITION FOR SPORT ON TV

In 1953, a publication called *Dear Viewer...* by MP Christopher Mayhew made a case against commercial television on behalf of the Fabian Society. His case echoed the view of the Labour Party and the critique was aimed at the 'motive which underlies it'. Mayhew's summary of the matter was: 'The apparent aim is to give pleasure, the real aim is to sell toothpaste.'<sup>1</sup> This was a common criticism of what commercial television might bring to the British culture of broadcasting, and Mayhew's fears stemmed from experiences and observations people had made of television in America. Gravitating towards the American commodification of television and its programming seemed inevitable, but the main problem, he suggested, was that 'American TV is horrible not because it is run by Americans but because it is dominated by commercial interests.'<sup>2</sup> As television entered the middle of the decade, the prospect of 'sponsored television', funded through advertising and based on regional franchises, was secured by the Conservative government, who saw a need to break the monopoly of the BBC in order to broaden the consumer boom for television sets and other consumer goods more generally. The end of rationing, increasing wages, increased car ownership and mobility, and the dream of modernity at events such as the Ideal Home Exhibition were the signs of affluence that led Harold Macmillan to claim Britons 'had never had it so good' in 1957. The development of ITV in 1954 was a considerable threat to the BBC,

and although many in the Corporation knew competition was coming, they did little to prepare for it. One area where the BBC did not rest on its laurels, however, was in the coverage of sport. In his review of the BBC's response to commercial television in the 1950s, broadcast historian Asa Briggs remarked that sport became one of the BBC's principal weapons against competition from ITV, with Peter Dimmock and editor Paul Fox singled out for being 'exceptionally vigilant and enterprising'.<sup>3</sup>

BBC staff, including producers, editors, cameramen, engineers and presenters, had their heads turned by higher salaries at the new rival. ITV needed experienced personnel to help develop its service, and this applied to outside broadcasting as much as any other form of programming. Norman Collins, who was central to the BBC's televising of the 1948 Olympic Games, was founder of one of the major ITV licenses, Associated Television (ATV), and had recruited others such as Philip Dorté, formerly of the radio outside broadcast team and Head of the BBC Television Films Department, and someone who had accompanied de Lotbinière during many of the BBC's negotiations with sport. Engineers were suddenly leaving and taking their expertise with them. Dimmock, also a target for ITV, worked hard to ensure OB staff were valued and supported.

The BBC needed to innovate new, more populist forms of programming to compete with ITV, and the magazine programme *Sportsview* was the BBC's first attempt at doing so. In what way did *Sportsview* accomplish this feat, and why was the innovator and editor of the programme, Paul Fox, so crucial to its success?

### PAUL FOX'S IDEA

Paul Fox was a talented young Editorial Assistant and scriptwriter for BBC Television Newsreel when he approached Peter Dimmock with his idea for a regular sports magazine programme that brought filmed outside broadcasts of sport to the studio. The television magazine format had been made popular by pre-war programmes like the 'topical' *Picture Page* edited by Cecil Madden, and in the immediate post-war period by the culturally more eclectic *Kaleidoscope* produced at Alexandra Palace from 1946. *Kaleidoscope* used a range of themed features to attract as wide an audience as possible, including a sports quiz introduced by Leslie Welch, Britain's sporting 'Memory Man'. There had been several previous incarnations of programmes that brought together a number of live sporting events under one umbrella, including the short-lived *Television*

*Sports Magazine* (1950–51). Produced by Dimmock, the format suffered from the need to coordinate live transmissions through a linkman, Max Robertson, who was located at the outside broadcast itself. The on-the-spot approach was open to a number of potential pitfalls, including technical and communication failures, the timing of events to coincide with the allocated schedule published in the *Radio Times*, availability of OB units, and the vagaries of the weather. As well as live sport, the programme tried to incorporate more entertainment-focused features, including a sports quiz compered by Raymond Glendenning. However, the format failed to persuade BBC management it was an enterprise worth pursuing and was soon dropped.

*Sportsview* was a different proposition. ‘It came about’, says Dimmock, ‘because we did a fortnightly programme called *Television Sports Magazine*, where we’d go to places like Richmond ice rink and do a bit of ice skating and various different items. Then Paul said to me—because he’d been on Television Newsreel—“Peter, why don’t we do a magazine programme linked from the studio?”’<sup>4</sup> Fox himself, recalls the relative ease with which things developed and how he ended up managing his new boss:

It was that much easier in those days to get a programme on the air... It was my proposal to Dimmock that we should have this weekly sports magazine and that Peter should introduce it. So I became part of his Department. He was my boss, but once a week I was his boss. I was the editor of the programme and had to deal with Peter in that way as the performer.<sup>5</sup>

Fox’s original idea for *Sportsview* was circulated on a single page of typed A4 early in 1953, with the sub-heading ‘A suggestion for a new sports programme’.<sup>6</sup> The idea was simple but with a clear purpose: ‘a 30 minute programme looking forward and back over the week in sport’. With a strong editorial underpinning in sports journalism, the programme would be ‘Television’s sportspage—a review and a preview of everything in sport.’<sup>7</sup> Fox felt the BBC’s television sports coverage missed a great deal of action across the country. Firstly, it was committed to live outside broadcasts, which were logistically complex, heavily restricted by resources and time consuming to set up. Secondly, sport was inadequately handled in Television Newsreel, where it was almost an afterthought. The idea of combining part studio and part film enabled a more flexible and coherent approach to the week’s sport. It allowed the audience to catch up with the latest action, news and views, thereby ensuring topicality. It would



also enable the OB department to trail and promote its live coverage of sport in the week ahead. The formula for studio-based sports programmes is now standardised and ubiquitous, but in 1953, when Fox's idea was first muted, the suggestion of moving to a studio was revelatory, mainly because OBs were focused on taking the cameras out-and-about. As Dimmock admits:

It was entirely his idea. I was very surprised the studio people did not object to us going in to the studio, because we were really outside broadcasts. But we got away with it, and it worked quite well.<sup>8</sup>

Fox suggested the programme format should have four principal ingredients: 'Weekend Sports Parade', a review of the weekend's top sports event; 'Personal Opinion', to present a sporting personality in the studio, interspersed with film; 'Background to Sport', a behind-the-scenes look at sport that probes the 'how, where, why and when parts of the game'; and 'Sporting Chance', a look ahead to the following week's major sporting events.<sup>9</sup> The 30-minute format meant these elements had to be focused, sharply edited and efficiently delivered. Fox summarised the philosophy of the programme as a 'snappy, newsy, up-to-the-minute look-round the sports that appeal to millions.'<sup>10</sup> In many ways, its focus on topicality, interviews and discussion mirrored much of what producer Angus Mackay had achieved in BBC radio with *Sports Report*.<sup>11</sup> However, the edited film summary of the previous week's events made sporting heroes more immediate and visually memorable. In time, *Sportsview* augured a form of television that became commonplace, but in the mid-1950s was a singularly rare and genuinely innovative piece of British television.

It was perhaps this novelty that led to some confusion as to where the programme should reside in the bureaucratic structure of BBC Television. Its hybrid nature, elements of outside broadcasts with studio talks and news, had the potential to cut across various BBC Departments, which historically had been difficult to mobilise together. Fox came from Television Newsreel, and his proposal was initially discussed in that Department, who thought it was their territory and outwith the remit of outside broadcasts. De Lotbinière, then Head of Outside Broadcasts (Television), thought OB should have oversight on sports-related productions, but agreed that *Sportsview*'s focus on sports news was operationally outwith its remit and beyond OB's 'manpower'.<sup>12</sup> In the end, Cecil Madden, Assistant Controller of Programmes (Television), persuaded the BBC's Programme

Board, which he chaired, to run with the idea, and de Lotbinière, and in turn Dimmock, were given the task of making it happen as soon as possible.

The urgency to develop the programme came from the imminent launch of commercial television, and a desire to stave off any challenge to the BBC's coverage of sport. In its populist style, *Sportsview* was, in the words of Madden, a programme 'the commercials would do.'<sup>13</sup> For the BBC, so complacent as a broadcast monopoly, this desire to innovate and produce popular television reflected the drive among newer, younger personnel, more eager to push the boundaries of television programming than the BBC's 'old guard' of pre-war broadcasting.

### PLANNING THE *SPORTSVIEW* 'BRAND'

Fox's idea for *Sportsview*, and the legacy it gave to British television, has rather unfortunately been understated in most histories of the Corporation. But it can be argued that his intervention as Editor of *Sportsview* transformed the nature of sports presentation on British television and opened the way for a more professionalised and specialist group of producers, editors, cameramen, engineers and presenters, who became synonymous with sports coverage through what could be described as the '*Sportsview* brand'. At first, the programme was produced by what Dimmock called 'a small but enthusiastic directorial unit'.<sup>14</sup> Fox had estimated that the weekly programme would require one camera unit, a film editor, an arranger-writer and a producer, all working full time on the programme. The resource, it was claimed, was kept slim as a deliberate ploy to wait and see whether or not the programme would succeed, thereby avoiding unnecessary redundancy and reorganisation. However, the scale of the operation was as likely to have been dictated by available resources within the OB Department as anything else. Indeed, much of the early years of *Sportsview* would be dogged by battles over financial and resource constraints, or as more often the case, by massive overspending and flagrant abuse of budgets as Fox and the *Sportsview* Unit strove to get the best possible results. On the plus side, *Sportsview* used the versatility of Fox as editor and scriptwriter, the canny resourcefulness of film editor Ronnie Noble and Dimmock himself as presenter (SNF: Staff No Fee) to keep down costs. On the debit side, the programme famously used a helicopter, with 'Sportsview' emblazoned across its side, to bring film from sporting events far and wide, and also used up a considerable proportion of the BBC's 16-mm film stock.

Before the end of 1953, it had been decided to second Fox from Film to the OB Department for a trial period. At first sight, it seemed a natural move for both departments. Fox was described by J. H. Mewett, the BBC's Television Film Organiser, as a 'student of sport' with a broad range of sporting contacts and de Lotbinière recognised him as 'a most valuable asset'.<sup>15</sup> However, as plans developed in early 1954, there was some resistance to Fox's move from Philip Dorté, previously an OB manager himself. His main concern was the decision to launch the programme as a fortnightly series, which had been forced on the project largely due to a lack of available studio space. Dorté had been advised by his Television Newsreel Manager, Henry Cox, another former OB employee, that Fox was needed to assist the move to six weekly editions of *Newsreel* and he should only be released on a screentime-ratio basis of 5:1, basically less than one day per week to work on *Sportsview*.<sup>16</sup> A fortnightly billing ran contrary to Fox's idea of 'topicality' and Dimmock stressed the injustice of removing Fox from a programme he had created.<sup>17</sup> It was a battle for a talented resource, and one Dimmock was determined to win. Several months into the first series of programmes, as a means to justify Fox's move to the OB Department, Dimmock wrote a long memo to Cecil Madden, which confirmed Fox as a young editor with the capacity to change the direction of BBC Sport presentation forever. 'Paul Fox', Dimmock remarked, 'has undoubtedly found his niche with this programme. He possesses a racy but factual style which suits admirably the tempo of *Sportsview*.'<sup>18</sup>

Each programme was scripted by Fox, whose experience as a news journalist gave him the ability to write clean and concise copy, with snappy headlines to accompany a lead in to topical items on the week's sport. As part of his pitch to Madden and Dimmock, Fox had written a dummy script, which was meticulously written to illustrate how filmed sequences could be introduced and linked back to a live interview in the studio. Fox made up imaginary interviews featuring leading stars of the day, such as footballer Tommy Lawton, golfer Henry Cotton and boxer Randolph Turpin. Premised on his own observations of similar programmes in America, Dimmock argued the programme required 'zip' and diversity, as well as 'animated captions' of breaking news to enhance the sense of topicality.<sup>19</sup>

A preliminary breakdown of the cost of the programme, based on a 30-minute episode in a studio with filmed sequences, totalled £250.<sup>20</sup> This included replacement costs for Fox, transferred from OBs to Film, a full-time film editor, replacement costs for an OB producer (it was originally

envisaged Dennis Monger, a former bomber pilot, would take this role), camera crew, film stock, processing and cutting room, animation, transport and duty for the crew, fees for guests and hospitality. However, before the programme could be launched, one of the most pressing issues was the appropriate booking of studio space. From 1950, the BBC had begun to use the former Gaumont Film Studios at Lime Grove as the main studios for television. A major constraint was scheduling the use of studios to accommodate the programme, and it soon became clear that the idea of transmitting the programme on a Monday evening was unworkable. Fridays were considered as the best day to conveniently trail the weekends sporting events, but it soon became clear that an early evening slot on Thursdays was the only workable solution for programme planners and work began building a set for Studio G at Lime Grove for a 'dry run' of the programme on 18th March 1954.

The dry run included a live interview with boxer Gordon Hazell from the BBC studios in Bristol. From the outset, as a means of saving money and to engage as wide an audience as possible from across the UK, Dimmock was keen to utilise filmed and occasional live interviews from the BBC's regional centres. In January 1954, regional OB organisers were primed to think about possible contributions to programmes being planned for the spring. Dimmock's idea was to include a live link to a regional studio or in some cases a regional opt-out. Replies came thick and fast from all parts of the BBC regional network, but with the exception of George Runcie in Glasgow, who offered up racing from the Scottish Grand National at Bogside, a preview of the Scottish Cup Final and interviews from the bicentenary celebrations from St Andrews, most of the responses were pretty negative. The main issue was impoverished resources at regional studios and uncertainties regarding lines and microwave links back to London. Philip Robinson from the North Region in Manchester thought the idea of a sports magazine excellent, but argued the provision of a 'lash up' studio and static camera from each regional centre was rather fanciful and 'by no means an accomplished fact.'<sup>21</sup> The Thursday slot also made contributions from OB locations extremely unlikely, given most sports broadcasts fell on a Saturday. Similar thoughts came in from other regions: Patrick Beech from the West Region had 'little enthusiasm for Thursdays', especially if *Sportsview* was to be 'newsy';<sup>22</sup> Peter Cairns in the Midland Region could only see the opportunity for one Thursday contribution in May from the Test Match at Trent Bridge and Hywel Davies in Wales could not promise anything until their plans for the third quarter of the

year were firmer.<sup>23</sup> The responses were disappointing, if understandable given resource and logistical constraints faced by most regional outposts of the Corporation.

### EARLY PROGRAMMES AND THE COUP OF BANNISTER'S FOUR-MINUTE MILE

The first programme of *Sportsview* was transmitted on Thursday 8th April 1954 at 7.50 p.m. The opening titles showed a rush back title sequence, fading in with 'Sportsview, News and Views from the World of Sport, Introduced by Peter Dimmock', and was accompanied by the theme tune 'Saturday Sport', a jaunty brass horn arrangement written by Wilfred Burns, famous for writing 'Fools Rush In'. The programme began with mocked-up newspapers with the latest sports headlines written by a caption artists on the day of transmission. A filmed soccer preview followed and included interviews with Scotland captain George Young, middle-distance runner Jim Peters, boxer Randolph Turpin and an interview with an ice hockey player from Harringay. The programme was edited by Fox and directed by producer Dennis Monger. Monger was an experienced OB producer, having joined the BBC in 1935 and moved into television in 1948. He was also an amateur magician and member of the Magic Circle, later producing magic shows as well as outside broadcasts.<sup>24</sup> Dimmock's assessment of the first programme was positive but guarded, and reflected a sense that there was room for improvement. While the producer from Scotland had 'stuck rigidly to his brief', the converse had happened during the interview with Peters, where the interview took place indoors and the script stipulated the camera should be on the pavement in Portland Place. 'The one impression that we really wanted in this interview', commented Dimmock, 'was that we were amongst the crowds and that Jim Peters was doing his road work.'<sup>25</sup> Timing in both the Peters and ice hockey interviews was awry and led Dimmock to reiterate a technical point of principle based on his experience of American television 'that wherever possible the interviewer should only be established and thereafter it should be a head and shoulders shot of the interviewee only'. The technique enabled the interviewer to script his questions in order to deliver a timely and concise interview.<sup>26</sup>

With timing paramount to the 30-minute running time, Dimmock introduced a new innovation to studio presentation also inspired by American

television—the teleprompter. The teleprompter was a mechanism to allow the presenter to maintain his or her focus on camera while still being able to read their script, which an operator scrolled automatically as each sentence was read. Dimmock had seen the innovation of the Autocue teleprompter system in the United States, but the American manufacturer was not ready to license its use in Europe. Dimmock asked BBC engineers to design a similar device:

Parrot said, 'Don't worry about that, get two sheets of glass and we can do it.' So we got a mangle and two sheets of glass, we wrote the script on a piece of white paper on the mangle and then turned the handle. For the first few *Sportviews* I did the links that way. Because it was just a piece of glass and we got the Autocue that way. I think they might have been able to sue us for infringement of copyright—I don't think so though, nobody ever raised that.<sup>27</sup>

The device soon became the envy of other studio productions, especially producers in the BBC's Talks Department. It was also personally vital for Dimmock who, as Assistant Head of OBs, was juggling the pressures of managing the OB department and negotiating with sports authorities, and therefore with very limited time to run through scripts.

The programme proceeded on a fortnightly basis, although an additional programme dedicated to previewing the FA Cup Final between Preston North End and West Bromwich Albion was squeezed into the schedule at the last minute, with analysis and interviews by Kenneth Wolstenholme. The fourth scheduled outing for *Sportview* on 6th May 1958 gave the series its first major scoop as a topical sports news programme: the news that Roger Bannister had broken the four-minute mile. The event itself was a low-key affair at Iffley Road athletics stadium in Oxford, where Bannister was representing the AAAs in their annual athletics match with Oxford University. But the presence of a *Sportview* film camera and the constant replaying of the closing moments of the race have, as Alan Tomlinson persuasively argues: 'acquired the potency of myth, in the classical sense of supernatural tales that reinforce a culture and its values.'<sup>28</sup> It has also, as Garry Whannel notes, 'become one of the signifiers of Britain in the 1950s', as well as being 'bound up with the birth of televised sport.'<sup>29</sup> The British press coverage of the time, in particular, drew on tropes of national pride, amateurism and English determination, all so emblematic of Britain's post-war reconstruction, that endure to this

day. ‘Roger Bannister will be known, for the rest of his days, as “the man who broke the four-minute-mile”’ proclaimed *Picture Post* in May 1954, and continued, ‘In many ways, it would be hard to find a more English-looking young man’ with a hairstyle that gave an ‘unmistakable mark of the English public schoolboy.’<sup>30</sup> A particular class-bound discourse of masculinity in sport is drawn from here, and the contemporary resonance of such language makes it is easy to understand why Bannister’s run carried such kudos at the time. But why did the BBC send a camera in the first place and what did this do for the BBC’s new sports programme?

As is now well documented from biographical and academic analysis of the run, the race was anything but a race in the standard sense. It had been prearranged that Bannister would attempt to break the four-minute time, itself an artificial barrier that had gained significance as a number of middle-distance runners, including Bannister’s main international rival, the Australian John Landy, came closer and closer to the breaking it. Bannister used two other Oxford graduates, Chris Brasher and Chris Chataway as pacemakers, and it was inside knowledge of this, by another former Oxford student turned sports journalist, Norris McWhirter, that ensured BBC film cameraman Alan Prentice was there for *Sportsvision* to capture what turned out to be an exclusive. As Paul Fox remembers:

It was such a coup. We were tipped off by Norris McWhirter that Bannister would run the four minute mile, and we managed to get Roger back in to the studio that evening to talk about it. It was such a coup. We didn’t have the film of the four-minute-mile—that went out the following day. But we were the only people who had filmed it.<sup>31</sup>

Fox and producer Dennis Monger had made their plans several days before, calling Bannister several times, who in turn promised to help the BBC as best he could, but could not guarantee a record time because, he said, ‘the weather is against it’.<sup>32</sup> With the exception of a short sequence at the start line and the image of Bannister propped up in exhaustion by his trainer immediately after he crossed the line, the entire race was captured with a single camera. Positioned at the centre of the infield, Prentice used a relatively low angle panning shot in combination with a zoom lens to close in and pull away from the athletes as they circled the track. The bespoke approach, clearly lashed up at the last minute, seems estranged from the formalised, visual language of televised sport that was emerging through this period. McWhirter’s tip off to Fox had been so late in the day

that the BBC were unable to get live OB cameras on site in time. Again as Fox recalls: 'That needed a fortnight's notice.'<sup>33</sup>

On the day, there was not enough time to process and dub the film for that evening's programme at 8.20 p.m., less than a couple of hours after the race. Instead, Fox persuaded Bannister to travel from Oxford to Lime Grove to be interviewed by Dimmock live in the BBC studio. Ever the gentleman, Bannister insisted on changing his suit to face the television cameras, but when he arrived at his home, he was locked out without a key. With press photographers surrounding the house, BBC OB manager Bill Stephenson persuaded Bannister not to break in to his own house and drove Bannister from Oxford to London flat out in 55 minutes.<sup>34</sup>

Fox suggests, the interview transformed the standing of the programme both internally across the BBC, and with the television audience more broadly:

The Bannister mile made the programme, and from that point on we were on every front page. It was the only interview Roger had given, and there he was. The great story was that we had a driver bring him back from Oxford and he was still in his tracksuit. He said, 'I can't appear on television in this', and the driver said 'you're perfectly OK'. But no, Roger insisted on going to his home in Harrow where he lived with his parents to put on a suit and tie so he could go on television. And from that point on, instead of being a fortnightly programme we became a weekly programme.<sup>35</sup>

The race was screened the following day, 7th May, as a special Television Newsreel presented by Max Robertson and titled 'Bannister Breaks the Four Minute Mile'. Robertson had dubbed a very minimalist commentary on to the film that morning, and began by saying: 'The most sought after title in athletics, the four-minute-mile, was achieved yesterday evening at the Oxford University track at Iffley Road.' Robertson continues somewhat facetiously, 'This is the story of the race in one continuous filmed sequence. A sequence that runs just under four minutes.'<sup>36</sup> This version of the film recording was sold to the major newsreel companies. The Robertson version has rarely been used in subsequent screenings by the BBC, instead a more excitable commentary by McWhirter has been added and it is unknown when this version of the film was dubbed by the BBC. On the day, McWhirter was the timekeeper, and announced the new record to the small crowd of spectators. At the end of the film, now recovered from his exertion, Bannister is seen thanking the groundsman



before giving a direct address to the Television Newsreel camera where he understatedly thanks his luck, the weather and his two friends Brasher and Chataway.

Although the studio interview and subsequent screening of the film gave spectacular advertising for *Sportsview*, close scrutiny of the transmission by Dimmock led him to conclude that lapses in his own interview and the general production of the programme were ‘untidy’. The *Sportsview* team were meticulous in their scrutiny of programmes, a trait inherited from de Lotbinière and other BBC stalwarts. Dimmock’s attention to detail also revealed his personal conviction that the new sports vehicle was something special, and connected with the television audience in new and innovative ways. The coup of getting Bannister into the studio also confirmed Fox’s notion that television could scoop stories before the sporting press. As Peter Dimmock later observed:

Paul, being a journalist at heart, knew what we could do on a Wednesday night that would be ahead of the newspapers, because we went on about eight-thirty, nine o’clock, and most papers had gone to bed with their sports pages in those days. So he always had an eye for ‘how can we beat the newspapers?’<sup>37</sup>

### EXPANDING THE *SPORTSVIEW* BRAND

From the mid-1950s through to the early-1960s, *Sportsview* had a strong editorial drive that effectively operated as a brand synonymous with BBC sports coverage. Fox helped spread the brand through editing *Sportsview* annuals aimed at a broad popular audience. The programme’s format became influential in other areas of programming, including children’s television, the Saturday evening sports highlights programme *Sports Special* introduced in September 1955 and programmes beyond sport like *Panorama*, of which Fox eventually became editor. In January 1956, *Junior Sportsview* was piloted as part of the BBC’s children’s television, and from July in the same year, it ran as a fortnightly programme introduced by Cliff Michelmoré, who introduced star names of British sport such as Stanley Matthews, Denis Compton and Godfrey Evans to young viewers.<sup>38</sup>

*Sportsview* explored as many ways as possible to strengthen the BBC’s association with sport. As a news-driven programme, remaining topical, getting a scoop or even making sports news itself was all part of *Sportsview*’s

remit to compete with ITV. Dimmock developed links with a range of sources of sports news, including British Overseas Airways Corporation, whose chief press and information officer, Freddie Allcott, instructed 'scouts' to 'keep a watch for likely, interesting departures from London Airport which might coincide with the programme'.<sup>39</sup>

Some of the ideas introduced into the programme were designed to provide set patterns of content. Many of these themed inserts into the programme lasted between four and eight weeks, and Fox and Noble were constantly coming up with new ideas. Most of them were more novelty items than hard sports news, drawing on personalities and inventive ways of using the studio. For example, Ronnie Noble came up with an idea to have a miniature golf competition on a course built in the studio; sports literature was reviewed in 'Sports Book Corner'; 'On the Spot' invited a sports personality into the studio to answer questions sent in by viewers; table tennis star Victor Barna would challenge the country's top amateur players to beat him with a ten-point start; a 'Ten Years Ago' series reflected on sporting news from the previous decade; a celebrity-led series of golf clinics with Dai Rees called 'They also play golf...', a forerunner of pro-celebrity golf programmes later introduced in the 1970s; and topical debates, such as the then controversial issue of 'Sunday sport' with sporting clergy in the hot seat.<sup>40</sup> The importance of these weekly features was the way in which they embedded into the rhythms and routines of *Sportsview* as a weekly programme, which in turn slotted into the 'rhythms of reception' experienced by the viewers.<sup>41</sup>

In 1955, the programme managed to organise the first football contract signed on television, as Billy Dare joined West Ham United for £5,000. On another occasion, *Sportsview* organised a live link-up to interview jockey Gordon Richards from his hospital bed. All these ideas and more were devised to engage viewers in novel and interesting ways. *Sportsview* as the BBC's flagship sports programme, therefore, had to negotiate the balance between news topicality that would meet the demands of the sports fan and features to entertain a peak-time audience.

Competition with ITV motivated the need to develop *Sportsview*'s popularity. Changes were introduced to boost the resources available to the programme, and the day and time of transmission were changed to fit more closely with the needs of the audience. For instance, moving transmission from Thursday to Wednesday fitted better with the midweek football schedule, and a later broadcast between 8.00 p.m. or 8.30 p.m. enabled film shot on the day to be rushed to Lime Grove for editing and

dubbing in time for the evening. Nearly half a century later, Paul Fox summarised the impact the programme had on the BBC's approach to sport:

ITV wanted to do a sports programme as well, which indeed they did, and then suddenly resources were available. Peter was very good with that, he managed to push it. I mean we had access to live and film cameras really as we wanted. The budget was elastic, so long as you were reasonable about it. The staff was small. We had our own people and we could get on with it. But essentially it was a live programme. [ ] The only thing that was really banned for us was live football. Live football, we had the Cup Final and that was it and all the rest of it had to be on film. But once we got it on film, the League Championship as it was then, it was available to be shown on the same night, and on the Saturday night in a programme called *Sports Special*. So the empire grew, and it became an empire.<sup>42</sup>

The inclusion of live outside broadcast coverage into *Sportsvieiw* initially raised concerns. Although the BBC had a desire to cover more live sport, *Sportsvieiw*'s aim as a topical magazine programme was to broaden the audience beyond the niche of sports fan. As the *Sportsvieiw* brand grew, Dimmock recognised 'there is a very real danger of our losing the family audience that we have tried to build up since *Sportsvieiw* began'. The programme was to be 'a self-contained thirty minutes.'<sup>43</sup> However, isolating *Sportsvieiw* from live sporting events on Wednesday evenings was problematic for television scheduling, and it was recognised that live sporting OBs drove up the programmes ratings.<sup>44</sup> A further problem with excluding OB feeds was the reliance on filmed material, which needed to be rapidly transported, edited and dubbed often at breakneck speeds. Furthermore, in the mid-1950s, the OB department only had one sound camera, so more often than not there was a need to use dubbed sound effects from library recordings of football crowds or motor sport engines. McGivern was concerned dubbed atmospheric sounds may lack authenticity, but Dimmock, informed by Fox, smartly rebuffed the argument to suggest 'a silent soccer match' would 'look farcical on screen'.<sup>45</sup> Fox even pointed out that *Television Newsreel* used 'faked' sound effects for sports bulletins which audiences would easily recognised as 'dubbed'.<sup>46</sup> Throughout the late-1950s and into the 1960s, the *Sportsvieiw* Unit maintained a tight identity with the BBC's coverage of sport—often complaining how *Television Newsreel* went about their business of covering sport. But its pre-eminence as the flagship programme also created an internal tension

in the OB department, which covered a broader range of programming, not just sport, and during the 1950s had no recognised 'Head of Sport'. The planning of sports-related programmes therefore tended to fall to Paul Fox as *Sportsview* Editor, who by default also dictated broader policy on televised sports coverage.

The BBC written archives provide plenty of evidence of *Sportsview*'s demands for resources, and access to both film cameras and outside broadcast units were not as straightforward as Fox recalled above. Requests for a full-time *Sportsview* film editor and an increase in film ration from 600 to 1,000 feet per week were initially rebuffed. Scheduling of *Sportsview* was as much about what preceded and followed the programme as any concern about extending the period available to edit the day's sport. Long trails of correspondence exist in the written archives discussing the appropriate day and time slot for the programme, and how long producers and editors required to firm up the running order, write scripts and edit film in time for the first rehearsal. Rehearsals for the programme were scheduled incredibly tightly, and were largely dictated by the availability of engineers and the meal breaks of union-controlled production staff as much as anything else.

The issue of diversifying interest was a consistent issue, but not always dealt with sympathetically. Diversifying the variety of sports covered, ensuring the programme included regional input or targeting female viewers through showcasing female sports and stars were key areas of debate and the focus of criticism. In June 1955, Dimmock admitted that an experiment to include an item with a 'women's angle' had not been properly considered and broke with the 'accepted formula'.<sup>47</sup> Women's sport, primarily tennis, table tennis, athletics and swimming, received attention on *Sportsview*, but too often the time afforded such sports was minimal in a tightly controlled schedule. For example, in 1955, the World Women's Doubles Table Tennis champions, the twins Rosalind and Diane Rowe, appeared on a *Sportsview* challenge against another British pairing, with the whole event lasting a meagre two minutes.<sup>48</sup> Although the volume of women's sport may have suffered in comparison to the coverage of men's, there is evidence to suggest *Sportsview* took women's sport seriously, challenging the dominant views of the period. In a 1957 *Sportsview* annual feature 'Our Girls Do Wonders', Fox remarked:

Sport is now one part of our male-dominated world where women have equal rights. And it's taken long enough to bring that about. Even now

there are restrictions. While women have been admitted as competitors to the Olympic Games since 1908—when four British girls won medals—the Olympic bar is still up to such events as the 800 metres.<sup>49</sup>

Challenging ‘anti-feminists in sport’, the article hints at precedents of second-wave feminism in Britain, which had clearly begun to influence how some men perceived women in society, including women’s place in sport. However, much of the article was still locked in a gendered language of sport, where female athletes were described as ‘charming girls’ and ‘pretty bundles of energy’.<sup>50</sup>

### SPORTSVIEW AND INTERNATIONAL SPORT

*Sportsview* soon stretched its horizons beyond the British Isles to film overseas. International filming was a way of representing a British perspective on events and enabled the footage to be produced in the *Sportsview* way. Instead, under the stewardship of *Sportsview*’s editor, Ronnie Noble, the programme developed a team of film cameramen it could trust to deliver the kind of films Fox was striving to achieve. Noble had begun his career in film at National Screen Services prior to the Second World War. He later joined Universal News as a film cameraman where his first assignment had been to cover the Boat Race, but by 1940 he was filming with the British Expeditionary Force in northern France and captured the British retreat to Dunkirk. Assignments in Syria and Egypt followed, and he spent a lot of time with the Desert Rats until he was captured in Tobruk in 1942, and then shipped to and interned in Italy. Returning to Britain after release in 1943, he then did further assignments in Burma and Singapore when they were recaptured by the Allies. In 1950, he joined the newly formed BBC Newsreel, and spent a year covering the conflict in Korea. Noble’s experiences, captured in his book *Shoot First: Assignments of a Newsreel Camera-Man*, published in 1955, made him ideally suited to international excursions to film *Sportsview*’s forays across Europe and into the Eastern Bloc.

Some of *Sportsview*’s journeys seemed financially extravagant and carried a high amount of risk, but Fox remained resolute in his conviction that having *Sportsview* producers on site was always preferable to trusting international filmmakers. In September 1955, Noble and cameraman Alan Prentice made arrangements to travel with the AAA to Moscow to cover a major athletics match between the Soviets, with leading athletes such

as Chataway and Pirie in the party. Fox was keen the filming was done under *Sportsview* direction, mistrusting the ability of Russian producers to handle the coverage. In spite of initial doubts as to whether or not the Soviets would let a film crew in the country, visas were obtained for Noble and Prentice, who returned from Moscow to edit the film just 24 hours before transmission.<sup>51</sup>

Televising any footage from behind the Iron Curtain became increasingly problematic as the Cold War grew through the 1950s. The one area where diplomacy softened was sport. 'We got in to Russia and things on the ticket of sport', Dimmock later recalled, 'I mean, that was how we got in to the Communist countries.'<sup>52</sup> In spite of building good relations with Soviet television, Dimmock was always conscious of the intelligence power of the Soviets:

I put black cotton on my suitcases in my room with wax, and it was never broken once. You know there are all these stories. What I do know is I am sure the room was bugged. I'm quite sure any telephone conversations I had were recorded. But I was very careful what I said on the telephone.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1961, Dimmock's diplomacy through sport enable the BBC to broadcast the May Day Parade from Red Square, along with the bonus of capturing the moment Yuri Gagarin landed in Moscow to be welcomed by Brezhnev following his historic space flight. 'Luck fell in our hands,' recalled Dimmock, 'that was sheer fluke'.<sup>54</sup>

### MONTE CARLO OR BUST?

Fun was certainly to the fore in many of *Sportsview*'s ambitious forays on the continent, particularly in its coverage of motor sport. In 1958, the BBC entered a car in the Monte Carlo Rally. Dimmock revealing that 'the whole thing was a bit of a stunt'.<sup>55</sup> Serious coverage of motor sport had proved difficult to televise for obvious logistical reasons, but also because it was not that appealing to watch on a small screen. Prior to *Sportsview*, the coverage of motor sport had been ad-hoc and more or less dependent on one individual, Raymond Baxter. Baxter was a former RAF Spitfire pilot who began his broadcasting career with Forces Broadcasting in Cairo and then the British Forces Network in Germany. In the late-1940s and early-1950s, Baxter had begun a slow process of trying to introduce motor sport into the BBC's coverage on radio and television. Much of Baxter's

work had been in radio, but television presented a challenge of presentation and interest for the non-expert, family audience. In 1952, Baxter was the instigator of the coverage of car trials and hill climbs on BBC TV. Working with producer Bill Duncalf, and recruiting drivers through Godfrey Imhof of the London Motor Club, this was the origin of the Television Trophy Trial, first broadcast on 15th November 1952.<sup>56</sup> The trophy was a replica of the Image Orthocon camera, the design later used for the BBC's *Sports Personality of the Year*.

The Monte Carlo Rally was first covered by BBC television in a filmed report by Richard Dimbleby in 1950. Baxter recounted his own experiences of the rally in *Television Sports Magazine* in 1951, and would go on to report on 14 consecutive rallies as a competitor on BBC radio. *Sportsview*'s forays into the event were less seriously competitive, and were instead an opportunity to share some of the romanticism of the race, which captured the imagination of the public, who were not interested in motor sport per se, but intrigued by the sights of continental Europe during the 1950s and 1960s. The event was notorious for the challenges of driving 2,000 miles for three days and nights, along minor roads through mountain passes, and the fatigue that affected the drivers. The most notorious coverage of the rally came in 1961 when Dimmock rode with professional grand prix racing driver Tony Brooks in a modified black London taxi, Rally Entrant 314. Dimmock recalled the remarkable journey and the publicity it drew:

We put a sports car engine in to a taxi. It could do 102 miles an hour this taxi. Only trouble was you couldn't stop the bloody thing because it had got just ordinary brakes. Not disk brakes in those days, and so, we had a hell of a job. But Tony Brooks was driving, we started at Glasgow, and we were driving down through Britain in fog, and Tony Brooks said, 'oh to hell with the fog' and drove straight down the middle of the road. And he said if anything is coming down the other way I'll be able to get out the way. But he hit an island. We flattened an island and we lost a door. We got to Dover and they put a new door on in about five minutes flat. I was very impressed. And then in the end we couldn't keep up. We decided that rather than go over the mountains, we cheated and went round the bottom in order to keep up. We wanted to film the end of the rally. So we cheated a bit there. But we hadn't realised what coverage we were getting back in England. If we'd known, we wouldn't have done what we did. We'd no idea. We were doing it for *Sportsview*. But what we didn't know was we were in every BBC news bulletin: 'BBC's *Sportsview* car has been seen at such and such a point.' And then they said, 'BBC *Sportsview* taxi seems not to have arrived!' [laughs] We

had no idea that this was going on... Fox was furious. Fox was saying, 'What the bloody hell were you doing Peter?' I said, 'Well, dear boy, you should have been with us. It's quite hairy enough.'<sup>57</sup>

Dimmock had started the taxi-meter on leaving Glasgow and the final reading as they arrived in Monte Carlo was £135 15s 0d. The taxi was accompanied by a *Sportsview* car with cameraman Freddie Hamilton 'hanging out of the window taking tracking shots'.<sup>58</sup> The filming captured the taxi stuck in a snowdrift as it negotiated the Massif Central, and on its descent narrowly escaped a crash with a snow plough.

Such stunts epitomised the *Sportsview* blend of sport and entertainment, always innovative and exploring new ways to engage BBC audiences with major events and personalities. The focus on entertainment led to the development of one of the BBC's most successful innovations, the Sports Personality of the Year Award.

### BBC SPORTS PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR

The live studio setting of *Sportsview* meant the programme spent a considerable amount of time focused on its guests as interviewees. Sporting heroes, both national and international, appeared on the programme, and by mid-1956, Fox could boast *Sportsview* had received more than 500 guests, each name filed on a card in the *Sportsview* office. Some of the interviews were re-enacted demonstrations of a particular skill or activity; others, like Bannister in 1954, captured the feelings of a sports star immediately after the event; others were straightforward star vehicles to meet and talk to a leading sports star of the day. The studio setting formalised the relationship between the BBC and the sporting elites of the day, which brought famous names to the screen at the same time making the BBC synonymous with British sport. ITV would mimic the approach, but in the 1950s and 60s were never able to fully realise the close ties the BBC enjoyed with leading sports celebrities of the day.

The development of stardom as a feature of twentieth-century popular culture is well known and critically understood, particularly with respect to Hollywood film.<sup>59</sup> The promotion of individualism and the discursive construction of fame as a dialectic between on- and off-screen presence became increasingly apparent in the 1950s as stars were lauded in the media, became newsworthy in their own right and began to enjoy increasing wealth as an adjunct to their fame. Sports fame was, however, slightly



different in that many sports remained amateur or, in the case of football, subject to the maximum wage. Sporting heroes had a more socially organic place in the community, and by and large remained wedded to their socio-cultural roots. The understated modesty of many sports stars was linked to the continued ideological power of amateurism, a nineteenth-century doctrine that prevented athletes, rugby union players and numerous other sports stars from earning money from sport. Amateurism also had an ethical dynamic, which was about fair play and ‘gentlemanly conduct’ in contradistinction to cheating and vulgar spectacle.<sup>60</sup> Sport was ‘for the love of the game’ and not financial gain. In practice, this ideal-type model of sport never existed, and commercialism and corruption have long played a feature in modern sports cultures. However, post-war sport in Britain did begin to see signs of increased celebration of sporting fame and notoriety, with a select group of sports stars beginning to earn commercial income from their new-found fame in the British media. The Middlesex and England cricketer Denis Compton’s endorsement of Brylcreem is one of the most oft-cited examples of commercialisation of sport stars in the 1940s and 1950s, and symbolic of an emerging exploitation of fame in sport, including the use of agents, in his case Bagenal Harvey.

From 1954, *Sportsview* had become the most visible champion of British sports stardom, and the studio interviews conducted by Dimmock were the central focus of this process. The key to the BBC’s approach was that *Sportsview* brought sporting champions directly into people’s homes via television. The interviews were live, and therefore provided a sense to the viewer that sports stars were giving up their own time to be present for the benefit of the audience at home. In October 1954, Fox wrote to Dimmock with an idea for a Review of the Year:

I would like to submit in writing what I mentioned to you verbally the other day—a ‘Sportsview’ review of the year. I visualise it as a 45/60 minute special edition of ‘Sportsview’ to go out on Thursday, December 30th. It would include out ballot for the ‘Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year’.<sup>61</sup>

The bulk of the programme was to be made up of a film review of the year, with sporting highlights reviewed and celebrated. The list of events for 1954 would include: West Bromwich’s Cup win; the Turpin fiasco; the Cockell fights; the football World Cup; the Landy-Bannister rivalry; the Empire Games; the Jim Peters marathon; the European

Athletics Championships; Gordon Richards; Drobny's Wimbledon; Peter Thompson's golf triumphs; and the Lester Piggott story. Fox concluded: 'There has seldom been a year like this in sport'.<sup>62</sup> Similar events, such as the Press Club's 'Sportsman of the Year' already existed and had been covered by BBC Newsreel in 1953, but the opportunity to use archive film from the year's sport was a new departure. Dimmock wrote to Joanna Spicer for permission to start trailing the idea to viewers, who would be asked to vote by postcard, although he believed 'Bannister is the obvious winner'.<sup>63</sup> A 45-minute slot was scheduled for 30th December at 7.45 p.m., and viewers would be invited to vote through adverts in the *Radio Times* and on screen. However, by November, the idea of *Sportsview* running their own prize-giving had given way to the prospect of piggy-backing on the *Sporting Record's* annual 'Sportsman of the Year' award ceremony. *Sporting Record* had begun their award in 1946 to boost its post-war profile, using a readers' ballot, and it was later taken over by the *Daily Express* in 1956.<sup>64</sup> By the mid-1950s, the notion of honouring outstanding sports performance was becoming a standard feature of the British media, with the Football Writers Association and the Sports Writers Association of Great Britain having established their own annual event dinners and awards ceremonies in 1948 and 1948 respectively. As sports historian Tony Collins has noted, the discourses that surrounded the idea of awards, and the performance of 'sporting personalities' when receiving them gave 'significant reinforcement and refinement' to the concept of British sports stardom. The BBC's new award gave public sanction to sporting fame, a process it has fostered ever since to reflect more than half a century of British sporting success and achievement.

Although the *Sporting Record* awards were established, Fox did not see any benefit in the BBC using another awards event for their programme. He was also concerned that the programme required more time to transmit the amount of film required to review the main sporting events of the year, which he estimated would take at least 25 minutes.<sup>65</sup> One of the conflicts the BBC faced by partnering a sponsored press event was the blatant use of advertising, as Peter Dimmock reflected:

The beginning of 'Sports Personality of the Year', in 1955, was originally called 'Sports Review of the Year', and Chataway won the first one. *Sporting Record* did it from the Savoy Hotel. The *Express* took the next one over, and we went in jointly with them as an outside broadcast. Blackburn, who was their advertising director, mentioned the *Daily Express* eleven times in his

speech. And we couldn't turn him off cos' we were there. And so Paul said, 'We can't have this again, it will cause a hell of a row'. Everybody from the DG downward said this was blatant advertising, so Paul said, 'Why don't we do it in Television Theatre?' That's how it got moved there and became television 'Sports Personality of the Year'. We did it entirely as our own show, no longer having to have newspaper support.<sup>66</sup>

The first *Sports Review* included interviews with leading sports stars of the day: Sir Gordon Richards, Pat Smyth, Dr Roger Bannister, Stirling Moss and Chris Chataway. Chataway won the award, which Dimmock later believed was down to the BBC's live coverage of his floodlit 5,000 metre world record-breaking race against the Russian Vladimir Kuts at White City in October 1954. The event was part of the London versus Moscow athletics match, in front of a 40,000-spectator crowd and millions of BBC television viewers. The BBC commentary was given by Norris McWhirter, a contemporary of Chataway's at Oxford University. Lit by spotlights that tracked the runners around the final bend, Kuts seemed to pull away and McWhirter commented 'This man seems unbeatable', but as they came down the back-straight, Chataway passed the European champion to go on and break the then world record by five seconds. Dimmock recalled: 'We did athletics from White City which were very, very popular... When he beat Kuts it was absolutely fantastic. One simply did not think he could do it.'<sup>67</sup> *Sportsvie* quickly rushed Chataway into the studio for an interview after the race, reifying his place as a leading public sports star of the moment, and thereby eclipsing Bannister's four-minute mile earlier in the year. Writing in *The Listener*, Reginald Pound, 'The Critic on the Hearth', reviewed the appeal of Chataway's success against Kuts as 'remarkably exhilarating television, showing conclusively again the power of Mr de Lotbinière's outside broadcast units to win friends and influence people at a rate far exceeding that of any other type of programme'.<sup>68</sup> It was a live media event with high emotive drama that got people talking the next day and, Pound believed, had touched life as it was being lived.

Pound's analysis highlighted a growing sense that televised sport, and the BBC's *Sportsvie* cameras in particular, were transporting viewers to genuine existential moments of joy, and a form of drama with which staged, fictional television drama could simply not compete. Such comments also helped the production ideology of realism that *Sportsvie* sought to capture as the 'window on the world' of British sport. Bringing the stars of such heralded moments of sport, such as Chataway's, further

cemented for the viewer the idea that the BBC were central partners in a national moment of shared rejoicing and pleasure. Fox suggested sports personalities were brought into the studio and showcased to the viewers from November onwards in an item called 'Star Spot'. Different commentators would introduce stars from eight different sports week by week to enable viewers to familiarise themselves with the main contenders, all voting to be completed by 21st December.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION: FROM SPORTSVIEW TO SPORTSNIGHT WITH COLEMAN

In 1965, Peter Dimmock had become the General Manager of Outside Broadcasting and was effectively managing the high-level rights battles against ITV. The 1966 World Cup was on the horizon, BBC 2 had expanded the capacity of OBs and new technologies such as satellite television and the potential arrival of colour television all combined to produce an array of complex strategic issues for what the BBC outside broadcast department were doing. The departure of Paul Fox had an impact on Dimmock's motivation to do the programme. 'Paul went to Talks.' Dimmock recalled, 'I mean that was another big blow. I lost Paul to Leonard Miall in Talks, and that is when I let Ronnie edit *Sportsview*, when I should have given it to Cowgill.' In the end, *Sportsview* became too much:

You see, I was in charge of OB's in general, and sport was 25 % of our output so it was terribly important. I had to do that as well as my other job. But then when Brian came in, Brian was full time on sport. And that I think made a heck of a difference... Of course Cowgill had the idea, when *Sportsview* was not very successful under Ronnie Noble, of *Sportsnight with Coleman*.<sup>70</sup>

*Sportsview* had been running for ten years and there was a sense that Dimmock's increasingly precious time meant it was time for him to stop. His last *Sportsview* was in January 1965, but by then a new up-and-coming sport presenter, Frank Bough, had taken over as the regular presenter of the programme, having introduced *Olympic Sportsview* in October 1964. *Sportsnight With Coleman* began in September 1968, replacing *Sportsview*, which had various editors including Cliff Morgan and Alan Hart. It was the first time a BBC programme had been named after its presenter, and it confirmed David Coleman as the BBC's leading presenter and commentator on sport.

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## Cowgill, Coleman and *Grandstand*

### INTRODUCTION

The BBC's outside broadcast department employed some indomitable people, none more so than producer-director Bryan Cowgill, known across the department as 'Ginger' but according to some, never to his face. The nickname was inspired by his complexion, but reflected his fiery temper when things were not up to his impeccable standards. As he once remarked, 'I only employ the best', from cameramen to commentators, whom he pushed to produce their optimum work in every programme he directed.<sup>1</sup> This chapter focuses on Cowgill's role in helping to devise, and then enrich, what became the BBC's flagship live sports programme, *Grandstand*. The programme was launched in the autumn of 1958 and was inspired by the BBC's coverage of the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Cardiff in the summer of the same year. Central to Cowgill's success in making the live magazine sports programme work was its presenter David Coleman. The two men became closely associated as the driving force of the BBC's sports output and its high professional standards. They were a similar age, shared similar provincial roots, had backgrounds in journalism and were dedicated to developing a new brand of professionalism in broadcast sport. Where did these motivations for high standards and professionalism in broadcasting come from? Why did these two men have such an impact on how the BBC went about their business of covering sport? What has been the legacy of their contribution to *Grandstand* and the BBC?



## THE MAKING OF THE FIRST HEAD OF TV SPORT: BRYAN COWGILL

Bryan Cowgill's professional career in the media began as a copy-boy for the *Lancashire Evening Post* in Preston after leaving school at the age of 15 in 1942. He had been born in the small Lancastrian town of Clitheroe, and both his grandfather and later his father were proprietors of a local newspaper, the *Advertiser and Times*. His family ties had given him the opportunity to work in newspapers, and he soon graduated to a position of reporter and feature writer. But as the war in Europe escalated, he decided to join the Navy's Y Scheme, introduced to allow boys aged 16 and 17 to pursue a career in the Navy. He was selected for officer training, and in 1945 became the youngest officer in the Royal Marines Commandos. The experience transformed his character and outlook on life, and on returning to Clitheroe after demobilisation, he found it difficult to settle back in to his role as a provincial journalist. As he explained:

I was in the marine commandos in the war and got demobbed in 1947. I bummed around really doing a bit of journalism up north, at a time when television was establishing itself. It was almost the mid-50s, believe it or not, when television reached the north through the Holme Moss transmitter. My grandfather was a journalist and they had a local paper in Clitheroe in Lancashire, a small Lancashire town where I came from. And I suppose it was hoped that I would follow them in to what was a family business. But of course like millions of others at that time, my eyes had been widened by some knowledge of the world, in my case in the Marine Commandos. I went back to Clitheroe for a spell and got very restless and it was at a time when the BBC were trying to recruit people and I answered an advertisement. BBC Outside Broadcasts were advertising for a post of 'Stage Manager'. Well, as far as I was concerned I hadn't a clue, a stage manager stood at the side of the stage and pulled curtains or something.<sup>2</sup>

By this stage, Cowgill was editing the family paper, but his response to the BBC advert in 1954 transformed his life. His experiences in journalism and the military, and his broad Lancastrian accent, must have made him stand out among the other applicants, and to his surprise he was offered the job. As he later recalled:

To my surprise I got an interview, I don't know why, I had no academic qualifications at all. People say to me now if you wrote a letter of application

now, with your qualifications, you wouldn't have even got an interview. The only thing on my C.V. at all was the Marine Commando, I had nothing else to put down. Which is presumably why they said, 'well, let's see this guy anyway'. It was at a time when all sorts of men were vying to get in to television, a lot were taken on and didn't last very long.<sup>3</sup>

He began working as a floor manager for the BBC on 22nd September 1955, which just happened to be the launch date of ITV and its London franchise, Associated Rediffusion. It was an odd job title for outside broadcasts, but as the eyes and ears on the ground of the producer in the scanner, he soon learnt the basics of production; its emerging grammar and the codes and conventions of the links between producer, camera operator, technicians and performers. He worked on one of the OB Department's flagship programmes, *Saturday Night Out*, which began each week with the scene of a female telephone operator calling to action the BBC's 'roving eye'—a camera mounted on top of an outside broadcast van—which set off across the UK every weekend to capture events as they were happening. This included the famous staging of a train crash in February 1956 by the Royal Engineers, known as the Longmore Train Crash, in which a steam locomotive was derailed by an explosive placed on the track. These outside broadcasts were exclusively live, and it was this element that appealed to Cowgill:

That's why I went in to television sport. Because television production was less sophisticated in the sense that most of it was purely live television. Long before the advent of videotape, which transformed the production of television. And therefore, it was a hard, but very good school in which to learn the business. And I got in to sport through television really. I didn't have any particular sporting expertise. I had a very healthy interest in sport, obviously, but that was it. And I learned my trade, really, directing sport and other outside broadcasts.<sup>4</sup>

There was no formal training. Getting on in the job simply meant observation of how other people did it. According to Cowgill, surviving in this environment was tough: 'It was a mess, that's why the casualty rate was pretty high. I got lucky.'<sup>5</sup> Working in television was not only about pushing technological frontiers, but personal boundaries too. Individuals were given the opportunity to show what they could do, and if successful, were asked again; if not, they were invariably released. Cowgill's own assessment of why he shone in the role reveals something of the journalistic

ideology of television technology, and its ability to tell vivid and immediate stories:

I think I must have had some in-built gift for translating pictures in to a new and very exciting form of storytelling. I still do. Whether it's stories in a football match, drama or whatever, that excited my interest really in television. And that is how I've always looked upon it really. Except that in terms of live drama it seemed to me that in those days, the most reliable source of live drama was obviously a sporting event.<sup>6</sup>

His television directorial debut came not in sport but a weekly ballroom dancing programme, *Dancing Club*, which came from the Carlton Rooms, Maida Vale. He clearly impressed, and was soon regularly directing outside broadcasts, including sport. Getting on in television production was about doing, partly based on observations of others, and partly one's own initiative and instincts. It was a production culture that the BBC fostered, and because of the people the organisation recruited, many with military backgrounds, by and large it worked quite efficiently.

