FASTER HIGHER STRONGER

That same year, the newly reborn medium of British television faced its first major international event as London hosted the Olympics. A symbol of the world going back to some sort of normal, with its countries coming together in the spirit of friendly competition, after six years of the distinctly unfriendly sort. The world was certainly spiritually ready for some Olympics. However, most of it was also in the process of rebuilding. It was questionable whether much of the world, if any of it, would be physically prepared for such a thing, particularly the host nation.

One of the first things Haley did when the Games began to loom large was to write to the Government to ask directly whether or not they could guarantee the damn things happening on schedule, or at all, in the first place. There was an element of unspoken hope that it wasn't, thus saving the BBC a lot of time and trouble, not to mention money and manpower. That being the case, Haley was to be disappointed when he heard back from the Secretary for Overseas Trade - future Prime Minister Harold Wilson - that the Government was committed to staging the games on time.

The principle Attlee and company were working under was that you had to spend money to make money. Or as Deputy Prime Minister Herbert Morrison put it, "There are few better ways of making such a net contribution to the balance of payments with so little offset in the form of imported materials." The country, having fought the biggest war in history for longer than almost anyone (who didn't lose) was severely brassic. The Olympics represented a heaven-sent opportunity to generate some cold, hard cash with which to rebuild the nation. Of course, it meant spending substantial amounts of the same stuff, to say nothing of the insanely complex logistics, but as long as they didn't mess anything up on a massive scale, it would bring in more, much more, than it cost. Mostly from tourism, that growth industry first discovered by Frederick Ogilvie.

So Haley really had no choice but to break some new ground in the audio-visual medium. These were to be the games of the XIVth Olympiad, and while not quite the first in the television era, they would be the first that had the opportunity to take full advantage of the medium. The previous Olympics, twelve years earlier in the newly-distant and alien world of Nazi Berlin, had been filmed by Leni Riefenstahl and others for a primitive form of television broadcasting, but it was almost exclusively a propaganda exercise. The broadcast signals went no further than some special invitation-only screenings in Potsdam and a few private TV sets owned by prominent Nazi officials. Now, symbolically enough, the literal torch passed to Britain, and London 1948 in its way was no less a piece of propaganda. They'd lost and we'd won and it was our turn to show them how it was done.

This naturally meant using, or at least identifying, the latest in outside broadcasting technology.

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Before the war, such things were a massive pain in the arse, involving colossal, cumbersome and often noisy cine-cameras and other pieces of equipment that had to be lugged around like the stones that made the Pyramids. Even in 1948, everything was still shot on extremely ephemeral film stock for one-time-only transmission (recordings only became truly viable almost a decade later with the dawn of a rudimentary videotape). However, after years of tireless research at Marconi and EMI, the days of hauling gargantuan movie cameras around for televisual purposes were coming to an end, and an edition of Newsreel around the start of the Games proudly showed off the all-new Emitron rig, which was not only far smaller - downright portable, in fact, folding up neatly into a box fitting snugly in the back of a van - but more efficient than a standard cine. Instead of a standard optical viewfinder, it had a miniature cathode ray tube system, using tiny valves made possible by adapting technology originally developed during the war for radar. Partly as a result, it was able to work in far dimmer light than a cine-camera - particularly useful before floodlights were commonplace.

And then there were those vans themselves, mobile control rooms equipped with the most state of the art technology available. They even had chairs now, where pre-war they'd had to stand around like paupers. Most importantly, on the roof was a standard television aerial, linking the van people with both Wembley and Alexandra Palace, enabling the techies there to cut smoothly from the one to the other without pausing and cutting to black for five minutes while they were faffing around trying to switch the feeds over manually, as had happened frequently in Berlin twelve years earlier. If the Nazis thought they were so impressive, with Leni Riefenstahl's smash cuts, underwater camera and seminal cinema documentary, the newly victorious British were now showing them what could be done on a practical, daily basis, without having to make a big cinematic fuss over everything.

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