



## Newsbox at Torino 2006

EBU members get near-instant highlights for Winter Olympics coverage thanks to Quantel's news system in a box



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Throughout the 2006 Winter Olympics the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) provided near-instant highlights of each event as well as two 30-minute highlight packages every day. These ‘multilaterals’ are distributed to its 60 members spread through Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East.

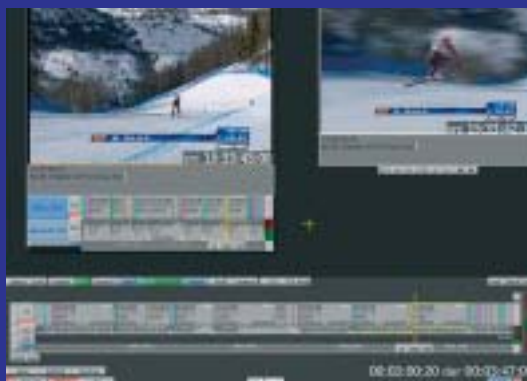
With around 50 hours of new material pouring in from the events every day, the workflow had to be well organised and efficient both for the EBU team to meet its scheduled distribution slots, and for its customers to be able to finish their packages on time for transmission.

In 2004 the EBU provided a similar service during the Athens Olympic Summer Games and again for the Euro 2004 football championships in Portugal. For both these events they made use of Quantel sQ server-based systems for editing and the compilation of the daily reports. With that experience the EBU wanted to use a similar formula for the Torino 2006 Winter Games. This time Quantel offered a production system based on Newsboxes – packaged application-oriented in-a-box systems based on the same sQ server technology and aimed at meeting the specific needs of news and sports events. These performed multiple roles working at the centre of the EBU operation.

## Requirements

To offer coverage of any event of this size and scope requires meticulous planning that must include clearly defined formats to work to. In editing terms the packaging of the material was quite straightforward. Fernando Pardo, Head of EBU Sports Operations, explains, “We don’t want to experiment with dynamite. In the Games we stick to what we have planned because this is not the time to make experiments.” For the video, editing was kept straightforward involving only cut transitions. As the material was intended for the recipient member broadcasters to add their own commentary and captions the audio and video was kept clean – as recorded from the event. At the editing stage the audio levels were matched and cross-fade transitions used to make continuous audio tracks that could be immediately used by the recipients.

From left to right: The first off-screen image shows the action being edited on a Quantel sQ Cut editing seat with the annotations about that clip included (H Maier finishing second in the men’s super-G event); the second image shows that same annotation automatically transferred into the EBU’s own management system for shot-listing; the third image then carries this same annotation right through the production chain to appear in the final running order as the edited highlights packages are fed out to the EBU members.



Right: The Newsboxes arrived pre-configured, rackmounted and ready to go.



The EBU service for its members was twofold: to offer packages of events immediately after they were completed and to transmit the assembled 30-minute highlights at 17:30 and 23:30 each day. Typically these included 20 to 30 items.

The real challenges were the timeframes and the scale of the operation. Based in the Olympic International Broadcast Centre (IBC) the EBU set-up had access to feeds for the various events. Two six-channel Newsboxes each with 110 hours of storage and configured as five inputs / one output, provided the core server, storage and management. In addition a third Newsbox with 50 hours' storage gave backup for the bigger events such as semi-finals and finals. The three Newsboxes formed the core of the video and audio operations, responsible for simultaneous multi-channel ingest, editing and replay.

### Preparation

All events are like airline seats; if you miss them they are gone. Everything had to be ready and working, fully up to speed, in Turin before the start of the Winter Games on 10 February. There was a tight on-site timescale with planned access from 1 February. As is its usual practise, Quantel configured and tested the whole pre-assembled system at its Newbury headquarters in January. This also allowed time for training but Pardo points out that only a limited amount was needed. "The majority of the guys who operated here were also in Athens. On top of that, some senior editing staff have been specifically trained in Newbury in January, two weeks before they came here, in order to refresh their knowledge." He adds, "We have only a few technicians who were involved with ingest and playing back the summaries." Generally the operation was easy to learn with nearly all features proving to be quite intuitive.