### *Two-Sides of the Same Coin: The Producer and Commentator*

Where Dimmock blazed a trail in negotiating the deals for the coverage of sport, Cowgill broke new ground in production, with innovative use of cameras and new technology, and coaxing engineers to deliver ever more sophisticated ways of covering sport. Cowgill was at the root of innovations in programming: satellite; video technology; slow-motion action replay; and eventually colour television, which transformed the look and coverage of sports such as snooker to dramatic effect. But it was perhaps in the gallery, directing live coverage of sport and with a direct talkback facility to the ear—and hopefully the mind and voice—of the presenter or commentator, that Cowgill truly excelled.

The producer and the presenter of live outside broadcasts are inexorably linked, and the dynamics of this relationship arguably influence the tone, shape and quality of the final broadcast. 'I had a fairly intimate relationship with most commentators of my time', Cowgill noted when being interviewed, 'And don't ever ask me who was the best, because I only ever used the best!' he concluded in typically rambunctious fashion.<sup>7</sup> His broad Clitheroe accent had a snappy delivery, which he had cultivated to great effect and power when barking instructions to numerous commentators

and cameramen through hundreds of programmes and thousands of hours of television. Many BBC commentators would characterise Cowgill as a combative, fiery character when directing an outside broadcast, but most respected his editorial judgements and his high production standards.

By the mid-1950s, the emergence of a dedicated team of BBC Television Outside Broadcast producers made the dual role of producer-commentator less necessary and more or less obsolete. Cowgill's contemporaries included Alan Chivers (Chiv), Alan Mouncer, Slim Wilkinson, Anthony Craxton, Bill Duncalf, Michael Henderson and, outside London, Ray Lakeland in Manchester and Peter Thompson in Glasgow.

In 1957, the then Director of Outside Broadcasting (Television), Peter Dimmock, asked Cowgill to produce *Sportsview*, and its children's offshoot *Junior Sportsview*, the BBC's popular midweek sports magazine programme, which Dimmock himself presented. The slick, fast-paced programme, still edited by Paul Fox, gave Cowgill valuable experience of mixing live studio presentation and interviews with filmed highlights from sport. With a finite transmission schedule, the programme demanded disciplined direction and timekeeping. Cowgill excelled in the role, and he later reflected it was his military background that helped him to call the shots with a commanding voice.<sup>8</sup> Former Welsh rugby captain and BBC commentator Cliff Morgan, who would eventually succeed Cowgill as Head of Sport, wrote: 'Cowgill must have been the greatest director we ever had', he continued, 'He made instant decisions which left you looking stupid and wishing you had thought of them first'.<sup>9</sup>

### COWGILL'S ORIGINAL IDEA FOR *GRANDSTAND*

From the mid-1950s, the BBC's Outside Broadcast department steadily increased its coverage of sport, building a broad network of relations with sports promoters and venues, enhanced further by more localised sports relations with BBC regional centres. From 1954, the *Sportsview* brand had consolidated the BBC's association with sport, but its reliance on filmed material meant that live outside broadcasts stood alone in the schedule. In 1955, Dimmock wrote a chapter called 'Seeing is Believing' for a book, *Sports Report*, edited by Eamonn Andrews and radio producer Angus McKay, which celebrated the coverage of sport on the BBC's flagship radio news programme of the same name. *Sports Report* had blazed a trail in developing a slick sports news service every Saturday at 5 p.m., providing its listeners with all the day's results and analysis of significant

stories of the day.<sup>10</sup> Dimmock mused: ‘It is, perhaps, not too optimistic to forecast that the television equivalent of ‘Sports Report’ may eventually be possible’.<sup>11</sup> It was increasingly possible for multiple outside broadcasts to be scheduled on the same day, particularly on Saturdays. However, they would be promoted in the *Radio Times* listings as separate programmes, and there was no vehicle to bring such broadcasts together. In radio, multiple outside broadcasts were often conjoined on the Light Programme under the general title of *Out and About*, which would be linked together by a resident announcer to ensure continuity from one broadcast to the next. In television, the presentation announcers who linked the programmes had limited knowledge of their content, often dependent on scripted links from one programme to the next. With multiple outside broadcasts from sport, it was often desirable to move from one event to the next, and in some cases to return to the conclusion of an event. Underruns or overruns of sport were common and this affected the timings of the next scheduled programme, which at teatime would usually impact on children’s programming. Being able to cope with such situations required a knowledgeable and sympathetic announcer, who could draw on their creative instincts to deal with shifting events. In 1956, an inept handover by an inexperienced announcer from multiple outside broadcasts in Farnborough and Blackpool led Cowgill to complain that it was hazardous to rely on inexperienced announcers if slickness was to be maintained. Instead, Cowgill seeded the idea that multiple television outside broadcasts from sport should have an ‘experienced and enterprising’ announcer, much like *Out and About* in radio, to ensure the BBC could cope with ‘swiftly changing circumstances’.<sup>12</sup>

The idea of a Saturday afternoon sports programme linking together various outside broadcasts remained on hold until late-1957, when Dimmock asked Cowgill to explore the feasibility of such a programme and what it might look like. In April 1958, Cowgill reported back to senior members of the *Sportsview* Unit—Dimmock, Fox, Oaten and Noble—on several months of conversation with programme and engineering departments, including those in the regions, as well as three general thoughts on the contents and mechanics of such a programme.<sup>13</sup> The first point he raised was that any programme needed to be anchored around one major sporting event with sufficient duration. From October to December 1957, this had been horse racing. Secondly, was the ability of a dedicated programme to ‘wrap up a multi-OB parcel in a much more attractive and professional package than has been achieved before’.<sup>14</sup> Continuity, speed

and slickness of presentation were viewed as key to the project and would be unlike anything previously tried before. The originality of the format would be particularly useful in the BBC's competition with ITV's presentation of sport, which was disjointed and moribund. The third key observation Cowgill made was that the whole operation would require more than three hours of continuous transmission, anywhere between 1.30 p.m. and 5.45 p.m., not only encompassing up to three outside broadcasts from London and regional centres, but also including studio presentation of sports news throughout the afternoon prepared by an editorial staff interpreting the flow of information from a bank of teleprint machines. The late afternoon results service *Today's Sport*, which Cowgill at that time produced, would also be integrated from the same studio. The proposed programme would therefore provide 'both a novel continuity and a setting right on top of the news'.<sup>15</sup> The inspired ingenuity of the programme idea came from the combination of live OBs with the rolling results service, and Cowgill's journalistic background and his experience on directing *Today's Sport* would have featured strongly in his thinking. For the autumn quarter, Cowgill suggested horse racing would best be supported by indoor events, for example boxing, swimming or snooker, and he had set about gathering information on suitable sporting events from colleagues in regional centres. 'One of the greatest strengths of the project', argued Cowgill, 'lies in its ability to incorporate many and diverse regional OB offers.'<sup>16</sup>

The programme was devised to provide viewers at home a seamless presentation of live sporting action and up-to-the-minute sports news. With the omnibus nature of the programme in mind, Cowgill came up with a working title 'Spectator'. Dimmock initially preferred the title 'Saturday Afternoon Out' and later suggested co-opting the radio title 'Out and About' because such titles would allow non-sporting outside broadcasts.<sup>17</sup> The title *Grandstand* was eventually suggested by Paul Fox as late as September 1958, and as the programme's editor, that title won the day.<sup>18</sup> Given the extensive investment and planning required for the programme, Cowgill suggested the ideal start date would be early October 1958. There were, however, some major obstacles to overcome before the project could be moved ahead. There would need to be significant uplift in OB Unit commitments, estimated at 66 % on the previous year, an increase in the annual transmission hours agreed for OBs, and the release of BBC crew necessary to produce a three-camera programme in Studio H at Lime Grove.<sup>19</sup> As Garry Whannel has previously noted, another

major debate arose regarding the timing of the programme, especially the ability to provide the day's football results before the programme went off air at 5.00 p.m.<sup>20</sup> Cowgill, and later Fox, would argue that bringing the results service forward from the slot then occupied by *Today's Sport*, which invariably went out just before 6 p.m. following *Children's Hour* and the evening news, would set the BBC at a distinct disadvantage in their competition with ITV. An immediate results service, argued Cowgill, would 'capitalise fully on the interest we have created earlier with running scores and news from the games in progress.'<sup>21</sup> Again, as Whannel suggests, 'here was a struggle between two different attempts to construct the audience through scheduling'.<sup>22</sup> The vexed issue of timing led editor Paul Fox to question again why an up-to-the-minute sports programme should end so abruptly. 'At the very moment this service reaches its peak', he argued, 'we go off the air.'<sup>23</sup> Fox recognised viewers would expect to see the results confirmed having watched the scores come in throughout the afternoon. It was not worth doing the programme at all, Fox argued, if the programme could not stay on air long enough to give the final scores. Not long after the programme eventually began the Head of Children's Television, Owen Reed, complained to McGivern about the impact *Grandstand* was having on their audience at teatime.<sup>24</sup> A month away from its launch Fox once more questioned the 'conception' of the programme: 'I think we are wrong to go off at half-cock; we are wrong to go off without a full-time compère; and we are wrong to use a title none of us really like.' Although the compère and title issues were resolved shortly after, it would be almost a year before the issue of the scheduling would be resolved in Fox's favour.<sup>25</sup>

Cowgill's detailed plan was written in the midst of one of the BBC's major outside broadcasts of the year, the 1958 British Empire and Commonwealth Games being held in Cardiff. The Games took place across five different venues, and the BBC used four OB Units, including the roving eye, as well as a film crew based at Lake Padarn to cover the rowing. Cowgill produced the daily television broadcasts from the Games, which on Saturday 26th July were sandwiched between other outside broadcasts from the fourth England Test against New Zealand at Old Trafford and the Royal International Horse Show at White City Stadium. The multiple outside broadcasts over the day convinced the senior producers and editors in the OB Department that the planned launch of a dedicated Saturday afternoon sports programme that could coherently link the events from a single production was becoming essential.<sup>26</sup>

There were other technical lessons from Cardiff. The coverage had produced over 200 feet of film a day, which had been rapidly processed for inclusion in daily *Sportsview Specials*. Fox concluded that in order to show 'football film flashes' at the end of the new Saturday afternoon programme, the BBC needed to install a Lawley developer at Lime Grove, essential for a 'rapid service sports programme'.<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, Cowgill's more detailed plans for the programme sent the same week also made a request for technical equipment, an Ampex tape machine, to be installed in Lime Grove to enable the studio to record outside broadcasts on tape to be replayed when needed later in the programme.<sup>28</sup> The design of the studio, the hiring of up to nine teleprinters for agency sports wire services from the Press Association, Exchange Telegraph and Reuters, additional crew, monitors, phones and rigging were all a significant expense, estimated by Cowgill to be £2,000 per programme. Even as the programme neared its first outing, the costs of production were unknown, and in late-August, the Superintendent Engineer, Douglas Birkenshaw complained to Peter Dimmock that in the rush to get the project up and running, the appropriate channels of authority for correctly estimating the financial cost of the technical aspects of the programme had been handled at a 'quite inappropriate level'.<sup>29</sup>

Part of the resistance to staying on air beyond 4.45 p.m., aside from children's programmes, was pressure from the regions, who were all keen to have their own opt-out to present local match reports and film in *Today's Sport*. Removing the stand-alone results service programme would undermine the premise of the opt-out. The compromise, in the end, would be to keep both: the immediate results service followed within the hour by a local sports news roundup in *Today's Sport*. Maintaining good relations with the BBC's regional centres was central to ensuring the programme had three outside broadcasts to draw from each week. 'We hope to represent regional sport as much as possible,' wrote Fox, 'for any success it may have will depend largely on regional contributions.'<sup>30</sup> In August 1958, Fox called an extraordinary meeting with regional representatives to talk through outside broadcast opportunities and commitments from across the country which could be scheduled for the fourth quarter of the year. With Fox and Cowgill at the helm in the Lime Grove studio, *Grandstand* pulled on the BBC's network of regional resources, and provided opportunities for regional producers to build their experience and reputations. Denis Monger, John Vernon, Bill Duncalf, Ronnie Noble and Cowgill himself in London were initially joined by Phil Lewis in the



Midlands, Ray Lakeland in the North, John Fearon and Ricky Crocker in the West, Selwyn Roderick in Wales, and Peter Thompson and Bill Stephenson in Scotland. Together, they scheduled three outside broadcasts every Saturday for a three-and-a-half-hour programme, with Cowgill at Studio H in Lime Grove as executive producer calling the shots for the overall pattern of the programme. Fox took overall responsibility for the running order of the programme, but timings could be contingent on the unfolding nature of the events themselves, so each OB producer was expected to be on 'continuous standby' just in case Cowgill decided the pattern should change or an update was required. This also meant commentators and crew at each event had to be aware that they were part of a united programme and at any time could be called upon for a 'snap report'. This united team effort became the underlying professional ideology of the programme, and the leadership of Cowgill and Fox instilled the disciplined news values and culture the programme was striving to achieve. The collective approach was a significant departure, and it required a very special kind of talent to hold it all together in front of the camera in Studio H.

### THE RISE OF DAVID COLEMAN

As the launch date for the programme neared, one significant issue to be resolved was who would present the programme. In August 1958, Dimmock wrote to Fox to ask if he had taken any steps towards putting a case for David Coleman to be the regular presenter of *Grandstand*.

Coleman had joined the BBC as a news assistant in Birmingham in 1954 following a brief period as a freelance reporter working for Derek Burrell Davis at BBC Manchester the previous year. He had trained as a cub reporter on the *Stockport Express* and at the relatively young age of 22 became editor of *Cheshire County Press*. In his teens, growing up in Alderley Edge in Cheshire, he had been a strong middle-distance runner, and in 1949 as a young man, he won the Manchester Mile. Injury prevented his athletic career progressing further, but his experience in the world of club athletics fostered his deep passion for the sport and informed his commentary on athletics, a role he occupied at the BBC for more than 40 years. His first television appearance was on 2nd June 1954 alongside BBC stalwart Rex Alston commentating on athletics and cycling from the Fallowfield Stadium in Manchester.<sup>31</sup>

At 32 years old he may have been viewed as too fresh faced to host a major sports programme, but his work in the BBC regions, in particular an interview with footballer Danny Blanchflower, had singled him out as a potential future star of sports broadcasting. Producers in the OB Department had been aware of Coleman since 1954 following a memorandum he wrote to producer Denis Monger to offer his services on *Sportsview*. 'If poss.,' Coleman urged with brevity, 'would like to make myself useful'. Ever enterprising and keen to be part of the BBC Network, Coleman suggested he could feed in items from the Midlands Region via his boss Peter Cairns, finally noting he would be 'pleased to help'.<sup>32</sup> From that moment on Coleman fed news stories and items in to *Sportsview*, and in September 1956 he presented the programme as temporary cover for Peter Dimmock.<sup>33</sup> He covered for Dimmock again in the first quarter of 1957. Over the coming year, Coleman had spells on the *Sportsview* Unit's other flagship programmes, stepping in to cover for Kenneth Wolstenholme on both *Sports Special* and *Today's Sport*. His experience on the latter, presenting the day's football, horse racing and rugby results, would provide an invaluable training ground for what was to come in *Grandstand* from autumn 1958.

In late-August 1958, Fox reviewed the potential alternative candidates for the job of anchoring their new Saturday afternoon programme.<sup>34</sup> Eamonn Andrews, by then building his reputation on radio as a calm, informed voice of the fast-moving sports news programme *Sports Report*, was ruled out due to his other commitments on television. Raymond Glendenning, the voice of radio sport in the 1950s, was too tied-up with radio commitments. Brian Johnston was due to cover the Ashes series in Australia, but was also viewed as 'not sufficiently all-sport minded'. Raymond Baxter, a solid broadcaster and specialist in motor sport, lacked all-round knowledge of sport, especially football and racing. Kenneth Wolstenholme, after Dimmock, probably the most recognisable face of BBC sport coverage in the 1950s, was overly committed to doing commentaries and already presenting the other two Saturday sports programmes. It was a *fait accompli*. Fox's search for a compare of *Grandstand* had shown 'there is no real alternative to Coleman'.<sup>35</sup> In Fox's view, Coleman had the all-round sports knowledge and was suited to the role. The one caveat was the requirement to request the release of Coleman from Midland Region and compensate them for the time he was away from his desk in Birmingham. In early September, Dimmock set about getting Coleman's release with a view to him making a permanent move

to his department, not least to secure his services for the BBC rather than the competition. In a confidential note to McGivern, Dimmock concluded Coleman was the ‘obvious choice’ with the ‘personality and knowledge required’. Cairns had warned that Coleman might flit to ITV, who were keen to acquire his services. However, Dimmock sensed Coleman had some loyalty and integrity towards the BBC noting: ‘knowing Coleman I think that as a family man he is more interested in continuing to serve the Corporation, for whom he has been an excellent ambassador in both the field of news and sport.’<sup>36</sup>

By this time, Dimmock had agreed to present the opening four programmes in order to provide a steady and knowledgeable hand. As Dimmock recalled: ‘I did the first few simply because we knew things were likely to go wrong and they did. In the first one I said, ‘Now we’ll go over to Harringay’, or somewhere, and something else came up on the screen!’<sup>37</sup> In the event, Dimmock presented the opening two programmes in October 1954, and Coleman took over the following week.

What was it about Coleman that made him so suitable to the new format? The role of *Grandstand* presenter demanded a blend of skills: sporting knowledge and homework; teamwork with the director and crew; an ability to analyse information on the spot; the need to be calm under pressure and unflustered when things went wrong; and a personality that viewers could identify with. On his interview, Dimmock, Fox, Weeks and especially Cowgill held Coleman in highest esteem as a commentator and presenter of BBC Sport. For Cowgill, who would build a life-long friendship with Coleman, who was best man at his wedding, Coleman represented the ‘image and face of BBC Sport’ in this era.<sup>38</sup> Cowgill also praised Coleman’s abilities as a commentator:

It was not only an enthusiasm. He had an inbuilt instinct and passion for his role as a sports commentator. When I picked him up he was working in Birmingham, and we used him a couple of times. I was looking for a chap to do *Grandstand* in its early days, and that’s how it started really. He knew a lot about athletics, because it was his own sport, he used to run. So he started really as an athletics commentator and he really made his name as a commentator in the first Olympic Games when we televised live back to this country, which was in Rome 1960, which was almost at the start of his career and that really set him up. In terms of ‘Mr Reliable’, I mean if he were available, ten-out-of-ten directors would have earmarked him if they had the choice... He was a trained reporter. He had that training. It helps that they have the disciplines of storytelling.<sup>39</sup>

Producer Alec Weeks, who worked with Coleman on *Grandstand* and *Match of the Day*, characterised Coleman as ‘a welcome friend in everyone’s lounge’.<sup>40</sup> Weeks’s assessment of Coleman’s professionalism in his autobiography pegged him as a courageous and inquisitive investigative reporter. He recounts a story filmed for *Sportsview* in 1959 that required Coleman to investigate illegal betting saloons in Manchester as part of a feature on the legalisation of high street betting shops. Weeks, a former boxer with contacts in the ‘underworld’ of illegal betting, introduced Coleman to four notorious Manchester criminals, who controlled gambling in the region. ‘Within a few seconds of my introducing David’, Weeks recalls, ‘they relaxed, smiling, and treated him like an old friend.’<sup>41</sup> In a glowing profile of Coleman, Weeks concludes:

If you can work with someone whose brain is lightning quick, who is reliable and brilliant, will not suffer fools easily, and whose brusqueness sometimes offends, then you’ll enjoy working with David Coleman. Without doubt the finest broadcaster the world of sport will ever know.<sup>42</sup>

When Coleman died in December 2013, similar eulogies were written and presented across the British media. In his obituary published in *The Telegraph*, Paul Fox summarised why he felt Coleman was so imperious as the frontman of the BBC’s flagship live sports programme:

‘It was *Grandstand* that showed how skilled and flexible he was on screen,’ Fox recalled. ‘He was able to listen to the producer’s talkback in his ear, walk across the studio talking sense and then either lead into the next event or sight-read the football results. It was the master at work and it was a joy to watch him.’<sup>43</sup>

Coleman turned the analysis of football results as they appeared on the studio teleprinter into an art. Standing at the side of the large machine, with lip microphone in hand, as the camera focused in on the final football results being tapped out over the ribbon of the teleprinter coming in over the Agency wires, Coleman’s depth of knowledge of teams, league standings and goalscorers came flooding forward to analyse what each and every scoreline meant to the respective clubs. It was an amazing mastery of instant recall of information. It became a much-loved and crucial ritual of the programme itself, echoes of which continue in the work of Jeff Stelling on the Saturday afternoon football results service of Sky Sports News.

SPORTS PROGRAMMING ON *GRANDSTAND*

The first episode of *Grandstand* aired on 11th October 1958 and was billed as ‘Saturday’s new-style, non-stop parade featuring sports and events as they happen, where they happen.’ The impression of immediacy was stark, and the bringing together of sports news and outside broadcasts also apparent. There was golf from the amateur Championships at St Andrews with commentary from Henry Longhurst, horseracing from Ascot with three races commentated on by Peter O’Sullivan and The Horse of the Year Show from Harringay with commentary by Dorian Williams. It was a particularly strong opening in terms of variety of sports and regional input. Cowgill was keen to receive audience reception on the programme as early as possible and the television duty officer reported on the nature of phone calls received during and immediately following the broadcast. The most frequent complaint focused on the timing of each OB, in particular, the short amount of space given to the broadcast from Harringay. Problems had also been caused by the billing in the *Radio Times* which suggested a strict running order, and Cairns, Coleman’s old boss, advised the timing of events needed to be flagged better in the programme. Cairns also suggested the magazine format required less expert jargon and should cater for the ‘fringe’ viewer.<sup>44</sup> The programme received enthusiastic support from the BBC’s audience research panel, with one respondent highlighted as commenting: ‘It is just what all keen sportsmen must have dreamed of for a very long time.’<sup>45</sup>

The first programme included what would become a regular ‘all-star’ snooker competition featuring the World Champion Joe Davis. The celebrity draw of Davis, who from 1927 won 20 consecutive World Snooker titles, was ideally suited for the studio set-up or simple outside broadcast, usually from Leicester Square Hall. Demonstration billiards had featured on television before the war and Davis had appeared in the first live outside broadcast of snooker in 1950, where the producer Henderson had numbers printed on the balls for identification purposes.<sup>46</sup> For *Grandstand*, Davis played a series of challenge matches in a regular slot on the programme, often travelling down to the BBC studio with a fellow professional from his home in Manchester. Snooker would continue in this format until Davis retired in 1964, and in November 1962 he made the first televised century break.<sup>47</sup> As Everton notes, the presentation of snooker on *Grandstand* lacked genuine competition, the matches being played were, in effect, a celebrity vehicle for Davis to showcase his talents.

Producer Alec Weeks recalls his first experience of working with Davis and his brother Fred in a Manchester studio on the final of the BBC's challenge series for *Grandstand*. It had been prearranged that Joe Davis would win the tie between the two brothers, but as the final frame unfolded Fred was pulling ahead and the scheduled slot on the programme was nearing an end. From London, editor Paul Fox called Weeks to remind him to tell the brothers there were only two minutes left of the transmission. Fred Davis miscued and in the remaining two minutes, almost to the second, Joe Davis cleared the remaining reds and colours to win the frame and the title. Weeks recalled his amazement at what happened, and that as Davis left the studio, he quipped 'Remember, Alec, always leave it to us. No matter what the sport. You concentrate on your pretty pictures'.<sup>48</sup> It was pure showmanship.

In contrast, the rolling news service and final score sequence were essential ingredients of *Grandstand*'s appeal to serious sports fans. The studio design was key to the presentation of sports news and Cowgill insisted on large caption boards assembled around the studio to compile the results from horse racing, football, rugby league and rugby union. *The Radio Times* billing written by Fox emphasised the 'high-speed sports reporting', which would be visible in the studio in the form of 'batteries of tape machines' and a 'giant-sized scoreboard' in order that 'not a moment is lost in passing the latest sports news on to the viewers at home'.<sup>49</sup> An army of sub-editors, including the extrovert horse-racing pundit, John McCririck, analysed the sports news as it came in from the wires and made it palatable for Coleman to read out on camera. The final football results were read by Leonard Martin, an Australian born broadcaster, who had visited England in 1953 to see the coronation and never returned home. Paul Fox had first used Martin as a freelance film commentator for *Sportsview* in 1954 and for many years he was the familiar voice of Movietone News in cinemas. His mellow voice became ideal for reading the football results, which he started doing for *Today's Sport*, before moving on to *Grandstand* in 1958. The signature trait of his result reading was the intonation of his voice which was suggestive of whether the result was a home win, away win or draw. The *Grandstand* results service became a ritualised Saturday event, as millions of people checked their football pools coupons as Martin read the scores. It was a role he undertook for 37 years, before his sudden death in August 1995. The rugby and racing results were read by John Langham, who was superseded by Tim Gudgin in 1965. The issue of whether or not the BBC should announce the racing

results had been contentious immediately after the war, mainly because of a paternalist view that gambling should not be encouraged. However, by the time *Grandstand* went on air, the issue had ceased to be of major concern, ITV having already started to announce starting prices. The BBC initially allowed *Grandstand* to show the odds in their results service, but once the BBC's Board of Governors had relinquished their censorship, it was not long before starting prices formed part of the coverage. In many respects, the programme did the betting industry huge favours in developing an interest in racing and the form of horses.

### *At the Races*

From the beginning, horseracing was a staple in the core running order of *Grandstand*. Because of Dimmock's network of contacts in racing, the BBC had built a solid relationship with many of the leading race-course owners, including major tracks such as Haydock Park, Kempton Park, Windsor, Doncaster, York, Goodwood, Newmarket, Newbury, Cheltenham and Ascot. The BBC's hegemony in racing would not be seriously challenged by ITV until the early 1970s, when the facility fees paid by commercial television increased significantly.<sup>50</sup> As he remembered:

We got in to Ascot quite early on. Of course I never let on to this, but the real reason we did so much racing was because the cost per thousand viewers was very inexpensive, and it kept our mobile units occupied when we couldn't get any other sport at the weekend.<sup>51</sup>

Coverage of racing usually meant three live races through the course of the afternoon. From 1960, the BBC added the Grand National to its major meetings (see Chap. 9), which became a centrepiece of *Grandstand*. However, one race that eluded the BBC was The Derby, which traditionally ran midweek. Although racing was relatively cheap as an outside broadcast which could fill a couple of hours of the *Grandstand's* schedule if need be, planning the schedule took several weeks, and each meeting took two days to rig.<sup>52</sup>

Racing also brought to the screen one of the BBC's foremost sports commentators, Peter O'Sullivan. Born in County Kerry, O'Sullivan grew up in Surrey with his grandparents, who owned a racing stable. After the Second World War, he had joined the Press Association as an on-course reporter, working alongside Peter Dimmock. As the BBC's coverage of

horse racing grew in the late-1940s and early-1950s, Dimmock did most of the commentary, and in 1947, he invited O'Sullivan to be his race-reader. Dimmock recalled:

Peter had worked opposite me at the desk at the PA, so I knew him quite well. I said 'Peter, would you like to come and be my race reader?' He said, 'Yes, sure'. I said, 'I'll teach you the technique of television.' Then, of course, one or two meetings I'd do two races, he'd do two races. Gradually I dropped out, and we gave him all the racing. He was a huge success. But he learned you see, by working with me for about a year, he learned television technique.<sup>53</sup>

In January 1948, O'Sullivan made his first television commentary at Kempton Park and, as his fellow television commentator Peter Bromley points out, the racing commentator's role is to identify each horse by the colour worn by the jockeys.<sup>54</sup> His knowledge of racing was exemplary, and because he preferred to keep his main post as racing correspondent for the *Daily Express*, working freelance as a BBC commentator, he was always on top of the racing news stories of the day. Cowgill held O'Sullivan in high esteem as a commentator, and noted O'Sullivan did thousands of hours for *Grandstand*, never once getting a winner wrong. 'He was uncanny', he later observed, 'He was very important, essential to the BBC's authority in the coverage of horse racing. Never mind the production, millions of people took his word as gospel, and he was outstanding.'<sup>55</sup>

O'Sullivan's commentary style became legend and was once characterised as 'honeyed gravel'.<sup>56</sup> The key to his technique was an even tempo of race-calling until the final few furlongs where his voice gradually built to a crescendo, almost it seemed, without drawing breath. Some viewers found the final over-excitement of a race too much to take, but as Nicholas Sellens describes, 'it was a voice that oozed class and breeding but that crucially retained the common touch'.<sup>57</sup> His voice became part of the ritual of Saturday afternoon for many viewers, the familiarity of his presence at racing drawing viewers in through their trust of his judgment.

The commentary positions at racecourses varied greatly. He disliked the position at Newmarket, but had to be warned by Dimmock that it was not his job to complain to the management of the track.<sup>58</sup> He also disliked the bureaucracy of the BBC, filling in forms to reorder a microphone and harness was, he thought, an unnecessary chore, and in October 1958, producer Alan Chivers had to smooth the waters with the Controller of



the BBC's North Region following O'Sullivan's criticism of Ray Lakeland for not having the appropriate technologies in place.<sup>59</sup> His reputation for complaining is well remembered by Dimmock: 'He was always grumbling about monitors, not being able to see the picture and all that. He was a real old moaner. But he was a damn good commentator.'<sup>60</sup> In spite of such troubles, O'Sullivan remained incredibly loyal to the BBC, even when ITV were seeking to sign him. The BBC also afforded O'Sullivan a certain amount of flexibility—every year in February he would take a month-long skiing holiday in Villars in the Swiss Alps. One of the more bizarre commentaries came in 1967 during the foot-and-mouth epidemic when horseracing was banned for six weeks. The BBC decided to take racing from Paris, but electronically from the Atlas computer held at London University.<sup>61</sup> The stunt created plenty of press coverage for *Grandstand*, but it also served to emphasise how important racing had become to the programme in its competition with ITV's Saturday afternoon sports programme *World of Sport*, launched in 1965.

### *Eddie Waring and Rugby League*

If horseracing served up an annual diet of live outside broadcasts for *Grandstand*, the steadfast sport in the winter months became the northern professional sport rugby league. In a collection of his writing and journalism on rugby league, commentator Eddie Waring provides a potted history of the early days of televising the sport. Immediately after the Second World War, the BBC turned to rugby league as a possible way to expand its sports coverage in a period of constraint. The main issue, however, was that in the late-40s television had not yet reached the core fan base of the game, and was more or less alien to a southern audience. The BBC had first televised the Challenge Cup Final at Wembley in May 1948. George Duckworth was the commentator. The following year, Waring wrote to the BBC's producer Michael Henderson and was invited to join Duckworth in the commentary box. In spite of an inauspicious start in the world of commentary, it brought his knowledge of the sport to the attention of BBC producers.<sup>62</sup> When Warrington played Widnes in the 1950 final, the Sutton Coldfield transmitter in the Midlands reached the southern fringes of Lancashire. 'Warrington fans thought it was great', Waring recalled, 'Widnes fans didn't like either the match or the commentator who, by the way, wasn't me'.<sup>63</sup> Viewers in the north were eventually able to watch the first outside broadcast from rugby league in November

1951, when the Holme Moss transmitter went live and enabled an outside broadcast of Great Britain versus New Zealand to be televised from Swinton, Manchester (the *Radio Times* mistakenly billed it as England versus New Zealand).<sup>64</sup> It was the first live outside broadcast of any sport from the north of England, and Waring was one of the first voices the few thousand households with television in the region heard. Experiments in floodlit rugby league on television were tried in February 1952 and February 1953 from Odsal Stadium in Bradford, and Waring's commentary alongside Alan Dixon further helped the sports' profile. But it was ultimately *Grandstand*, and Waring's commentary, that did more than any other programme format to elevate the sport in to the national consciousness beyond its Lancashire and Yorkshire roots. As Jack Williams has argued:

He was probably the only television commentator who became the biggest personality of his sport, being better known than any rugby league player.<sup>65</sup>

Waring's presence and influence within rugby league was significant, but also contentious. As a rugby league secretary-manager, Waring had transformed the fortunes of his hometown Dewsbury during the 1940s, winning the Challenge Cup in 1943. After the war, Waring travelled to Australia and reported on Great Britain's Test series for the *Yorkshire Evening News*. It established him as a leading writer on the game, and in the late-40s and early-50s, Waring was a freelance writer for the *Sunday Pictorial*, the *Sunday Mirror* and *Rugby League Review*. His move into television commentary, in both radio and television, gave him a privileged position in the negotiations for the sport with the BBC. In October 1954, Dimmock wrote to Fox on the BBC's coverage of rugby league with the suggestion that the sport had 'missed the boat' regarding television coverage, but with Waring onside, the League were clearly warming to the idea. Waring became a seminal figure in the administration and promotion of the sport beyond its northern hotbed. Both Tony Hannan's biography of Waring and Jack Williams research on the image of rugby league on television reveal Waring's style of commentary as being focused on entertainment as much as information. With his broad Yorkshire accent, Waring developed a conversational style, which also knocked the hard edge of the brutal contests. This led some to criticise his approach as frivolous and mocking of the north, the actor and producer Colin Welland arguing that Waring reduced the game to 'mud and wrestling'. But in truth, his

commentaries opened up the sport to millions of viewers on *Grandstand*, who otherwise would have nothing to do with the sport. It was his emotive portrayal of tough and ‘daft’ northerners amid the decaying fabric of northern provincial towns that made the sport entertaining.

He had his supporters both inside the BBC in the south and outside the BBC in the north. Williams notes how one journalist for the *Yorkshire Evening Post* defended Waring’s approach on *Grandstand*, arguing: ‘It’s a game with a raw Northern accent. It’s a game for men who can laugh at themselves from time to time. Eddie Waring reflects these characteristics’.<sup>66</sup> Within the outside broadcast department, there were little doubts that Waring had innovated a unique approach to the sport. Early in *Grandstand*’s run, Dimmock wrote to McGivern to express how successful the coverage of rugby league was for the programme.<sup>67</sup>

Waring was crucial to the success of the sport on television. Dimmock’s assessment of Waring many years later was truly glowing:

Eddie Waring was wonderful. I’ll never ever forget I was producing the Rugby League Cup Final from Wembley. It had been pouring with rain in the morning. It was touch and go whether or not they would go ahead with the match. But they decided to and one of the players broke away on the left hand side—I can see it to this day—to score a try. And as he went over the line the water flew up. Eddie Waring said, ‘And he’s just scored in the deep end’. [Laughs] He was a wonderful chap.<sup>68</sup>

Cowgill also recognised the importance of Waring to rugby league’s appeal on television:

Eddie Waring wasn’t so much a commentator as a fan. He was in the commentary box but in his heart he was standing in the crowd. In professional terms, as a commentator, he broke every rule in the book and few the ‘book’ hadn’t invented. Millions of people loved him for it.<sup>69</sup>

In many respects, Waring’s approach epitomised what *Grandstand* was trying to achieve by broadening the appeal and attracting a family audience to sport. In 1964, as ITV’s challenge to Saturday afternoon sport began to hot up, especially through the televising of professional wrestling, Cowgill emphasised to Donald Baverstock the Controller of BBC One, how rugby league had become the BBC’s draw to audiences wanting to watch a combative, physical sport with high entertainment value, noting: ‘I have never advocated wrestling of the phoney variety exploited

by ITV. There is straightforward and honest professional wrestling to be had in which action is just as entertaining and which could be amusingly capitalised by Eddie Waring.<sup>70</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the 1960s, the *Grandstand* brand became synonymous with the BBC's coverage of sport, and so did Cowgill's working relationship with its presenter David Coleman. In November 1966, Coleman was Cowgill's best man when he married Jennifer Elizabeth Barker, a BBC Television secretary. The programme proved a powerful tool in the BBC's competition with ITV for weekend viewers, and the sports news element, running throughout the afternoon, remains a feature of British television long after the demise of *Grandstand* in 2007. Its 49-year run is symbolic of how important the programme was, replacing *Sportsview* as the BBC's dominant sporting brand. In time, the programme would develop numerous variants including *Olympic Grandstand* and *Sunday Grandstand*, as the title became a trusted vehicle for British viewers to access a variety of sports. The liveness of the programme and the fact that it pulled together several outside broadcasts on the same afternoon frequently proved its undoing. However, the professionalism of the production, which filtered down from Dimmock, Fox and Cowgill to its producers, presenters and commentators, ensured that no matter what the problem, there was always a solution to any immediate crisis, invariably brought together by the unflappable David Coleman. ITV's rival sports programme, *World of Sport* presented by Eamonn Andrews and then Dickie Davis, never fully assailed the BBC's pre-eminence in *Grandstand*, in spite of the popularity of professional wrestling, which was stripped across *World of Sport* every week at 4.00 p.m. before the final football scores came in. Wrestling, with its cast of heroes and villains, was as much variety entertainment as sport, and was said to be very popular with a female audience. However, it was the BBC's longstanding and rolling negotiations for television rights to sport, led by Dimmock and then Cowgill, which ensured ITV were sidelined from televising the major British sporting events in cricket, golf, horse racing, motor sport and athletics, among others. *World of Sport* was pulled with impoverished ratings in 1985. The programme required considerable effort and investment of resources, but because *Grandstand* anchored the BBC's weekend schedule, it proved an important device in its head-to-head for viewers. The rise of niche sports channels, especially

Sky Sports, as well as competition from Channel Four in horse racing, ultimately led to the loss of key rights to live sport and *Grandstand's* purpose seemed to be lost in this new television environment. Roger Mosey, the Head of Sport who decided to pull the programme, argued that the digital age meant the audience for sport could best be served by new formats and forms of access, such as the 'Red Button' and online services. The shifting schedules of major sport meant start times to events like international rugby union did not always coincide with the traditional Saturday afternoon slot. As sport searched for an audience to appease its commercial partners, it moved more events into primetime viewing in the early evening. Audience research by the BBC suggested viewers felt nostalgia for the programme but deemed it irrelevant for the digital age of television. Nevertheless, the legacy of the programme was its professionalism to outside broadcasts from sport, for which Cowgill and Coleman will long be remembered.

## NOTES

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## Prestige of the Nations: International 'Rugger'

The history of rugby union is heavily imbued with myths and values of nationhood, class, masculinity and amateurism. Although its rules have a common thread, the Unions of each nation across the British Isles developed their own distinct set of values and traditions, and the place of rugby in the symbolic function of uniting a nation has different dynamics in each nation. When broadcasting first became interested in rugby, these differences in view would have a significant influence on perceptions of television and beliefs about its impact on the game. In England, the fissure in the two rugby codes, union and league, which was principally, but not solely, about remuneration for play, had by the 1950s created two distinct cultures and rules of rugby playing, which was riven by class and regional differences between north and south. League was the professional game of working class men in the northern industrial regions of Lancashire and Yorkshire, whereas union was the strictly amateur game identified with the middle to upper-middle classes of the midlands and home counties, although it was played far more widely. In Wales, rugby union was a unifier of social classes, bringing communities together, particularly in the southern Welsh mining towns and villages. In Scotland, rugby union had prospered in two distinct ways: firstly, among the urban middle class in independent schools and universities; and secondly, in the farming communities of the Scottish Borders. Rugby union in Ireland, like Scotland, was a game that thrived in the universities, schools and rural communities. It also organised itself on a provincial basis, thereby enabling competition



across the nation state divides of the North and the Republic. Throughout the post-war period, the four home unions, along with France, held a strong hegemony over the running of the sport internationally, and tropes of nationalism and national pride became heavily associated with the international teams. The political power of the home unions would not be undermined until the rise of professionalism, led by the southern hemisphere nations in the 1990s and taken up by a select group of clubs in England, who would insist on more control over the future of the sport.<sup>1</sup>

The strength of the national rugby unions was drawn from their club members, and clubs, along with the Rugby Union Referee Societies, therefore wielded great power in the decisions made on their behalf. This became particularly acute when safeguarding union's amateur status and, paradoxically, the sport's financial viability. The perception that television threatened the gate receipts of club rugby was strongly upheld by national unions, specifically in Scotland and Wales. The ideological opposition to any sniff of commercialism, however, also guided the Unions' negotiations with television, especially after the introduction of commercial television in 1955. How the BBC managed the political contradictions of the four Home Unions and developed an attractive way of presenting the sport for its followers and new audiences is the focus of this chapter.

### POST-WAR EXPERIMENTATION

Negotiations between the BBC and the English Rugby Union at Twickenham were conducted with Commander Sydney Cooper, a former Royal Navy Engineer who had been secretary of the union from 1924. Twickenham, the national stadium for rugby union in England, had hosted television cameras as early as 1937 (see Chap. 2) and the infrastructure of the commentary positions and camera 'boats' in the upper west stand dictated the immediate post-war approach to covering rugby from the stadium. In the immediate post-war period, the logistics and technical proficiency of television coverage from Twickenham occupied the BBC's attempts to broadcast the sport. Initially, the BBC enjoyed an amazing level of compliance and lack of financial incentive on behalf of Cooper or the Rugby Football Union (RFU) members.

Correspondence between the BBC and the rugby unions from 1946 to 1953 was primarily focused on the access, production values and transmission of the BBC's rugby coverage. This included the accommodation of cameras in Twickenham and other stadia, and the exploration of new

ideas and innovations in coverage. Producers such as Ian Orr-Ewing, Philip Dorté, Peter Dimmock and then Anthony Craxton continually experimented with camera positions, lens combinations, commentators and enhancements to the presentation of rugby on screen. For example, during coverage of a match between Harlequins and Bristol in November 1946, the BBC used three cameras positioned at different parts of the ground and produced limitations in the quality of the transmission. One camera with a six-inch lens mounted on a tripod on a dolly was pitch side and used for interviewing captains before the game. Orr-Ewing reflected that the camera 'was quite useless for following the play' but could be 'useful for getting a front view of the crowd' and it was considered unlikely the RFU would allow such a lower positioned camera during an international, as newsreel cameras had previously been denied.<sup>2</sup> A second camera was housed in one of the 'boats' in the upper west stand, but produced images that were deemed 'quite untransmittable'. This left a third, and final camera placed at a central position, 37 feet up from the pitch, to give a perfect view of play. The Super Emitron camera with a four-inch lens became the only camera functioning after three minutes of the broadcast and was operated by a novice cameraman. Left to his own devices, without a communication link to the producer in the scanner, the new cameraman was prone to pulling the lens focus too far, meaning the camera was only in focus 10 % of the time. The broadcast was so poor, it nearly brought a broader suspension of television outside broadcasts from sport, with Maurice Gorham, Director of Television, commenting that such mistakes could cause lasting damage to the future project of television.<sup>3</sup>

Gorham suggested a similar occurrence would mean a rethink on OBs themselves and their viability. Camera positioning continued to be a vexed issue at Twickenham: there were real constraints on the cameras ability to show the whole of the pitch due to the proximity of the commentary box and scoreboard in the upper tier of the stand, which prevented full panning to one corner flag, and the vertical constraints further affected the ability of the BBC to cover the play. Commentators were asked to realise the cameras could not pan quickly to follow the game, especially when the ball was kicked down field, so a 'word picture' should fill the gap for the viewer. During the coverage of England v The Rest in January 1947, the main camera broke down not long into the broadcast and although the second camera worked well, its restricted position meant it missed a try scored to the nearside corner of the field.<sup>4</sup> Modifications were made to the siting of the commentary box and the Twickenham scoreboard to

enable a second Super Emitron camera to be installed.<sup>5</sup> The BBC also experimented with placing a camera in the north stand looking straight along the pitch, thereby negating the need for panning shots, but providing a narrow, one-sided perspective of the play. The experiment was soon dispensed with.

The BBC requested other concessions designed to help viewers follow the game. The standard colour of a rugby ball during the period was brown leather, which did not show up well on camera. Cooper therefore agreed to introduce 'a new ball of the very lightest possible colour' in order to aid the cameras to pick it up. Requests were also made for teams with similar colour shirts to change kit, or at the very least wear different colour shorts.<sup>6</sup> In 1950, the BBC asked for the erection of large letters along the bottom of the east stand to aid viewers regarding the meaning of each line—G for goal line, H, for half way, 25 for the attacking quarter.<sup>7</sup> All these measures produced new interventions in sport for the purpose of television, and although none of them significantly altered the actual playing of the game, they did, nevertheless, represent changes in sport for the benefit of the broadcaster.

Innovations in commentary were slightly less productive, mainly because the BBC initially found it difficult to find a balance between rugby expertise and broadcasting know-how. Early attempts saw staff commentator Bob Dougall with journalist Dudley Vernon, who was viewed as having a working knowledge of the game but was dismissed by Orr-Ewing, who explained the BBC were looking for an 'expert' commentator, a person who has been playing until very recently and therefore knows the weaknesses and strength of the majority of people taking part.<sup>8</sup> In the same month, the BBC tested six commentators during a game between Harlequins and Oxford University on 16th November 1946. Orr-Ewing's view on rugby commentary was that 'A television commentary on rugger has to be very much more full than the normal television commentary but it is not necessary to describe the happenings'.<sup>9</sup> Other commentators were thrown into the mix. Kenneth Best was trialled during coverage of England versus The Rest in November 1947: he tended to talk too much and too fast, and his enthusiasm deflected from his lack of knowledge. 'Best kept getting the sides muddled, the players muddled and making grossly inaccurate statements,' reported Orr-Ewing, 'he said the Rest had scored a try when we could see that England were coming out for a 25 drop-out.'<sup>10</sup> Another sports journalist, Ian Hamilton, was used for a London Counties XV game against an Australian XV in an experiment

using two commentators located in different parts of the stadium. Situated in the north stand, alongside the camera looking straight down the pitch, Hamilton kept repeating 'Anything can happen now', and was summarily ditched. More encouraging was the trial of Michael Henderson (then with the European Service), who was tested in the second half, and was said to have a 'nice voice, quick grasp of what was required and a good knowledge of the game.' Simon Vaughan later reported in Henderson's obituary that the commentator recalled:

'I went to Twickenham where I happened to know there was a match being televised. I went up to have a look at the scanner (mobile television control van) and happened to notice the cameraman taking shots of pictures of the teams,' said Michael, who pointed out to the producer that two of the players in the photograph were not in fact playing. At half-time he was given the opportunity to listen to the commentator through 'cans' (earphones) and, 'being a young naïve man', told the producer he could do a better job.<sup>11</sup>

The identification of the players was the key to providing a coherent and fuller commentary, which was made all the more difficult by a lack of coherence in shirt numbering and player positions. Union clubs had become used to their official match day programmes being pirated and so began to publish inconsistent numbering. In 1951, producer-commentator Michael Henderson tried to persuade the rugby authorities to introduce numbering consistent with a certain place on the field, but recognised the reasons why the practice of confusion had been introduced. 'As you know,' Henderson wrote to one viewer, 'at all big football matches, both rugger and soccer, programme touts sell unofficial programmes outside the ground at prices much higher than for the official one.'<sup>12</sup>

From 1948 onwards, rugby commentaries were shared between Michael Henderson, Rex Alston, Robert Hudson, E.W. Swanton and Peter West. Alston was a BBC staff commentator, who joined radio outside broadcasting during the war following a career as a schoolmaster at Bedford School. Educated at Trent College where he played rugby (like the famed Prince Obelesky), he then studied at Cambridge University where he gained a blue in athletics, racing against Harold Abrahams in 1923. He became one of the BBC's most trusted commentators in radio and television. Robert Hudson had served in the Royal Artillery in Malaya during the war and had joined the BBC in 1946, having successfully completed a test alongside cricket commentator John Arlott. Like Henderson, his role as

a commentator on rugby, cricket and royal occasions would go hand in hand with an administrative career in the BBC, later becoming BBC Head of Radio Outside Broadcasts in 1969, where he amalgamated both news and outside broadcasting from sport. Both Swanton and West have previously been discussed in Chap. 5. All of these commentators also worked in radio, and also commentated on cricket. The BBC's rugby commentary team therefore reflected the broader English middle-class bonds that characterised the social formations of both rugby and cricket during the period, and arguably gave them an air of added authority as knowledgeable experts on these sports.

As the occasional producer of rugby coverage, Henderson considered Robert Hudson to be a very effective broadcaster, but tended to talk too much, still in 'sound' commentary mode. When both worked together on the England versus Wales international in January 1950, the broadcast went so well that the Controller of Television, Norman Collins, sent praise to de Lotbinière for the best commentary on rugby thus far. Collins also noted the Director-General, Haley, added his commendations, but 'draws attention to one point, namely, that the mechanics of the scrum are still unintelligible to the uninitiated'.<sup>13</sup>

Producer Anthony Craxton was less impressed with Hudson, describing his commentaries on rugby to de Lotbinière as 'flat' and 'unenthusiastic'.<sup>14</sup> Craxton, preferring West and Henderson, wrote to Hudson in January 1952 with some key pointers on his technique. Suggesting his commentary was not 'attuned to the tempo and excitement of the match', he urged Hudson to 'reflect in the tone of your voice the crowd's reaction which it is not always possible to transmit in vision or sound.'<sup>15</sup> West had previously been thought inferior to Hudson but by 1951 was firmly favoured by Craxton as the BBC's principal rugby union commentator. Craxton and West were also working together on cricket during the summer, but West thought the needs of the two sports were considerably different: cricket was more 'measured' and enabled 'tactical' analysis, whereas rugby union was swift and required the commentator to forego the general picture for following the ball.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, West advocated the use of a third summariser to provide the bigger picture, and although dismissed at the time, it would be a technique tried later in the 1950s. In his production of rugby, Craxton began to use more narrow focused close-ups of play to capture the close-in action of scrums, mauls and tackling, which were more informative to viewers. In his report on the coverage of England v Wales in 1951, he defended his decision as assisting

those viewers with a nine-inch screen. Much like the coverage of cricket, which required expertise in the sport to fully complement expertise in broadcasting, the technical detail of rugby union required producers who understood how the game was played, at the same time appreciating how to transmit the technical details and excitement of play to the audience. Understanding the desire to get closer and learn more about the players, Craxton made arrangements for post-match interviews to be conducted outside the changing rooms, which started with the annual Varsity match between Oxford and Cambridge universities in 1951. The experiment was considered very successful, not least because cameras also captured an interview with Australian international rugby star Bob Stuart. Flash interviews are now commonplace in televised sport, but here was an early example of an understanding that viewers were interested to hear from players immediately after a contest, to learn of their perspective of the game, and to form their own opinions.

The coverage of England v Wales in December 1951 brought a new development in the BBC's approach to sport and accommodated fears that television had an effect on attendances. At the behest of the RFU, the BBC experimented with the use of a 'telefilm'—a telerecording—of the match to be shown in full later in the evening. It enabled rugby fans to watch their local club and see the day's major international match. However, this potential influence of television on club rugby would dictate the terms and conditions of the BBC's dealings with the home unions for the best part of the next two decades.

