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Broadcasters, Production Teams Test Out New Tech, Workflows at Australian Open

Posted By [Ken Kerschbaumer, Editorial Director](#) On January 22, 2013 @ 4:04 pm In [Headlines](#), [TOP STORIES](#) | [No Comments](#)

For the past 10 days, the Australian Open in Melbourne has helped tennis fans and others with the winter blues get a taste of summer: the sun always seems to shine on this opening Grand Slam event. And the production teams at ESPN, Tennis Channel, and Channel Seven Australia, and production-services team at Gearhouse Broadcast have been at the center of creating that taste of summer.

"The Australians are passionate for their sports and also reflect a gregariousness and enjoyment that does not have an overly serious mindset," says Jamie Reynolds, VP, event production, ESPN. "I'm not saying that they do not respect or have reverence for the sport, but it is hard not to be in good spirits and have energy with what this event conveys."

It's a busy event, like all Grand Slams, but it's even more so as the first Grand Slam of the season and the networks try out new technologies and workflows for the upcoming season.



[1]

ESPN is on-air 12 hours a day with the year's first Grand Slam.

conclude nearly 12 hours later.

"We take advantage of the fact that our broadcast window begins in the middle of the night, and we put more priority on the day-session matches," explains Reynolds. "We may not have the marquee matches, but that is our primetime window."

From a production standpoint, the workflows are nearly identical to the other Grand Slam events. Helping in that effort is that now, more than ever, it is possible to rent the same production technologies around the globe.

There is, however, one major difference that is immediately discernible to tennis fans who watch all the Grand Slam events: the heavy reliance on the Spidercam system, which is used much more dramatically than on other Grand Slam events. With costs shared by ESPN and Channel Seven, the system is integrated into the world-feed production, giving it the ability to sweep lower and closer to the players than with similar systems in place at the U.S. Open and the French Open.

"It's a test drive of sorts that points to what we will do in June," says Reynolds. "How do we change the workflow and systems so that we are ready when we get to the larger broadcast window of Wimbledon?"

ESPN's efforts at the Australian Open begin with a solid relationship with Channel Seven, the host broadcaster. Operating out of a production compound completely devoid of production trucks (something unique to the Australian Open) and comprising multilevel cabins, the ESPN team of 85 personnel from the U.S. and another 50 from Down Under makes use of Hitachi cameras, Canon lenses, a variety of EVS replay gear, a Grass Valley Kayenne production switcher, two Lawo MC2 audio desks, two Yamaha audio desks, and Orad and Vizrt graphics gear during on-air windows that begin at 1 p.m. Melbourne time (9 p.m. ET) and



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In addition to Channel Seven productions, ESPN has access to discrete camera feeds and its own camera positions.

the audio experience at each Grand Slam event is not consistent in levels, miking techniques, or mixing techniques.

Besides relying on the Channel Seven host productions from the seven TV courts, the ESPN team has access to discrete camera feeds and its own camera positions within Rod Laver Stadium. EVS XT3 servers and 24 IPDirector systems play a key role in giving U.S. viewers the replays they want and a massive Signiant data pipeline between the compound in Melbourne and Bristol, CT, allows content and clips (along with relevant metadata) to be pushed and pulled between the two locations.

With the tournament heading toward its final day and on track for a very exciting final few days, the goal now is to keep the big-time tennis fans tuning in and the casual tennis fan willing to stay up late. Or, as in the case of last year's historic six-hour men's final, getting up early to tune in.

"Last year, we had the ardent fan going the distance and the casual fan checking in on Sunday morning," says Reynolds. "Whether we can capture lighting in a bottle like that again I don't know, but we will just ride the wave."

"The players are becoming more comfortable with it, and its use has evolved as our relationship with the host broadcaster is becoming stronger," Reynolds explains. "It's a long-term investment that was a prototype three years ago and is now part of the world feed. Channel Seven shares our mindset that this system can elevate the stature of the event and the consciousness of the fan."

Whether the use of Spidercam-like systems at other Grand Slam events will eventually become as compelling as it is at the Australian Open remains to be seen. But one additional area of emphasis for ESPN is improving audio.

"We still believe that the audio of what is coming off the court and the crowd will help define what the sport is about," adds Reynolds. The challenge, however, is that

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