Right: Fernando Pardo, Head of EBU Sports Operations, with the Newsbox Q Record ingest control stations at the IBC in Torino. The Newsboxes enabled the simultaneous recording of up to ten feeds from different events as highlights editing of the incoming material continued.



### Workflow

Providing the pure video/audio side of the operation with SDI ins and outs was only a part of the overall system. All the many and various operations that were needed to produce and replay the finished packages were carried out using over 20 PC-based workstations all connected to the Newsboxes over 1GB Ethernet. The Quantel hardware and software combined with EBU applications produced a novel workflow designed to meet the specific needs of the EBU's Turin operations and service to its members.

The openness of Newsbox and its ability to integrate with IT-based equipment was one of the major reasons for its selection by the EBU. The video/IT split system created the whole workflow where the IT usage was not just to make the system cost effective but also to address the pressing needs for distributing information as well as to avoid using paper. The whole workflow from the live event to the

member broadcasters' transmissions had to be fast and reliable.

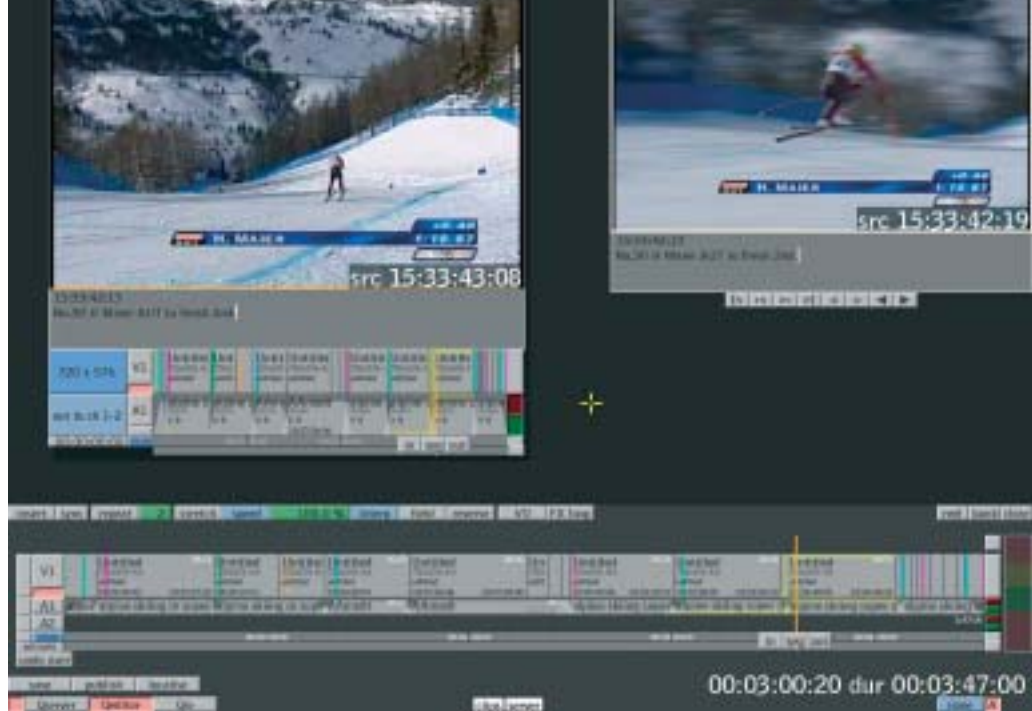
As the operation was all live, there was no need for an automation system as such. All the control was from the PC stations – many using Quantel applications software. Four Q Record PCs, each capable of controlling four Newsbox SDI ports, together provided both the main and backup ingest control. Two Q Play applications controlled all the main playouts.

To handle the volume of work, eight sQ Cut editing seats worked in parallel to share the work and created all the highlights and summaries. Based on its recent Olympic experience, the EBU saw it as essential that they produced not only the video and audio, but also information about the footage to guide local commentaries. Pardo points out that, "The operators are editors; not VTR editors but sports editors!" This was of major importance as they

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**Fernando Pardo, Head of EBU Sports Operations**

Right: Enlarged screenshot of sQ Cut showing the annotation of H Maier finishing second in the men's super-G event.



were called on not just to cut together the highlights and summaries but also to write the information to make up the detailed shot lists so the members' commentators could prepare their voiceovers – even ahead of seeing the video.

