



ATHLETICS BROADCAST COVERAGE MANUAL

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1. One-Day Athletics Competitions

1.1 Introduction

The one-day meetings are the backbone of athletics competition outside the championship events.

It is essential to achieve harmony between the Host Broadcaster and the Competition Organiser. The Organiser must assure the quality of the event, a full stadium, and an entertaining schedule of competition. The Host Broadcaster must add quality with the TV coverage ensuring a maximised television audience has an entertaining program.

The best events should be concentrated into a live broadcast window of TV Coverage of 120 minutes at Prime Time of the best events.

To fulfil these tasks the Organiser may extend the Meeting Time-Schedule to a total of (3-4 hours), with the addition of second tier track and field events and qualifications. These add on events should happen outside the 120 minutes window. This ensures the TV viewers have the highest quality in the content of what they receive, and the Stadium Audience also gets a dramatic competition and is enthusiastic for the prime events.

The philosophy of the coverage is as follows:

120 minutes – Prime Time is achieved in one day meetings as follows:

Schedule:

Usually, 10 to 12 Events are scheduled:

- About 8 track events live.
- About 4 field events live or as live.

Pre event introductions:

- Sprints – should be limited to 3 minutes maximum.
- Track races - should be limited to 2.30 maximum.
- Field events – should be limited to 2.30 minutes maximum.

Replays:

- Emotional dramatic live coverage should have the priority over replays.
- There should be selective use of replays.
- Full laps of honour and ceremonies laps of honour and individual ceremonies should not be covered.

Planning:

It is important that for each event within the broadcast window those priorities are identified to show:

- Significant moments
- Motions and emotions
- Flexibility for slots and replays

Where introductions of Athletes are planned these should be done in strict co-operation with the Organiser who should instruct the announcers/technical staff of the coordination and needs.

Of utmost importance is the need for the Organiser to:

Start planning at least 6 months before the one-day competition

Hold an Event Briefing and TV Briefing in conjunction with the Host Broadcaster the day before the meeting.

1.2 Impartiality of the International Integrated Signal

The International Integrated Signal, produced from the Integrated Feed should provide a universal coverage of the sport, without national bias and must be understandable by any viewer around the world even without commentary.

All signals shall be produced in an objective and universal manner so as not to concentrate only on Athletes from one or a few countries, but rather to cover the events with knowledge of the sport and the impartiality required for an international audience.

The International Integrated Signal shall exclude elements of a unilateral or national character both in vision and in sound, on-camera appearances of commentators and any advertising other than that of the official sponsors.

In-Field interviews in English of winning Athletes can be inserted in the International Integrated Signal if the timing allows it but are not required.

The production of these signals shall have a priority over all unilateral requirements, including that of the host country's domestic Right Holder.

2. The Journalistic Approach

2.1 Introduction

Covering athletics is difficult. Competition rules and event formats have led to complicated timetables. For the broadcaster, these schedules often lead to built-in clashes between events, which may reach their peak moments simultaneously. Therefore, great attention needs to be taken on the format of athletics competitions to enhance and better promote this great sport.

In many ways, the quality of coverage of major athletics events is declining. Besides poorly composed timetables, directors, and producers with misguided approaches to the sport have become a problem. Viewers are becoming frustrated, and they deserve better.

All the best camera positions for covering athletics have been discovered. Recognising this, the driving force for any broadcaster should be how the average viewer views the competition, rather than rushing to locate cameras in innovative ways. Producers and directors must understand the way in which viewers watch television: how they think, feel, and want to be entertained.

The approach to adopt for athletics coverage is the **Journalistic Approach**. The journalistic approach means outlining this reality in a way that captures the viewer's interest.

The journalistic approach demands these two keys to better coverage:

- 1 - Thorough homework
- 2 - Proper storytelling

2.2 Homework

By homework the Host Broadcaster gets acquainted with the venue, the organizers, and the tools of television production, but also explores the sport itself. The director's preparation should include in-depth research into the key players: the Athletes.

Beyond the Athlete's names, it is crucial to identify them and their potential. The Director must know not only the favourites and the defending champions, but also those Athletes with their last shot at a win, recovering from an injury or showing exceptional nerve at a major event.

