

THE PRESENTATION OF ATHLETICS EVENTS IN EUROPE

1. Introduction

Good presentation of the activities that take place in and around the competition area of an athletics meeting is critical for the success of the event. Presentation affects the performances of the athletes, the enjoyment of spectators and media audiences and the satisfaction of sponsors and other supporters of an event.

With the trend for each generation of young people to expect a greater level of entertainment and professionalism from sporting events, the failure of athletics meetings on any level to fulfil these expectations could eventually lead to decreased public interest and a loss of participants to other sports.

At the same time it must be said that athletics is and will remain a sport of tradition and the presentation of its events must always be done with good taste and style. One of the challenges of event presentation is to incorporate the sport's valuable traditions into a modern format. Moreover, it must never be forgotten that the athletes are the focus of the sport and therefore the presentation of an event must never compromise their possibilities for achieving their best performances.

The aim of event presentation is to make athletics as attractive, exciting and user friendly as possible. The effect must be the creation of a show that incorporates the competition and all other activities taking place at the venue. In addition to the activities, the show will include audio, video, data and graphic elements.

The success of event presentation will be felt as a positive, even electric atmosphere in the venue and a memorable experience for everyone involved, either directly or through the media.

Organisers should be aware that no matter what the level of the competition, a commitment of time, resources and management skill will be required in order to achieve the aims of successful event presentation.

This paper has been prepared by the European Athletic Association to assist the organisers of EAA events and other events in Europe by providing a general framework and guidance on the key aspects of the preparation and delivery of event presentation.

2. Considerations

The following must be considered in the process of preparing for an event presentation operation:

2.1 Event and Venue

How an event is presented will depend on the nature of the event and the characteristics of the venue where it is taking place. A championship event, with its essential elements of protocol and formality, will be presented differently than a one-day invitational meeting, where new ideas and innovation are essential for attracting spectators and media interest.

Likewise the venue itself must be considered. Large stadia, smaller stadia, indoor venues, cross country courses and road courses all have certain limitations and possibilities that will effect the presentation of the event.

2.2 Audience

Keeping in mind the primary importance of the needs of the athletes, the planning of event presentation must involve trying to see the event from the point of view of the audience. Stimulation in the form of competition, a flow of information and other activities is essential and “dead” time, where nothing is happening, is to be avoided. On the other hand, people must not be overloaded and the event they are witnessing must be made user friendly so that they can fully understand and enjoy the experience.

When the event is to be broadcast on television the needs of two different audiences must be considered: the spectators at the venue and the audience at home (by far the larger group). The presentation of the event must integrate both audiences and it is a mistake to think that there can be two separate shows at the same event. The audience at home should never have the feeling that something different from what they are seeing on their screen is happening at the venue. It is important to plan the event presentation in such a way that television producers are able to show as much as possible “live”.

2.3 Technical Requirements

The technical requirements for event presentation at major championships or other event in a large stadium will normally include:

- A control booth with a view of the entire stadium or course (ideally located adjacent to the Competition Director's booth) and the announcer's booth
- High quality public address system;
- Music presentation system including audio mixer, notebook computer (for mp3 and DVD discs) and synthesizer (for rhythm, drum and sound effects);
- High quality alpha-numeric scoreboard(s) (two are required for the European Championships);
- Video screen(s) (two are required for the European Championships) with high quality resolution (see Appendix 1);
- A video screen mixing desk capable of mixing at least different feeds (for example Host Broadcaster feeds, dedicated camera(s) feeds, data feed from results system, video source feeds);
- Screens with all TV production signals;
- Audio connection with the Host Broadcaster producer;
- A communication system linking the members of the event presentation team with each other and with the Competition Director and the Competition Referees;
- Fixed and roving dedicated cameras (for on-field flash interviews, crowd shots, etc.).

For smaller events, including cross country and road races, and events that are not broadcast, some elements of the above list will be optional.

