Opinion: The BBC's Wimbledon in 3D Coverage

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By Yasmin Hashmi, 3Droundabout

The BBC's 3D coverage of final stages of the Wimbledon men's and women's singles tennis was a first. The rationale for where cameras were placed and what types of shot were used is described well in our case study by Jason Coles of Can Communicate, but how did the coverage go down with the viewers?

The Wimbledon Women's Singles winner, Petra Kvitova.

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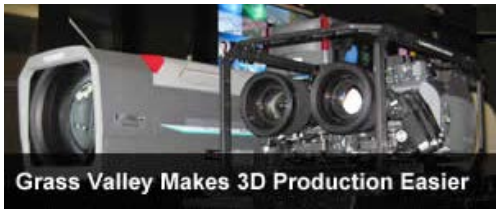

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From the blog of BBC director of London 2012, Roger Mosey came a mix of feedback from the general public. Some were enthusiastic, with comments such as, "It was actually like being there, rather than watching on TV," and, "The commentator was right when he mentioned that the 3D pictures allowed the viewer to see how 'gruelling' the tennis was."

Some people qualified their praise with comments such as, "The actual tennis looked quite good, but I thought the drop in detail quality from HD was noticeable," and, "Having the one angle behind the players was pretty annoying. Maybe when they use more cameras it will be better".

The Wimbledon Men's Singles winner, Novak Djokovic.

There are the usual detractors, and it is not clear how many of these actually watched the 3D coverage. Indeed it seems that one of them had not realised that they needed to wear 3D glasses! And then there were some who wanted an even greater 3D effect, complaining that "I thought it was OK, but the strength of the 3D wasn't as much as I'd have hoped."

If you watched the Wimbledon in 3D coverage, what was your verdict?

What did you think of the BBC's Wimbledon in 3D coverage? (Poll Closed)

It was better than I expected 50%

It was about what I expected 50%

It was worse than I expected 0%

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From the experts' point of view, the consensus seems to be that, as to be expected, there were some issues, but overall, the BBC is to be congratulated for a good first effort. Here is a selection of their comments:

David Wood, Deputy Director, Technology and Development, European Broadcasting Union

As a principle, for a first 3D TV broadcast, the BBC Wimbledon coverage gets high marks from me. True, there were some 'faults', including window violations cutting the bottom edge of the stereo window. As far as captioning was concerned, there seemed to be an almost transparent BBC logo top right with negative disparity. Did they really need that?

Also, the circular 'swosh' logo was as annoying as they usually are.

The floating scoreboard with varying negative disparity left and right side was cute the first time, but got to seem just a gimmick after that. It was possible to spot the 2D to 3D conversion shots, but it was better than just leaving them flat.

Sometimes the 3D shots were really nice, and I loved it when (I think) the cameraman by the umpire turned his camera on the crowd near him. When you see pictures which are geometrically congruent like this you think, wow, this is great.

The BBC idea of using the PEG interactive system to allow viewers to choose a 2D picture (one of Sibs images, stretched) was an excellent idea, and could open the door for more 3D broadcasts that do not penalize 2D viewers (well, OK, the pictures are a bit softer than normal HD) .

For what it's worth, I thought it showed that tennis makes better 3D TV than football. Probably boxing might be even better?

www.ebu.ch

Sangeetha Narasimhan, Director, Chasing Rainbows Digital

We watched the Women's singles final in 3D on a 55″ Samsung TV at home. I loved the immersive experience of watching it on 3D. The depth was amazing. And I did feel like I was sitting as one of the spectators. But as the match went by, I noticed a few things. I think the BBC has not invested in that many rigs for the match. Hence the views were only from a few cameras, which meant missing some important shots in close up. The player reactions were missing in close ups. Also missing were the graphics and replays of vital shots in other angles which were abundant in the HD coverage.

3D as a format is stunning and absolutely works, but I think more investment is needed to make it as immersive an experience as it should be. We chose to watch the Men's finals in HD to get into the actual action as played out by the several cameras, plus enjoy the classy graphic replays!

www.chasingrainbowsdigital.com

John Archer, Freelance Technology Journalist & Owner, HD Wars

The single most obvious thing about the BBC's 3D Wimbledon coverage was that rather than the high camera angle used predominantly for the 2D footage, the 3D camera position was kept low down behind the server, at court level. This makes sense in 3D terms, because it gives you a much better sense of the power, loft and spin of the ball during each shot as well as the structure of each rally than you'd get from a more elevated angle. Interestingly, too, the game feels faster when your eyes are responding to the ball being hit back right at you.

We also appreciated the fact that the crowd hardly looked 3D at all unless the camera was deliberately focussing on it during a break in the play. This ensured that your focus remained locked on the action, while also making the viewing experience less tiring than if your eyes were constantly having to resolve a more extensive image depth.

The main behind-the-server cameras were a touch too close to the action, making it sometimes impossible for them to follow the serving player if they ran off to either extreme side of the court. There was also a slight lack of variety to the camera shots used around the court between points.

Another concern was that the 3D coverage didn't fare quite as well under Wimbledon's natural light. The ball didn't seem quite as crisp as it flowed in and out of the image, and it was difficult to make out all the facial expressions of the players due a) to an editorial preference for mid to long shots, and b) to the amount of brightness lost from the image as a result of the active shutter 3D glasses.

The loss of resolution of the BBC's side by side 3D approach versus Blu-ray's alternate frame full HD approach didn't help the image's slight lack of clarity either – though this is hardly the BBC's fault given the logistical nightmares involved with trying to deliver alternate-frame full HD 3D over any current broadcasting network.

Overall however, we now feel confident, as die-hard tennis fans, that we would choose to watch future tennis finals on the BBC in 3D if they're available. Especially if improvements can be made in some of the negative areas.

For the full article visit www.hdwars.com

Which?

The production was clearly made with comfortable 3D viewing in mind, as panning shots were slow and considered and camera angles were carefully selected.

When comparing the 3D and 2D broadcasts directly, firstly, the picture definition was noticeably better in the 2D version – the square patterns in the tennis net were clearly visible from the court end camera position. On the 3D transmission, the tennis net pattern was not discernable even though the 3D camera appeared to be positioned closer to the court. This loss of definition is a characteristic of 'side by side' broadcasts.

The camera angles between the two broadcasts were noticeably different too. The 3D court end cameras were positioned a lot lower than the 2D cameras. This aided 3D viewing as it gave the actual view the players had of the game, and it helped capture the speed of the tennis rallies.

The BBC 3D director wisely limited the number of switches between camera shots over the whole broadcast. 3D viewers will find constant editing shots extremely tiring to watch, as they require continual re-focussing. The 2D version had a more normal number of shot changes

which the viewer is used to.

Overall, our experts thought the 3D production was well done, and the BBC achieved a very good result. The 3D depth was good; giving a real ‘feel’ to the tennis action, and the director was sensitive to the viewers’ 3D experience.

However, while they found 3D impressive, some of our testers still preferred to view the match in conventional high-definition 2D format. They found the viewing easier on the eye, less tiring to watch, more vibrant and with noticeably better detail and definition.

For the full article visit www.which.co.uk

You can use the comments box below to add your opinion or join the 3Droundabout LinkedIn Group. If you want to find out more about the 3D production technology and techniques used at Wimbledon, visit the 3Droundabout WImbledon in 3D Spotlight page.

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