

See differently

TV Content Focus Group 1 (Sports)

Football matches on TV

28 January 2022

Purpose

The purpose of this focus group was to explore the experience of watching football games on TV and to understand the preference for a certain type of commentary over others. Three types were discussed:

- Standard commentary on TV matches
- Standard commentary on radio
- Audio described commentary offered as an independent track and not interspersed with standard commentary. Such tracks are also called enhanced audio tracks.

Participants

There were 6 participants, 4 male and 2 female with differing levels of sight loss ranging from SI to SSI. Some participants had no useful sight, some had light perception, whilst others could see parts of the picture.

Material

Participants were shown three clips of 5 minutes each with commentary delivered in the styles described above:

- Clip 1: FA Cup Third Round: Hull City v Everton on BBC 1. Played from BBC iPlayer
- Clip 2: BT Sports Disability Cup 2021 with audio description. Provided by BT Sports
- Clip 3: FA Cup commentary of Newcastle v Cambridge United on BBC Radio 5 Live Sports. Played from BBC Sounds.

After each clip, participants were asked the same set of questions:

- Are there any issues relating to quality?
 - Are there any issues relating to clarity?
 - How was your overall experience of listening to the clip in this format?
-

Introduction

In order to understand the viewing environment of the participants and whether it has any correlation with the style of commentary they prefer, participants were asked, generally, did they watch matches alone or with family and friends.

The majority of participants stated that they watched alone, due to being able to concentrate on the match better.

However, some watched football matches at the pub with family and friends but found it hard to follow what was happening due to noise levels being high. When watching in a pub, participants predominantly listen to radio commentary on a portable device, although the commentary and pictures are not always synced meaning participants cannot follow the match in real-time. This led participants to watch matches by themselves, as it enabled them to focus on the match with no distractions.

“I tend to watch a lot of stuff on my own. So, for instance with the football, I don’t go to the pub with the boys anymore, because when there is too much disruption, I’ve got no idea what’s going on, so I tend to prefer watching alone.” [Football fan]

“In the pub you can’t hear the commentary or see what is going on. I feel then I would rather watch the game at home and just go to the pub to socialise, rather than be sitting there missing out on something I want to be doing.” [Football fan]

Participants with some useful vision tended to watch on an iPad that they could hold closer to their face, which allowed them to see some elements of the game. However, this often led to them watching the match alone.

“I watch on my iPad, so it tends to just be me on my own.”
[Football fan]

Nevertheless, participants stated that they would like to watch with other people.

Clip 1 - FA Cup Third Round: Hull City v Everton on BBC 1

The television commentary did not provide enough detail for blind and partially sighted viewers to follow the match. For instance, many participants were at times unaware of where the ball was on the pitch. When the goal was scored, participants were not entirely sure where the free kick was taken from and how the goal was scored. The build-up play was not always described in sufficient detail.

“At no point did I really know where the ball was. The goal was scored, where did the ball come from. Did it come from the centre, the right or the left?” [Football fan]

“I’ve got no idea how they won the free kick. What was the build-up play to getting the free kick? What type of free kick it was? Where it was on the pitch? What happened for that goal?” [Football fan]

There was a general consensus that the description lacked sufficient detail to help paint a rich picture.

At times the commentators discussed things that some participants considered as irrelevant to the game, such as where players used to play. It was suggested that commentators on the television are there to provide a bit of flavour rather than describing the match as it is produced for a sighted audience.

“It was pretty vague to say the least and you couldn’t build up a picture of anything that was happening. There was just a bit of useless waffling on for most of it.” [Football fan]

“It really felt to me there that the commentators made the assumption that because it was a television programme everyone could see what was happening and they were there just to add some richness and colour to the experience.” [Football fan]

When the goal was scored, the commentator did not describe it in detail or in real-time. The co-commentator too, in this instance, failed to analyse and describe the goal in his slot.

One positive was that the players kits, team formation and the direction of play was described at the start of the match.

One participant wanted football jargon to be explained, for example what a free kick is due to having never visualised a football match before. However, other participants felt that this was not necessary and there would be a lack of time to describe all elements during a match.

Some participants found streaming the television pictures with the radio commentary useful for building a richer picture.

Clip 2 - BT Sports Disability Cup 2021 with audio description

There was a consensus that the commentator provided a detailed and precise description of the match. For instance, participants highlighted knowing where the ball/players were, understanding the direction of a shot due to it being saved down to the left. It was clearer which team had the ball.

“I knew where the ball was more...a lot less waffle. They described the kits well, so we knew who was who.” [Football fan]

“It was clear concise. It will never be perfect, but that was as close as. It was really good, knowing where the players are, where the ball is.” [Football fan]

Some participants thought the audio described commentary sounded a bit like the radio. However, one participant felt that this is what radio commentary used to be like with less talking for talking's sake.

