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### **23 “For the good of the world”: the innovations and influences of the UK’s early international televising of sport**

**Abstract:** British television’s early experiments in pan-continental exchanges of programming were heavily reliant on sharing live coverage of sport events with other nations. This led the BBC’s post-War Controller of Television Cecil McGivern to proclaim such international exchanges of television were “for the good of the world.” These formative explorations in pan-European exchanges are explored in order to understand the motivations for such innovations, the operational challenges that needed to be overcome and the ideological underpinnings for the national prestige some of these broadcasts brought to both television broadcasters and audiences. Through case studies of the BBC’s international sport broadcasts and the pan-European coverage of the 1954 FIFA World Cup from Switzerland, the chapter explains how the BBC’s public service mission and technological know-how were influential in the development of the European Broadcasting Union and the prominence of sport in its “Eurovision” broadcasts. The chapter explores the development of unilateral opt-outs from the multilateral broadcasts of the 1958 World Cup and how such innovations continue to shape contemporary coverage of major sport events on television. In conclusion,

the chapter urges scholars to recognize the importance of broadcast history to help explain the cultural and technological transformations of television's relationship to sport.

**Keywords:** television sport, BBC, FIFA World Cup, Eurovision, unilateral broadcasts.

## **1 Introduction: for the good of the world**

There is something very much deeper in Eurovision than, shall we say, Wimbledon being seen by various countries. There is the B.B.C.s purpose of using broadcasting for the good of the world. There is the gratifying fact that when I go to an E.B.U. conference I meet friends. Not only friends, but good friends. We have learned to know one another, to respect each other. This fundamentally, is Eurovision (Cecil McGivern, cited in Ross 1961: 134).

In the mid-1950s the BBC's Controller of Television, Cecil McGivern, remarked that the prospect of European viewers watching live coverage from the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships would be "for the good of the world" (Ross 1961). McGivern's chief point was to suggest that broadcasting of live events on television brought people together, and with the advent of international transmissions, could potentially bring people from different nations and cultures together to share in the same moments of international sport. The BBC had first televised the Wimbledon Championships in 1937 as it sought to exploit the cultural value of big public occasions, especially major sporting events. From 1951 the BBC had begun trials to transmit programmes to the south of England from France and in 1954 the first major trans-continental exchange of broadcasts, labelled "Eurovision" by the journalist George Campey of the London *Evening Standard* newspaper, led the way in the development of international television in Europe. By the end of the 1950s the European Broadcasting

Union, which oversaw such broadcasts, included twelve nations and sixteen television services. Many of these broadcasts included live outside broadcasts (known as telecasts in North America) from sport. In some cases, they set the mould for future collaboration of broadcasters in the coverage of major sport mega-events such as Olympic Games and the FIFA men's World Cup among others (Billings and Wenner 2017). This chapter explores some of the BBC's early interventions in the pan-continental exchanges in order to understand the motivations for such innovations, the operational challenges that needed to be overcome and the ideological underpinnings for the national prestige some of these broadcasts brought to both television broadcasters and audiences.

The BBC's innovations and legacies in international broadcasting from sport, much of which continue to echo in the global sport broadcasting landscape of the 21st century, sought to bring the world of sport under its influence and control in order to ensure both a sense of realism and entertainment for its viewers (Whannel 1992). The immediacy of television, showing what happens as it happens, has consistently made for thrilling spectacles from sport. However, in the formative period of the medium such exchanges were frequently hampered by the constraints of technology and geography. Nevertheless, the drive of television's pioneers to bring such moments to the television screen arguably remains a continuing driver of contemporary television sport production with all its sophisticated technologies and global reach. This chapter is based on archival research from the BBC's Written Archives and a set of oral history interviews with a key pioneer of outside broadcasting, Peter Dimmock. Dimmock, the former General Manager of BBC Outside Broadcasts who joined the BBC in 1946, was a leading figure in negotiating television access to sport and championing the development of shared European transmissions. In this sense, the chapter gives a voice to someone who was involved at a senior level of decision making at the time. Capturing Dimmock's memories prior to his death in 2016 is also worthy of

methodological note, as the need to capture the memories of sport communications professionals of the middle period of the 20th century is now an issue of extreme historical importance and urgency.

Investigating the immediate post-war coverage of sport up to the late 1950s provides knowledge on the place of sport in the BBC's public mission as well as its formative role in the development of international television exchanges. The historical analysis focuses on the organizational structures and cultures of sports production at the time, as well as the wider relationships the BBC had with governing bodies of sport and other European broadcasters. The late 1940s and the 1950s represent a period of intense innovation in the medium and one that arguably casts a shadow on the production practices and principles of today. What the chapter does not account for is the social and cultural impact televised sport had on its audience. Although contemporary evidence from the BBC's Audience Research can provide insights on the reception of television in the past, far more evidence survives of the institutional practices of the BBC outside broadcast department.

