

## **The Voice of the Commentator**

The crowd is tense. A ball arcs through the sky. A striker steadies himself. And then, before the net even ripples, a voice cuts through the noise: "It's in! He's done it!"

Football's most iconic moments rarely exist in silence. They come packaged with the soundtrack of commentary - words that stick in our heads long after the images fade. Think of Kenneth Wolstenholme's immortal "They think it's all over... it is now!" or Martin Tyler's spine-shaking "Aguerooooo!". These phrases are more than background noise; they are part of the sport's collective memory.

But why does the voice of the commentator matter so much? Why do some words and tones resonate with us for decades, while others fade instantly into obscurity? And what power do commentators hold over the way fans perceive football?

### **The Narrators of the Game**

At its heart, commentary is storytelling. Commentators are narrators who give shape to the chaos of a football match. Ninety minutes of running, passing, and shouting could feel like static without a voice guiding us through. The commentator connects the dots - they don't just describe what's happening, they tell us what it means.

This isn't new. Sports broadcasting has always relied on the "voice of authority" to lead the audience. Media theorist Stuart Hall described television as an "encoder" of meaning - and in football, the commentator is the one encoding, packaging the game into a story we can all follow.

When Martin Tyler shouted Agüero's name in 2012, it wasn't simply about one man scoring. It was about destiny, drama, and history being made in real time. His voice took a football match and turned it into a myth.

### **The Thin Line Between Passion and Bias**

Of course, not every fan hears the same thing. A Manchester United supporter might cringe when Gary Neville lets his excitement slip during a United win. A rival might dismiss it as bias.

Commentators often walk a fine line between impartiality and passion. Fans expect neutrality, yet they also crave emotion. When Peter Drury delivers his poetic lines - calling a player "a man reborn" or declaring that "this is not just a goal, this is theatre" - some swoon at the artistry, while others roll their eyes at the drama.

The truth is, no commentator is ever fully neutral. Even the choice of words - calling a foul "clever" rather than "cynical" - tilts perception. Over time, these small choices shape reputations. A team that is always described as "plucky" might be remembered as underdogs, while another painted as "cynical" risks being branded villains.

In that sense, commentators don't just reflect fan perception - they actively influence it.

## The Soundtrack of Emotion

There's a reason commentary is inseparable from memory: it taps directly into emotion. Sports psychologists remind us that emotion cements memory - and commentators provide the emotional cue.

Ask an Arsenal fan about Michael Thomas's last-minute goal in 1989 at Anfield, and many won't just recall the strike itself. They'll remember Brian Moore's words: "It's up for grabs now!" The line is stitched into the memory of the moment, inseparable from the euphoria of the victory.

In today's digital culture, this emotional soundtrack is amplified. Clips of goals go viral on Twitter or TikTok, not just because of the footage, but because of the audio. A Drury monologue or a Neville scream becomes part of the meme, the joke, the shared culture of football online. The voice carries just as far as the ball.

## Challenged by the Crowd

Yet, the authority of the commentator is not what it once was. Where once there was a single broadcast, now there are countless alternatives. Fan-led commentary streams, YouTube watchalongs, and podcasts provide new voices that compete with television's polished professionals.

For younger fans, the official broadcast isn't always the default. They might choose to watch a game muted while listening to their favourite fan creators. They might experience a goal through a TikTok clip rather than live TV. In this fragmented landscape, the "voice of football" isn't singular anymore. It's multiple, messy, and contested.

And yet, even in this noisy digital age, the old guard still matters. A line from Tyler, Drury, or Moore can still echo for decades. The digital challengers may be louder in the short term, but history remembers the voices that framed the moment when it happened live.

## Why the Voice Still Matters

So why does all this matter? Because football is more than sport - it's culture. It's a memory. It's identity. And commentators are the custodians of those things.

They don't just describe the game; they script it. They turn fleeting moments into lasting stories. They remind us where we were, how we felt, and why it mattered. Their words echo in stadiums, pubs, classrooms, and living rooms for years after the final whistle.

Imagine football without them. Imagine a silent Aguero goal, a muted World Cup final, or a title decider with nothing but the crowd noise. The image alone would never have the same weight.

The voice of the commentator is more than a soundtrack. It's part of the game's very fabric - shaping how we see it, feel it, and remember it.