All of this forms the most important part of production planning because it hints at, or even reveals, how the reality will unfold during the competition. Only then do the start lists begin to make sense. Only then there is solid ground to draft the potential story and decide how to tell it with cameras and microphones.

2.3 Storytelling

The viewer expects and demands to be entertained. To do this, feelings must be touched only when a viewer chooses an Athlete as their favourite, and identifies with him or her, do the Athlete's rivals become a threat.

In his book *Poetics*, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) explained the fundamentals of storytelling. To capture the viewer's emotions, he said, a story should contain three parts: the beginning, the middle and the end. This formula perfectly suits athletics.

A - The Beginning

In athletics, the beginning includes the heats of track events and the qualifications for field events. Here the favourites must be highlighted so that the viewer can recognise them. This is achieved at the cost of other Athletes, who appear less in the pictures. This is most important, because, as Aristotle puts it, if we do not know the player, what may happen to him later makes no difference.

In the first part of the story, the ingredients are planted to evoke expectations. The viewer enjoys the feelings of excitement and suspense that relate to this anticipation.

B - The Middle

The middle part includes the semi-finals and finals of track events and the finals of field events. These are the highlights of the event: the battle for medals. The competition should be filmed in an intelligible way, without missing any essential incidents. A viewer anywhere in the world must comprehend both the competition itself and the story line. This will be explained later. The middle part ends with a climax: as the final of each event concludes, everything becomes clear.

C - The End

The third section, the end, covers the euphoria of victory and the disappointment of defeat. This part also includes a motivated step back to analyse the race or field event final.

2.4 Turning Points of a Single Event

All events therefore by implication should be covered as a single competition, starting with qualification, and going through to the final.

As mentioned above, the favourites need more on-screen time than the average Athlete during qualification sessions of the throwing events and horizontal jumps. Generally, the top Athletes meet the qualification standard on their first attempt and then leave the range of cameras.

On the other hand, the favourites may not meet the qualification standard in the first round. Thus, they may create the journalistically interesting situation of a favourite in trouble during the third round.

The heats of track events and the qualifications for the vertical jumps offer the director more room to manoeuvre regarding the top Athletes. But in throwing events and horizontal jumps the third round (or, in the vertical jumps, the height set as the qualification standard) is the first point of elimination and good material for storytelling.

The next elimination points come in the semi-finals of track events or the third round of the throwing and horizontal jumps finals. The elimination points of athletic events can be considered turning points where the story heats up.

During the last rounds of a field or track event final, the key players eventually deserve equal treatment, as these Athletes are vying for medals.

2.5 The Viewer's Position

In watching sporting events, particularly athletics, the viewer looks into the depth of the picture. The viewer picks out objects of interest from this depth, normally the key Athletes of the event. The viewer is reluctant to lose visual contact with his or her favourite. The viewer also participates in the coverage, in effect using the mind as a camera. There is pleasure in mentally zooming, panning, and tilting in the view of a camera shot.

The producer or director should understand this when cutting between cameras. Hectic cutting without any clear motivation annoys the viewer, as visual contact with a favourite competitor may be lost and must be re-established. Unnecessary slow-motion replays have the same effect.

The Director should not cut to a medium shot for three seconds in a sprint final this indicates a lack of skill. In this case the viewer loses visual contact with his or her favourite for six seconds, as it takes an additional three seconds to find and re-identify the competitor. In a sprint event this means lost visual contact for over 50 meters.

Furthermore, the filming plan should allocate the viewer the best seats in the stands. These angles should be maintained through the event. The cutting must answer three questions for the viewer.

- **First:** where are we or which event?
- **Second:** which Athlete?
- **Third:** how is this Athlete doing in relation to his or her rivals?

Producers and directors pursuing world-class coverage of major athletic events should understand the importance of the journalistic approach. This approach leads to good storytelling, as the reality of the competition becomes entertaining. The target should always be the viewer's mind.