The chapter is shaped around key developments in the Eurovision project and the role of sport in the 1950s. This is significant not only because of the eventual growth of Olympic television (Billings et al. 2018) which was eventually driven by the leading American networks and the mediatization of sport-mega events more generally (Frandsen 2015), but also because it was happening at a time of the emergent ideological battle between Soviet and Western sport as a backdrop to the Cold War. I begin with an overview of how sport broadcasting fitted into, and became a central showcase of, the BBC's public mission to inform, educate, and entertain. Much of the vision for how the BBC approached its sports coverage came from the firebrand leadership of its General Manager of Outside Broadcasting, Peter Dimmock, which began to transform the range of television's ambitions to bring live events to the small screen. Secondly, the focus turns to innovations in the

geographical and technical boundaries of what television engineers could develop in order to bring the first trans-national live outside broadcasts. Driven mainly by technocratic and symbolic motivations for linking the television systems of European nations, these innovations led to the Eurovision experiment in 1954, where coverage of the FIFA World Cup finals from Switzerland was a fortunate happenstance. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the preparations and planning for the coverage of the 1958 FIFA World Cup held in Sweden, which saw the rise of attempts to produce nation-specific coverage, commonly known as unilateral coverage, as a complimentary source of coverage from multi-lateral broadcasts of Eurovision. This latter development has remained a significant feature of global broadcast sport, particularly at Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups. It is part of the local–global nexus of how broadcasting continues to remain wedded to national norms and cultures.

## **2 Why sport mattered to BBC Television**

One of the central issues raised by the BBC's coverage of sport has been the role it has played in the BBC's mission as a public service broadcaster. From its inception in 1936, the BBC Television service was adventurous in spirit but heavily constrained by resources in comparison to radio broadcasting (Briggs 1979). This was partly because radio had established itself as an affordable and immediate medium for news and entertainment, but also because the BBC's own public service mission, imbued by its first Director General John Reith, created an environment among its senior management that television was to be contained, not least to ward off the encroachment of commercial interests of advertisers that was driving the expansion of American television networks. Therefore, in Britain by 1950 there were 12 million radio-only licenses and a mere 350,000 joint radio and television licenses (Briggs 1979).

In the 1930s, outside broadcasts from sport were already well established in the mix of programming in radio at both national and local levels. It would, therefore, have seemed natural for television programming to simply follow suit. As Mark Aldridge (2011) has suggested, why television emerged as it did in the pre-war years was largely due to bureaucratic reasons, of how the BBC was institutionally established and operationally run. The great difference in the reality of producing outside broadcasts in radio and television, however, was the scale of the technology required to achieve this. Television outside broadcasts required significant investment in equipment and personnel compared to radio, and producers also faced enormous logistical problems to resolve, both on site and in relaying the pictures back to BBC Television's first home at Alexandra Palace in North London.

The need for resources, in technology and skilled employees, as well as in time and energy to set things up, meant that meeting the BBC's core value of serving the public interest through televised coverage of major national sporting events required a far greater investment than many forms of broadcasting. Sport was central to the public service mission to inform and entertain, with live coverage of national sporting occasions drawing interest from across Britain, producing some of the BBC's largest audience ratings. Sport has been central to the BBC's public service identity. It brought households and the UK nations together, in doing so defining the boundaries of what constituted a "national community" (Born 2005: 512). The BBC's monopoly of some sports and events both cemented its position as the nations' favored sports broadcaster and invented broadcast traditions that were culturally and politically difficult to challenge. When commercial television was launched in 1955 it found the doors to sport either firmly closed or, at the very least, firmly established with the BBC way of doing things (Whannel 1992). It arguably brought what would now be considered minor sports to the screen from a very early stage. In the 1950s, the BBC brought sports such as show jumping, ice hockey, motor sport, snooker, and skiing to new audiences.

As the reach of television grew, it also brought sport from beyond the UK to British audiences, opening up opportunities to see international sports stars and competitions for the first time.

In 1950, the BBC's Television Outside Broadcasting (OB) department began to gain new impetus and a sense of adventure following the appointment of a new Assistant Head of OBs, Peter Dimmock. A former RAF flight-lieutenant flying instructor during World War II and a post-war horse-racing correspondent for the Press Association, Dimmock quickly rose to prominence in the modest-sized OB department. As the Head of Television Outside Broadcasts, a role he later designated as General Manager, Dimmock oversaw the first live broadcast from an aeroplane, the first trans-continental television transmission, the first international satellite transmission, presented the first regular television sports magazine program *Sportsview*, was the first on British television to use a "teleprompter" (autocue), and the first to negotiate television coverage of the Grand National horse race and many other sporting events on television. At one time, in the late 1960s, he was arguably among the most experienced and most powerful people in the BBC and British broadcasting more broadly. His own modesty, however, would not allow him to concede he held such a position, but his international reputation in brokering deals for the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup ultimately led him to be head hunted by American networks keen to capitalize on the Dimmock charm.

In an oral history interview with Dimmock in 2009, he revealed why sport and outside broadcasts became so important to the BBC:

With OB, dash it, they depended on us enormously for the overall audience figures.

*Sportsview*, I suppose when you think about it now and it may sound ridiculous, but

we had a regular audience of about 11 million. Which in those days was huge. All our events, our royal events and things in those days, they all got enormous audiences.<sup>1</sup>

Through the late 1950s and into the 1960s, Dimmock's role as negotiator became vital to keeping the BBC ahead of its commercial rival ITV. Following the launch of Eurovision in 1954, Dimmock became the head of sports negotiations on behalf of the European Broadcasting Union, frequently travelling the globe to meet and smooth-talk international administrators of sport. Again, his modesty in opening the way for global television coverage of sport shone through in his praise for the institution he worked for: "When I travelled all round the world, it was so wonderful. It was the fact that I was from the BBC that they gave me a great deal of respect, and help, and courtesy. Which was entirely because I was BBC, nothing to do with me."<sup>2</sup> Dimmock's professional achievements in internationalizing televised sport are not only evidence of a broadcasting pioneer, but also offer an insight into the discourse of modernity which was driving the motivation to push television technology to its limits and bring both European, and subsequently international, populations together through the shared experiences of viewing sport. The remainder of the chapter focuses on specific instances of this process and based on the BBC's written archives and Dimmock's memories, explores how innovation and professional ideologies of public service began to globalize television sport.