There was a consensus that the little details provided helped to build-up a richer picture.

Some participants wanted more tactical break downs during the match as they rely on shows such as the Monday Night Football Club for this.

One participant who used an iPad up close wanted an extra slow-motion replay of any exciting moments to utilise their useful vision better.

“Great development in apps is something I would really love to see.” [Football fan]

“When you said would you prefer it to be on an app or on television, I have got to say I don’t really care. If I can access it one way or another, that’s what really matters to me.” [Football fan]

“I do find using a tablet and apps really useful as I’m able to see a bit clearer. I think more stuff that can be built into apps such as extra slow motion replays the better.” [Football fan]

Clip 3 – FA Cup commentary of Newcastle v Cambridge United on BBC Radio 5 Live Sports

Some participants felt that the radio commentary provided more detail compared to the television commentary. However, other participants were lost during some moments of the game, for example during build-up play.

Details such as a players hair colour help to build up a picture, although irrelevant information about Formula 1 was not helpful. Some participants liked stats thrown in after a goal for some extra detail. It was highlighted that there was a time and a place for extra detail. For instance, commentators could say that the ball is out of play before discussing extra contextual details, so visually impaired people do not feel as if they are missing the match.

One participant preferred some of the contextual information as there are often parts of a match when there is not a lot happening.

Another participant liked the stadium being described, as it helped them to build up a rich picture.

“There were bits of description and then bits of waffle.” [Football fan]

“I didn’t mind that commentary. I think as long as they say when the ball is out of play before they start waffling on, then at least

you know you are not missing anything. It was nice to get a description of the stadium because it could be one man and his dog in a shed. I didn't think the commentary was too bad, could have been a bit more descriptive." [Football fan]

Which commentary style did you prefer?

There was no support for the television commentary, with participants predominantly preferring the audio description or a mixture of radio commentary and audio description. One participant preferred the radio commentary.

Participants who preferred a mixture of audio described and radio commentaries at times found the audio description too frantic and overwhelming. They enjoyed a few short pauses.

"I probably preferred the radio out of the three commentaries because the commentary is the most important bit, but I did quite like bits of the context and the ball is often out. There isn't always much happening, so I was okay with that. I found the audio description at times can be a bit frantic for me to follow." [Football fan]

Participants who preferred the audio description found that it provided lots of detail and was intriguing.

Participants felt that commentators should have a greater knowledge of sight loss.

What are your thoughts on a traditional television style audio description being fit into the pauses of a commentary on a football match?

Participants were generally not keen on this style of description as they felt there were not many opportunities for this to be used during a football match. However, most agreed that they couldn't be sure until they had heard this style.

Magic wand question:

If you had a magic wand and you could do one thing to make your experience of watching football on TV enjoyable, what would it be?

One participant suggested an option to provide additional commentary and subtitles providing clear detail.

“I think if I could always have the option to press a button that would give you additional commentary. I don’t know if there could be a red button for audio description and subtitles. I think I would use that every time because on Sky Sports when it is Gary Neville and Martin Tyler commentating, I do prefer the radio commentary over that pairing. Gary Neville is amazing don’t get me wrong, but they are not descriptive enough when it comes to the game. So, if there was a button, I could press that would give me a descriptive commentary rather than trying to guess what is going on, I’d use it.” [Football fan]

Some participants would like more descriptive radio commentary tied into BT, Sky, Amazon.

“It is just more descriptive commentaries. The number of times we pause the telly to tell me what is going on because they are not telling me on the audio themselves. Especially for the goals. The game must go on for an extra 20 minutes due to the number of times we pause it.” [Football fan]

Participants indicated that they would like the ability to listen into stadium audio describers’ commentary.

“For me it would be something if there could be a tie in between broadcasters, so you could have the equivalent of a red button, so if you were watching for example on BT Sports if there was a tie in to get a 5 Live radio commentary or the free audio description provided at grounds, so you could listen to that whilst watching the game. Because I can’t really see what is going on, I don’t subscribe to any premium packages because I just don’t get the value.” [Football fan]

“I think after going to a live football match and watching it with the audio description, any broadcaster who listened to that will agree it could be done.” [Football fan]

“It is just being more descriptive of what the commentators see. It is not that hard really. Just a lot more description would be great really.” [Football fan]

Participants suggested an app which provides audio description, stats, slow motion replays and more.

“Magic wand would be an app that’s got the live broadcast coming through with a massive pause button and a standard commentary, radio or audio described commentary from the stadium, but also some stats on one side which you can touch, and it starts reading them. All elements can be paused and started at any time. An app where you get the visual, audio and the stats, which would be completely accessible.” [Football fan]

“I would want an app where you can select a match, for instance Spurs vs Chelsea and you can get an audio described commentary through a headset, so as not to disrupt others experience.” [Football fan]

End of document

Please email your questions to broadcast@rnib.org.uk