3. Track Events Breakdown

3.1 Track Events – 100m, 110m, 200m Sprints

The coverage of the sprint's competition format should be taken as a whole, from heats to final. During the heats, the favourites should be presented to the viewer. They deserve more filming time than the average runner. The favourites' faces deserve more close-ups than those of the other runners. Filming body language also helps viewers to identify competitors. Some top Athletes are known to be restless walkers before the start, while others sport long nails, tattoos, or jewellery. Such details help the viewers to identify them.

In the finals, of course, the best Athletes have qualified. Great moderation should be shown regarding close-ups after the “on your marks” cue. The viewer is compensating for the camera operations by zooming in with his or her mind’s eye.

The race is filmed in one shot. All separate shots of the start should be dropped from the cutting patterns of Host Broadcasters. Every viewer needs continuous visual contact with all finalists. This is the guiding principle, although often the discus/hammer cage or misplaced scoreboards or tents partially obscure the view of the 200m sprint starting line.

After the race, the facial expressions of the key players are again needed. The viewer is entertained by the joy of success and the agony of defeat. Only when the reactions fade, should the producer/director replay the race. At this moment, the basic rule must be repeated: if the final is a dead heat, and a photo finish is required to define the winner, then the director must shun the replays, stay with the suspense, and wait until the winner is declared. Live coverage should never miss Athletes’ reactions to knowing the results of their competition.

Track replays

Slow motion replays will be explained in detail later, but it may be appropriate to present some main principles here.

A replay always breaks the viewers’ connection with the reality of the live event. Therefore, there must be a strong motivation for a replay – only then does it enhance the coverage. Unnecessary replays annoy the viewer.

The first replay after the race should verify the placing of the runners. In heats and semi-finals, two to four Athletes generally qualify for the next round (although some Athletes also now qualify by time). The producer/director must bear this in mind now when the first replay is run. If the three best Athletes qualify, then the replay should emphasise, as part of the basic story, which Athletes were third and fourth, the last qualifier and the first to be eliminated. In finals, of course, the first replay shows the medallists.

The second replay highlights the winner. A favourite’s poor performance is also always a substantial journalistic point.

The production must also be arranged to adapt to surprises. Certain camera operators must have special tasks. Incidents of special interest must be recorded and replayed. Thus, filming false starts, injuries, Athletes running outside of their lanes or stumbling should be included in the production plan.

To shorten the time when the viewer is disconnected from the live event, replays should be produced in sequences. The sequence should consist of the most effective camera angles. If necessary, the replay director can always shorten the sequence. The quality of coverage of recent major athletics events has often in the past been reduced by needless replays of excessive duration.

3.2 Track Events – 400m Sprint and 400m Hurdles

The coverage of the 400m is a tough nut to crack.

Over the last decade, many innovations in filming the 400m lap have been explored and implemented.

Obstacles in camera view, encourage producers and directors to choose cutting patterns that weaken the viewing angle and make viewers feel as if they are being moved around the stadium. As mentioned earlier, these include the cages, misplaced scoreboards, the pole vault landing areas, and pole charts, even the tents mounted on the top of Athletes' benches.

In practice, this solution easily leads to excessive cuts, which disturb the viewer. A very high filming angle also kills the speed of the runners and strips the race of its spell.

Additional difficulty arises from the start handicap of lanes, which widens the range of the runners on the back stretch of stadiums. To visualise the situation better, it is advisable to squeeze the band by filming it to some degree head-on. This allows the viewer to maintain visual contact with all the Athletes in a heat or final, especially a favourite.

Furthermore, it is also advisable to apply the one-camera-shot principle to the last 200 meters of the lap. Thus, the viewing angle is not violated, as in the image the Athletes on the back stretch travel right to left.

Format and Replays

Generally, what has been said about sprints – about taking a view of the format and replays – also applies to coverage of the 400m.

3.3 Track Events – Middle Distance Races – 800m and 1500m

The demand of storytelling is also a paramount feature in the coverage of middle-distance races. The journalistic approach allows anticipation, the realisation of the tactical aspects of the competition and their portrayal in a crisp way. The spice of these races often includes the pushing or bagging up a runner as part of team tactics, or swift changes in the pace.

On the first back stretch, even if the Athletes coming out of the first bend congregate on the inner lane, the viewer needs to see who is taking the lead.

