

The Flatwater Racing Rules - 6. Announcing:

A basic guide for Announcers and Interviewers

The Rules describe the duties of the announcer very simply. They are, on instructions from the Competition Manager, to announce the start of each race, the order of starting and the position of the competitors during the race. After the race is finished, to announce the results.² However, the responsibilities of the announcer are much deeper and wider than this.

Responsibilities

The main responsibility of the announcer is to be an anchor for the competition. He (or she) is there to enhance the entertainment value of the competition. He must project the image of the Sport, possessing the ability to “sell” it. Therefore, he must be a communicator who entertains, informs, or persuades the audience, and satisfies their needs as spectators.⁷ In doing this he should project his personality in the delivery of the information.

He must know his audience. Probably the first thing the announcer should think about is how he would describe them. He must fully understand the meaning of his announcements and combine that with what will interest them, many of whom may be near experts in their knowledge of the Sport. Others will have no knowledge whatsoever.

Preparation

The I.C.F. Instruction Manual on Organisation and Technical Utilities for World Championships includes an Announcement Script. Although a very good guide as to the timing of announcements, this script will not be appropriate in most International Competitions. Also the wording used either may not fit the occasion or may even feel stilted, not reflecting the natural speaking delivery and personality of the announcer. So, using the Announcement Script as a guide, he should always prepare his own script.

For example, the wording for part of the weather forecast reads:

“The wind will be blowing out of the north west at 0.5 metres per second.”

This could be rewritten as:

“There will be a light wind from the north-west at half a metre per second.”

Another example reads:

“Gracefully looking brick red uniformed persons are the technical officials.”

This could be rewritten as:

“The technical officials have red blazers.”

Depending on the audience, the announcer may wish to include information about the competitors. Done well, this can provide “colour” and interest, helping to “sell” the

competition.⁷ Information can include the age of a competitor, their profession, most recent best result, lifestyle information, or the like. However, the announcer must be aware of legal and ethical concerns. The key words of the script should be copy-marked to assist delivery.

It will be obvious that it takes considerable preparation time to gather all the information needed, which will often include extensive research that may well need to be checked for accuracy. As the competition progresses additional information will be supplied, so it is vital that the announcer be very careful and methodical in handling all his papers.

Delivery

The announcer should have a pleasant, energetic voice, which is easy to listen to. He should use a conversational style and be able to use the English language correctly (or whichever broadcasting language is used). It is essential to practise volume, rate, tone, pitch, articulation and pronunciation⁷ to deliver clarity of speech. This all requires skill and the understanding of techniques. The announcer must be able to work for long hours and handle stress. Sometimes emergency information will need to be broadcast, so any instructions given must be unambiguous and clearly understood.

Equipment

The announcer must be fully conversant with the equipment he has to use, including the properties of various microphones. He may be responsible for maintenance of the equipment, even providing it and setting it up.⁷ Music may be needed, including anthems for medal ceremonies. This music may be supplied in any form of recording medium and the appropriate equipment will be needed to transmit the sound at an even volume between the different sources. All this equipment must be tested thoroughly, well before the start of the competition. The test should also be done before each day's competition, as there is nothing more embarrassing than to find that overnight the wind has turned a speaker causing howl-round. It is invariably the case that the offending speaker has been mounted in a difficult place, so that the announcer will be found in his best blazer, performing a monkey act.

Interviewing

Sometimes it is possible to interview athletes, either immediately after the final when they land to have their boat weighed or in front of the stands immediately after the medal ceremony. A radio microphone is best here but whatever system is used great care must be taken in the location so as to avoid feedback from speakers. The interviewer should possess the same delivery skills as described for the announcer, and there needs to be good co-ordination and communication between the announcer and the interviewer.

An interview can provide "colour" to the entertainment value of the competition. It is a forum for the audience to have a greater appreciation of the Sport and the demands that the competition makes on the athlete. However, the interviewer needs to be well

prepared, use the skills of asking questions and listening to pick up on answers that may require more explanation. An interviewer who is ill prepared will ask inappropriate questions, will be regarded as a moron or buffoon by the interviewee who will quickly provide shallow or poor answers if any, and the interview will be pointless and potentially damaging to the Sport. A good interviewer would be an ex-athlete or ex-coach⁷ who has very sound knowledge of racing and training, and who knows the competitor's previous performances.

Interviewers must be flexible and not simply run down a list of questions, otherwise the interview will be extremely dull. Questions need to be well planned. If the interviewee has heard the same questions before he may be weary of repeating the same answers. So, interviewers need to be creative, really enthusiastic, having a strong interest and depth of knowledge about the Sport. They must remember that many of their audiences will be near experts, that their responsibility is to entertain, to project a level of excitement, so injecting their own excitement and personality to draw out appealing interviews with the competitors. If, in turn, they manage to draw out the personalities of the athletes, that would be a real bonus. Interviewing is a technique that requires good practice with listening skills.

Further development

In this paper I have barely scratched the surface of the subject but I hope that I have given an insight into the overall requirements of the job and to the way forward to personal development. Announcing and interviewing are part of the Entertainment Industry, complete with its university and college courses.

A book entitled Broadcast Announcing Worktext, by Reese, Beadle and Stephenson, and published by Focal Press,⁷ provides a good guide to personal development and performance skills in a very practical way. The text includes a series of self-studies and projects. A CD-ROM is included which runs through a web browser interface. Icons throughout the book correspond to specific tracks on the CD, which contain audio and video clips to provide examples of performance techniques.

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