

ATHLETICS OMNIBUS – THE ANNOUNCER AS THE ENTERTAINER

From the Athletics Omnibus of Richard Stander, South Africa

1 INTRODUCTION

The Announcer can be defined as an entertainer rather than conveying information. It is the responsibility of the announcer to inform the public of all relevant information such as results, lane draws, lap times, composition of the heats, etc. in such a way that it captures the imagination of the audience. At the same time, it is also the responsibility of the announcer to restrict the time spent on the public address system.

An athletics meeting stands or falls by the standard of the support team that supplies the announcer with information. Good presentation and announcing can make a mediocre meeting tolerable; bad presentation can turn a potentially brilliant meeting into a disaster.

Different types of meetings require quite different type of presentation. A South African Championships demands formal announcing combined with a speedy information service. A track and field 'spectacular' such as 1 hour meetings on the other hand, requires atmosphere, presentation build-up to big races and some form of race commentary. Smaller inter-club events require yet another kind of presentation, usually a swift, efficient result service with the announcer also acting as the focal point of the organisation.

A well planned programme is essential for good announcing. The times indicated on the programme will enable the announcer to inform the spectators what to expect from the participants that is about to compete. Running commentary should be comparative information such as it is a world class performance rather than the athlete is leading with 5 meters. Results of the event should be announced within 5 minutes after the event takes place to ensure that the spectator remains interested in the information.

2 BASIC QUALITIES OF A GOOD ANNOUNCER

The announcer is basically an informer, His/her essential job is to provide the spectators with sufficient information to stimulate their interest and enthusiasm and to keep athletes and officials informed. The announcer must consider the needs of the athletes and officials, but marry these needs with his task of selling the sport to the crowd.

The announcer must also know his/her audience i.e. whether there is a pre-conference of enthusiasts or casual relatively unknowledgeable spectators, and gear his/her presentation accordingly.

Basic knowledge of track and field is an essential requirement and expert knowledge is needed by those presenting top meetings. This includes knowing the rules, assessment of performance and instant recognition of leading competitors.

The announcer must be able to assess quickly the information constantly passed to him; that which is inappropriate and then succinctly pass on that which in his assessment, will interest his listeners, e.g. new records, major championships qualifying performances, personal bests, etc.

The good announcer must expect to spend a good deal of time on comprehensive pre-meeting preparation. He must get from the organisers full details of events and competitors. He should have readily available information on national records and international matches and on competing clubs, states or regions for match events. A regular subscription service to national and international magazine, as well as annual statistical publications is a necessity for leading announcers.

An announcer's voice should be pleasant, clear and well modulated; he should avoid monotone and should not be frightened in showing enthusiasm. If there are two announcers, a contrast in voices is suitable. Women's voices are particularly suited to announcing over the public address, having a clarity rarely met with in male presenters.

A sense of humour is required to live with the pressure endemic with a track and field meeting. The Announcer has to cope with an excess of information, misinformation and requests from officials and other persons and yet curb any irritation that is felt, and keep the announcing process unaffected.

3 FORMAT OF PRESENTATION

To ensure that the announcer is used effectively, ensure that information such as names, numbers of athletes, SA and Provincial Records of the event, etc. are published in the programme or are freely

available on notice boards. That will allow the announcer to entertain the spectator with comparative information.

3.1 PRE-EVENT PRESENTATION

- Number, name, (preferably Christian name and surname) and club, region, state or country of athlete, together with, if appropriate, a brief piece of information about the athlete, e.g. Olympic Champion or Ethiopian record holder.
- Lane, jump or throw order together with qualifying conditions are informative of nature. Providing this information should not distract the attention from events in progress but rather used as “filler” information during period where no information is available.
- A pre-meeting conference with leading officials, including the Starter, would help in this regard.

3.2 DURING THE EVENT

- During races provide lap times, the name of leader and a rundown of the leading runners. An indication of the race pace and whether a record is possible, adds to the atmosphere.
- In field event provide inter-round summaries and details of significant performances.
- Highlight star performers before they begin their preparation run, throw or jump.