### FEES AND REGIONAL 'BLANKETS'

As the BBC tried to develop their coverage of rugby union, there was a sense of frustration at the lack of reliability of what was a fundamentally amateur-run sport. For example, on one occasion, the BBC had been told there would not be team photographs taken prior to the match: however, this is precisely what happened. It led Orr-Ewing to conclude: 'It seems quite impossible to get concrete and accurate information at amateur run sports.'<sup>17</sup> In 1947 and 1948, the facility fee for matches at Twickenham remained minimal—25 guineas for internationals and 15 guineas for other matches. By 1950–51, the fee for England v Scotland had grown to 100 guineas, and by 1954, the fee for international matches was £200.<sup>18</sup> As Twickenham pushed for £100 for the annual Varsity match, de Lotbinière pushed back to suggest the BBC's coffers were not 'bottomless'.<sup>19</sup> Rugby

union had a relatively select audience, but the quality of coverage was highly regarded by its supporters. An audience research report for coverage of *Harlequins v Coventry*, transmitted on 27th October 1951, revealed the match received one of the smallest recorded for a rugby match with 42 % of families in the BBC panel tuning in compared to an average of 56 %. Although relatively low, the reaction index was 71, slightly below the average of 75 for the previous nine rugby broadcasts, but above the general average for sports broadcasts of 69.<sup>20</sup> Rugby was highly enjoyable for a select group of its followers, and this fuelled the fears among the Unions that their core followers would desert attendance for viewing televised rugby.

The club attendance fears manifested themselves differently across the four home unions. The English and to a certain extent the Irish unions were open to BBC broadcasts, whereas the Welsh and most of all the Scots were trenchantly opposed. The 1951 telerecording experiment became a favoured mode of coverage for the unions, as it avoided the clash with club games but enabled viewers to watch rugby. De Lotbinière reported on the use of telerecordings in terms of their value to the BBC and to rugby union in terms of encouraging players and spectators to go to matches, relying on the certainty of seeing the big match on television later in the day.

The main issue for the BBC was that telerecording was expensive (£3 to £5 per minute), took a lot of editing and did not provide the same live experience. A challenge for edited highlights was how to maintain the suspense of the game. In 1954, Peter West received criticism for announcing the final score when introducing the telerecording—in time, the withholding of the final result prior to edited highlights would become the custom, so as not to upset viewers who were tuning in unaware of the score. In June 1954, the BBC transmitted a recording of the England v New Zealand match, five months after the game had been played, and West noted that his previous mistake of announcing the result had ‘spoiled people’s pleasure’. So when the telerecording of the New Zealand game went on air he announced:

Well, I can’t really believe that there are people who still don’t know the result of Saturday’s fine match, but for those of you who want to play this game the hard way close your eyes while I show a card giving the score at the end. Are they all closed? Right. Here we are. All right, now open up again and just let me set the scene.<sup>21</sup>

Although delivered with some irony, West's jape would later develop in to a standard BBC code of warning to audiences who did not want to know the score of recorded sports highlights.

In April 1954, the BBC planned to televise a schoolboy rugby match on the same day as a Scotland international. The RFU asked the BBC to contact the Scottish Rugby Union (SRU) to get permission to televise the match in case it interfered with their attendance. This was a new significant turn in the governance of televised matches and the SRU provided evidence for its guarded approach. During the coverage of the Calcutta Cup match in 1954, one club reported its income had been reduced to a meagre £5. John Law, secretary of the SRU, was a Glaswegian lawyer and benign administrator of rugby in Scotland, which was dominated by the demands of his committee. The SRU was conservative in most of its actions, which meant Murrayfield's decision-making followed the edict of 'Say no, then think about it'.<sup>22</sup> The first television transmissions from Murrayfield had not been rugby but the City of Edinburgh Highland Games in 1952. In 1953, BBC Scotland opted out of screening cricket to show a programme called 'The State of Scotland' from Murrayfield stadium and it was not until February 1954 that live coverage of Scotland against New Zealand was televised, followed by telerecording on the Monday after the Saturday game. Where Twickenham was accommodating and yielded to the needs of television—building a new box to accommodate both cameras and commentators—Murrayfield was intransigent and suspicious.

Meetings between the BBC, the Scottish Broadcasting Council and the SRU discussed the pressing issue of the impact of television on Scottish club rugby, and the SRU's initial request was for matches to be telerecorded and transmitted on the Monday following a major international. At a meeting in the George Hotel, Edinburgh, in September 1955, a more hard-line approach to television emerged. The SRU raised the possibility that when an England match was televised from Twickenham, the BBC in Scotland should transmit alternative programming to appease fears that the live coverage would affect the gates of club rugby. The 'blanketing' out of coverage in Scotland verged on censorship. Blanketing also had the added adversity of affecting the Divis transmitter in Northern Ireland, which took a secondary signal from Kirk O'Shotts in Scotland. Television, according to the SRU, 'imposed so many difficulties on established customs', by which it was meant the amateur traditions of club rugby. The union in Scotland therefore called for a dialogue with the BBC to ensure



‘the public would feel that everything reasonable was being done both to fulfil the BBC’s responsibility and to preserve the prestige of the game.’<sup>23</sup>

Upholding the ideals and established traditions of rugby union was therefore as important as any financial remuneration from television. Such beliefs were absolutely apparent in the home union’s attitude to commercial television following its launch in 1955. A core principle of the unions was their vehement stance against any deals with commercial television. As an amateur sport, the collusion with an advertising-led industry was viewed with deep suspicion. Craxton, among others, played on the BBC’s public remit and established reach, to secure the BBC exclusive coverage of the sport. The BBC was the established public broadcaster, whereas the ITV networks were brash, commercially driven, untested and with a fractured television service. Why would a principled sport such as rugby union have anything to do with them?

In December 1955, representatives of the four home unions met to effectively form what would become known as the Four Home Unions Television Committee, chaired by Eddie Kirwan of the De La Salle Palmerston Football Club and president of the International Rugby Football Board based in Dublin. The Committee agreed that three internationals could be exclusively televised live by the BBC for a fee of £600 per match, the only caveat being that England’s game against Wales would be ‘blanketed’ to viewers in Scotland. Blanketing Scotland adversely affected viewers in Northern Ireland, much to the annoyance of the BBC’s Head of Programmes in Belfast, Harry McMullan, who had met an Irish Rugby Union official in Dublin a couple of months earlier and learnt of ‘a considerable awakening of interest in television in the Irish Union.’<sup>24</sup>

The regional issue began to create some internal tension in the BBC regarding responsibilities, principles of subsidiarity and the technicalities of opt-outs. Desmond Hawkins, Head of Programmes in Bristol, which fed the south west of England, was particularly perturbed by references to the ‘blanketing’ of rugby in Wales through control of the Wenvoe transmitter. Hawkins noted: ‘It is a matter of great consequence to the West region to have it stressed at every opportunity that there is nowhere in the BBC a switch labelled ‘Wales’ which, when pulled, plunges the Welsh people into television darkness.’<sup>25</sup> The Wenvoe transmitter fed transmissions to North Hessary, which in turn fed the BBC’s television signal to Devon and Cornwall, so any rugby negotiation that promised ‘except Wales’ was not in practice so straight forward and affected the viewing of a much wider catchment area. The rugby negotiations with the home

nations therefore created a number of technical and management issues for the Controller of Television, who ultimately had control of subsidiarity in television scheduling across the BBC's network.

In 1955 and 1956, the BBC had the opportunity to take a Eurovision transmission of rugby from Paris but on both occasions had to withdraw interest due to a lack of permission from the Welsh or Scottish unions. Nevertheless, the BBC persevered with the idea that all rugby internationals could potentially be televised, including filmed coverage of matches played in Dublin. The BBC's position in terms of negotiations remained strong because of the support of the English rugby union and its exclusive contract, which effectively kept ITV out in the cold. However, relations remained sensitive, and there were constant comparisons to be made between the televised coverage of rugby in comparison to other major sports. On one occasion in 1956, a letter from the BBC's finance office including a £5 5s 0d cheque for the facility fee for a club match between Middlesex and Lancashire accidentally included a letter to Sir Stanley Rous at the Football Association with a cheque for £150 to televise three FA Cup matches. Prentice called Dimmock in a rage, wanting to know why there was such a huge difference in fees. On another occasion, Bill Ramsey, secretary of the RFU, wrote to Dimmock to ask if the BBC could 'spare a crumb of space from the orgy of cricket' to mention the touring side from New Zealand. Rugby was the sport of the Commonwealth, Ramsey argued, but cricket received all the 'ballyhoo'.<sup>26</sup> Dimmock was able to mollify such complaints, but negligence and neglect of rugby union in comparison to other sports alerted its administrators to the fact that television was selling them short.

A new, two-season deal for four internationals plus highlights of club union matches was agreed in July 1956 worth £7,600 per year with an option for a third year at £8,000. Crucially the deal included the transmission of Eurovision games from France, as well as sharing games via Eurovision including to Rai in Italy, and coverage would be free from transmitter restrictions, with the exception of an opt-out for the Scotland v Ireland game, which took place on the same date as the England v France match (labelled as 'doubletons').<sup>27</sup> The BBC's exclusivity ban on commercial televising of rugby also remained. Similar deals were renewed in 1959 to 1961 for £11,000 for five internationals, two on the same day with Scottish opt-out, and again from 1961 to 1964 in a three-year contract worth £39,500.<sup>28</sup> The escalating fees reflected the continuing exclusivity contract for international matches in the context of mounting

competition from ITV, as well as coverage of autumn internationals, which had previously been denied to television cameras.

Bill Ramsey had been integral to persuading the other unions that television was a positive development for the sport, but during negotiations in 1958, the unions had heavily criticised *Sportsview* for inflaming controversy around the sport. The accusations related to episodes of fighting breaking out during coverage of a county final in *Sportsview*. On another occasion, when foul play by the Australians had been highlighted, Prentice barred the Australian manager from appearing on the programme and Fox cheekily screened an empty chair in the studio for *Sportsview* viewers. When the Controller of Programmes, Kenneth Adam, met Ramsey for lunch in 1959, the BBC executive was unprepared for the hostile reception such antics precipitated. A major bone of contention from the RFU was the lack of promotion the sport received from the BBC, in particular within *Sportsview*. Ramsey believed the BBC were failing to account for the grassroots popularity of rugby union, alerting Adam to the fact that the number of clubs affiliated to the RFU had doubled throughout the 1950s, and in terms of prestige, BBC television had allowed the celebration of Twickenham's Jubilee—a combined match between England and Wales against Scotland and Ireland—to pass without any mention. Adam sympathised with Ramsey's view and warned Dimmock against complacency: 'We must not, I think, forget that because we are the only people who do rugby football at all, we are thought of with interest and indeed some affection by the rugby playing public.'<sup>29</sup> Again, the criticism rankled with Fox, who had experienced consistent denials when trying to arrange rugby-related action features in the studio. Dimmock reiterated the general sentiment of the rugby union fraternity to television, which was 'ultra conservative', 'autocratic' and demanding, without giving very much in return.<sup>30</sup>

A further concern was the threat to club rugby caused by other televised sport, especially on the new Saturday afternoon programme *Grandstand*. Rugby union officials in Wales feared the success of *Grandstand* as an enticement for households to stay indoors during a cold winter day and that the programme was also popularising its professional northern rival, rugby league.<sup>31</sup> The hope was that the prominent exposure and popularisation of rugby league would in turn persuade rugby union that Saturday afternoon matches were worthy of consideration. Exposure of union on Saturday afternoons did change. By 1960, the BBC had already begun to use film reports of the British Lions and English touring sides in

*Grandstand*, and in February 1960, an audience of six million viewers had watched England v Ireland on the programme.<sup>32</sup>

The issues of promoting the sport, the arrival of television in the Republic of Ireland, renewed interest in rugby by ITV and rumours of a new pay-TV service provided the context for the renewal of the BBC's rugby union contract in 1965. The BBC offered a significantly inflated £60,000 for a three-year deal.<sup>33</sup> As part of the deal, the BBC promised to launch a new programme dedicated to highlights of rugby union on BBC Two called *Rugby Special*. Produced by Alan Mouncer, the 45-minute programme, launched in January 1966, provided a weekly series of rugby union highlights early on Saturday evenings, taking up the place of *Match of the Day* that had since moved to BBC One. Although filmed club rugby had been featured on the Saturday evening highlights programme *Sports Special* presented by Kenneth Wolstenholme, *Rugby Special* regularised the screening of rugby union for the first time, albeit to a niche audience. The programme was invariably directed by an up-and-coming producer of outside broadcasts Dewi Griffiths. After national service working on radar in the RAF, Griffiths joined the BBC's Welsh Home Service as a technician in 1954 and went on to work in sports programming as a camera operator and sound recordist. In 1962, with former Welsh rugby international Cliff Morgan, he established the sports department of BBC Wales and went on to produce every rugby international at Cardiff Arms Park for 29 years. The regular presenter of *Rugby Special* was Keith Macklin, who for most of his broadcasting career was more synonymous for working with Eddie Waring on rugby league but had become a regular face of sport on BBC Two, presenting a short-lived programme *Sport of the Day*, launched in 1965. From the mid-1960s onward, BBC Two became rugby union's televisual home, formed mainly, as the unions had always preferred, on recorded highlights with only *Grandstand* accommodating live action from major internationals.

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'VOICE OF RUGBY UNION'

Throughout the late-1950s and early-1960s, on top of the regional headaches of which games could appear in which regions, with the related demands of opt-outs and subsidiarity in outside broadcasts from rugby union, an additional dimension related to commentary also emerged. West, Swanton, Hudson and Henderson were all from similar social backgrounds, and were variants on the received pronunciation so redolent

across the BBC's services. The home counties, cut-glass accent of all these commentators chimed well with the middle-class amateur ethos of the sport in England, but was not representative of the social groups associated with rugby in the Scottish Borders or Welsh mining villages. The emergence of regional accents in rugby union commentary was therefore something of a rare intersection into the broadcasting norm. However, both Scots and Welsh accents would, at the same time, carry some authenticity among rugby union followers, as they were representative of rugby union's historical hotbeds and culture. In radio, regional voices in rugby commentaries had become a standard feature of coverage from 1947, when G.V. Wynne Jones shared commentary with Rex Alston from Cardiff Arms Park.<sup>34</sup> In 1955, Dimmock had written to the agent Teddy Somerfield, who looked after the affairs of both West and Henderson, to let him know that during regional rugby internationals, the two of them would not be booked together. Dimmock did not feel he could dictate to the regions which commentators they should take, 'as this might result in an up and coming commentator losing an opportunity to show his merit'.<sup>35</sup> In 1957, Hudson had moved to radio and Henderson concentrated on tennis, golf and athletics from 1959 after eleven years of commentating on rugby union. Only West remained of the original BBC television commentary line-up from earlier in the decade and the way was open for new voices to emerge from the other home nations.

In 1955 and 1956, BBC Wales initially turned to the popular radio voice of G. V. Wynne-Jones for the tour matches against the Romanians and Italians in Cardiff. In 1958, the BBC turned to him for the network coverage of Wales v Australia with Peter West, but he does not seem to have been used again. Another Welsh voice, the former Welsh international Cliff Morgan was introduced as an interplay summariser alongside Peter West. Using a former international player to provide commentary on rugby was a new departure, but it followed a principle of Craxton's that a suitably intelligent person with knowledge of sport could in time be turned into a commentator.

Another commentary talent that would become synonymous with the sport was emerging in Scotland, a physical education teacher and journalist who grew up in the Scottish border town of Hawick that was steeped in rugby union and whose rugby career as a 'tearaway flanker' was cut short by tuberculosis. Bill McLaren had been a second lieutenant in the Royal Artillery and, after the war, supplemented a career in teaching with work on the *Hawick Express*.

McLaren was steeped in Scottish rugby history. His mother's cousin had played for Sutherland and was regarded as one of the great Scottish wings. His father regularly took him to games and explained what was going on, and as a boy he was fascinated by the detail and facts of rugby, keeping newspaper match reports in a scrapbook. He also listened attentively to radio running commentaries by the likes of H.B.T. Wakelam. 'I used to spend hours impersonating the rugby commentators of the day doing my own commentaries on my own matches,' he reminisced. 'It was great preparation for doing commentaries in real life, so to speak.'<sup>36</sup> His background in rugby union was immensely important to his future career:

The fact that I came from a rugby town. Hawick is renowned for its rugby players and its rugby reputation and that, in its own way, helped me greatly to become a rugby commentator. Because in a town like Hawick, you had to know your rugby and be able to talk to people about rugby, and by God they didn't half tell you if you got things wrong.<sup>37</sup>

As a freelance journalist, John Hood, the local editor, was a key influence on McLaren's knowledge and training in sports reporting. Hood was a meticulous sub-editor, scoring out unnecessary lines, a lesson in the economy of words McLaren took with him into broadcasting. Hood, the BBC's main contact in the Borders, encouraged McLaren to go for his first audition with BBC Scotland and its main producer of outside broadcasts, Peter Thompson. This included a second-half practice commentary on a district game in Glasgow alongside the established Scottish rugby commentator Jock Wemys. Wemys was an international himself, in a great tradition of Border forwards, who was capped seven times for Scotland between 1914 and 1922. His rich, warm border voice and pervasive enthusiasm for the game made him an ideal role model of McLaren as he entered radio commentary in 1953. As McLaren recalled:

I benefitted greatly from my friendship with Jock, because I learnt so much about the game from him. He'd been an internationalist and became a journalist and he had a depth of knowledge about the game and the characters in the game.<sup>38</sup>

In his autobiography, McLaren recalls the apprehension and stress he felt during these early auditions: 'My hands were shaking' he recalled. 'I was a nervous wreck'.<sup>39</sup> However, the anxiety of public performance on the radio

became part of a ritualised aspect of commentary preparation: ‘It was to give me an edge, that nervousness, throughout my career’.<sup>40</sup> Thompson was key to McLaren’s development as BBC Scotland’s main rugby correspondent and ultimately commentator. Thompson was matter of fact and, according to McLaren, ‘just laid it on the mark and that’s how he felt about things’. His principled decisiveness and no-nonsense approach clearly appealed to and inspired the young McLaren, who soaked up every bit of instruction and feedback he could to develop his broadcasting career.

McLaren’s earliest assignments for the BBC were short match reports for either the Home Service or Light Programme in Scotland but from 1956 to 1958, he would provide eye-witness accounts and summaries of the day’s rugby for BBC Scotland’s Saturday teatime sports programmes *Talking Sport* or *Sport in Scotland*, later known as *Today’s Sport*. Each week, McLaren would provide a report of a key Scottish rugby union match from Studio 3 in Queen Margaret Drive, Glasgow. For a freelance rugby correspondent, the BBC paid well: an 8 guineas fee plus expenses,<sup>41</sup> which made all the travel from Hawick worthwhile:

I was going through to the BBC every Saturday. I was refereeing a schools game in the morning, dashing home, showering, changing, getting on my TV suit, jumping out in the car up to Glasgow. Week after week after week. And thought nothing of it. When I look back on it now I think ‘what the hell was I doing?’ But in those days that’s just how it was done and you just got on with it.<sup>42</sup>

His contributions to live television news summaries in Scotland became a staple form of income, especially after being placed on a long-term contract. His commitment to developing a career in broadcasting while maintaining a full-time teaching career, helping to raise a family and support youth rugby union in Hawick was a remarkable feat. Occasionally, his reports would be telephoned from Edinburgh to Thompson in Glasgow. Following the launch of *Sportsreel*, which included filmed highlights of Scottish sport, McLaren had to dub commentaries onto film, which was often completed close to transmission. McLaren regularly arrived home in the early hours of the morning and on one occasion missed the last train home to Hawick and needed overnight accommodation.<sup>43</sup>

By 1959, McLaren had insisted he travel first, having picked up a tip from the BBC stalwart commentator Rex Alston. He admired and worked with Alston, who, according to McLaren, was concerned about

the programme rather than himself, which was all focused on the BBC and its reputation. 'He gave me an appreciation of how important the BBC was,' McLaren explained, 'and played a very big part in my development as a commentator.'<sup>44</sup> McLaren saw the BBC as an upholder of particular moral values, and to be part of the great public institution he viewed as both a privilege as well as a 'sheer delight'.

Perhaps the most inspirational lesson from within the BBC did not come from another rugby or even sports commentator, but from the most celebrated broadcaster of the era, Richard Dimbleby. McLaren interviewed Dimbleby for the local paper when he visited Hawick to present an episode of *Down Your Way*. Entering his hotel room, McLaren was surprised to see papers strewn across the room, which he soon learnt were full of Dimbleby's 'homework' for the programme. Tutored in the de Lotbinière tradition of outside broadcasting, Dimbleby prepared for every broadcast by making copious notes on whatever subject matter he was due to present, distilling the information on to a final 'crib sheet', which he would have in front of the microphone. As McLaren explained, this inspired the development of his own 'crib sheets', now famously associated with his rugby commentaries:

Working with Dimbleby I realised how much detail was essential to make a commentary come alive and to be able to provide the kind of atmosphere in the commentary would encourage people to enjoy what they were seeing before them. It was really just a question of homework. My commentary style was basically on homework. On starting on the Monday night, getting the teams sorted out, what teams were playing on the Saturday and into the match, then getting as much of that detail about the players, the teams, on the referee and the touch judges and all the rest of it and that grand history to the game. Getting all that in to one double-foolscap sheet and that was what I used to spend hours poring over the information on the sheets before Saturday's match.<sup>45</sup>

McLaren worked tirelessly to gather information for each commentary, drawing on a range of sources. He attended rugby referee society meetings, spent hours reading the rugby union law book over and over and attended international training sessions to familiarise himself with players and their ways. Access to such rugby environs, a strictly amateur sport, was a genuine privilege for a professional journalist or broadcaster: 'Nobody had ever done it before,' noted McLaren, 'because rugby union was taboo



to people outside it.<sup>46</sup> By the end of the week, McLaren's crib sheet would be crammed full of information and detail to prompt, qualify and embroider his running commentary. As he explained:

I could tell you how many children the referee had. I suppose some people look upon the information I had was overdone. But I liked to have something about everybody that was liable to come in to the commentary in some way or another just in case I needed a little filler.<sup>47</sup>

In order to ensure his identification of players was correct, McLaren used a device innovated by horse racing commentators such as Raymond Glendenning and Peter O'Sullivan, who identified horses by the jockey's colours. McLaren memorised the names and numbers on the team sheet, testing himself using numbered cards.

I had my own cards numbered one to fifteen. I just used to shuffle those every day of the week. I would shuffle those cards and turn them over. At the beginning, Monday – Tuesday, I was very slow at putting names to numbers, but come that Friday night I was beginning to put the names to numbers with speed. Like the change of identification that I would have to do during the game. So that when the kick-off came you could put any three cards in front of me and I could tell you who they were. That, I suppose, was the most valuable aid that I ever had to use.<sup>48</sup>

Although the BBC initially used two commentators for rugby union internationals, McLaren much preferred to do a commentary on his own, happy to go to the commentary box, sit down, do the commentary, sum up and push off. BBC producers eventually came round to his thinking, realising he was much more comfortable building his commentary narrative on his own. In the 1980s, former players would be brought in to the commentary box as summarisers but for nearly 20 years, McLaren preferred to work solo behind the microphone, which may be why he became so synonymous with the televised game and earned the epithet the 'voice of rugby'.

McLaren's voice had a distinctive 'Border's burr' and the flow and cadence of his delivery was so mellifluous that it was more akin to a radio commentary than a conventional television commentary on sport. This was partly because rugby was full of incident and complexity requiring explanation for the viewer. 'I realised early on in doing commentary that there are a hell of a lot of people don't know a thing about rugby football...

I soon realised I had an obligation to take on, to understand the game, because rugby is a very complicated affair.<sup>49</sup> McLaren expressed what he saw and how he felt at that instant, but because of his exemplary preparations was able to drop in broader contextual information with impeccable accuracy and timing. 'I was always aware of the occasion, and the effect of that occasion on thousands and thousands of devotees of the game', he recalled, 'I suppose because of that I had a real desire to get it right, to do it well.'<sup>50</sup> Over time, McLaren became part of the cultural fabric of rugby union from his beloved home in Hawick to the sport's international stage. Values of comradeship, mutual respect, discipline and enjoyment were promoted within rugby union and were imbued in McLaren's own feelings about the sport:

Rugby union has been very fortunate, not only in the quality of people playing the game, but in administering as well. There's some very solid citizens that have been responsible for the direction that rugby union has taken... rugby union is a very great spectacle when it is played in the right way and right spirit.<sup>51</sup>

McLaren's trusted approach and dedication to the sport of rugby union helped solidify the BBC's place as the naturalised home for televised rugby. Throughout the 1960s, rugby union would begin to receive the level of coverage its grassroots popularity merited. In Wales, the appointment of Cliff Morgan as Sports Organiser from January 1961 boosted the profile of rugby union on television, and helped smooth the way for wining and dining rugby union executives in order to keep them onside with the BBC. Club rugby soon became a feature of Saturday afternoons in Wales, unbilled so as to protect gates. The committee appreciated that BBC Wales and Cliff Morgan in particular were doing much 'to propagate rugby in Wales through both broadcasting mediums.'<sup>52</sup> Rugby union coverage remained rooted to its core devotees in the mining villages of Wales, the Borders of Scotland and the home counties of England. There also remained a sense of class distinction in the middle-class references to 'rugger' by broadcasters in London, whereas rugby union was the dominant form of 'football' in McLaren's Border towns. However, at international level, rugby union received broader recognition and appeal on *Grandstand* where McLaren, and occasionally Morgan, delivered some of the most memorable lines in the history of British televised sport.

## NOTES

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## Negotiating the Grand National

Horse racing became a staple of BBC television sport coverage: it was regularly available in both winter and summer; it filled hours of the schedule and was cheap to produce; it had broad appeal to either racing aficionados or the casual viewer; and it linked to gambling, which was a popular entertainment in and of itself. After football, racing remains the most televised sport in Britain. Racing had its characters and compelling narratives, but for most people, each race was instantly forgettable, with another race and another bet on the horizon. Betting on horses was an established part of male popular culture by the interwar years. When combined with actual spectatorship, horse racing, according to Mike Huggins, was arguably the most popular sport of the period.<sup>1</sup>

Horse racing had its own popular media, which informed a dedicated racing public with detailed information on race meetings, results, the form of horses and breeding. Publications like *Sporting Life* were for aficionados of the sport, from both within the racing world and regular punters. The centrality of gambling to sustain the industry of owners, breeders, trainers, jockeys, racetracks and even racing journalists was accepted as a given. The Press Association was the central source of information to the national press, who, by the 1930s, were employing their own sports journalists to cover racing and provide ‘tips’ to their readers. As Huggins notes: ‘The popular press of the interwar years opened up racing and its affairs to wider public view and understanding, hugely increasing and sensationalising its coverage, a point already alarming to anti-betting campaigners.’<sup>2</sup>

Unlike many sports, horse racing rarely drew on notions of identity for its appeal, with limited exceptions such as Irish stables or romantic stories of exceptional horses from particular stables. More discursive stories, the soft news of racing, mainly focused on human-interest stories and were mainly reserved for the major national races, such as Royal Ascot, the Derby, the Oaks, the St Leger and the Grand National. The popular appeal of the sport, mainly for punters, contrasted with a popular characterisation of racing as ‘The Sport of Kings’, run by wealthy aristocrats with royal patronage. Racing was hugely popular but overtly associated with wealthy patronage, which created a paradoxical tension in the sport and influenced popular perceptions of racing *per se*.

In 1926, the BBC made its first tentative and inauspicious experiments in running commentaries from horse racing, and in 1927 had gained access to cover the Grand National on radio for the very first time. Again, as Huggins suggests, the coverage helped broaden recognition of racing’s cultural importance, and thus began a long historical association between the sport and public service broadcasting. Both the Derby and the Grand National became woven into a sporting calendar of events, and made betting on horse racing more respectable. The association with gambling did not sit comfortably with the BBC, who forbade the broadcast of starting prices or mention of ‘the favourites’. The radio coverage of horse racing, especially the major meetings such as Aintree, was important for fashioning the idea that racing mattered to a broader audience than simply those in the Tattershall rings, and that coverage of racing mattered to the BBC.

Post-war running commentaries on racing were heavily associated with the distinctive voice of Raymond Glendenning. Radio had developed a co-commentary practice of having the main commentator supported by a ‘race reader’, who would aid the identification and provide contextual information on their behalf. The issue of identifying horses was a major challenge, not just for radio commentators, but for television commentary too.

Television had experimented with covering racing from the Derby at Epsom in 1937, but it was not until after the war that television outside broadcasts became more seriously considered. The appointment of Peter Dimmock in 1948 was significant for the BBC’s coverage of horse racing. Dimmock’s brush with horse racing and his previous experience as a racing correspondent for the Press Association meant that the BBC always sought opportunities to cover races from courses within reach of the OB network. Alexandra Park, a stone’s throw from Alexandra Palace,

was frequently used for racing coverage in the immediate post-war period. In the late-1940s, racing featured prominently from the track, which was nicknamed the 'Frying Pan' because of its shape, and it continued to be used for BBC television coverage until its demise in the 1970s. Kempton Park, in Sunbury-on-Thames, also featured heavily. Racing featured so regularly that in autumn 1950, John Bretton of *Television Weekly* noted that 'Racing enthusiasts this week certainly cannot complain that their interests have not been looked after. In fact, it might almost be true to say that they are being looked after too well'. Viewers would ultimately decide whether or not racing would be popular, but Bretton argued: 'There is no doubt about it. When once the Outside Broadcast boys decide in favour of a certain sport, they go to town on it.'<sup>3</sup> By June 1951, within five years of his first appearance behind the microphone, Dimmock had given his 200th racing commentary. The occasion was marked by the *London Evening Standard*, which remarked that Dimmock's landmark commentary would come at Ascot, where he had conducted his first commentary back in 1946. The article also showed Dimmock in formal top hat and tails, with the headline 'What the well-dressed BBC man will wear.'<sup>4</sup> His sartorial style, always immaculately turned out and set off by his 'RAF moustache', made him instantly recognisable to viewers.

Coverage of horse racing was immeasurably enhanced by the innovation of the 'Roving Eye' camera in 1954. The Roving Eye was a new vehicle equipped with a television camera, very high frequency (VHF) sound and vision transmitters, and a built-in power unit. The unit was devised for use in bringing topical outside events to viewers. The van had a transmitting radius of two miles and the camera could be operated when the vehicle was in motion or stationary. It enabled the BBC to innovate the tracking shot for horse racing coverage, and as long as a racing track had a suitable road on the inside of the rails, the Roving Eye van could keep up with the leading pack of horses and provide steady, dynamic images of the horses in action.

### 'MA' TOPHAM AND NEGOTIATING THE 'NATIONAL'

The national hunt race, The Grand National at Aintree, was first officially run in 1839 and grew into one of the most popular racing events on the calendar. Usually run in March, the National became world famous for having the largest field, over the largest fences, on the four-and-a-half mile course. The Aintree race meeting was immensely popular. During

the interwar years, cheap race-day excursions on special trains became an established route to Liverpool and part and parcel of the whole racing experience.<sup>5</sup> Hotels, especially the Adelphi in Liverpool, were booked up months in advance and the racegoers were drawn from a wide spectrum of society. After the war, newsreels trailed the National by labelling it 'The Greatest Steeplechase', and new, innovative camera positions and slow-motion cameras were used to capture the horses as they landed or fell over the most well-known fences such as Becher's Brook, Valentine's and the Canal Turn. In 1947, prime minister Clement Attlee requested the race be run on a Saturday 'in the interests of British industry' and the Saturday race made the event even more accessible to the working class. In 1949, Aintree was bought by the Topham family for a quarter of a million pounds, and so began a decade of protracted and what might have seemed tortuous negotiation by the BBC to televise the Grand National.

In 1949, the Controller of Television, Norman Collins, raised the prospect of television covering the Grand National. Peter Dimmock had found that the BBC could buy film rights to the event at £1,000, but this was viewed as being too great for the BBC's purse. In 1950, de Lotbinière summarised his dealings with Aintree's managing director, the indomitable Mirabel Topham. He told Collins that he had not had much luck, that Topham was dead set against television for fear of affecting attendance at Aintree for the one-off event, and having offered £500 for the facility fee, he had been told: 'Add a nought to that and even then I don't think my directors (which is in fact herself) would agree'.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, BBC engineers were prepared to make preparations for coverage from Aintree, which required pushing the General Post Office to advance the Birmingham to Holme Moss cable link planned for spring 1951. The gamble would be worth the scoop, wrote R. T. B. Wynn, Assistant Chief Engineer, to Collins, but if it was not subsequently used, 'my name would be worse than what you find at the bottom of stagnant pools!'<sup>7</sup> The exchange reflected the perceived importance of the race to BBC Television, their desire to make it happen and the understanding that they were totally beholden to the whims of the Tophams.

With discussion on television copyright between members of the APCS in full flight, the attitude of many sports administrators towards the BBC hardened in the early 1950s. De Lotbinière, in his capacity as head of radio OBs (in tandem with his responsibility for television), was invited by Mirabel 'Ma' Topham to watch the 1951 National, but when a group of television engineers arrived to carry out reconnaissance of Aintree, the



bailiff who admitted them to the course was threatened with the sack.<sup>8</sup> The BBC had won the battleground on radio coverage on the National prior to the war, but this was now being jeopardised by complacency perhaps born of familiarity. Topham, and other racecourse owners, were concerned about the public relay of commentaries at competing meetings where the Tote and on-course bets were being made on Aintree races from other parts of the country. In the 1950s, there was an ongoing political debate about the prospect of off-course betting shops being legalised (which actually did not happen until after the 1960 Betting and Gaming Act), all of which added further concerns among racecourse owners that attendances at race meetings could be adversely affected by broadcasting. The issue of public relays became the key point of contention for radio coverage of the 1952 Grand National, and Topham's stance on preventing public broadcast was 'no guarantee, no broadcast!' This produced problems for the BBC, who had planned to broadcast their sound commentary of the Grand National on television using captions to illustrate the race. Furthermore, the BBC risked adding insult to injury by televising a national hunt meeting from Hurst Park in Surrey on the same day. De Lotbinière noted: 'She will claim that by carrying a sound commentary of the race and also showing racing at Hurst Park we are likely to do her damage.'<sup>9</sup> Relations between Topham and the BBC rapidly disintegrated after she appointed a company, Mercury Sound, to run the commentary and negotiate British and international rights to the Aintree meeting on her behalf. The BBC carried the broadcast, which was heavily criticised in the press for the level of incompetence and calamity. Topham had tried to recruit freelance commentators Peter O'Sullivan and Michael O'Hehir to help with the commentary, but out of loyalty to the BBC, they refused.<sup>10</sup> Instead, five new commentators, including racing correspondents Bob Butchers and Jack Topham, Marie Draper, who had previously broadcast on pony racing, and John Kirkpatrick, an employee of Aintree racecourse, produced, according to O'Hehir, a commentary 'marred by pauses, hesitations, contradictions, overlapping of voices and that most unprofessional of phrases "I can't see very well"'.<sup>11</sup> Butchers later reflected on how well he had done, considering he provided his commentary kneeling on a table without a racecard looking through a six-inch window at the horses running through mist and rain.<sup>12</sup> O'Sullivan also sympathised with the plight of the 1952 commentary team, but it proved a turning point in the faith and trust Topham could place in the BBC to provide professional and polished coverage of the Grand National.

Mistrust of television continued. With little effect, Peter Dimmock had offered Topham a loan of a BBC television set in November 1952 in order that she could ‘judge for herself how valuable they are for horse racing’.<sup>13</sup> Instead, Topham’s sold international film rights for the 1953 Grand National to the newsreel company Gaumont, who sought to sell the film to American television networks for £2,000. The BBC balked at a price of £2,000 for a film of the race, fearing it would create a precedent in rights fees for filmed sport.

The BBC tried another tack in 1954 and 1955 with tentative attempts to encourage Aintree to accept television cameras to motor racing or the autumn race meeting at Aintree. Dimmock visited Mirabelle Topham for tea in February 1955, and in a subsequent letter confirmed that during their three-hour meeting, he had sought to convince her ‘that “controlled” live television can be the greatest “shop window” and free publicity agent for all your events at Aintree’. Precisely what he meant by ‘controlled’ is not clear, but we must assume it meant there would be no rediffusion of live television pictures in cinemas and other public places. Dimmock relayed to Cecil McGivern, Controller of Television Services, a summary of his thoughts on his discussions with Topham, including a strategy for what the BBC might do next to win her over. Dimmock confirmed Topham was a ‘great showman’ and that the Grand National was ‘in a special class of its own’, but she did not appreciate the difference between filmed, live or telerecorded coverage, principally because she did not own a television set. However, Topham was keen to popularise her new venture of motor racing at Aintree. For Dimmock, this was ‘the weakest chink in her armour’.<sup>14</sup> He suggested the BBC offer £2,000 for a bundle of Aintree events that would include live coverage of the Grand Prix, the Sefton Race Meeting and the film of the Grand National, the rights to the latter split with the newsreel companies. Topham declined, but once more invited de Lotbinière to the Grand National as her guest, referring to him as ‘Lobby’ on the basis that she was now ‘a very old acquaintance’. Topham also asked if she could appear on the popular light entertainment quiz *What’s My Line?*, which hinted at the informal bonhomie that had grown between the two.

Another year passed and in January 1956 Dimmock proposed another new deal, this time worth £15,000 per annum for a three-year, non-exclusive contract with ITA to cover the entire Aintree meeting. It was a significant uplift in the BBC’s offer, and a new tactic in sharing the rights with the BBC’s rival. Topham countered that because the fee covered

the whole of the meeting, this diluted the price for the National by half (£7,500), and rights for telerecording and distribution via Eurovision were also bundled and required separate rates. Dimmock and Howard Thomas from ITA redrafted the offer to coverage of one day's racing including the Grand National for £20,000 per annum. The offer was leaked to the press, who reported the 'TV Pact' had offered more than £10,000 for the rights, which would have been a record fee for any television programme at the time.<sup>15</sup> Once more, Topham declined the offer because of her main concern that rediffusion in cinemas could undermine attendance at the race, and therefore her income. Both the BBC and ITA had made assurances they would police 'big screen' distribution, and fully promote the Grand National to their respective audiences. However, Topham concluded that pre-promotion would merely encourage 'the public to stay at home to see the race, or to see it in public places other than the race-course'.<sup>16</sup> Topham's contract for newsreel coverage with Gaumont British was renewed in 1957, and the film company guarded their good fortune by blocking any use of their films on television. Granada television did manage to shoot a news item on the Grand National fences prior to the 1957 event, but when Dimmock pressed for the principle that news access to major events could at least allow up to two minutes coverage of the National, the newsreel companies refused.

The first signs of breaking the stalemate came in 1957 when the offer of access to televise the Grand Prix d'Europe from Aintree was revisited. The BBC agreed a fee of £1,250 for coverage of the 1957 event with an option to renew for a further two years. Although the BBC's public announcement of the deal upset Topham for not mentioning her personal sanction of the contract, it was a significant breakthrough, and Dimmock admitted: 'Mrs Topham is a difficult women and we are lucky to have got our foot in the door with live television at Aintree albeit that our ultimate aim is four legs instead of wheels'.<sup>17</sup> 'Oh she was a bird', recalled Dimmock, 'She was incredible to deal with. She was impossible.' Indeed, at times the relationship became vindictive, Dimmock recalling: 'I got into stick because I asked Wally Barnes who was under contract with us not to play in a charity soccer match [organised by Tophams]. I was bloody stupid really.'<sup>18</sup>

The Grand Prix d'Europe in July 1957 produced a successful broadcast, with three visits to Aintree capturing the first British car, driven by Tony Brook and Stirling Moss, to win a race in the post-war period. Live cameras on the course provided further impetus to discuss the prospect of covering the Grand National, or at the very least allowing BBC film

cameras on to the course. Topham held that the BBC pockets would ‘not be deep enough to cut across our present contract’, which she had with the newsreel companies, and to protect their own interests, the newsreel companies once more declined to share the footage. Dimmock met Topham in London where a facility fee of £25,000 was discussed. The scale of the potential offer rang alarm bells among senior BBC management, with both Cecil McGivern and Kenneth Adam concerned the inflationary effect of a deal with Aintree would set a dangerous precedent for the Corporation (it was two-and-a-half times the fee paid for the FA Cup final broadcast). Dimmock even received an appeal from Howard Thomas at ABC Television requesting he relent from offering such a large amount, concerned at the ‘upward trend in payments for sporting events’.<sup>19</sup> The concerns of both BBC senior management and ITV companies who wanted to share coverage of the ‘national event’ effectively ended negotiations for 1958, and Dimmock sought to develop coverage of other Aintree events.

In October 1958, the BBC signed a deal worth £4,000 with Topham’s for their November race meeting, making a last-minute decision to drop its children’s programming ‘Watch With Mother’ in order to accommodate live racing in the afternoon. Denis Scuse, the BBC’s Television Planning Assistant, accepted the changes, understanding this was ‘a sprat to catch a mackerel’. The Sefton Meeting, in which the Grand National fences were used, provided BBC viewers the first live coverage from the course, and paved the way for future negotiations for the main event. Not all those in racing were happy with the public announcement of the deal. Brian Paxton-White, a member of the Racecourse Association, complained that the press coverage had suggested the deal with Aintree had been the ‘biggest ever paid by the BBC for such a programme’. Aintree was not a member of his Association, and news that ‘Mrs Topham has achieved what others have failed to do—that is demand and get big fees’, perturbed his members, who had bemoaned the ‘low and inadequate fees’ they had received from television.<sup>20</sup>

Topham felt live coverage had impacted on attendances at the meeting, but the BBC had broken her intransigence to live television. From May 1959, the BBC discussed in earnest the idea of offering Aintree a ‘global contract’ for certain fixed annual events from the course, which would include the Grand National. By bundling the rights to several race meetings and motor sport, the deal would provide a series of opportunities for

live outside broadcasts and offset what was likely to be the most expensive facility fee for the Grand National itself.

The denouement of the deal came in the summer of 1959 and provided a moment of personal jeopardy for Dimmock. In July, the BBC sent a draft contract for a three-year deal for coverage of all Aintree events, motor racing and horse racing, including the Grand National, for a global figure of £35,000. The National itself was valued at £25,000. Topham invited Dimmock to her holiday home on the Isle of Wight for the weekend where she wanted to run through a number of queries on the contract. For convenience, Dimmock hired a small aeroplane, which he flew to the Isle of Wight, taking along his 11-year old daughter for company. It had taken the best part of a decade of trying but finally Dimmock had finally landed one of the largest events in the sporting calendar for live television. ‘I think what happened in the end I wore her down,’ he recalled. ‘Because I’d gone on and on and on and then I went down to see her in the Isle of Wight, and talked to her and said, “Look, now come on you’ve simply got to do it.”’ The personal touch and Dimmock’s charm finally succeeded. With the deal sealed Dimmock returned to London, but immediately ran in to trouble as a smog descended and drastically reduced his visibility.

They said, ‘Right, we’ll take you over Windsor Castle.’ For nearly three hours I went round and round. And they said, ‘Well, we hoped to get you in to Gatwick, we’ve got the jets in but it’s too thick, we’ll take you by radar in to Biggin Hill.’ I think I told you I hadn’t done any instrument flying, let alone night flying, for yonks. God, I’ve never sweated so much. They were wonderful. There was a radar unit at Croydon and they took me in to Biggin Hill and I couldn’t see a thing. I saw the runway lights flashing under the wing, and I hit the runway and went up in the air, and I thought ‘Oh, what’s going to happen here?’ Nearly broke the undercarriage. Then we banged down again and the plane held together. It took them twenty minutes to find me. They came out in a little Austin Seven, funny little car that. They came up and couldn’t find me. The visibility was about twenty yards... My god, I could so easily have killed my daughter.

This remarkable story of Dimmock’s close escape with peril having sealed the deal with Mirabel Topham reveals the extraordinary lengths to which he went to ensure the Grand National could be televised. There was one further twist in the relationship. In March 1960, Dimmock married his second wife, BBC reporter and presenter Polly Elwes, who just happened to be the god-daughter of Mirabel Topham.

As a national event, the Grand National broadcast could not be licensed under an exclusive contract. However, Ron Rowson of ABC confirmed that ITV were not interested in taking a feed from the BBC's coverage, and that from this moment on would only seek exclusive contracts with sport. Dimmock replied to Rowson and concluded:

In view of our previous discussions I can well understand that you feel that there is really only one audience for major sports television and that there is little point in trying to divide it between us for events that of necessity command a large facilities fee in return for live rights.<sup>21</sup>

ITV's decision had effectively handed the BBC exclusive coverage from Aintree, although Rowson aired his concern that a 'package deal' with the Topham's ran against the agreed principle set out by the Postmaster General of non-exclusivity on national sporting events. The BBC would screen every Grand National for the next 54 years until the rights were bought by Channel Four from 2015.

### COVERING THE NATIONAL

One immediate issue the BBC faced was whether or not to provide the betting odds on the National. The BBC's Board of Governors had from the outset of televised racing insisted on a policy of not giving any betting information for fear of promoting immoral behaviour by its viewers. The principle of not supporting betting ran contrary to the public's behaviour around major racing events like the Grand National. By the late-1950s, there was a greater libertarianism towards gambling, which challenged the shadows of Victorian paternalism over the moral and financial concerns of working class people, which, in the words of editor and Conservative MP Bill Deedes, protected them from their 'own excesses and follies'. By the time the BBC were making plans to cover the National, Harold MacMillan's government was in the process of introducing the Betting and Gaming Act 1960 that would herald the introduction of licensed betting shops in the high street. For Dimmock, not to give the betting market odds prior to the race would 'seem really ridiculous'. Coverage of the Grand National, Dimmock argued, would provide the ideal timing to ask the Director-General to persuade the Board of Governors to change its policy. 'I dislike the bookmaker as much as anybody', Dimmock wrote, 'but nevertheless it seems to me that the viewer is entitled to know the

odds before each race purely on the grounds of normal information.<sup>22</sup> The prospect of betting shops being open and screening live televised coverage from Aintree did agitate Mirabel Topham, as she feared this would keep people away from the course: ‘Naturally we are worried about Television, which shown in a palatial Betting Establishment where you can have your Champagne luncheon and back your fancy, will prove most attractive!’<sup>23</sup> The scenario was a real threat, albeit most punters would not be enjoying a champagne lunch. Rather, as racing broadcaster John McCrick remembered when first betting on the National in 1961, high-street bookmakers were smoky masculine domains, which became animated and raucous during a classic race like the National:

I climbed the rickety wooden stairs to Jack Swift’s first-floor betting office in Dover Street, off Piccadilly and this tiny emporium was glorious bedlam, packed out with punters shouting their horses home. The place was filled with cigarette smoke but that day a breeze of fresh air wafted into the lives of British punters.<sup>24</sup>

The ability of punters to watch the racing on a television screen inside a betting shop, many preferring the nomenclature ‘Turf Accountants’ to reflect their new found respectability, was a real boon to racing more broadly, and arguably increased interest in racegoing than detract from it.

Dimmock was keen for the Aintree coverage to push the boundaries of both engineering and programme quality to produce the highest possible standards of racing coverage. Planning the coverage of the National raised a series of problems. First, the distance travelled by a large field of horses over some of the world’s largest fences made it especially difficult to capture what was happening for the viewer. Following the BBC’s coverage of the Sefton meeting in November 1959, Peter Webber of Television Outside Broadcasts in Manchester wrote to Dimmock with criticism of the quality of coverage. Nevertheless, Webber understood Dimmock had ‘scooped the kitty again’ in getting the Grand National for the BBC.<sup>25</sup>

The plan was to use as many cameras as possible, and after a reconnaissance visit by Dimmock and Northern producer Ray Lakeland, it was agreed the BBC would need three Mobile Control Rooms (MCRs) with a total of twelve cameras. One MCR would cover the parade ring, the start and the finish of the race. The other two would cover the twelve fences on the other side of the course. However, central to capturing the dynamic of the National was the BBC’s roving-eye camera, originally introduced

for use in outside broadcasts in 1954. The roving-eye enabled a television camera and accompanying sound to be carried unimpeded by cables. Based on the Karrier Bantam, a popular commercial vehicle of the 1950s, the van was built with a self-contained MCR with its own power source and microwave links to the nearest transmitter. It was heavily used for short inserts into *Sportsvision* and *Grandstand*, as well as factual programmes like *Panorama*. Tests were carried out using the roving-eye at race meetings at Cheltenham, Lincoln and the autumn meeting at Aintree itself, but because of its size, stewards at Aintree had complained the roving-eye obscured their view of the race on the far side of the course. Newspaper reports also claimed jockeys had complained the noise of the roving-eye as it tried to keep up had distracted the horses as they prepared to jump.<sup>26</sup> Producer Ray Lakeland requested permission to test a smaller vehicle for future races, and although early trials had been encouraging in terms of improving visibility for stewards, the chief problem was finding a vehicle strong enough to withstand the weight of a camera and operator on top of its roof. The answer had a sense of rebelliousness about it, as Alec Weeks remembered:

Ray Lakeland was the producer of the Grand National. The first one, 1960, won by Merryman. They were pioneering days. There was thing called the roving-eye. And the whole idea of the roving-eye was that you could broadcast whilst it travelled. But it travelled at fifteen miles-an-hour. The horses travelled at thirty-five miles-an-hour. And up there, the EIC, George Cook, he was also in charge of transport for the whole of the North Region. They had two Humber Sceptres, based in Manchester for when the D.G. or the Chairman came up. One of them, they lifted – I can't remember the correct name – but the base of the camera, they cut a huge hole in the Humber Sceptre, screwed this in – I mean mechanically it was done within a fraction of an inch – screwed, welded and fitted this in, and of course the Humber Sceptre now that could keep level with the leader. The point I'm making is, in those days, whatever you covered, you gambled. We pioneered. If you overspent a bit, or did things unusual, it was a pat on the back, never mind next time etc. That's what happened. Ray gambled. The buck stopped with Ray Lakeland. I looked after the cameras in the field, the Canal Turn after Becher's Brook. I looked after three or four cameras there. But the big thing was the roving-eye, and Ray got the permission to cut a hole in the Humber Sceptre on the Monday *after* the Grand National.<sup>27</sup>

Lakeland worked with engineer George Cook to create the first high-speed roving eye camera for the BBC. The Humber estate not only carried



a cameraman on the roof, sitting on a rotating cradle, but the car was also customised inside with the passenger seat reversed to enable an engineer to control the transmission from the car. Ray Lakeland would produce the Grand National for 15 years until 1975, later using a second, fast roving-eye built on a Citroen Safari estate car with a colour camera. On 26th March 1960, the Grand National was the main feature of *Grandstand* introduced by David Coleman live from Aintree.

The BBC's television coverage made the Grand National part of a broader national cultural tradition, ritualised and canonical in the British sporting calendar. Operating outside the culture of those who followed and bet on racing through the year, the National drew together a broad constituency of viewers, who perhaps took a small flutter, and were compelled by the drama of the event and the heroic deeds of the horses and riders. However, the broader exposure did, in time, also raise concerns from many who saw horse fatality and injury, which they strongly held as irresponsible cruelty to animals. Television would, therefore, expose people to the racing world, even provide them with a sense of its culture and language, but at the same time, raise concerns that racing was far from a benign sporting industry and was driven by greed and gambling, to the detriment of animal welfare. Regardless of the pros and cons espoused about the race, the Grand National grew and grew in popularity through the 1960s and 1970s: perhaps as 'Ma' Topham knew it would all along.