3. Personnel and Roles

3.1 Overview

The techniques and technology used in event presentation are constantly evolving and therefore it is important that the event presentation team, and particularly the person responsible for event presentation, the Event Presentation Manager (EPM), are experienced, up-to-date and flexible. It is normal for event organisers to hire specialist professionals or even production companies for this highly specialised function.

The event presentation team at a major stadium event will normally include:

- Event Presentation Manager;
- Video Screen Operator;
- Scoreboard Operator;
- Audio Operator / Music Producer;
- Announcers (including Stadium Announcers and On-field Announcers);
- On-field Co-ordinator(s);
- Event Presentation Camera Operator(s).

For smaller events, including cross country and road races, some elements of the above list will be optional.

3.2 Event Presentation Manager

The Event Presentation Manager (EPM) is responsible for the preparation and implementation of the event presentation plan and script (see below). EPM has to consult the Technical Delegate in advance about the event presentation plan and script. At larger events there may be an assistant EPM.

An EPM should be an expert in athletics, have an agile mind, have the conviction and capacity to lead, be able to work under extreme pressure and have a sound technical knowledge of television and audio-visual means.

3.3 Video Screen Operator

The Video Screen Operator is in charge of presenting images and information on the video screen under the direction of the EPM.

3.4 Scoreboard Operator

The Scoreboard Operator is in charge of presenting information on the alphanumeric scoreboard under the direction of the EPM.

3.5 Audio Operator / Music Producer

The Audio Operator is responsible for introducing music and sound effects to the presentation over the stadium's public address system in accordance with the script for the event and under the direction of the EPM. The Music Producer is in charge of preparing appropriate music and sound effects in advance.

With developments in technology it may be possible for one of the announcers (see below) to also act as the Audio Operator, thus improving the co-ordination of the two functions.

3.6 Announcers

There are two types of announcer on the event presentation team. The first type is the “generalist” Stadium Announcer, who works from a box in the stands and provides information in the local language (at EAA events and other major meetings there will be a need for an additional announcer who works in English) under the overall direction of the EPM. The second type is the “On-field” Announcer who, working in the local language, conducts flash interviews, crowd competitions and improvises announcements at appropriate moments under the direction of the EPM.

The announcers must be carefully chosen for their professional skills and knowledge of athletics.

3.7 On-field Co-ordinators

On-field Co-ordinators are the “hands” of the EPM on the field and thus play an extremely important role in the presentation. Their responsibilities include assisting the On-field Announcer with athlete interviews, delaying or speeding up the start of an event when required, placement of the athletes for presentations (to the stadium audience and TV cameras) and moving people who disturb the event presentation or broadcast.

3.8 Event Presentation Camera Operator

The Event Presentation Camera Operator(s) are responsible for shooting images on the field under the direction of the On-field Coordinator.

3.9 Organisation of the Event Presentation Team

The following figures show the organisation of the event presentation team at major and smaller athletics events.

