

Zerb



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The history of ITV's contribution to the evolution of sports broadcasting

For decades now, sports broadcasting has been a massive provider of work for many a camera professional. With the rights to televise the various sporting events fairly often bouncing around between broadcasters and even, increasingly, the big-hitting on-demand streaming services too, we've also seen those contracts bounce around between OB companies that hire us. But this isn't such a new phenomenon; there were power struggles even when there were only a couple of channels on the box. **Phil Nott**, from the Broadcast Engineering Conservation Group (BECG), looks back on how, as the new kid on the block, ITV shook up the status quo of early sports OB coverage on British TV.

We pick up the story of ITV's contribution to sports broadcasting from the late 1960s, as that's when most of the interesting innovation took place. *World of Sport* was ITV's flagship sports programme for which LWT became responsible in 1968. LWT had come into being in August of that year, after winning the franchise for servicing London at the weekends, now including Friday evenings from 7.00pm.

Up until that point, *World of Sport* had been produced and compiled by ABC TV (the weekend franchise contractor for the North and Midlands) at its Teddington Studios. It was presented by *This is Your Life's* Eamon Andrews as the first single link presenter, having started in 1965. Before that, it had been a far less coordinated affair, under the *Saturday Sport* banner.

Becoming brand savvy

In readiness for the forthcoming new era of colour broadcasting, LWT instigated a new look for *World of Sport*, with an updated studio set, logo and typeface. The distinct 'S' logo went on to be used as a branding device for ITV Sport in general, not just for *World of Sport*. ITV's OB crews were even issued with an 'ITV Sport tie' with the 'S' logo emblazoned on it – and very smart they were too.

In common with all of ITV Sport, *World of Sport* was perhaps a little downmarket in approach and didn't take itself too seriously; however, it was presented by the smartly turned-out Dickie Davies. The programme was quite different from its BBC competition, namely *Grandstand*, although

this had much to do with the fact that the BBC held most of the key sports contracts. ITV had to make do with the lesser sports, such as horse racing and, of course, famously, wrestling.

This meant that, at times, *World of Sport* was padded out with some rather obscure sports, for example banger racing from Wimbledon Stadium and the figure of eight demolition derby being particular highlights on a Saturday afternoon. Motor sport in general did actually become quite popular, with the introduction of Rallycross, which featured Mini Coopers and Lotus Cortinas flying around in the mud on a winter's afternoon. Great fun was had by all and Rallycross is still shown on ITV4 to this day.



The new ITV Sport brand unveiled in 1968 for the relaunch of *World of Sport* with Dickie Davies

However, whilst the BBC was showing its token gesture of three races from Ascot, the centrepiece of *World of Sport* became an established institution in working men's clubs, with the introduction of the *ITV Seven*, which featured four races from the day's principal meeting and three others from a minor course, such as Haydock. The ITV Seven accumulator bet, where punters could win several thousand pounds, was a very popular feature throughout the 1970s and is still with us today. When ITV Sport won horse racing coverage back from Channel 4 in 2017, 'ITV Racing' branded OB trucks (actually NEP's, but we won't quibble) began to once again adorn racetracks across the land.

ITV goes big on football

In the beginning, ITV Sport's coverage of football was very regionalised, with each ITV area filming a particular match in their region. The big five franchise areas covered were: Granada TV (North-West), Associated TV (ATV – Midlands), Yorkshire TV (Yorkshire) and Thames & London Weekend Television (London).

Outside the big five, the smaller ITV stations were also providing coverage of soccer matches in their region or taking games from other ITV regions, namely Southern, Anglia and Tyne Tees. ATV launched *Star Soccer* in October 1965; Southern Television had *Southern Soccer*; and ABC TV had *World of Soccer*, until it lost its franchise in 1968.