Also, medium head-on shots in the early stages of the race effectively support the viewer's need to identify the Athletes.

As the race progresses, the director must remain alert. The moment a tactical move or a breaking spurt towards the finish line takes place, the cutting must emphasise this at once. Camera

operators with journalistic minds should take over this task, and close-up shots of various situations should be rehearsed.

Again, to preserve the viewer's visual contact with a favourite, the director should avoid unnecessary cuts during the last lap.

Home straight

The filming of the home straight requires special arrangements. Generally, the battle for victory is correctly shot from the main camera placed on the finish line with a side angle. If, however, the winner crosses the line 15-20 meters ahead of a bunch where the fight to qualify is still going on, then the main camera must include both the winner and the chasing group in the shot. The moment the winner passes the line, a cautious zoom-in towards the group is needed.

In heats and semi-finals, some runners fall behind. These Athletes should be filmed coming over the finish line head-on. This enables the viewer to regain visual contact with the top Athletes sooner, as they normally fill the foreground of the head-on shot.

Format and Replays

In addition to what has been said about the replay patterns of sprints and one-lap races, one piece of observation must be stressed. During the race, the director should refrain from inserting replays. Even if a favourite falls, visual analysis of the incident should be held back until the race is over.

If stumbling occurs right after the start, then live camera shots are justified, as this may form an important part of the story.

3.4 Track Events – Long Distance Races – 3000m Steeplechase, 5000m and 10000m

The challenge connected with the coverage of the long-distance track races is often underestimated. The director's primary difficulty in the application of the journalistic approach is presenting the best Athletes to the viewer. Some nations seem to bring new top Athletes to every major event. Therefore, a hasty head-on panning of the Athletes with the start camera is not enough.

An effort to make the faces of key Athletes familiar to the viewer is required in the early stages of the race. This should be done with the help of tight head-on shots and onscreen graphics before gaps start to build up (in the 3,000m steeplechase around the first kilometre, in the 5,000m perhaps two kilometres and in the 10,000m three kilometres).

This procedure should be repeated just before the attack for the medals starts. The aim is to show which of the Athletes is still in good shape. The viewer wants to assess who can snatch the gold.

Normally heats are run in the steeplechase and 5,000m races. Generally, a certain number will qualify by placing and others by time. To enable the viewer to compare the pace between heats, the approach and the passing of each kilometre line should be filmed in a total shot from a side angle. The viewers' favourite from the first heat may remain among the group qualifying by time. Therefore, the viewer may be worried about the pace of the remaining heats.

During long-distance races, elbowing, stumbling, or even falling may occur. If such incidents of major storytelling interest occur before the halfway point, then immediate replay is recommended.

The latest technological devices make it tempting to film the runners on the back stretch from outside of the track. Of course, this can be done as part of live coverage, but the crossing of the basic cutting line must always be pointed to the viewer. The main principle remains: the Athletes running on the back stretch should proceed on the television screen from right to left.

Should the Athletes arrive at the finish with clear margins, it is preferable to film the finish line head-on in one shot. Then the viewer can better see the emotion of the medallists as it happens.

Hectic cutting between side cameras often destroys the ambience and tends to cut off the viewer's onscreen visual connection with the medallists for too long.

The most difficult situation arises when the medallists have formed two close clumps that arrive at finish line with an interval of 40 to 50 meters. To cover this situation, two cameras should be mounted at the finish line. Utilizing these cameras, a useful solution is to first film the leading couple (or winner) arriving and running along the home stretch. Then one can cut to the second finish-line camera to set up the contest of the latter group arriving at the home stretch. Then one return to the winning couple, pans them over the finish line and immediately cuts back to the group fighting for bronze (or silver). Finally, when the medallists are clear, the best way to film the other Athletes' finish is head-on.

Format and Replays

Finally, a note about replays: after the first replay verifying the positions of the Athletes, it is advisable that the winner's highlights include a sequence analysing the decisive stages of the final.

3.5 Track Events – Relays

At major events, the relay events take place in the two last days of competition. Therefore, the 400m filming pattern, which is already familiar to the viewer, should be employed. The director should refrain from cutting during the handovers of the 4x100m. Moreover, in the 4x400m relays, it is also preferable to film the second and third exchanges in one shot. Remember, the viewer does not want to lose visual contact with a favourite team.

