

Best practice for making TV sports commentaries inclusive and accessible for viewers with vision impairments.

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
1. Text on screen must be read out.	2
2. Using descriptive language and setting the scene	2
3. Gameplay for team sports	3
4. Gameplay in individual or team sports	4
5. Use of action replay and role of co-commentator.....	4
6. Using jargon and terminology	5
7. Audio mixing.....	5

Introduction

In the dynamic world of sports, television commentaries serve as an essential element that brings the thrilling action to life for millions of viewers worldwide. However, while these commentaries offer valuable insights and emotions for sighted audiences, they often present significant barriers for viewers with visual impairments. To bridge this accessibility gap and ensure inclusivity in sports broadcasting, it is imperative to focus on making sports TV commentaries more accessible to blind and low vision viewers. This may involve incorporating descriptions of the on-field action, providing vivid details of key moments, player movements, and the overall game dynamics.

Moreover, employing descriptive language, clear and concise narration, and avoiding unnecessary jargon or ambiguous expressions can significantly enhance the experience for visually impaired viewers. Ensuring a well-balanced commentary that not only informs but also

conveys the emotions and atmosphere of the game will enable blind and low vision audiences to feel more connected to the sports they love.

This best practice guidance includes effective strategies for making TV commentaries for most sports more inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of their sight level.

1. Text on screen must be read out.

Important information displayed as text during sports broadcasts should be read out. For instance, scores, names, team line-ups, formations, player stats and any other data that is on the TV screen during the sporting event. However, providing commentary on the sport should be prioritised over reading out every piece of text.

Example 1:

[100m Freestyle](#)

This is a good example where important text was read out during the 2020 Olympics 100m Free Style Swimming event. In the commentary, data provided on screen about the individual swimmers was spoken when they walked out.

Example 2:

[10m Synchronised Diving](#)

The 10m Synchronised Diving provides a good example where text displayed on screen could be read out to enhance the experience of viewers with visual impairments. In this clip, information is provided on the type of dive about to be performed, but this is not always verbalised.

2. Using descriptive language and setting the scene

Including physical descriptions of the sportsmen, facial expressions of players/ others on screen, atmosphere in the stadium/arena/location, surroundings, descriptions of attire and accessories will enhance the experience of viewers with visual impairments. Commentators should use their tone and choice of words to convey their enthusiastic reaction to gameplay.

Example 1:

[Men's Super Heavyweight](#)

In the 2020 Olympics Men's Super Heavyweight boxing, the commentary provides some useful information about the boxer's height

and that one is wearing red, while the other is in blue. However, descriptions on each boxer's height and weight would be useful contextual information to provide at the start of the event, rather than during the commentary. Also, there was little description of the venue and crowd atmosphere at the start, which would be useful information to help build a better picture of the event.

Example 2:

During martial arts and other close action sports, it is useful to provide details such as whether a competitor is looking tired or dropping their guard.

Example 3:

[Men's Goalball Gold Medal match](#)

Knowing team colours is valuable information in sports like rugby or football. This information will help some people with residual vision identify the teams more easily, or it can help to add some colour to the event. In the Men's Goalball Gold Medal match at the 2020 Olympics, the commentators only provided a description of one team's kit. It would be useful to describe both kits for consistency.

3. Gameplay for team sports

Including information on positioning of ball and players (is the shot to the right, to the left or down the middle) will improve orientation of viewers with visual impairments and provide valuable information to better understand the match.

Example 1:

[Men's Goalball Gold Medal match](#)

In the Men's Goalball Gold Medal match at the 2020 Olympics, it was hard to follow where the ball was shot from and where it was being defended. It would be useful to provide information about where the ball is coming from and travelling to. For instance, if the ball is shot from the left wing, it would be useful to know if the ball is traveling straight or across the court. Subsequently, a description of how it was defended would be useful. Information about players moving to different positions on the court is useful information to keep track of what is happening. This extra description is useful information to provide on any sports where the ball and players are moving around.

Example 2:

[Goal Fix Cup 2023](#)

The Goal Fix Cup is a good example of where a descriptive commentary is provided. Information is provided about player kits, where they are shooting from and where the ball is defended. Some of the descriptions provided could be applied to a mainstream commentary.

4. Gameplay in individual or team sports

In individual or team sports, it is important to describe any actions, sequences or movements.

Example 1:

[Commonwealth Games Gymnastics Floor Event](#)

During gymnastics or diving, there are lots of complex movements, so it is important to describe what is happening. In the gymnastics floor event at the Commonwealth Games, the commentators provide a good description of the sequence being performed. However, it could be improved if the description were provided as the routine is occurring, rather than after each segment.

Example 2:

[Commonwealth Games 60kg Judo Gold Match](#)

In the 60kg gold judo match at the Commonwealth Games, the commentator does not always describe what is happening. There are several long pauses in the commentary, where no detail is being provided. This makes it hard for a blind or partially sighted person to follow what is happening accurately.

Example 3:

[Men's Super Heavyweight Tokyo Olympics](#)

During the men's Super-Heavyweight boxing match at the Tokyo Olympics, the commentary provided some description of the boxing moves, but there were not enough descriptions to understand what was happening. To overcome this, more detailed descriptions on the types of punches would be beneficial.

5. Use of action replay and role of co-commentator

In high action sports, action replays could be used to describe the action in more detail. The role that the co-commentator plays during the commentary is an important factor to consider.

Example 1:

In athletics events such as the 100m, action replays can be used to provide extra details on the action. This is particularly important in fast events as there is not always time to describe all of the action live. The replay can provide an opportunity to cover more of the action providing more detailed descriptions.

Example 2:

The co-commentators are an important part of a commentary, allowing former athletes to comment on the action. However, the commentator should have priority over the co-commentator as they are providing information on the live action. Football commentaries on TV are a good example of where the commentator and co-commentator are not providing enough information about the match. They often discuss irrelevant information, or the co-commentator is speaking while the game is happening. Therefore, it is important for the co-commentator to provide analysis at an appropriate time, where it will not be too disruptive to the main commentary.

6. Using jargon and terminology

The commentary should include explanations of terms for specific routines/movements. This can be done pre-roll or during action replays in high-intensity or fast-paced sports, offering extra detail for better understanding.

Example 1:

[Judo Commonwealth Games](#)

During gymnastics or martial arts commentaries, movements are often described with technical terms, which some blind and partially sighted people may not be familiar with. This is particularly noticeable in a judo commentary from the Commonwealth Games, where traditional terms were used to describe movements. To overcome this, common technical terms could be described before each event, or they could be described after their first use in a match.

7. Audio mixing

It is important to have the correct audio mix, so the commentary can be heard over the atmosphere and other background noises.

Example 1:

[Commonwealth Games Boxing](#)

In the boxing during the Commonwealth Games, the commentator was at times hard to hear over the crowd. This is particularly important to get

correct, as not being able to hear the commentary makes it very hard for a blind or partially sighted person to follow the action.

Questions or comments in relation to this document can be sent to broadcasting@rnib.org.uk