Soccer coverage really began to increase on ITV when LWT launched *The Big Match* in 1968. Over time, the entire ITV network's football coverage would come to be broadcast under the title *The Big Match*. The main presenters and commentators were Brian Moore (1968–1983) and Jimmy Hill (1968–1973), and the format was to cover the action from a main London match, followed by highlights coverage of a further two selected matches from the different ITV regions. However, Brian Moore did have to provide a verbal credit (for example: "*Pictures from ATV*") for every section of regional highlights coverage.

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The battle on the pitch turned out to be nothing compared to what was happening off it, between the BBC and ITV OB staff and technicians!

ITV Sport vs BBC Sport Cup Final punch-up

The first real test for the new look ITV Sport was the 1969 FA Cup Final between Manchester City and Leicester City. However, the battle on the pitch turned out to be nothing compared to what was happening off it, between the BBC and ITV OB staff and technicians!

This was LWT's first Cup Final on behalf of ITV Sport and was very much a case of the new kid on the block squaring up to the very established BBC TV Sports Department. The FA Cup Final was an opportunity for ITV to hold an audience for a whole afternoon, although by the mid-1970s the



An LWT EMI 2001 in the studio for a live edition of *The Big Match*, presented by Brian Moore

programme start had become earlier and earlier, eventually extending to 11.00am. This meant much more additional content, particularly relating to the two opposing teams.

The first opportunity to officially see the teams would be when they walked out onto the Wembley turf, after which they could be interviewed live on air. A furious row ensued between ITV and the BBC as to who would be first to interview the players. Brian Moore famously recalled later that "*fists began to fly*" as one of the ITV floor managers had a tooth knocked out and both broadcast teams went away badly bruised! All this played out in front of the guest of honour, Princess Anne, and the Football Association (FA) were livid, subsequently calling both broadcasters to a meeting at Lancaster Gate. As a result, going forward the two TV companies grudgingly worked side by side, with TV coverage arrangements duly discussed before each Cup Final. Aspects that were coordinated included access to the players and placement of cameras on the pitch, all of which was closely monitored by the FA. The Cup Final was simultaneously broadcast by the two companies for a number of years, until 1989.



LWT's early colour portable camera on the pitch at Wembley, going for that all-important closeup interview!



Sunderland's manager, Bob Stokoe, doing the lap of honour after their 1-0 win over Leeds, accompanied by the ITV Sport LDK 13 camera, to the right of the picture in the scrum, trying to get the best live shot

ITV lead the way for improving the televising of TV sport

It was ITV's competitive streak in the early pioneering days, led by LWT, that helped to push the innovation of football coverage even further. ITV had already been the first to successfully use slow-motion replays, but further breakthroughs were on the way. ITV's Sports Director/Producer Bob Gardam placed a camera behind the goal at a Wembley Cup Final for the first time to capture the unique footage that this new camera angle afforded. But Bob's more famous breakthrough was when he received permission from Wembley to dig a hole just outside the pitch byline. A camera on a standard tripod could be placed in the hole and, positioned at this lower level, could capture far more interesting action shots. It became known as the 'Gardam Pit' – and the BBC were not best pleased!

Also, ITV was the first to place a live TV camera on a Cup Final team coach as it made its way to Wembley. After much persuading, Bob Stokoe, the manager of Sunderland, allowed ITV cameras to be present on the team coach for the entire journey from the team hotel to the Wembley ground for the 1973 Wembley FA Cup Final between Sunderland and Leeds United.

Another ITV Sport innovation came in 1970 with the introduction of a newfangled 'computer' that would predict the result for that year's FA Cup Final between Leeds and Chelsea. The predictions were given out at 15-minute intervals as the game progressed – although rumours circulated and questions were raised as to how much 'computing' was actually being done, with doubters suggesting that perhaps there was more 'typing' involved than had been implied!



