

# All events live in some form for Olympics on NBC

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(AP) -- NBC's Olympic coverage in London will look very familiar, with one major twist.

For the first time, the network plans to show every event live in some form - even if it's just raw video streaming online. But the prime-time broadcasts will still use that traditional formula of human-interest features and taped competition.

The man behind that coverage will be someone steeped in the NBC philosophy of packaging the Olympics for a wide [audience](#). NBC announced Tuesday that "Today" executive producer Jim Bell would serve in that role for the 2012 Games.

He fills the spot held by Dick Ebersol, who resigned as chair of NBC [Sports](#) Group in May. Earlier in his career, Bell was coordinating producer for NBC Olympics under Ebersol.

"That's what our approach on the Olympics has been and what it will continue to be," said Mark Lazarus, who replaced Ebersol atop NBC Sports Group. "Having Jim do that for the Olympics assures we'll have that sensibility."

Except the prime-time programming bearing that sensibility will no longer be the first opportunity viewers have to watch who wins the gold. Ebersol was adamant even as he left NBC that showing events live during the day would hurt overall ratings.

But to Lazarus, the sports fan of today demands immediacy - and that doesn't have to be mutually exclusive to highly stylized broadcasts aired when people are most likely to be sitting in front of the TV.

"I believe in that, and that will be some philosophical shift from my predecessor," Lazarus told The Associated Press.

Next year's Olympics will test whether those broadcasts will still be highly rated, too.

"You can show things in its rawest form to satisfy that immediacy," Lazarus said, "and then you can package it and make it a bigger story and broader and more inclusive of other elements, and people will watch it again and bring others with them."

The blending of old and new with the Olympics is just a piece of the broader evolution at NBC Sports that Lazarus is in the middle of. Comcast Corp. took over NBCUniversal in January, bringing new bosses - and the resources of the company's sports cable networks.

Lazarus, an outsider to both sides, came aboard as president of the NBC Sports Cable Group with the merger. Then Ebersol, the unmistakable face of NBC Sports for more than two decades, left in a contract dispute.

A former president of Turner Entertainment Group, Lazarus was suddenly overseeing a stable that included the traditional broadcast network of NBC; Comcast's Versus and Golf Channel; its regional sports networks; and digital assets.

Lazarus proudly asserts it's the only media company with all four sorts of platforms. He believes his status as an outsider makes it easy to think in terms of what's best for the entire NBC Sports Group, instead of how the

cable channels can benefit NBC or vice versa.

But clearly a key cog in the future is Versus, which is already slated for a significant change: its name. It will be known as NBC Sports Network starting early next year. The cable channel is getting Major League Soccer broadcasts, which gives it games in the summer to go with the NHL in the winter.

Versus is currently in about two-thirds of American homes with televisions, and Lazarus calls increasing that number "one of our major goals and aspirations." Next year's Olympics will help, along with the MLS deal and the recently extended and expanded NHL contract.

"Take that accumulation of things," Lazarus said. "Any one of them in themselves doesn't necessarily move the needle. On the whole we're trying to build critical mass to inspire people to want to carry us on broader distribution."

And those may have to be enough for now, with few key sports TV contracts ending soon.

"No one's going to give us distribution and say, 'Hey, we really like you guys, so here's another 5 million homes,'" Lazarus said. "We're going to have to earn that."

The big recent deal of course was the Olympics, with NBC securing four games through 2020. As part of that agreement, the network planned to show every event live starting in 2014. That approach will extend to two years earlier in London, as NBC experiments to figure out what works best. Still to be determined for next year is how exactly the live coverage of those marquee events that anchor prime time will be presented earlier in the day.

At the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the network showed 172 total hours of coverage. Lazarus expects about 275 hours a day from London across all its platforms.

The last two [Olympics](#) earned strong ratings even though in the age of the Internet, viewers often already knew what happened when they tuned in at night. The London Games will show whether they'll tune in if they've already seen the action. [NBC](#) has a \$4.4 billion investment riding on that answer.

That balance of old and new, immediate and relived, was part of the network's winning pitch to the IOC.

"From us, you will" get that, Lazarus said. "From the others, I don't know that you would. From us, that will be more of our going-forward philosophy."

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