### **3 Origins of Eurovision sport**

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Dimmock, interview with the author, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Dimmock interview, 2009.



The pan-European broadcasts to the allied forces and European populations during World War II had cemented the notion that European broadcasters could collaborate to deliver multi-lateral content (Stourton 2017). Although pan-continental broadcasts had featured since the origins of radio services in the 1920s with the formation of the International Broadcasting Union (IBU) in 1925, the harm caused to pan-continental relations created by conflict with Nazi Germany and, post-war, subsequent mistrust from the Allies of the emerging influence of the Soviet Union meant attempts to create new international broadcasting unions were heavily politicized and full of mistrust. Following a Constitutive Conference at Torquay in February 1950 chaired by the BBC's Director of external broadcasting services, Ian Jacob, it was decided to create a new entity, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which would be formed by representatives from West European broadcasters, with Jacob as its first President (Ross 1961: 128).

Early negotiations between emerging television services across Europe focused on how best to standardize television frequencies. Different nations used different frequencies and according to Fickers and O'Dwyer (2012: 69) there was "a hidden techno-political conflict" masking the *entente cordiale* being developed under the banner of the EBU. Underlying the technical conflict were industrial trade wars: British television manufacturers were keen for the BBC to work with European partners to help serve their commercial interests in competition with American rivals. The BBC were also keen to be viewed as the standard-bearer of television production practices having launched the world's first public television service in 1936. Therefore, the "techno-political bargaining" of pan-European broadcasts was also inflected by protectionist industrial policies and hegemonic struggles for cultural leadership as to what a European network would look like and how programs under its remit would be produced (Fickers and Osborn 2012: 69).

In August 1950, the BBC instigated a series of Franco-British experiments to transmit television signals across the Channel using new portable radio links stationed across the south coast of England ideally positioned by BBC engineers pick up transmissions from Calais. In the BBC listings magazine, *The Radio Times*, the BBC's Controller of Television Programmes, Cecil McGivern recalled the moment the first flickering images came through in early engineering trials:

For several hours we have been staring at the pictures on the screen. At seven o'clock it was black. Then light flickered across it, then turned blackness again. We knew that our outside broadcast engineers in Calais had switched on their gear, that cameras were alive, that pictures were struggling to reach us in Alexandra Palace. No one was sure if they would come. Then slowly a picture formed. It was L'Hôtel de Ville, the Town Hall of Calais. The picture settled. The building became clear. [...] all thoughts of the suffering of Calais were pushed in to the background by the excitement of this moment. (McGivern 1950: 35)

McGivern's report of the first cross-channel experiment captures the genuine sense of awe in the power of television to bring live images across the continent. Live outside broadcasts were key to television's aesthetic in developing a sense of "co-presence" with the audience: essentially giving them a sense of being somewhere else or, in the sporting context, a front row seat at the stadium (Ellis 2000). As the BBC sought new sites and events from which to broadcast, Dimmock's experience as a pilot proved efficacious in the speedy reconnaissance of new locations and European partners.

In January 1951, Dimmock travelled to the United States to learn how they had begun to transmit television over hundreds of miles. While on his visit, he watched live scenes of a

large fire in Chicago from his hotel room in New York (Cannel 1951). Throughout the 1950s, Dimmock's work-life became increasingly driven by the desire to stretch the horizons of television technology and the distance it could relay live images from across the world. Further exchanges were planned between the BBC and Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF), such as "Paris Week" in July 1952 with Dimmock working closely with his French counterpart Jean d'Arcy for an entire week of broadcasts from the French capital including cycling from Velodrome d'Hiver. Frequently held as a television visionary, d'Arcy became integral to the success of the EBU and pan-European broadcasts from sport. In their analysis of d'Arcy during this period of innovation Fickers and O'Dwyer (2012: 70) conclude he "clearly saw the potential of television as a tool of rapprochement between people and nations and developed into an ambassador of this vision all around the world." The Paris transmissions were important for promoting further uptake of television in the UK, with 1.5 million homes reported to have access to the coverage, but technical issues bedevilled the broadcasts as viewers received sound without images, images without sound, pictures that wobbled or split the screen.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, some standards in how to transmit television across longer distances from mainland Europe to the UK, and vice-versa, were beginning to take shape ahead of the largest outside broadcast of the era: the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. The scale of the Coronation broadcast, shared with five European countries, gave a further fillip to the confidence of the BBC to explore further experiments with European broadcasters and in 1954 a major breakthrough for the EBU came with plans for the first major "Television Continental Exchange."

### **3.1 Eurovision and the 1954 World Cup**

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<sup>3</sup> Unknown cutting from Peter Dimmock's private scrapbooks.

