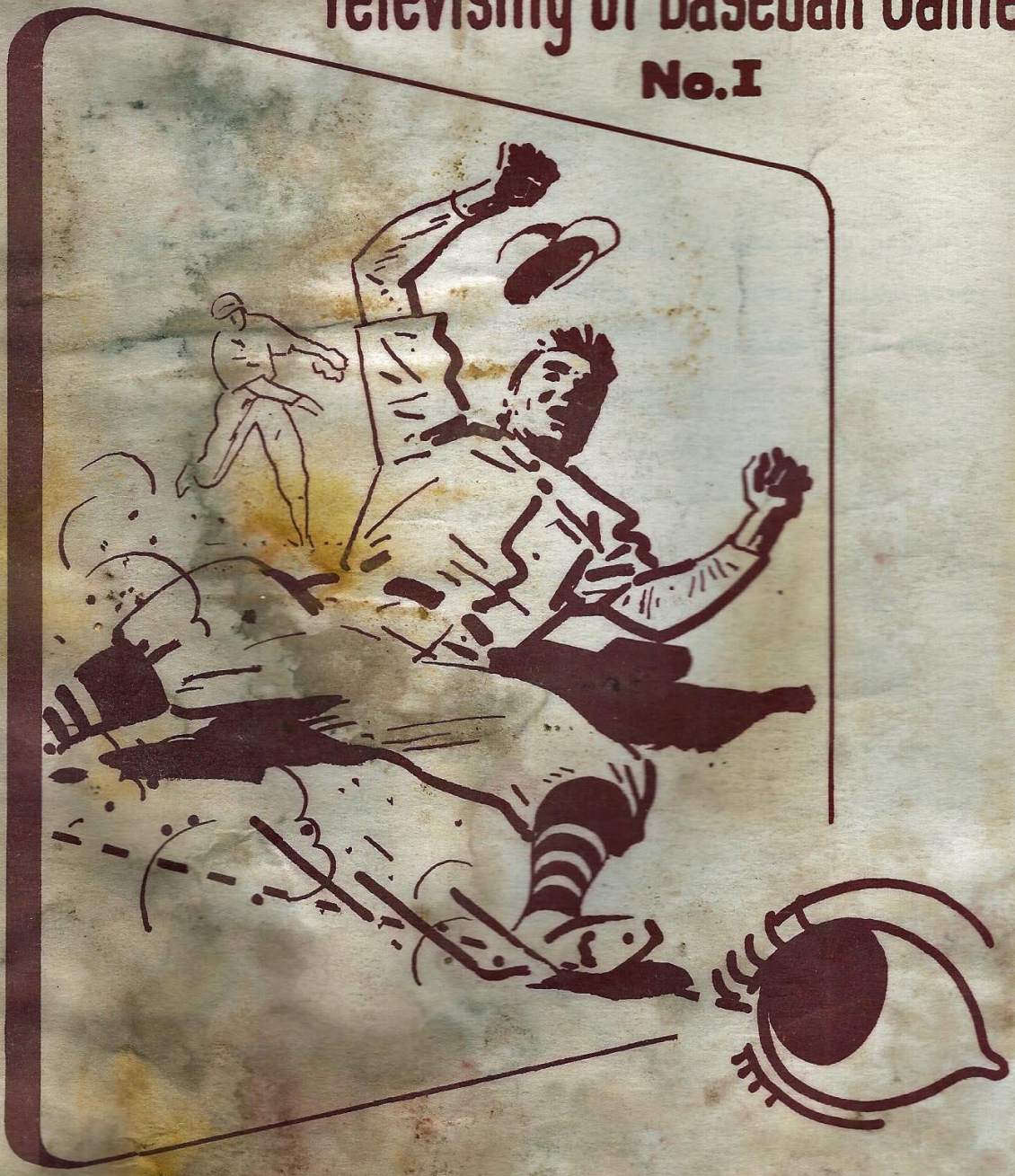
Continuity of Action in the Televising of Baseball Games

No. I



A copyrighted viewer's angle for creating new customers through television.