Much effort is required to set up the production so that it is possible to catch any possible drops of the baton or an Athlete stepping into the wrong lane. This can be achieved by appointing specific tasks to camera operators whose shots are not included in the live cutting pattern of the relays.

4. Field Events Breakdown

4.1 Field Events – Introduction

The format of field events makes with finals lasting on average 100 minutes makes their duration too long for broadcast in their entirety. The number of finalists and the number of attempts is reduced in some cases.

Regardless of the competition format, however, the main points of proper storytelling of field events remain valid.

Again, the producer/director's duty is to do thorough homework. One must know the sport and the top competitors. Knowing the top Athletes means not only being able to identify their faces, but also their potential to score. This information is then shared with the technical team. As described earlier, it also requires adjusting the machinery to face the reality of the forthcoming event.

All field events (except for vertical jumps) should be treated in the coverage as a single competition, starting with the qualification and ending with the last attempts of the final. According to the journalistic approach, the story contains three key turning points:

- The (first and) third round of the qualification sessions,
- The third and sixth rounds of the final.

Coverage of the qualifying rounds for throwing events and horizontal jumps should start with plenty of images of the favourites. The journalistic approach obliges this as part of storytelling. Emphasising the top Athletes takes place, to some degree, at the expense of other qualifiers. This is motivated by the viewer's need to identify the most important faces and by the fact that often these Athletes leave the venue quickly, because usually they meet the qualification standard on their first attempt.

The next point of importance is the third and last round of the qualification event. Some of the key Athletes may fail to score a result. After two red flags, major drama is attached to an Athlete's situation. A medal favourite may be excluded from the final. A good director acts accordingly, refraining from needless replays and frequently filming the Athlete who is under pressure.

The situation repeats itself during the third round of the final. A potential medallist who had trouble qualifying among the eight best becomes a source of journalistic interest. Exploiting the suspense related to confusion around a favourite can be entertaining. The reactions of other top Athletes to this situation are also storytelling material. The basic rule is the culmination of the finals in field events should always be seen and covered as a duel between two Athletes.

4.2 Field Events – Shot Put

Shot put is a “white or red flag” event. The validity of every trial is indicated by a judge, who raises a white or red flag after every attempt. Because the flag decides the filming sequence, it should be part of camera cutting and a repeated target after every trial.

The shot putters’ reaction should promptly follow the filming of the flag. If the flag is white, then after the Athlete’s immediate reaction, the coverage should return to the measurement of the result, followed by the competitor’s reaction to the score. If the flag is red, capturing the shot putter’s facial expression is part of the story.

The viewer wants to evaluate the feelings of Athletes during the crucial last attempts of the final. The reversed order after three rounds gives the leader the upper hand by granting him the last performance. His score is the result to beat. During the last round his rivals try to beat the leading score. Now the “duel principle” should be applied.

When the real favourites, say, the four last competitors, step into the circle, the face of the leader is an essential part of the story. The “duel principle” demands that his or her image be included during the rivals’ preparation sequence. If the rival does not improve his or her standing, then an instant shot of the leader is required. This shot is then followed by the rival’s reaction and perhaps a motivated replay.

The culminating moment of the competition comes when there are two Athletes left. Let us assume that the Athlete with the last attempt is still the leader. As we have noted, the leader must be cut into the story as the last rival prepares. After the second-to-last Athlete’s attempt, there are three alternatives.

- **One:** the standings remain unchanged. At this moment our leader is the winner of the competition, thus the director must cut to his or her face the moment the shot hits the field. Only then should the coverage return to the rival. It should also be stressed that the competition is over and hence there is no reason to rush to the replays.
- **Two:** the result of the last attempt of the rival seems to be extremely close to the leading score and the white flag indicates it must be measured. At this moment, the director must absolutely refrain from running any replays before the result unfolds. Instead, the faces of the two uncertain Athletes are the highlight material of this sequence. The replays should only be injected after showing the reactions of these two rivals, the delight of victory and the disappointment of defeat.
- **Three:** the rival takes the lead. At this moment the director should cover the instant joy of the new leader, followed by the reaction of the former leader. Now the situation is reversed. But the competition is not yet over: the former leader has still one attempt. Now the challenger, the new leader, is worried. Again, the same three alternatives remain, in which the “duel principle” should be practised.