'Brian Moore in his gantry position commentating on a live, colour televised match for LWT in 1970. Incidentally, the LWT 'river ident' logo had just only been devised, and a somewhat hastily created camera badge had been applied to the EMI 2001 next to him

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ITV Sport, OB major event coordination

Whilst ITV companies were competitors commercially for ad revenue and audience ratings (particularly LWT and Thames as they were the only two who shared the same geographic region), cooperation in OBs was slightly more convivial.

The management of OB resources on a network basis was mainly related to Sport, but also occasionally to Light Entertainment, Royal and State Occasions etc. Controller of ITV Sport, John Bromley, was a key coordinator; although he was officially employed by LWT, his remit was actually across the whole network. For *World of Sport* on Saturday afternoons, five or more OB units might be in operation at any one time, covering horse racing, football, wrestling, motor racing and, less frequently, athletics, tennis or cricket.

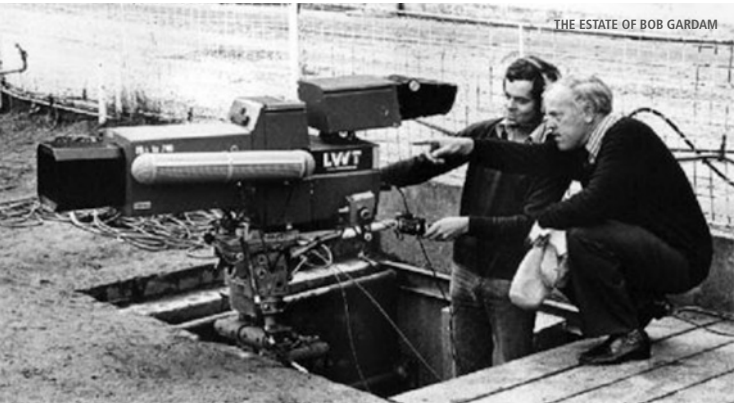
The financial arrangements for televising sport on the ITV Network between the ITV companies were on a 'quid pro quo' basis. Therefore, OB units from ATV, Yorkshire, Granada and LWT would be in regular operation (ATV and Yorkshire had two OB scanners each, but Granada and LWT just one each until the mid-1970s). Other ITV companies could be called upon for support too, in particular Southern, HTV, Tyne Tees, Anglia and STV, which each had one OB scanner.

Thames TV OBs had the largest fleet in ITV but, being a 'weekday' only company, Sport was not its main service provision and it focused mainly on coverage of Royal and State occasions, which tended to occur during the week. Therefore, Thames only assisted with live networked sport if the event straddled both weekdays and a weekend. For example, for the Derby, or if the FA Cup Final had a weekday replay, then the LWT crew that had provided the OB coverage for the previous Saturday's match would be pulled out and Thames TV OBs would move in to provide the coverage.

This weekend/weekday service demarcation even extended to studios so that, for example, if *World of Sport* was on a Bank Holiday Monday, then the presentation would be switched from LWT's Wembley/South Bank Studios to Thames TV's Euston Road Studios, although the programme would still be presented by Dickie Davies, even though he was an LWT employee!

ITV Sport goes exclusive (ideally) and live!

World of Sport, which had been created 20 years earlier by LWT's Managing Director Brian Tesler at ABC TV, was finally laid to rest in 1985. The older downmarket audience profile was not what the new-look ITV Network required. Also, by this time, coverage of horse racing had moved to Channel 4



Bob Gardam discusses shots with the cameraman in the 'Gardam Pit' at Wembley. The camera is an IVC 7000s, which replaced the EMI 2001 originally used in the pit

Keeping the interest alive

By the mid-1980s, both the BBC and LWT had decided that the popularity of recorded football was waning. The way to restore the excitement, it was thought, was to move to televising 'live' games. After much wrangling, LWT secured the 'live' contract rights from the Football League, although these were not exclusive at this time.

The first live match under the new banner *The Big Match Live* was broadcast in September 1983, the first game being Tottenham vs Notts Forest. Not the most thrilling match as it turned out (Tottenham won 2-1), but no matter as it was live!