## NOTES

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18. Peter Dimmock interviewed by author, 2009.
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21. Rob Rowson to Peter Dimmock, 10 October 1959, BBC WAC T14/15/5.
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## Boxing on the Beeb

*Of all sports, I suppose boxing must be the most adaptable to the television screen. It meets the direct demand of the medium: the maximum action within the minimum space.*

*Harry Carpenter (1964)<sup>1</sup>*

### A SPORT MADE FOR TELEVISION?

Boxing is ideal for television. On a spatial level, the 20 × 20-foot boxing ring is, as Harry Carpenter noted in 1964, the perfect staging for a televised sporting event: small enough to fill the screen and large enough to accommodate rapid movement and dramatic action. Perhaps only snooker equalled boxing for the focused intensity of the camera on a controlled space of sporting competition. Depending on where cameras were positioned, there was limited need for panning shots, and indoor rings were well lit yet perfectly framed by the darkness of the crowd. Usually covered by at least three cameras, a television director could cut from long wide shot to frame the entire ring, to mid shot showing the boxers' torso, to more intimate close-ups to reveal the power, emotion and brutality of the event or the struggle to revive a boxer in his corner, thereby varying the image and engagement with the fight for the viewer. On a temporal level, the three-minute round and one-minute interval provided neatly packaged episodes for explosive action and drama. In 1950s America, the

interval proved a boon for advertisers, the most successful of which were Gillette razors who sponsored NBC's weekly Friday night *Cavalcade of Sport*, oft cited as a significant reason why American families purchased their first television set.<sup>2</sup> But the BBC, not driven by commerce, used the interval as an opportunity for reflection and analysis by the commentator and expert summariser, and arguably educated the British audience in the arts of pugilism in more detail because of it.

Although the presentation of boxing was ideal for television, the BBC's wider institutional context of suspicion against anything remotely commercial did not sit comfortably with the sport. Throughout the formative years of television, the BBC had a tightly regulated mix of programming premised on deep-seated public service values. Any whiff of commerce, gambling, advertising and self-promotion for financial gain was driven out of the organisation by tight internal regulations and a lingering legacy of Reithian ideals. Prizefighting, on the other hand, was principally about making money, a thorny truth that did not sit comfortably with some in the BBC hierarchy. Not only did the BBC dispute paying over the odds for the rights to televise events, there was a clear distrust of anything commercial. Professional boxing was driven by greed, entrepreneurship and avarice. Gambling had played a key role in the history of the sport and its associations with various forms of racketeering were part of the urban folklore that surrounded the sport.

Professional boxing also drew criticism as a sport, both in terms of the harm caused to participants and abhorrence in turning such brutality into a public spectacle. Deaths and serious injury captured on television have been rare, but the prospect of such extreme consequences haunts the sport and its relationship with the public. The social acceptance of boxing is, therefore, constantly being negotiated in wider popular culture. The anti-boxing lobby in America, which grew rapidly upon the death of George Flores at Madison Square Garden in August 1951, also spread to Britain in the 1950s, culminating in the publication of *The Ignoble Art* by feminist, physician and Labour politician Dr Edith Summerskill (later Baroness Summerskill) in 1956.<sup>3</sup> Summerskill lambasted promoters and sports journalists alike for glorifying and publicising the sport and ignoring the risks and dangers professional boxers faced every time they entered the ring. In the late-1950s, she lobbied tirelessly for the abolition of boxing lessons in school, which eventually happened in 1962. In a damning article on boxing, drawn from Summerskill's arguments of the time, journalist Trevor Philpott wrote: 'The armchair boxers, in their safe seats by

the ringside, the T.V. set, and the sporting columnists with their salacious and 'manly' descriptions, will still talk about skill and courage, even when the slaughter is most disgusting and most insane'.<sup>4</sup> Such strong sentiments may have been shared by some in the BBC, but never surfaced in public and, from the written archives, did not appear to be represented in either the radio or television outside broadcast departments.

Throughout the middle of the twentieth century, boxing remained incredibly popular and the media played a significant role in this regard. During the interwar period, the boom in fight promotions, supported by the press, newsreel and radio commentaries, made boxing one of the largest working-class spectator sports in the country.<sup>5</sup> It had been no coincidence that Baird had used boxing as a subject matter to help promote his innovations in television. The sport had mass appeal in the interwar period and was a staple diet of cinema newsreels. Neither was it surprising that boxing promoters would turn to broadcasting, especially television, to market major boxing events and capitalise on the sports' popularity with audiences. Knowledge of precisely why professional boxing gained such popularity in the UK during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s is unclear. Boxing was an intense, combative spectacle. It was also full of intriguing characters with fascinating personal narratives, many imported by the media from the boxing scene in the USA. Boxing stars, such as Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano and Sugar Ray Robinson from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, were lionised by journalists, writers, broadcasters and film-makers to garner popular interest, principally among working-class men. Two world wars may also have created a general benign public attitude to boxing, although the cultural influence of military conflict on violent sports such as boxing are by no means clear. The sport in Britain had also gained some respectability through the work of organisations like the British Boxing Board of Control (BBBofC), formed in 1929, and the European Boxing Union, formed in 1948. But the murkier side of how boxing talent was managed and the wheeling and dealing of promoters who set up events and matched up boxers, sometimes regardless of their abilities or physical fitness, helped sustain suspicions that the sport was poorly administered and driven exclusively by profit.

The history of the BBC and boxing is, therefore, riddled with the tension between balancing the interests of its own institutional practices of commercial restraint, and a desire to build an audience based on the popularity of professional boxing, which was heavily influenced and controlled by private promoters and motivated by commercial interests. The tension

would shape BBC coverage of boxing immediately after the Second World War, the celebrated televising of the Boon versus Danahar fight in 1939 (see Chap. 2), ever-present in the minds of promoters, the governing body and the BBC.

### THE BBC, THE BRITISH BOXING BOARD OF CONTROL AND FIGHT PROMOTERS

In the immediate post-war period, the explosion of professional boxing on American television was not immediately paralleled in Britain. Championship prizefights were rare occurrences. The principal reason for the dearth of professional boxing was a dispute over access. The British Boxing Board of Control were weary of the impact television could have on attendance, and were in league with other governing bodies as part of the APCS. The administrators of British boxing perhaps listened to the complaints from leading boxing journalists across the Atlantic that television was becoming overly commercialised and the live audience, even at boxing venues like Madison Square Garden, were ‘severely diminished’ on their pre-war days.<sup>6</sup>

In the UK, from 1945 to the mid-1950s, boxing enjoyed a halcyon period of popularity. Well aware of the fact, the BBC sought to cover boxing as frequently as possible, but as early as October 1946, the British Boxing Board of Control had announced to the press an outright ban on the televising of professional boxing. The decision curtailed the BBC’s deal with promoter Jack Solomons to televise the middleweight title fight between Ernie Roderick and Vince Hawkins at the Albert Hall on 28th October 1946. The decision was symptomatic of the general malaise created by governing bodies over the televising of sport during the period, but had the added complication of a private third party to consider, the promoter. As a rule, Solomons would only allow cameras if his promotion was a sell-out, and on this occasion it was. However, any arrangement to televise a professional bout had to be sanctioned by the BBBofC, regardless of whether or not a deal had been struck with the BBC. Promoters worked under license from the BBBofC, and on the whole were free to run their own bills with little interference from the Board. But agreements with television had the potential to impact on other events, particularly if they were rediffused in cinemas. ‘Without the ‘small promotions’ the sport of boxing would gradually die’, wrote the Chairman of the BBBofC, J. Onslow Fane.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Council claimed to have monitored the impact of big fight broadcasts (mainly radio) on small

venues and came to the conclusion that their research into gate receipts provided convincing proof that broadcasting affected smaller promoters of boxing.<sup>8</sup> The evidence was never publicly published, but the Stewards of the Board were convinced of their efficacy. The main point being made in this exchange, however, was the Board's insistence on controlling the relationship between professional boxing and television. It was a position that had wider jurisdictional and commercial ramifications.

The Board were considered by some to be an unelected group of noblemen and Army officers who were out of touch with the commercial reality of boxing in the immediate post-war age. Sports columnist, John Batson, was one of a number of journalists who questioned the authority of the BBBofC to govern the sport, in particular the decision to 'prevent a show being broadcast or televised if the promoter concerned has agreed to terms with the BBC'.<sup>9</sup> The complaint of interference in the business of the sport echoed the view of promoters, some of whom no doubt in private primed Batson's truculent public criticism of the self-appointed regulator of boxing in Britain. In the minutes of a conversation between Solomons and the BBC's first post-war Director of Television, Maurice Gorham, the promoter pronounced he would not accept BBBofC control in his business dealings with the BBC.<sup>10</sup>

Solomons was a formidable character. Orr-Ewing's assessment of him in March 1947 was that 'he is a hard-headed business man to whom it is difficult to appeal'.<sup>11</sup> From the late 1930s to the early 1960s, he had a hegemonic grip over the promotion of major championship prizefighting in Britain. As a boxing promoter, he was the sporting impresario extraordinaire. His image matched his promotional bravura, always seen with a giant Cuban cigar in hand. The television sports director Alec Weeks, himself a boxer as a young man in the RAF, remembered just how widespread the appeal of boxing was during this period and the importance of Solomons in its promotion. Recalling the place of boxing in the post-war sports boom, Weeks wrote: 'from 1945 all the big sporting events had been pulling gigantic crowds: soccer, athletics, speedway, dog and horse racing, but none more so than a big fight night—and they didn't come any bigger than the Jack Solomons Promotion at Harringay Arena'.<sup>12</sup> In business, Solomons was the man who opened up opportunities for British and other European boxers to fight the dominant force of American boxers in the immediate post-war era. Between 1945 and 1948, Solomons worked exhaustively to broker deals with a number of American boxers and their managers to travel to the UK. More crucially, he had come to terms with

Mike Jacobs, the promoter for Madison Square Garden, who had built his own reputation and vice-like grip on American Championship boxing in the 1930s and 40s on the back of World Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis. In the post-war era, the transformation in the fortunes of American boxing was primarily due to television, which brought live fights into the home, showcased new heroes and stars of the ring, and gradually generated more income for promoters, boxers and their managers. Kasia Boddy has argued boxing made a gradual transformation to a form of mass entertainment with each new technological innovation. This process not only transformed its consumption, but also ‘the supply and control of boxers and fights’.<sup>13</sup> As television became the focus of the American boxing world, so the role of the promoter became more and more important, and the potential riches involved greater and greater.

RCA in America had introduced the ‘image orthicon’ cameras, which were superior and far more stable than pre-war cameras. Sammons suggests ‘the resultant picture equalled the view from a seat approximately thirty feet from the ring’.<sup>14</sup> Although most American fans remained reliant on radio commentaries of major fights, many flocked in increasing numbers to bars that had invested in a television set, becoming the communal focus for watching live coverage of boxing. The symbiotic relationship between television and the business of boxing grew from strength to strength: the buzz created by coverage of prizefighting helped to sell sets, and also raised the commercial stakes of boxing’s value to the new medium. In America, television rights to championship fights in the early 1950s were being bought for sums between \$50,000 and \$100,000. Compared to the UK, where the BBC held a monopoly and facility fees for domestic boxing remained relatively small (from as low as £200 to £2,000 for an hour’s boxing), the American fight scene was incredibly lucrative. The extensive coverage of live boxing made household names of leading fighters, such as Jersey Joe Walcott, Rocky Marciano and Sugar Ray Robinson, and some of this fame travelled across the Atlantic in to the British media and on to boxing fans.

According to Sammons, the boon to boxing delivered by television was a significant reason for New York’s organised criminals to infiltrate the International Boxing Club and dominate the sport in the first decade after the war.<sup>15</sup> The new economy of prizefighting was increasingly top heavy. As Harry Carpenter noted, the ‘inevitable result was that only the most important fights in America attracted any sort of paying crowd’.<sup>16</sup> Stories that television was harming the provincial boxing scene in America were



harmful to the BBC's claims that television helped promote the sport to the wider public. Between 1946 and 1950, the BBC made several unsuccessful attempts to televise professional boxing. A number of major fights involving the British heavyweight champion, Bruce Woodcock, were discussed, including bouts against American Joe Baksi, Freddie Mills, Lee Oma and another American, Lee Savold. The BBBofC refused the request to televise from the promoter Solomons on every occasion. Other promoters such as the National Sporting Club, which reformed in 1947 and ran regular professional boxing nights every Monday, as well as major fights at the Empress Hall, were also thwarted in their dealings with the BBC, who had hoped to negotiate a deal worth 1,400 guineas for a full season of regular transmissions of minor professional fights.<sup>17</sup> Approaches to televise boxing were also frustrated by the landlords of some of boxing's major venues. In November 1948, Orr-Ewing had agreed a fee of £350 with Solomons to televise the fight between Ernie Roderick and Henry Hall for the British welterweight title at Harringay Arena. But the landlords of Harringay were the Greyhound Racing Association, whose president Frank Gentle had a clause forbidding their tenants to permit television without their consent. The GRA refused permission. Gentle and other landlords like Elvin at Wembley were leading the APCS's push for copyright 'in the spectacle' and this ran contrary to their cause.

Throughout this period, the BBC turned to amateur events to meet what they perceived to be a significant demand for televised boxing among its developing audience. The ABA was only too willing to showcase their sport, and the BBC began to receive favourable reports from viewers. 'I would much prefer seeing one amateur match', wrote one viewer, 'to half a dozen professional fights.'<sup>18</sup> Orr-Ewing presented the viewers' letters to Solomons as evidence of the appeal of boxing in general, noting 'there is something in this professional boxing!'<sup>19</sup>

The dispute over televised boxing was widely known in the sport and not all those from the wider world of British boxing adhered to the ruling of the BBBofC. Some promoters approached the BBC with promises of televised boxing outside the auspices of the principal controlling body. Although the OB managers were always courteous in their response to such approaches, in private BBC producers often viewed such promoters with suspicion. On one occasion, Dimmock attended an event organised by promoter Jimmy Roberts, who bogusly associated himself with a rival authority, the British Boxing Association. Dimmock agreed with boxing journalist Peter Wilson's summation that the promotion represented

nothing more than ‘all-in wrestling with boxing gloves’.<sup>20</sup> He agreed with Orr-Ewing’s sentiment that the public ‘lap up this type of boxing’ but did not feel the BBC should associate itself with unofficial bouts.<sup>21</sup> It was not only the quality of boxing that concerned Dimmock, but the potential harm such coverage might cause to a settlement with the BBBofC.

Early in 1948, the BBC and the BBBofC did at least enter into a dialogue to try to ease the impasse that had emerged over television. Under de Lotbinière’s direction, and with the support of Norman Collins, the BBC had successfully negotiated live coverage of boxing on BBC radio, and a concerted effort was made to try to assure the BBBofC that television was simply an extension of the BBC’s interest in the sport. After lengthy discussion in February 1948, it was agreed that the BBC could televise one big professional fight as a test to see if the gates of smaller promotions were affected. The problem with this arrangement was finding a suitable fight to test the BBBofC’s assertion of influence, and also a promoter willing to go along with the scheme. Orr-Ewing visited Solomons and Sam Burns at their gymnasium in Piccadilly to discuss the idea of a trial, and got short shrift from a resentful promoter who argued: ‘The BBBofC have given permission for five big and ten small sound broadcasts and one big television broadcast, now let them provide you with the fights because I know of no promoter who will’.<sup>22</sup> In spite of his contempt for the Board’s approach to television, Solomons and other promoters, such as Claude Langdon at the Empress Hall, Earls Court, agreed fees with the BBC for a number of bouts but none of them were deemed suitable under the BBBofC’s scheme to test television’s impact on attendance. In February 1949, a fight involving middleweight champion Dick Turpin was agreed for Earls Court. The BBC had gone as far as drafting a billing for the *Radio Times*, proudly announcing that mobile television cameras were to be at a professional contest, but the Board dragged its heels, failed to discuss the matter at its next meeting and therefore railroaded any chance of the Earls Court promoters giving access to BBC cameras. The whole episode was fraught with delaying tactics and obfuscation on the part of the governing body.

Time elapsed and some eight months later Collins wrote to the chairman, Fane, to ask if there had been any development in the Board’s attitude towards the televising of professional boxing? By 1949, de Lotbinière had taken control of TV OBs, and a meeting in December 1949 involving de Lotbinière, Collins and the BBBofC committee made headway to agree coverage of a minor promotion that would avoid any clash between

top promoters like Solomons and Earls Court. De Lotbinière observed: ‘Donmall is a strange customer, but I am more hopeful than not that we shall be able to get something fixed up for January or February.’<sup>23</sup> The BBC’s first screening of a professional fight after the war took place at the Empress Hall, Earls Court on 7th February 1950. The bout, a middleweight contest between Albert Finch from Croydon and the black American fighter Baby Day, was promoted by David Braitman and R. Sassoon Ezra. The BBC did everything in its power to prevent prior notice of the transmission reaching the public before its listing in the appropriate *Radio Times*, although there were some initial fears that Braitman would pull the deal due to slow ticket sales. The BBC paid Braitman a £200 facility fee. In return they received complimentary tickets for BBC senior management, Norman Collins and Cecil McGivern, to sit ringside with the manager of the Empress Hall, Claude Langdon.<sup>24</sup> It would be an ‘auspicious occasion’, wrote Collins<sup>25</sup>, a sentiment echoed by the Alexandra Palace announcer prior to the fight, who introduced the broadcast noting, ‘We have taken you many times to the Empress Hall to see a variety of shows, and tonight at 9 O’clock we are going there again for a very special occasion—to televise a professional boxing contest for the first time since television restarted after the war.’<sup>26</sup> The BBC contracted Peter Wilson of the *Sunday Pictorial* and former boxer, and later writer and broadcaster, Tony Van den Bergh to conduct the commentary. It was important for the broadcast to impress the BBBofC, and according to the producer Keith Rogers ‘the programme went very smoothly’; the images were clear and the lighting good. Wilson’s commentary was considered to be ‘good’, but Van den Bergh gave his commentary ‘as if he were reading it from hurriedly made notes’.<sup>27</sup>

De Lotbinière had lunch with new secretary of the Board, Teddy Waltham, and the possibility of extending the experiment was discussed. Waltham and Fane did not feel the Finch fight had revealed very much about the impact of television, and insisted that the BBC spread their broadcasts amongst different promoters. The next televised event came from the Embassy Sportsdrome in Birmingham, the BBC’s first outside broadcast of any kind from the West Midlands, and included the light heavyweight contest between the Welsh champion, Dennis Powell, and American Mel Brown. The promoter Alex Griffiths was enthusiastic about television, but revealed to Dimmock a certain nervousness about agreeing to the £250 BBC contract, not least because Solomons had tried to put him off allowing television cameras.

Dimmock reported that once again the production had gone well. There were early signs of the management of the spectacle by television: the BBC had introduced spotlights to track the boxers to the ring and the PA system played a music recording, cued by the BBC producer. Wilson was used as the main commentator, and even interviewed the winner Brown immediately after the fight, although Dimmock thought he asked the wrong questions and let the fighter's manager do most of the talking. McGivern was more impressed, believing the close-ups of the first-class fight to be 'one of those occasions which reminded one forcibly of the excitement and wonder of Television'.<sup>28</sup> He had mixed feelings about the commentary, and criticised summariser Freddie Mills who 'did practically everything that was wrong', but somehow 'still managed to retain an individuality and a freshness which I found enjoyable'.<sup>29</sup> McGivern suggested keeping Mills as a summariser, but giving him 'an intensive course' by taking him along to OBs and talking to him about 'the art of commentary'.<sup>30</sup> Despite BBBofC reports of a disappointing gate, Griffiths conceded it was some of the best television he had seen. A viewer wrote to Peter Wilson to applaud the broadcast, which had encouraged his friends to go and buy TV sets. 'This, in my opinion' wrote the viewer, 'was the most lifelike and remarkable TV of my experience.'<sup>31</sup>

In November 1950, the BBC had another opportunity: the BBBofC approved coverage of the fight between Roy Ankara and Tony Lombard from the Empress Hall, again promoted by Braitman and Ezra. Initially, the promoters asked the BBC to show two fights split between the London and Sutton Coldfield transmitters—arguably an early attempt to regionalise television broadcasts from sport, the purpose for such blackouts being to reduce the impact on regional gates. Although the BBC declined, it represented a desire for promoters to control how, and to whom, boxing was broadcast. Braitman and Ezra even went so far as to script a post-fight interview with themselves. The fight also saw the introduction of Eamonn Andrews to the coverage of professional boxing, Dimmock's programme review recording that Andrews had done a good job but had an inclination to be 'effusive'.<sup>32</sup> Andrews had perhaps enjoyed the fight too much. The broadcast was marred by a loss of transmission from the Empress Hall, compounded by a dispute in the previous bout where two boxers refused to leave the ring, delaying the Ankara v Lombard fight, and threatening the BBC's running order.

Nevertheless, by 1951, the BBC began to find confidence in their style of boxing coverage and audiences reacted favourably to most of its

innovations. BBC audience research revealed an above-average viewer rating of 81 for the nine amateur and professional boxing transmissions between 1950 and 1951, and 86 % of viewers gave boxing coverage an A or A+ rating.<sup>33</sup> During coverage of a fight from the Hoxton Baths in February 1951, Dimmock introduced the idea of superimposing round and time captions, achieved by mixing images of the fight with those of a purpose built clock and caption board. In between rounds, the BBC also introduced a composite shot of both boxers in their respective corners. Cecil McGivern wrote to de Lotbinière in praise of the round and time captions and asked whose idea this was? De Lotbinière noted it was Dimmock who had picked up the idea on a visit to the United States. The only problem: one of the hands from the clock fell off during transmission! Other innovations from the USA, especially the use of the image orthicon cameras, first used during a boxing match at the Leyton Baths, transformed the quality of televised fights. Where the old CPS Emitron cameras sometimes made the distinction of boxers quite difficult due to a lack of contrast, the new cameras gave crystal clear images.

The Monday night transmission from Leyton Baths in March 1951 was so successful that it had a detrimental effect on negotiations with the BBBoFC. Waltham rang Dimmock to say that the returns of other small promotions on the same evening had been poor. Internally, the BBC held their nerve that television was actually helping to promote boxing 'on a long terms basis' rather than detract audiences from the sport.<sup>34</sup> Small promoters needed all the help they could get, not least because of the impact of the Government's Entertainment Tax on boxing, which took one third of the gate receipts, and dramatically hit the profit margins of smaller venues. Increasingly throughout the 1950s, the public demanded big fights and drifted away from the smaller venues and promotions. For the BBC, the answer for small promoters was to present more boxing on television, not less. But the decline in local talent was more endemic, and promoters turned to international fighters to generate interest and excitement, which usually consisted of an American against a Brit, such as the World Middleweight Championship bout between Sugar Ray Robinson and Randolph Turpin in London in 1951. Robinson's promoter had arranged a seven-fight tour of Europe, and arrived in England in a blaze of publicity and showmanship, including a bright pink Cadillac, following an exhibition bout in Italy. The fight was promoted by Solomons at Wembley Arena, to a capacity crowd of 18,000 spectators. In a shock result, Turpin masterminded a piece of strategic brilliance to outscore the American,

dazed by what had happened. The fight was covered live on radio, with commentary by Raymond Glendenning and Barrington Dalby on the BBC's Light Programme. A film of the fight was subsequently shown on BBC Television the following evening. Controversy reigned when television viewers claimed the radio commentary had favoured Robinson over the British boxing hero, and the press took the opportunity to condemn the BBC's radio coverage. To quell the public outcry, the BBC took the unprecedented step of rebroadcasting the live commentary three days after the fight in order that listeners could make a second judgement of the broadcast.<sup>35</sup>

### AGENTS AND COMPETITION

Boxing promoters loom large over the sport of boxing, and most have strong opinions about fighters, matchups and their value to television and 'the punters'. Solomons was no exception. According to ITV's long-time boxing commentator, Reg Gutteridge, Solomons was 'a born show-off'.<sup>36</sup> From the mid-1950s and through to the 1960s, the competition between promoters, particularly Solomons and Harry Levene, became increasingly pronounced as the potential benefits of television rights and exposure flourished. Their grip on the sport was so great that the BBC were approached with the suggestion that they promote their own fight night to circumnavigate the Solomons/Levene hegemony of the sport, thereby avoiding the travails and costs associated with dealing with promoters, and schedule fight nights on Saturday nights, a day traditionally eschewed by promoters as it clashed with the public's appetite for football and greyhound racing. De Lotbinière remained cautious of such ideas, not least because it would muddy relations with the BBBofC.

Like Solomons, Levene had grown up in the East End of London and had worked for Labour politician George Lansbury. In the 1920s, he lived in New York, and worked for the *New York Times*, as well as managing Cockney fighter Danny Frush.<sup>37</sup> In 1953, he became a promoter, including the fights of Jack Kidd Berg, and became the first promoter to challenge the monopolistic fiefdom of Solomons in championship title fights. Although the pair had been on friendly terms as young men, a dispute over Solomons's fishmonger business became the catalyst for decades of rivalry and genuine hatred. He would later earn the nickname 'The Merchant of Menace', and as his obituary in *The Times* noted: 'He could be colourful, explosive or modestly charming to those

who ventured into his office, as the mood took him. He was seldom without a cigar, though it never usurped the famous nose in the public imagination.<sup>38</sup>

Solomons's near monopoly on major prizefights in Britain ironically began to wane as the BBC's own monopoly on television disappeared with the competition of ITV. According to Gutteridge, 'TV helped to topple Solomons'.<sup>39</sup> Although he had initially tried to encourage the BBBofC to allow television transmissions, he was less in favour of live coverage, preferring delayed filmed coverage, with 24-hour embargoes as with the Turpin and Sugar Ray Robinson fight in 1951. In 1954, his business took a further hit with the closure of Harringay Arena, the venue for many of his promotions.

In 1955, Solomons had signed an exclusive deal with the two new ITV franchises, Associated Rediffusion and Associated Broadcasting Company, to be their boxing consultant and basically bring his fight promotions to the new commercial channel. On ITV's opening night, Solomons had a primetime slot with live coverage of the Southern Area Middleweight Championship between Terence Murphy and Lew Lazaar from Shoreditch Town Hall. The BBC's former controller of television, Norman Collins, lay behind the deal, and the BBC's former boxing producer Keith Rogers directed the programme, with commentary from former heavyweight Len Harvey, and another former BBC employee, Tony Van der Bergh.

Solomons also developed an idea for a television series showcasing films of famous fights from the history of boxing. Film cameraman and producer Ronnie Noble went along to view some of the films and report back to Dimmock. But as time passed without response from the BBC, Solomons lost patience and sent a stropic letter to *Sportsview* editor Paul Fox regarding the lack of speed in making a decision on his 'film idea'. He argued he knew who to deal with in radio (Angus McKay of *Sports Report*), but when it came to TV, he was unsure if it was Fox, Dimmock, Oaten or even McGivern he was dealing with.<sup>40</sup> Dimmock wrote a lengthy reply, arguing it was clear he was dealing with Fox and that any decision rested on a firm figure for the fees to the films requested, which were owned by Associated Rediffusion. In the event, after much prevarication, Solomons's idea was rejected by AR and ATV, who owned the rights to the films. Dimmock later argued Solomons had been using the BBC as a lever to get the series produced by ITV, which they eventually did under the name *Ringside*, presented by former BBC radio boxing commentator, the Canadian Stewart McPherson.

Going to boxing became a broader entertainment experience. Although professional fighters came from working class backgrounds, a significant proportion of the boxing audience for arenas such as Earls Court, Wembley and Haringay was middle class, celebrities or Britain's nouveau riche, and the tradition of formal black tie dress codes added to the ambience of glitz and glamour associated with championship prizefighting. Carpenter recalls:

Jack Solomons was a brilliant showman. A big Derby-eye fight night out of doors at the White City called for ringside evening dress and women smothered in fur and diamonds. In case the customers got bored waiting for the boxing to start, Joe Loss and his band entertained them from the ring.<sup>41</sup>

Solomons's allegiance with ITV opened the door for Levene to collaborate with the BBC, and from 1956, the majority of the BBC's coverage of professional boxing invariably had something to do with Levene and his associates, Mickey Duff, renowned for his matchmaking skills, and Jarvis Astaire, who had a flair for managing talent and introducing wider entertainment business opportunities. Solomons traded off BBC and ITV bids for his promotions. In January 1957, Oaten circulated a memorandum detailing the loss of fights to ITV and his concern that the BBC had not taken the competition seriously enough. Boxing did produce large audiences. 'If we really want professional boxing', Oaten remarked, 'we must be prepared to bid in proportion to other events which have lower viewing values but at present command higher fees.'<sup>42</sup> Rivalry and competition for coverage of the most lucrative professional fights intensified as what many called the 'golden age' of boxing faded, as a new, more commercial, global and satellite-driven era of television emerged.

### THE 1960S AND THE ERA OF THE TELEVISUAL BOXER

In an age in which the professional athlete has melted into the faceless television mob that attempts to satisfy our insatiable appetite for entertainment, there can be little question that Cassius Clay is the most controversial sports figure of the last twenty years. With his mouth and ability, he has managed to direct the attention of an uninterested public toward a sport suffering through the last painful stages of rigor mortis.<sup>43</sup>

Jack Olsen



As the new decade of the 1960s began, the BBC increasingly focused on the heavyweight division, dominated by a new crop of African-American fighters: Sonny Liston, Floyd Patterson and Cassius Clay. In December 1961, the BBC covered a special World Heavyweight Boxing Fiesta from Wembley. On the bill in separate fights were world champion Patterson, former champion Liston and British and Empire champion Henry Cooper. The evening triggered over a decade of top-flight heavyweight boxing on British television. If the 1950s had been for many the true ‘golden age’ of boxing, the 1960s saw a whole new boxing talent, a crafted (and crafty) television performer, with a character that would be increasingly shaped by the civil rights movement and the broader socio-political context of 1960s America—the Kennedy’s, conflict in Vietnam and, most importantly, the globalisation of communications: Cassius Clay, later to be known as Muhammad Ali.

In 1963, Clay’s rise coincided with one of Solomons’s greatest, and virtually his last, major fight promotions, which brought the rising heavyweight star to Britain to face British champion Henry Cooper. Clay was angling for a world title fight with Sonny Liston, and the BBC had screened action from his narrow victory over Doug Jones in March 1963. On that occasion, Harry Carpenter had been sent over to the USA to interview Clay for *Grandstand*, taking him to the top of the Empire State Building in New York, where Carpenter announced ‘The Greatest has met the Highest’. On the day of the contest with Cooper, *The Times*’s boxing correspondent wrote: ‘Boxing itself is on show this evening and there is much more at stake than two boxers’ chance of glory.’<sup>44</sup> Solomons staked all on a 50,000, sell-out crowd at Wembley Stadium, the first time since the war it had been used for boxing (Carpenter reckoned the torrential rain put many off coming to Wembley and estimated only 18,000 turned up). Aged 21, Clay had already begun to perfect his own brand of publicity for which he was famed, with proclamations of victory in the fifth round against, ‘the big brute’ from England. The British press lapped up his bravura, sometimes taking his comments too literally. The BBC brought Ali in to the *Sportsview* studio to be interviewed by David Coleman. Producer Alec Weeks later recalled how Clay faked being insulted by Coleman when the presenter remarked Clay’s fight with Archie Moore ‘was more like being involved in the Chicago race riots.’<sup>45</sup> Clay rose and stormed out of the studio, claiming he ‘didn’t come here to be insulted’. The furore surprised everyone but Coleman and Weeks, who were in on the joke, and the following day, sensationalised reports of the aborted interview

appeared in the British press. The episode revealed both the showmanship and guile of the heavyweight boxer, and his ability to drum up support for any event he was involved in.

At Wembley, as Clay entered the ring, he wore a crown he had picked up during the weigh-in at the London Palladium. The booing and shrill whistles from the British crowd that accompanied him to the ring were proof that his pre-fight antics and showmanship had worked. In the fourth round, the British heavyweight champion, Henry Cooper, delivered a fierce left hook ('enry's 'ammer) that sent Clay to the floor, grasping for the ropes as he fell. Unfortunately for Cooper, the near-knockout blow came close to the end of the round, and as the dazed Clay stumbled to his feet on the count of four, the bell sounded for the end of the round. What happened next has fallen in to boxing folklore: corner man Angelo Dundee spotted a tear in Clay's glove, and is accused to have torn it open further. As the referee inspected the glove, and the call came for a replacement, the delay allowed Clay to recover and, as he had boastfully predicted, he ended the contest in the fifth round as a serious cut opened above Cooper's left eye, forcing the referee to stop the fight. Because of the recorded televised footage, the fight has become mythologised in both sporting and television history. It was arguably a seminal fight for Clay as he mounted his ambition to fight for the world title against Sonny Liston, and it became a celebrated moment in the career of Cooper, who had come so close to silencing the 'Louisville Lip'.

The heavyweight division had received a fillip in the 1960s with the arrival of Muhammad Ali, although Sonny Liston loomed largest, and fiercest, in the first half of the decade. In Liston's fight with Patterson in Chicago in July 1963, Champions Sports Inc. had sold the television rights to a new pay-television company, Sport Vision. The fight was relayed to 143 locations across 35 states in the US, bringing in receipts in the order of \$700,000.<sup>46</sup> The company had received criticism for a poor, fuzzy picture during its first production, but had shown the potential of pay-TV to dictate the economics of professional boxing. In Britain, there was a 'battle royal' emerging between promoters Solomons and Levene. Solomons was no longer the force he was in the 1940s and 50s, but had managed to stage the fight between Clay and Cooper at Wembley. Levene now drew on the services of Micky Duff, whose experience in the ring and as a trainer meant he had a good eye for matching up boxers and promoting an attractive billing.

1964 saw the first fight to be televised live via satellite. The World Heavyweight Championship between Sonny Liston and Cassius Clay in February 1964 was held in the Conventional Hall, Miami, in front of a modest crowd (8,297 had ringside seats at \$250), and recovered only \$402,000 of the \$650,000 the promoter W. McDonald had paid for the fight.<sup>47</sup> However, Theatre Network Television claimed record receipts for their closed-circuit coverage of the fight in American cinemas. The second controversial contest between Clay and Liston took place on 26th May 1965 at an ice rink in Maine. The BBC applied for live transmission via Early Bird satellite on 12th May 1965 and invited Cooper to watch the fight from the studio. His initial verdict of the 'phantom punch' that knocked out Liston in the first round after 1 minute 52 seconds was: 'That was no punch Clay landed. From what I saw he never even turned his wrist. It could not have hurt anybody.'<sup>48</sup> The US Congress were concerned that Liston's two fights with Paterson and Clay amounted to nine minutes of boxing for a total of \$12 million. In the UK, Lady Summerskill in the House of Lords questioned whether the BBC were right to broadcast the event and, given the state of its finances, how much the BBC had paid for the fight via satellite.

Major fights were increasingly held under the auspices of private clubs, such as Solomons's World Sporting Club, which excluded the public from fights, and increased the value of television rights fees because of it. Another Clay fight with George Chuvalo, fought in Toronto, was also beamed live via satellite in 1966. The second fight with Cooper in 1966 was partly instigated by the British pay-television company Viewspport, run by Jarvis Astaire, a former boxing manager and promoter, who would later become a leading Hollywood agent and executive. Astaire began his boxing career in his early twenties as manager of British and European lightweight champion Billy Thompson, and had teamed up with Levene in the early-1960s. The two met Arthur Grafton, a lawyer acting on behalf of a syndicate that managed Clay in Louisville, and managed to persuade him that a defence of the world title with Cooper would bring huge financial rewards. In 1964, Astaire had reintroduced the post-war experiment of closed-circuit television to cinemas, relaying a fight between Terry Downes and Willie Pastrano from Belle Vue in Manchester to the Phoenix Theatre in Charing Cross, London. In collaboration with Levene, the fight was held in front of 43,000 spectators at Highbury, with an estimated 40,000 watching in cinemas across the country and a further 40,000 via pay-TV boxes attached to their televisions. In the USA, 20 million viewers were expected, watching live via satellite, with receipts in the region of £400,000.

## CONCLUSION

Although championship prizefights were not as frequent in Britain, the BBC did appreciate its appeal as a sport to a mass audience. The majority of boxing coverage between 1937 and the late-1950s was amateur boxing, a different beast to its professional cousin, but it enabled the BBC to develop commentary talent, Eamonn Andrews and Harry Carpenter, who would have incredible longevity in television broadcasting. Carpenter, in particular, became synonymous with the sport and particular boxers including Cooper, Ali and later Frank Bruno. Carpenter's father had been an influential figure in amateur boxing in London, and his experience of listening to fights on BBC radio during the 1930s had inspired him to become a boxing journalist. His connections via his father enabled him to rub alongside promoters such as Solomons and Levene, and give him the inside track on the British boxing scene. He first auditioned for the BBC in 1948, and gave his first television commentary in 1949. Alongside Peter O'Sullivan in racing and Murray Walker in motor sport, he was one of the longest serving sports commentators the BBC ever employed. In recognition of his contribution to the BBC's boxing coverage, and as a sign of their redoubled intent to increase coverage of professional boxing, Carpenter was made the BBC's first Chief Boxing Correspondent in 1962. His interview with Clay in New York in 1963 remained a stand-out television feature on boxing, oft repeated and cherished by British viewers as their first insight into the new heavyweight sensation. Carpenter would expand his sporting portfolio in the 1970s, especially in golf and at Wimbledon, ultimately replacing David Coleman as the anchor of *Sportsnight*. His trajectory from a very hard working, straight-laced boxing reporter into a television celebrity in his own right in many ways mirrors the BBC's own suppressed and understated role in boxing, which then flourished from the mid-1960s onwards. Carpenter's retirement and the BBC's decline in boxing coverage also went hand in hand, as the sport emigrated to pay television in the early-1990s. The BBC's coverage of the sport has never really recovered from this period.

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## Golf: From Minority Interest to Commercial Megalith

### DEMONSTRABLY UPWARDLY MOBILE: INTERWAR GOLF ON THE BBC

Golf first appeared on British television on 1st March 1937 from a small pitch-and-putt course, described in the *Radio Times* as a ‘miniature golf links’, adjacent to the BBC’s first home at Alexandra Palace.<sup>1</sup> *Golfers in Action* was presented live by Bernard Darwin, who had reported on golf for BBC radio as early as 1925, and had also provided eye-witness accounts of the Open Golf Championships from 1927 to 1934. The 15-minute programme introduced professional C. A. Whitcombe, who was one of three golfing brothers who were all members of Britain’s Ryder Cup team of 1935. The programme was later re-enacted on film in 1937 in order to commemorate the BBC’s earliest broadcasts, and a short, 53-second clip of the film survives as part of the British Golf Museum’s film archive. The film, probably the oldest surviving sports footage from British television, shows presenter Leslie Mitchell (replacing Darwin) introducing Whitcombe, dressed in ‘plus-fours’, who illustrates the drive shot as Mitchell looks on. The film encapsulates the challenge of televising golf: showing both the player striking the ball as well as the trajectory and final resting place of the ball down the fairway or on the green. It would take many years for the BBC to innovate an appropriate method for covering the sport, but in the 1930s, the emphasis was purely on learning how to play the sport rather than how to follow the sport as a television spectator.

Golf demonstrations continued through 1937 and 1938, including the first female golfer to appear on television, Poppy Wingate. Wingate was part of a prodigious golfing family—her father, uncle and two brothers were all golf professionals—and she was a professional at Temple Newsam Golf Club in Leeds.<sup>2</sup> As part of the programme, Wingate illustrated a range of shots from driving to putting, and probably showcased her own range of golf clothing, which had featured in the magazine *Golf Monthly* in 1936.<sup>3</sup> In July 1938, another series of demonstration films featured Ernest Bradbeer, the professional at Calcot Golf Club in Reading. The 15-minute programmes provided demonstrations on the main golf shots, and were screened during the evening.

Early experiments in televising golf live from the course were precarious affairs. Indeed, as Lewis has noted, ‘Live golf on the radio developed concurrently with television’ and this was chiefly due to the logistical improbability of being in ‘the right place and the right time’.<sup>4</sup> Attempts to cover a challenge match at Coombe Hill Golf Club in Surrey between the South African player Bobby Locke and the Open Champion, Reg Whitcombe, in June 1939 revealed just how difficult this was. The *Radio Times* promised viewers would see play ‘as it actually happens’, but there were only three outside broadcast cameras to show ‘play around the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth holes’.<sup>5</sup> Reports of the coverage in *The Times* and *The Scotsman* were highly complimentary, the latter reporting that ‘the short chips to the greens were shown particularly well’.<sup>6</sup> However, the presenter of the programme Archie Compston had to fill in the periods with golf demonstration shots when play extended beyond the reach of the cameras, and commentator Darwin later recalled he had to keep running up and down hills amongst spectators in order to see the play.<sup>7</sup>

The expansive area of the golf course and the diffusion of play by the golfers across each hole meant that golf became one of the hardest sports to cover on television. In terms of temporality, golf play was intermittent as players moved from one shot to the next. In terms of spatiality, golf covered extensive swathes of land with natural barriers such as trees, hills and water: all hazards that affected the BBC cameras as much as the players. Before the war, the BBC neither had the resources nor the know-how to cover the sport comprehensively. Nevertheless, the appetite for the sport amongst producers and television’s minority, affluent audience meant golf demonstrations featured relatively frequently on television prior to the war. In the interwar period, golf had grown in popularity among the new suburban middle class as new courses were built. Between 1920 and



1930, new courses were being built at a rate of fifty per year.<sup>8</sup> ‘In the interwar period, the presence of a golf course often influenced the siting of the more affluent suburbs’, notes sports geographer John Bale, ‘large detached ‘Tudor’ style housing frequently abutting the suburban English course.’<sup>9</sup> Golf magazines such as *Golf Illustrated* grew steadily too, and new golf stars such as Britain’s leading player Henry Cotton gained wider notoriety.<sup>10</sup> By the time the Second World War broke, golf was firmly established as an aspirational sport, with its own celebrities, specialist press and tentative but enthusiastic support within the BBC.

### OUT OF BOUNDS: THE CHALLENGE OF POST-WAR TELEVISED GOLF

During the Second World War, many of Britain’s golf courses were used for military purposes, with pillboxes, anti-invasion blockades, trenches and even airfields. Some were returned to club use, but many were lost forever to urban developments or agriculture.<sup>11</sup> However, the passion for golf as both a pastime and a professional spectator sport began to grow again as the nation emerged from austerity in the 1950s. Precisely seven years after television had been taken off the air on 1st September 1939, the BBC ran an extremely short programme, *Chip Shots*, featuring the former English Ryder Cup professional Archie Compston, who gave a two-minute demonstration of how to play a chip shot from Alexandra Park Golf Course. Compston had become something of a celebrity golfer during the 1930s, appearing in a number of demonstration films, and went on to coach King Edward VIII (later Duke of Windsor), who was a keen golfer and captain of Walton Heath Golf Club.

However, it was another Ryder Cup player of the 1930s, Bill Cox, who would establish himself as one of the BBC’s core team of experts on the sport. Cox was a club professional from Fulwell Golf Club in Middlesex, and was *Golf Illustrated*’s chief instructional writer. His career in golf and especially his work in golf publishing and the media led to him receiving an OBE (Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in 1967. In a series produced by Peter Dimmock simply called *Golf*, transmitted intermittently between November 1946 to April 1947, Cox provided instruction on various shots in a studio at Alexandra Palace that had been rigged with reinforced netting and matting fit for the purpose of receiving full-blooded strikes of a golf ball. The *Radio Times* noted the

programme had been moved inside to ‘avoid any possible bad weather’, but assured viewers it would not ‘mean that because the demonstrations are indoors you will see a rather tame show’.<sup>12</sup> The winter fuel crisis of 1947 interrupted the series as television went off air for a month from the second week in February. Although the programme may have been innovative in trying to accommodate an explosive sport in a very short space for the television cameras, it would not have given any sense of golf as it is really played, nor would it have been very entertaining to golf enthusiasts wanting to see the golfing heroes of the day.

In February 1948, producer Michael Henderson, a keen amateur golfer, visited the High Course at Moor Park Golf Club in Hertfordshire on reconnaissance to establish whether or not an outside broadcast could be made. Henderson was interested in covering the Silver King Championship in April of that year, and Moor Park was ideally situated inside the 40-mile radius of the BBC’s reach from Alexandra Palace. Restricted to a single camera, he found a spot by the 18th tee, which afforded a view to the 15th and 17th greens, as well as the 16th and 18th tees. Writing to Commander R. C. T. Roe, the Secretary of the Professional Golfers Association, Henderson appeased any misconceptions that the camera might interfere with play, explaining that unlike film cameras, television cameras did not make a noise.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately for Henderson, all three of the BBC’s mobile outside broadcast units were in use during April, and the coverage was shelved. Nevertheless, television had received encouragement from the golf club, the tournament sponsor (the golf ball manufacturer Silvertown Company) and the Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA).

Henderson requested BBC engineers to conduct ‘field tests’ at a number of sites around the south east of England to ascertain whether microwave signals could be used, including Sunningdale and Royal Mid-Surrey courses, but it was deemed ‘unsatisfactory’. The research Henderson had conducted was not in vain, and in January 1949, he produced *Saturday Afternoon Golf*, a 45-minute broadcast which included Moor Park club professional Arthur Havers, who gave a brief demonstration, followed by a driving contest with former Open Champion Alfred Padgham. Both were paid ten guineas for their participation and the club was given a 15-guinea donation towards its funds. The remainder of the coverage was given over to pairs play from the 15th tee by a select group of members, including the Ladies Captain, Mrs M. Paton. The programme was introduced by the *Sunday Times* golf correspondent and club member Henry Longhurst, who also provided the running commentary.<sup>14</sup> This would be Longhurst’s

first television appearance, which would eventually launch a celebrated career as a BBC commentator on golf, and for a generation of viewers in the mid-twentieth century, he would become synonymous with the sport.

Longhurst had first been approached by de Lotbinière to give a talk on the caddie's view of the golfer and the golfer's view of the caddie in 1935.<sup>15</sup> He was then the golf correspondent of the *Evening Standard* and towards the end of the 1930s, he provided eye-witness reports from the Open. In 1943, he was elected as a Conservative MP for Acton but lost his seat in 1945. Having established a relationship with de Lotbinière, he wrote to him in February 1946 to announce his availability for work with the BBC, noting: 'There seems to be an extraordinary boom in sport, as I believe is usual after our periodic wars with Germans, and golf is no exception'.<sup>16</sup>

The Moor Park experiment used pre-filmed material to establish the setting for the programme, the remainder of which was transmitted live via three outside broadcast cameras. Henderson produced a notional script for Longhurst for the live broadcast, directing his movements around the course and interaction with the players. His resulting 'camera report' provides some insight on the challenges television faced in covering golf, as well as recognising the ease in which Longhurst orchestrated events and commented on the play. The low January sun compromised the vision of one camera overlooking the 15th fairway; a second camera had given good coverage of the 15th and 16th holes but, with 15 minutes left to run, was lost due to cabling problems; and a third camera positioned on a dolly was able to mobilise around the 15th green to provide close-up coverage of players as they approached the hole. The sound was considered to be poor with various clanking sounds of equipment caused by a moving boom, which we can only deduce was difficult to manage out on the course, and an effects microphone became the focus of a barking and sniffing dog. Finally, the BBC had positioned seven television screens in the clubhouse to enable members to see the action, but after five minutes, many of them moved out on to the course and swamped the cameramen, sound engineers and Longhurst to witness the mechanics of television in action. Henderson concluded that in future the BBC must insist on the course being roped off, not only for the benefit of golfers, but the production staff too.<sup>17</sup>

'The affair was a pretty good shambles', recalled Longhurst some years later, having had to resort to 'sweeping people up by the ankles with the microphone cable' in order to view the play.<sup>18</sup> Longhurst himself came

in for praise from Henderson, not only for managing the awkward situation but also for the manner of his commentary which was ‘pleasantly conversational’, ‘easy to listen to’ and ‘humorous’ under ‘extremely trying conditions’.<sup>19</sup> Henderson’s appraisal of Longhurst was glowing and understated. The experience, as he noted, had been ‘trying’ but through the process the BBC, had discovered a gem of a broadcaster. In his autobiography, Longhurst suggested his entrance to television had been due to a stroke of good fortune rather than ‘honest toil’: ‘happening to be standing somewhere, thinking of nothing, at exactly the right time.’<sup>20</sup> The evidence in the papers held by the BBC written archives would suggest this was skewed modesty. Longhurst had clearly volunteered his services to radio and then television and had received recommendations from acquaintances such as Michael Standing, a former BBC variety producer and fellow Cambridge graduate. By the late-1940s, Longhurst was an established golf journalist writing for a prominent Sunday title, the *Sunday Times*, as well as the periodical *Golf Illustrated*. There was little happenstance about it. Professional status and privileged social networks developed from his time at Charterhouse School and Clare College, Cambridge clearly played their role in his new-found career. However, Longhurst was an exemplar of the conversational style, which he had transferred to broadcasting from his writing. ‘Though most of Longhurst’s work was done on the sport and against time’, wrote E. W. Swanton, ‘he never wrote an ugly word’.<sup>21</sup> His television commentary was characterised by a genuine economy of words, which fitted the de Lotbinière edict of annotating the picture to allow the images to tell the story. His greatest contribution to the practice of commentary was his ability to know when to be silent. This was particularly pertinent to golf where, according to Longhurst, ‘Silence on the stroke’ is an ‘absolute principle’, and because when applause goes up for a great shot or holed putt, the moment captured by the camera and effects microphone was enough—the viewer did not need any more. Reflecting on the ‘art of commentary’, Longhurst railed against what he described as the ‘declamatory style of commentary’ being imported from American broadcasting, which he thought false and ‘brassy’. Instead, he believed the viewer preferred a more conversational approach:

For myself, it has never occurred to me that I am talking to more than a couple of people, which I suppose is the size of the average television audience, and since they are probably in their own homes they certainly do not want to be declaimed at. In fact, all they want to know is who is the player; how

is he doing; what is his background; is he doing well this year, etc., together with any interesting or amusing trivialia of the kind which you might have quoted to friends in the club bar.<sup>22</sup>

Compared to radio commentary where a long pause caused panic, he thought television was a 'piece of cake'. But this belittled his own skills of observation, timing and golfing intelligence that he brought to his television work. Swanton, who was a fellow journalist, broadcaster and friend, eulogised:

It is scarcely too much to say Longhurst 'made' golf on television. He conveyed with an enviable economy of words, to handicap players and non-golfers, the emotions of the player in the eye of the camera.<sup>23</sup>

Longhurst's eventual successor as the BBC's principal golf commentator, Peter Alliss, learnt a huge amount from Longhurst and arguably continued his conversational style for a further four decades after Longhurst's death in 1978. Of his character, Alliss believed there was 'a roguishness about him', and in a forward to the reprint of Longhurst's *My Life and Soft Times* wrote:

At first he frightened me but then he gradually taught me to marvel at the skills of great players, to appreciate their dedication and their hard work; and he taught me how to smile, if wryly, at their misfortunes. Above all, he thought the game of golf should be fun.<sup>24</sup>

Alliss, a leading British Ryder Cup player of the 1950s and early-60s, began his commentary career at the Open from Birkdale in 1961 while still playing. BBC's northern producer of sport, Ray Lakeland, had overheard Alliss talking on a flight back from Dublin, liked his analysis of players and offered him a role alongside Longhurst and Cox. Unlike many commentators, Alliss did not turn up to the commentary box with pre-prepared notes; instead, he preferred to observe and react to the action as it happened, drawing on his own experience as a professional golfer to inform his analysis and asides. 'I just bumble along', he said, 'I imagine I'm just talking to two or three people, like sitting in the grandstand watching somebody come by, one of us has a programme and just talks about what you see'.<sup>25</sup> One major difference between Alliss and his predecessor was his experience as a top professional, and to this end Alliss

believed it enabled him to ‘understand the pain and the glory of it’. Both Longhurst and Alliss would develop dual careers in British and American television commentary, where the laconic style proved an antidote to audiences used to hyperbole and superlatives.

### COVERING CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF

Throughout the first half of the 1950s, the coverage of golf remained fairly sparse. The BBC’s early experiments in broadcasting live golf produced some important lessons on covering the sport, albeit often through genuine trial and error. One of the significant challenges facing each new broadcast was that every golf course was different and a lengthy process of reconnaissance was required to find appropriate sites for cameras, the outside broadcast vans and commentary positions. For viewers, there are three key points of interest: watching the player strike the ball; following the ball in flight; and seeing where the ball comes to rest, which may be in the hole. The first and third camera shots are fairly straight forward; the tracking of the ball in flight is far more difficult. As Longhurst noted: ‘Trying to follow it crosswise with a television camera is as difficult as with the wrong end of a telescope.’<sup>26</sup> Far better is to position a camera either directly behind the golfer or, as is more common, to position a camera directly in line of the ball being struck. Having a camera high up behind a green is therefore an ideal position for camera placement, and remains the case to this day.

