

The Play-by-Play Announcer's Role and Voice

Third course, Second grading period, Week 2

Sportscasters must have a strong interest in, and knowledge of, the games they announce. In radio, since the audience can only hear the play-by-play, the announcer must be the eyes, ears and sometimes the heart of the game being played. This lesson focuses on the practice and the research needed for excellent play-by-play coverage.



Enduring Understanding

Announcers play the pivotal role to an effective sports broadcast. They are the “quarterback” of the broadcast team.



Essential Questions

What characteristics do the great sports announcers possess? How can these attributes be attained and honed? What do audiences look for in a play-by-play announcer?



Objectives and Outcome

Students will gain an understanding for the role of the play-by-play announcer in the broadcast team and how to develop the skills and attributes necessary to succeed in that role.



Suggested Time

One week



Resources and Materials

“The Play by Play Announcer” by Jon Miller, voice of the San Francisco Giants and ESPN Sunday Night Baseball (www.americansportscastersonline.com/playbyplay.html)

“Sports Broadcasting Tips for Radio Beginners,” by Paul Tinkle, Thunderbolt Broadcasting, Martin, Tenn. (Includes play-by-play tips) (www.americansportscastersonline.com/radiosportscastingtips.html)

“Joe Buck on Sportscasting,” Lou Schwartz interviews Fox Sports and St. Louis Cardinals announcer Joe Buck, May 1999 (www.americansportscastersonline.com/buckonsportscasting.html)

“A Legendary Career That Speaks for Itself,” Dave Sheinin, The Washington Post, July 5, 2005 (www.washingtonpost.com/nie, in Lessons select “From Print to Air”)

Professional models for play-by-play work include Red Barber, Bob Costas, Bob Uecker and Vin Scully.

“Sports Play-by-Play” and “Improving Play-by-Play and Color,” *Announcing*, pages 265-274

“Sport,” *Radio Production*, page 216-224

KBPS 1450 AM Play-by-Play Duty Chart



Procedure

1. Read with students “A Legendary Career” and discuss Vin Scully and his career as a baseball announcer. What attributes are pointed out by others that led to Scully being ranked as baseball’s No. 1 announcer? List attributes on the board and discuss with students how Scully likely developed and honed these attributes over 56 years. What is the role of an announcer as opposed to a reporter or a color announcer?
2. Review the “Know the Sport” lesson (Second course, Third grading period) with students and discuss the importance of having a complete understanding of a sport before becoming an announcer. Reporters must understand the ins and outs of a sport in order to develop an effective story, but announcers must go a step beyond this. They must understand all the rules, procedures, plays, concepts, background, players, coaches. Announcers are the eyes and ears and understanding for the audience and cannot afford to get caught in an “I don’t know” scenario.
3. Jon Miller in “The Play by Play Announcer” states the following requirements of the commentator:
 - Develop credibility with the audience.
 - Cover the game fairly and accurately while informing and entertaining the audience.
 - Locally, the information provided by the play-by-play commentator must provide information relevant to that team.
 - Nationally, the information provided by the play-by-play commentator must be broader in scope and more closely related to the game at hand.
 - A word to avoid at any cost is “we.”

Discuss what each of these points means. Teachers should read the entire article in order to elaborate on these points.

4. Expand on the “Know the Sport” lesson (Second course, Third grading period) to help students learn how to gain a full understanding for a sport in order to be effective announcers.

Record and bring in a radio or television broadcast of a recent professional or college event. Play portions of the game and have students point out the positive and negative attributes of the announcer.

- How much knowledge of the sport does the announcer demonstrate?
- How does the announcer help fill in the holes in action and keep the viewer or listener up to date on important information such as scores, statistics, injuries, and other aspects of the event?
- How does the announcer match the intensity and excitement of the game with his or her tone of voice and pace?
- Why is this attribute important in an announcer?

Localize the research required for play-by-play announcing. Form five to six groups in the class, placing students with an interest in sports in different groups. Assign each group a different sport played by teams in your school to cover. Students are to brainstorm the information that a play-by-play announcer would need to cover this sport, your team and its opponent, and where to get this information.

