

R N I B

See differently

Accessibility of Football Broadcasts on TV Research Report

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Introduction

This report explores blind and partially sighted people's experiences of watching football broadcasts on TV. It investigates people's preferences for which commentary or audio description style is enjoyable, accessible and enables the match to be followed accurately. Firstly, the report provides some contextual information on blind and partially sighted peoples current thoughts on football broadcasts on TV, as well as how they access football matches. It then provides a discussion on the findings, before finishing with a set of recommendations to improve football broadcasts on TV.

Context

An attitude scale combining the enjoyability, accessibility and the ability to follow a match accurately was used to measure blind and partially sighted peoples experience of watching football matches on TV. From this research which interviewed 10 people, football broadcasts on TV had a score of 6.1 out of 15. The primary reason participants expressed for giving this score was that football commentators on TV do not provide enough description or detail for the match to be followed accurately.

All interviewees used a range of platforms to follow football matches. Radio was the most popular medium for following football. Some participants highlighted that this was due to the commentaries being easier to follow. Most participants had used the TV to follow games, although this was not their preferred method. Tablets, the internet and in-house stadium commentaries were also mentioned as ways football matches were followed.

Methodology

A qualitative approach in the form of interviews was used to explore blind and partially sighted people's thoughts on how effective different commentator audio description styles are for football matches on TV. Ten interviews were conducted on MS Teams and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All participants were chosen due to having a keen interest in football and regularly following matches.

Interviewees were shown two clips lasting 10 minutes. The first clip demonstrated a commentary style with one commentator providing the description of the match. A traditional audio description, where the describer provided information in the gaps of a mainstream commentary was demonstrated in the second clip. For all the interviews a topic guide with a set of questions was produced to help guide, probe and keep participants on topic.

Discussion

This section will provide a summary of interviewees thoughts on the two clips. It explores the perspectives provided on topics including the level of description provided, the ability to follow the game, the level of detail and the pace of the commentary. It finishes by providing interviewees overall thoughts on both clips.

Clip One – One Commentator

Do you think the level of description was sufficient?

Participants felt that the level of description was sufficient to follow the game. It was highlighted that compared to a TV commentary, there were not so many dead silences. The commentator did not just say the players name, instead a description of the match was provided.

“Yes, I think that there were not too many dead silences, like TV commentators who just say the name of the player on the ball and that is it. I would say it was a fairly good commentary.” (Football fan)

“The level of description was good, I could follow the game well.”
(Football fan)

How accurately were you able to follow the match?

Overall, participants felt that they could follow the game accurately. When the free kick was scored, some interviewees found the description of the positioning of the wall and goalkeeper useful information. Other participants indicated that they were able to follow what type of a shot it was from the description provided.

“I was able to follow the free kick goal well. The commentator described the position of the wall as well as who was in it. Also, the position of the goalkeeper was covered. There was a good description of the wall splitting when the ball went into the top of the net.” (Football fan)

“That was good. I understood that perfectly well. I liked that he described that it might be a penalty but rethought it. I thought he described it just as I would like to hear it.” ((Football fan)

“That was fine as it described the wall, where the players were in the wall. It was good. I don’t think I would change anything.” (Football fan)

Most participants highlighted that they could follow other elements of the game, such as the positioning of players, the types of passes played or the interchange of play reasonably well. Some participants particularly enjoyed the descriptions provided on how many players were in front or behind. However, it was suggested that more information could be provided on the positioning of players off the ball.

“I was able to follow where the players were on the pitch fairly well. The commentator at one point indicated that player x had two players in front and one behind which was useful information. Information was also provided when the ball was switched from left to right. Overall, I thought it was good.” (Football fan)

“That actually wasn’t too bad. He did describe most of the time where players were on the pitch. He also said when the ball was on the right it was being switched to the other side, so you could follow that. The commentator did this throughout the clip.” (Football fan)

“That was good in relation to where the play was happening, where they were passing the ball too. It covered where the players were around them. It said at one point two in front one behind that they had to get around.” (Football fan)

“I think that could be improved a bit. It was mainly talking about the player on the ball as you would expect, but I think that wider perspective

about knowing where the players are would also be useful.” (Football fan)

What did you think of the level of detail?