Interestingly, it was ITV (ABC TV) that, on a Saturday evening way back in 1960, had broadcast the first ever televised football match. This had been transmitted under the banner *The Big Game* – 4 years before the start of *Match of the Day* – and covered Blackpool vs Bolton Wanderers at Bloomfield Road. Although the match kicked off at 6.50pm, the broadcast itself had been delayed until 7.30pm to give enough time for any fans who had attended the earlier match, which had kicked off at 3.00pm, to get home to view the match on the telly.

Bringing in the new

With live football's home now fully established on ITV, and as coverage developed through the 1980s, LWT's new Managing Director, Greg Dyke, wanted the sport to be filmed in a new way, with lots of low angles and closeup shots, using a more multicamera approach in general. Whilst this was potentially fine for any match played in London, where the OB would be fulfilled by an LWT crew and facilities, it would be problematic

and, as racing was the main live sport component of *World of Sport*, this led to the demise of the popular betting favourite the ITV Seven.

John Birt, LWT's Director of Programmes, now wanted sports coverage that was live and exclusive, as opposed to recorded and shared with other broadcasters. This was partly as a result of pressure from advertisers, mainly driven by the exclusive sports programming being assembled on the then fledgling satellite channels.

Two particular sports now became the main focus of LWT's programming: athletics and football. Throughout the 1980s, LWT had wisely been aware that events such as running and athletics were becoming increasingly popular with UK audiences. In 1985, the company decided to bid for the contract to cover British Athletics, which, up to that point, had been in the hands of the BBC. The contract was for three years, during which time, LWT covered the AAA Championships, Talbot Games, Westminster Mile and World Cross Country Championships, all on behalf of ITV Sport.

However, it would prove a lot harder to secure exclusive live football than athletics. Problems ensued between LWT and the ITV Network although for a different reason from in the early 1970s, when LWT's OB fleet was not large enough to take on the task of regular live football. It certainly was more than capable because, by the mid-1980s, LWT's OB fleet had grown to be one of the largest in ITV, except perhaps for Central TV and Thames TV. The issue this time was one of the costs of the broadcasting rights.



A young Fred Dinenage in the World of Sport Studio at Wembley, looking somewhat bemused as he tries to understand the results the computer has just produced. An 'ITV Sport' branded EMI 2001 tries to focus on the teleprinter that's meant to be printing out the eagerly anticipated results

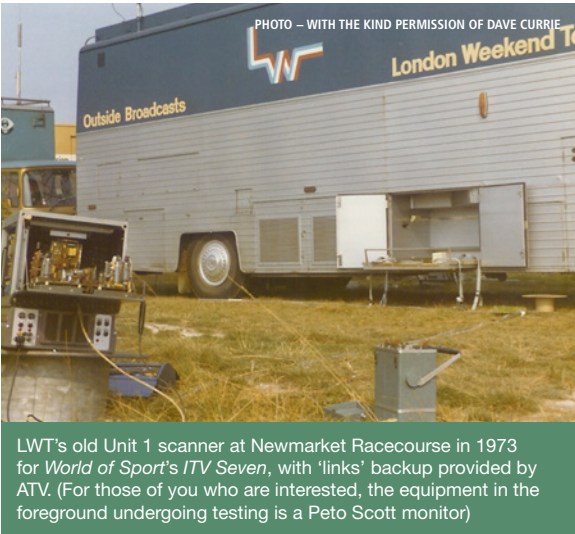
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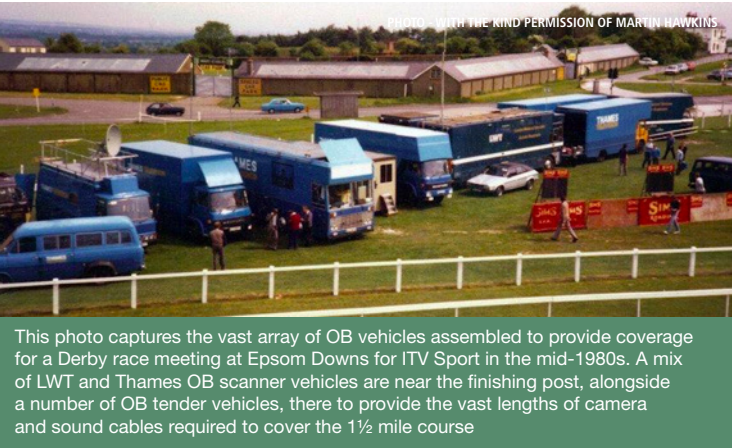
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LWT's old Unit 1 scanner at Newmarket Racecourse in 1973 for *World of Sport's* ITV Seven, with 'links' backup provided by ATV. (For those of you who are interested, the equipment in the foreground undergoing testing is a Peto Scott monitor)

