

The History of Global Communications in the World Olympics

Throughout history, sports have often been a major part of every society and can often bring lots of people together for any occasion to cheer on their home team or country. Although many countries have only one or two major sports that the country can enjoy together, the world Olympics offers something that no other sport event can truly offer. That is a large variety of multicultural sports for countries all over the world to compete in, which allows for people all over the world to spectate and watch. Due to the global factors that the world Olympics can play on the countries around the world it was important for the Olympics committee to be the first major entity to establish a Global International communication network to spread sports entertainment throughout the world, peace across the globe, and bring together many countries to an event that is hosted every 2 years.

Originally, the Olympics was an event that could be watched in person usually in a coliseum around 1896. However, as the Olympics was coming to Berlin, Germany, the Olympics committee decided to make this the first ever World Olympics that would be broadcasted. According to Dan Mattia, “Though the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany were broadcast on TV, viewers had to be local, the black and white closed-circuit broadcast was only viewable by athletes in the Olympic village and to the public in 25 “viewing rooms” in Berlin and the nearby cities of Leipzig and Potsdam” (Mattia, 2018). This quote explains how the first 60 years of the Olympics occurring across the globe there was not much communication infrastructure in place to broadcast a global broadcast of the Olympics. This would limit the broadcast to the local civilians surrounding the Olympics location for that year’s events and would ultimately stop hundreds of thousands of people from being able to access the global spectacular that is the

Olympics. For the next 20 years the World Olympics would only be broadcast in local areas near the Olympics location because the communication infrastructure was still not developed, and it would not be developed or put into use until 1956.

In 1956 the Winter Olympics was being held in Cortina d' Ampezzo, Italy and the Olympics committee thought that this was the proper time to test their new global communications network to broadcast the Olympics to countries across the globe. According to Adam Augustyn, "in 1956 an Italian television network carried international live coverage of the games which was a first in the history of the Winter Olympics" (Augustyn, 2010). Surprisingly enough there was an eventful opening for these Olympic games that would not have been remembered in the history books if not for it being globally broadcasted and that is the tripping of the torch bearer as he approached the center of the opening ceremony. This was captured on the World's first international live broadcast of the Olympic games and shows the importance of globally broadcasting any sporting event especially events with the magnitude of the Olympics.

For the 1960 Winter Olympics, the United States of America was hosting the Olympic games in Squaw Valley, California. This marked the American debut of televising the Olympics games and surprisingly enough we added our own little American twist to how the games would forever be broadcasted past 1960. "When officials became unsure as to whether a skier had missed a gate in the men's slalom, they asked CBS-TV if they could review a videotape of the race. This gave CBS the idea of inventing the now infamous "instant replay" (International Olympics Committee, 2021). This exemplifies the effect that the broadcasting of the World Olympics can have on the entire globe because one country hosting the broadcast of the games can allow for the introduction of plenty of traditional cultural flavors to be added to the multi-cultural pot that is the World Olympics. If the Olympics did not have the communication

infrastructure to broadcast these games globally, then who knows if the instant replay would ever be added to the Olympics. These little additions that get added to the Olympics traditions make the event that much more exciting to spectate.

Over the course of the next 2 Olympic Games, there would be dramatic changes in the ease of global broadcasting. These dramatic changes came in 1964 when the Syncom 3 was implemented. According to William McCann, “A thrust-augmented Delta rocket was used to boost the Syncom 3 television satellite into orbit” (McCann, 1964). This television satellite allowed for lots of live broadcast footage to be transmitted and transferred across countries in a matter of hours. This compared to 1960 when most footage of the 1960 Summer games in Rome were flown from Rome to Paris to be copied before being flown to Canada, the United States, and Mexico to be broadcast internationally. This allowed for the time spent trying to broadcast these sporting events in half and made it extremely easy for them to broadcast the Olympics internationally from 1964 onward. According to Mattia, “in 1968, the Olympics were debuted in color for the first time from Mexico City” (Mattia, 2018). This explains the significance that Syncom 3 played in globally broadcasting the World Olympics because 4 years after its first implementation for the Olympic games, it was used to transmit another sporting event but in color. For this period, this was a remarkable step in communication technology because not only could they broadcast globally, but they could finally broadcast in color without the need for multiple flights to deliver the footage of these sporting events.