All participants thought that the level of detail provided was sufficient to paint a good picture. The descriptions of the players kits and boots, consisting of different colours and patterns was noted by all interviewees. Participants also enjoyed the physical descriptions of players as it is helpful to know if a player is short or tall and how strong they are. Some participants found the descriptions of the height of players useful detail in understanding the composition of a wall.

“That was very good, even the description of the player. For instance, the physicality, how big they were, how strong they were. He gave a clear description of what they were wearing. He said each team was playing in XYZ colours. It was very good.” (Football fan)

“The level of detail was good. The commentator described the colour and patterns of the players kits and boots. The physicality of the players was also described. This was particularly interesting when the commentator said who was the tallest player in the wall.” (Football fan)

“I liked some of the extra details. For instance, the commentator talked about someone’s white and blue boots. He also talked about their physical attributes. He mentioned if they were large or fast players. That additional background information is always good.” (Football fan)

How did you find the pace of the commentary?

All participants were happy with the pace of the commentary. They felt that enough information was being conveyed, but not to the extent where it would become overwhelming. Some participants indicated that extra information about a player’s form could be provided in the pauses, but this should not be at the expense of the commentary on the match. On the whole, participants thought that the commentator showed the right level of excitement to enhance the listening experience.

“I thought it was fine. I thought the commentator was quite good.” (Football fan)

“The speed was good as the commentator was providing enough information without being overwhelming.” (Football fan)

“It was good. I wouldn’t want it much slower and for the speed of the game it was right.” (Football fan)

Clip Two – Traditional Audio Description

Do you think the level of description was sufficient?

Participants did not think that the level of description from the commentators was sufficient to follow the match accurately. It was highlighted that the commentary was similar to a mainstream commentary, where there is not enough focus on the match.

“I don’t like the conversation bit when they are not focused on the game. I felt I was missing what was happening.” (Football fan)

“At times, I wasn’t sure what was happening. The commentary didn’t provide enough detail to follow the match accurately.” (Football fan)

How accurately could you follow the match?

Participants indicated that they struggled to follow what was happening during the match. For instance, when the free kick was scored participants were unsure what had happened in the build-up, the positioning of the keeper and the wall. The type of shot could be followed, but participants felt that the information on the goal was being described after the event. Interviewees wanted to follow the action in real time.

“I could not follow what was happening so well. I wasn’t sure who was taking the free kick or exactly where it was on the pitch. The audio describer provided useful information to fill in the gaps, but it was after the event.” (Football fan)

“It wasn’t very well described at all, it was terrible. It was a free kick and until the audio describer came in, I was not sure what had happened.” (Football fan)

“Not as well, because in this clip we were told who had the ball and not how it was played around in the build-up. You are left thinking what has happened. In the first clip, it was clear where everything was happening. I could follow what the keeper was doing, but not as well as I could in the first clip.” (Football fan)

Furthermore, participants found it hard to know where players were located, where the ball was and what types of passes were being played. Participants stated that this was because the commentators either just said the players name or were not describing the match. However, the commentary did improve slightly when something exciting was happening.

“No, you could not follow where the players were on the pitch. A couple of times they said it was a good skill which was nice. I just couldn’t work out what was happening. It was very hard to follow.” (Football fan)

“I struggled to follow what was happening and where the ball was. The commentators only said a player’s name and at times this information wasn’t provided. There was more description provided when something exciting was happening. I was unable to understand what type of passes were being played. There just was not enough description.” (Football fan)

“I didn’t really follow it at all. Again, it was the usual conversations between the commentators, and you can hear things happening, but you don’t know until after.” (Football fan)

What did you think of the level of detail?

Participants indicated that the level of detail provided on the players kits, boots and physicality ranged from minimal to non-existent. This prevented participants from painting an accurate picture.