5. Make copies of the “KBPS Play-by-Play Duty Chart” and distribute to students. Discuss the different duties and their order of importance. Why are they in that order of importance? If possible, obtain a copy of a television or radio broadcast of a football game and examine this duty chart in the context of the game. How do the announcers show their understanding of the impact of the duties and their order of importance?

6. Play-by-play announcing often is much harder than it appears because of the years of effort and training and study. Put students to the test by recording a televised sporting event, gathering information about the teams, players and coaches and challenging several or all students to do play-by-play for the game as if they were doing a radio broadcast.

This exercise is necessary to show students that while play-by-play may look easy, it is indeed hard and requires much practice and preparation. Evaluate each student’s performance and help students provide constructive criticism.

If students need to be persuaded that this is a good exercise, read to them or assign as homework “How Does One Become a Sportscaster?” by NBC sportscaster Dick Enberg. He stressed the importance of practice: “Go to a little league game, a high school or college game, and practice calling the action. You can even practice at a major league game. Sit in the upper deck (you may feel a bit conspicuous at first) and start polishing your approach. I used to turn down the TV sound and sharpen my play-by-play calls in my own living room.” (www.americansportscasteronline.com/enbergsportscasting.html)

If you have an operating student radio station (or a local radio station that covers local sports), students who do well in this lesson may sit with the current play-by-play announcer to observe the organization, preparedness and pace that is maintained to have no open spots on air.



Homework

Assign students the reading in the Resources and Materials section.

Each group in the localize research exercise (#4 above) will assign group members information to gather. The group will collate this information in a manner that could be used by a play-by-play announcer.

It might be necessary to offer extra credit or some other incentive to entice students to put themselves out there in front of the other students in the play-by-play demonstration in class (#6 above). The students who will demonstrate play-by-play to the class will need to do research and reading to prepare themselves.



Assessment

At this stage, students cannot be effectively evaluated on their play-by-play abilities, but on their understanding of the steps to be taken to develop those abilities. Some students may not even have the desire to become play-by-play announcers, but they must still understand the process. Therefore, teachers should prepare practicum, quizzes and homework accordingly.



Academic Content Standards

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. (Standard 8, NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts)

Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities. (Standard 11, NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts)



Industry Standards and Expectations

“The most important aspect of being a play-by-play commentator is to develop credibility with your audience. You have to always tell the truth so the audience has confidence and trust in you. A lack of credibility means you’re of no use to your audience, station or network.” (Jon Miller, American Sportscasters Association Board Member, Voice of the San Francisco Giants and ESPN Sunday Night Baseball)

Comprehend and use reading strategies to learn meaning, technical concepts and vocabulary. (F02.1 Career Cluster Project: Communications Skills)

Locate, organize and reference written information from various sources to communicate with co-workers and clients/participants. (F02.2 Career Cluster Project: Communications Skills)

Analyze announcing competence. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Demonstrate the ability to deliver a broadcast production. States’ Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

KBPS Sports: Play-by-Play

Duties

Set the scene and provide the listener with the basics of the on-field action. Also, creates and reflects on the storyline for the game.

Order of Importance

1	2	3
	EVERY PLAY	
DOWN DISTANCE YARD LINE "1ST & 10 at the 20" "2ND & 8 at the 22" "3RD & 2 at the 28"	FORMATION RECEIVERS HASH MARK "I formation, receivers to both sides, ball in the center of the field."	RUN/PASS MOVEMENT YARDS /PENALTIES "Here's the snap, it's a run up the middle of the field across the 25 for a gain of five."
	EVERY SERIES	
SCORE TIME YARD LINE	SITE OF THE GAME DIRECTION TEAMS ARE MOVING	
	EVERY QUARTER	
TEAM RECORDS SCHEDULES IMPORTANCE OF GAME	UNIFORM COLORS WEATHER CONDITIONS CROWD CONDITIONS	

Remember Voice Control

Pace: The faster you talk, the more exciting an event becomes.

Tone: The deeper you talk, the more important an event becomes.