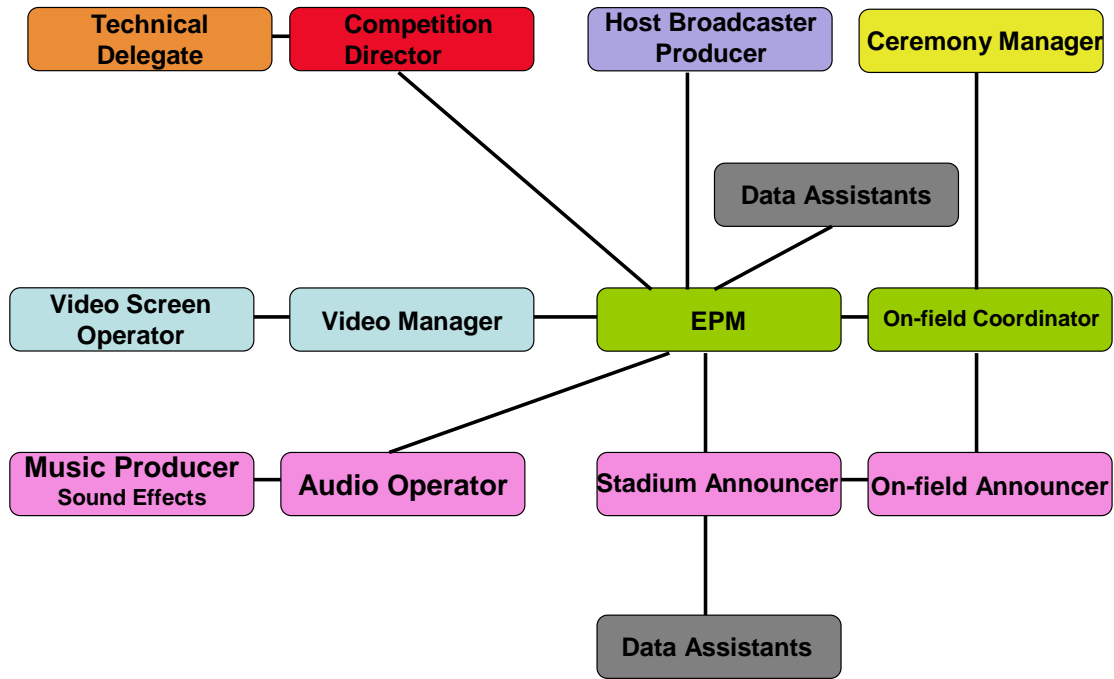


Figure 1: Organisation of the Event Presentation Team at a major athletics event (Source: European Athletic Association)

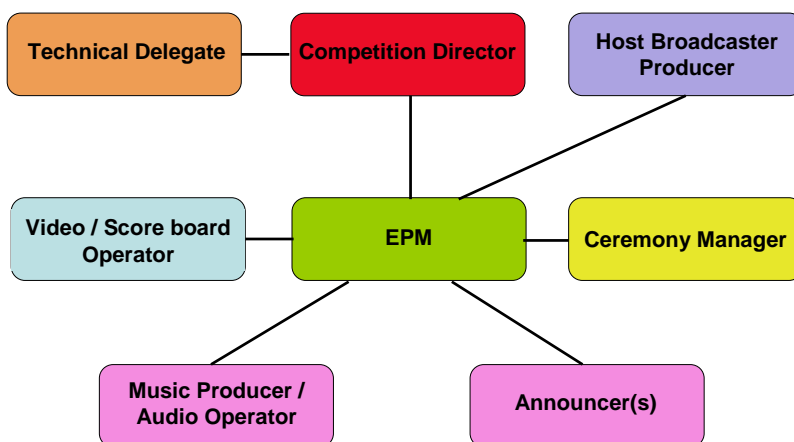


Figure 2: Organisation of the Event Presentation Team at a smaller athletics event (Source: European Athletic Association)

4. The Preparation Process

4.1 Project Planning

Successful presentation of an athletics event involves precise, co-ordinated delivery of a complex set of elements, which can only be achieved with careful, detailed planning and meticulous preparation. It is always a mistake to leave thinking about event presentation to the last possible minute or, as is too often the case, to simply make it up on the day as the event happens.

The following are normal steps in the work plan of preparing for the presentation of an athletics event:

- The event organisers appoint an experienced person to be responsible for the event presentation (normally called the Event Presentation Manager or EPM);
- The EPM selects the members of the event presentation team;
- The event presentation team develops the event presentation plan;
- Testing of technical equipment (maintenance or repairs as required);
- For EAA events, the EPM meets with the Host Broadcaster and the EAA Technical Delegate and Event Coordinator to explain his/her team's plan and co-ordinate work;
- Event presentation plan finalised;
- Final testing of technical equipment and rehearsals.

4.2 Event Presentation Plan

The event presentation plan includes the competition timetable and a detailed running order or script of every aspect of what the audience will experience.

It is difficult to over-emphasise the importance of developing this plan and the two essential tools it comprises as carefully and completely as possible. The event presentation team and others involved in the event need to be able to see and understand the full concept, be aware of all the implications and know exactly what is expected of them.

