

Orienteering on TV – great potential

BY BJÖRN PERSSON

Orienteering is rapidly developing into a sport for television. The last 6 years have seen a number of high-quality TV productions.

In 2008, the World Orienteering Championships productions were made by National Czech Television with Karel Jonak as host broadcaster director. Jonak is a very experienced sports producer with FIS Nordic World Ski Championship, FIBA World Championship for Women, World Cup events in skiing, cycling, gymnastics, volleyball and several Olympic Games to his credit. He is the recipient of two prestigious awards from Fédération Internationale Cinéma Télévision Sportifs (FICTS) Sport Movies & TV Challenge.

A new model for production

Karel Jonak has been producing orienteering on TV since 2007 and he is enthusiastic about recent developments in orienteering



Olav Lundanes was interviewed by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation after his first World Championship gold.

PHOTO: WOC2010

broadcasting in Czech Republic.

“For us, the catalyst was the successful live TV production of the World Championships 2008. Thanks to the cooperation between the head office of Czech TV, the organising committee, course setters and others, we realised our vision of creating a new model for live TV production of orienteering. Since then, another two World Championships have been successfully televised, which has meant that TV stations have begun to recognise that orienteering is attractive to a TV audience.”

No room for being average

Jonak had little experience of orienteering when he began to plan the World Orienteering Championships production for 2008. He had intended to take a look at earlier TV productions of orienteering and then decide what to do. However, he quickly found out that there were few examples of complex orienteering productions. Therefore, he decided to basically create the production model from scratch.

“What I try to avoid is being average. I start planning as early as possible

Jonak believes that orienteering can compete with established and attractive TV sports.

and I am always thinking about the added value of the production. A good relationship between TV, course planners and the organising committee saves money and can prevent many problems. Then you need emotions, nice pictures and the story. To give you an example, the drama at the World Orienteering Championships relay has in the last three years been beyond price.”

A regular TV sport

Nowadays the Czech Orienteering Championships are broadcast regularly and the sprint is always live. Both the sprint and middle distance from this year's World Orienteering Championships featured in the broadcasting schedule. A couple of months ago Czech TV started preparations for next year's World Cup.

“I am proud to tell you that orienteering has become a regular TV sport in the Czech Republic”, Karel Jonak says.

A bright future

According to Jonak, there is nothing to stop orienteering from becoming even more visible on TV. The viewer ratings of orienteering in the Czech Republic are already equal to basketball, volleyball, and horse racing. And it is not only on TV that orienteering is popular, Karel Jonak points out.



“We should not forget the internet audience. The situation has changed and live TV is not the only means of viewing TV programs. Each orienteering competition is viewed by between 20 and 30 thousand people on the Czech TV website.”

Jonak believes that orienteering has great potential and a bright future as a sport for live TV.

“The fact that you simply cannot tell the story just by using TV cameras gives you the possibility to vary the product and utilise multi-media. Using GPS tracking and other technologies in the right way we can create a unique and attractive mixture for the TV audience. Of course, you have to educate the TV spectators to watch orienteering: there should be an all year TV production model to keep the sport at the forefront of people's minds and to ensure continuity. All in all, I am very confident that orienteering can be as attractive for TV as, for example, biathlon or cross country skiing.”

Yle believes in orienteering

Markku Jylhäsalu, Head of Sport at Finland's national public service broadcasting company, Yle, agrees with Karel Jonak about the potential of orienteering as a TV sport.

“Orienteering is an interesting sport with great values. In Finland it attracts a large audience: the World Orienteering Championships 2010 had more than 220 000 viewers. This is over 20% of the market share and that is a really good result.”

The World Orienteering Championships attracted a larger audience in Finland than the traditionally very popular Formula 1 and UEFA Champions League.

On the right track

Markku Jylhäsalu compliments recent developments in orienteering that have made the sport more spectator friendly. According to Jylhäsalu, TV broadcasts of

orienteering have significantly improved and today's course planners take TV well into account.

“Orienteering has really developed into a good sport for TV”, Jylhäsalu says.

In addition to the World Orienteering Championships, Yle, this year, broadcast an all night live production of the Jukola relay and all three World Cup events of the Nordic Orienteering Tour. “We aim to show as much orienteering in the future”, Jylhäsalu confirms. In 2013, Yle will broadcast all finals of the World Orienteering Championships in Finland.

“The World Championships in Finland are a big challenge for both the organiser and Yle. We are going to utilise all available tools and expertise to reveal what is happening in the forest. We are eager to develop orienteering broadcasting.”

