

“We must do this again”

Televising The Ryder Cup 2014

Ninety-four years ago, the first unofficial golfing contest between Great Britain and The United States was held at Gleneagles. Five years later, in 1926, a spectator at the second challenge in Wentworth enthused in the clubhouse bar afterwards: “We must do this again!” His name was Samuel Ryder, and the inaugural competition bearing his name took place the following year. The Ryder Cup visited the famous Perthshire resort in the autumn of

2014, for the latest chapter in the history of a tournament that has become one of the most tense and emotional dramas in sport. With a global audience watching, excellence in the television coverage is the minimum expectation, so what is involved in bringing this giant of the sporting calendar to our screens? Camera supervisors Keith Gibson and Rick Fox, and technical manager Hamish Greig share their insights with Zerb ...

In 2014 the ‘World Feed’ coverage of The Ryder Cup was provided by European Tour Productions and facilitated by CTV Outside Broadcasts. In addition, CTV serviced the needs of other broadcasters, including the BBC, the Golf Channel and TNT, along with facilities to other organisations connected to the event. Television rights in Europe and the United States are held by Sky and NBC respectively, and outside broadcast companies Telegenic and Visions looked after their specific requirements on site. Visions worked with the Americans, while Telegenic provided the facilities for Sky, which included studio presentation cameras, some RF cameras and, notably, 4K coverage from cameras on some of the holes.

Trans-Atlantic planning

For GTC member Keith Gibson, CTV’s camera supervisor, involvement with the event began around the time of The Open Golf Championship at Hoylake in July. Planning by the producer, director and unit managers had started some time before, which included on-site meetings with the NBC director to determine camera positions and tower heights. “My involvement started when I received a camera plan from Jim Storey, the World Feed Director. I didn’t start work on it until after The Open, but then transferred the information from Jim’s plan onto the CTV camera sheet format normally used for the golf throughout the year. This format combines the necessary production and technical information relevant to each camera.”

Meanwhile across the Atlantic, Rick Fox, senior cameraman and ‘FAX TD’ (facilities technical director) at NBC Golf, was similarly preoccupied with camera plans. “Although I don’t do the surveys of the golf courses and get involved with the actual planning of the camera positions (that is all handled during extensive surveys by our executive producer Tommy Roy and director Doug Grabert), I do get involved from that point on with the actual implementation of the setup.”



A giant replica of the famous trophy stands guard at The Harris Pavilion

For CTV technical director Hamish Greig, however, discussions had begun much, much earlier. “One of the most challenging aspects of the Gleneagles Ryder Cup was to engineer all the required cabling and RF prerequisites when you are situated in a compound that is just under 2km away from the 1st tee (T) and across public roads. For the cabling, over winter, we had three main fibre pipes installed to three locations on the course – 592 cores to the 1st fairway (F) hub and 192 cores to 6th green (G) and 16th fairway hubs respectively. From these hubs we further extended cores over ground to create camera, sound and RF hubs as required at 3T, 9G, 14G and 18F. At the hubs we installed our own purpose-built camera TEDs (camera interface over two fibres), of which we used over 110 TEDs to service CTV clients’ camera cables, plus six audio Hydra systems for all our on-course stereo FX mics.”





Multi-camera on a grand scale!

Keith Gibson had 53 CTV cameras on the course, broken down as follows:

- 6 RF cameras with 22x lenses
- 1 Xmo (RF camera) with 22x lens
- 1 Steadicam (RF camera) with 14x lens
- 1 GF-9 Jib (cabled) with 14x lens
- 44 cabled cameras:
 - 22 box lenses, mainly 86x
 - 16 40x lenses
 - Six 22x and two 11x lenses



IMAGES:

- 1 Guy Chadwick using a HJ40 lens
- 2 Russell Dawson at work in the sub mix gallery
- 3 16th Fairway: Tigger Gray (left) at his first Ryder Cup and Andrew MacClenaghan
- 4 Graham Keyte's Gator with GF-9 Jib in hi-vis travel mode
- 5 12-channel camera hub with audio Hydra interface above
- 6 The production gallery hot seats
- 7 Steadicam RF crew – L to R: assistant Chris Crowe, operator Phil Walker and rigger Jim Ritchie



The surrounding countryside at Gleneagles made a great backdrop to the event but, beautiful as it is, the hills and hollows are not very RF friendly!

Keith Gibson explains: "A couple of the tee cameras had the option of a 22x or an 11x, which is why the total number of lenses doesn't tally with the number of cameras. We had big lens cameras on towers as the main coverage at the greens, and big lenses on the four crane cameras (cherry pickers). The 40x lenses were used on fairways and low cameras on the greens, with most of these commuting between positions. The 22x and 11x lenses were mainly used looking from behind various tees, with one 22x camera starting at the practice putting green, followed by two fairway positions. The tee cameras were used in conjunction with the Pro-Tracer system (www.protracer.se). The Pro-Tracer cameras were mounted on vertical specially fabricated scaffold tubes with a pod adaptor and leveller. The Sony camera plate bolted straight onto the leveller using it to tilt the camera down.