The first televising of the World Cup came in 1954 from Switzerland from 16 June to 4 July. By 1953, with the prospect of the finals in Switzerland, the possibility of linking up a number of European countries as part of a “Television Continental Exchange” were being discussed by the EBU. A series of programs were transmitted between June and July 1954, and the Swiss contribution from Berne included ten matches from the World Cup Finals. This represented the largest contribution to the exchange by any single country. The EBU exchange relied upon some four thousand miles of connecting landlines, with forty-four transmitters spread across the continent. The ideological motivation for the exchange, at least from a British perspective, is identifiable in the following quote from the BBC’s chief engineer Michael Pilling (1954) in the BBC’s listing magazine the *Radio Times*: “We have tried to advantage the universality of the picture as a way of overcoming the language barrier. This has led us to develop much more along the lines of shared programmes.” The modern rhetoric of “universality” is quite striking in this statement, and represents a cultural politics cast in the shadow of the post-War international relations, cemented in organizations like the United Nations, but also identifiable in collaborative schemes to share knowledge and resources in organizations like UNESCO and the EBU.

Each participating national broadcaster – many of them less than one year in operation, many borrowing equipment and expertise from the BBC – had their own commentator for the same pictures, situated either at the stadium or in a remote studio. The technique of segregating background sounds or “effects” from commentary had first been used during the Coronation in 1953, with telerecordings exported to North America and Australia. British manufacturers supplied much of the technical apparatus to European broadcasters: for example, Pye sold outside broadcasting units to Belgium and Switzerland, and Marconi sold microwave links to enable transmitters to link up across national boundaries (British equipment 1954).

The “Eurovision” experiment represented the beginning of a new standard broadcasting format for the delivery of global sporting events, which later combined “unilateral” and “multilateral” feeds. In September 1953, EBU members met in London to discuss the 1954 summer season of television exchanges, which would act as a prelude to regular Eurovision programming (Fickers and Johnson 2012: 35). The concept of Eurovision enabled nations with modest resources to sustain a regular television service. The exchange worked on principles of reciprocity, independence of program selection, and voluntary participation.

The BBC started planning their coverage of the World Cup in December 1953 in the knowledge that both England and Scotland would be involved in the tournament. Initial correspondence with the Swiss revealed their lack of outside broadcasting technology and experience, and the BBC’s premier producer of televised football Alan Chivers was dispatched to Geneva to work with Swiss producer (Regisseur) Frank Tappolet to help establish the best camera positions in the World Cup stadia and provide advice on how to cover a football match (Haynes 2016: 79). By 1954, the Swiss had only produced one outside broadcast of any note, so the European link-up from the World Cup hosts came with considerable risk. Chivers produced coverage of a friendly international between Switzerland and Holland on 30 May, the match being relayed live to audiences in the Netherlands. The coverage of the World Cup was an early experiment in production knowledge exchange, with the BBC sharing both equipment and, perhaps more crucially, its technical expertise of outside broadcasting. Production of the World Cup coverage was handled by the Swiss following Chivers’ tuition who stepped aside following his mentoring of Swiss producers. The only exception was the main camera operator Bill Wright from the BBC, who as an experienced hand with the zoom lens was brought in to provide the close-up shots of the players.

The *Radio Times* (21 May 1954) previewed the broadcasting experiment under the heading “Television in Europe Today” noting that “between June 6 and July 4 viewers in Britain will be able to see a series of programmes relayed from seven European countries.” Alongside British television were RTF from France (launched in March 1945), NTS from Holland (October 1951), ARD from (West) Germany (December 1952), RTB from Belgium (October 1953), SRG from Switzerland (November 1953), RAI from Italy (January 1954) and DR from Denmark (January 1954). The BBC transmitted eight live games in total starting with France versus Yugoslavia from La Pontaise Stadium, Lausanne, subsequently followed by England’s opening group game against Belgium and Scotland’s second group game against the then World Champions Uruguay.

Scotland had entered the World Cup Finals for the first time and following defeat to Austria in their opening game the Scots fell to a heavy defeat in their first live televised game on 19 June 1954, with ignominious defeat to Uruguay by seven goals to nil in Basle. Commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme was highly critical of the Scotland players and he later reflected the broadcast had emphasized the revelatory power of television which was “giving the British public its first real view of the might of world soccer” (Wolstenholme 1958: 77). Wolstenholme’s commentary had caused controversy back in the UK, with some television critics suggesting his role was to “comment and not to criticize.” In Scotland, the Glasgow newspaper the *Evening Citizen* published an open letter from Wolstenholme on its front page under the headline “Stop Your Crying, Scotland,” explaining why his commentary had been so disparaging. This further fanned the flames of criticism of the BBC’s coverage, but McGivern sent a telegram to Wolstenholme congratulating him on a “first-class job” (Wolstenholme 1958: 77). The episode revealed the way in which television was not simply a “window on the world” of international sport, but increasingly engaged within its discursive cultures. The controversy also revealed the tensions apparent for television when navigating

the cultural politics of Britishness, Englishness, and Scottishness. Television became part of the national conversation on football, and as future World Cups would reveal, the passions associated with the tournament ran deep for all nations involved. Television played a compelling role in fostering strong emotions around international sport, at the same time revealing a need for more localized coverage. By the end of the 1950s the demands for more “unilateral” coverage, either live or recorded, from major international sporting events became increasingly apparent.

#### **4 From multilateral to unilateral television sport: the 1958 World Cup**

At an EBU conference in July 1954, M. Eduard Haas, the Program Director for Swiss Television announced to members that the next World Cup would be held in Sweden. The 1958 Finals were something of a landmark for the World Cup as a global tournament, not least because it was the first time Brazil became world champions, but principally because it was extensively filmed and televised for more nations than ever before. FIFA, ostensibly governed by post-colonial Europeans were, nevertheless, expanding their membership and reach following the relative success of the 1954 World Cup. By the time of the World Cup in Sweden, FIFA had 84 affiliated member associations, and from June 1956 an English president in Arthur Drewry (Rollin 1978). Grimsby born Drewry, a former President of the Football League and selector of England’s losing side against the USA in 1950, had been hostile to television in the early 1950’s (Briggs 1979: 856). In 1958, television had emerged from its relative infancy and was now playing an increasingly important role in gelling the international profile of FIFA and its event, delivering an emergent global consciousness to national audiences.