Competition Timetable

The competition timetable is a schedule of the various competitive disciplines that will take place during the event. The key aspects are the order and timing of the competitions.

At EAA events the timetable is developed by the EAA Technical Delegate in close cooperation with the Local Organisers (Competition Director and Event Presentation Manager) and the Host broadcaster. The timetable has to be approved by the Council after consulting EBU).

It is important to remember that the competition timetable is more than a technical tool and in its development consideration must also be given to the following:

- Ticket sales;
- Spectators;
- Broadcasters;
- Sponsors.

Key principles for the development of a competition timetable are:

- Balance the highlight competitions over the course of the event (note that if part of the meeting is to be broadcast, the highlight competitions may need to be concentrated in the period of the transmission);
- Close the meeting with a highlight event;
- Ensure the field events finish before the last running event;
- Avoid dead time (note that not having a running event in progress is not necessarily dead time, as it allows for attention to be focused on a field event, which may be a highlight of the meeting).

Additional principles for the development of a timetable for an EAA Championship are available in the EAA Organisational Manual.

There are a number of ways of presenting a competition timetable, depending on who will be using it. As shown in the following figures, a timetable may be presented as a simple list (normally used for general publications) or graphically, showing the activities taking place simultaneously (important for the event presentation team).

Saturday 5th March 2005

09,30	60 m	Men	Heptathlon
10,15	Long Jump	Men	Heptathlon
10,30	High Jump	Men	Qualification (2 Groups)
11,25	Shot Put	Men	Heptathlon
11,30	200 m	Women	1 st Round
11,55	Long Jump	Men	Qualification
12,15	200 m	Men	1 st Round
12,40	High Jump	Men	Heptathlon
17,00	60 m Hurdles	Women	1 st Round
17,05	Triple Jump	Men	FINAL
17,15	Shot Put	Women	FINAL
17,25	60 m Hurdles	Men	1 st Round
17,30	Pole Vault	Men	FINAL
18,00	800 m	Women	Semifinals
18,15	800 m	Men	Semifinals
18,20	High Jump	Women	FINAL
18,30	200 m	Women	Semifinals
18,45	200 m	Men	Semifinals
18,50	Long Jump	Women	FINAL
19,00	1 500 m	Women	FINAL
19,10	Shot Put	Men	FINAL
19,15	400 m	Women	FINAL
19,30	400 m	Men	FINAL
19,45	60 m	Women	FINAL
20,00	60 m	Men	FINAL
20,15	3000 m	Men	FINAL

Figure 3: Sample competition timetable (Day 2 of the 2005 European Athletics Indoor Championships in Madrid). (Source: Event Guide, 2005 European Athletics Indoor Championships)