This was made possible by using the 'Annotation' feature. Annotation makes it extremely simple to take material and metadata out of the Quantel world and use it meaningfully in any other application. It enabled the sports editors to insert timecode-accurate tags that were associated with the video and write their notes and other additional information about the competitors and the results, as they cut the material together. The data was then stored, as part of an industry-standard AAF 'EDL' file, under sQ Cut tags in the ISA Manager database that is a part of Newsbox. Next an EBU application copied information from the Newsbox systems, including the clip and event names along with the timecode tagged editors' notes to create detailed

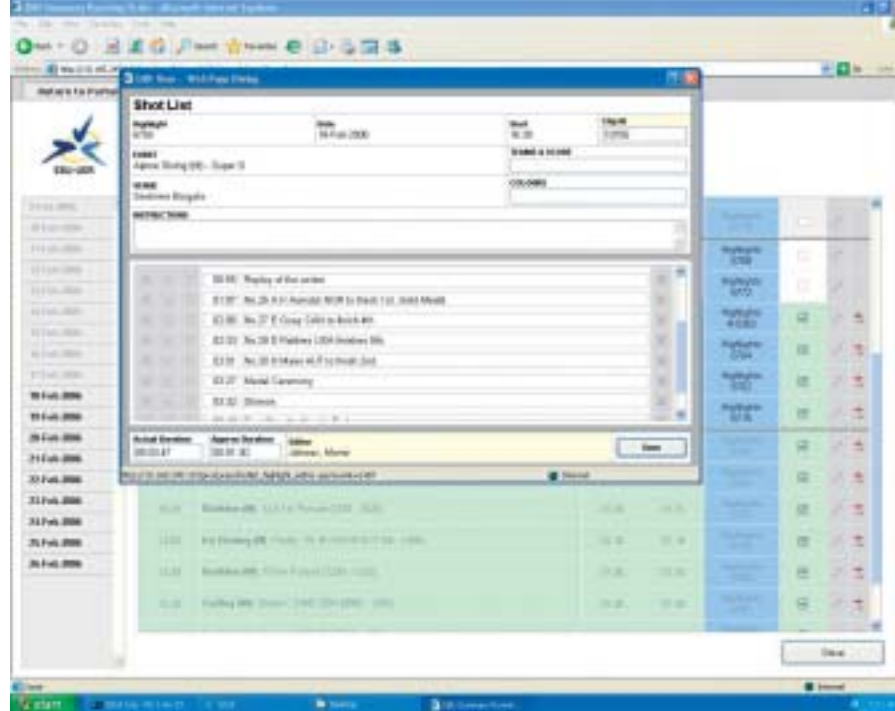
shot lists. These were then automatically linked with the video, placed onto the EBU intranet web pages and made available to all the members – only moments after the edit was completed.

At all times, speed was of the essence as all highlights were due to be available for transmission to members within 10 minutes of the completion of the event. Besides facilitating the swift delivery of detailed shot lists, the Newsbox helped further by allowing editing to proceed as soon as an event began to be ingested on the Newsbox. So the work was mostly already done as the event concluded. For a second opinion the results were checked on one of the four sQ View seats where any necessary adjustments could be made, and were then available for the two sQ Play applications to replay. As the same server was also used for playout, there was no separate replay server, no time was spent copying material and playout could start immediately.

Right: One of the eight sQ Cuts in full flow.



Right: Annotation automatically transfers to EBU shot list.



There was a great emphasis on ensuring reliability. All the footage ingested from the Games was recorded onto either of the 110-hour servers and, as already mentioned, the third 50-hour server was reserved to backup the recordings of the more major events. Also the subsequent editing automatically resulted in the edited packages being duplicated onto both main Newsboxes to provide full backup of replays. With 50 hours of new footage recorded every day, the data was downloaded from the 110-hour servers every two days, and every day from the 50-hour server. This ensured there was always plenty of room available in all servers.

### What's next?

Pardo reflects on the Turin operation. "We are more than happy. And we expect to develop the equipment even further for our future operation in Beijing – or anywhere else; we never stop!"