

THE MATCH

THAMES 1, THE REST 0

Many people are now aware that Thames has won the Football Contract from ITV Sport to provide television coverage of a number of this season's League and Littlewoods Cup matches including the final at Wembley.

This was achieved against fierce competition from a number of other ITV companies and facilities houses. It is seen as an important step forward for Thames in demonstrating, through a tremendous team effort at all levels in the company, from negotiation to implementation, its commitment and strength in today's tough new broadcasting market place.

Whilst none of us has found it easy to encompass a greater workload with less resources, the changes we have made are being shown now to be justified by the results yielded.

Unlike earlier years where ITV contractors would provide sports coverage in their local area on a quid pro quo arrangement, the present political and economic pressures on broadcasters require that such coverage may now be put out to tender on the open market.

In an enquiry document sent out from ITV Sport, Thames in common with other interested companies, was therefore given the opportunity to bid for the provision of Outside Broadcast facilities for 'The Match' programme, featuring 21 football league matches to be broadcast live on Sundays starting on 29 October with Liverpool against Spurs at Anfield.

After discussions at senior management level, the Engineering Department was approached by the OB Department to determine how to meet the specification and set out a bid.

It was clear from the outset that the ITVSport specification would require our flagship OB Unit 1 for the main match scanner.

But extensive modifications were going to have to be carried out, and after a careful feasibility study, the Engineering Department proposal was to increase the number of cameras to 8, to replace the existing vision mixer with a 20 channel Grass Valley unit and to install a Questech Charisma DVE. Two new MII VTR machines were to be fitted and a monitor rack installed containing no less than 42 monitors for all the required sources. This in turn implied additional air conditioning plant for cooling the new equipment.

It was decided to proceed with this work on Unit 1 immediately in order to meet a deadline for a racing programme commitment at Sandown Park. This was achieved after long hours and hard work right up until 11 p.m. on the night before the programme.

But what about the OB Unit 6?

The configuration described by the ITVSport specification indicated that in addition to this main Match Scanner controlling the cameras, a similar Presentation Scanner was required for the co-ordination of VTR's and SLOMO together with 3 interview studio cameras for half time and full time reviews and reports.

A sophisticated dynamic caption scanner from Quantel known as Cypher Sport was to provide animated captions for team listings and field positions with pictures of the players as well as a host of football statistics.

This information was to be derived from a separate Unisys computer programmed to load in constantly-updated data to the Cypher and trigger the instant selection of a player biography and recent performance caption.

The Engineering proposal was to fit all these facilities into Thames OB Unit 6 as the Presentation Scanner, which would entail a total strip-out of the existing production area and a near-impossible rebuilding programme of just 9 weeks.

After a number of revisions of the operational layout to suit production requirements, the work commenced in earnest and was completed on 26 October, allowing the OB department just 2 days to plug up together Unit 1, Unit 6, the VCTender and the Caption Vehicle in a testing and familiarisation session at Hanworth. The vehicles were then driven overnight to the first location at Liverpool in a scramble to be ready for play.

But what of the teams on the pitch on the day?

After an intense battle to take them to the top of the league, the result was Liverpool 1, Spurs 0 at the final whistle.

Yet not many knew that behind the Thames cameras, another tremendous match had been played for the contract against the toughest of opponents. Only our tired, but very relieved OB and Engineering Department knew that the best team had won and that the score line was the same as that first match at Liverpool—Thames 1, The Rest 0.

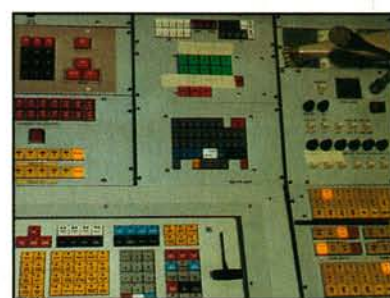
P R Thorpe



The team that worked on the Outside Broadcast project



The new vision mixer . . .



. . . and the Charisma control panel in OB Unit 1



Vision control . . .