3.3 AFTER THE EVENT

- Announce the winning time and performer within 60 seconds. Highlight significant performances such as records etc.
- Provide a full results service. Time available will dictate the depth of such service e.g. the 1st 3 finishers or all the athletes in the competition.
- Give information on weather conditions and the effect it has on the performance e.g. a head wind slowed the sprinter down.
- Up to date team scores in match events at frequent intervals will add to the excitement of the crowd.

3.4 CEREMONY PRESENTATION

Try to combine such presentations with the results and to have the slickest possible ceremony. The Promoter should plan such presentations into their programmes and provide the Announcer with such the medal ceremony schedule.

4 GENERAL ADVICE

- Be consistent in the format of announcements
- Try at all times to avoid speaking when an athlete is jumping or throwing. If necessary interrupt an announcement to allow a jump or throw to take place
- Once a race is under Starter’s order, be completely silent
- When the audience is mainly casual and un-knowledgeable, give general information on rules, scoreboard format etc.
- Let the event speak for itself. Silence is often golden in track and field presentation. It is a good practice for announcers to attend meetings as pure spectators to appreciate exactly how much information an audience can assimilate.

5 A FEW DON'TS

- Don’t overburden the spectators with statistics
- Don’t give television type commentaries during races
- Don’t pre-judge events
- Don’t tell the crowd what they have witnessed i.e. “Browski goes clear at 2,10m”
- Don’t talk over crowd applause
- Don’t make too many organizational announcements
- Don’t keep saying “hello” and “ladies and gentlemen”
- Don’t be afraid of silence
- Don’t sound cross or agitated
- Don’t be negative

6 GENERAL SUPPORT TO THE ANNOUNCER

- To ensure that the announcer is kept up to date with the latest information, the announcer should be in touch with the Meeting Director 'Walkie-talkie'/field telephone.
- At the same time there should be operators on the field that move from point to point keeping the announcer informed with the latest information.
- A Statistical Back-up Recorder should assist the announcer to sort and provide support information to the announcer.

7 GENERAL SUPPORT TO THE ANNOUNCER

For the Announcer to function effectively, a team announcing team should be compiled to support the Announcer. The Announcing team consist of:

- 7.1 **The Announcer**
- 7.2 **The Announcing Assistant** will sort the information needed by the Announcer e.g. point out the result is a new record, find relevant information in statistics books and bring it under the attention of the Announcer, etc.
- 7.3 **The Recorder** will collect all results as they arrive and place them in chronological order. Results already covered must be filled in a separate file in a chronological order.
- 7.4 **The Runner** will collect information from the competition area and give it to the recorder.
- 7.5 **Security guard** that stands in front of the entrance of the announcer's room and allows access only to the announcing team and the Competition Director.

8 THE ANNOUNCERS ROOM

The announcer's room should have a full view of the competition area as well as the main pavilion and the pavilions surrounding the competition area. The view should be at least 180°.

It should be located in a position that allows the announcer to have full view of athletes finishing. The announcer's room should be at a height that provides the Announcer a bird's eye view of the competition area and surrounding areas.

There should be restricted access to the announcer's room with a door that can be locked from the inside to avoid the general public from interfering with the announcer's activities.

The contents of the announcer's room should consist of:

- 8.1 A long table that facilitate at least 4 people in a row next to each other.
- 8.2 A table at the door where the recorder collects and files the results as they arrive.
- 8.3 5 x Chairs
- 8.4 2 x Paper weights
- 8.5 2 x programmes for the 2 announcers
- 8.6 5 x events lists for the announcing team
- 8.7 Public address system
- 8.8 2 microphones – one for each announcer
- 8.9 Back up address system
- 8.10 Tape recorder or CD player with music

9 CONCLUSION

A presentation team has a vital role to play in the public's appreciation of athletics. The announcer is the Promoter's mouthpiece and should not try to please everyone but rather aim at the majority. The really good announcer can create the atmosphere that produces, along with outstanding performances, a memorable meeting.