“The level of detail was insufficient to paint an accurate picture of the players kits or what they looked like.” (Football fan)

“There was no description about what they were wearing. On a scale of 1 to 5, I would give it a 0. There was no description at all, it was terrible.”
(Football fan)

“The audio describer did not provide so much detail on the kits or on the players appearances.” (Football fan)

How did you find the pace of the commentary?

Participants described the pace as either ok or too slow. This was primarily due to the commentators not describing the game, leading to interviewees missing out on the action. It was highlighted that the commentators also spent too much time off topic discussing players form, rather than commentating on the match. The one positive some participants indicated was the level of excitement the commentators showed.

“When they were commentating on the game it was ok, but they rambled on about other information, which is ok if there is a pause in play.”
(Football fan)

“I found it a little bit slow as sometimes they had to explain what was happening after the event. They were playing catchup.” (Football fan)

How did you find the relationship between the commentators and the audio describer?

In terms of the relationship between the commentators and the audio describer, participants had mixed feelings about how well it worked. Interviewees recognised that the audio description provided useful information to help follow a match, but since the information was not provided in real time, parts of the match were being missed. For example, some participants highlighted that the extra description helped them follow the free kick being scored, but the information came after the goal was scored.

Moreover, participants indicated that the audio description felt a bit disjointed from the two commentators. It was highlighted that the audio description would be more useful if more description was provided

throughout the match. Some participants also thought that the audio describer was superfluous as the commentators could provide the extra description instead.

“The relationship worked to an extent. The audio describer provided useful information about the free kick and penalties, which was good. However, the information was provided after the event, so at times I felt a bit lost and that I was missing out on what was happening. It would work better if the commentator provided the information in real time.” (Football fan)

“Once I knew what it was, it was helpful. It separated it a bit from the commentary. He was doing it at the right time as he had to do it after the goal or after the penalties. However, you are missing what the commentators are saying so you can get a bit lost.” (Football fan)

“It worked a bit. The two commentators were bouncing off each other and getting excited. They provided a lot of detail about how many cups each team had won, that worked well. However, their description of the game was lacking big time. The information provided by the audio describer was a lot better than the commentators. He came in and explained the goal, but other than that you were left in the dark. It would be useful if the audio describer came in more often.” (Football fan)

Overall Thoughts on the Clips

Overall, participants preferred clip one as it provided an accurate description of the match and a good level of detail on players kits, boots and physicality. It was felt that most elements of the game could be followed, including where players were on the pitch, where the ball was, switches of play and when the goal was scored.

Conversely, participants found the audio description in clip two useful, but it came across as disjointed from the main commentary. Participants also wanted the action to be described in real time, instead of an audio describer backfilling. Interviewees also thought that the description provided by the audio describer could be done by the main commentary team.

Participants felt that a commentary works better with only one commentator as they can focus solely on describing the match. This would result in the loss of the co-commentator/star commentator, but participants thought that they would be more suited to being saved for the start of a match, half-time, and the end of a match.

Recommendations

This section will provide a set of recommendations which could be implemented to improve the experience for blind and partially sighted people watching football broadcasts on TV.

1. The use of one commentator enables the commentary to stay focused on describing the match, rather than discussing extra detail.
2. Star commentators can be used at the start of a match, half-time or at the end of a match to add some colour and their insights. This enables the match commentator to stay focused on the game.
3. When a goal is scored, it is important to describe the build-up play, the goalkeeper's response, and the type of shot to ensure blind and partially sighted people can follow the action accurately.
4. A clear description of elements, such as where players are on the pitch, where the ball is and what types of passes are being played is useful information to help follow a match. Accurate descriptions of corners, throw ins and free kicks would also be useful information.
5. Details about a player's kit, boots or physicality is useful information for a commentator to include. For example, colours, patterns or whether a player is big or small could be described. It helps blind and partially sighted people build-up an accurate picture.
6. The pace of the commentary needs to keep up with the gameplay, but not be so fast as to be overwhelming.
7. The tone of a commentator can help to convey extra information and provides an enjoyable listening experience.
8. A range of platforms including radio, TV, tablets, apps and the internet are used to follow football matches, so investment in linear and non-linear channels would create a seamless user experience.