In 1952, the BBC televised its first golf tournament, The Daks £2,000 from Wentworth in Surrey. According to Lewis, the coverage was restricted to the second hole on the West Course. Longhurst was joined in commentary by Raymond Oppenheimer, a leading amateur, Walker Cup player and member of the wealthy family who operated the De Beer diamond mines in South Africa. *Sports Illustrated* named Oppenheimer ‘last of the Bertie Woosters’, which it characterised as ‘that agreeable and happy species that lived in a sunlit world of long weekends’<sup>27</sup> A year later, the BBC cameras returned to Wentworth to cover the Ryder Cup, and Bill Cox was added to the commentary team as the PGA General Committee ‘felt that the BBC should be pressed to utilize the services of a professional golfer’.<sup>28</sup>

The coverage of golf reached something of an impasse in 1954 in spite of persistent encouragement from both the golfing authorities and the BBC’s commentators Longhurst and Cox. In December 1953, Roe wrote to the BBC’s producer of golf Anthony Craxton offering up nine possible

PGA tournaments the Corporation might consider over and above the Open Championship, which came under the auspices of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club (R&A). The Secretary of the R&A, Brigadier E. Brickman, had offered the Open Championship at Birkdale but the BBC's northern OB unit under the management of Ray Lakeland was assigned to cricket and therefore the offer to televise the Open for the first time was declined. Cricket, remained more popular for audiences and therefore the BBC's programme planners. Craxton produced both sports in the south of England and was keen to strike a balance, and when Longhurst published an article complaining of the lack of golf on television in his *Sunday Times* column, Craxton relayed his own frustration on the matter exclaiming: 'My wife has insisted on cutting the article out and placing it on our mantel-piece, which has embarrassed me even more.'<sup>29</sup> It was, he remarked to Longhurst, a 'disgraceful omission'.<sup>30</sup> From having had no live golf whatsoever in 1954, there was a significant upturn in coverage from 1955. There was a more concerted effort to cover golf, and agreements were made to cover both the Walker Cup and the Open from the Old Course St Andrews in Scotland. The R&A charged a fee of £150 for each broadcast and in doing so began a long and mutually successful partnership with the BBC for coverage of its major championship event, a 60-year relationship that only ended when the rights to the Open were sold to Sky for exclusive five-year deal from 2017 for £75 million.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, 1955 saw innovations in gantry positions, including platforms for commentators who sat alongside the cameras with a covered monitor in front of them. Some of these temporary structures were 60- to 70-feet high, and Longhurst drolly remarked 'on a windy day, with no suggestion from the BBC of "danger money", this has become an increasingly dubious proposition for commentators like Bill Cox and myself, each of whom has turned half a century and fifteen stone.'<sup>32</sup>

The innovations in coverage went hand in hand with a desire to cover more golf. The BBC's Director-General, Sir Ian Jacob, was a keen amateur golfer, and in 1956, a chance meeting with the director of the sports manufacturer Slazenger led to a discussion for the BBC to cover the Commonwealth Golf Tournament, a Slazenger-sponsored event.<sup>33</sup> Jacob's advocacy of the sport led him to suggest the BBC carry more filmed coverage of the sport where appropriate. In 1959, Craxton certainly believed golf was becoming more popular for two reasons: firstly, the BBC had found satisfactory methods for presenting golf on television;

and secondly, there was considerable suspense interest in every stroke. Craxton explained golf's televisual appeal:

Your champions are just as likely to drive into the woods, slice into a pond or hook into a bunker as play down the middle, and when every stroke counts this gives you all the suspense you need which, coupled with our ability to show lots of players at almost one and the same time, gives a pace to the presentation which has clearly caught the imagination of the public.<sup>34</sup>

The narrative pleasure of live sports coverage, where the outcome is unknown, was a major appeal of golf. Live golf was therefore viewed as superior to filmed golf, which according to Craxton was fraught with logistical and resource difficulties and would take three or four days to shoot, edit and dub a half-hour film.<sup>35</sup>

There was also a third factor in golf's popularity—as the Director-General's approach had shown, it was a growing sport among the professional middle class. Golf was also becoming a sport of choice for the rich and famous, and the rise of pro-celebrity tournaments for charity also came under consideration for BBC coverage. Dimmock received calls for more recorded golf from the BBC's own Golf Society, one of the oldest staff clubs formed in 1928, as well as for an instructional golf series in Scotland. Ultimately, Dimmock concluded based on audience ratings, golf had limited appeal and was in his estimation 'a minority sport'.<sup>36</sup> Writing directly to Jacob on the idea of screening golf films in the evening, he suggested it would be preferable to open up more hours to outside broadcasting.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, if a series of golf films aired in prime time, other sports such as cricket, tennis and rugby would soon be making a call for their inclusion in the evening schedule. Nevertheless, although golf may have had a specialist following and Dimmock had reservations, it was an influential sport in terms of networking and status, and encouragement was clearly there among the BBC's senior management to boost its profile.

Negotiations for more golf continued apace throughout the late-1950s and early-1960s. In 1959, both the Open and the Walker Cup were held in Scotland and the manner of negotiations, led by Craxton from London, produced a dispute with George Runcie at BBC Scotland. Runcie's disgruntlement was born of frustration at the tone of correspondence coming from London, and the fact he had been sidelined by a process of centralisation. It was a debate about lines of command, transparency and undermining relationships with sport at the regional level. Craxton



had suggested the Walker Cup might not be financially viable to cover, to which Runcie countered it was a 'must' to 'hundreds and thousands of golfers in Scotland'.<sup>38</sup> The spat led Dimmock to concede all national negotiations on golf, which invariably occurred in Scotland, should and would include BBC Scotland, but he warned, 'we must be careful not to let the tail wag the dog by paying, as Anthony Craxton says, more for regional than national network coverage.'<sup>39</sup>

The costs of golf coverage in relation to the poor audience response to golf became a focus of detailed scrutiny. A review of facility fees and overheads for golf coverage in 1960 revealed the relatively high cost per hour of covering golf on television. For example, coverage of the Open from St Andrews in 1960 cost £450 for a maximum of one and a half hours of play per day, a further £100 per hour for any additional coverage and a production overhead of £400. The full costs per hour of golf was estimated to be £1,729, which compared unfavourably to a live broadcast from *Trooping the Colour* at a cost of £452 per hour.<sup>40</sup> *Sportsview* producer Alan Mouncer, another keen golfer and captain of the BBC team, appealed to Dimmock to once again consider filmed golf, arguing that the Central Council for Physical Recreation had estimated that 'more people take up golf than any other sport'.<sup>41</sup> He also pointed out that commercial rivals Scottish Television (STV) had bought a 38-film series *All-Star Golf* from the US, which gave it more hours of golf than any other channel. Dimmock remained cautious, noting STV had not persuaded the rest of the commercial networks to take the films, and that when the Ryder Cup had been screened on *Grandstand*, the viewing figures dipped on every occasion it came back on screen.

The poor viewing figures influenced both the BBC's commitment to the hours of coverage going forward (seven scheduled days live golf in 1961 and only five in 1962) and the fees it was prepared to pay the R&A. In 1961 and 1962, the BBC paid £1,250 for coverage of the Open, and followed this with a modest increase to £1,500 in a three-year deal from 1963 to 1965 (with an additional £500 for coverage of the Walker Cup in 1963). The cost of rights was potentially offset by the sale of recordings to Eurovision, the Commonwealth and ABC in North America, with profits shared with the R&A.<sup>42</sup> The deals for the Open and the Walker Cup revealed a recognition in the BBC that golf was growing in popularity, and its premier tournaments, professional and amateur, needed to be covered. However, this did not deflect mounting criticism from within golf, especially the golfing press, that, with the exception of

STV, British television was neglecting their sport. Lewis has noted how both *Golf World* and *Golf Monthly* weighed in with severe criticism for the poverty of television coverage in Britain, particularly when compared to the USA, Japan and Australia.<sup>43</sup> American networks were screening up to 100 hours of golf, mainly in specially devised challenge matches between leading players such as Gary Player, Gene Sarazen, and Jack Nicklaus that were edited into filmed programmes like *Shell's Wonderful World of Golf* and *CBS Matchplay Challenge*. Dimmock also received a personal letter of complaint from one of the most prolific golf course architects of the era, John D. Harris, who claimed 'golf is booming everywhere, and I am glad to say that Irish Television is to run another Golf Series. What a pity British viewers cannot yet tune to the American and Australian programmes'.<sup>44</sup> The profile of golf was changing and the pressure on the BBC to include more coverage of its increasingly global superstars, Arnold Palmer, Player and Nicklaus, was too great to ignore.

#### MCCORMACK AND THE AGE OF GOLFING CELEBRITY

The star-led commercialisation of golf and its broader links to golf consumerism began to take an influence on the role and importance of television to the sport in the mid-1960s. The triumvirate of sport, television and commerce, particularly sponsorship of events, remains a dominant model of sport as a global media spectacle. The trenchant Americanisation of golf, in terms of equipment, fashions and commercial orientation, transformed the sport throughout the 1960s, and television played a central role in the process. One of the most influential drivers of this process was sports agent Mark McCormack and his company International Management Group (IMG). An excellent amateur golfer, McCormack studied law at Yale, and in the 1950s began giving tax advice to professional golfers, including a former college rival, Arnold Palmer. McCormack was the same age as Palmer and struck up a lifelong friendship. He began to manage Palmer's commercial affairs in 1960, forming his company IMG, and a year later was also handling the endorsements, financial affairs and ancillary businesses of Player and Nicklaus. By the end of the 1960s, the three had won 20 Major tournaments between them, and would go on to dominate the sport in the 1970s. With the three most prolific golfers under his wing, McCormack set about developing a sport marketing and media empire that remains the largest sports agency of its kind in the world. Golf as a sport and form of entertainment would never be the same again. Howard

Sounes has rightly pointed out that McCormack ‘recognized that golf could be exploited in ways other games could not,’ meaning ‘most of the people who follow golf also play the game.’<sup>45</sup> Matching star players with golf endorsements of different kinds proved to be highly lucrative. Sports historian Allen Guttman analysed the appearance of different sports on the front cover of American magazine *Sports Illustrated* between 1955 and 1974. Between 1955 and 1958, golfers only appeared nine times, compared to the dominant sport of the era baseball, with 41 front covers. Between 1959 and 1966, golf topped the appearance chart with 29 front covers, one more than baseball. Golf’s rise in media popularity and public prominence can only be attributed to the rise of McCormack’s management of Palmer, Player and Nicklaus.<sup>46</sup>

How did this impact on the BBC’s approach to golf? The launch of BBC 2 in 1964 made an enormous difference to the coverage of long-duration sports such as cricket, tennis and golf, opening up the schedule and providing the BBC with a distinct advantage to ITV, whose regional organisation and squeezed schedule immediately disadvantaged any hope of extensive coverage of sport. The BBC’s coverage of golf took a major turn in 1965, including recorded golf series, which hitherto had been viewed as too expensive or unattractive to audiences. In May 1965, the BBC illustrated the flexibility of having two channels when coverage of the Schweppes Golf Championship from Sandwich was shared between BBC 1 and BBC 2. The BBC also gave Harry Carpenter the opportunity to broaden his television career beyond boxing, producer Ray Lakeland asking him to be the ‘link-man’ to its live coverage of the sport. Carpenter later reflected ‘Lakeland’s offer widened my career, gave me a new set of friends and turned working into sheer pleasure.’<sup>47</sup> The contrast with boxing provided diversity for Carpenter, who would be the BBC’s main presenter of golf for more than 25 years.

Carpenter took on a new role in the coverage of golf as the third member of the commentary team. Golf had been anchored by Cliff Michelmore, who declined the new role, which demanded more knowledge of golf. Producer Innes Lloyd had considered offering the role to Brian Moore, then in BBC radio, and for a short spell the role was briefly occupied by Kenneth Wolstenholme. Carpenter became the link-man, main scorer, interviewer and general summariser of play and was located near the 18th green. In his first year, Carpenter introduced the Ryder Cup from Royal Birkdale and then the Piccadilly World Matchplay from Wentworth. The World Matchplay, sponsored by the tobacco company Carreras, with

£16,000 prize money, £5000 to the winner, was devised and managed by McCormack and brought together eight of the world's best players in a knockout match play for the Piccadilly Trophy. The coverage cost the BBC £1,000 in rights fees, and £2,000 in total to cover. Peter Alliss was invited to play in the 1965 tournament, and recalls the first rate pampering the players received from Piccadilly, who paid for the player's wives and partners to stay at the Savoy Hotel before being chauffeur driven to the course in Surrey. In future years, the sponsor rented nearby homes, which were lavishly appointed with personal assistants and a cordon bleu chef.<sup>48</sup> Between them, Palmer (1964 and 1967) and Player (1965, 1966 and 1968) won the first five tournaments, assuring it received maximum publicity and a central space in the professional golf calendar. The association of the Piccadilly cigarette brand with golf was significant following the ban on cigarette advertising on British television in 1965. Carreras estimated that a £20,000 investment in golf sponsorship was actually worth £1 million in television advertising.<sup>49</sup> Televised golf became a 'Trojan horse' for brand exposure.

From 1965, McCormack's presence and influence over the coverage of golf on television began to become more pronounced. In October 1965, following the BBC's successful coverage of the Piccadilly World Matchplay, McCormack told Bryan Cowgill he hoped it would represent 'the beginning of a long and mutually profitable relationship'.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the opportunity to meet the Head of BBC Sport during the Wentworth event enabled McCormack to offer a wider range of services to the BBC. McCormack was keen to be the BBC's exclusive sales agent of golf programmes in America. However, the BBC had already entered into a contract with Michael Malitz, a New York agent, who also brokered television rights in boxing, and did work on behalf of BBC Enterprises. Although McCormack was guarded in respect of precisely what the gross revenues from golf films might be, he assured Cowgill that the BBC would be making more money from films of the Open than the rest of their sports content combined.<sup>51</sup> It was an attractive proposition.

A second phase of business relations would involve the development of a series of golf programmes with Palmer, Player and Nicklaus. If the BBC had any doubt about McCormack's emerging power in the game, they received evidence when Palmer and Player withdrew from the Pringle Golf Tournament at the Royal Burgess golf course in Barnton, Scotland, prompting Cowgill to inform Runcie that outside broadcast resources

would not be released to BBC Scotland for coverage of the event. The draw of star players was dictating outside broadcast policy.

In 1965, McCormack sold the series *Challenge Golf*, which paired Palmer and Player together in match play with other golfing pairs in various courses across the state of California. In 1966, McCormack brought another IMG-backed series, *Big Three Golf*, to Britain, executive produced by his associate Jay Michael's for the subsidiary Trans World Enterprises (TWE, later TWI). The series was part of a twelve-series contract between the BBC and McCormack for a contract worth \$156,000, where \$120,000 was distributed as fees to the players. The deal was extravagant and highly inflated, but was underwritten by future sales of the series around the world to be split 50-50 between the BBC and TWE. In the contract, McCormack guaranteed the BBC a sum of \$31,000 within 18 months of receipt the final film, but once production costs were included (estimated at £4,000 per film), the BBC needed to recoup £60,000 from sales to balance its programme allowance.<sup>52</sup> In a note to the BBC's solicitor, Dimmock reiterated the reasons why the BBC were entering the arrangement with McCormack: 'we are not viewing this as a trading operation but merely as a package deal that will provide BBC 2 with prestige world class golf on colour film at a reasonable cost'.<sup>53</sup> The first series filmed in America had been screened on BBC 2 in 1965, but building on his new relationship with the BBC, McCormack brokered a deal to film a new series on British golf courses. In the first event of its kind held in Britain, Palmer, Player and Nicklaus played three rounds at Gleneagles, Carnoustie and St Andrews for prize money totalling \$50,000 (1st \$25,000, 2nd \$15,000, and 3rd \$10,000). Produced and edited by the BBC's Phil Pilley and directed by Bill Stevenson, the programme was a new departure for the BBC's approach to golf and sports coverage more broadly. It was the first commissioned golf series the BBC had made, and the first coverage of golf to be in colour. The series was filmed from July through to October 1966 and transmitted on BBC 2 in 1967. The 54-hole series ended in a tie, but according to Controller of BBC 2, David Attenborough, 'produced some of the most exciting golf that has ever been filmed'.<sup>54</sup> Rather than share the prize money, the players were invited to a play-off at Dorado Beach club in Puerto Rico to decide the winner. Golf films, focused on the sport's three mega-stars, brought a new glitz to televised sport, with exotic places and sparkling golf. The calibre of the stars the BBC were now dealing with was reiterated by Michaels in a letter to Cowgill a few weeks prior to filming:

If we take the attitude that we are filming a television show, and that the golfers should cater their styles and their game to our production problems, then we shall have something false and unacceptable. I am not requesting we handle the golfers as though each of them is a Sir Lawrence Olivier, but I think that we must respect their status as players in a most difficult and competitive contest.<sup>55</sup>

The message was clear: Palmer, Player and Nicklaus were the ‘talent’ and the cameras were to yield to them, not vice versa. They were to be pampered and certainly not treated as employees of the BBC. McCormack sold the films in America, Australia and Japan where a third series was filmed in 1968. In 1969, *The Big Three* was once again filmed in Scotland, this time in colour, transforming its value to American networks.

### CONCLUSION

The coverage of golf on BBC television in the mid-to-late 1960s certainly increased, in part due to the growing excitement of competition between the Palmer, Player and Nicklaus triumvirate. There was recognition too that golf had a strong and loyal following that some, but not all, senior management were happy to pander to because they were fans of the sport too. The audience figures for golf did not reflect a broad appeal. In November 1967, Paul Fox, now controller of BBC 1, requested a review of golf audiences and its cost. The resulting survey of eight British tournaments screened that year revealed that average audiences through 1967 ranged from half a million to four million, with the Open Championship only receiving three million viewers at its peak when on Grandstand on BBC 1.<sup>56</sup> Coverage was also expensive, ranging from £2,600 to £4,300 per hour of coverage. Fox instructed a dramatic reduction in coverage of live events for 1968, and it was halved for the year. Dimmock conceded: ‘We firmly decided that the smaller sponsored tournaments on the British circuit are not sufficiently rewarding either in prestige or viewers to justify the expensive overheads.’<sup>57</sup> This view cut across the PGA’s renewed negotiations with Cowgill for coverage of up to seven British tournaments in 1967, but Fox’s intervention proved final.

However, there remained a feeling that golf was growing in popularity and the BBC therefore needed to reflect this wider cultural turn in its coverage. The tie-in to sponsors, particularly of the players who sported goods from Wilson, Calloway, Dunlop or Slazenger, meant the coverage

of golf always carried a commercial edge that connected with the amateur golfer, which no other sport on television had at this time. Professional golf's commercialisation went hand in hand with television, and therefore caused moments of conflict for the public service ethos of the BBC. For example, in order to keep commentators and the viewers abreast of the fluctuating scores out on the course, the BBC were reliant on the scoring service produced by the *Daily Express*. Jack Courtney at the *Express* pressed for recognition of their service in both the *Radio Times* and on screen, but producers of golf Mouncer and 'Slim' Wilkinson reiterated the problems of providing an 'engineered plug'. A compromise was found, with BBC cameras dwelling on the main scoreboard at the start of transmissions, which included the *Express* branding. It was one of several commercial headaches the BBC negotiated during the period, but would later dissipate once sponsorship and advertising became standard and naturalised in the coverage.

The guiding hand of McCormack in the world of golf was starting to influence the nature of golf coverage on the BBC. From refusing the very concept of edited golf films in the late-1950s and early-1960s, the BBC moved to being proactive in establishing new golf tournaments in partnership with IMG and its leading roster of players. Outside the control of the R&A or the British PGA, these bespoke, television-led tournaments were lucrative in terms of sell-through rights fees, as well as popular with audiences. In 1966, Dimmock had pressed BBC Enterprises to appoint a dedicated salesperson for outside broadcast material, and an agreement that American sales would be negotiated through McCormack. The commercial deals did raise eyebrows among the more established golf institutions, so the PGA, for instance, were quick to demand some answers from the BBC when they were overlooked in any negotiations.

McCormack developed strong working relations with Bryan Cowgill, Head of Sport, and was given introductions to other parts of the BBC, whether in radio or enterprises, which enabled him to expand his portfolio of golf to sell to new and international audiences. Other filmed formats were innovated and introduced, such as the 1968 series *USA v The World*, which pitted a leading American (usually Palmer or Nicklaus) against a leading professional from Europe, South Africa or Australia for a \$4,000 prize. Outside major golf tournament, made-for-TV golf became a dominant mode of televised golf throughout the late-1960s in to the early 1970s. This included a curiosity called *Target Golf*, which as the title suggests involved leading players competing to score points by landed the ball

on a target. It was a clear attempt to broaden popular appeal of televised golf. Later made-for-TV golf programmes, such as Pro-Celebrity Golf with Peter Alliss, placed more emphasis on the entertainment value of packaged golf, but the key to the success of such programmes was the willingness of leading professionals, most managed by IMG, to support such ventures. McCormack's relationship with the BBC was solidified once and for all when he joined the commentary team for the 1967 Open at Hoylake. His distinctive Cleveland accent would become a familiar voice on BBC coverage of golf throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1966, golf producer Alan Mouncer drew attention for the need to cover the Masters from Augusta National in Georgia. With satellite television now available, the BBC took live coverage of the final round of the 1967 Masters for the first time. In September 1967, a deal with NBC for the World Series golf tournament from Akron, Ohio was the first colour transmission of golf on BBC 2. David Coleman and Peter Alliss conversed and assessed play from a London studio. Both developments in satellite and colour would transform the coverage of international golf, especially the Masters, which joined a familiar calendar of annual major sporting events BBC viewers would enjoy.

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Today's Sport on Your Screen Tonight:  
*Sports Special* and *Match of the Day*

THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE, FLOODLIT FOOTBALL  
AND THE NEW EUROPEAN GAME

The BBC's relationship with the football authorities had been gradually developed throughout the 1920s and 30s as negotiations to provide access for live running commentaries of games required diplomacy on the part of broadcasters to overcome the bloody-mindedness of football administrators. The intransigence on the part of club chairmen, and especially the Football League Management Committee, was born of the fact that unlike newsreel film, radio broadcasting could be live, as it happened, and was therefore a direct threat as a competing form of entertainment. The BBC's first director of outside broadcasting, Gerald Cock, continually pushed the public service line that broadcasting opened up access to football for those who could not attend matches, such as the blind and infirm. Live commentaries also served another public function of promoting the game to new audiences, especially female listeners who were tuning in with the rest of the family. There was commercial compensation too, but the amounts were fairly modest. Cock and his successor de Lotbinière resisted the payment of excessive facilities fees, mainly because commercial payments ran contrary to the BBC's ideological public purpose. Concessions were, however, made by both the BBC and the Football Association to ensure the public could hear running commentaries of major football events such as FA Cup matches and internationals. The Football League, and many

club chairmen, had remained suspicious of the BBC from the outset. The old concern that broadcasts affected attendances was always foregrounded in their negotiations. The acceptance of selected commentaries on the Empire Service paved the way for stronger personal relations between outside broadcasting staff and the League. By the outbreak of war, Fred Howarth, the indomitable Secretary of the League, was converted to the power of radio to provide interest in the game by de Lotbinière's charm offensive and shrewd negotiations in the late-1930s. Although the BBC were restricted in promoting football broadcasts prior to the event, football became a standard feature of the post-war broadcasting landscape during the autumn and winter months.<sup>1</sup>

Having won the battle to provide live running commentaries from domestic and international matches in England and Scotland, television presented a wholly different proposition. As we have already discussed in Chap. 3, the football authorities were among the chief protagonists in the protection of rights to sport, and fiercest of all was Fred Howarth of the Football League. Howarth, born in Preston, was conservative by nature, and became the steward of everything the League stood for, having taken over as League Secretary from his father-in-law Tom Charnley in 1933. Based in the bedroom of a Victorian terraced house in Preston, he marshalled the League Management Committee through the post-war boom period of football, but resisted the onset of modernity in the game for fear it would undermine the integrity of the sport: floodlights, the abolition of the maximum wage and broadcasting were all enemies of the League's underlying values, and he believed, its mass appeal. As Simon Inglis wrote in his centenary history of the Football League: 'The modern world kept on intruding upon the League in the early 1950s, despite the Committee's best efforts to keep it at bay.'<sup>2</sup> However, as the gates began to fall from their all-time highs in the late-1940s, by the mid-1950s the League's finances were in danger of falling into the red. The League's parlous economic position began to thaw its attitude to change, including television.

Football and other sports had experimented with floodlighting as early as the 1870s and concerted efforts to hold floodlit games were developed in the 1930s, although the FA had passed a resolution prohibiting their use. The ruling was rescinded in December 1950, but any competitive game played under artificial light required the prior permission of the FA. Social historian Eric Midwinter argued floodlighting 'banished football's enslavement to daylight and often produced a theatrical atmosphere that became particularly related to cup football.'<sup>3</sup> More crucially,

because many of these games were classified as 'non-competitive', they were beyond the governance of the FA, the Football League, the Scottish FA and Scottish League. This made the clubs involved open to approaches from the BBC, with facility fees to television supplementing regular income through the turnstiles. It was a boon for the BBC's desire to televise live football on winter evenings, and created memorable moments of early television, especially when British clubs played European opponents. Nevertheless, the moves to approach League clubs upset the League Management Committee and Howarth reiterated the League's stance on its ban on television to de Lotbinière in October 1952.<sup>4</sup>

Domestically, the advent of midweek friendlies under floodlight encouraged one-off friendlies between Scottish and English teams in front of the cameras. These games perturbed the football authorities north and south of the border because they broke their respective bans on live League football. One specific floodlit fixture between Falkirk and Newcastle United in November 1953 caused tension between the Scottish Football Association and the clubs involved. Robert Kelly, president of the Scottish Football League and chairman of Celtic F.C., protested that unrestricted television would seriously damage the future of small concerns in sport just as, he argued, it had in North America. Moreover, William McIntosh, chairman of Dundee United F.C., was reported in the *Glasgow Herald* as saying television 'would be a cancer' if allowed to go unchecked.<sup>5</sup> Within the post-war climate of increasing modernisation within the entertainment industries, such discourses were beginning to be perceived as overtly conservative and increasingly ludicrous. For instance, the *Herald* drew its readers' attention to the more enlightened view being taken by Stanley Rous at the English Football Association towards such fixtures, specifically regarding English teams playing clubs from the 'Continent'.

England's national team had played its first competitive match under floodlight in the summer of 1953 at the Yankee Stadium, New York, during a prolonged tour of North and South America. Moreover, by 1955 the English FA recognised the benefits of midweek evening kick-offs for FA Cup replays, and in 1956, after much prevarication on whether League games would or would not be played under floodlights, the Football League sanctioned their use for those games rescheduled because of postponement.

By the 1954–55 season, the Football League's reticence to allow television cameras into grounds remained, but was under fire on several fronts. Aggregate attendances at League games had fallen for five seasons

in a row from 39,594,967 in 1950–51 to 34,133,103 in 1954–55. Clubs in many cases were finding it increasingly difficult to balance their books. From 1952, there was a dramatic jump in the number of players on the maximum wage, and the Chancellor had also increased the Entertainment Tax, pushing up admission prices and resulting in a continued fall in attendances.<sup>6</sup> The League were also finding it increasingly difficult to finance its Provident Fund for injured and retired players, which was based on a 4 % levy of gate receipts and by the mid-1950s ran at an annual cost of £145,000.<sup>7</sup>

The players themselves were making moves to use the rise of television coverage to persuade the football authorities to dispense with the maximum wage, which in 1955 stood at £12 per week. With more appearances on television, especially live games under floodlight, the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), under its chairman Jimmy Guthrie, had sought advice from other entertainment unions such as Equity to inform their argument to claim remuneration from football's new income stream. For a brief period, Guthrie argued the BBC owed players a fee for appearing on television, but this was smartly rebuffed: the facility fee was paid to their employers, and any payment for 'performance' in front of the cameras was the concern of club chairmen, not broadcasters. Guthrie threatened a ban on PFA members playing under floodlight, and by default on television, and won a concession that players would be paid an additional £2–3 when playing in floodlit televised games. In 1957, Guthrie was superseded by Jimmy Hill. Hill's forward-thinking dynamism aimed to modernise the game and broke new ground for players, especially regarding the maximum wage. A dispute over the banning of players at Sunderland who had received illicit payments confirmed that the maximum wage was an anachronism which unfairly suppressed the value of players as entertainers. By January 1961, Hill had the overwhelming support for strike action from his members, and the threat and the public sympathy for their plight forced the arm of the football authorities to scrap the wage ceiling. The precipitation of Hill's successful lobbying included Britain's first player to earn £100 per week, Fulham's Johnny Haynes. Haynes had been the transfer target of Italian club A.C. Milan, but Fulham's chairman, Tommy Trinder, rebuffed the offer, announcing if he had the power, he would pay the player £100 a week. 'Haynes is a top entertainer', Trinder was quoted as saying, 'and will be paid as one from now on.'<sup>8</sup> The concession by the football authorities that income from television was dependent on footballers performing in front of the cameras meant football, entertainment and television became fused thereafter.

The fears that television remained the key threat to attendances began to seem hollow, and although the League Secretary, Arthur Drewry, reiterated the Management Committee's ban on television in May 1955, League chairmen were soon being swayed by the prospect of the much needed income television could provide. In September 1954, Dimmock pushed harder to persuade League chairmen that televised football on a Saturday could actually be beneficial to clubs. Leaked to the *Sunday Graphic*, Dimmock's letter to the League's Management Committee proposed a piloted series of games to prove the potential of live televised football to broaden interest in the game: 'Let us televise a League match for half-an-hour just once a for a trial period of six months', he proposed, 'If it doesn't meet with your approval at the end of that period, we'll abandon the idea.'<sup>9</sup> The initial proposal went unanswered, but in 1955, Howarth received further bids from both the BBC and ITV for live coverage of the second half of matches scheduled for early evening on Saturdays. The BBC offered £1,000 per game, for up to 30 games a season. Not wishing to miss out, ATV offered £40,000, for 35 matches in the London area only, but even at these unprecedented prices, Howarth felt football would be selling itself too cheaply. In an interview with *Picture Post*, he spelled out his reasoning:

What do the television people pay in fees to famous stars, and in production expenses for a ninety-minute variety show? [ ] Much more than a thousand pounds. So how much is a League game worth, bearing in mind that production and staging expenses would be nil? Suppose we were offered ten thousand pounds a match, for thirty or forty matches a season? Then we would be getting somewhere. Money like that would give us a fund from which we could compensate clubs whose gates were affected by television.<sup>10</sup>

If the statement did not reflect a sea change in attitude to television, it certainly reflected a change in the commercial outlook of the Football League. Although Howarth had a genuine belief that attendances had bottomed out and would rise again (but they never did), there was a dawning realisation that football needed more income from somewhere to cover its costs. The issue of live televised football came to a head in July 1956 during an Extraordinary General Meeting in Manchester. Leading the opposition to the idea were the two Merseyside clubs, Everton and Liverpool, who gathered support to reject ATV's offer and effectively kill off the chances of live League football for nearly three decades.<sup>11</sup> However,

prior to the League Management Committee killing off the live coverage, Dimmock had managed to persuade the Committee to agree to a deal worth £5,000 for exclusive rights to televise up to 15 minutes per week of League matches. It was a major breakthrough for the BBC, and it enabled Fox to plan a new television magazine sports format for Saturday evening, *Sports Special*.

### SPORTS SPECIAL: THE ORIGIN OF FOOTBALL HIGHLIGHTS

The BBC had remained eager to cover as much football as possible since the resumption of television in 1946. They had largely been restricted to the occasional international match, the FA Cup Final and amateur football. With the exception of very brief football items on BBC Newsreel, edited highlights of games were simply barred, particularly the weekly fixtures of the Football League and Scottish Football League. Floodlit, international club football had revealed the popularity of the game on television, and provided some evidence, albeit not wholly persuasive, that television would not adversely affect actual attendances. The success and excitement created by the 1953 ‘Matthews Final’ in coronation year had also consolidated a growing sense of modernity in British life, and the place of television within a new consumer-oriented future.<sup>12</sup> The Cup Final had been watched by an estimated 10 million viewers; as Midwinter notes, ‘that was four times as many as had paid and watched all the score or so Wembley finals thus far’.<sup>13</sup> After a year of success with the midweek *Sportsview*, Paul Fox made a proposal to introduce a new Saturday evening programme, under the editorial control of the *Sportsview* team, but using the BBC’s regional centres more regularly and effectively.

Fox’s plan for football on Saturdays was based around three football-driven programmes: a Saturday results service; an early evening sports news round-up; and a late-evening sports magazine programme primarily focused on football highlights following the BBC’s new deal with the League. Fox had originally floated the idea of a five-minute Saturday evening news slot as early as August 1954, which would centre on an eye-witness report of what he labelled the ‘match of the day’ in the London area, and a short sequence of film from that afternoon’s sport. In July 1955, the idea turned in to a trial programme called *Today’s Sport*, initially hosted by Peter West, using telerecordings of outside broadcasts from Ascot Racecourse and Edgbaston Tennis Club earlier in the day. Following the trial period, Fox believed the programme could be slightly



extended to include some filmed highlights of football. Thus began an idea of a Saturday evening sports programme with edited highlights of the day's matches.<sup>14</sup> In December 1954, Fox developed the idea further to form the basis of a new Saturday evening magazine programme, *Sports Special*, with *Today's Sport* becoming a short sports news bulletin following the News and Weather earlier in the evening. Both programmes were presented by Kenneth Wolstenholme, who arrived in quick time from one of the afternoon matches, usually in the London area. Although the billing in the *Radio Times* lacked any detail, the main structure of *Today's Sport* revolved around discussing the day's football results, showing the top and bottom of the League tables, and rapidly developed and edited film clips from two of the day's sporting highlights, including the 'match of the day', which acted as a trailer for the late evening programme. The programme also included racing results and was generally considered to be an extension of the *Sportsview* Unit's output. *Today's Sport* avoided post-match interviews with players, something the League were not keen on, and when ITV broadcast an interview with Jackie Milburn following a game for Newcastle United, Dimmock wrote to Howarth with the assurance that 'this is an undesirable principle which we agree not to permit.'<sup>15</sup> The underlying principle in question was really to avoid upsetting the League's hierarchy, but interviews would in due course become a staple of televised football.

Fox had been keen to launch the programme as soon as possible in 1955 and would preferably use the 'roving-eye' camera to provide a live sports feed back to Lime Grove. This would have been telerecorded and edited at the BBC. Although this technique would have been preferable to film cameras, which took more time to edit and were expensive, it would not be flexible enough to cover a wide range of sports or football matches from around the country. It was an idea that would have to wait for electronic cameras and video editing to be developed in the early 1960s. Instead, *Sports Special* would primarily be based on edited film highlights, with a live studio presenter reading a script that was hurriedly written by Fox or Noble that evening. Post-war television was used to being live or recorded, but combining the two with film shot and edited on the day of transmission was an innovative departure.

At 10.15 p.m. on 10th September 1955, *Sports Special* made its first outing as the BBC's Saturday evening sports round-up, and was billed as being 'Today's sport on your screen tonight'. The *Sportsview* team made up the backbone of the production: the programme was initially

introduced by Peter Dimmock, was directed by Alan Rees, and edited by Paul Fox. The production staff on the programme had also grown, including sports writer Leslie Ketley, sports news expert Hugh Driver, who joined from BBC radio's *Sports Report*, and film editor Dennis Edwards.<sup>16</sup> In the *Radio Times*, Dimmock explained to BBC viewers the lengths to which the BBC were going to get *Sports Special* on air:

A helicopter, two aeroplanes, plus a fleet of motor-cycles and fast cars, will be brought in to action each Saturday throughout Britain to bring film reports of the day's sport to your television screens the same night. From all over the country – from points as far afield as Bristol and Glasgow – sports films will be flown to London for developing, editing and transmission.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1950s, film would be flown from film developing laboratories at Elstree Studios to Croydon Airport to save time, but when the airport closed in September 1959, it caused a crisis in the BBC's operation and was only salvaged by the evolution of regional film developing laboratories in Glasgow, Birmingham, Cardiff and Manchester. The sense that no cost was too great to bring the weekend roundup of the big stories and the big names in sport to the viewer was powerful public relations material in the BBC's battle with its new rival ITV. The second programme was introduced by David Coleman, who filled in for the programme's eventual regular presenter, Kenneth Wolstenholme, who was away commentating on live Eurovision coverage of Switzerland versus Hungary from Lausanne.

Shot, edited and transmitted on the same day, the programme frequently stretched the resources, ingenuity and sheer luck of the production team to get *Sports Special* on air. Because the programme was reliant on 16mm-film content corralled from all parts of the country, the chances of things going wrong was always high. In one account, producer Bryan Cowgill explained how a January fog over Lincoln meant films of the two halves of a match between Lincoln City and Sunderland were sent to editors at different ends of the country. The first five rolls of film had been dispatched for processing and editing in Manchester, but as the fog descended, the second half films were re-routed to London. As *Sports Special* went on air the same game was being edited in two cutting rooms over one hundred miles apart:

Just fifteen minutes before the end of the programme, the first half was ready in Manchester, and Wolstenholme led smoothly into the film story of the match. Two minutes later the second half film reached the film projector at

Lime Grove, and on an agreed cue in the studio control gallery, the Vision Mixer switched the picture from the end of the first half in Manchester to the second half in London. Not one of the eight million viewers watching that edition of *Sports Special* would have noticed the switch or have guessed at the feverish activity involved in getting that particular report on the screen.<sup>18</sup>

The pressures of using filmed sequences of sport for transmission that same evening were immense. Film was rushed for developing in laboratories, then on to the BBC in negative for editing in the traditional way of cutting and gluing film, and aligned, mounted and transmitted through the 'flying spot' telecine machines at Lime Grove. The process was lengthy and intense. The news values that drove the programme meant items could be introduced or dropped at the last minute, and if films were not ready in time, the schedule would be rejigged to suit. How this looked to the viewer may well have seemed chaotic and haphazardly concocted at times. However, the calm delivery of Wolstenholme or Coleman would frequently mask the panic off-screen of editor Ronnie Noble and producers Alan Rees, Tom Millett or Richard Tilling.

Nevertheless, errors did occur. For example, games were filmed on two cameras in order to maintain as much continuity as possible when covering a match. However, because of time and resources, it was never possible to film entire football matches. Cameramen and commentators therefore had to work out for themselves when to let the cameras turn, and when to keep them still. Frequently perched high up on the roof of a stand or gantry in all weather, often in cramped conditions, making decisions was not easy, and it is therefore not surprising things could go wrong. In an interview conducted in 1994, Wolstenholme later recalled an episode at Ninian Park in Cardiff in 1955 when both film cameras jammed:

There was a great fella we had in the BBC, Colin Prentice, a superb cameraman. 'We've got a jam', he said. This camera, number two [he points across], hasn't been loaded, and that camera, number one, is out of action. So we haven't got a camera. So we did Wales against England at Cardiff, and England score first, and Wales are then winning two-one – they'd scored two in the second half, I think Chris Jones scored a superb goal – and we had the same situation on each camera. That camera, number one, had just finished and hadn't been loaded, and that camera, number two, had jammed. Now, no one believes it. There were letters sent to the BBC. MP's asked questions in Parliament: 'This was disgraceful'. We had one goal to show. We had film cameras and there was nothing you could do about it.<sup>19</sup>

In September 1955, Fox reviewed the progress of the format, and had serious misgivings about pressures from McGivern to increase the amount of film included in the programme without giving the programme more staff and resources. Fox reiterated to Dimmock the original idea for the format, which required outside broadcast telerecordings rather than film, football analysis by experts such as Wally Barnes and Frank Swift, player and manager interviews and topical news items.<sup>20</sup> Fox also bemoaned the resources at his disposal as series editor of the programme: six cameramen, three film editors and two writers to produce 25 minutes of film was considered unacceptable when compared to the resources of television newsreel, which had more than twice as many employees and produced 15 minutes of film each evening. The pressures were so great that Fox had called in favours from BBC staff to help on their days off get the Saturday programmes on air. Although chastised for employing 'salaried staff on an 'old boy' basis', Fox remained resolute that for the programme to succeed the BBC had to employ enough staff to produce a viable 30-minute programme.<sup>21</sup> Those editors seconded from the BBC's Film Department were requested to have an interest in sport, for they needed to understand what the viewer expected to see. For 90 minutes of football, 9,000 feet of film would be required, and it took two hours to process 3,000 feet of film.<sup>22</sup> The *Sportsview* Unit's pre-eminent film editor Dennis Edwards was a fast cutter and skilled in the art of identifying sports stars and action in negative. He regularly had to edit between 5,000 and 6,000 feet of film on a Saturday evening, which would account for two-thirds of the filmed output. The over-reliance on specialists like Edwards was viewed as unsustainable and the BBC had to find more staff with the necessary skills. The debate about editors ran on throughout the end of 1955, and Fox concluded that without the necessary resources, *Sports Special* would soon be a 'dead duck'.<sup>23</sup> The programme had received close to a 50 % share of the audience and consistently had appreciation ratings in the 70s, which was more than respectable.

More broadly, there appeared to be confusion within the BBC as to what the BBC's Saturday evening coverage was trying to do. Fox, increasingly frustrated and disheartened, was keen to promote a coherent front of what the *Sportsview* Unit were doing with the results service, *Today's Sport* and *Sports Special*, and at every opportunity used his contacts in the press to promote both. His maverick approach upset the BBC's corporate approach to publicity, especially George Campey, who complained to Dimmock about Fox's behaviour. Fox defended his vision for

the programme, insisting he was keen for the programme to draw film and interviews from across the UK, including live OBs where possible.<sup>24</sup> The programme format was ideally to be made up of 13 minutes of film, ten minutes of outside broadcasts and seven minutes of interviews from the London studio. The triumvirate of Saturday sports programmes was viewed as being key to maintaining viewer interest through the evening.

### FOOTBALL IN THE NATIONS AND REGIONS

Fox acknowledged that audiences in different parts of the UK would demand items that were relevant to them. 'So long as we are a national programme that cannot editionalise' he argued, 'we must give every sports fan wherever he lives, something that comes from his part of the world.'<sup>25</sup> Regional input to the programme was restricted to one minute of filmed highlights and one minute of personality interviews. Although minimal, Fox was adamant the programme would benefit from such short forays across the British football scene.<sup>26</sup> The problem with regional opt-outs was that if they were too long, they would be too parochial for other viewers to be interested, but to avoid them would make the programme too London-centric and lose important sport stories and personalities from across the country.

The constraints on regional input to two minutes apiece, especially from Scottish football, began to raise the issue of whether or not regional stations should produce their own sports output or entire programmes. News that commercial television were starting a franchise in the Midlands prompted the BBC to allow the Midland Region to opt out from *Today's Sport* for three minutes with David Coleman providing reports of local matches from their studio in Birmingham. Hywel Davies, Assistant Head of Programmes in Wales, noted his region could only 'look on with surly faces' at the prospect of studio opt-outs: in 1956, Cardiff had yet to be provided with a single camera channel for such purposes.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the opt-out scheme was rolled out to Birmingham and Glasgow; the latter was viewed as essential given Scotland had separate sporting competitions. Fox was keen to reiterate that *Sport Special* would continue to receive 'newsy contributions' from the regions, and he sought assurances that regions did not keep newsworthy stories for their own news output.

In Scotland, BBC Scotland's Television Controller, George Runcie, welcomed the opportunity for opt-outs, but also complained that on occasion items and interviews lined up from Glasgow for inclusion in the

programme had been pulled at the last minute. This had caused embarrassment when they had brought in a personality to be interviewed only for the contribution to be scrubbed.<sup>28</sup> In order to avoid any further ‘fankle’, Runcie sought assurances that when Scottish content was being presented to Network it would be used, and would not impede on its own limited period for an ‘opt-out’. Filmed inserts from Scotland were proving expensive. Charter planes from Glasgow to London carried film for inclusion in *Sports Special*, at a cost of £60 per flight, for inserts as short as two or three minutes.<sup>29</sup> The most economic answer, Fox noted, was for BBC Scotland to introduce closed-circuit telerecording of sport, which could then be transmitted to the Network. The programme consistently ran over its budget of £956, sometimes by 30 to 40 %.<sup>30</sup> Its recurrent costs for studio and engineering were £320, but transport, artists and in particular the cost of filming or telerecording OBs could rapidly spiral out of control.

Peter Thomson, who was BBC’s Scotland’s lead producer of outside broadcasts and produced *Radio Sportsreel*, also gave commentaries, and had first covered football for television as early as October 1952 during a floodlit game between Arsenal and Hibernian. In October 1955, Fox made the suggestion that a three-minute opt-out within *Sports Special* may be the best way to appease complaints from the regions. In addition, he wryly observed, ‘it would save us from seeing the morons of each region’. Instead, the London studio would only have ‘moron footballers of the London region to worry about.’<sup>31</sup> Scottish clubs and two governing bodies were split on the merits of television. Sir Robert Kelly, the chairman of Celtic, consistently remained critical of television’s potential impact on attendances which he had seen first-hand in the USA. However, clubs such as Falkirk, Hibernian and Hearts had been proactive in supporting the use of floodlit games in front of the cameras. Hearts were the leading Scottish club of the late-1950s, had introduced floodlighting in 1957, had been the first British club to enter the European Cup and had built a new press box to accommodate the growing needs of broadcasters. R. K. S. Galloway, the club’s chairman, noted ‘TV stands for the march of progress and to halt progress would be like Canute trying to roll the waves back.’<sup>32</sup> With the launch of commercial television in Scotland in August 1957, and its flagship sports programme *Scotsport* the same year (which became the world’s longest running sports title lasting 50 years), BBC Scotland were keen to include as much Scottish football as possible. Following tentative negotiations with the Scottish Football League in the summer of 1959, a *Sports Special from Scotland* was launched in time for

the 1959–60 season. The programme still took items from London, but afforded at least ten minutes of edited highlights from a Scottish fixture. In August 1963, the programme was rebranded again as *Sportsreel*, a name it kept until 1975 when BBC Scotland introduced *Sportscene*, eventually replacing its football film unit with electronic cameras. Introduced by Archie Henry, football commentaries were initially the domain of retired mariner and academic George Davidson. Davidson had been Head of Navigation at James Watt College in Greenock, but his passion for football and Greenock Morton had led him to be a regular commentator on football for radio in Scotland.<sup>33</sup> In the late-1950s and into the mid-1960s, he was BBC Scotland's principal voice on televised football, later replaced by another educator, former school headmaster Archie MacPherson. A surviving programme from September 1963 illustrates the makeshift nature of the Scottish output, which was produced on extremely limited resources. The programme titles show Scottish supporters filing in to a stadium, metaphorically connecting the idea of entering the match day experience for viewers. Henry, sat behind a desk in a small studio set-up, promptly introduced the programme before reading a series of captions with some of the day's sporting headlines, such as 'First Win for Falkirk', before introducing the first match highlights of the Old Firm game from Ibrox. The highlights, filmed on a single film camera by Norman Shepherd slung underneath the main stand, were brutally edited, jumping from one part of the game to the next, and producing a staccato experience for the viewer. Shepherd had learnt his trade filming for the Royal Navy, and would later go on to work for STV on Dr Finlay's Casebook. The single camera quickly panned the pitch to follow play, and was often tightly cropped, meaning the pattern of play was hard to follow. Davidson's identification of the players was exceptional, and given the poor quality of the edit, would have been much appreciated by viewers of the time. The news values instilled by Fox across the BBC's sports output was redolently evident in the middle section of the programme when Henry provided a 'Star Rating' of each player, followed by a brief comment by sports producer Murdoch McPherson on the relatively low arrest figures at the game, notorious for its rivalry. An eye-witness account of the Falkirk versus East Stirling from Alastair Duke described the game as 'football I can only compare to a British Rail sandwich, in other words, not much of it and what there was of pretty poor quality'.<sup>34</sup> The programme, although low budget and suffering from poorly edited highlights, was heavily imbued with a strong journalistic approach and ideology, employing a presenter,

four studio reporters, two commentators, two film cameramen, two film editors, arranged by Peter Thompson and edited and presented by Bill Malcolm, all for a 30-minute programme.

In 1958, writing about how *Sports Special* was produced, Wolstenholme reflected on the high-pressured process of commentating on a game in the afternoon, making his way to Lime Grove to announce the football scores, running through his script for *Today's Sport*, before catching a bite to eat prior to learning his script and presenting *Sports Special* later in the evening:

And then comes the wind-up and the eventual good nights. Another 'Sports Special' is over, and a drink is a welcome relief after a day of work which began in the morning and is now, around eleven o'clock at night, just ending, thereby enabling you to drive home, sometimes in fog, sometimes on ice. And you know that someone is bound to telephone or to write and demand the reason for you not mentioning the shove-ha-penny contest at Little Flippington.<sup>35</sup>

The comment wonderfully captures the stress of producing the programme, and the relief of those involved when it was over. *Sport Special* continued until 10th April 1965, its last programme covering highlights of the drawn international between England and Scotland at Wembley. By now on BBC1, and still reliant on filmed highlights, the programme was usurped by a dedicated football highlights programme on BBC2, *Match of the Day*.

### BBC 2 AND VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS: THE RISE OF *MATCH OF THE DAY*

In the early-1960s, the production of television sport at the BBC was starting to change. There were three key drivers of this change: the introduction of new electronic cameras using the 625-line UHF system that gave live feeds to video recorders at Television Centre, which could be edited immediately; the formation of a distinct BBC sports department under the outside broadcast group with a new Head of Sport; and the introduction of a second television channel, BBC2, which opened up more hours in the schedule for sport.

The Pilkington Committee's report in 1962 had been highly critical of the populism of commercial television, which the inquiry saw as putting



profit before quality.<sup>36</sup> The channel itself had an inauspicious start in April 1964, as a power cut blacked out the transmission before it properly began, and the next morning, a wreath arrived at Lime Grove with the message 'BBC2 RIP from all at ITV'.<sup>37</sup> The faltering start did not prevent BBC2 opening up space for innovations in programming, and through 1964, Bryan Cowgill was determined to extend the BBC's coverage of sport, in particular exploiting the new outside broadcast technology. 'I decided it was time to make a move towards the men running football in England', he later wrote, 'with a view to creating a programme that would later become known as *Match of the Day*'.<sup>38</sup> The process of persuading the Football League had been a dalliance in which football and its chairmen held the upper hand. From January 1957, the League's Secretary, Alan Hardaker, had held both the BBC and ITV companies at arm's length, presiding over his members from the League's new offices in Lytham St. Annes near Blackpool. Hardaker was no friend of television, but understood the game needed reform and new sources of income. His intransigence to television led many BBC executives to despise his overarching control. Peter Dimmock recalled:

I could never break down Hardaker. The number of times I went up to Lytham St. Annes and the bloody of arguments I had with him. Couldn't get him to shift at all. Not at all. They were thinking don't let's accept a silly price now let's wait until we can get really big money. Let's wait for television to grow.<sup>39</sup>

Cowgill had similar memories:

I thought Hardaker's style was as a bullyboy and negotiating with him was made even more arduous because for some reason he had made his headquarters in Lancashire at Lytham St. Annes near Blackpool – the 'salad tea belt' I used to call it.<sup>40</sup>

However, by August 1964, Cowgill had managed to persuade Hardaker to allow one match to be televised by the BBC's new electronic cameras and for edited highlights of the recording to be transmitted on BBC 2 early in the evening, ahead of a previously agreed 10 p.m. embargo. The early evening slot would act as a driver of audiences to the new channel, and delighted the channel's first Controller, Michael Peacock. It may not have seemed revolutionary for televised football at the time, but the

introduction of *Match of the Day* and the extended highlights of League matches would transform the regularity of football on television, and broaden access to football in society like never before.