For the World Feed coverage, we had 44 camera operators, some of whom commuted between pre-rigged, fixed camera positions. In addition, we had four assistants and myself, as non-operational supervisor. I was assisted by two other supervisors: Phil Gilbride looked after the RF cameras and Dave Matthews was responsible for the cranes. The six RF cameras were double-crewed on the first two days, as they are particularly long, with two rounds a day – one each of the foursomes and fourballs. Six of the RF cameramen moved to cabled cameras for the singles matches on the Sunday."

For the US coverage, Rick Fox's NBC crew had operators at all the greens sharing the towers with the World Feed cameras,

plus a number of fairway and low camera positions. They also had their own team of RF camera operators and studio crew. The output of both teams of RF cameras was shared by NBC and the World Feed, but the Perthshire countryside isn't the ideal environment to provide uninterrupted signals to the worldwide audience. As Keith Gibson explains: "The Ryder Cup is normally on an inland course, not a seaside links course. The surrounding countryside at Gleneagles made a great backdrop to the event but, beautiful as it is, the hills and hollows are not very RF friendly! The course covers a very large area, which made getting around very time-consuming, compounded by the enormous crowds during the event. We had to have a number of 'receive and transmit' points for the RF cameras and radio talkback." Hamish Greig elaborates: "RF was a huge challenge. We had four main RF cranes for a combination of either: camera receives, talkback transmit and receive, or high power radio mic reception for 100% course coverage. We had a 44m crane at 6G, a 72m crane at 3T, a 72m crane at 16F and a 56m crane in the TV compound. For CTV's clients we provided:

- 39 duplex radio talkback channels plus 340 radios
- 33 high power radio mic kits for either commentator use or FX mic coverage
- 14 radio cameras."

Yep ... keep track of that lot at the derig (or 'teardown' as our colleagues across the pond would say)!

Differing styles

From the camera operators' point of view, the foursomes and fourball formats on the first two days of competition don't make a huge difference to the way in which play is covered compared to the more familiar singles golf format. Matchplay, however, means that putts can be conceded, so

it is important to keep an eye on all the players as well as covering the player putting on the green, in case a 'game-changing' moment occurs.

While the approach and practice to covering golf is very similar in Europe and the USA, small differences are apparent. Rick Fox explains: "There are some differences in the coverage between the European channels and the American network (NBC). As an NBC cameraman, and especially when we travel overseas, we tend to take fewer breaks than our European counterparts, and we normally do two cameras each due to the shortened field of golfers. For example, in Scotland this past year, I covered holes 9 and 18. We tend to take our breaks while transitioning from hole to hole, if possible.

"As for the coverage, I have noticed over the years that the European cameramen tend to follow the ball in flight by zooming out – and then zoom into the ball after it lands. In the USA we tend to zoom in to the ball in flight and zoom

Rick Fox

"It was a very quiet and reserved event from our point of view. We all commented on how respectful and nice the spectators were to all of us. While talking to a policeman one day, he asked me what I did back in America. I explained that I was a sports camera operator for a television network in New York City and told him how I travelled the world covering various sporting events, including the Olympics. He then told me I was "Leaving the leaf of railey". It took me a few moments, but I finally realised he meant I was "Living the life of Reilly"... I'm sure he got a kick out of my Philadelphia accent too!

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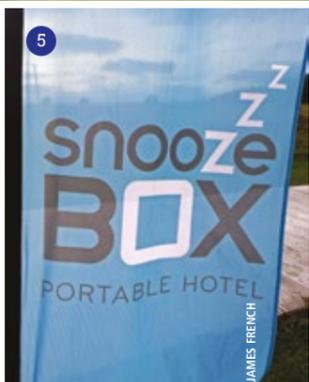
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IMAGES:

- 1 Above the 17th green
- 2 It wasn't just the spectators showing their support - this for the European side
- 3 ... and here for the Americans
- 4 Overnight accommodation or POW camp?
- 5 Actually the Snoozeboxes were very comfortable and great for early starts



I am sure 4K will become increasingly popular as the 'next big thing' in the quality of TV coverage and will become more prevalent as time goes on.

out to show the relationship of the ball to the pin once the ball lands.

4K is not currently a huge part of any golf coverage that I know of in the USA. I was first introduced to the quality of 4K pictures while covering the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, earlier this year. I am sure, however, that 4K will become increasingly popular as the 'next big thing' in the quality of TV coverage and will become more prevalent as time goes on."