AN OUTLINE OF
NEW TELEVISION TECHNIQUES
IN
BASEBALL

Television coverage of baseball in the past has, in the majority of cases, been limited to a visual adaptation of the techniques developed in radio broadcasting. It has been increasingly evident that the presently accepted use of a camera in fortifying the audio description has introduced confusion into the broadcast, rather than clarifying that description. This primarily is based on the inability of any optical system to quickly re-adjust itself to varying depths of focus and varying angles of coverage. While it is true that a qualified baseball fan might be able to integrate this combined aural description and spotty camera coverage into a continuity of action, it is doubtful whether or not such coverage would make sense to the average layman who does not have a complete knowledge of baseball.

Mr. Philip K. Wrigley and his associates with the Chicago Cubs have recognized this fact during the two years of experimental coverage of Cubs' baseball by WBKB. At a meeting of the team committee in February of this year, Mr. Wrigley suggested that steps be taken to analyze and

revise television techniques with a view towards creating a production method which would not only correct these deficiencies, but would popularize baseball with the non-fan, as well as satisfy the regular baseball viewer.

To this end, Mr. Wrigley requested the cooperation of the two local television stations applying for coverage of the home games of the Chicago Cubs. An experimental project at Television Station WBKB in Chicago, and KTLA in Los Angeles, was accordingly set up, and active test work under field conditions was inaugurated at Los Angeles.

In our analysis of the problem, it was apparent that many of the basic precepts of good showmanship had been overlooked in presentations thus far attempted by television stations covering baseball. Some of these inconsistencies were:

1. All action on the playing field developed away from cameras located behind home plate, reducing rather than heightening the dramatic impact of the play.

2. The camera placements in common use normally resulted in a wide variation of viewing angles, causing abnormal or complete disorientation of the non-qualified viewer.

3. Because of the limited field of the television lenses, normal camera coverage could only show one or two players in detail, thus destroying any visual association with the other members of the team or the playing field itself.

4. It has been a precept in motion picture switching techniques that the center of interest should not change position on the screen during scene-to-scene transitions. Considerable thought in motion pictures is given to the preplanning of switch shots in order to retain the focal point of interest in the same relative position during a change of scenes. Television, with its present hit-or-miss coverage, has heretofore disregarded this function entirely, resulting in a confused and disorientated picture of the game.

In order to develop a satisfactory television technique, it was necessary that as many of the fundamentals of good showmanship as possible be incorporated into the video coverage. Some of these requirements were:

1. Change in the viewing angle from scene to scene should not be tolerated.

2. Action of the play should develop towards, rather than away from the cameras, in order to heighten the dramatic impact.

3. A viewpoint or camera position must be selected which would orientate the individual player with the team, as well as with the playing field.

4. Maximum utilization of good camera techniques and modern equipment must be employed in any successful coverage.

Coverage of infield plays was the first problem. To satisfy the above listed requirements, a position alongside the home dugout at third base was selected. It appeared preferable to have this camera quickly adjustable in height, so that it could either shoot from ground

level or be elevated to a position from which first base would be visible over the pitcher's mound.

A series of test films, and subsequent test broadcasts over KTLA proved that this position had unusual advantages in the coverage of infield plays. These advantages are enumerated:

1. All infield players are within easy detail range of this particular camera, and any unusual activity can be given dramatic close-up or intermediate close-up coverage.

2. All plays except third base to home develop toward the viewers, thus building up the maximum dramatic impact. Plays from second to third base and on third base can be shot from a ground level position, further increasing the dramatic interest by introducing negative height into the picture.

3. All details of infield plays are open to the third base camera.

4. Close-up coverage of plays on first base and home are easily available to this camera, and can easily be presented in full detail.

5. Crowd reaction shots can be integrated into the broadcast by panning the camera around to the dugout or into the stands, affording excellent picture material for slack periods or situations where normal television coverage of the play is impossible.

6. Most infield action, i.e., home to first, pitcher to batter, traverses the full width of the receiver screen.

Equivalent positions were tried at both first- and third-base locations, and while first base appeared

to be more satisfactory because of the increased traffic, lighting conditions in the afternoon dictated a move to the down sun side, to allow for image orthicon operation.

Various camera heights were tried from the dugout location, establishing the fact that the lowest level possible afforded the most dramatic coverage. It is a known fact that the introduction of a positive vertical angle into action shots reduces the apparent speed of movement on the field. For this reason, the selected position was maintained at ground level, rather than using a higher position in the stands.