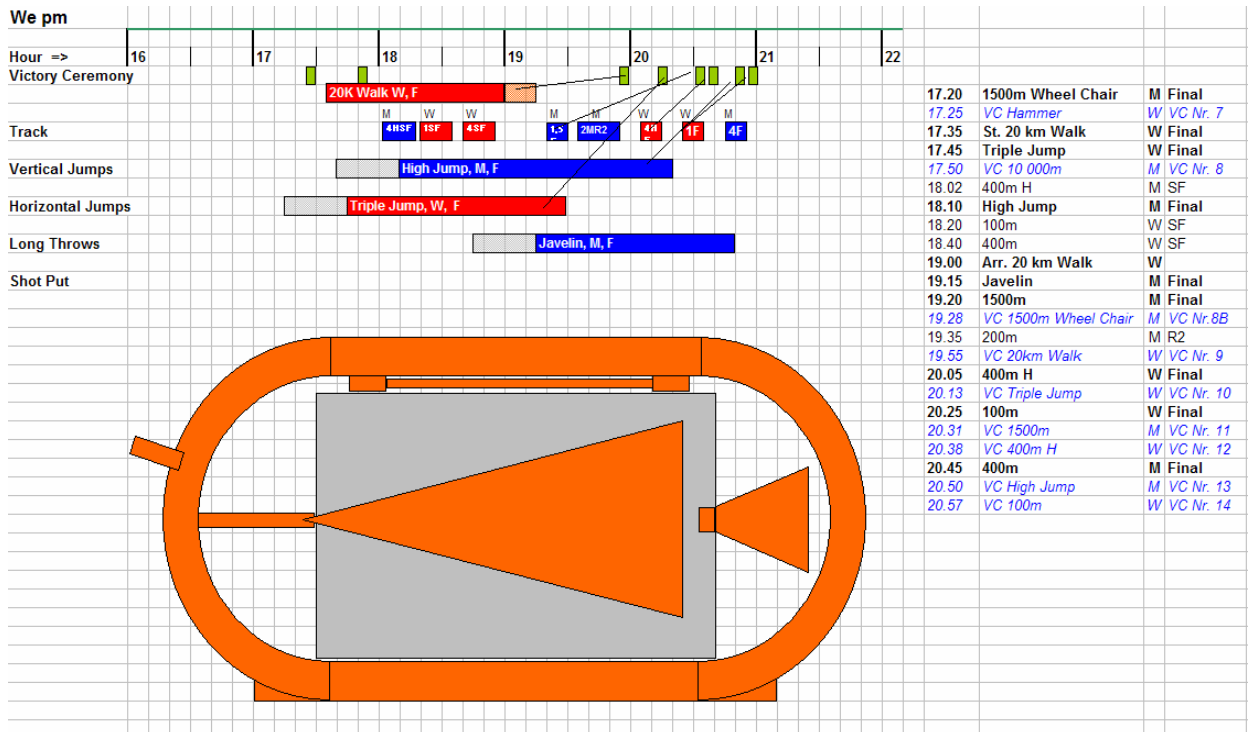


Figure 4: Model of a detailed presentation of the competition timetable for a major athletics championship. (Source: Kari Wauhkonen)

Figure 4 shows a timetable that incorporates a schematic diagram of an athletics stadium (for reference) and both the simple list and graphic presentation of a timetable for a championship event. Note the inclusion of victory ceremonies and road events.

It is also possible to incorporate the location where the competition will take place into the timetable and make a “time-space plan” as shown in the following figure.