Due to this communication infrastructure being implemented into the Olympics committee they were able to create a sub committee called the Communication Commission to focus on a variety number of goals that help the development and spread of the World Olympics. One of the things that the Communications Commission is focused on achieving is, “in a rapidly

evolving media landscape, ensure the IOC employs innovative communications approaches to engage people around the world, in particularly young people, in the mission and values of the Olympic movement all year round” (“Communication Commission”, 2021). This explains how much the Olympics committee is committed to spreading peace across the globe and communicating Olympic values to every participating country. This ultimately helps unify and group together countries and people so they can focus on their country winning and competing at the Olympic games. As Beriatis explains, “the innovative design of space appears to be expansively used as major components of contemporary strategic plans of cities for the transformation and improvement of the urban landscape” (Beriatis, 2004). This also explains the importance of spreading communication infrastructure in every city that hosts the Olympic games because of the economic growth that usually follows the city that hosts the Olympics. Improving their communication infrastructure for the broadcast of the games even if it is not used after games can lead to these countries having lots of economic growth that can help their country thrive for years after the Olympics.

The broadcasting of the Olympics would primarily remain on television networks for 40 years until the rise of the internet in 2004. By 2004 the internet was becoming extremely popular, and this intrigued the IOC Communications Commission since they like to stay relevant on all communication methods used by people across the globe and particularly young people. Sadly, this effort fell short due to the new infrastructure that was being used at the time for the internet that could not support many people on the same website viewing a live broadcast. “The HD feed started with approximate 20-minute delay from NBC’s network NTSC telecast and then slowly lagged to a 24-hour delay” (TVTechnology, 2004). By 2008 the Olympics was more successful in hosting a full HD live broadcast of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games. This made

amazing use of the internet and allowed for more users to access the Olympics than ever before. According to Nielson, the Olympics had 4.7 billion people watching the Summer Olympics compared to 3.2 billion in 2000 before the introduction of the internet (Nielson, 2008). This just goes to show the positive impacts that adapting to new communication methods can have on a global event and the amount of people that will be attracted towards watching the Olympics on this new communication platform.

The internet not only made it easier for the average person to access and watch their favorite parts of the Olympic games, but it also allowed for the price of Olympic game coverage to increase exponentially by making it more important and valuable to countries around the world. According to Statista, the cost for broadcasting rights across the globe has tripled over the last 20 years because of the increasing demand and influence that the Olympics has on the world (Guttmann, 2021). This is mainly due to the broadcasts that allow for the Olympics to be viewed in every country in the world so people can stay up to date on how their country is doing compared to others live in real time. Deals are beginning to get made with every major broadcast network in countries for insane amounts of money such as how the International Olympic Committee awarded NBCUniversal the broadcast rights in the USA for the Olympic Games through 2032 for \$7.65 billion (International Olympics Committee, 2021). These broadcasts would not be possible without the proper global communication infrastructure in place and that is why it is so important for the Olympics to have been the first major entity to establish a global communications network aimed at uniting the world towards peace through sport.

Overall, the Olympics is one of the most influential events that happens throughout the world for the impact that it has on multiple countries across the globe. While sports are a great way to unite people of different cultures and backgrounds to find a common ground, this

common ground would never be found if it were not for the communication infrastructure in place that allows for the broadcasts of this major event. Due to the global factors that the world Olympics can play on the countries around the world it was important for the Olympics committee to be the first major entity to establish a Global International communication network to spread sports entertainment throughout the world, peace across the globe, and bring together many countries to an event that is hosted every 2 years.

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