for any games played further afield. The issue with this setup was that any OB in the regions would be provided by one of the ITV franchise contractors, and therefore there could only be very limited overall control of matters such as on-air presentation and direction of the live programmes.

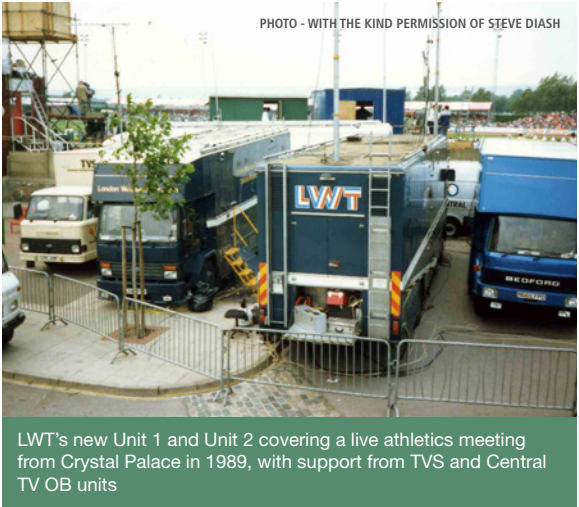
Things finally came to a head and, perhaps ironically, a camera crew happened to capture one particular tête-à-tête, which played out in front of them as they were filming a programme for Yorkshire Television. *One Day in the Life of Television* was a two-hour documentary taking a behind-the-scenes look at the production, reception and marketing of British television; multiple film crews had been deployed to record the real-life programming decisions that were made daily across the main networks, and it involved both the BBC and ITV.



This photo captures the vast array of OB vehicles assembled to provide coverage for a Derby race meeting at Epsom Downs for ITV Sport in the mid-1980s. A mix of LWT and Thames OB scanner vehicles are near the finishing post, alongside a number of OB tender vehicles, there to provide the vast lengths of camera and sound cables required to cover the 1½ mile course

The scene in question shows Greg Dyke in discussion with LWT's Controller of Sport, John Bromley, about a particular live Manchester derby that had just been covered from Old Trafford. Greg stated that all the camera angles had been wrong and the OB crew hadn't adhered to the new way of presenting live football, to which John Bromley replied robustly that this was all the Granada OB crew's fault: *"I told them what we wanted, but they never listened!"* An interesting aside worth mentioning in light of this particular exchange is that it was John (whilst still at LWT), who chose Granada's Elton Welsby to present the ITV network's new live football coverage under the banner of *The Match* – clearly he must have held Granada's presentation abilities in higher regard than he did their pictures!

It was this exchange, along with other similar instances, which served to be the catalyst that eventually led, a few years later, to the decision to use the same OB crews for all live matches, irrespective of which ITV region the live match was being played in. ITV's football coverage continued to expand throughout the 1980s, particularly after it won exclusive football league rights in 1988, when *The Big Match* was renamed to simply *The Match*. That same year, ITV paid £44 million to finally secure all exclusive rights to be sole broadcaster of top-flight football, in what became known in the press as 'Snatch of the Day'. Up to this point, the rights for the football league had previously been shared between ITV and BBC, but it was actually ITV's dogged determination to show 'exclusive' live football that inflated the bid price by so much.