Keeping track of everything

Managing such large quantities of camera and other equipment is clearly a major undertaking, so how do the supervisors keep track of everything, including breakdowns,

swap-outs and all the daily adjustments to plans that keep the coverage going? Keith Gibson explains his method: "The camera department had a portacabin for an office next to a marquee-type tent, about 12m square. The CTV Head of Cameras, Dave White, was the mainstay looking after and organising the kit, both with the prep at CTV's base and on site at Gleneagles. We were able to put together individual camera kits in the tent prior to taking them out onto the course, all the big lenses being rigged in position for the duration. The other cabled cameras were assembled in the tent and went out onto the course daily, being stored overnight in the tent. On the Sunday, all the cameras came back to the tent before being loaded onto various trucks for transport to the next golf job, the Dunhill Cup, which would be held across the three courses of St Andrews, Carnoustie and Kingsbarns. One truck with the surplus equipment returned to CTV's base. Everything came off the course on the Sunday evening, but some of the truck loading was left until the Monday morning.

Snoozebox vs Hilton

There is, of course, much more to working on an event of the Ryder Cup's magnitude than just filming the protagonists on the fairways and greens. It's fair to say that members of the opposing continents' crews had a rather different experience of staying in Scotland. Most of the UK crew stayed at the Premier Inn in Stirling but those who were there for the rig and the RF camera crew stayed in Snoozeboxes, an ingenious 'portable hotel' that is erected on site (www.snoozebox.com/home/index.html#welcome).

Ed Nash

I was filming for PGA Turner. I've worked on golf regularly, but never with an atmosphere like this - it was truly electric.

On the first morning, out of the haze, a terrified deer bolted past us, up the 1st fairway to the tee, where the golfers were waiting. A wave of noise at the shock of seeing this gave way to cheering and clapping. A magical moment to kick off this amazing event!

It ended just as memorably. The Ryder Cup is a 'free-for-all' at its conclusion. We'd just interviewed Jamie Donaldson about his winning wedge shot, with players still hitting up to the green, when everyone suddenly backed away, leaving me alone. I didn't see the shot, but I knew it was headed straight for me. The ball landed, luckily about a metre away. Chaos began. The media rushed in and suddenly I was getting soaked with bubbly, camera held above my head, right at the heart of the scrum. It was fantastic madness and I was so glad to be involved. I've done a lot of memorable jobs, but the Ryder Cup is definitely up there with the best of them.

Outside Broadcasts for Winners



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IMAGES:

- 1 Some of the 2014 production team
- 2 Crew receive their planning sheets in the equipment marquee
- 3 Dawn breaks over the pavilions
- 4 The peace of the Perthshire countryside ... soon to be shattered by thousands of exuberant spectators
- 5 The galleries around every green were packed
- 6 A beautiful sight to greet the Snoozeboxers



It was lovely to see the sun rise over the hills around the course, in what at that time of the day, were very peaceful surroundings.

Keith Gibson: "With the early starts and long days, staying next to the compound was a huge advantage. It was good for me as I was able to go out on the course before breakfast on a couple of mornings to check things while it was still very quiet. It was lovely to see the sun rise over the hills around the course, in what at that time of the day, were very peaceful surroundings."

Meanwhile, the US crew were being bussed into Glasgow each night. Rick Fox describes this: "Our accommodation was actually quite good, with no complaints from the crew as far as I know. We stayed at the Hilton in the centre

of Glasgow and found it to be very nice from beginning to end. Although it sounds like it had some advantages, the Snoozebox option wasn't available to us due to union and company regulations.

Established friendships

Since the introduction of European golfers to the tournament in 1979, The Ryder Cup has become a treasure for the viewing public on both sides of the Atlantic. It is also a special time for the camera crews, as Rick Fox illustrates: "The very best part of the entire trip for me was running into old friends that I only see every two years or so. Some of the European broadcasters are old friends of mine that I have known since about 1992. Keith Gibson tops my list, but there are others: Nick, Badger, Peter, Roger, Steve – all only first names – but when you've known old friends like these for almost 25 years, first names are all you need."

Fact File



Keith Gibson: Freelance for about 35 years having started in the business at Television Centre followed by BBC Outside Broadcasts.



Rick Fox: After 14 years working for a small TV station in Philadelphia, Rick joined NBC in New York as a cameraman in 1984, working predominantly in the studio/field division. Although he doesn't play golf, over the last 30 years he has operated in every camera position on the course, and is NBC's Facilities Technical Director for golf coverage.



Hamish Greig: In 1986, after 11 years working abroad, Hamish Greig joined CTV (Carlton), and four years later took over technical management of large projects such as the Barcelona, Lillehammer, Athens and Torino Olympics. In 1992 he pioneered the first CTV flypacks for European Tour productions of golf. Since 1996 Hamish has been Director of Engineering for CTV's OB fleet, overseeing builds, budgeting, engineering operations, projects and the technical crewing of CTV's fleet and business.