The World Cup was certainly high on the agenda of the BBC’s outside broadcast department. Although accessing live coverage of the Finals via Eurovision was given highest

priority, the BBC's *Sportsview* team under the leadership of Paul Fox (Editor) was key to the BBC's coverage of the event. The *Sportsview* team had invested time in covering some of the qualifying round matches, including England's game with the Republic of Ireland, Scotland's fixture with Spain, live Eurovision coverage of Northern Ireland's first-leg qualifier against Italy in Rome, capped by filmed highlights of a deciding qualifying match between one of the favorites for the Cup, Czechoslovakia versus Wales in May 1957.

The 1958 finals offered an opportunity for British football to redeem its international standing, as well as reverse a noticeable decline in aggregate attendances at English League matches from the high of the immediate post-war years; down from 41.3 million in 1948–49 to 33.2 million in 1955–56 (Rollin 1979). Calamitous defeats in previous World Cups for both England and Scotland had been sobering for British football, but according to Wolstenholme, it required “a road back” to prosperity, and to his mind the fault lay at the door of the poor standard of British football. Wolstenholme (1958: 61) conjectured: “is it not conceivable that the public, realizing that our standard of football has dropped to third rate, has decided to look elsewhere for its pleasures?” With all four home nations present at the 1958 Finals in Sweden the mounting pressure on British teams to succeed was growing in the face of immense criticism in certain quarters of the British press. Wolstenholme's pleas for improved standards and forethought against international competition was representative of a broader shift in the British sports media, which perceived home nation success as being crucial for national morale.

Radiotjänst, Sweden's first public television service, began in September 1956, and the prospect of relaying live football matches, in some cases simultaneously, from Malmö, Gothenburg, Norrköping, and the capital Stockholm required significant investment (3.9m Swedish Krona) in telecommunications by the Swedish state. The Swedes planned to use twelve stadia for the finals, and it was viewed as impossible to get live relays from them all.



Instead, EBU members would be supplied with 15-minute edited 16mm films of games where live transmission via microwave and landlines was not feasible.<sup>4</sup> There were two major issues: first, there were concerns that the landlines to connect the major cities of Malmö, Gothenburg, Norrköping, and Stockholm would not be ready in time; and secondly, that Svenska Fotbollförbundet (the Swedish Football Association) were stalling on negotiations over television rights in fear that television would affect ticket sales.

The logistical and commercial issues compounded a number of issues facing the BBC, which created tension between senior managers and the *Sportsview* unit. Interest in the 1958 World Cup had up-scaled considerably since 1954, and Dimmock, ever conscious of the threat of losing out on a rights deal to commercial rivals ITV in either television or film, purposefully built an alliance with the host broadcaster Radiotjänst, visiting their offices in May 1957. The Swedish FA had given Radiotjänst the final option on the World Cup coverage, and thereby by default the BBC.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4.1 Unilateral *Sportsview* film**

With the logistical issue unresolved the BBC began to explore the idea of having their own unilateral *Sportsview* Unit film crews covering matches. This meant eschewing the Swedes' 15-minute 16mm film, which would have to be dubbed back in England, by substituting their own footage of entire games filmed with unilateral sound and running commentary. The consequences on resources were significant: flying out a whole production crew of camera operators, sound engineers, electricians, editors, commentators; producers and couriers to transport the film; purchasing enough film for at least 3000 feet per match; a

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Henrik Hahr to Peter Dimmock, 4 April 1957, BBC Written Archives Centre.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Gert Engström to Peter Dimmock, 28 May 1957, BBC WAC.

motor pool of motorcyclists to transport film from stadia to laboratories for development; finding suitable editing facilities near to transmission facilities; facilities for redubbing German-built “Mayhak” tapes the Swedes were using into transmittable magnetic tape; finding suitable telecine transmission facilities; and studio facilities for introducing and analyzing the film.<sup>6</sup> The other problem associated with filmed matches was the likelihood they could not be screened on the same day as the matches, so an enforced 24-hour delay in transmission would occur, losing much of the power of immediacy created by live Eurovision feeds. It was not the solution Dimmock’s team had anticipated but the pressure to have BBC coverage alongside the multilateral feed was felt to be paramount to meet the demands of British viewers.

Controller of Television Programmes, McGivern, was not keen on sending the *Sportsview* Unit to Sweden for fear of jeopardizing the production of *Sportsview* itself scheduled to run through June 1958. Relaying the disappointing news to editor Paul Fox and producer Brian Cowgill, Dimmock revealed McGivern did not feel “that the interest of a World Cup will be sufficient to warrant a late night placing of expensive film material unless we can provide overwhelming and concrete evidence to the contrary.”<sup>7</sup> The editor Fox was unequivocal in his belief the BBC required a *Sportsview* unit out in Sweden, both because the Swedish football films he had seen were “most unsatisfactory” but primarily because all four United Kingdom nations were likely to be represented. In January 1958 he wrote a strong plea in favor of sending a BBC crew:

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Fox to Peter Dimmock, World Cup Championships, no date given but likely October 1957, BBC WAC.

