

Ten tips for Play-by-Play

Kevin Harlan, Bob Costas, Jim Nantz type stuff!

1: Game opening: Announce your presence with authority!

This is the first thing most listeners will hear from you, so it's vital that right away, they trust what you're saying. Don't give some off the wall intro if your team is expected to win big. In sports, they say to win humbly; same thing in broadcasting. If it IS a big game, your viewer should know it by your tone and what your saying. Be honest and truthful in your opening, and your viewers will trust what you're saying the rest of the game.

Our intro from the 8 man All Star Football game, June 2015...

In Nebraska, football is a way of life. They sell out the big stadium on fall Saturday's in Lincoln. And, kids, even from the small towns - where 8-man football is the game - dream of someday playing for their home state Cornhuskers.

Their names fill the past of those great Nebraska teams: Steinkuhler, Conneally, Mackovicka, Shanle. Today, some of the names still fill roster spots at the game's highest level: Ott, Rath, Bazata.

Since 1978, the best 8 man players in the state have congregated in Hastings to showcase the little games talent. Today is no different. And, now, these players will play the game they grew up with one last time. This, is the Sertoma 8-Man All-Star Game on strivsports.com.

2. Player and Team ID: Who's in the game?

Hugely important once you are into the game, is telling us who's in the game. Yes, video helps, but most of the people watching don't have a roster in front of them. Unless that person has been part of the team, like, yesterday, they need to know who is out there. Get to know both rosters very well. I like to highlight starters on football, so I know if the guy who made the play is a starter or sub immediately. Same with bball. It also breaks up looking at an entire roster.

Also, not everyone viewing the game knows a lot about the game. Who's the red team? Who's in green? Who's got the long socks when everyone else has short? Those kind of descriptions will help people retain names and teams much quicker and you as the broadcaster will too.

3. Location, location, location: Where is everybody?

Using video makes it much easier, but we don't always have that, especially if you go into radio. There are plenty of landmarks on all surfaces to help you out. Football has yard lines, hash marks, the numbers, pylons, midfield logos and such to help you out. An extra note for FB, when talking about a tackle, it's easier to say "He gets across the 20 and is stopped there." As you get ready for the next snap, you can say something like, "From the 22, it's second and 4." Basketball gets more interesting when you can add where the players are on the floor, like right elbow, wing left side, near corner, under the hoop, baseline, mid court, etc. I always describe a play as if I were looking from behind the offense, especially if I start talking about right and left a lot. Your viewer will see that more clearly, but a listener needs that perspective.



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4. Score and time: Can't do it enough

The verbal call of the time remaining and the score can't be overstated enough. It's literally the single most important thing you can say, ESPECIALLY if you don't have video. It's the easiest thing to overlook, and will ALWAYS be the first thing people will comment on. Mitch Holtus, voice of the Chiefs, is awesome at it. Say it every 3 plays in FB. Every other trip up the floor in bball and definitely after every score. Every at bat in softball/baseball. It's also a great way to transition into and out of commercial breaks.

5. Voice Quality and Excitement: Can you hear me NOW?!?!

They go hand in hand. Can the audience understand what you're saying, and why you sound the way you do. For example, a 2 handed dunk over a player in the first quarter SHOULD be more exciting than a lay up at the end of a blow out. But, you don't want to yell out of your shoes and distort the audio.

Also be wary of too much hyperbole, as in, one player doesn't always play like another. Not every receiver tries to make an Odell Beckham catch every time. Not every running back is as tough as Rex Burkhead. Not every bball player is as good as LeBron. Every great once in a while, someone at the HS level might "make a catch that would make Jordan smile." Even better than Jordan, use some names from your school. "We haven't seen a shooter like that since Jason Glock!" Also, schools tend to have siblings or even mom and dad or aunts and uncles that played. The more you can relate them all together, the better.

6. Speed and Clarity: canyouhearmeNOW

This kind of goes back to player and team identification, but it boils down to, can you get your thoughts out quickly, so as to not bog down the play, and clearly, so people understand quickly what you're trying to get across. The better you know the rosters and players and coaches, the faster you can say when they make a play. The better you know the sport you're covering, the faster you can describe what's going on.

Uhh, and uhh, don't say uhhh, too much. This can take years to get through, and I still do it a lot with interviews. Say what you want to say, don't over think it. If you can't think of what to say, don't talk.

7. Partner transition: Don't Can try you to hear talk me over now each ?? other. (now read every other word.)

The worst thing to do with a duo is talk over each other. Clearly, you both have something to say, but it can't be at the same time. I would highly suggest designating one person as the play by play, and one person as the color commentator. PbP is your main talker, describing the action and really focusing in on the players and coaches during games. Your "color" is there to brighten up the broadcast, by being able to drop in fun stats or other notes. A good PbP guy will "walk" his color into a comment when he's ready; the color shouldn't really "jump in" on top of the PbP. Knowing each other well off the mic, will help you converse on the mic.



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8. Prepare to prepare

It's easy to be nervous when going on air, whether its recorded for play back or live to the world. The best way to avoid the nerves, is to be as absolutely prepared. Get ahold of both teams rosters well ahead of time. Many coaches will also let you see some stats as well. You can glean from those stats who is most likely to contribute early and often. Getting the starting line up and making notes about key players is vital to being able get that information out during the broadcast.

9. Be smooth

Don't. Try. To. Talk. Like. Every. Word. Is. The. End. Of. Your. Sentence. (that's even weird to type!) Try to let your words flow to the completion of your thought. Once you've completed that thought, you're done! Don't feel like you need to always expand on what you or your partner just said. It's ok to move on.

10. Be YOU

If you are funny and outgoing, let that come through. If you are a little more stoic and down-to-business, go for that. It's very easy to tell if someone is "faking" excitement or trying to sound like someone else. Let your personality shine, and your audience will trust in your broadcast.