Although Hardaker had agreed to the BBC's new approach to the game, it ruffled feathers among many of the League chairmen, who berated the League Secretary for agreeing the deal. Hardaker rang Cowgill with the bad news that the Management Committee had 'wrapped his knuckles' and told him he had 'no business to break the ten o'clock embargo on recorded football.'<sup>41</sup> Cowgill, horrified, later blamed complaints from ITV executives to League chairmen for the pressure placed on Hardaker. Cowgill also believed it was the first time Hardaker's 'dictatorial authority' had been eroded. The very first *Match of the Day* billed for 6.30 p.m. on BBC 2 on 22nd August 1964 was therefore delayed to 10 p.m. to appease the Management Committee.<sup>42</sup>

The BBC had begun experimental trials with electronic recording on magnetic tape, known as VERA, as early as 1952, and had been illustrated by Richard Dimbleby during an episode of *Panorama* in 1958. The introduction of the American Ampex video machines in 1959 enhanced further the ability to record live feeds from either studio or outside broadcasts. However, the initial phase of video editing still required engineers to literally cut and stick together edited tape, which was time consuming and susceptible to error. Alec Weeks, then a 37-year-old sports producer, later recalled how videotape transformed the job of broadcasting football:

Videotape was different. Within minutes, seconds, we could transmit: one could also record again and again on the same piece of tape; it was robust, it was cheap, and its comparison with live transmission was excellent. By August 1964, six machines stood proudly in the basement of Television Centre.<sup>43</sup>

The revolution in the editorial process was showcased in the first game to be screened on the programme, Liverpool v Arsenal from Anfield. Weeks had limited time to create a 20-minute edit, which he later described as a form of 'butchery'. 'How we got it on the air I do not know', Weeks recalled, 'I was in charge of the editing for the first five programmes. We only had six machines for the whole of BBC Centre and we had about half an hour before we went on air.'<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the edit was so fiercely produced that in one section of play, a throw-in by Liverpool's Ron Yeats came over towards the penalty area and was headed on by Ron Yeats. Before the

innovation of time code editing, which enabled electronic editing with more control and frame-by-frame accuracy, such gaffs were inevitable when razor blades and glue were involved. Nevertheless, the electronic cameras and video editing vastly improving both the speed and quality of edited highlights.

*Match of the Day's* first presenter and commentator, Kenneth Wolstenholme, opened the programme standing pitchside with the packed Anfield terraces singing 'She Loves You' in the background. 'Welcome to Match of the Day the first of a weekly series coming to you every Saturday on BBC 2,' he began, 'As you can hear we're in Beatleville for this Liverpool versus Arsenal match.' Alongside Wolstenholme was the former Arsenal and Welsh captain Wally Barnes, who provided some minimal analysis. The programme brought a more dedicated, lively approach to football, which reflected the changing nature of League football of the era, with emergent stars like George Best and Alan Ball appearing on television on a more regular basis. Somewhat ironically, with the launch of BBC 2 restricted to the London area, the first programme was not accessible to viewers in Liverpool. An estimated 20,000 viewers watched the first programme, less than half the 48,000 who had attended the game at Anfield.<sup>45</sup> Wolstenholme later noted, 'Mystified Liverpool fans saw our vans and cameras at the ground and wondered when the game was going to be shown on the box.'<sup>46</sup> The programme's invisibility 'north of Watford' would become a burning issue for BBC management, and only expanded beyond the London in December 1964 when the 625-line transmission was expanded to the Midlands region. At the start of the 1965-66 season, the programme moved to BBC1 at a revised time of 10 p.m., replacing *Sports Special* and appeasing fears that the early screening was a threat to match day attendances.

Alec Weeks would become the BBC's main producer and then executive producer of *Match of the Day* for 23 years, until his retirement in 1987. His experience in broadcasting began in 1941 thanks to a piece of nepotism. His father knew boxing commentator Barrington Dalby, who managed to get Weeks a job as an office boy at Aldenham House, the home of the BBC's Overseas Service during the war. In 1943, he became a junior programme engineer at Broadcasting House, and following the war worked in radio on the programme *Sports Report* and then various outside broadcasts of sport.

His boss, Stuart Hood, advised Weeks to apply for a job in television, and in November 1958, he became a sports production assistant

at the BBC studios in Manchester, and from 1959 he was helping produce live television outside broadcasts in the north west including the Harewood Horse Trials in 1959 and the Grand National in 1960. His first opportunity to direct coverage of football came in January 1961 during Burnley's European Cup tie with German team Hamburg.<sup>47</sup> Weeks returned to London later that year working as a television studio manager for the BBC's flagship sports programmes *Sportsview* and *Grandstand* before becoming the understudy to Alan Chivers on *Match of the Day* in 1964.

The improved quality of transmission of electronic cameras from football has been cited by Weeks as one of the reasons why England was chosen to host the 1966 World Cup. The advantages of the 625-line cameras was the greater definition, which enabled wider shots without loss of clarity. Writing in the *Radio Times*, Alan Chivers explained the wide shot enabled the programme to 'show much more of the overall pattern of a game' than had hitherto been the case with either film cameras or the 405-line outside broadcast cameras.<sup>48</sup> However, the first two years of the programme continued to throw up challenges, mostly caused by the instability of the new technology. As Weeks recalled:

You went out and left base with the O.B. unit and four cameras. You knew one camera would break down, but you never knew which one. We would always have two cameras high up on the gantry, ninety feet up at forty degrees. You would have one on the narrow angle and one on the wide angle... I could guarantee between 1964 and 1965 we never finished a game with four cameras.<sup>49</sup>

The two remaining cameras were positioned at ground level and provided the close-up, 'interest' shots, which brought the personalities of the sport into people's living rooms.

The prospect of colour television was on the horizon when the 625-line broadcasts were introduced, but for the first four years of the programme, the transmission remained in black and white. This could prove problematic to the producers of the programme, especially where the team colours looked similar. Plain red and blue shirts were indistinguishable in black and white, and so the BBC began to request club manager's change to their second strips where clashes were likely to occur. 'The teams are very co-operative about colours', Chivers once remarked, 'one side is always prepared to wear white shorts and the other black to make it easier for

viewers to identify them.<sup>50</sup> The colour of match balls of the era were also a challenge. As Weeks recalls:

Often in the mid-1960s the popular shade of match ball was an orangey colour, which on black and white TV was the same colour as the spectators' faces. If the background to the ball was a sea of faces the cameramen eventually lost the ball, so one always requested the club to provide a white or bright-yellow ball.<sup>51</sup>

The colour of the ball used was ultimately the decision of the referee, but as the regularisation of football coverage increased in the 1960s, it empowered television to shape and influence aspects of the game. While this did not, as yet, stretch to influencing kick-off dates and times, there was clearly a sense that part of football's contract with television was to make it as amenable and accessible as possible. Football stadiums began to build more permanent platforms for television cameras to be situated, usually slung under the eaves of the main stand roof.

Broader issues also surfaced regarding the presentation of football, in particular the creeping surreptitious appearance of advertising hoardings at televised matches. Advertising had long been a feature at British football grounds, but with the increasing regularity of television cameras frequenting the stadia of leading clubs, the opportunity for additional commercial income was too great to resist. Advertising either on the front of the roof or at the side of the pitch became a familiar and near ubiquitous scene at football stadia, which was problematic for the BBC, which maintained its principle of avoiding screen promotions of any kind. Weeks remembered 'perimeter advertising, gave me more headaches than anything else in my 30 years in O.B.s',<sup>52</sup> noting how football clubs ignored the clear statements in the BBC contract that OBs should not be used for promotional purposes.

## CONCLUSION

*Match of the Day* remains synonymous with the BBC's coverage of football and in 2014 celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. From the start of the 2015–16, season it became the longest running televised sports programme ever on British television. On one level, its longevity in the age of niche live sports coverage is something of a paradox. Sky and BT Sport have paid extortionate rights fees to gain access to live coverage of the

Premier League, which reflects the powerful draw of live football for their subscribers, and yet many more viewers tune in to *Match of the Day* for their weekly fix of England's domestic league football. The endurance of the edited highlights format reveals its continued appeal to audiences who do not have the time, inclination or financial ability to only watch full live coverage of football on television. Edited highlights, therefore, have their place in a broader mix of coverage. As the history of both *Sports Special* and *Match of the Day* illustrates, the development of edited highlights as a format with wide appeal is at the root of why viewers continue to value this approach to televising sport. The pioneers of the genre, Alan Chivers and then Alec Weeks, refined the art of editing 90 minutes of footage down to ten minutes of highlights to such an extent that watching football on television in this way became naturalised and perfectly formed. Where the remaining 80 minutes of a game are lost, or how the perfect edit points are found in both sound and vision, was derived from many years' experimentation and refinement of techniques during the 1950s and 1960s. As we have learnt, for some of those involved in cutting filmed footage, finding the in and out points, and joining the play seamlessly had to make glaring mistakes before football highlights appeared 'natural' and maintained a narrative realism which viewers found coherent and met expectations. The programme's popularity grew and grew in the late-1960s, especially following England's World Cup success in 1966. 'Footballers hitherto unknown outside their own town or city' wrote football commentator John Motson, 'were suddenly catapulted into the national limelight.'<sup>53</sup> Motson, like his predecessor Kenneth Wolstenholme before him, was synonymous with the programme, and, alongside the players, would become a household name himself. Along with Barry Davies, the BBC's other pre-eminent football commentator, the two would dominate the programme through the 1970s, 80s and 90s.

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## From Eurovision to Global BBC Sport: The Rome and Tokyo Olympic Games

### THE 1960 ROME OLYMPIC GAMES

For various reasons, the BBC struggled to get any comprehensive coverage of the Olympic Games throughout the 1950s. Following the highly experimental coverage in 1948, the 1952 Games in Helsinki predated Finnish television. In 1956, the Winter Olympic Games in Cortina, Italy, did enable the *Sportsview* team to cover the event, especially ice skating via Eurovision (see Chap. 6) but international television crews were barred from the Summer Olympic Games in Melbourne where the Australian organising committee dithered on filmed rights for TV, in the end deciding on a blanket ban on TV rights for international broadcasters.

The 1960 Winter Games in Squaw Valley, California, have significance in the history of television, as they were the first to be transmitted live to an American audience by host broadcaster CBS. For the BBC, the lack of a live feed and a depleted British team (only nineteen athletes travelled to California, mainly competing in ski events, as well as speed skating and figure skating) meant their coverage on both radio and television was kept to a minimum. Other European nations took the opportunity to use delayed recorded coverage (up to 31 hours of coverage was made available by the Canadians)<sup>1</sup> but the only footage of the event screened on the BBC came in a retrospective review of events within the BBC's sports magazine programme *Sportsview*. According to BBC commentator Max Robertson, the BBC's decision not to cover the 1960 Winter Olympics came down to cost: 'With a probable dearth of medals to report and winter sports still

not widely enough followed by the public, the expense was thought to be unjustified.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the Games, *Sportsview* had included a feature entitled, ‘Should Britain go to Squaw Valley?’—presumably a reaction to the withdrawal of the bobsleigh, an event in which the British would gain gold in 1964.<sup>3</sup> The BBC’s political stance on whether or not to support televised coverage of the Winter Games was heavily dependent on national interest and the perceived cultural value of the event to its audience. In 1960, winter sports were seen as peripheral to the concerns and interests of the British public, and hence the resource put into the coverage was slim. Over time, as the globalisation of the spectacle of the Winter Games was familiarised by television, so the broader interest in the event grew. For the Summer Games of 1960, television’s interest in the Olympic Games took a new turn for both the BBC and its audience.

#### EUROVISION AND NEGOTIATIONS

The BBC’s coverage of the Rome Olympic Games was two years in the making. It represented the biggest commitment of resources to a sporting event the BBC had ever undertaken. However, in spite of its internal commitment to invest resources in covering the Games, contention flared in Paris at a meeting of the EBU where the BBC were heavily criticised for undermining the Eurovision project. The contention was focused on the BBC’s desire for increased unilateral coverage of the Games, a demand that some members felt ran against the emerging television union being developed through the latter half of the 1950s as new television services emerged across European nations. The demand for unilateral coverage—the ability to opt out of the multi-lateral feed from the host broadcaster with a single national specific television feed from the event—was a new development and may have been considered to be against the ethos of Eurovision at the time.

From early in 1960 to June of that year, the negotiations for coverage between the host broadcaster, the EBU and the Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano (CONI), who held the television rights, were fierce. The BBC were largely unhappy with the way in which CONI were handling the deal, not least due to a lack of trust in host broadcaster RAI. The potential for a TV boycott began to circulate in the British press and the BBC’s written archives show a series of memoranda, letters and minutes associated with the ongoing process of negotiations over the television

rights and the Corporation's desire to ensure they had access to unilateral coverage. The BBC stood accused of undermining negotiations and jeopardising the EBU project (even though it was a founding member of the collective and the EBU president was the former BBC Director-General, Sir Ian Jacob).

Rome 1960 had been the first instance where the EBU had collectively paid rights fees to the Olympic Games, although negotiations were conducted between RAI and CONI in the first instance. There was a series of vested interests on each side of the deal. For Europe's emerging public television services, the Games represented an ideal opportunity to expand their reach to a wider audience, particularly in the UK and Germany where they faced competition from new commercial television services. Television set manufacturers saw the Games as a motivating factor for households to purchase their first set, and were keen for rights to be settled. Sports Editor Fox received a concerned letter from electronics company Philips about their plans for a big marketing drive to sell their new television sets with the slogan 'See the Olympic Games on Philips Television', and were alarmed the BBC had not confirmed its coverage of the Games as late as June.<sup>4</sup> The fee payment was eventually processed on 15th August 1960, a mere ten days before the start of the Games. The final deal negotiated by RAI on behalf of the EBU was 427.5 million Lire, with the BBC's share being 127.8 million Lire (close to £75,000, and more than double its original budget).<sup>5</sup>

### BBC COVERAGE IN ROME

Throughout the 16 days of the Olympic Games, 102 hours of live television were broadcast using multilateral transmissions, of which 96 hours 30 minutes were passed abroad as well as through the RAI network. The peak was reached on 10th September with 8 hours 30 minutes of coverage on Olympic events, whilst the minimum was on 11th September (the closing of the Games) with 3 hours' coverage. The average transmission was over 6 hours per day. Transmissions exceeded the BBC's coverage of any previous Olympics or sporting event, and in the end, the BBC used 52 hours 36 minutes and 55 seconds of live and Ampex material of the Rome Games. The BBC's coverage also included 27 unilateral transmissions totalling 24 hours 57 minutes of transmission. This unilateral coverage was more than any other broadcaster and more than one third of all unilateral transmissions.<sup>6</sup>

The BBC's coverage was notable for a number of reasons. Firstly, the BBC went to great lengths to showcase the historically thrilling setting of Rome, which for many viewers would have seemed exotic and a world apart from the dreariness of post-war Britain. Setting the scene for Rome 1960 involved showing the sights and sensibilities of the Italian capital, and Fox relied upon the Rome tourism board and various other sources to help him plan the coverage and set the scene for the international festival of sport. Setting the scene for Olympic sport was also the beginning of a process of internationalisation of television sport, where film was sourced from around the world to showcase talent to new audiences, creating 'global stars' of sport.

A second aspect of the BBC's coverage was the showcasing of new British athletic stars. British swimmer Anita Lonsborough won the Women's 200 metres breaststroke and in setting the scene for the event, presenter Max Robertson reminded the BBC viewers: 'Don't forget it's lane five we're interested in'.<sup>7</sup> As the race came to a conclusion, Lonsborough held off the German Ursel, and Alan Weeks's excited commentary concluded, 'Fifteen yards to go and everyone is standing and yelling at her. Lonsborough just ahead, and Ursel making great efforts. Five yards, four, three, two, Lonsborough's so tired, but she touches first!'<sup>8</sup> Animated commentaries of this kind have become standard in BBC Olympic coverage. Although impartiality has been the default ideology of BBC journalism since the 1920s, during Olympic broadcasts, its presenters and commentators have eschewed any pretence to adhering to such a policy.

The BBC reaffirmed 'national interest' in its star performers by rushing athletes to the BBC's studio in Rome for an interview. In this context, unilateral coverage came into its own with an interview with gold medalist Anita Lonsborough. She watched a recording of the race alongside the BBC's lead commentator and Olympic anchor, David Coleman.

Video recording technology gave television the ability to recall recent events with more technical ease, and therefore set up such opportunities for the athletes to share not only their moment of success with the viewers, but also some intimate, human experience that revealed something of the athlete's character. Coleman's exchange with Lonsborough made the swimmer more accessible and personalised for the viewer, and revealed some of the psychology of an athlete at such pressurised moments of their careers. BBC Audience Research revealed Lonsborough's victory was the focus of great national pride, with one respondent proclaiming 'the film

of the breaststroke final had us all shouting for Britain and cheering the winner'.<sup>9</sup>

Controversy ensued in the pool with the video replay of the Men's 100 m Freestyle. Harry Walker co-commentated on swimming with Weeks, and for him, Olympic swimming was one of the 'more intimate' forms of televised sport: 'The tracking camera, running alongside the swimmers, brings them into such close proximity that their every effort and gesture become apparent'.<sup>10</sup> During the Men's 100 m Freestyle in Rome a dispute broke out when Australia's John Devitt was given the gold medal above the American Lance Larsson when to most viewers watching the tracking shot Larsson appeared to touch first. The electronic backup timer had Devitt at 55.16 and Larsson at 55.10 and it seemed as if the American had won by the smallest margin. However, the chief judge, the Swede, Henry Runströmer, cast a deciding vote for Devitt, who he claimed had looked the victor from his standpoint at the edge of the pool. During live coverage, the commentator Alan Weeks presented a news flash of a US appeal to the Devitt/Larson placings as television films of the race suggested Larsen touched first. The result was subsequently appealed to both the IOC and the Fédération Internationale de Natation, the governing body of international swimming, but to no avail. The controversy raged for many years, and led to calls for the introduction of electronic timing devices, which were subsequently introduced during the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico.

Other notable events of the BBC coverage included open criticism of the GB team management by some of the athletes. *Sportsview* had previewed the British middle-distance runner Gordon Pirie in conversation with former athlete turned broadcaster Christopher Brasher in a feature called 'Man of Tomorrow'. Pirie was a firm favourite for a British medal and in the BBC's film cue of 10,000 metres, the commentator's prescribed introduction reminded viewers it was his 'last chance for gold' and that he had 'usually come unstuck in the really big test'.<sup>11</sup> The heat and an uncharacteristic error in tactics affected Pirie's performance and he did not qualify for the final. Pirie caused controversy after he criticised the GB team management for coming out to Rome too late, thereby reducing time to acclimatise to the conditions. The BBC reported that athletics coaches had given the GB team a full bill of health in extreme heat conditions, with athletes taking pills to ease dysentery and salt for the heat. There were also minor complaints about noise in the village at night.<sup>12</sup> The theme of unrest in the British camp carried on through the BBC's

presentation of the Games, a narrative that came to a head when the GB boxing manager, John Henderson, heavily criticised the performances of some of the British boxers, saying ‘they could not care less whether they win or lose’. The BBC reported on counterarguments from the boxers, and Dimmock’s own conclusion on the matter was that ‘it was a pity they did not save the fireworks for the ring’.<sup>13</sup>

The complaints and tensions of male athletes were contrasted with the fortunes and positive news stories created by female athletes. Comments such as ‘it’s the women who are doing Britain proud’ and ‘Sport is no longer the prerogative of men’ captured a broader discourse of Rome 1960, representing a watershed in British female achievement in the Olympic Games.<sup>14</sup> In athletics, the Women’s 800 metres was held as an Olympic event for the first time since 1928, and the BBC’s focus on the final, which included British athlete Joy Jordon, undermined dominant discourses of the time that questioned the ability of women to have the stamina to run such races.

Also featured were Britain’s female sprinters, in particular Dorothy Hyman, who won silver in the Women’s 100 metres and bronze in the 200 metres. In the final of the 100 metres, the BBC commentator, David Coleman, noticed early on that Hyman was in a medal position and focused his whole commentary of the race on Hyman’s silver medal position, ignoring the clear winner Wilma Rudolph, who went on to win three gold medals. After Hyman won bronze in the 200 metres, Dimmock concluded:

Well, Britain’s girls really have done well in these Olympic Games. And they’ve not grumbled about when they came, or made any excuses about heat, or whether they were brought out too late or too early.<sup>15</sup>

Dimmock’s point contrasted the female athletes’ performance to the disrepair of the British male athletes. The reference to ‘girls’ in women’s sport, arguably representing the hegemonic position of male presenters in sports coverage, was standard practice in the 1960s and would remain so for several decades to come. Some viewers also found the BBC’s studio interviews with female athletes unacceptably sexist. David Coleman’s interviews with Hyman and Lonsborough were awkward and mildly flirtatious: ‘the interviews appeared to ask unnecessary questions, thus making the competitors ill-at-ease, and I was trembling lest they enquired “are you courting?”’<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless the BBC’s focus on Hyman and Lonsborough

does provide evidence that women's sport was gaining increased respectability in this period,<sup>17</sup> and the BBC were keen to celebrate their successes as part of broader national prestige in the Olympics.

### THE CRITICS RESPONSE

The BBC relied upon its own research unit to gauge the success of its coverage, and shortly after the event reported that many of the live transmissions received between 12 and 13 million viewers, with some evening transmissions peaking at 14 million. An Audience Research Report on *Olympic Sportsview* from 27th August 1960 concluded that viewers were 'delighted to be seeing so much of the Olympic Games'—one quote from a viewer was that 'it must be of great interest to everyone to be able to watch the world's best in action'.<sup>18</sup> The immediacy effect of viewing live action from continental Europe also infected the newspaper critics excited at the BBC's extensive coverage. A report in the *Belfast Telegraph* reflected on the power of television to transport the viewer to another place, and that it was 'television as it was meant to be; television as I am sure inventor Logie Baird envisaged it'.<sup>19</sup> The theme of both the exotic nature of international coverage and the complexity of delivering outside broadcasts from such long distances was also reflected in the *Daily Mail*, which reported: 'I like the flavour of foreign parts that Eurovision brings... The BBC *Sportsview* team is revelling in the excitement, in the difficulties, and its ability to cope with anything thrown at it'.<sup>20</sup> This equally glowing analysis raises another dimension to the emerging BBC approach to sport, the slickness of style driven by an exacting professionalism, which meticulously planned every aspect of the coverage. The slick style of presentation developed by the BBC *Sportsview* team and its ability to showcase new sporting experiences to its viewers did not go unnoticed: 'I suppose there must be something of the gambler in all of us, so much so that even a particular sport we wouldn't normally cross the road to see can rivet attention to the screen when it's nicely wrapped up in the unwrinkled package the BBC's *Sportsview* team provides'.<sup>21</sup>

*Sportsview* framed the Olympics in a tried and trusted formula with previews and interviews via unilateral feeds presented by faces familiar to British audiences. For Sandy Duncan of the British Olympic Committee, the BBC's coverage set a standard where 'truth was of major importance and sensation of none', a reference to previous correspondence from Fox on assurances over interviews with athletes.<sup>22</sup> The broader social impact

of the BBC's coverage is captured in the following report from *The Bolton Evening News*:

When the fellow at the bar interrupts your quick one, as he did last night, to tell you mournfully that Gordon Pirie isn't doing well, you get the measure of what television has come to mean. There always was an interest in the Olympic Games, thanks to the excellent service provided by the newspapers, but now we are right at the Games, enjoying almost everything but the heat.<sup>23</sup>

This news story cuts to the heart of the transformative nature of the televisual spectacle of the Games, the litmus test of which is the way in which it began to shape everyday conversation. The coverage of the Games via Eurovision in 1960 represented the lift-off of the Olympic franchise across the continent. The next Games, four years later, took the transcontinental reach of televised Olympics one step further, with shared pan-continental coverage for the first time.

#### TOKYO 1964: THE FIRST SATELLITE GAMES

The enduring clips commonly repeated from the BBC's coverage of the Olympic Games of 1964 held in Tokyo are of Mary Rand and Lynn Davis gold-medal successes in the Women's and Men's Long Jump, and a stalling, slightly bemused but increasingly infuriated Cliff Michelmore as he awaits a delayed transmission from Japan carried via satellite. Being able to view the success of the British long jumpers represented a leap in global communications, but the paucity of the transmissions, which were dependent on the location of the Syncom III satellite over the Pacific, and the fragility of both the sound and the image from Japan meant the wonder of global television could be wiped from the screen at any moment. Where Rome 1960 had produced hours of seamless Olympic television, Tokyo 1964 made television venerable, unstable and exploratory, much like the early days of the medium.

The BBC's plans for 1964 were well under way by 1961. Peter Dimmock was the EBU's Sports Advisor and chaired an advisory group on the EBU's plans to negotiate with the Japanese public service broadcaster, Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK), assisted by producer Alan Chivers. NHK, an organisation nearly as old as the BBC, were the authorised administrators of the broadcasting rights and would coordinate the operational aspects of



television and radio coverage of the Games. For European broadcasters, this proved a challenge—logistically, financially and perhaps more crucially, culturally. Japan in the early 1960s was an emerging industrial power after its suppressed post-war austerity. Under the leadership and stability of the Liberal Democratic Party, it was moving rapidly towards a process of modernisation, which influenced its culture and society. Corporations like Sony, Nikon and others were advancing a new, technologically driven economy. Politically, Tokyo had been awarded the Games as a sign of international acceptance, having lost the right to host the Games in 1940 due to the outbreak of war. It was also the first time the Games had been held by a non-Western nation. For the Japanese government, the Games were an opportunity to showcase its advanced urban regeneration and transport infrastructure, such as the Shinkansen ('bullet train'), which in turn would enhance its international prestige. The cost of the games was estimated at \$690 million.<sup>24</sup> Companies such as Sony invited broadcasters, including the BBC, to visit their factory and view their new, smaller, portable designs of cameras and recording equipment. This technological turn in Japanese industrial development and ideology would also drive the idea of using recently launched satellite communications by NASA for the purposes of television. The space age, hyper-modernity of what satellite technology represented was informed by a 'rhetoric of renewal' that pervaded Japanese society in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Tokyo 1964 also provided an opportunity for Japanese designers to rearticulate traditions of visual culture for a 'western' audience, which emphasised 'newness' and internationalism, and the sharp modern designs of the Games, especially the use of sporting pictograms, introduced a new era of Olympic design for the global television era.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of the voracious modernisation, the Japanese remained something of an enigma to Europeans and especially the British. Tokyo had originally been chosen to host the Games in 1940, a decision overturned in 1938 as Japanese militarism gained pace and political isolation from the USA grew.<sup>26</sup> It had been less than 20 years since the end of the war, and memories of the past fused with progressive ideas of the future of Japan. References to 'Japs' appear in the BBC outside broadcasting correspondence, but so too do compliments regarding their hospitality and meticulous planning. As Bryan Cowgill later recalled: 'The Japanese spent millions of dollars on those Games buying back respectability after the Second World War and they made a fantastic job of it'.<sup>27</sup>

## NEGOTIATIONS FOR TELEVISION RIGHTS

The expanded coverage in Rome (1960) had provided something of a template for how the Games could be covered on television. In terms of negotiations, the EBU had been stung by the manoeuvres of CBS in the USA, who, in the race to get exclusive coverage of the Rome Games ahead of their American rivals NBC and ABC, had massively inflated the value of television rights to the Games to \$600,000 for only 20 hours of recorded material, concurrently damaging the bargaining position of the EBU moving forward to negotiate deals with Olympic hosts. The value of rights, however, was linked to the growing popularity of television as a medium, and in 1964, it was estimated that there were more than 50 million households with televisions in the USA alone.<sup>28</sup> In Europe, the sale or rental of sets had also increased exponentially year on year into the 1960s, and by 1960, 82 % of British households had access to television.<sup>29</sup> Based on the CBS formula based on television sales, Dimmock believed the EBU could guarantee the rights for the Tokyo Games at two-fifths the price American broadcasters had paid. This was premised on the belief that television ownership in the USA was a decade ahead of that in Europe, and beginning to reach near saturation point.

The television rights for Tokyo 1964 were brokered by the host broadcaster NHK, who were operating on behalf of the Tokyo Olympic Organising Committee (TOOC). While relations were generally viewed as positive, the approach to the negotiation process, in particular delaying tactics on facilities for European broadcasters, caused considerable frustration among EBU members. Dimmock had travelled to Japan to meet NHK representatives, members of the Tokyo Olympic Organising Committee and the Chief Executive of the Japanese Olympic Committee in January 1961. The way open to such meetings was smoothed by diplomatic agents in Japan such as Sir Oscar Morland at the British Embassy, and Dimmock also took counsel from Lord Burghley, Marquess of Exeter, Vice-President of the IOC. Dimmock learned that the American agency Gardners had tried to open negotiations but the Japanese had decided not to be rushed into any commercial decisions.

Prior to his visit, Dimmock had been sceptical as to the BBC's ability to provide coverage on a par with the 1960 Games from Rome, but returned buoyed by the intentions of NHK, which included colour transmission and extensive video recording equipment. The commercial station NTV transmitted three and a half hours of colour television every evening, and

had installed colour television sets in every major hotel in Tokyo in an attempt to broaden public awareness of the new technology. The BBC's research division under the supervision of Bill Spronson had been testing colour television technologies since the resumption of television after the war, but no public service was considered reliable or compatible with monochrome sets. By the early-1960s, there were great expectations that colour would be introduced, and Tokyo 1964 was clearly in the mind's eye of Dimmock as an opportune moment to promote the technology in the UK. In 1964, the BBC moved to the 625-line from the 405-line system, which improved the quality of the image and paved the way for colour transmissions, but television set manufacturers were not ready to mass produce colour sets at affordable prices, and the BBC therefore withheld its use of colour transmissions.

At an EBU meeting in Geneva in August 1961, it was agreed where possible a close but informal co-operation would exist between the North American networks and the EBU negotiators so as to prevent any inflationary spiral in rights fees for the Olympic coverage. A major sticking point was the delay in the American networks submitting any firm offers to NHK for the reason that the timing of the Games clashed with the US Presidential election.<sup>30</sup> European broadcasters also remained nervous that competition between the American networks would spark a bidding war, thereby pulling up the cost of television rights more broadly. Initial principles for an EBU agreement with Ichiro Matsui of the host broadcaster NHK had been achieved by September 1961, premised on 20 hours of deferred coverage (delayed as live) of the Games. It had been agreed that direct negotiations with individual European broadcasters were to be denied, a principle abused by ITV who had made approaches to the TOOC but were promptly disavowed by the EBU president. Old antagonisms between the BBC and their commercial rivals soon flared up, and the BBC's Jack Oaten was pulled from the EBU's Exploratory Committee led by Ernst Braun on the grounds that he was directly involved in the BBC's competition with ITV. The EBU's main Negotiating Committee included Cyril Francis from ITV alongside Dimmock. The relationships between the BBC and the EBU were therefore compromised by ITV's intervention, and the ability of Dimmock or Oaten to dictate terms on the grounds of being a public service were also affected. Dimmock was adamant 'it would obviously be foolish to leave the field open for ITV to beat us at our own game'.<sup>31</sup>

The EBU working party met NHK representatives in October 1963, which included both Oaten and Hamilton from the BBC. Matsui had been absent from the morning's discussions but following lunch took charge of the final negotiations, which lasted fourteen and a half hours, lasting into the middle of the night. Braun, leading the EBU group, believed this was all designed to draw out negotiations and encourage the EBU representatives to about-turn and return to Europe.<sup>32</sup> Braun reminded his hosts that they 'had not come to Japan to be offended or to receive lessons in behaviour', all of which led him to conclude NHK 'would never manage to master the problems of the Games', and they 'were unable to take decisions'.<sup>33</sup> Oaten reported to Dimmock that many of the problems had been caused by poor translation, that the Japanese would never see the operation in the same light as the Europeans and it was all part of 'their national trait to be un-cooperative'. This last slur hints at issues of cultural translation as much as linguistic issues, and a national stereotype of strong-willed stubbornness. The EBU wanted every detail down on paper, which the Japanese negotiators understood as mistrust and 'unwillingness to meet Japanese mentality'.<sup>34</sup>

There were three major difficulties: first, whether or not the facility to provide live coverage to Europe was a possibility; second, the paucity of hotel rooms for European broadcasters; and third, insufficient numbers of commentary positions in Olympic venues. On the first and third issues, NHK were satisfied the Americans could provide satellite transmissions and more commentary positions would be provided at most venues, but these could only be delivered at a renegotiated fee. The concern over accommodation for visiting broadcasters remained, although the BBC had acted on this early and had pre-booked their hotel over a year in advance. An agreement for broadcast and facilities was signed by the EBU and NHK in December 1963 for \$380,000.<sup>35</sup>

### SATELLITE SPORT

Early attempts to transmit television via satellite had begun in 1962 with the Telstar satellite developed by AT&T, which produced the first transatlantic television feed: an unscheduled use of a televised American baseball match between Philadelphia Phillies and Chicago Cubs from Wrigley Field, the stadium announcer informing its patrons they were now being telecast live into Europe. The Americans, in particular the Olympic rights holder NBC, did not envisage using satellite coverage,

but were happy to facilitate Olympic broadcasts transmitted to the USA then relayed back to Europe. On 23rd November 1963, the first Pacific satellite television transmission by ABC from the base station in the Mojave Desert California to Ibaraki in Japan was tested using the Relay 1 satellite carrying news of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Five days later, German, French, Italian, Belgian and British EBU members each prepared a short film for transmission by ABC to Japan. The BBC's contribution was a film of Tottenham Hotspurs's 1963 European Cup Winners Cup success against Atletico Madrid, edited and produced by Slim Wilkinson.<sup>36</sup> Innovative as ever, the BBC included a Japanese-paraphrased translation of David Coleman's presentation of the film, which apparently delighted the Americans.<sup>37</sup> The successful experiments in November 1963 prompted discussion of direct satellite feeds to Europe from Japan. However, the periods of satellite coverage into Europe were so brief that the chances of a direct satellite link from Tokyo to the UK were incredibly slim.

Other possibilities such as microwave links through Siberia to Moscow were considered unlikely, not least because the Japanese refused to cooperate with the Soviets on political grounds.<sup>38</sup> The EBU therefore devised two methods for distributing coverage of the games. The first, included three hours of videotaped material, which was compiled at the Broadcasting Centre in Tokyo and flown over the North Pole to Europe. The main injection point for the deferred video material was Hamburg, which would then prepare and transmit images across the Eurovision network. This method meant a minimum 24-hour delay in coverage from the Games, not ideal when television could be beaten by radio coverage and even press reports of medal winners from Japan. The second method was to use satellite communications fed to the West coast of America, recorded in the East and then flown on to Hamburg for transmission via Eurovision. Seeking the prestige of hosting the world's first major satellite sports event, the Japanese government invested half a million dollars on satellite ground stations and were lobbying hard for the US government to invest in appropriate ground stations in the USA. Television broadcasts via satellite in the USA were organised by a new organisation, Communications Satellite Corporation (COMSAT), but NBC, the American Olympic rights holder, decided not to pay for a satellite feed, having already invested \$1.5 million on the operations in Japan.<sup>39</sup> COMSAT was keen to fulfil the wishes of the Japanese, but had to recoup \$350,000 of investment in an adapted naval ground station at Point Mugu, California. NBC preferred that COMSAT

were unsuccessful and that NASA would fund Pacific satellites with public money and thereby deliver images at no cost.

In exploring the possibilities for recorded satellite coverage, Cowgill learnt ITV had approached COMSAT with a bid of \$120,000 for an exclusive feed. The bid was rejected given the Eurovision deal, but the information fuelled concerns in the BBC that the BBC could lose out to their rivals.<sup>40</sup> The BBC was generally lukewarm about the project, and sought assurances on picture quality before investing any money in to Point Mugu.<sup>41</sup>

Syncom III, the world's first geostationary communication satellite launched in August 1964, made one orbit per day over the equator and was able to cover two fifths of the planet. With testing having taken place just a few weeks before the Olympic broadcasts by Communications Satellite Corporation (COMSAT), NHK decided to transmit 60 minutes of edited coverage to North America by Syncom III, then on by microwave to Montreal where the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) would record and prepare videotapes to be flown to Hamburg for transmission into the Eurovision network. Separate sound circuits were required between Tokyo, Montreal and Hamburg, which would marry the images with commentary feeds prior to transmission. The entire operation was estimated to cost \$850,000.<sup>42</sup> Onward live transmission across the Atlantic was impossible because Telstar orbited the southern hemisphere in autumn, and the Relay satellite offered only 12 minutes of transmission at times unsuitable for European audiences. Because the broadcast came back across the international dateline, the BBC were able to transmit the coverage on the same date it was recorded, so that material transmitted in Tokyo at 1 p.m. would be on British television screens by 10 p.m. that evening. The instability of the pictures via satellite led EBU to agree to only pay COMSAT \$150 for each minute that was found suitable for broadcast—any poor pictures would not be paid for. NHK agreed that the additional hours of coverage via satellite were at no cost, in part because some of the coverage duplicated the recorded material being flown over the pole.

### CONCLUSION: THE EMERGENCE OF GLOBAL BBC SPORT

The introduction of satellite transmissions as part of the BBC's Olympic coverage in 1964, albeit delayed, represented a step change in the use of technology and operational delivery of sports images from the other side

of the world. Transnational broadcasts from sports mega-events are frequently held to be symbolic of the processes of globalisation, associated with modernisation, time-space compression and global connectivity. The BBC's engagement and interventions with events in Sweden, Rome and Tokyo were part of broader transformations of both the phenomenological and discursive approaches to international sports broadcasting. Notions of 'liveness' and realism drove the professional ideology of sports broadcasting. At the same time, the expansion of air travel, global communications and tourism at international sports events further incentivised broadcasters to invest in covering World Cups and Olympic events. Television, in turn, popularised and glamorised international sports competition. The virtuous, symbiotic nature of this relationship made the marriage of television and global sports increasingly appealing to major television networks, and collaborative organisations such as the EBU. However, what the BBC's experience tells us about the expansive nature and technical complexity of this emergent global television culture was that the planning, production and delivery of these major events became ever more difficult to organise, politically complex, financially expensive and personally demanding for those involved. Dimmock and Oaten, for example, became formative members of what Leslie Sklair would later call a transnational class, constantly travelling overseas for meetings and reconnaissance of facilities. They were also diplomats and negotiators: mindful of their obligations to the BBC and the context of its competition with ITV, costs had to be kept down and standards had to be upheld. Balancing these pressures alongside dealing with broadcasters and sports administrators speaking different languages and from different cultures led to tensions and misunderstandings.

The BBC's approach to sending its team of producers, commentators and technicians to Tokyo mirrored the approach of an athletics team, with tight logistical planning organised by a Chef de Mission (Dimmock) and a Team Manager (Oaten). In Tokyo, BBC Television sent 24 staff in all, each provided with a corporate, pale blue BBC jacket with the BBC's logo and 'Tokyo Olympic Games 1964' underneath. Looking professional as well as working professionally mattered. Accommodated in the Diamond Hotel, one of the new 'western style' hotels in Tokyo, the party included seven producers, five commentators and assorted technical support. As the experience at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden had shown, having unilateral coverage alongside the EBU's multilateral feed became the dominant practice of the BBC, who were always looking for ways to embellish a

particular British perspective on international sporting events for viewers 'back home'.

For this very reason, the BBC took the issue of local relations with the hosts of international events very seriously. In part, it was to ensure their staff were catered for and comfortable, but it was also to smooth the way with their hosts. For Tokyo, Jack Oaten began the BBC's preparations in Tokyo in 1962, concerned and mindful that the Organising Committee and NHK had not taken into account accommodation for overseas broadcasters, which caused a crisis for other EBU broadcasters down the line. The BBC located its Tokyo coverage at the Olympic Broadcasting Headquarters at Washington Heights, and the BBC employed two Japanese staff to help coordinate its operations with the local NHK broadcaster. Cultural translation was as important as linguistic translation. The BBC's key fixer in Japan was Geoffrey Hamilton, stationed in Tokyo for the BBC's Asian Service. Hamilton had been in Tokyo since 1961, was fluent in Japanese, was well acquainted with the local cultural traditions and customs and most crucially was well networked within NHK, being on friendly terms with its managing director, and Head of Olympic Broadcasting, Ichigiro Matsui. Oaten believed it was 'invaluable to have someone who can short circuit things and go straight to the people involved'.<sup>43</sup> Hamilton's appointment to help smooth the way for the BBC's plans seemed all the more crucial in the context of the EBU's stuttering progress with NHK. In thanking Hamilton in August 1964, Oaten remarked how the BBC would beat the 'Olympic bogey' partly caused by the EBU 'making a porridge of the whole thing'.<sup>44</sup>

The rhetoric of modernity pervaded everything about Tokyo 1964: the use of IBM technology for instant information on events, the extensive use of recording technology with slow-motion reruns and the introduction of satellite were all significant markers of advancement. However, these technologies were fragile and in many ways untested. The satellite coverage was partial and underdeveloped in global terms. The BBC was always sceptical of the quality of image it might provide. The narrow bandwidth available meant sound had to be carried by traditional telecommunications cable, and reacquainting it with the pictures required skilled engineering. The untried frailty of satellite led the BBC to devise a 'breakdown plan' should the transmission from Tokyo be lost during broadcast. If vision went, the broadcast would continue with sound with a caption apologising for loss of picture. If the sound went, the BBC would continue with the vision coverage and the continuity announcer would use a lip microphone



to continue with the commentary. If sound and vision went, the presenter would apologise in the studio before linking to a standby film from a 'bank' of Ampex recorded material.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, it was not long before one of these scenarios was needed. A shorting of the underwater telecommunications cable from Japan to Guam led to complete silence on screen, with no 'clean effects' arriving in Montreal where they were to be dubbed on to the images or BBC commentaries getting through to Hamburg, which were to be synchronised with the satellite recordings. A significant amount of the satellite coverage was therefore broadcast with 'off tube' commentary from Norris McWhirter and others in BBC Lime Grove, with the words of Coleman, Bough, West and Carpenter superfluous and lost forever under the Pacific Ocean. In 1964, satellite television coverage remained experimental and unpredictably vulnerable to last-minute technical hitches. Four years later, the 1968 Games in Mexico City would prove to be the landmark Games in terms of genuinely global satellite coverage, but Tokyo 1964 had provided enough evidence of what that future might look like.

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## Wimbledon, Colour and The Open Era

### THE WIMBLEDON TRADITION

The All England Lawn Tennis Club is responsible for hosting the Championships at its home at Wimbledon. It is now one of the four major tennis tournaments in the world, and for two weeks of every year across the end of June and the beginning of July, enthral the British public with a game most of them rarely, if ever, play, and at other times of the year have very little interest in.

The BBC's coverage of Wimbledon soon picked up on a perennial theme: from where will Britain's next Wimbledon champion emerge? The media focus in the post-war period remained on British, or more specifically English, hopes of success at Wimbledon. Typical of the genre was a 1948 *Picture Post* feature on a number of rising English tennis players, including the British number one Tony Mottram.<sup>1</sup> However, it was Australian players who dominated men's tennis in the 1950s, especially Ken Rosewall and Lew Hoad, who first appeared as 17-year-olds at Wimbledon in 1952, and subsequently Rod Laver and Roy Emerson in the 1960s. From the restart of the Championships in 1946 to the end of the amateur era in 1967, Australian men won the Wimbledon singles title on ten occasions. Laver became the only player ever to hold calendar 'grand slams' twice. The Australians were model amateur tennis players of the era. As cultural historian Elizabeth Wilson describes: 'They fitted with the self-effacing, polite and unobtrusive side of the decade in which they

excelled as they swept across the smooth green surface of the 1950s tennis in their all-white gear.<sup>2</sup>

Although British men's tennis did not hold up any outstanding challengers, Wimbledon continued to attract some of the world's best players. This was partly because victory at Wimbledon brought prestige to carry through into the professional ranks. This was particularly so for American players such as Bobby Riggs, Jack Kramer and Pancho Gonzales. Wilson suggests for these players tennis was not about being an amateur gentleman, it 'was a route to a better life'.<sup>3</sup> Tennis, along with other sports like cricket, was changing its social status in public life, as a player's commitment to the sport increasingly meant turning it into a career.

Wimbledon clearly stood for the tradition of the amateur, gentleman's club approach, and the BBC's coverage initially at least bought in to this philosophy. The problem was for the Championships to be respectable in terms of the quality of tennis, it needed to attract the world's best, and the world's best had to be financially supported from somewhere. The rise of 'shamateurism' therefore infiltrated the higher echelons of the game, with illicit payments and benefits keeping the best players interested in playing. As social historian of tennis Robert J. Lake has argued, administrators in the sport clung to the idealism of amateurism, appearing 'unashamedly deceitful and hypocritical, yet at times naïve to the social conditions of post-war tennis and post-war tennis players'.<sup>4</sup> Kramer, who turned professional after winning the Championships in 1948, became the most vocal and active promoter of 'open' tennis, not simply for players to receive remuneration for the spectacle they provided, but also to free them from the shackles of traditionalists who wielded power in the dominant clubs, such as the All England Club at Wimbledon.

From a British perspective, the search for 'a new Fred Perry'—the Wimbledon singles champion from 1934 to 1936—would continue to set the tone for the coverage of Championships well into the 1960s and beyond. Few British men came close to achieving anything of note, and the BBC's 'great British hope' did not materialise until the era of Tim Henman, then Andy Murray.<sup>5</sup> The media's focus on women's tennis in the immediate post-war years was very much on fashion, and the cut of women's tennis dresses. Teddy Tinling, a former player and intelligence agent during the Second World War, designed tennis outfits for many of the great players of the era, which gained notoriety when he designed lace tennis knickers for Gussie Moran in 1949. Tinling's objective was to 'overthrow the idea that good clothes and good tennis did not go

together' with the aim of producing 'feminine efficiency'.<sup>6</sup> The accent on femininity and 'sexing up' women's tennis did little to challenge the gendered hierarchy of the game.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, there were some signs of recognition that the post-war women's game had changed, with more athleticism and speed. In June 1946, Robin Lucas hosted a programme which reviewed 60 years of women at Wimbledon and asked 'Are Ladies Faster?'<sup>8</sup> In the early 1950s, a new American teenage sensation, Maureen Connolly, known affectionately as 'Little Mo', dominated women's tennis in the first half of the decade and held the Wimbledon singles Championships for three successive years from 1952. Connolly retired from the game in 1955 at the young age of 21 following her marriage to Norman Binker. She had won nine major titles. Connolly's early retirement led to claims she had not taken the sport seriously, but her victories and women's tennis more generally were certainly made credible by the BBC's coverage of the Championships. *Peter Dimmock's Sportsview* annual challenged any detractors from Connolly's skill and dedication to the sport: 'To her it was deadly serious, an art to master, a profession to perfect.'<sup>9</sup> The feature, probably penned by Paul Fox, took a now familiar theme of how Britain could foster the next generation of tennis stars, and concluded that like 'Mo', at a young age any future British female star 'would have to devote her life to tennis'.<sup>10</sup>

British women fared better at Wimbledon than the men over the period. In 1961, Angela Mortimer won the title, beating fellow Brit Christine Truman. It was Mortimer's third major title, having previously won the French (1955) and Australian (1958) Championships. She would marry the British tennis player John Barrett, whose career in tennis included work for sports brand Slazenger, as tennis correspondent for the *Financial Times* and, from 1971, as tennis commentator for BBC Television.

By the mid-1950s, there were signs that the British public's appetite for watching tennis was blossoming. The *Radio Times* of 20th June 1952 confidently claimed: 'There is glamour about the Wimbledon fortnight which touches the imagination of thousands who have only a rudimentary knowledge of lawn tennis. Some of the names that glitter on the electric scoreboards are known all over the world, for Wimbledon has become one of the biggest international events in the sporting calendar.'<sup>11</sup>

In 1956, the BBC's coverage of the London Indoor Professional Championships provided a marathon of tennis viewing. Going on air at 9.40 p.m., the live coverage of the final between Pancho Gonzales and Frank Sedgman lasted four sets and ran on until 12.40 a.m. The match and

the extended coverage stuck in the mind of commentator Dan Maskell, who later noted BBC television ‘won a lot of friends that night.’<sup>12</sup>

### COVERING WIMBLEDON

According to commentator Peter West, who joined the BBC’s Wimbledon coverage in 1956, televising the Championships in the 1950s ‘had the air of a pleasant garden party’.<sup>13</sup> Sedate and formal, it was not the explosive sport of today. The All England Club and its Secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Duncan Macauley, were very amenable to television from the off. In 1946 and 1947, the facility fee was a mere £150, and as an additional token of thanks, Orr-Ewing sent Macauley’s personal assistant a basket of fruit.<sup>14</sup> Competition for film rights among the newsreel companies led to some modest rises in the fee to £600 in 1952, and when Basil Raey, the Secretary of the Lawn Tennis Association, complained that the BBC were getting the Championships on the cheap, de Lotbinière retorted that he had never concealed the BBC had been treated generously by Wimbledon, but had always assumed ‘it was a deliberate policy of an amateur sport towards a “public service”’.<sup>15</sup> Fees steadily rose as the prospect of competition from commercial television rose: in 1953, the BBC paid a total of £2,000 for all broadcast rights (£1,500 for television) and £4,500 in 1955.<sup>16</sup> The facility fee for televising Wimbledon would not change significantly again until the end of the 1960s.

For many years throughout the 1950s, Wimbledon was produced by Bill Duncalf and, by contemporary standards, it was a very staid affair. Coverage was restricted to Centre Court and No.1 Court, and the main challenges were finding appropriate camera positions. Built in 1922, Centre Court provided a number of issues for the accommodation of television. During pre-war coverage, cameras had been positioned at the back of the Centre Court stand, blighting vision with steel girders. There was also no commentary box for television, so commentators sat alongside the cameras, keeping their voices down during rallies. The hushed tones resulted in some viewers complaining they could not hear what was being said.<sup>17</sup> After the war, the sightlines were remedied by moving the cameras to a position above the royal box where five seats from three rows were removed to accommodate the Super-Emitron camera, which looked straight down the court. Bomb-damage repairs from the Second World War meant this could be built anew for the BBC’s purposes. However, when spectators stood to applaud the presentation of the Championships

trophies by the royal family, the crowd obscured the camera's view. The ceremony was, instead, captured by a second camera positioned on the newsreel balcony in the corner of the stadium, which provided close-ups of players, officials and the spectators with an 8-inch lens.<sup>18</sup>

The patronage of royalty at the finals was a significant feature of the Championships, bringing prestige and media interest for tennis, and was part of the monarchy's ritualization of attendance at major British sporting events. Deference of players and officials to royal protocol remained powerful, and when the two princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, attended the Championships in 1947, the BBC sought permission to show the two young women in the royal box.<sup>19</sup> In 1951, confusion as to whether or not the BBC could televise the playing of the national anthem on copyright grounds led Duncalf to exit the final day's coverage quickly, leaving Director of Television Cecil McGivern aghast at the 'shocking throw away' of the final moments of the BBC's coverage, which lacked 'dignity' and 'feeling'.<sup>20</sup> The mistake revealed the rituals of television coverage of the event were not quite in step with those of the All England Club, but in time the two organisations would begin to work together to showcase the Championships to their maximum appeal.

That year, camera positions remained a problem on Centre Court. The BBC had conceded to moving its cameras further back behind the royal box so as not to annoy spectators, who had previously been sandwiched between television and the newsreel cameras.<sup>21</sup> However, the slightly poorer vantage point led one television critic, writing for *The Listener*, to complain that the cameras never seemed to get 'in to the heart of it', with the best coverage reserved for the entrance and departure of players from the court, or 'in recording the swallow-skimming of the ball boys'. The review also unfavourably compared the coverage of tennis with cricket, arguing: 'We have been given none of those character-study shots of fans which often enliven our viewing of Test cricket.'<sup>22</sup>

Without action replay or slow motion, which were introduced in 1967, the role of the television director from Wimbledon was to switch between play and reaction shots following a rally, and as West noted: 'the player who loses a point, in singles or doubles, usually reacts more dramatically than the one who wins'.<sup>23</sup> Advice for the coverage of Wimbledon came from on high, with Maurice Gorham, Controller of Television, suggesting each game should be covered by one camera as far as possible, with no mixing during rallies, no lingering crowd shots once play resumed and to



keep commentator anecdotes to warm-ups and change-overs.<sup>24</sup> As a rule of thumb, his advice from 1946 still holds firm in the BBC's coverage.