Shot put is a spectacular sport. These roaring giants, male and female, are excellent material for television. In addition to filming the Athletes’ faces, preparations, and reactions, covering the attempt properly is important. A total shot is required to show the shot putter from toes to fingers launching the shot. The cut to the flying apparatus must slightly be delayed, to give the viewer an impression of the Athlete’s balance after the throw.

In all throwing events, the landing area of the flying apparatus must be marked with clear lines (coloured sectors or Virtual Graphics lines and markers) and distance markers, so that the viewer can immediately estimate the length of the throw.

4.3 Field Events – Discus Throw and Hammer Throw

The “duel principle” of filming is also valid in the discus and hammer throws events. To tell the story, the director must know the Athletes and their potential. This allows quick judgement of whether the result may be good enough for a medal, thus triggering the duel treatment.

To start the treatment, the director and camera crew must know the whereabouts of the key Athletes all the time. This is achieved with the help of spotters, who work close to the officials on the field of play. The spotter is a director’s assistant and a specialist in athletics. Spotters are familiar with the needs of storytelling, and they guide the director in trying to locate key Athletes.

There are 60 attempts in a final. In the process of repeating the basic cutting pattern of the attempts, the director, feeling the pressures of his artistic ambition, must resist the temptation to vary the cutting pattern. This is to grant the viewer trouble-free circumstances to assess the score.

Nowadays Host Broadcasters can place cameras inside the cage. Modern coverage requires intimacy, which is free of the obtrusive effects of cage netting. The storyboard must include an isolated camera to film the flag and a camera for foot faults, showing the Athlete stepping out of the circle.

Obviously, the landing area of discus and hammer throws must be clearly marked, and the flying apparatus should be filmed from a sufficiently wide side angle. The shot of the flying discus or hammer must be zoomed out well ahead of landing, to include the distance lines and signs in the shot.

4.4 Field Events – Javelin Throw

The demand of storytelling in the javelin throw is as essential as in other throwing events. There are Athletes who often make their best score in a certain round. Many gold medals have been won with a first-round throw. The producer/director’s research should cast light on this kind of probability. Thus, the application of the “duel principle” may commence with the first round.

When applying the “duel principle”, a couple of additional matters should be taken into consideration.

When launched, the javelin flies for a longer time than other throwing apparatuses. Therefore, the director has plenty of time to stay with the Athlete and check the validity of the throw before cutting to the flying javelin.

Technically, the javelin throw is a delicate sport. Justified replays, which help to analyse the technical aspects, are welcome. A vibrating javelin never flies far. A super slow-motion replay,

filmed from behind the throw, illustrates the behaviour of the javelin. If the thrower looks at the flying javelin and seeing it vibrating or swinging, he or she often steps over the throwing line voluntarily, deciding to earn a red flag even before the javelin hits the grass.

The director should also know the importance of technical matters of the throw, such as the Athlete's proper approach to the throwing position and the necessity of hitting the supporting foot correctly against the runway. The camera layout should cover these details, which affect the length of the throw.

4.5 Field Events – Horizontal Jumps and Triple Jumps

The events of the horizontal jumps are red flag events, with Athletes of explosive take-off power. The runway is often narrow, which calls for special precision with regards to positioning the measuring devices, officials, and scoreboards. The placement of the scoreboards must not interfere with filming. A compromise is required, because these devices may often obstruct the filming, of not only of the horizontal jumps, but the track events as well.

Because the take-off in the long jump and triple jump is so swift, the decision of the flag-holding judge must be included in the cutting pattern. A white flag after the jump triggers a wait for the result. Once again, if the score affects the medal standings, the director should avoid running replays, in order not to miss the key players' reactions. If the flag is red, then the director has been given precious extra time to tell the story.

The main camera should be mounted as low as possible. This low angle makes the height of the jump more spectacular. The relation between the landing marks and the reference board of the distance also become clearer.