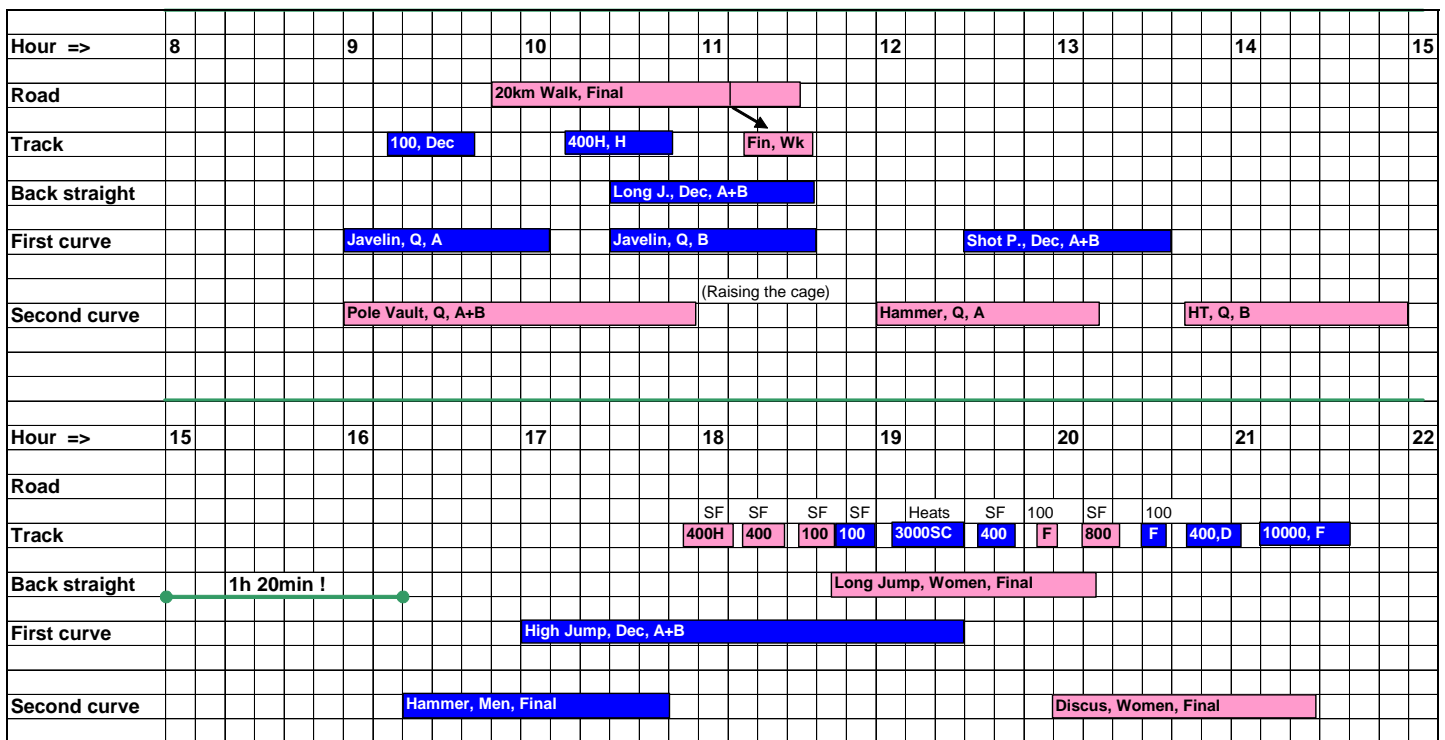


Figure 5: Model competitions timetable at major athletics championships (Source: Kari Wauhkonen)

The time-space plan format for a competition timetable is particularly important for stadium events as it makes it possible to:

- Ensure the best possible distribution of activities to all parts of the competition arena;
- Minimise the impact of technical equipment not in use blocking the views of spectators and TV cameras;
- Plan the logistical activities so as to minimise their impact on the timetable on the sightlines of the spectators and TV cameras.

Script

Step	Time	Minutes	What	Who	Remarks
	11:15:00	5'	Parade of flags		
			Comments, facts and figures	Mainspeaker	
	11:20:00	3'	Welcoming by ...	Infieldspeaker	
Event 1: Junior women					
1	11:23:30	30"	Insert "Spar Europ. Champ." Announcement Junior women	Video screen	
2			race	Mainspeaker	
3			Presentation Athletes (facts and figures)		
4		1'	Statistics feed to Supervision	Sportec	Statistics Junior women
5			Statistics	Video screen	
6		2'	Starting list feed to Supervision	Sportec	Starting list Junior women
7			Starting list	Video screen	
8		1'	Presentation Croatian Athletes	Mainspeaker	
9			Croatian Athletes	Video screen	
10	11:30:00	12'	Start Junior women		
11			TV pictures / lap times / team results	Video screen	TV feed
12			lap times / team results feed to TV	Sportec	
13		1'	Start comment, announcing music	Mainspeaker	
14		2'	Music		
15		1'	Race comment	Mainspeaker	
16		1'	Music		
17		1'	Flashinterview from VIP tribune	Infieldspeaker	
18		1'	Race comment	Mainspeaker	
19		2'	Music		
22			Commenting Finish, winners and places	Mainspeaker	
23	11:42:00		Finish Winner		
24	11:42:30	2'	Expert comment by ...	Infieldspeaker	
25		1'	Flashinterview winner	Infieldspeaker	
		2'	Advertisings international		
26		2'	Final results feed to Supervision	Sportec	Final Results Junior women
27			Final results	Video screen	
28			Presentation final results	Mainspeaker	
30	11:49:30	30"	Award music		
31	11:50:00	3'	Podium Junior women		
32			Slow motions / results / ceremony	Video screen	TV feed
33			Award ceremony	Mainspeaker	
34			National anthem winner		