The second camera position was selected for panoramic coverage of the entire playing field, with the camera equipped with a Zoomar lens. In keeping with our plan of establishing a fixed viewing angle, this camera position was chosen in the far left field, at the foul line, permitting use of the foul line as an orientation reference point in establishing the geography of the play. With a 340-foot range to home plate, a normal Zoomar lens thus could cover the infield satisfactorily and further permit close-up work on any play or player that appeared interesting. It was further evident that the speed of a hit ball could be optically reduced at the start of its and thus permitting the cameraman to follow the

ball into the outfield. Use of the Zoomar lens then permitted a full details shot of the play, and the following of the delivery of the ball back to the infield.

The third camera position was selected in the stands, in order to provide the psychological advantage of covering the game from the typical fan's viewpoint. Necessarily this position should be in a spot which provides approximately the same viewing angle as locations one and two. By using this camera for semi-panoramic coverage of the playing field, with actual fans in the foreground, a strong psychological tie-in between audience and player is provided. By utilizing this location as the viewpoint of the announcer, it is possible to provide a highly satisfactory audio coverage of the game, closely coordinated with the video coverage from the three camera positions.

Inasmuch as baseball is a sport where highly dramatic incidents and body-to-body impact are the exception rather than the rule, provision must be made for continuity of coverage during the less dramatic moments. This third position with the announcer center stage and within easy camera range of the actual fan provides a logical reaction shot around which plays on the diamond can be integrated. Competent use of all three cameras provides sufficient

story material at the directorial console for satisfactory cutting into a well-balanced and acceptable production which will appeal to the viewer from the dramatic as well as the reportorial standpoint.

Considerable thought must be given to the choice of these camera positions, with the major consideration being the presentation of a consistent viewing angle. The announcer's position should be logically at one of these locations, preferably in the stands between the two extreme cameras. Third base line coverage is preferable to first, even though the preponderance of plays and inning-to-inning traffic will be less at this position. While frequency of available shots at third base is less, the advantage of covering the inside action of the more dramatic slide plays at second and third outweighs its disadvantages.

Care should be exercised in choosing a position from which an unnatural vertical angle is introduced into the picture, such as might be obtained from a balcony shot or a roof-top location. This vantage point, while providi[illegible]ramic coverage, would reduce the apparent action [illegible]eld, and in most cases would introduce a de-orientation into the coverage.

While variations of the above locations can be easily incorporated, the broadcaster must be particularly careful to observe these cardinal points of showmanship:

1. Wherever possible, action should develop into, rather than away from the cameras.

2. Angle of viewing from camera to camera should not change appreciably in switch shots.

3. Introduction of players and fans into the foreground of the composed shot enhances the psychological effect of the picture, and ties the audience closer to the fan's reaction.

4. Vertical camera angles should be kept at a minimum, on all but panoramic effects.

5. Reaction shots of announcers, fans, and players should be used liberally to fill in non-spectacular periods of the game.

6. Close-up switch shots from the dugout camera should only be used in conjunction with and following complete panoramic coverage of the play by Zoomar, in order to orientate the viewer properly.

7. Panoramic camera (the Zoomar) should normally be operated in unzoomed setting, and in following a ball to the outfield should not attempt to hold the ball in center screen by change of horizon level. An unzoomed pan shot should be used until the trajectory of the ball is such that the camera can safely be zoomed without ...ng the horizon.

8. ... the zoom feature of the panoramic ...era should be held to those situations ...ere close-ups are either required or ...ferable. Continual in-and-out use of ...s lens destroys its advantages and the ...pact of the shot.

9. Zoomar shots should be accomplished as slowly as possible to preserve satisfactory orientation by the viewer.

While no format on paper can specify all of the considerations entering into a complete and satisfactory coverage of a baseball game, it is believed that the details of the system outlined herein as originally proposed by Mr. Philip K. Wrigley will permit a far more reasonable presentation of baseball than has heretofore been accomplished in television.

It is patent that the principles of showmanship outlined in this description will have equal importance in the coverage of sporting events other than baseball, and that, properly employed, these basic precepts will contribute to the growth of interest in a sport by the television audience, resulting in the creation of new fans at the box office.

Respectfully submitted,

W. C. Eddy,
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