Outsourcing the outside broadcasts

In light of this, ITV finally saw the perfect opportunity to outsource the OB production of *The Match*, so as to achieve the required presentation consistency as well as the new expanded technical requirements related to the overall production of the programme. As a result, ITV Sport prepared a tender document for the provision of live coverage for *The Match*, which was to include 21 football league matches to be broadcast live on ITV on Sunday afternoons. The tender was sent to those OB facilities companies that had been identified as potentially capable of providing the required coverage, including VTR, slow-motion, pitchside cameras, as well as three interview cameras in a purpose-built studio in the stadium gantry. The tender was eventually won by Thames Television OBs, who commenced their first live *Match* on 29 October 1989 with Liverpool vs Tottenham at Anfield (Liverpool won 2–1). Subsequently, the Thames crew travelled all round the country for the next three years.

For Thames Television, the timing of the tender document was perfect as, although the OB market had been more or less deregulated in that each 'tender' had to be offered out on the open market, the independent OB sector was still fledgling in 1989 and none of the indies had the required capability to fully answer the tender brief. Thames, as mentioned, still had the largest OB fleet in the UK outside the BBC. Also, what was recognised to be in Thames' favour was a willingness to reconfigure some of its OB trucks technically, at great expense, to answer the brief.

After three years, ITV lost the rights for the new Premier League to British Sky Broadcasting and the BBC in 1992.

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The end of ITV individual franchise holder OB departments

By the early 1990s, the television industry in general increasingly comprised individual independent production companies, a move largely instigated by the launch of Channel 4 as a 'publisher broadcaster' with no studio or OB facilities of its own. This had been further driven by Carlton TV, which won the ITV London weekday franchise as a 'publisher broadcaster' in 1992, thereby displacing Thames. LWT saw this as an opportunity to move into hiring out facilities and marketing its South Bank studios as an independent TV production facility, subsequently renamed 'The London Studios'.

The same approach wouldn't work for OBs though, because of the greater competition in the sector with Thames TV's large OB fleet (subsequently including Anglia TV's fleet as well) now available for hire under the 'Teddington Mobiles' banner. In addition, Carlton already had a small OB fleet and would soon take over Central TV with its much larger fleet, and subsequently the two would merge to form O21 Mobiles. Alongside this, in support of the new 'indie sector', all major sporting events now had to be put out to tender.

Consequently, LWT decided to sell off its OB fleet to Arena Mobiles, a new OB operation started in 1989 by Richard Yeowart. Originally based near Gatwick in Sussex and now in Redhill, Surrey, Arena bought some of the LWT OB fleet, including the Unit 1 scanner and other support vehicles. In a semi-formal arrangement with LWT, it was agreed that Arena would be used for its ongoing OB requirements related to Drama and Sport.



One of Thames Television's Philips LDK 5 cameras in position at Anfield



Thanks

A special thanks to the many ex-LWT OB crew personnel who have related many great memories and anecdotes, as well as sharing rare photos of the golden days of LWT / ITV Sport, in the course of this research, the like of which has not been attempted before.

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Fact file

Phil Nott is a trustee of the Broadcasting Engineering Conservation Group (BECG), which is a group of dedicated individuals who rescue and restore historically significant broadcast equipment. Over the years, the BECG has collected a large amount of equipment which it aims to use to present television history to the public by various means, going forward. Currently, the BECG's focus is mainly on outside broadcast vehicles and TV camera restoration, returning them to a state where they will once again be able to undertake live and recorded programming.

BECG is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and all donations are welcome to enable it to continue its mission to restore TV's glorious past for future generations.

To find out more about the BECG or to donate, visit: [website: becg.org.uk](http://website:becg.org.uk)

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