Figure 6 Sample page from the event presentation script of the 2003 SPAR European Cross Country Championships. (Source: European Athletic Association)

The event presentation script shows minute by minute (and at 30 second intervals for some stadium events) what the spectator will be experiencing at the venue and who is responsible for making each element happen. In addition to the timeframe, the elements covered in a script include:

- The competition;
- Other activities (awards ceremonies, crowd competitions, logistical activities);
- Audio (announcements, music, on-field flash interviews, crowd reactions)
- Data (start lists and results on main alpha-numeric scoreboard, infield scoreboards);
- Video (TV feed, dedicated camera feed, sponsor announcements on the videoscreen).

The script can be developed and presented using spreadsheet software.

It is important to emphasise that the script must be prepared with the full participation and approval of the Technical Delegate and Competition Director (and, in the case of a televised event, with the TV Producer).

Figure 6 shows a sample pages from a relatively simple script for a cross country event while Figure 7 shows the detail required for a major event taking place in a stadium.

4.3 Approval and Control

It is very important that the organisers with overall responsibility for an event are aware of and in agreement with all elements of the event presentation plan. Without approval and close control of this plan it is possible that inappropriate activities will take place, compromising the intended experience and reducing the overall value of the event.

In the case of events under the authority of the EAA, the detailed plans for the event presentation must be approved by the EAA Technical Delegate and Event Coordinator and the preparation milestones will be carefully monitored.

5. Operational Guidelines

5.1 General

The EPM is responsible for the presentation of the event and must be in control of all aspects at all times, including all the interactions between the members of the event presentation team. The EPM will act in accordance with the principles and details of the event presentation plan and in direct connection with the Competition Director and Ceremonies Manager (and, in the case of televised events, with the TV Producer). However, the Technical Delegate has the full responsibility for any changes to the timetable.

Note: Significant changes must be agreed with the Host Broadcaster.

The EPM may, after consultation with the Technical Delegate, give the relevant orders to change the plans in case of external or internal needs that may arise in the course of the event.

5.2 Equipment Testing and Rehearsal

It is essential that rehearsals involving the whole event presentation team and as much of the technical equipment as is practicable be carried out before the day of the event. The best results can be achieved having the final rehearsal together with all involved parties (all Technical Partners, Host Broadcaster, competition officials, etc.). This will allow for problems to be identified and adjustments to be made to the event presentation plan.

5.3 Video Screen

The video screen is used for TV feeds (both broadcaster and dedicated event presentation cameras), pre-prepared videos of sponsors (in accordance with IAAF regulations) and graphics that announce an event or help add to the atmosphere (for example, "Clap!!", "Make Some Noise").

The video screen may be set up to show only the images from one TV feed (the Integrated Feed as a Clean-Clean Feed) produced by the Host Broadcaster. In this case, the operator needs only to be a competent technician who will make the connection and control of the broadcast.

A more creative (and costly) arrangement is for the video screen to be connected to all the Clean-Clean feeds produced in the stadium by the Host Broadcaster. In this case, the Video Screen Operator will be responsible for choosing the most interesting images at any particular moment and coordinating these with the work of the announcers, the graphic presentations (i.e. PowerPoint or other productions, plus start-list and results, when no alpha-numeric scoreboard is available) and other activities taking place in the stadium (dedicated Event Presentation cameras, sponsor videos, crowd competitions, etc.).

Replays of running events (in particular, close finishes or incidents) should be shown immediately after the conclusion of the race.

If two screens are in use, both should show the same picture unless one must be used as a scoreboard.

5.4 Scoreboard

The alpha-numeric scoreboard is used to provide start lists and results. Attention should be called to the information displayed (by the announcer and or music). The information should remain on the scoreboard long enough to be read completely but should not remain once a reasonable period has passed.

Care should be taken that the display of information does not take place at a time when it would detract attention from a competition.