<sup>7</sup> Dimmock to Fox and Cowgill, 20 December 1957, BBC WAC.

All our soccer coverage throughout the winter is building up towards the World Cup. Football interest is enormous because of the approach of the World Cup. A million people – a potential three million audience – are going to soccer each Saturday. I feel that we have a duty towards them, and to the millions more who regularly follow our sports programmes, to provide the best possible World Cup reports.<sup>8</sup>

Fox knew the British press would be giving full attention to the Finals and would therefore be a major talking point of the nation. The divergent views revealed a discord between the BBC's senior and middle management about the status the World Cup, its popularity and why it should matter to the BBC's public mission. While those working in televised sport completely understood the emergent international kudos associated with the World Cup, senior management could not appreciate its broader appeal. Fox clearly thought the BBC would look out of pace with the nation if they didn't provide extensive coverage, going so far as to suggest: "England could win this World Cup – and wouldn't we look silly if we weren't on the spot!"<sup>9</sup>

With all four home nations represented, one further issue for the BBC to overcome was the scheduling of matches. FIFA had scheduled many of the games on the same date and the same time, and in an attempt to relax this policy Dimmock wrote to Drewry requesting FIFA revise the timetabling of significant fixtures. It was the first time television had attempted to interfere with the organization of the World Cup, but Dimmock's request fell on deaf ears. The reluctance to move fixtures meant Eurovision could only televise one quarter-final and one semi-final. With the high possibility of fixture clashes, the BBC were concerned

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Fox to Peter Dimmock, 3 January 1958, BBC WAC.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Fox to Peter Dimmock, 3 January 1958, BBC WAC.

at the prospect of limited live feeds of relevant games for British viewers. Jack Oaten, the BBC's "Sports Organizer" spelt out the consequences to Dimmock:

It could well be that the BBC would not get any of the British teams in a "live" relay and I would have thought more study should be given to the prospect of alternative routes for relays, although obviously Germany hold the key to this. The combinations of the various matches will greatly affect the issue. Regretfully these may not be known in time to do much about it.<sup>10</sup>

In the event, live coverage was complemented by *Sportsview* crews filming the British nations in action and Fox worked on the logistics of access and resources with the EBU representative Kirk Bergoten. There were therefore three sources of coverage: Eurovision live transmission, Radiotjänst non-dubbed pooled edited film highlights, and BBC dubbed filmed material with commentary. Both un-dubbed pooled film and dubbed *Sportsview* film were flown from Stockholm at 8.30am arriving in London at 1.30pm. The pooled material was sent to Television News, who inserted no more than two minutes of film in the evening news bulletin, and the latter produced for *Sportsview*, was included in a television news feature called *World Cup Report* transmitted during the early evening topical magazine program *Tonight* presented by Cliff Michelmore. The *Tonight* feature enabled the BBC to provide some filmed highlights of the British national teams in action, including England's matches against the USSR and Austria, Scotland's matches against Yugoslavia, Paraguay, and France, Wales against Hungary and Mexico, and Northern Ireland against Czechoslovakia and Argentina as well as a roundup of the first week's events. Fox again, detailed the reasoning

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<sup>10</sup> Jack Oaten to Peter Dimmock, 21 October 1957, BBC WAC.

for the BBC's singular approach: "We have evolved our own, highly specialized system of football reporting on film and since the World Cup is a highlight that occurs only every four years, we hope to be given the facilities to use our own reporting methods."<sup>11</sup>

The BBC had arranged editing facilities on a Steinbeck machine, unilateral telecine transmission, and unilateral studio facilities. This set up had first been trialed on a smaller scale during the Winter Olympics from Cortina, Italy in 1956, but Sweden was a new departure in combining pooled and BBC shot footage. The film shot by two BBC crews led by Alan Prentice and Jimmy Balfour would also form part of the EBU pooled content. FIFA had insisted no more than ten minutes of film could be televised from any one day, which had to be transmitted as "news" rather than sports content per se. Any contravention of the contract would be met with a hefty fine from FIFA.<sup>12</sup> The *Sportsvie* film for the *Tonight* program, was cut in Sweden, with commentary recorded and synchronized on 16mm sprocketed-sound-film, before being flown back and transferred to 35mm magnetic tape at the BBC's Television Film Studio in Ealing.<sup>13</sup> The dubbing of commentary in Sweden was shared by Wolstenholme, Peter Thompson who described Scotland's games against Paraguay and France, and by a new voice of the time, David Coleman. Where the *Sportsvie* crews were filming the game, commentary was produced live on to the recording, where pooled material was used the commentary was dubbed afterward. Coleman's cooption in to the *Sportsvie* team did not go down well with his superior the Head of Programmes in the Midland Region, Denis Morris, who agreed the experience would help Coleman's career but

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Fox to Imlay Newbiggin-Watts, 3 January 1958, BBC WAC.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Fox to Donald Baverstock, 27 May 1958, BBC WAC.