The platform or footprint supporting the main camera must be broad enough to allow exact placement of the camera. Depending on the distance of the take-off boards from the landing area, the required width of the platform is about four meters. This is sufficient to cover all the men's and women's events.

During the qualifiers, the main camera must stay exactly at the distance of the qualification standard. During the finals, an appropriate position is chosen. Generally, the position depends on the Athletes' potentials. If, for instance, the medallists in the men's long jump are expected to jump 8.50-8.30 meters, the main camera should probably be 8.40 from the take-off board.

There are many ways to find the correct camera position, but one workable means is to mark the distances on the railing of the platform. Then slight reposition can be made during the competition, should the director so wish. The correct camera position is vital for the viewer, who wants to instantly assess the distance of the jump.

As it happens, the jumper sometimes interrupts the run-up and returns to the end of the runway to repeat the effort. Now an interesting new element becomes part of the story: the clock. Another target of filming is the windsock. The Athlete often looks at the air sock, trying to find a calm moment within the time allocated for the jump. This should be included in the camera coverage.

4.6 Field Events – Vertical Jumps and Pole Vault

The competition format of the vertical jump offers the director a wide range of situations. There are clear rules on how a tie is resolved, with the win awarded to the Athlete with the lowest number of jumps at the height where the tie occurs. If there is still a tie, the victory goes to the competitor with the lowest total of failures throughout the competition up to and including the last cleared height. Often, after failing the first or second attempt, the Athlete may forego the next trial(s) and still jump at a subsequent height.

Generally, the Athletes play tough games in the final stages of the competition. They skip heights or, as we said, forego their next attempt to put pressure on their opponents. Therefore, the producer/director and the spotters must be well acquainted with the competition rules of vertical jumps. The clearance of a gold medal height often occurs well before the end of the competition.

Hence, the director should meticulously observe the build-up of the battle between the potential medallists. And realizing this, one must cover the tension and execute “duel game” cutting between the Athletes remaining in the contest.

The viewer enjoys watching the key Athletes being frustrated by clearances of their opponents. The moment the bar drops for the last time, the viewer hates to miss the reaction of the gold medal winner. Of all field events, the events of vertical jumps offer the director the widest chances to capture the fine drama of athletics.

The Athletes’ rituals during preparations for the jump can provide wonderful filming material.

Normally the Athlete’s movements signal that the run-off is about to begin. A director who is familiar with their body language will be able to catch this.

Other elements of the cutting pattern are the stare of the jumper, the crossbar, the windssock (especially in the pole vault), the clock, the coach in the stands and, as mentioned, the rival or rivals. By clever cutting, suspension is built into the sequence: the bar either stays on the pegs or it drops.

Finally, Athletes execute their take-off with either the right or left foot. Filming of the attempts of high jump should, however, only take place from one side of runway. Two head-on positions of the reaction cameras are needed to capture the reaction of the jumper after the attempt.

5. Use of Replays

5.1 Replays – Introduction

During the coverage of athletic events, smart replays enhance the viewing pleasure. Overly long or poorly motivated slo-mos have the opposite effect. Replays should be grasped as a necessary part of modern coverage. Their proper use, controlled by the journalistic approach, provides additional value. Clever replays help the viewer to understand the reality of the competition.

The timing and duration of a replay are important factors regarding storytelling. The director should not miss an announcement of winner or an emotional reaction by hastening to inject replays too early. As we have said, slo-mos disconnect the viewers from the live event and therefore must be justified.

Browsing through the footage of past major athletics events, it is easy to find far too many unnecessary replays. Often, the replays do not include the best filming angles. The director of an athletic event must make a substantial effort to prepare a plan of replays, adapting to various situations. This planning is a vital part of the production plan.

5.2 Replays – Track Events

Generally, in the track events, certain cameras are dedicated to shooting replay shots. These cameras may or may not be included in the live cutting pattern. The replays should consist of sequences of appropriate camera shots. The sequences are split into packages, which better suit the demands of a live event. Often one replay package is run, and then the coverage returns to live pictures before the next package is inserted at an appropriate moment.