The lack of dynamism in the coverage soon became a source of concern when, in 1955, ITV began to compete with the BBC's televising of Wimbledon. Cecil McGivern had noticed that their rivals showed far more close-ups of players and the use of three-time champions Fred Perry and 'Little Mo' as a commentators added both gravitas and youthful verve. As Garry Whannel has suggested, this was unusual for the BBC to be so threatened by what their rivals were doing, particularly in terms of production values.<sup>25</sup> In a move to solidify the BBC's association with the Championships, de Lotbinière agreed to the idea of *Sportsview* promoting a special edition of the LTA programme for Wimbledon. The BBC, mindful this smacked of advertising, agreed the LTA was a not-for-profit organisation and was there to promote the good of the sport. For the BBC, this wedded its identity to the sport, helping its new-found competition with ITV. With young producer Frank Keating at the helm, and Philip Dorté to negotiate for the commercial channel, ITV would persevere with their coverage of Wimbledon until 1968, with new commentators joining Fred Perry including Dennis Coombe and Bill Threlfall, who later became a staple of BBC coverage. Perry, with his mid-Atlantic accent, was the main draw for audiences, and his network of socialites sustained ITV's coverage when rain delays interrupted play. On one occasion this included facilitating the appearance of Bing Crosby in the small ITV tent, which acted as their on-site studio.<sup>26</sup> However, with limited archive to fill rain delays, and only one channel, ITV's challenge to the BBC at Wimbledon could not be sustained.

The BBC's coverage gained more edge and impetus with the appointment of Bryan Cowgill as executive producer of Wimbledon in the early-1960s. Cowgill suggested that when he took over the coverage of the Championships, it was not the big deal it would become. 'Before the invention of video tape', he recalled, 'when rain stopped play then it also ended on the television screen.'<sup>27</sup> Any complacency in the competition with ITV was quickly eschewed, and according to West, he 'brought to his task a newsman's editorial flair, he chiselled away at the All England Club in his search for new camera positions and facilities, and he transformed what was already by contemporary standards a respected professional operation into something that was not in business to finish second best.'<sup>28</sup> In 1964, the camera positions on Centre Court were moved to the opposite end of the Royal Box, and a new commentary box was built

by the scoreboard, where they continue to reside. The ability for the BBC to use two channels after the launch of BBC Two in 1964 transformed its breadth and flexibility of coverage.

### THE VOICES OF WIMBLEDON

The BBC's commentary team, like many sports, enjoyed incredible longevity, especially Dan Maskell, who for decades became the 'voice of Wimbledon' for British viewers. Maskell came from an ordinary working-class background in Fulham, but would go on to be the BBC's pre-eminent and much coveted commentator on tennis, forever synonymous with television coverage of Wimbledon. Maskell's first appearance on television had been as a coach on the studio demonstration programme in June 1938. Tennis was a perfect match for the BBC's early television audience: its social status among London's suburban middle-classes was ideally suited and Maskell recalls being impressed by a committee member of Wimbledon, who mentioned he had seen an announcement of Maskell's performance.<sup>29</sup> In a cramped studio, Maskell demonstrated ground strokes, the serve and volleying, and in his autobiography noted 'it was a pretty ordinary little item but at the time we all thought we'd achieved something rather special.'<sup>30</sup> Maskell's tennis career had begun as a ball boy at Queens Club, nearby his family home. As Elizabeth Wilson suggests, 'Dan flourished in this socially segregated world', apparently undaunted by the deeply ingrained class structures that distinguished the members from professional coaches, ground staff and ball boys.<sup>31</sup> Begging, stealing and borrowing his way to playing tennis, Maskell nurtured his talents and eventually became British Professional Champion in 1928. During the Second World War, Maskell joined the RAF as a Rehabilitation Officer, and later became a Squadron Leader, working with wounded servicemen. Maskell recognised how tennis had opened doors and privileges in life that might have otherwise been well beyond his working-class roots:

In spite of the personal tragedies that I have suffered I have always considered myself a fortunate man – fortunate in my work, fortunate in my friends and fortunate in the path that destiny chose for me behind a microphone.<sup>32</sup>

In post-war life as the All England Club coach, he was no stranger to broadcasting, appearing in numerous sports talks on radio and demonstrations on television. His first commentary on television came in 1951,

having spent a couple of years summarising tennis on radio alongside Max Robertson. Dimmock had suggested they trial Maskell alongside the BBC staff commentator Freddie Grisewood, who Maskell described as ‘the man with the golden voice.’<sup>33</sup> Maskell described his apprenticeship under Grisewood in glowing terms: ‘I could not have had a better or kinder mentor. I literally sat at his feet in the tiny commentary box and learned the business of television commentary.’<sup>34</sup>

Grisewood, an Oxford graduate and a BBC staff commentator, had presented the BBC’s first ever outside broadcast during the coronation of King George VI in 1937. From 1946, he became the BBC’s principal commentator at Wimbledon. Economical in style, Grisewood epitomised the emerging trend in television commentary, which George Barnes, Director of Television, praised for its minimalism and selective annotation of the pictures.<sup>35</sup> Others who were tried alongside Grisewood did not gain such favour: Brigadier Smythe was judged by Orr-Ewing to be slow with a ‘Poona voice’ (odd sounding); whereas Dudley Vernon spoke too much and tended to be facetious.<sup>36</sup>

The All England Club was very amenable to BBC constructions on both Centre and No.1 Courts. Two radio commentary boxes, one for the BBC, the other for international broadcasters, had been constructed in the 1920s below the Royal Box, and in 1946, a third was added for television, situated in-between the older two. Rebuilt in 1950, access to the box was convoluted and treacherous, climbing an iron ladder up through the concrete floor. In 1955, the physical hardship of getting into the box gave Duncalf an excuse to question if Grisewood was getting too old for Wimbledon commentary, when in reality he felt the commentator no longer held expert knowledge of the sport.<sup>37</sup> In 1956, Peter West was brought onto the Wimbledon commentary team to replace Grisewood. On another occasion, Maskell recalled, editor Paul Fox fell from the ladder, cracking several ribs. However, once inside the cramped box, the view of the court was amazing for such a prestigious event. ‘We looked straight down the sidelines past the umpire,’ Maskell observed, ‘It provided almost as good a view as the Royal Box and was in a better position than our present television commentary box which is at the other end alongside the scoreboard.’<sup>38</sup> The commentary box moved in 1967 following the BBC’s move to colour cameras.

From 1951, Maskell commented on 41 consecutive Wimbledon finals for BBC Television. His tone and economy of words marked him out as one of the great television commentators of BBC Television Sport,

grasping early on the need to remain silent during rallies, and only adding analysis or short interjections such as ‘Oh I say’ or ‘what a peach of a shot’ to add some dramatic effect. His understated approach shocked American broadcasters, used to constant streams of narrative, but as Sellens suggests, it was in keeping with the refined culture of the All England Club, of which he had been an integral part. Ultimately, Maskell’s success as a commentator came from having played and coached tennis at a high level, which left him with a rich knowledge of the sport and its history. His life had been dedicated to the sport, and this immersion led him to conclude his skills as a tennis commentator were partially acquired and partially instinctive. The deep understanding of what was happening in any given match and the psychological turns the players went through enabled him to interpret the television images before him. He was a big fan of Henry Longhurst, and the best commentators, he suggested, ‘feel what the players feel and use words sparingly to communicate those feelings’.<sup>39</sup> By his own standards, Maskell performed his duties as a commentator with imperious ease and relaxation, which befitted the traditions of Wimbledon.

Released from his role as club professional, Maskell had an acumen for commentary that was recognised from the beginning, although Duncalf had to provide constant reminders of the ‘half-witted viewers’, for whom his expertise needed to be brought down ‘to the level of the less knowledgeable’.<sup>40</sup> The BBC’s coverage and Maskell’s commentary came in for particular praise in 1952. One respondent to the BBC’s Audience Research noted: ‘Dan Maskell is the exception where the expert at the game is an improvement on the expert broadcaster.’<sup>41</sup> Another viewer, clearly a tennis fan, gushed: ‘The televising of Wimbledon is always a high spot. If the remainder of the year contained only trashy programmes, I should still think it worthwhile to own a set just for the Wimbledon fortnight!’<sup>42</sup> The research also showed an exceptionally high ‘reaction index’ for Wimbledon coverage, averaging 82, with no grades under 80. There were some in the BBC’s audience panel who bemoaned the amount of tennis on television, while others wanted more close-ups of players or noted the amount of times crowd headshots got in the way of the cameras.<sup>43</sup>

Maskell was at the forefront of two key innovations in coverage of Wimbledon: interviews and a final day summary. Interviews per se were a sticky subject for the LTA and the All England Club. The laws of the LTA did not permit competitors to be interviewed during the course of the Championships, and the object of this rule was to preserve the ethics

of amateurism by avoiding any unfairness or self-praise.<sup>44</sup> In 1952, the All England Club had built a glass-fronted players' lounge beneath the Royal Box for the specific purpose of media interviews. Interviews had to be recorded, could not go out live, and could only be transmitted on the last two days of the Championships. Recorded interviews had to be passed by two committee members and were arranged through Macauley's office. Live interviews were exclusively with the singles Championship winners, and in 1952, Maskell conducted memorable exclusive interviews with both Frank Sedgman and Maureen Connolly.<sup>45</sup> Maskell was not only comfortable in front of the camera, but also had the technical knowledge to ask the probing questions.

The second innovation, the end-of-day summary, became a feature of the BBC's Wimbledon coverage, and has indeed remained commonplace in the coverage of tennis championships on television. Maskell perfected the role, much like E.W. Swanton had achieved in cricket, which he later ceded to other experts such as former American professional player Jack Kramer, who joined the BBC's commentary team in 1960. Together, Maskell and Kramer produced a most unlikely double act, and for producer Bryan Cowgill, their contrasting but complimentary styles were like strawberries and cream: 'their respective cultures and backgrounds fused on television in a partnership that gave the viewer the perfect picture of the occasion'.<sup>46</sup> Kramer's introduction into the BBC's coverage would prove to be profound, crucial not only to the BBC's association with Wimbledon, but also for the game of tennis as a whole.

### JACK KRAMER, COLOUR TELEVISION AND THE OPEN ERA

Professionalism in tennis began when leading players Suzanne Lenglen and Vincent Richards signed a contract to play exhibition games for promoter C. C. Pyle in 1926. After the war, men's professional tennis blossomed in the USA, driven by Jack Kramer. Kramer, a powerful tennis player, innovated a style of tennis known as the 'Big Game' based on the serve and volley technique. It brought him great success, but his frustration at the hypocritical approach to amateurism, with players receiving under-the-table payments and financial support, led him to turn professional in 1948. His impact on the sport, as player and promoter of a US professional tour in the late-1940s and 1950s, paved the way for the open era of tennis, which, after much campaigning against intransigent tennis administrators, eventually came in 1968. American tennis journalist

Bud Collins argued: 'From a competitor to an administrator to a broadcaster, Jack Kramer was the most important figure in the history of the game.'<sup>47</sup> His impact on professional tennis is irrefutable, but what role did the BBC play in transforming the direction of elite tennis, and the shift in Wimbledon to the open era, where amateur and professional players could compete against each other?

As Robert Lake has argued, the struggle to maintain amateurism in tennis led tennis administrators and 'official' media to ignore or censor the press coverage of the professional game.<sup>48</sup> However, the turn to professionalism by the Australian pair Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall in 1957 had begun to turn heads at the BBC, who wanted to cover the world's best players on the world's leading tennis stage. This could only happen if the major championships in tennis were made open to professional players. By the mid-1960s, the winds of change were beginning to blow across SW19, the home of the All England Tennis Club. In 1964, Maskell, a firm advocate of abolishing the amateur-professional distinction, concluded his overview of tennis for television viewers by explaining the unhappy situation:

At one time it could be taken for granted that the Wimbledon champion was the best player in the world. Among the men this is no longer so. This is because of the unfortunate division of the game between amateurs and professionals, many of the Wimbledon champions of recent years having changed their amateur status.<sup>49</sup>

Cowgill, now Head of Sport, became increasingly frustrated that the finest players were not appearing on the BBC's coverage of Wimbledon. In 1966, the BBC's rigging, number of cameras and expenses of its Wimbledon coverage had grown, but the quality of the entertainment on screen had significantly diminished. The top-ranked men's player, Roy Emerson, was heavily favoured to win a third consecutive title, but had fallen heavily against the umpire's chair in his fourth round match against Owen Davidson, injuring his shoulder, and thus ending his challenge. Bad weather also disrupted much of the Championships, leaving the BBC with no alternative but to run videotape replays of previous tournaments. The only salvation for viewers was the success of British women's singles player Ann Jones in reaching the second week of the Championships. Indeed, the tennis had become so mundane that producer Slim Wilkinson followed the cultural trend for televised beauty pageants, such as Miss

World, and organised a fashion parade of women's tennis wear being worn by the world's leading players as a form of light entertainment. Although the reaction index from Audience Research was very good at 76, the Championships were unremarkable. The following year, 1967, would prove to be a landmark in the evolution of the BBC's coverage of Wimbledon, when colour cameras were introduced for the first time and a one-off professional tournament, in front of BBC cameras, was played for the first time at Wimbledon.

The decision to use colour cameras came relatively late in the planning cycle. Jack Oaten had written to David Mills, the secretary of the All England Club, in February 1967 with an ultimatum to decide if colour cameras could take up certain seats in Centre Court. Mills and the committee, as ever, agreed but David Attenborough, then Controller of BBC Two, nervous that the new colour cameras were untried and untested for such a large outside broadcast, agreed with Paul Fox, newly instated as Controller of BBC One, that the BBC's principal coverage of the Championships would remain in monochrome.<sup>50</sup> Attenborough decided that colour transmissions would start on 1st July 1967, six days into the Championships, which would allow the BBC engineers to run closed-circuit tests on the new colour cameras and scanner before going live to the public on BBC Two.

The colour operation was completely independent of the usual domestic operation and solely focused on the Centre Court. The cameras were positioned at the opposite end of the court to the black and white cameras. A new, independent commentary team was employed—Keith Fordyce and Billy Knight—with Fordyce focussing on the presentation of play (the Maskell role), while Knight would be the tactical man (Kramer's role). Two colour cameras were based at the back of the stand focused on the centre line and a third was positioned by the base line for personality shots. A fourth camera was positioned outside Centre Court for linking and captions.<sup>51</sup>

The BBC's facility fee for the 1967 Championships was considerably increased to £8,377, but the response from the public and the media made the BBC's decision to use Wimbledon as the site to launch its first public colour transmission an overwhelming success.<sup>52</sup> Cowgill wrote to executive producer Slim Wilkinson, with news that audiences and reaction indices are 'beyond any doubt the highest we have ever had'. Wilkinson, said Cowgill, was as the 'architect and builder' of the new colour transmissions from Wimbledon and had set a pattern of 'polished attractive production standards in which the Department can take immense pride.'<sup>53</sup>

Colour television sets were few and far between in 1967, costing anything between £250 to £350 to buy, but the look and feel of Centre Court with the lush green grass, the whites of the players and the colourful spectacle of the crowd, held the attention like never before. The chief engineer of the colour transmission, Tommy Thomas, was reported as saying: 'Black and white is never going to look the same after colour. When I get home I shall find it hard to even peep at my own black and white set.'<sup>54</sup> The very fact he did not have a colour set was an indication of just how new and select colour television was. Other reports noticed how colour coverage of Wimbledon would pass most people by, but noted Violet Johnstone in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'we will get a chance of seeing it in almost every TV rental shop's window display'.<sup>55</sup> Some set manufacturers had been upset by the BBC's decision to launch demonstration colour transmissions ahead of the expected launch in December 1967, leaving many rental shops short of supplies with mounting waiting lists.<sup>56</sup> However, there was a genuine sense of the revelatory nature of colour television, and the *Daily Mail* television critic, Peter Black, noted the 'fascination of colour fastens on to the primitive'. Even the vivid colour of the Robinsons Barley Water caught the attention of those who watched the briefest amount of Wimbledon in colour. The critical success of the BBC's colour transmissions, up to seven hours per day during the second week of Wimbledon, had been captivating and enlivened the coverage of tennis like never before.

With the prospect of colour transmission from Wimbledon, Cowgill had approached Jack Kramer earlier in 1967 with a request that if the BBC could persuade Herman David, chairman at the All England Club, to host a one-off professional tournament to be televised by the BBC, he could ensure that the world's best professional players—Hoad, Rosewall, Laver, Gonzalez, Sigura and others—would appear. Cowgill also asked Kramer if he would agree that if and when the open era began, his players would play their first Open tournament in Britain.<sup>57</sup> Acting as intermediary, Cowgill felt he could persuade Herman David, the Chairman of the All England Committee, to host its first professional tournament, thereby paving the way to the open era, something many tennis fans wanted to see. Cowgill's reminiscence of how he persuaded David to take on professional tennis at Wimbledon is worth quoting at length:

I said to him at lunch one day, 'We can't go on for ever claiming the Wimbledon champion is the best tennis player in the world, because Jack Kramer has thirty-odd who could beat him every day of the week!' That was



my approach at that time. And that's why I was a supporter of open sport. Selfishly, because I, as a television operator, wanted to have the best in front of my cameras. I said, 'Well, is Wimbledon in favour of Open tennis?' 'Well' he said, 'we haven't really discussed it at length. In any event Wimbledon on its own couldn't do it because we are subject to the authorities, the Lawn Tennis Association.' I said, 'You're a bloody sight more important than the Lawn Tennis Association, if you don't mind me saying so. Anyway, I understand the politics of the situation.' He said, 'In any event, even if I express my belief that's the way it will go, I haven't had any discussion at all with the professional side of the game.' I said, 'One of your former champions, who you know well anyway, is a pal of mine Jack Kramer, and as far as their participation's concerned, I mean he'd been waiting thirty years for this to happen.' 'I have an idea', I said to him, 'Why don't you hoist your flag up the mast? Why don't you signal your intentions?' And he said, 'How am I going to do that?' I said, 'In August, why don't you put a professional tournament on the Centre Court?' And of course it was a great stir. And he did. I said, 'I don't want to be on Court One, I want to be on Centre Court. Jack will bring his best professional players in the world and do it over the August bank holiday weekend...' Anyway, we did it over the August bank holiday weekend. Sixty thousand people turned up over those three days. Men like Pancho Gonzales, he'd never been on Centre Court in his life. There was Rosewall and Hoad, all former Wimbledon Champions. It was a huge success, and I knew what that success meant for Wimbledon. There was no turning back. And I said to Jack Kramer to assist the relationship with Herman David and Wimbledon, 'If, as we hope now, tennis does become Open in the very near future, you've got to, through me, give Wimbledon a guarantee that all your professionals would take part in the first Open Championship, whatever the rewards.' He said, 'You can have it in writing, I've been waiting twenty-five years for that day.' And of course it happened a year later. And all those things came together.<sup>58</sup>

### GAME, SET, MATCH BBC

The story, as Cowgill remembers it, reveals the emerging power of television to act as intermediary in sport, in this case transcending the amateur-professional divide into the open era, which ultimately benefited the spectacle of Wimbledon on the BBC and arguably reinvigorated interest in tennis for British audiences. The professional tournament was sponsored by the BBC, with prize money totalling £35,000.<sup>59</sup> It was not, as some have suggested, the BBC's first colour outside broadcast from Wimbledon, but it was perhaps one of the most memorable and significant.

Following the success of the professional tournament, an overwhelming majority of the LTA members voted to remove the distinction of amateur and professional from its statutes. In 1968, the first open Wimbledon Championships were transmitted in colour on BBC Two, and in a letter of praise to producer Slim Wilkinson, Cowgill summed up his feelings on what had been achieved: ‘It is not often in this business that you can look back on a programme or a series of programmes and say genuinely “Well, I don’t quite see how that could have been bettered”, but Wimbledon 1968 was in retrospect one of those very rare occasions.’<sup>60</sup> With the production values finely tuned, established and much loved commentators in place and the world’s best players on show, Wimbledon regained its status as one of the major sporting rituals on British television. British victories in the women’s singles—Ann Jones in 1969 and later Virginia Wade in 1977—consolidated the national desire and discourse for home-grown success at the Championships, which has never abated, was ignited once more in the era of Tim Henman and universally celebrated in British public life when Andy Murray won the men’s title in 2013. As a measure of their perceived national significance, the Wimbledon Championships remain protected for free-to-air television under the Broadcasting Act (1996), which by default has supported the BBC’s continuous run of rights agreements with the All England Club, which has spanned seven decades. Were the BBC to lose the Wimbledon fortnight, it would leave a sizeable hole in their early-summer schedule and their reputation as a sports broadcaster. However, for the foreseeable future, the partnership between the BBC and the All England Club remains a resolute winning formula, which at the very least enhances the visibility of tennis in people’s homes and maintains the BBC’s role in a unique British sporting tradition.

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## They Think It's All Over... 1966 and the New Era of TV Sport

### 'SOME PEOPLE ARE ON THE PITCH': 1966 AND BBC SPORT

The end of Kenneth Wolstenholme's television commentary on the 1966 World Cup Final is probably the most replayed piece of television in the BBC's history. It begins, 'Some people are on the pitch, they think it's all over', and as the England forward Geoff Hurst scores the final goal, he concludes, 'It is now!' It is a poetic piece of commentary, and won Wolstenholme acclaim for many years until his death in 2002. Wolstenholme later recalled that his instinct took over once he saw an England supporter running onto the pitch out the corner of his eye. Sensing the referee was close to blowing the final whistle at the end of extra time, the confluence of the fan, timing and the emphatic finish by the England forward came together perfectly to create the most memorable commentary lines ever spoken. The World Cup Final in 1966 came at the end of a prolonged period of planning for the BBC Outside Broadcast Department. For many, the coverage of the 1966 World Cup would produce the signature moment of their careers.

## THE PERFECT MATCH: THE BBC/ITV WORLD CUP CONSORTIUM

By comparison to the majority of outside broadcasts from sport, the BBC had an incredibly long lead-in time to plan its coverage of the 1966 Jules Rimet World Cup. Sir Stanley Rous, Secretary of Football Association and future FIFA President, had alerted Peter Dimmock as early as August 1961 that the World Cup finals were likely to be held in England in 1966. In contrast to the Football League, Rous had fostered a strong working relationship with the BBC, and urged Dimmock to seek a retainer to secure the BBC an exclusive option on a fixed price for television rights to 1966.<sup>1</sup> As Dimmock recalled:

He deserves an enormous amount of credit that he didn't get at the time for the World Cup coverage here in '66. I'd done a deal with Sir Stanley Rous – now Rous, he was a forward thinker – and he said to me “Peter, we've got the World Cup in Britain in '66 which you, the BBC, are going to want.” The previous World Cup was in Chile. He said, “Look, how about doing a deal that if you will film the World Cup in Chile I will do a deal with the BBC, and you, for the World Cup back here in Britain.” Well, of course I worked it out. The contract cost us a lot of money, I think the Board of Governors said, “What's this?” because the cost of sending film cameras and the crew to Chile was pretty big. But I said but look if you put the whole lot together think what it is going to mean when we get the World Cup here. And they said, oh very well, OK, and I signed the deal with Rous. Of course, it worked wonderfully well for us, but also for them, because that absolutely established television and football.<sup>2</sup>

The film deal for Chile in 1962 was agreed. With live television transmissions to the UK from South America impossible, the BBC turned to some extraordinary measures to get footage of the event to British viewers. The plan was to provide British television viewers with coverage of the finals approximately 48 hours after each match had finished. A ten-man team, including commentators David Coleman and Kenneth Wolstenholme, headed out to Chile with two complete film-camera crews poised to cover 18 matches. The process of transporting and developing the film was meticulously planned: films were flown between Santiago, Lima, Panama, Miami and New York, where the film was processed before being shipped to Europe from Idlewild Airport on the first available transatlantic jet.<sup>3</sup>

The length the BBC went to get coverage from Chile was symbolic of the emerging perceived importance of the World Cup among broadcasting elites and, crucially, part of Dimmock's gentleman's agreement with Rous. However, the BBC's advocacy of the championships was severely challenged following the now infamous match between the hosts Chile and Italy—commonly referred to as 'The Battle of Santiago'. In presenting the highlights to British viewers, Coleman did not hide his disgust at the events on the pitch, opening his presentation of the film as follows: 'The game you are about to see is the most stupid, appalling, disgusting and disgraceful exhibition of football possibly in the history of the game.'<sup>4</sup> Coleman's assessment of the violence was not harsh, but the events had blemished the finals, eventually won by Brazil. The lack of live games had also produced a distancing of the event.

By the time the 1962 World Cup had begun, the BBC had already obtained confidential draft plans for the venues and scheduling of games for 1966 from the Football Association. The BBC's response revealed, certainly for the first time in a football context, that television would be inherently built into the scheduling of the games. Oaten, the BBC's Sports Organiser, requested no more than four games be played on any single day during the group phase, and no more than two from the quarter-finals onward. Matches were also to be scheduled at varying times to suit maximum television exposure.<sup>5</sup> The BBC's intervention was a major institutional step change in the relationship between a major global sporting event and television. Excerpts from the FA's plans also revealed recognition of television's changing role: 'By 1966 it is felt that television will have become an important and established part of everyday life of the sportsman'.<sup>6</sup> The FA, and therefore FIFA, were also aware that the structure of British television may have changed by 1966 with a third channel, enabling more space for coverage. Rumours were also circulating on the prospect of 'closed-circuit' television emerging, with a pay-per-view business model. FIFA's opening gambit for a television rights fee to the 1966 was £300,000.<sup>7</sup>

From an early stage, it was clear broadcasting was forming part of the infrastructure of the World Cup itself, and the requirements of television, and international television audiences, were framing the plans of the FA and FIFA executives. Denis Follows, the new Secretary of the FA, found the draft broadcasting plans 'staggering' and joked that once the world's press had been accommodated, there would be little room left for spectators. Ten stadia were designated for use and each would have to accom-

modate up to 40 commentary positions for television. One further development was the establishment of a consortium between the BBC and ITV to organise the coverage. As Alec Weeks later recalled, the consortium promised FIFA that every match would be covered by a total of 45 electronic television cameras, and by 1964, the BBC and ITV did not have that many OB cameras between them.<sup>8</sup> It was a considerable, but necessary, shift in the institutional politics of British television. Rivalry was temporarily put aside for the greater good of being the host broadcasters. In 1958, ITV had tried to break the EBU negotiations by unilaterally intervening to capture the rights to the World Cup in Sweden. Now, Alan Chivers (BBC) and Graham Turner (ITV) found themselves working hand in hand to coordinate the host broadcast facilities, which were being used by the rest of the world. Nevertheless, ITV had persuaded the FA to push for all England's games to be played at Wembley. The BBC and ITV cameras would be split regionally, so in 1963, Oaten warned that the BBC must ensure it took control of the London stadia.<sup>9</sup>

By 1966, the institutional and bureaucratic character of running a major championship such as the World Cup had significantly changed to accommodate and assimilate the requirements of television. From its earliest forays into outside broadcasting, the BBC had searched for ways to tame its subject, sport, for the needs of its cameras. However, nervous and commercially sensitive sports administrators had battled to keep television at arm's length, at least in terms of how sport was being organised for the paying spectator. The experience of 1966 represented a new level of institutional compromise, and the acceptance that television was now an integral part of social and cultural life, including sport. For example, in December 1963, Dimmock, in his capacity as Chairman of the World Cup Television Consortium and Sports Advisor to the EBU, expressed his concern about FIFA arranging the semi-finals on the same date.<sup>10</sup> Follows did not initially understand the BBC's concerns; indeed, he simply referred to previous World Cups in Switzerland, Sweden and Chile where the semi-finals were played at the same time. However, the 'Bureau' of the FIFA World Cup Organising Committee soon changed their minds and the matches scheduled for Goodison Park, home of Everton FC, and Wembley Stadium were promptly switched to different dates to accommodate television's demands. Today, the manipulation of the scheduling of football matches to suit television is ubiquitous. In the mid-1960s, it was revolutionary.



Dimmock also acted as the EBU's agent for the distribution of World Cup rights, and as such, also reported to the FA and FIFA on the progression of negotiations. The relationship emphasised the mutual interest and trust that had grown between broadcaster and governing body, and formalised television's central role in the organisation of a major global sporting event. By May 1965, Dimmock, assisted by Basil Sands of BBC Enterprises, had concluded contracts with 17 EBU nations, seven Intervention nations in Eastern Europe, and 24 nations worldwide. Deals with South American television were especially lucrative for FIFA, with deals worth £35,000 with Corizo in Argentina, £67,500 with Diarios Asociados Pool in Brazil and £10,000 with Telesystema for the first satellite coverage of the World Cup via Early Bird in Mexico. The same satellite link was used to transmit the World Cup Final live to NBC in the USA, a deal brokered through Mark McCormack's television distribution company, Transworld Sport International.

One of the few tensions in the relationship to arise concerned the installation of advertising boards by FIFA at World Cup venues. The EBU had written in a clause in their contract to forbid advertising at grounds, in part because of laws governing some European public broadcasters. The World Cup Organising Committee, determined to raise additional commercial income, suggested as a compromise that advertisements could be placed at a 'second level' place, above the eyeline of the pitch itself.<sup>11</sup> However, due to pressure from the EBU, FIFA's advertising plans were dropped. An inspection of grounds by Chivers in June 1966 discovered the original local perimeter advertising boards of the respective clubs were still in place, and Dimmock sent a reminder to the FA for these to be removed or covered up.<sup>12</sup> Follows, somewhat incredulous, defended the right of clubs to keep existing advertising in place, feeling it was not in the FA's power to force clubs to break long-standing localised contracts. Follows also noted that the advertisements at Old Trafford had been broadcast by the BBC and the EBU across the continent during Manchester United's European Cup games.<sup>13</sup> In time, the authority of FIFA and the local organising committee would ensure host venues would adhere to the commercial contracts of the World Cup. In 1966, there appeared to be a lack of coherence in regulating the commercialisation of host venues, and the conflict of interest between the values of public service broadcasters and the commercial needs of the football authorities remained an unresolved contradiction. Nevertheless, it is clear that television now played a central role in the planning and organisation of the World Cup. The BBC, as agents

to the EBU and as part of the host broadcaster consortium with ITV, was more heavily integrated into the decision-making process of a major sporting event than ever before. They influenced the scheduling of matches and the facilities created to accommodate broadcasters at each stadium, and instigated the negotiations regarding the international distribution and sale of television rights to the event.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the process, the FA Secretary, Denis Follows, paid a high compliment to Chivers and his ITV counterpart, Graham Turner, suggesting ‘I have grown up with them, and I was as proud as anyone could be at the excellence of the end product’.<sup>15</sup>

### REPLAYING GEOFF HURST’S GOAL

Where Dimmock, Oaten and Chivers were integral to the institutional marriage of television and the football authorities, Bryan Cowgill as Head of Sport and executive producer and Alec Weeks as the main director of the coverage were responsible for the shaping the televisual aesthetics of the 1966 World Cup coverage. As discussed in Chaps. 4 and 12, Chivers and then Weeks had been central to the BBC’s development of the generic conventions of televising football in Britain. From 1954, these prescriptive ideas also influenced EBU coverage of football at the World Cup. The aesthetics of televised football were predicated on the possible technologies available. In 1966, the introduction of new technologies played a significant role in transforming the televisual experience of the 1966 World Cup. The BBC had introduced electronic cameras and video technology to its sports programming in 1964, which helped accelerate the editing process, removed the expensive need for film footage to be rapidly transported from location to the studio and led to the origin of its long-running edited highlights football programme, *Match of the Day*. The new programme had been the brainchild of Cowgill, and in 1966 he introduced a further revolutionary technology to the coverage of football: the slow-motion action replay machine. Cowgill had been visiting his friend, the tennis commentator Jack Kramer, at his home in Los Angeles in the mid-1960s and had been watching coverage of American Football when he saw a moment of the action repeated at half its original speed. In bemusement and awe, Cowgill immediately wanted to know more about the technology, with a view to using it in the coverage of the World Cup. The device had been created for the ABC network and when Cowgill enquired whether or not it would be possible for the BBC to obtain or

borrow one, he was told that the machine was the only one of its kind. BBC engineers were sent to the USA to understand how the technology worked, and then asked to recreate the technology for the BBC in time for the Finals. It cost £58,000 to develop.<sup>16</sup>

The technology was used on air for the first time during England's opening match against Uruguay. For the first time, viewers had been given an immediate replay on their screen of the incident they had seen live only a second or two earlier. Bemused viewers called the BBC's telephone exchange asking if something was wrong with the transmission. As word spread to the director's gallery, Cowgill asked if a caption could be inserted to explain to viewers what was happening. When asked by the caption artist what this should be, Cowgill instinctively said, 'call it "Action Replay"', and the phrase has stuck ever since.<sup>17</sup>

In subsequent letters to the *Radio Times*, viewers reported being left 'breathless' at seeing the technology for the first time.<sup>18</sup> Action replay was a significant departure from previous televisual experiences of sport. In 1966, the manipulation of the image in this way seemed completely alien. In time, action replays would form part of the language of televised sport, and watching sport on television would appear incomplete without it. During the 1966 Final between England and West Germany, the technology would replay one of the most contentious moments in World Cup history. In extra time, the England striker Geoff Hurst struck the ball against the bar, which bounced down and then out off the turf. The goal was given, and because it was captured on television in slow-motion action replay, it has been replayed and cross-examined frame by frame ever since. In the history of British television, the moment has iconic status in the nation's cultural memory, but remains a 'slow-motion' moment of television history that continues to defy the technology that made it. Operating the machine was assistant director Jonathan Martin, who stopped the action replay at the moment the ball appeared to cross the line. Once stopped, the machine would freeze the image and not allow the replay to roll forward. Because of the camera angle to the German goal line, it remains debatable if the ball ever crossed the line. In Germany, a goal scored off the crossbar continues to be called a 'Wembley Tor'. The rhetoric of 'liveness' or realism, which the coverage of football frequently adopts, even within edited highlights, was made problematic by the introduction of action replay technology, which has produced a complex and altered time scheme within the ontology of television.

In the UK context, and arguably beyond, 1966 proved to be a landmark event in the manipulation of the image and the subsequent conventions of televised football.

One other technology that was much discussed and debated in the lead-in to 1966 but ultimately dispensed with was the potential of introducing colour television. Colour television had been sequentially introduced in the USA in the mid-1950s and 1960s, and the debate in Europe rested on the standardisation of colour transmission and reception, as well as the cost of introducing it for broadcasters, manufacturers and the consumer. Monochrome coverage had long created issues of identification for the viewer, particularly in team sports. In July 1964, Dimmock had written to Rous to request if opposing teams could wear contrasting colour shorts to assist viewers in identifying the two teams.<sup>19</sup>

The BBC's Outside Broadcast department could see the potential power of having the 1966 World Cup available in colour. Again, prestige played a role in this desire, but it was also the ideology of technological progress driven through by a sporting mega-event that underpinned a conviction that the timing was right to introduce it. The BBC had the technological know-how, but the government was concerned that television manufacturers were not ready and that a mass consumer spree on colour TVs prior to the World Cup would prove embarrassing to British television manufacturers not wanting to lose out to overseas competitors from Europe (Philips) and in particular Japan (Panasonic and Sony), who had introduced colour in 1960 and had transmitted colour images during the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Although British viewers would not receive colour programming, in May 1966, Dimmock began conversations with the Daily Express and Rank Organisation regarding the possibility of transmitting colour coverage to the Odeon Cinema at Leicester Square. The cinema broadcast would be done on an experimental basis and no fee would be charged for entry. The possibility of colour transmission was also considered for the satellite transmission of the Final to NBC. Television projection equipment was sourced and tested from Philips in Holland and issues of 625-line and 525-line transmissions were technically discussed. After more than a month's deliberation, the colour scheme was aborted, almost as soon as it had been conceived.<sup>20</sup> The BBC would launch their colour transmissions at Wimbledon the following year, and the first colour broadcast of a football match came from the Charity Shield at Wembley in August 1967.

## PROFESSIONALISM, ENTERTAINMENT AND THE NATION

The pinnacle of the pioneering era of BBC television sport arguably came in 1966. It coincided with England not only hosting the event, but also winning the World Cup. Historically, 1966 has formed a central role in national myth-making around football in English popular culture. Both its players and television coverage of the Final have received an enduring national celebration, which has gone beyond the ephemeral moment of victory to create a much broader cultural mythology around the meaning and significance of England's win over West Germany, its captain Bobby Moore and Kenneth Wolstenholme's commentary.

In his memoir of his career at the BBC, the television sports director Alec Weeks, who directed the coverage of the 1966 Final, argued that the World Cup represented the pinnacle of his personal career in television—all facets of the technology, people and the event coming together to create what continues to be one of the most replayed pieces of television in the history of British broadcasting. Weeks explains that there were three teams at Wembley that day: England, West Germany and the BBC. The BBC crew were kept together as a group prior to the final, apart from wives and family, given a strict diet and banned from drinking alcohol. At the Wembley Final, the BBC had a crew of 54 and according to Weeks, their training for the event had reached 'Olympian proportions'.<sup>21</sup> Camera operators were issued postcard-sized images of players to memorise in order that they could identify and pinpoint a player at the behest of the director or the prompt of the commentator. This level of meticulous planning marked a watershed in the professionalism of televised sport, arguably creating an institutional discourse of excellence in the production practice that endures to this day within BBC Television Sport. Reflecting on the performance of his BBC crew, Weeks always remained proud of their achievements: 'In spite of the electric atmosphere, which invaded not only the stadium but the television platform housing the world's commentators and technicians, and a host of cameras, our team were ice cool. Ice cool and razor sharp.'<sup>22</sup>

Weeks was well aware the BBC's pictures were transmitted to many parts of the world. During the Final, the BBC had ten cameras in all (ITV had seven), which included two handheld 'creepie peepie' cameras with radio connections, which enabled the BBC to show close-ups of the players lining up in the Wembley tunnel and lining up for the presentation of the teams and the national anthems. In the review of the television coverage,

only one item of criticism appears to be noted from other nations: the excessive use of close-ups. Chivers notes that the directors were briefed on the balance of wide-angled and close-up shots, and argued: 'Those who found the use of close-ups disturbing were clearly unaccustomed to what has, in fact, become accepted BBC/ITV technique.'<sup>23</sup> However, the criticism of the tightly focused coverage did produce an official complaint from ITV's producer Stephen Wade, who found the BBC cameras covering the game between West Germany and Russia dwelt overly long on close-ups.<sup>24</sup> The personalisation of sport through close-ups has become a key ingredient for drawing in the viewer to an event and adding humour or psychological suspense during elite competition. When compared to today's coverage, the core principles of mixing the main wide-angled coverage with close-ups has remained relatively consistent, with the only exception being the proliferation of action replays from multiple angles. Midway through the BBC's coverage in 1966, the French newspaper *Le Figaro* recognised the professionalism of the British television coverage, which it believed had found the perfect balance between the game and the players. The paper concluded: 'It will no longer be possible for us to watch a televised football match other than through the eyes of the English cameras'<sup>25</sup>

The BBC also introduced new innovations in the coverage of the World Cup designed to build up the nations' expectations of the finals. This included coverage of the selection of footballs for the final and the World Cup finals draw in January 1966. Also, immediately prior to the finals, the BBC ran a short series entitled *World Cup Challenge*, which featured the best nations in the tournament. Introduced by Kenneth Wolstenholme, the series began with a profile of world champions Brazil and their star player, Pelé. The arrival of the BBC at the Brazilian training camp in Rio clearly caused a stir, with the Brazilian media claiming the BBC crew were actually spies.<sup>26</sup> The furore was capitalised on by the BBC publicity department to promote the series in the British press. Audience research revealed viewers enjoyed the interviews and debates in the series, which set them up 'to share in the thrills and excitement to come'.<sup>27</sup> A *World Cup Grandstand Preview* programme presented by Coleman and including interviews with Walter Winterbottom, Danny Blanchflower and Billy Wright on the eve of the championship had a mixed reception from the BBC's viewing panel. There was a sense that some viewers were experiencing football fatigue even before the three weeks of football had begun, while others were beginning to understand 'what all the fuss was about'.<sup>28</sup>

All of these programmes helped set the scene for the main event, and the device became a standard feature of the BBC's coverage of World Cups and Olympic Games.

The response of audiences to the BBC's coverage of the World Cup was consistently strong; the viewing figure for the Final itself, 32.3 million, has remained a British television record. Coverage of the pageantry of the opening ceremony on 11th July was viewed by many respondents to have created a great sense of occasion.<sup>29</sup> The connection between televised sport, royalty, ritual and nation heavily bonded to great effect. Even for those who did not consider themselves football fans, the ceremonial nature of the event drew them in to the national significance of the occasion. The BBC press office released information suggesting 400 million viewers from around the globe would be watching the World Cup Final. In all, 26 nations in Europe and North Africa received live transmissions of the Final and the USA, Canada and Mexico received satellite coverage. Nearly 30 countries received recordings of the Final.<sup>30</sup> The process of interconnecting international viewers around sport had begun with a limited reach during the Eurovision coverage of the 1954 World Cup, but by 1966, the reach of the World Cup had become more global than ever before. The 1966 tournament provided evidence of the World Cup's global appeal to television, a phenomenon that grew exponentially as more widespread satellite coverage developed in the 1970s.

### ‘THEY THINK IT’S ALL OVER’: WOLSTENHOLME, COLEMAN AND THE NEW ERA OF BBC SPORT

The enduring voice of the 1966 World Cup belongs to BBC commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme, even though the BBC also used David Coleman, Alan Weeks and Frank Bough, along with summarisers Wally Barnes, Ken Aston and Arthur Ellis. The rhythmic nature of his commentary at the end of the final when Geoff Hurst scored his hat-trick, and England's fourth goal, is possibly one of the most frequently replayed moments of television in the history of the medium.

Less well known is how Wolstenholme's career at the BBC came to an end, and why he felt there was a conspiracy to oust him from the role as the BBC's senior football commentator. Wolstenholme's departure from the BBC was, in many ways, symbolic of the end of a particular era in BBC sport. Wolstenholme had become the familiar face and voice of football

coverage from the late-1940s. He commentated on 23 FA Cup Finals, multiple internationals and five World Cup Finals in the post-war era. The story of his departure is of interest in that it tells us much about the rising profile of commentators in broadcasting institutions and public life in the 1960s and 1970s. Wolstenholme had always worked on a freelance basis for the BBC and the BBC Written Archives at Caversham contain the majority of Wolstenholme's contracts. He had employed Teddy Sommerville as his agent from 1953, who also acted on behalf of cricket commentator Peter West and radio commentator Michael Henderson. The increasing use of agents in television contracts and their role as intermediaries between commentators and BBC outside broadcast managers began to become more prominent as television sport boomed in the 1960s. Wolstenholme and West were two of the best-paid commentators in the business. By the end of the 1960s, Wolstenholme would command £55 for the weekly slot on *Match of the Day*, increased to £75 for European and international matches, and in 1970, he was paid £1,200 plus expenses for all his contributions to the World Cup in Mexico. Wolstenholme was one of the best-paid commentators in the BBC and, at this time, earned as much as some of the football stars he commentated on. He therefore had a significant standing in the culture of the game and this was reflected in his contract with the BBC.

However, Wolstenholme's status as the voice of televised football started to be challenged by a new breed of commentator, such as Barry Davies, who joined BBC Television from ITV in 1969, and Brian Moore, who had been the BBC's first football correspondent on radio but had joined London Weekend Television in 1968. Other established figures, especially David Coleman, began to request more work on football. David Coleman's rising public profile thanks to his weekly performance on *Grandstand* and, from 1964, *Sportsnight with Coleman*, significantly boosted his status and his desire to commentate on football's most prestigious occasions. Paul Fox also recalled the situation and Coleman's rising profile in the BBC:

Wolstenholme, for example, was very, very sensitive to criticism, because Ken thought of himself as the top commentator in football. When David Coleman came along and really encroached on Wolstenholme's territory – where Coleman was a journalist and Ken, I don't know how Ken got into it, because he did some work in radio. Well he was a bomber pilot. He'd been a pathfinder pilot and Ken sort of stumbled into this really. Ken was very



good but his time was coming to an end because Coleman brought a fresh approach to it. To my way of thinking Coleman has been the best sports commentator there ever was. Because what David did was he captioned the picture and that is really what sports commentary is about. You see all it needs is captioning.<sup>31</sup>

Post-1966, with British clubs Celtic and Manchester United gaining European success in 1967 and 1968, football became an increasingly popular form of entertainment on television. Coleman's desire to tap into this new era of the game and strengthen his persona as the face of BBC Sport led to increased tension in the OB Department. This came to something of a head in 1968 when Wolstenholme was interviewed by the *News of the World* about the BBC's increasing use of Coleman on the BBC's flagship football programme, *Match of the Day*. The headline proclaimed 'Who's taking the mike/ I'm not jealous of David Coleman says Ken', which left the BBC's Head of Sport, Bryan Cowgill, irate that the matter had been made public and in a memo to senior management, he berated Wolstenholme's decision to do what he thought was a 'stupid interview'. The contract files for Wolstenholme become pretty thin after 1971, and his last contract for the BBC was for the European Cup final between Ajax and Panathinaikos in June 1971. In his autobiography, published in 1999, and with some animosity, Wolstenholme recounts how his BBC career came to an end. He was convinced that Cowgill and Fox (by then controller of BBC1) had hatched a plan to get rid of him to make way for Coleman to do the Cup Final and all the big games. In summing up the episode he wrote:

I had twenty-three years of the best job in the world, doing what I loved doing, and now it had ended. Not through any wish of mine but just because a carefully laid plan had been devised to make sure I was pushed aside.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, in 1970, his contract was due for renewal and on the strength of his performance and prestige created after the 1966 World Cup and two British successes in the European Cup, Sommerville pushed the BBC not only to improve Wolstenholme's remuneration, but also to request first refusal on all of the BBC's football coverage. Bryan Cowgill, then Head of Sport, saw the episode slightly differently:

Whether it was on a Saturday, *Match of the Day*, International matches or whatever, he had first refusal on every match the BBC was proposing to

televise. I was Head of Sport, and I said, ‘No way. He is a senior football commentator, but to give him the right of first refusal is going to stop me breeding the next generation of football commentators by denying them the opportunity. Which I cannot hand on a plate to Kenneth much as I respect him and want him to continue as our senior football commentator.’<sup>733</sup>

Peter Dimmock, then the General Manager of Outside Broadcasts, recalled a more detailed scenario of what happened and how he tried to persuade Wolstenholme and his agent to accept the deal on offer:

Well you know it was a great tragedy we lost him. We lost him in very strange circumstances, you know. What happened was that David Coleman’s contract was coming up for renewal and his agent came to me and said ‘I’ll let Coleman go, he’s got a very good offer from commercial, but he can stay with you as long as he does the commentary for the Cup Final.’ I said, ‘Hang about we’ve got Wolstenholme’. He said, ‘No, David will go unless you do this’.

So I agonised, and I thought the only thing I can do is come clean with Kenneth first of all. So I sent for Kenneth, he came and I said, ‘Kenneth, I’ve got some good news and some bad news. So I’d better give you the good news first. We’ll double your salary.’ So he said, ‘What’s the catch?’ So I said, ‘well the catch is this: I’m afraid that you can’t do the Cup Final. David Coleman is going to do it.’ Whereupon he got off his chair and he said, ‘If that’s all you think of me, to hell with you!’ and slammed the door. I thought ‘Oh Christ.’

I rang him up at home that night and said, ‘Have you cooled down Kenneth, have you really thought about this? Put yourself in my position. We’ve got Coleman, Coleman does a great deal as well as football, but we can’t afford to lose him to commercial television, I’m sorry, but we really can’t. I hate having to say to you what I’ve said to you, but surely you’ll understand, and surely if we double your salary, you keep all the other football?’ *Wolstenholme* ‘No, no, me pride won’t let me do it.’

So he went to commercial where he was never really a success. Then of course the big joke was, Coleman did the Cup Final that first year. Coleman then rang me up and said, ‘Peter, I am finding this too much to take. With all the other stuff I’m doing I cannot give the Cup Final the attention it deserves. So I’d rather not do it in future.’ And that’s how we got Motson.

I couldn't get Kenneth back. It was a very great pity because he was a very good football commentator.<sup>34</sup>

In the context of the maturation of TV sport and increased rivalry between the BBC and ITV over the coverage of sport in the early 1970s, Wolstenholme's departure from his BBC contract represented a departure in the kind of commentary emerging at this time, with the increasing star status of leading commentators and the egos that went with them.

In his autobiography, Wolstenholme recalls that he felt undermined by the BBC hierarchy, who favoured David Coleman. His agent's intransigence snapped the patience of Cowgill and Fox (and possibly Dimmock) to the point where all negotiations were brought to an abrupt end. Wolstenholme's claim that this was a scheming device to get him out is not substantiated but similarly, there appears little remorse for the abrupt nature in which his career at the BBC ended. This is partially explained by the fact that Coleman was such an overbearing presence in the sports department, the BBC were scared of losing him. Wolstenholme's demise was also due to the fact that new commentators had emerged, with John Motson (the dominant voice of TV football in the 1970s, 80s and 90s) recruited on Wolstenholme's departure. In spite of the sour end to his BBC career, Wolstenholme's commentary of the 1966 World Cup Final, especially his most oft cited phrase 'They think it's all over', reminds us how live television sport, once recorded, can develop its own mythological status in popular collective cultural memory. Because of its symbolic importance in the history of English football, and perhaps until England win another major international football tournament, it will continue to be repeated, an echo of television's past, a reminder of when a nation celebrated global sporting success and a calling card for future England teams to thrill another national audience in front of their television sets.

## CONCLUSION

The BBC's 1966 World Cup television coverage represented a material and symbolic transformation in the BBC's approach to sport. It was something of an end point of BBC Sport's development over a period of three decades, at the same time indicating the portents of where the coverage of sport on British television was moving. The professionalism of BBC Sport

production developed under the leadership of Dimmock, Fox and Cowgill in the post-war era ensured the Finals pushed the limits of technology at the time, albeit, frustratingly for those concerned, not in colour. The 1966 World Cup therefore provides a fascinating case study of the institutional and cultural characteristics of the BBC at the time, its approach to outside broadcasting and its consolidation as ‘the home of sport’. It is unknown when or where this epithet became associated with the BBC’s coverage of sport, but it is certainly reasonable to suggest its coverage of sport in the 1960s, especially the World Cup in England, naturalised its position as the leader in televised sport. Established relationships with governing bodies, promoters and venues of sport ensured the BBC dominated televised access to a wide range of sport, and the institutional, technical and cultural narratives of these relationships have been explored in this book. Once the fears of sports promoters were overcome, at least partially, BBC Television’s OB Department expanded the Corporation’s role as the ambassador of sport in national culture. Wimbledon, the Cup Final, Test cricket, the Boat Race, the Grand National, the Open, international rugby union and Olympic sport (especially athletics) all served up opportunities for the BBC to build its emancipatory position as the nation’s public broadcaster of sport as entertainment. The BBC’s success in achieving this role was not absolute, and its struggles with sport administrators, internal battles over resources, competition with ITV and the challenges it faced reaching and accommodating the needs of its audience all mitigated against its claim to be a pre-eminent sports broadcaster. Nonetheless, 1966 shall always be remembered as one of the defining moments in the BBC’s history, not least Wolstenholme’s timely and joyous commentary.

## NOTES

1. Dimmock to Rous, 14 August 1961, BBC WAC T14/3267.
2. Peter Dimmock interview with the author, May 2008.
3. *Radio Times*, 25 May 1962.
4. Coleman’s tirade on Chile versus Italy in 1962 can be viewed on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOtL1m1o\\_ok](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOtL1m1o_ok), accessed 28 July 2015.
5. Oaten to Dimmock, 4 December 1961, BBC WAC T14/3267.
6. Extract from ‘Secret and Confidential FA document on the proposed organization for the 1966 World Cup in England’, no date 1961, BBC WAC T14/3267.

