

Creating accessible sports broadcasts for the visually and hearing impaired

Mada Center

In the world today, there are 1 billion people with disabilities – about 15 percent of the world’s population – and their proportion and number are increasing as humanity lives longer. In developing countries, a disproportionately high number of people with disabilities are present. Television, radio, and the Internet are an integral part of society’s fabric, and without them we cannot imagine a “full life”. Having a disability may deny normal media access, which may limit life choices, personal independence, personal fulfillment, sense of identity, enjoyment, and social cohesion.

In shaping our society, television plays an important role. It is a primary source of news, entertainment, and sports programming, and plays a critical role in making us aware of the vast array of ideas and perspectives that make up our society’s rich fabric. As a result, ensuring that everyone can take advantage of what TV has to offer is important.

For the visually impaired:

Fans of sports love watching a good game. But if you’re visually impaired, following the action on the TV screen is much harder.

The main way to make sports broadcasts accessible to people with visual impairments is to use “audio descriptions” in details. These are audio passages that explain what’s going on in the picture visually. Audio descriptions can also be useful for those with aging disabilities to bring the things they need to notice in the picture to their attention in order to fully follow the broadcast.

For the hearing impaired:

The main way to make sports broadcasts accessible for people with hearing impairments is by providing subtitles. Hearing impaired people prefer, broadcast, stream or download television programs that include optional subtitles in the intended audience’s language. Digital TV systems enabled the subtitles to be cut into the picture through a simple remote-control procedure. The secondary way to make broadcasts accessible for television viewing is by having a “in-screen” signer providing a sign language version of the audio.

Close captioning allows people who are deaf or hard of hearing to benefit from television. It has the added advantages of being useful to people learning to read or speak a second language and enabling people to enjoy television programming in restaurants, gyms and other places where the sound is often turned off.

Closed captioning makes broadcasts accessible by translating audio into text captions displayed on the screen for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Also, the captions identify who is speaking and the emotions they feel and include icons for elements like music.