The first package illustrates and verifies the result of the race. If the three best Athletes in a heat qualify, then the sequence must clearly demonstrate which Athletes occupied third and fourth positions.

The first package could be called the highlights of the final. Vital tactical moments, often the ingredients of a middle-distance race, are included in this sequence.

The second package portrays the winner. This sequence is loaded with effort and emotion. The temptation to add too many clips to this package must be resisted.

The third package covers false starts. The fourth package covers various incidents, which may influence the competition result. A loose shoelace, elbowing, an Athlete stumbling or dropping out of the race are typical of this package.

An experienced assistant director responsible to produce replay packages should always be included in the crew list of major event productions.

No replays should be injected during races shorter than 1,500m. During the long-distance events, the replay of elbowing or stumbling may be included in the coverage before the halfway point of the race, if the situation in the final looks calm otherwise.

5.3 Replays – Field Events

As in the track events, replays of field events should be produced in sequences. The first sequence verifies the result, showing a replay of the Athletes' attempt and the result. The sequence may end with an Athlete's reaction to the score.

To save time in the discus, hammer and javelin, the image of the flying apparatus in the replay sequence should be shortened.

The time element during a competition should always be taken into consideration. The tempo of the competition normally restricts the time of replays. The main rule is to refrain from unmotivated slo-mos.

Mostly slo-mos are run at half-speed. Sometimes, depending on the field event, the analysis of an incident requires a much slower replay, even a stop frame. The slo-mos producer and the event director must share the same understanding of the sport.

If an approved attempt clearly does not improve the result of a thrower or a long jumper, and the next Athlete to perform is a medal contender, then the director should hold back the replays and instead use the time available to cover the potential medallist – again applying the “duel principle”.

Another often-forgotten rule is that replays should be avoided until the announcement of a vital result. The viewer wants to see the reactions of those involved. There is plenty of time after the competition is over and the last attempt has occurred. The replays can wait.

6. The Spotter System

6.1 Spotter System – Introduction

Good coverage of major athletic events cannot be achieved without spotters. Spotters are specialists in both athletics and television production. At the venue, they are the director’s eyes and ears on the field of play. Their duty is simply to tell the director what is taking place at the venue.

Spotters track the whereabouts of key Athletes and help camera operators to find them. They report any interesting incident, whether an injury, a change of course of the wind, the location of a trainer or an Athlete’s peculiar way of relaxation. The director needs to know when the pole vault bar is raised, or if a measuring device malfunctions. Spotters sit inconspicuously close to the officials’ table, reporting in a low voice via an intercom.

If someone accidentally blocks filming by standing in front of a camera, or if a scoreboard should slightly be moved, the spotter communicates with venue management and tries to settle the problem.

Generally, one spotter oversees a field event. During the simultaneous qualification sessions for shot put, horizontal jumps, vertical jumps, or the respective events of decathlon/heptathlon, two spotters are needed. For track events, two spotters suffice. One stays with the starter, the other sit in the stands and, with the help of binoculars, reports things of journalistic value before and during the race.

The Integrated Feed production of major events also has a separate spotter system to guarantee accurate transitions from one feed to another. These spotters are led by a head spotter, who sits beside the Integrated Feed director. The head spotter, surrounded by relevant CIS screens, assists in the storytelling by reporting vital attempts taking place on various feeds.

7. Conclusion

Television production of major athletics events is divided into separate productions of certain events. Track events occupy one feed, while feeds for throws, horizontal jumps and vertical jumps cover the other events.

The Integrated Feed uses the coverage from other feeds to create a combined signal; called the International Integrated Television Signal (CIIP, World Feed) most broadcasters use this signal, which should include all athletic incidents of journalistic value.

The production of the International Integrated Signal is a complicated issue, which requires profound understanding of television production. To succeed in this, all directors of the various feeds must obey certain rules. They react to the calls of the International Integrated Signal Director. These may concern delaying replays or adjusting the framing of a starting shot.

The integrated feed director can then hopscotch from one feed to another playing “the game”. The decision to dissolve over to a different feed should however only be made according to journalistic principles. The aim is to entertain the viewer, who does not want to miss any significant performance.

CREDITS:

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