<sup>13</sup> Ronnie Noble to Jack Oaten, 30 May 1958, BBC WAC.

would leave a group of “hard pressed people” to produce a daily television bulletin, radio, and sports output at “tremendous strain.”<sup>14</sup>

Dimmock thought the inclusion of World Cup football in *Tonight* would give its producer Donald Baverstock “an invaluable ingredient to his programme in terms of audience size and appreciation.”<sup>15</sup> His assumption was premised on the ratings boost *Tonight* received when it televised the FA Cup draw in 1958. On 18 June, at the mid-point of the World Cup, Fox attempted to arrange a live feed from Sweden during the weekly edition of *Sportsview*. The idea of hosting the entire program from Sweden would, Fox argued, “mount another audience-puller by the very fact that the *Sportsview* desk has been moved to Stockholm, where the big sports news is being made.”<sup>16</sup> The Swedes could not release the lines required at that time in the evening and the idea was sunk. Broadcasters now invest huge resources on locating their studio to showcase their presence at the host nation of a major sporting event. Fox’s idea reveals the early imagination of such global possibilities for live sports coverage, which he considered important for the viewer. In the end, the cost of sending two *Sportsview* crews to film the games was £3527, a modest investment for maximum impact of having World Cup football across ten evenings.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4.2 Eurovision, live rights and competition**

In March 1958, FIFA and the Swedish FA established a small working group to negotiate live television rights, which included Sir Stanley Rous. Rous promptly wrote to the

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<sup>14</sup> Denis Morris to Peter Dimmock, 2 May 1958, BBC WAC.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Dimmock to Seymour de Lotbiniere, 22 May 1958, BBC WAC.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Fox to S.P.A.Tel II, 28 May 1958, BBC WAC.

<sup>17</sup> J. Mair to de Lotbiniere, 27 May 1958, BBC WAC.

BBC's Director General, Sir Ian Jacob, who was also the President of EBU, in order to ascertain where the matter stood so that he may "know where to begin negotiations."<sup>18</sup> However, negotiations for the live television rights took a new, and for the BBC alarming, turn later in the same month when Bill Ward at commercial franchise Associated Television (ATV) directly offered £103,500 for an exclusive deal to the Swedish FA to televise and distribute the European rights for the World Cup. The Swedes notified the EBU, and Jean d'Arcy issued a stern warning to ATV via Bernard Sendall at the commercial regulator the Independent Broadcasting Authority. Ward and other commercial television managers were invited to an EBU Bureau meeting in Brussels where they were asked to put their case. The Bureau pronounced the deal was contrary to all EBU agreements and ATV retracted their offer. The episode alerted BBC senior managers, including Seymour de Lotbiniere and Cecil McGivern of the threat the ITV companies now posed to the BBC's position in covering major sporting events. The contract Ward had offered to the Swedish FA had mentioned using transmission lines to "Swingate or any other point suitable to ITA," and McGivern concluded, "ITA can be disconcertingly successful in its aims and methods."<sup>19</sup> The late intervention from commercial television emphasized the poor management of the rights process by the Swedish FA and FIFA. On 7 May 1958 the Swedish FA in conjunction with FIFA representatives agreed a television and sound deal with the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation for 1.5 million Swedish Kronar (£104,000). The BBC's estimated share of the rights fee was £20,000, and the total cost of sending Kenneth Wolstenholme (covering eight matches), Wally Barnes (covering two matches), Peter Dimmock and a producer was £1473. When added to the *Sportsview* crew costs, this brought the total cost of televising the World

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<sup>18</sup> Sir Stanley Rous to Sir Ian Jacob, 12 March 1958, BBC WAC.

<sup>19</sup> Cecil McGivern to C.Tel.S.Eng, 24 March 1958, BBC WAC.

Cup to approximately £25,000. When the negotiations were finalized, Dimmock admitted to de Lotbiniere:

All in all it has been a most frustrating negotiation, and I am still bitterly disappointed that by leaving things so late we have been landed with – comparatively speaking – an unsatisfactory contract. At the same time, although it is not financially outrageous, it would have been unthinkable had negotiations finally broken down altogether on the live side, in view of the participation of four teams from the British Isles.<sup>20</sup>

Dimmock's concerns were clearly born of the delays to signing the contract which had left the door open to the late-comer ITV to join the Eurovision feed, and adversely affect the aspiration of the BBC to schedule coverage of more games involving British teams. The BBC ultimately televised ten live transmissions including the opening ceremony which kick-started the event with a fly-past by the Swedish Royal Air Force. ITV transmitted three group matches including games involving England and Wales, as well as one quarter-final, semi-final, third-placed play-off, and the final. Special dispensation was given by the EBU for two English-speaking commentators to be present in the stadium, where other language groups could only have one. The BBC's live coverage from Sweden was as follows:

2.00pm, 8 June, Mexico vs Sweden, Stockholm.

7.00pm, 8 June, Germany vs Argentina, Malmo.

7.00pm, 11 June, England vs Brazil, Gothenburg.

7.00pm, 12 June, Sweden vs Hungary, Stockholm.

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Dimmock to Seymour de Lotbiniere, 22 May 1958, BBC WAC.



2.00pm, 15 June, Sweden vs Wales, Stockholm.

7.00pm, 15 June, Northern Ireland vs Germany, Malmo.

7.00pm, 19 June, Quarter-Final, Sweden vs USSR, Solna.

7.00pm, 24 June, Semi-Final, Brazil vs France, Solna.

7.00pm, 28 June, 3rd Place Play-Off, France vs West Germany, Gothenburg.

7.00pm, 29 June, Final, Sweden vs Brazil, Stockholm.

The BBC also made contingencies to take live feeds of any replayed matches, though none were required. Noticeably absent from the list of live games were Scotland, which for a nation of football enthusiasts must have been deeply disappointing to many viewers.

