THE HAZARDOUS JOB OF TELECASTING THE OPEN

BY

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The most hazardous of all sports telecasting undertakings is a major golf championship.

This is true for many reasons. The action is spread over some 150 acres of terrain, as opposed to the boxing ring which is 20 feet square or the football field which is 120 yards from goal post to goal post. Time cannot be forecast with any degree of accuracy. The general confusion in computing the results of simultaneous action in several places is exceeded only at the time of a general election.

Accordingly, the telecast of a golf championship requires far more planning than any other sports event.

The man responsible for such planning at NBC is Perry Smith, the producer.

It is his job to visit the championship course months in advance in order to plan his camera and audio positions. He must solve the myriad problems of detail in order to present a show that will be seen by millions of people.

He must keep in mind that not all of these millions are golf fans. Indeed, many of them couldn't tell a niblick from a caddie. For them, the show will be just an athletic contest in which one man is trying to beat some other men, and the telecast must be presented in terms that they can readily grasp.

The producer, then, must decide where he will place his cameras and where he will place his announcers. He has learned, too, that he must put both cameras and announcers on platforms at strategic locations so that they can see all the action. This creates the added problem of keeping the gallery off the platforms.

Then there is the problem of where to park the mobile units, the trucks which are the control centers. They must be situated so that the cable-run from the truck to any camera position is not too great.

The producer has learned that he must be able to provide continuous action on the course. Once he picks up a pair of players at any point, he must be able to stay with them right on to the finish at the eighteenth green. The video audience is demanding on this point. If it is watching a player who has a chance to win, or who is, indeed, winning, it does not want to be switched to anyone else. The object of any sports presentation on the television is, of course, to show the winner winning.

Lindsey Nelson, right, of NBC, interviews Sam Snead during a tournament.

Camera Position is Everything

When the producer starts to survey any course for a telecast, he is shown a number of places where, it is suggested, he can place his cameras. These suggestions come in the form of advice such as, "From here you can get a beautiful shot of number four," or "This will give you a perfect view of the twelfth tee."

These things are true, but insofar as planning a telecast is concerned they are useless. If you show a pair playing No.

4 and are not prepared to show them playing No. 5, No. 6 and so on, you will never hear the end of it. If you show a pair on the twelfth tee and are not prepared to show them on the twelfth green, you are in equally deep trouble.

Accordingly, producers tend to start at the eighteenth green and walk the course backward in order to determine how far back they will be able to cover. And they hope they can go backward as far as the fifteenth. Their limitations are determined by the length of the cable runs and the number of cameras at their disposal.

Perry Smith uses five cameras on football games, four on baseball games, three on boxing matches. However, at the Open Championship at the Oak Hill Country Club, Rochester, N.Y., he used, including commercial set-up, a total of twelve cameras.

Since the normal mobile unit accommodates no more than five cameras, he used three mobile units. There was a director in each mobile unit, all three of which were interconnected.

Before we proceed further, there was another interesting thing about covering that Open. Directly in front of the eighteenth green, the fairway fell off in during the time we were on the air, but he couldn't take that chance.

The camera proved its worth. Coming to the eighteenth hole on Saturday afternoon (the seventy-second hole of the Championship) with a chance to tie, a fellow named Ben Hogan played his ball right there. It was a pretty important shot to be able to cover.

The Producer's Role

Once the cameras and the announcers have been placed in their proper positions, the producer and the directors (Harry Coyle and Jack Dillon) retire inside the mobile units where they watch the action on monitors that show what is being seen by each camera on the course. It is their job to select from this mass of audio and video reports a series of images that will tell a concise and exciting story on the air.

Getting instantaneous and correct information during the playing of a championship is not the easiest thing in the an almost perpendicular drop. Cameras placed behind the green couldn't see into this depression. So Perry Smith placed an extra camera to the left of the green in order to be able to cover this one spot. There was a good chance that no ball would be played from that depression

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world. If every player on the course knew how every other player was doing at every moment, many shots would be played differently. Even with the use of walkie-talkies, telephone lines, flags and runners, it is just barely possible to keep posted on how the competition is shaping up all over the course.

If you have ever taken up a position at one green on a course during a championship and listened to some of the queries from a breathlessly arriving gallery, you will know what I mean.

The first question likely will be, "Who's this?" The spectator means, of course, that he is unable to identify the golfers he is watching and would like to know who they are.

The next question probably will be, "What are they shooting?" By this he means that he doesn't know who is leading or by how many strokes.

The next question likely will be, "What hole is this?" The indication here is that the fan has been scooting back and forth on the course and is not sure just where he is.

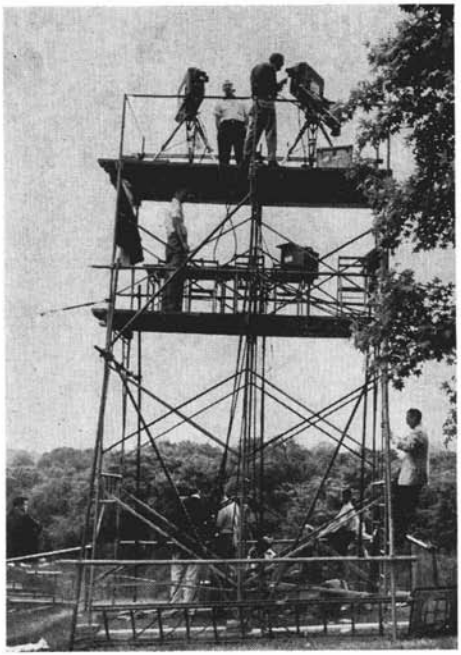
There are, then, on the course a great many spectators who don't know who they're watching, who's winning or where they are. This only magnifies the problem faced by the television producer, who must know all of these things instantly. To know a player's score through the previous hole is of no use. His score must be known right to the stroke he is playing.

So Perry Smith, seated inside the mobile unit watching the pictures being taken by each camera, has a direct telephone line to the tee of each of the last four holes in order that he can keep up to date on scores. He also has direct lines to the assistant directors at each of the announcing positions in order to keep the announcers posted on the scores and the plan of coverage.

Smith will relay instruction such as, "When Mayer has putted out on eighteen, we'll pick up Middlecoff at fifteen and bring him in. If he can pick up a birdie, he can tie."

He must also figure where the commercials will be inserted.

The directors have the job of relaying to the camermen the exact manner in which a shot is to be covered, whether the ball will be followed in flight, the clubhead will be shown in close-up striking the ball on the tee or the ball will be shown in close-up hitting in the fairway or on the green.



The cameras must be able to cover consecutive holes. The success of the telecasting depends on camera position.

Since the golf ball is not quite so large as a basketball, a football or even a baseball, the camermen also have their work cut out for them.

Announcers Shun Verbosity

On a golf telecast, there is no inclination on the part of the announcer to do a lot of talking, as he might in reporting other sports. If the announcer can properly identify the golfers, relay correct scores and give a complete report of who has a chance to win, he has done well enough.

While the announcer is the man who is heard, the responsibility for the whole production lies with the producer.

After the championship closes and the telecast is off the air, the producer is easy to spot. He's the guy in the clubhouse with the two ears cauliflowered from headsets, eyes squinty from trying to read scribbled scores and a general air of bewilderment.