7. Oaten to Haas, 21 March 1962, BBC WAC T14/3267.
8. Weeks, *Under Auntie's Skirts*, 108.
9. Oaten to Dimmock, 17 January 1963, BBC WAC T14/3267.
10. Dimmock's anxiety was noted in a letter from Chivers to Follows, 6 December 1963, BBC WAC T14/3267.
11. World Cup Organising Committee 1966, Minutes, 16 August 1965, BBC WAC T14/3267.
12. Dimmock to Follows, 21 June 1966, BBC WAC T14/3267.
13. Follows to Dimmock, 24 June 1966, BBC WAC T14/3267.
14. For details of the global audience for 1966 see Chisari, F. (2006) When Football Went Global: Televising the 1966 World Cup, *Historical Social Research*, 31(1), 42–54.
15. Follows to Dimmock, 8 August 1966, BBC WAC T14/3267.
16. Weeks, *Under Auntie's Skirts*, 112.
17. Bryan Cowgill interview with the author, June 2008.
18. *Radio Times*, 11 August 1966.
19. Dimmock to Rous, 6 July 1964, BBC WAC T14/3267.
20. Dimmock to Monger, 9 May 1966, BBC WAC T14/3,271/2.
21. Weeks, *Under Auntie's Skirts*, 109.
22. *Ibid*, 118.
23. *World Cup 1966 Television Operational Report*, September 1966, 19, BBC WAC T14/1426.
24. Wade to Chivers, 26 July 1966, BBC WAC T14/3,271/2.
25. BBC translation of *Le Figaro*, 21 July 1966, BBC WAC T14/3,271/2.
26. Kettley to Publicity Office, June 1966, BBC WAC T14/3,271/2.
27. Audience Research, World Cup Challenge, 5 July 1966, BBC WAC T14/3,271/2.
28. Audience Research, World Cup Grandstand Preview, 10 July 1966, BBC WAC T14/3,271/2.
29. Audience Research, World Cup Grandstand, 11 July 1966, BBC WAC T14/3,271/2.
30. BBC Press Service, 28 July 1966, BBC WAC T14/3,271/2.
31. Paul Fox interview with the author, June 2008.
32. Wolstenholme, *50 Years and It's Still Not Over*, 170.
33. Bryan Cowgill interview with the author, June 2008.
34. Peter Dimmock interview with the author, May 2008.

## Conclusion

This book has focused on a span of 31 years of televised sport from 1936 to 1967, documenting the BBC's first formal broadcasts from sport, the hiatus during the Second World War and relaunch in 1946, to the official introduction of colour television in Britain in 1967. Although this periodisation may seem arbitrary, it has been a way of capturing the story of what might be termed the formative relationship between sport and television. In other words, the book has charted the extended courtship in the marriage of two central characteristics of the British popular cultural establishment: the leisure pastimes of sport and television. Towards the end of this period, where this book signs off, the technologies of television and the culture of the medium were being transformed in some radical ways, much of which was starting to be driven by the coverage of sport. The turn to colour was part of this process, but so too was the use of satellite links to live sporting action from around the world, especially during the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games, and the increasing innovations in the use of slow-motion and instant replays. There were cultural transformations too. In Britain, the BBC's near monopoly of sport on television began to be challenged seriously for the first time. London Weekend Television's *The Big Match*, featuring former footballer and Coventry City manager Jimmy Hill and former BBC radio commentator Brian Moore, was making genuine inroads into the coverage of domestic football in England.

Allied to this was the increasing visibility of advertising at sporting venues, and more crucially sponsorship of events, all strategically positioned for the television cameras. Viewers were exposed to an emergent globalisation of sport events, which was widening the exposure of sport stars, not only as athletes, but also as television personalities to provide colour and insight from within sport. The emergence of agents and publicists in sport, such as Bagenal Harvey in the UK and Mark McCormack in the USA, and their influence on the structure and economics of sport were also significant developments. These remain recognisable traits of contemporary media-tised sport, but the first 30 years of sport on television had a very different sensibility, pace and visual texture. It was genuinely experimental. It pushed the boundaries of technology and the logistics of the medium. It crafted new production practices from solving the limitations of available technology to create innovations in programming that endure to this day. For those working in BBC Television Sport, they were at the margins of broadcasting, not its epicentre. It is for these and other reasons that the book has explored this 30-year period.

Of course, there were influential continuities in sports broadcasting before 1936, and enduring continuities after 1967. Sport did appear on experimental transmissions prior to 1936 and the connections the BBC already had with sport through radio outside broadcasts helped fan the flames of the courtship. At the end of the period, black and white transmissions did not abruptly end, which was reflected in the *Radio Times* that for a while indicated which programmes were in colour (meaning the rest were in black and white). Moreover, for many viewers, black and white television endured deep into the 1970s and 80s, as households gradually invested in new colour sets. I have personal memories that vividly recall watching the opening ceremony of 1972 Olympic Games in colour at friends of my parents, when we still had a rented black and white set at home. The wonder of getting our first colour set a year or so later was a genuine revelation in our household: seeing the vibrant green grass of Wimbledon or the colour of snooker balls on *Pot Black* transformed the experience of television sport. Nevertheless, the transformations that occurred in the BBC's black and white television coverage of sport over this relatively narrow span of time, technologically, institutionally and culturally, are also remarkable, as were the characteristics of social, economic and political life in Britain from 1936 to 1967.

## SPORT, THE BBC AND PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

One of the key questions this book has raised is what role the coverage of sport has played in the BBC's mission as a public service broadcaster. When the BBC's television service began, outside broadcasts from sport were already well established in the mix of programming in radio at both national and local levels. It would, therefore, have seemed natural for television programming simply to follow suit. As Mark Aldridge has suggested, why television emerged as it did in the pre-war years was largely due to bureaucratic reasons, of how the BBC was institutionally established and operationally run.<sup>1</sup> The great difference in the reality of producing outside broadcasts in radio and television, however, was the scale of the technology required to achieve this. Television outside broadcasts required significant investment in equipment and personnel, and producers also faced enormous logistical problems to resolve, both on site and in relaying the pictures back to BBC Television's first home at Alexandra Palace. The need for resources, in technology and manpower, as well as in time and energy to set things up, meant that meeting the core Reithian value of serving the public interest through the televised coverage of major national sporting events required a far greater investment than most forms of broadcasting. In this respect, employing commercially minded managers in outside broadcasting who could broker deals on a strict budget, such as Peter Dimmock in the post-war era, paid dividends for ensuring the BBC never paid too much for the rights to cover sport. Sports coverage arguably received a level of security other genres did not enjoy because it met all of the BBC's core values. Sport was central to the public service mission to inform and entertain, with live coverage of national sporting occasions drawing interest from across Britain, producing some of the BBC's largest audience ratings. The BBC's approach to the studio presentation of sport, especially *Sportsview*, was certainly imbued with a desire to educate, and former members of the outside broadcasting department interviews have been unequivocal in interviews in their belief that BBC Television promoted sport to a broader audience.

Sport has been central to the BBC's public service identity. It brought households and nations together. It arguably brought what would now be considered minority sports to the screen from a very early stage. In the 1950s, the BBC brought sports such as showjumping, ice hockey, motor sport, snooker and skiing to new audiences. The BBC's monopoly of some sports and events both cemented its position as the nation's



favoured sports broadcaster and invented broadcast traditions that were culturally and politically difficult to challenge. When ITV launched in 1955, it found either the doors to sport firmly closed or, at the very least, the BBC way of doing things firmly established. Dimmock was acutely aware of competition from ITV, losing some of his best production staff in the early days of commercial television. Nevertheless, as many of the episodes of facility fee negotiations in this book have shown, Dimmock was himself highly entrepreneurial, and used his innovative talents to broker deals with sport for the benefit of the Corporation and the detriment of ITV's aspiration to use sport as a key form of content to consolidate its place in the broadcasting landscape.

Facility fee negotiations became an awkward but necessary evil for the BBC, often requiring sanction from senior management. Different sports and the administrators or promoters within them each had their own traits and ways of conducting business. In football, for example, the Sir Stanley Rous and the Football Association became great advocates of television broadcasting, aware of both the public promotion television gave the sport and its potential commercial investment. Rous would ultimately smooth the way for the BBC to cover the World Cup and the promise of full television coverage was important for the decision to host the event in England in 1966.

Conversely, administrators of the Football League, such as Fred Howarth or Alan Hardaker, were sticklers for maintaining the interests of their members above and beyond any sense of public interest for watching domestic football on television. The fears over the impact on attendances, not only at televised matches but also at League grounds struggling to stem the decline in attendance figures, meant negotiations to cover League football were among the more fraught and protracted of the BBC's negotiations. The promise of better coverage via *Match of the Day* eventually broke this resistance in 1964, but even this minor victory for the BBC was massively constrained in the exposure of League football compared to today's profuse glut of matches on television.

The Football League was one of many governing bodies concerned about the rapid rise of television in the post-war period. Scare stories from American sport, especially the impact of television on boxing attendances, led to the formation of the APCR, and as we saw in Chap. 3, for a number of years hindered the progress of the BBC to develop its coverage of live sport in particular. Intervention by the Postmaster General, who restricted the hours of sport on television, and subsequently the government, which

legislated new terms for copyright, made television sport overtly politicised for a period. The legacy of the impasse over access created by the governing bodies and the non-exclusivity clause enforced by government regulation following the introduction of ITV has been the ‘Listed Events’, which protect particular sporting events of national resonance for transmission on free-to-air television. The original list was drafted by Dimmock and de Lotbinière at the behest of the PMG, and it focussed on those events the BBC were prepared to share with their rivals ITV. However, because of the BBC’s pre-eminent position in televising certain events, such as rugby union at Twickenham, the Oxford versus Cambridge Boat Race, the FA Cup Final and Test cricket, they became synonymous with the BBC’s coverage and ITV rarely sought to cut across the BBC’s bows. In the period covered by this book, the major exception was Wimbledon, but as discussed in Chap. 13, the quality of coverage and the assured voice and analysis of Dan Maskell eventually saw off ITV’s racier coverage.

The media environment for sport on television is now radically different. Television sport is the domain of companies with global reach and aspirations. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, battle for supremacy commenced between two communications megaliths, Sky and British Telecom (BT), for British sports audiences. Both used sport to build their subscriber base, but for different commercial ends. Sky is a media business but in the unregulated market used its TV market to move into telecommunications too. BT is a telecommunications company, who see TV sport as the attraction to catch the bigger fish of the broadband market. Both companies were fiercely competitive and cash rich, which filled the boots of sport, especially footballers.

For the BBC, sport has been equally as important, but for quite different reasons. As a public service broadcaster, the BBC has been key to making certain events of national significance available to a broader audience. While it is not alone in this function—any free-to-air channel could perform this role—the BBC has played a seminal cultural role in using sport to bring the British public together via their television sets and now via other devices, including computers and mobile technologies. Whether it is the Olympic Games, major horse races, football and rugby cup finals or traditional British sporting occasions like the Boat Race, the BBC has not only been the public’s trusted broadcaster of such events, but also the champion of new technologies from which to access them.

In the early 1950s, with the heavy promotion of television sets by manufacturers and innovations in transnational television technologies, BBC

sport played an increasingly important role in the assimilation of television into British homes. The BBC's outside broadcast department used technology to push the boundaries of what was possible in the coverage of sport, and this was most evident in its collaboration with European partners to cover the 1954 World Cup Finals in Switzerland, the 1958 Finals in Sweden and the Rome Olympic Games in 1960. In this context, the BBC shared its technical know-how and conventions of televised sport, and the trade-off was the way this 'exotic' coverage from continental Europe transformed the cultural experience of sport for viewers, arguably transforming the meaning of international sport and its connection to national prestige. The BBC, then, were at the forefront of globalising televised sport, and heavily influenced the nature of this process in collaboration with EBU partners.

### BBC SPORT LEGACIES: PROFESSIONAL CODES AND CONVENTIONS

Raymond Williams discussed how media institutions shape individuals to which they belong and, in turn, how individuals 'colour' the media institutions in which they work.<sup>2</sup> The professional lives of people like Seymour de Lotbinière, Peter Dimmock, Paul Fox, Ronnie Noble and Bryan Cowgill, who were central to the formation of BBC television sport, provide examples of precisely how individual and institutional processes of change were negotiated and given direction. The values and habits of BBC television sport were, to use Williams's idiom 'coloured' by the presence of these men and the particular skills they each brought to outside broadcasting and programme development. De Lotbinière and Dimmock were seminal to the BBC's emergent and cordial relationships with sport administrators, and influential in suppressing overt commercial interests of sports organisations and promoters for the benefit of the BBC's viewers, the license fee payers.

Dimmock, in particular, helped by the editorial vision of Fox and the creative talents of people like Noble in filming sport and Cowgill in marshalling live outside broadcasts, crafted an approach to the coverage of television sport which kept its commercial competitor ITV at bay but at the same stroke launched a number of enduring television formats, which, in the case of *Match of the Day*, continue after half a century, still secure as a highlights format in a very different television environment. It is through

the work of these and many other pioneering producers of television sport in the BBC throughout the period covered in this book, the middle of the twentieth century, that the styles, modes of address and habitual institutional conventions of television outside broadcasting were formed and subsequently endured.

This is none more so than in the role of the television commentator, which, for so many years in the BBC's coverage of sport, delivered voices so indelibly wedded to the sport they commentated on, it made new exponents behind the lip microphone sound alien. The longevity of many of the BBC's commentators from the 1950s and 60s into the 1980s and 90s emphasises the power of their reputations but also how culturally important they had become to their respective sports. Peter O'Sullivan spent 50 years as the BBC's horse racing commentator; Dan Maskell had 42 years as the BBC's principal commentator on tennis; Bill McLaren was the voice of BBC television rugby union for 43 years; Eddie Waring's individual style entertained viewers of rugby league for 30 years; former Test cricketer Richie Benaud's career behind the microphone lasted nearly 50 years; and David Coleman, who joined the BBC in 1954, commentated on athletics at 11 Olympic Games over a 40-year period. Whole generations of British sports viewers grew up with these voices, which were synonymous with their sports.

What is noticeable from this list, and is ever-present throughout this book, is the invisibility of women in the role of commentator on British television throughout the period under consideration in this book. Although regional voices and different social backgrounds were represented in the BBC's roster of leading commentators, women very rarely featured behind the microphone in any of the BBC's coverage of sport. To a degree, this gender imbalance has received some attention since the 1990s, with Claire Balding, Hazel Irvine and Sue Barker the most prominent names at the BBC. However, even given their highly respected talents and knowledge on sport, their role as commentators has remained marginal. Instead, most women in television sport take the role as anchor or presenter of programmes rather than the narrator of them.

As this book has shown, life inside the BBC's Television Outside Broadcast Department was almost a completely male affair. In the post-war period, the BBC was populated by former servicemen, who returned to civilian life excited and undaunted by the opportunity to work in a largely unknown fledgling industry. For many years, the BBC's engineering division remained an all-male domain; there were cameramen but

never camerawomen. Outside broadcasting editors, producers and directors were also all male throughout the period this book has addressed. It would change slowly, and people such as Pat Ewing would head radio sport at the BBC and Barbara Slater would take the role originally created for Bryan Cowgill as Head of BBC Sport in 2009. Cowgill himself would follow Paul Fox into senior BBC management as Controller of BBC1. Both Cowgill and Fox would move on to be leading executives at two ITV franchises, London Weekend Television and Yorkshire Television respectively. Where they had worked in close collaboration at the BBC to develop *Sportview* and then *Grandstand* as the BBC's flagship sport programmes, a spat over the poaching of American drama series *Dallas* to ITV in the mid-1980s damaged their relations irreparably. Peter Dimmock, who arguably did more than any other person to transform the BBC into the innovative leaders of television sport, applied his skills as a negotiator to lead the international sale of programmes at BBC Enterprises. He finished his career in the USA working for ABC's Olympic broadcasting legend Roone Arledge. The Americans had heard Dimmock was prepared to leave the BBC and a bidding war ensued between ABC and rivals NBC for his services. Employing an American lawyer to handle his affairs, Dimmock negotiated a lucrative executive package that made him financially secure into retirement in the early-1980s.

David Coleman, who became immensely popular and lampooned in equal measure throughout the second half of his career, like Wolstenholme ended his BBC career in acrimony, after being abruptly dropped by a new regime of BBC managers, who thought his time had passed. It did not take long, however, for the BBC and viewers, to recognise what a goliath of sports broadcasting he truly was. He had set the standard by which all television sports broadcasters would be judged. A detailed study of Coleman's influence on the next era of BBC Sport in the 1970s and 80s and how the changing nature of the political economy of sport and television changed the BBC's approach to sport once more in the 1990s and 2000s should certainly be the focus of future histories of television sport.

The transformations that took place over the 30-year period from the launch of the BBC's television service in 1936 were great, and the subsequent changes in television sport, which matured in the 1970s and 1980s, were greater still. The technological and institutional changes in BBC television production were rapid and incessant throughout the first 30 years of the medium. The speed of change in outside broadcasting from sport was largely born of continual experimentation in finding the most appropriate

means for covering different sports. The whole period from the late-1930s to the late-1960s could be characterised by trial and error. There was, therefore, a certain pragmatism behind the development of production techniques, whether it be the positioning of cameras, commentary, studio presentation or editing of sports programming. Some of the conventions of outside broadcasting drew on the experience of newsreel, and to this end, it is no coincidence that the BBC's principle film editor of sports film was a former newsreel cameraman, Ronnie Noble. Continuities with radio outside broadcasting also existed, not least in the relationships BBC personnel had fostered with sports and sport administrators. But in some areas, such as commentary, live direction of cameras and the logistics of coverage, television sport had to be innovated and refined almost as it happened. Instances of this exist across the evolution of outside broadcast technologies such as microwave links to extend the reach of sport OBs; the 'roving eye', which enabled more mobile production facility to visit sporting venues; or the 'creepie peepie' camera, which brought more intimate, mobile television images from sport, most legendary from the live coverage of the climb from the Old Man of Hoy in the Orkney Islands watched by 15 million television viewers in 1967.<sup>3</sup>

Innovations in programming were also central to the BBC's success during this period, especially in its battle for audience share with ITV. *Sportsview*, *Sport Special* and *Grandstand* were the BBC's triumvirate of sports programming, which consolidated the BBC's position as the 'home of sport' on television, but also formalised its approach to, and relationships with, television audiences. Topicality, live transmission and the immediacy of its reach into sport across the nation were the key characteristics that made BBC sport not only popular with audiences, but trustworthy too. From the mid-1950s into the mid-1960s, *Sportsview* as a brand became the watchword for televised sport and the quality of coverage viewers could expect to receive.

As we have seen throughout the formative history of BBC television sport, the BBC developed codes and conventions of production in order to construct a sense of co-presence at sporting events through television. Providing a 'grandstand view' preoccupied the reconnaissance and rigging of cameras. The craft of commentary evolved to annotate what viewers saw on screen, in contrast to the picture painted by radio running commentaries. By 1966, the BBC's roster of commentators was well established, many working on a freelance basis, on lucrative contracts negotiated by their agents. If radio dominated the BBC's institutional resources in the

immediate post-war period, as seen in the coverage of the 1948 London Olympics, by the end of the 1950s, television ruled the roost, certainly in terms of sports coverage. Olympic Games and World Cups held in far off locations of the world delivered to viewers new exotic and exciting experiences from the comfort of their living rooms. Eurovision, followed by satellite coverage, intensified the viewers' ontological feeling of co-presence in the world of sport, and as noted in Chaps. 5 and 12, the BBC were at the forefront of making such technologies, and the institutions that supported them, a reality. The 1966 experience was slightly different in that England, and the BBC, hosted the media spectacle of the World Cup. The Corporation's role as host broadcaster added new pressures to the coverage, but delivered new technological advances and the beginnings of a transnational period of televised sport. The BBC's studio arrangements and roving reportage, all under the *Grandstand* banner, made its coverage of the World Cup seem familiar and naturalised.

By the mid-1960s, BBC Sport had an established mode of address for each and every sport it covered. Programmes such as *Sportsview* (which became *Sportsnight*), *Grandstand* and *Match of the Day* (still enduring after more than 50 years) were devised as appropriate formats to entertain viewers and compete for audience share in the BBC's ratings battle with ITV. In David Coleman, BBC Sport also had a skilled and talented presenter, who was also one of the most well-known faces on television more generally. By 1966, the BBC's experienced team of sports producers, many with military backgrounds, strong professionalised work ethics and practical problem-solving experience, had in many cases innovated the generic conventions of television sport in Britain. As discussed in Chaps. 5, 12 and 14, this was certainly the case in the coverage of football where Alan Chivers, and then Alec Weeks, had blazed a trail in making football 'televisual'. Consequently, 1966 brought 20 years of experience and inventiveness in televising football together in a pinnacle of the craft of direction and teamwork.

Finally, the BBC Television Outside Broadcast Department held a special position in the BBC's institutional alignment with its audience. While it had to accommodate and adhere to the BBC's remit as a public service broadcaster, which it frequently used in its dealings with sport, it nevertheless had a certain amount of freedom to explore the best way to maintain its interests in sport and build the BBC's popularity with its audience. If high cultural values constrained areas such as drama, news, arts features and even certain forms of light entertainment, sports coverage was largely

untouched in where it could go and how it could be covered. There were, of course, exceptions: betting odds on greyhounds or horse racing were censored for a period; the vulgar spectacle of professional wrestling was allowed to gravitate to its competitor; and commentaries were scrutinised for their appropriateness. Yet, when it came to expanding regional input to television, especially regional accents of commentators, sport helped broaden the cultural mix of television, most notably through rugby league. The BBC's sport magazine programmes, which drew on sport from across the United Kingdom, opened up access to both urban and rural cultures of sport like never before. Continuing the work of *Match of the Day*, the 1966 World Cup reflected the British regional cultures of sport through its different stadia and the supporters that filled them, which, for perhaps the first time, were also shared with an international audience. As television expanded into the households of the nation, so too did the demand for sports that represented the recreations and passions of the regions. Much of the expansion of outside broadcasting in the nations and regions was premised on the professional skills and ingenuity of producers in the BBC's major provincial centres of Bristol, Cardiff, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow and, to a lesser extent, Belfast.

The BBC's place in creating new technologies, practices and philosophies of sports broadcasting is an important strand of its broader place in our culture. However, from the era of poly-media sport and the niche sports channels of today, the BBC's position in sports broadcasting is arguably a shadow of its former self. When televised sport began in the UK, it was a BBC monopoly. Even after the introduction of commercial television in 1955, the BBC's pre-eminent place in broadcast sport remained monopolistic, or a shared duopoly at best. What endures, however, are a set of cultural values around sports broadcasting done the BBC way, or at least a perception that the BBC does sport in a way that audiences have come to know, love and share like no other broadcaster has delivered. Why this should be so relates to the history of the BBC's approach to individual sports or sporting events, illustrated throughout this book. It is also an important feature of the place of sport and the BBC in our popular cultural history, which makes the BBC's approach to televising sport matter, just as driving on the left-hand side of the road is valued as being quintessentially British and culturally distinctive. These aspects of British popular culture were not a given; they were constructed by people in institutions and positions of power for specific reasons and under particular material and ideological conditions. Sport in British society has



been undeniably enriched by the BBC's presence and promotion of its events. At the same time, the BBC was at the forefront of transforming sport for its own ends. The history of the negotiated struggle for cultural power between the BBC and sport has been a central focus of this book. Sport has been affected in multiple and nuanced ways by the presence of television cameras, sometimes influencing the very shape of sporting competition, the rules of the game, the engagement of audiences and the commercial lure of sponsors and advertisers. The public service tradition of the BBC coverage of sport led it to create some memorable moments of television, which have become indelible in British popular culture. That said, the BBC is a large enough organisation to have multiple histories—some coherent, others contradictory—and what I hope this book has achieved is a narrative that nevertheless amalgamates these histories into a shared, cultural view of what BBC sports broadcasting represented in its formative decades, and how this will continue to shape the present and future understanding of televised sport in Britain.

#### NOTES

1. Aldridge, *The Birth of British Television*, 181.
2. Williams, R. (1970). *Communications*. London: Pelican.
3. See, Gilchrist, A. (2007) Reality TV on the Rockface: Climbing the Old Man of Hoy, *Sport in History*, 27 (1), 44–63.

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# INDEX

## A

- Adam, Kenneth (Controller of Programmes), 172, 190  
Alexandra Palace, 2, 18–24, 26–30, 33, 34, 37n15, 50, 51, 53, 56, 112, 184, 205, 217, 219, 220, 317  
Association for the Protection of Copyright in Sport (APCS)  
  copyright issue, 59–61  
  Gentle, Frank, 58–60, 203  
  Perkin, Herbert, 58–60, 95  
athletics  
  Davies, Lynn, 266  
  Hyman, Dorothy, 264–5  
  Jordon, Joy, 264  
  Pirie, Gordon, 127, 263, 266  
  Rand, Mary, 266

## B

- Bale, John, 219, 234n8  
Barnett, Steven, 7, 12n6, 39n60  
BBC anti-commercialism

## BBC TV Sport Commentators

- Abrahams, Harold, 165  
Alison, George, 20  
Alliss, Peter, 223–4, 230, 234  
Alston, Rex, 13n15, 146, 165, 174, 176, 235n25, 236n48  
Andrews, Eamonn, 141, 147, 157, 206, 214  
Arlott, John, 165  
Barnes, Wally, 189, 246, 253, 307  
Baxter, Raymond, 13n15, 127–8, 135n56, 147  
Best, Kenneth, 164, 180n9  
Compton, Dennis, 91–2, 98, 108, 122, 130  
Cox, Bill, 219, 223–5  
Dalby, Barrington, 208, 253  
Darwin, Bernard, 24, 217, 218, 234n7  
Davidson, George, 249, 257n33  
Dougall, Bob, 164  
Edrich, Bill, 91–2  
Fender, Percy, 53, 137n47  
Fordyce, Keith, 290

BBC TV Sport Commentators (*cont.*)

- Glendenning, Raymond, 113, 147,  
178, 184, 208, 215n35
- Grisewood, Freddie, 28, 286
- Hamilton, Ian, 164–5, 270, 276n30
- Hudson, Robert, 165, 166, 173,  
174, 180n15
- Johnston, Brian, 13n15, 48, 54,  
65n24, 65n37, 65n38, 91,  
109n1, 110n51, 147
- Knight, Billy, 290
- Longhurst, Henry, 150, 220–5,  
235n15, 235n16, 235n18,  
235n20, 235n22, 235n23,  
235n26, 235n29, 235n30,  
235n32, 287
- Macklin, Keith, 173
- McLaren, Bill, 11, 13n15, 174–9,  
181n36, 181n39, 181n41,  
181n42, 181n43, 181n45, 321
- MacPherson, Archie, 13n15, 249
- McWhirter, Norris, 120–1, 132,  
275
- Mallin, Harry, 23
- Maskell, Dan, 13n15, 282, 285–9,  
294n12, 294n29, 294n32,  
295n38, 295n40, 295n49,  
319, 321
- Michelmores, Cliff, 48, 65n23, 122,  
135n38, 229, 266
- Mills, Freddie, 203, 206
- Mitchell, Leslie, 23, 24, 27, 33, 34,  
38n31, 217
- More O’Ferrall, Frank, 53
- O’Sullivan, Peter, 49–50, 53,  
65n26, 65n27, 65n29, 150,  
152–4, 159n50, 160n58,  
160n59, 160n61, 178, 187,  
195n10, 214, 321
- Robertson, Max, 113, 121, 259,  
262, 275n2, 286
- Smythe, Brigadier, 63

Swanton, E. W., 165, 166, 173,  
222, 223, 235n21, 235n23,  
288

Van den Bergh, Tony, 205

Vernon, Dudley, 164, 180n8, 286

Wakelam, H. B. T. (Teddy), 20, 175

Walker, Harry, 13n15, 263, 275n10

Waring, Eddie, 9, 154–7, 160n63,  
173, 321

West, Peter, 51, 165, 166, 168–9,  
173, 174, 180n16, 242, 282–4,  
286, 294n13, 294n18, 306

Wynne Jones, G. V., 174

## BBC TV Sport Producers

Chivers, Alan (Chiv), 76–9, 83,  
141, 153, 160n59, 254, 256,  
266, 300–2, 306, 313n10,  
313n24, 324

Cowgill, Brian, 11, 46, 105, 108,  
110n62, 133, 137–58, 158n1,  
158n8, 158n12, 158n13,  
159n21, 159n28, 159n38,  
160n55, 160n69, 160n70,  
230–3, 236n55, 244, 251–2,  
257n18, 258n38, 258n40,  
258n41, 258n42, 262, 267,  
272, 276n27, 276n39, 284,  
288–93, 294n27, 295n46,  
295n53, 295n57, 295n58,  
295n60, 302, 303, 309,  
311, 312, 313n17, 313n33,  
320, 322

early career,

138–40

Head of Sport, 138–41, 233,  
289, 302, 309–10

Craxton, Anthony, 92, 102–6,  
110n50, 110n51, 110n53,  
110n57, 110n58, 141, 163, 166,  
167, 170, 174, 180n14, 180n15,  
180n16, 224–7, 235n29,  
235n30, 235n34, 235n38

- de Lotbiniere, Seymour Joly, 30, 31, 39n58, 45–8, 56, 60, 61, 64, 65n18, 65n21, 65n22, 66n42, 66n43, 78, 79, 89n27, 89n32, 89n46, 94–7, 99, 102, 109n15, 109n16, 109n17, 109n20, 109n21, 109n24, 112, 114–16, 122, 132, 134n15, 159n27, 166–8, 177, 180n13, 180n14, 180n19, 186–8, 195n6, 195n8, 195n9, 204–5, 207, 208, 215n23, 215n28, 215n34, 221, 222, 235n15, 235n16, 237–9, 257n4, 282, 284, 294n15, 294n16, 294n20, 294n21, 295n45, 319, 320
- Dimmock, Peter, 11, 41–67, 71, 73–5, 79, 81, 85, 88n7, 88n13, 88n17, 89n26, 89n27, 89n31, 89n32, 89n37, 89n41, 89n50, 90n52, 90n55, 97, 99–102, 110n36, 110n41, 112–19, 121–5, 127–33, 134n8, 134n13, 134n14, 134n17, 134n18, 134n19, 134n21, 134n22, 134n23, 134n25, 134n27, 135n37, 135n39, 135n40, 135n43, 135n44, 135n45, 135n47, 135n48, 135n49, 135n52, 136n61, 136n63, 136n65, 136n66, 136n69, 136n70, 140–3, 145–8, 152–7, 158n11, 158n12, 158n13, 159n17, 159n18, 159n19, 159n21, 159n23, 159n28, 159n29, 159n30, 159n34, 159n36, 159n37, 159n44, 159n51, 160n53, 160n58, 160n60, 160n67, 160n68, 163, 171, 172, 174, 180n18, 180n19, 180n24, 180n25, 180n26, 180n27, 180n29, 180n30, 180n31, 180n32, 180n35, 184–6, 188–93, 196n17, 196n18, 196n19, 196n20, 196n21, 196n22, 196n23, 196n25, 203–7, 209, 215n20, 215n21, 215n34, 219, 226–8, 231–3, 235n36, 235n37, 235n39, 235n41, 235n42, 235n44, 236n53, 236n57, 241–4, 246, 251, 257n15, 257n18, 257n20, 257n21, 257n23, 257n31, 258n39, 264, 266, 268–70, 273, 276n22, 276n30, 276n31, 276n38, 276n41, 277n43, 286, 295n37, 298–302, 304, 310–12, 312n1, 312n2, 312n5, 313n9, 313n10, 313n12, 313n13, 313n15, 313n19, 313n20, 313n34, 317–20, 322
- Commentator, 53–4
- General Manager, 54, 133, 310
- Head of Outside Broadcasts, 73, 75
- Negotiator, 49, 54–5
- Presenter, 48, 115
- Producer, 52–4
- Dorte, Philip, 30, 32, 39n59, 51, 93, 98, 109n9, 112, 116, 134n16, 134n17, 163, 180n6, 284, 294n17, 294n24, 295n44
- Duncalf, Bill, 128, 141, 145, 282, 283, 286, 287, 295n37, 295n40, 295n45
- Fox, Paul (Sir), 11, 82, 89n45, 111–33, 134n5, 134n6, 134n9, 134n17, 134n19, 135n31, 135n32, 135n33, 135n34, 135n35, 135n40, 135n42, 135n44, 135n46, 135n48, 135n49, 136n61, 136n65,

- BBC TV Sport Producers (*cont.*)  
 136n69, 141–9, 151, 155, 157,  
 159n17, 159n18, 159n23,  
 159n26, 159n27, 159n30,  
 159n34, 159n49, 172, 209,  
 216n40, 232, 236n56, 242–4,  
 246–9, 257n14, 257n20,  
 257n21, 257n23, 257n24,  
 257n25, 257n27, 257n28,  
 257n29, 257n30, 257n31,  
 261, 262, 265, 275n4, 275n6,  
 281, 286, 290, 294n9, 308,  
 309, 311, 312, 313n31, 320,  
 322
- Griffiths, Dewi, 173
- Hart, Alan, 133
- Henderson, Michael, 141, 150,  
 154, 165–6, 173, 174, 180n7,  
 180n11, 180n12, 220–2,  
 234n13, 235n14, 264,  
 294n26, 308
- Hunter, Nick, 104–6, 110n55,  
 110n56, 110n59
- Lakeland, Ray, 105, 141, 146, 154,  
 193–5, 223, 225, 229
- Lewis, Cecil, 21–3, 25, 38n29
- Lewis, Philip, 105, 145, 218, 224,  
 228, 234n2, 234n4, 234n6,  
 235n28, 235n31, 235n43
- Monger, Dennis, 117, 118, 120,  
 134n24, 145, 147, 159n32,  
 3213n20
- Morgan, Cliff, 133, 141, 158n9,  
 173, 174, 179
- Mouncer, Alan, 141, 173, 227, 233,  
 234, 235n41
- Noble, Ronnie, 115, 123, 126–7,  
 133, 135n51, 135n58, 142,  
 145, 209, 243, 245, 320, 323
- Orr Ewing, Ian, 19, 31, 46, 48, 51,  
 53, 56, 66n42, 73, 94,  
 109n11, 163, 164, 167,  
 180n2, 180n5, 180n8, 180n9,  
 180n10, 201, 203, 204,  
 215n7, 215n17, 215n18,  
 215n19, 215n20, 215n21,  
 215n22, 282, 286, 294n14,  
 294n18, 294n24
- Rees, Alan, 244, 245
- Rogers, Keith, 51, 205, 209,  
 214n24
- Standing, Michael, 30, 222
- Thompson, Peter, 131, 141, 146,  
 175, 176, 181n41, 250
- Weeks, Alex, 11, 148, 149, 151,  
 159n40, 159n48, 194,  
 196n27, 201, 211, 215n12,  
 216n45, 252–6, 258n43,  
 258n44, 258n47, 258n49,  
 258n51, 262, 263, 300, 302,  
 305, 307, 324
- Wilkinson, Slim, 141, 233, 271,  
 289, 290, 293, 295n51,  
 295n53, 295n60
- BBC TV Sports Programmes
- Grandstand*, 1, 2, 137, 141–58,  
 172–3, 179, 194, 195, 211,  
 227, 254, 308, 322–4
- Match of the Day*, 1, 149, 173,  
 250–6, 302, 308, 309, 318,  
 320, 324, 325
- Rugby Special, 173
- Sport in Scotland, 176
- Sport of the Day, 173
- Sportsnight With Coleman, 133,  
 308
- Sports Special*, 243, 247, 250, 323
- Driver, Hugh (sport news), 244
- Edwards, Dennis (Editor), 244,  
 246
- Ketley, Leslie (sports writer), 244
- Sport Special from Scotland, 248
- Sportsreel, 2, 176
- Duke, Alastair, 249
- Henry, Archie (Presenter), 249
- McPherson, Murdoch, 249
- Shepherd, Norman (cameraman),  
 249

- Sportsview*, 2, 111–36, 141, 142, 147, 149, 151, 157, 172, 194, 209, 211, 227, 242, 243, 246, 254, 259, 260, 263, 265, 284, 317, 322–4
- Bannister, Roger ‘Four minute mile’, 10, 118–22, 132
- battle for resources, 115, 116
- ‘brand’, 115–18
- coverage of international sport, 126–7
- coverage of women’s sport, 125–6
- Junior Sportsview, 122, 141
- Monte Carlo Rally, 127–9
- original conception, 113
- regional input, 117–18, 125
- Sports Personality of the Year, 128–33
- teleprompter, 119
- topicality, 113, 114, 116, 123
- Winter Olympics 1956, 259
- Talking Sport, 176
- Television Sports Magazine, 113, 128
- Today’s Sport*, 143–5, 147, 151, 176, 242–3, 246, 247, 250
- BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC), 10
- BBC Yearbook, 1949*, 41
- billiards and snooker
- Carpenter, Thelma, 43, 64n12
- Davis, Joe, 150–1
- Gardner, Joyce, 43
- Birley, Derek 12n3, 109n3
- boxing
- Alexandra Palace Boxing Club, 22, 23
- Ali, Muhammad (Cassius Clay) v Henry Cooper, 10, 211, 212
- Amateur Boxing Association, 33
- Brahman, David (promoter), 205, 206
- Cooper, Henry, 10, 211–14
- Duff, Micky, 210, 212
- Ezra, R. Sassoon, 205, 206
- Harringay Arena, 35, 58–9, 62, 201, 203, 209
- Levene, Harry, 208, 210, 212–14
- Liston, Sonny, 211–13
- Mitchell, Kevin, 215n15
- National Sporting Club, 35, 203
- pre-war coverage
- Boon, Eric v Danahar, Arthur (1939), 35, 200
- Harvey, Len v McAvoy, Jock (1938), 35
- Repton Amateur Boxing Club, 33
- Robinson, Sugar-Ray, 199, 202, 207–9
- Sport Vision, 212
- Turpin, Randolph, 116, 118, 207, 209
- Waltham, Teddy, 205, 207
- Bridgewater, Tony, 18, 27, 38n44
- Briggs, Asa, 66n51, 66n57, 112, 134n3
- British Empire and Commonwealth Games (1958), 137, 144
- Broad, Chris, 39n54, 110n61
- Buscombe, Edward, 9, 12n11
- C**
- Campey, George, 71, 78, 80, 88n8, 196n17, 246, 257n24
- Chataway, Chris, 120, 122, 127, 131, 132
- Churchill, Winston, 71
- College, Ceclia
- Collins, Norman (Controller of Television), 57, 60, 61, 66n45, 66n60, 69–71, 94, 98, 109n14, 112, 166, 180n13, 186, 195n7, 195n9, 204–5, 209, 215n23, 215n25
- Cooke, Les, 5–6, 12n4

Corner, John, 3, 11n2  
 coronation, King George VI (1937),  
     25, 27, 286  
 coronation, Queen Elizabeth II  
     (1953), 63, 69  
 cricket  
     Aird, Ronnie (MCC), 96–102,  
         109n25, 109n27, 109n28,  
         109n29, 109n31, 110n33,  
         110n34, 110n35, 110n36,  
         110n37, 110n38, 110n41,  
         110n42, 110n43, 110n44,  
         110n45, 110n46, 110n47,  
         110n48  
     Armchair Cricket, 91  
     Castor, Brian (Surrey CCC), 95, 96,  
         100, 107, 109n19, 109n22,  
         110n38  
     County Championship (cricket), 92,  
         107  
     effect of TV on gates, 93  
     finances, 92  
     Hobbs, Jack, 16, 98,  
         109n27  
     Howard, Geoffrey (Lancashire  
         CCC), 98, 109n28, 109n29,  
         110n33  
     limited overs cricket, 92, 107–8  
     Lords Cricket Ground, 30–2, 92–4,  
         96, 98, 106, 107  
     MCC, 11, 30, 31, 92–102,  
         106–8  
     Nash, John (Yorkshire CCC), 96,  
         109n23  
     pre-war coverage, 30–1  
     production codes and conventions,  
         102–6  
     Rait-Kerr, Colonel (MCC), 31,  
         39n58, 39n59, 93–6, 109n9,  
         109n11, 109n15, 109n16,  
         109n17, 109n18, 109n19,  
         109n20, 109n21, 109n22,  
         109n23, 109n24

**D**

Dimpleby, Richard, 45, 128,  
 177, 252

**E**

Ellis, John, 72, 76, 88n10, 89n21  
 European Broadcasting Union (EBU),  
     74, 77, 78, 83, 84, 87, 89n49,  
     260–1, 266, 268–74, 300–2, 320  
 D'Arcy, Jean, 75, 80

**F**

## football

Drewry, Arthur, 241  
 England v Scotland (1938), 32  
 FA Cup, 16, 20, 32, 36, 76, 119, 171,  
     190, 237, 239, 242, 308, 319  
 FIFA, 75, 78, 84, 87, 298–301  
 floodlit fixtures on TV, 86, 238–40,  
     248  
 Football Association, 20, 32, 38n20,  
     78, 86, 171, 237–9, 299–301,  
     318  
 Football League, 32, 62, 86, 87,  
     237–9, 241, 242, 251, 318  
 Galloway, RKS (Hearts FC), 248  
 Hardaker, Alan, 251–2, 318  
 Haynes, Johnny, 240  
 Hill, Jimmy, 240, 315  
 Howarth, Fred, 238, 239, 241, 243,  
     257n4, 257n15, 318  
 impact of Entertainment Tax, 240  
 Kelly, Robert (Celtic FC), 239, 248  
 McIntosh, William (Dundee United  
     FC), 239  
 ‘Matthews Final’ 1953, 76, 242  
 Milburn, Jackie, 243  
 nations and regions (TV football  
     coverage), 247–50  
 Professional Footballers Association,  
     240



- Rous, Sir Stanley, 32, 78, 171, 239, 298, 299, 304, 312n1, 313n19, 318
- Scottish Football Association, 80, 239
- Scottish Football League, 239, 242, 248
- World Cup (1950), 75–6, 80  
Charles Buchan eye witness reports, 76
- World Cup (1954), 75–87  
‘the Battle of Berne’, 84  
BBC Newsreel coverage, 82  
coverage of Scotland, 81, 82  
‘Eurovision’ origin, 78, 83  
impetus to European club coverage, 77–80  
Tappolet, Frank (Swiss TV), 79, 83  
television continental exchange, 77–82  
Wright, Billy, 83, 85, 90n56, 306
- World Cup (1958), 88, 273
- World Cup (1962), 299
- World Cup (1966), 297–313  
action replay technology, 302, 303, 306  
advertising, 301  
audience research, 306  
BBC/ITV Consortium, 298–302  
international sales, 302  
Martin, Jonathan, 303  
planning of television coverage, 298, 299  
Wolstenholme commentary, 297, 305  
Wolstenholme v Coleman debate, 307–11
- G**
- General Post Office, 25–6, 186
- golf  
American influence, 228
- The Big Three* (Palmer, Nichlaus and Player), 232
- Bradbeer, Ernest, 218
- The British Open, 29
- Chip Shots, 219
- Compston, Archie, 21, 218, 219
- Daks, 224
- Darwin, Bernard, 24, 217, 218, 234n7
- Faudel-Phillips, Major, 21
- Golfers in Action (1937), 24, 217
- Golf Monthly, 218, 228
- Guttman, Alan, 229, 236n46
- IMG, 228, 231, 233, 234  
innovations in coverage, 225  
logistical difficulties in coverage, 218, 226
- Moor Park Golf Club, 220
- Piccadilly World Match Play, 229, 230
- R&A, 225, 227, 233
- Rees, Dai, 123
- Runcie, George, 117, 226–7, 230, 235n38, 235n39, 247–8, 257n28, 257n29
- Ryder Cup, 24, 217, 219, 223, 224, 227, 229
- Saturday Afternoon Golf, 220
- Target Golf, 233
- Whitcombe, C. A., 24, 217
- Wingate, Poppy, 24, 218
- Gorham, Maurice, 163, 180n3, 201, 215n10, 215n17, 283, 294n24
- Goss, Tony, 70
- H**
- Haley, William (Director General), 44, 56, 57, 60, 63, 66n44, 66n46, 109n14, 166, 215n10
- Hankey Committee on Television* (1944), 58
- Hartley, John, 41, 64n1

Hawkins, Desmond (Head of Progs  
Bristol), 170, 180n25

Hennessy, Peter, 44, 65n16

Holt, Richard, 12n3, 56, 66n44

Hood, Stuart, 253

horse racing

The Derby, 16–18, 21, 25, 29, 36,  
58, 152, 184

early radio commentaries, 184

The Grand National, 25, 48, 117,  
152, 183–96, 254, 312

racing press, 154, 183, 187, 189,  
190

Topham, Mirrabell, 186–93, 195,  
196n13, 196n16, 196n23

Huggins, Mike, 12n3, 36n1, 36n2,  
36n3, 36n5, 64n5, 65n41, 183,  
184, 195n1, 195n5

## I

ITA Sports Advisory Committee, 97,  
101

ITV (commercial television)

Associated Television (ATV), 63,  
99, 112, 209, 241, 242

Associated Rediffusion (AR), 99,  
101, 139, 209

BBC negotiations with, 99, 112,  
157, 171

Becher, William Sir (AR), 101,  
110n42

competition for TV rights, 97–100

## J

Jacob, Sir Ian (Director General), 225,  
226, 235n33, 235n37, 261

## K

Kay, Joyce, 43, 64n9, 276n17

Kellner, Martin, 7, 12n7

## L

Lake, Robert J., 280, 289, 293n4,  
295n48, 295n59

Lime Grove Studios, 45, 117, 121,  
123, 143, 145, 146, 243, 245,  
250, 251, 275

Lineker, Gary, 1

## M

Madden, Cecil, 19–23, 37n15, 38n23,  
38n31, 112, 114–16, 134n13,  
134n18

male domination of BBC TV Sport, 6

Mayhew, Christopher MP, 111, 134n1

McGivern, Cecil, 75, 80, 81, 124,  
135n45, 135n46, 144, 148, 156,  
159n23, 159n36, 160n67, 188,  
190, 196n14, 205–7, 209, 215n28,  
246, 257n14, 283, 284, 294n20

Midwinter, Eric, 238, 242, 256n3,  
257n13

## O

Oaten, Jack, 142, 181n32, 209, 210,  
216n42, 235n34, 235n40, 269,  
270, 273, 274, 276n36, 276n37,  
277n43, 277n44, 290, 299, 300,  
302, 312n5, 313n7, 313n9

Olympic Games

1948 London, 55–8, 70, 112, 259,  
324

1952 Helsinki, 259

1956 Cortina, 259

1960 Rome, 78, 148, 259–66, 268,  
320

1960 Squaw Valley, 259–60

1964 Tokyo, 266–9, 273–5, 304

1968 Mexico City, 2, 263, 275, 315

Braun, Ernst, 269, 270

Comitato Olimpico Nazionale  
Italiano (CONI), 260, 261

- Duncan, Sandy (BOA), 265, 276n22
- Eurovision, 78, 260–1, 266, 271–2
- Japanese regeneration, 267
- multilateral and unilateral coverage, 260–2, 273
- Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK), 266, 268–70, 272, 274
- RAI TV, 260, 261
- rights negotiations, 260–1, 268–70
- satellite coverage, 266–7, 270–2, 274–5
- TV coverage and globalisation, 260, 273
- Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion (OIR), 74
- Outside Broadcast Production
- Amplex video recorder, 145, 252, 261, 275
- cameras, 21, 27, 28, 35, 218, 221, 254
- 625-line UHF (impact of), 254, 269
- P**
- Peacock, Michael (Controller, BBC 2), 251
- Philco television sets, 72
- Pilling, Michael, 77
- Postmaster General, 59–61, 100, 101, 192, 318, 319
- pre-war television sport
- Baird, Malcolm, 17
- The Boat Race, 16, 20, 25, 29, 36
- Cock, Gerald, 19–21, 23, 25, 29, 32–4, 37n20, 38n33, 39n53, 39n62
- The Derby (1931, 1932), 16–18, 21, 25, 29, 36
- FA Cup, 16, 20, 32, 36
- golf, 21, 24, 29
- Kamm, Anthony, 17, 37n6, 37n8, 37n11
- Logie-Baird, John, 16–19, 22, 26, 35, 37n6, 37n8, 37n9, 37n11, 37n15, 37n16
- Marconi-EMI, 15, 19, 22, 26, 33
- rugby union, 15
- snooker, 23, 26
- table tennis, 22, 25, 28
- Television Advisory Committee, 18, 19
- Women's League of Health and Beauty, 23, 43
- R**
- radio
- Radio Sportsreel, 248
- Sports Report*, 105, 114, 141, 147, 209, 244, 253
- rediffusion, 35, 55, 59–61, 93–5, 188, 189
- tele-cinema, 61, 95
- rowing, 24, 28, 144
- The Boat Race, 16, 20, 25, 29, 36, 60, 126, 312, 319
- Rugby Union
- commentary style, 174–5
- Cooper, Sydney Commander, 162, 164
- Rugby Union Referee Societies
- Hood, John (Editor), 175, 181n33, 235n42
- International Rugby Football Board, 170
- Irish rugby, 168, 170
- Murrayfield, 169
- Ramsey, Bill, 171–2, 180n26
- regional coverage and 'blankets', 167–73
- RFU, 162, 163, 167, 169, 171, 172, 180
- rights fees, 167, 171
- rivalry with Rugby League, 172

Scottish rugby and Scottish  
Broadcasting Council, 161,  
162, 168–72, 174–6  
Twickenham, 28, 51, 162–3, 165,  
167, 169, 172, 319  
Welsh rugby, 168, 171, 173, 174  
Runcie, George (Controller, BBC  
Scotland), 117, 226–7, 230,  
235n38, 235n39, 247–8,  
257n28, 257n29

## S

Scottish Broadcasting Council, 169  
show jumping, 62–3  
Sport Agents  
Harvey, Bagenal, 98, 108, 130, 316  
McCormack, Mark, 228–34,  
236n50, 301, 316  
Somerfield, Teddy, 174, 181n35  
Sport Television Advisory Committee,  
66n58  
Staff No Fee (SNF), 52–4, 115  
swimming  
Devitt, John (controversy), 263  
Lonsborough, Anita, 262, 264

## T

Television Act (1954), 62, 97  
non-exclusivity, 100  
Television Newsreel, 112–14, 121,  
122  
television  
sponsorship and, 9, 92, 230  
sport adaption to, 7  
tennis  
All England Lawn Tennis and  
Croquet Club, 279, 280,  
282–91, 293  
Barrett, John, 281  
Centre Court, 28, 282–4, 290–2

colour television and the open era,  
288–92  
commentary styles, 286, 287  
Connolly, Maureen ('Little Mo'),  
281, 288  
conventions of coverage, 282–5  
Emerson, Roy, 279, 289  
Gonzales, Pancho, 280, 281, 292  
Hoad, Lew, 279, 289, 291, 292  
Keating, Frank (ITV producer),  
284  
Kramer, Jack, 280, 288–92, 302  
Mills, David, 290  
Mortimer, Angela, 281  
Mottram, Tony, 279  
Laver, Rod, 279, 291  
Lawn Tennis Association, 282, 292  
Perry, Fred, 16, 18, 280, 284  
pre-war coverage Wimbledon, 28,  
30, 282  
Riggs, Bobby, 280  
Rosewall, Ken, 279, 289, 291, 292  
royal patronage, 283  
'shamateurism', 280  
Tinling, Teddy, 280, 295n51  
Truman, Christine, 281  
Wade, Virginia, 293, 306  
Wimbledon Championships, 293  
women's tennis, 280–1, 290  
Tomlinson, Alan, 75, 88n19, 119,  
134n28

## W

Waddell, Daniel, 39n54, 110n61  
Whannel, Garry, 7, 8, 12n6, 12n10,  
65n20, 66n49, 66n50, 109n5,  
119, 135n29, 143–4, 159n20,  
159n22, 159n25, 236n49,  
276n29, 284, 294n25  
*What's On Today* (McNaughton,  
1938), 26

Williams, Jack, 36n1, 36n2, 92–3,  
102, 109n6, 109n7, 109n8,  
110n49, 155, 156, 160n65,  
234n10

Williams, Raymond, 8, 12n8, 71,  
88n9, 320, 326n2  
Wilson, Elizabeth, 279–80, 285,  
293n2, 293n3, 294n7, 294n31