Although all three of Scotland's games were filmed, most Scots were left with the option of listening to live running commentaries or eyewitness reports on the BBC's Light Programme. England's only live transmission was against Brazil and produced the first ever 0–0 draw in World Cup Finals history.

British audiences had never been exposed to so much football on television, and the BBC's competition with ITV had heightened the promotional battle to capture viewers. ITV had proposed alternating the coverage, to avoid both channels covering the same event, but Dimmock had refused claiming the BBC had "9,000,000 viewers not served by commercial." Moreover, the BBC had "paid a big fee" and it "would be unfair to cut some of our licence fee payers off from some of the matches."<sup>21</sup> For some, as the *Daily Express* critic James Thomas put it, "duplicated soccer relays are killing any idea of choice in live television."<sup>22</sup> It was a scenario that would perpetuate for decades to come, until genuine alternation of World

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<sup>21</sup> World Cup TV "Double" Sparks Row, *Daily Express*, 17 June 1958.

<sup>22</sup> World Cup TV "Double" Sparks Row, *Daily Express*, 17 June 1958.

Cup games was agreed between the two rival broadcasters. Nevertheless, on another front, the experiment of mixing unilateral with multilateral coverage showed quite convincingly that televising large-scale international sports events needed to be contextualized for the home audience.

## **5 Conclusion**

The BBC's coverage of the World Cups in 1954 and 1958 reveal both material and symbolic dimensions of television technology and the role of sport within it. There were technical challenges: the logistical problems of transmission across the continent; the incommensurable technical standards and capacities of different EBU partners; the limits of technology to provide live coverage from every location; and innumerable resource constraints of material and human kind. But there was an optimistic, pioneering will to overcome these challenges, even in the face of cultural differences. Televising the World Cup also had symbolic meaning, which transformed over the decade from near ignorance and willing indifference, to greater public awareness and mass appeal to share the World Cup televisual experience. This sense of the World Cup as a mediated experience was still new, contested and unstable.

The BBC's approach to the coverage of sport in the 1950s was central to the consumption and appropriation of television in the UK, which had changed from a monopoly service when relaunched in 1946 to a hard-fought competition for viewers following the launch of Independent Television regional franchises in 1955. The BBC under the leadership of Peter Dimmock used its leverage as the established national broadcaster, built on the foundations of public service, to secure access to sport events and competitions and lay the foundations among the British public that sport was wedded to the BBC's national identity. It is an identity the BBC has attempted to maintain, even under severe pressure from dedicated

sport channels delivered by Sky, BT, and others which have massively undermined the BBC's ability to obtain rights to television sport.

Where the BBC has been able to maintain its position as a public broadcaster of sport has been major international competitions such as the Winter and Summer Olympic Games and coverage of the FIFA World Cups for men and women. This is partly due to the protected status of such events to be freely available under the UK's Listed Events legislation, but it is also arguably part of a legacy which stretches back to the BBC's formative role in the development of televising such events, organized through its collaboration with the EBU and Eurovision project, naturalizing the BBC's place in the coverage of certain sport mega-events for the British public. Ultimately, the economic and technological environment in public broadcasting shall dictate the ability for the BBC to sustain its position in this respect, but what this chapter has also revealed is that the cultural importance of how television brings a nation together during moments of major sporting competition, something which has been maintained even in the face of the digital disruption to global television industries, had its roots in the innovations in sports programming of the 1950s.

Such continuities in television sport, which cut across the impulse in communications research to recognize every new technological revolution which is changing our society and culture, are important to recognize and also study historically. As Michael Pickering (2015: 16) has persuasively argued regarding the devaluation of history among media and communication scholars, we need to be "more receptive to slower processes of cultural change and adaptation, longer-term institutional formations and resilient structural continuities." In the context of international television sport, the BBC, the EBU, and other public television networks of the world represent such resilient forms as they adapt to new global and local economic, cultural, and political circumstances.

The growth of new television services across Europe in the 1950s and the pioneering work achieved by engineers and producers at the BBC and their counterparts across the Eurovision enterprise in the coverage of sport continues to shape the mechanics of how major sporting events are covered, distributed, and viewed across the world. The development of satellite technology in the early to mid-1960s obviously transformed the technological reach and immediacy of televised sport into homes across the world. Nevertheless, the combination of multilateral with unilateral feeds continues to feature strongly in the coverage of major sports, combining as it does, both shared images of momentous moments of sport with the localized narratives of national sport stars and teams. The BBC's inroads to deliver unilateral coverage from the FIFA World Cup in 1958, and subsequently from the Olympic Games in Rome 1960 (Haynes 2014) and subsequent sport mega-events, represent a particular approach to global television sport which the broadcaster felt was its duty to deliver for British audiences.

One key to this process has been the availability of technical know-how and resources to do so, something not all international public broadcasters have been able to do. To this extent it must be recognized that the world of global televised sport continues to have economic and cultural discrepancies between nations in how televised sport is distributed and received by different audiences. Moreover, as public broadcasters across the globe have receded in the face of inroads in local television markets by global media conglomerates, so free public access to major sport mega-events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games have been privatized behind subscription pay-walls. Again, this is where historical research on what such coverage of global events has meant to both public broadcasters and their audiences provides useful counterpoints to contemporary economic decisions on sports broadcasting which do not always meet with public favor. The cultural politics of global televised sport, therefore, can benefit from a knowledge of previous generations of sports

broadcasters and their motivations for marrying the interests of sport and television, as Cecil McGivern suggested, “for the good of the world.”

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