5.5 Music and Sound Effects

The purpose of music and sound effects during an athletics event is to add to the atmosphere. Music should help to create a mood (for example, before a race or a victory ceremony) or maintain the mood level in spaces where it might otherwise drop (for example, immediately after a race or victory ceremony). Certain sound effects may also enhance the atmosphere (for example, rhythmic or drumming sounds during a long distance race). Ideally, there should be a balance between continuous, low-level or “background” music and “highlight” music used to introduce an event or wake-up the spectators and the changes between the two should be scripted in advance.

However, it is important to remember that the music and sound effects must never dominate the atmosphere. Music and sound effects that are excessively loud or loud too frequently tend to disturb and annoy the audience, thus detracting from the atmosphere and overall experience that the event presentation is seeking to create.

The type of music and particular songs to be used should be planned in advance. Ideas can be obtained by asking top athletes what music they like best or speaking with a local radio disc-jockey about local tastes. It is also possible to generate jingles for certain elements of an event (i.e. the announcement of a race or as a signal that results are being shown on the scoreboard).

5.6 Announcing

Both the Stadium and On-field Announcers should be fully integrated in the event presentation team. If the individuals concerned have not previously worked with the team it is essential that they be available for preparation meetings and rehearsals prior to the event.

Stadium Announcers

The task of the stadium announcers is to provide very specific information and direct the audience's attention to information provided shown on the video screen and scoreboard or activities taking place in the competition area. Announcements should be short and to the point. Ideally, the information provided by the stadium announcer is largely scripted for timing and co-ordinated with the video screen and the scoreboard so that it fits into the overall event presentation show.

It is important that stadium announcers remember that they are not running the competition or the event presentation show, which are always under the control of the EPM. As a general rule announcers should not commentate on the races or field events in progress at major championships where other audio and visual information is available to the audience. Moreover, they should keep in mind that people in the audience have a limited capacity to receive audio information while they are experiencing the variety of other stimuli taking place at the event. Announcements that are too many in number or too long winded tend to disturb and annoy the audience, thus detracting from the atmosphere and overall experience that event presentation is seeking to create.

In the case of EAA events announcements in English (if it is not the local language) will be required. This requires careful planning and preparation to ensure that the announcers work in a co-ordinated way. At EAA events two-thirds of the announcements should be made in the local language and one-third should be made in English.

On-field Announcer

The task of the On-field Announcer is a bit more difficult to prescribe than that of the stadium announcer. In most cases the primary task is to provide flash interviews with athletes on completion of their events. These interviews should be short (as a general rule 30 seconds maximum) and provide the audience with the initial reaction of the athlete. They should not be too detailed nor should they in any way interrupt the flow of other activities taking place in the competition arena. In the case of a major championship the On-field Announcer should look to deliver 2 to 4 reactions per session, depending on its length.

Other tasks for the On-field Announcers will depend on the event presentation plan, the abilities of the individual announcer and local custom. However, they must always be under the control of the EPM.

In the case of events under the authority of the EAA, it will be necessary for the activities of the On-field Announcer to be well planned and approved by the EAA.

5.7 The Event Presentation Stage

It is essential that the competition arena is free as possible from the unnecessary clutter of personnel and equipment. For this purpose a detailed plan of the movements and locations of all personnel and equipment must be agreed in advance by the Technical Delegate, Competition Management, EAA Event Coordinator, EAA Marketing Manager, EPM, Technical Partners, Host Broadcaster, Photographer Commissioner. In addition, responsibility for the enforcement of the agreed plan must be assigned.

6. Appendices:

- Video screen Technical Requirements for Event Presentation
- Requirements for TV Signals for EAA Major Events
- Checklist for Event Presentation at European Athletics Championships
- Checklist for Event Presentation at European Athletics Indoor Championships
- Checklist for Event Presentation at SPAR European Cross Country Championships
- Checklist for Event Presentation at SPAR European Cup
- Checklist for Event Presentation at European Athletics Indoor Cup
- Checklist for Event Presentation at European Junior / U 23 Championships