. . . now with eight cameras



Sound Control



Bob Warren checks the scanner . . .



. . . before its first programme at Sandown Park

Thames 1, The Rest 0 – Picture Special



9 weeks to go – it can't be done! OB Unit 6 is stripped out



1] The planning begins . . .



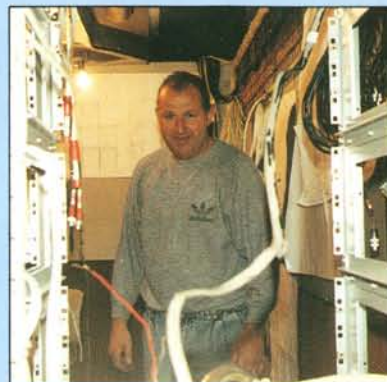
2] The rear racking is tried in position



3] Jack Reeves starts on the first kilometre of cable



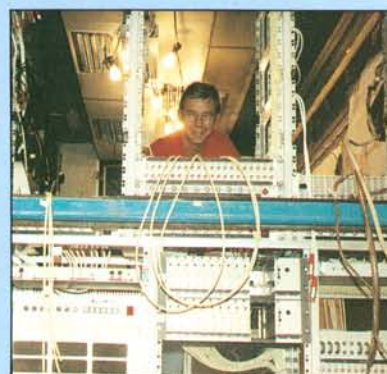
4] Spaghetti eating contest?



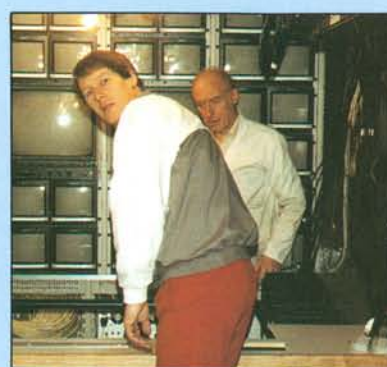
5] Bruce Stevens admires . . .



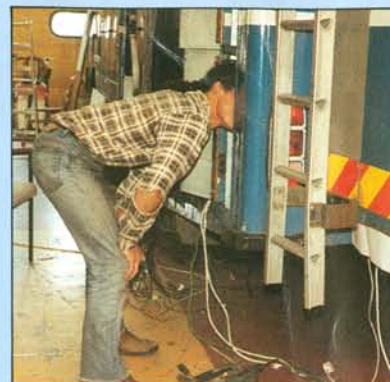
7] Gunter Karn is chief engraver



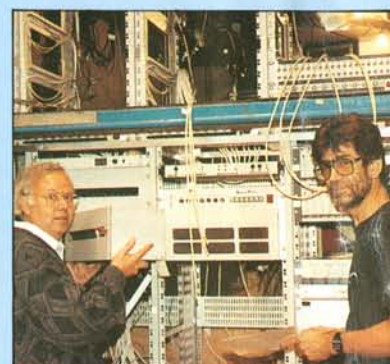
9] Richard Harding directs from above . . .



11] Alan Herbert and Rod Green try the desk in place



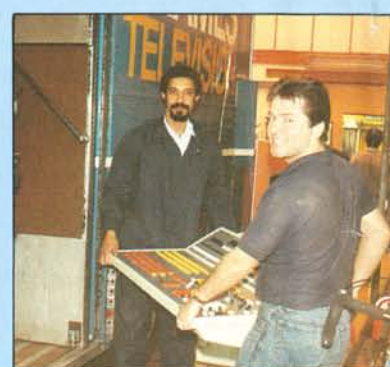
6] . . . Danny Roberts' designer elbows



8] Peter Thorpe installs the CDU upside down assisted by Adrian



10] . . . and works below



12] The mixer arrives . . .



13] and so does the Cypher



14] The fried egg was overdone in the microwave next to it



15] Graham Stephens tries the PA position . . .



16] . . . and Brian Scott makes a good Editor



17] Joe McCarthy finds the vehicle . . .



18] . . . but only to use the phone



19] At last it is finished - Vision Control . . .



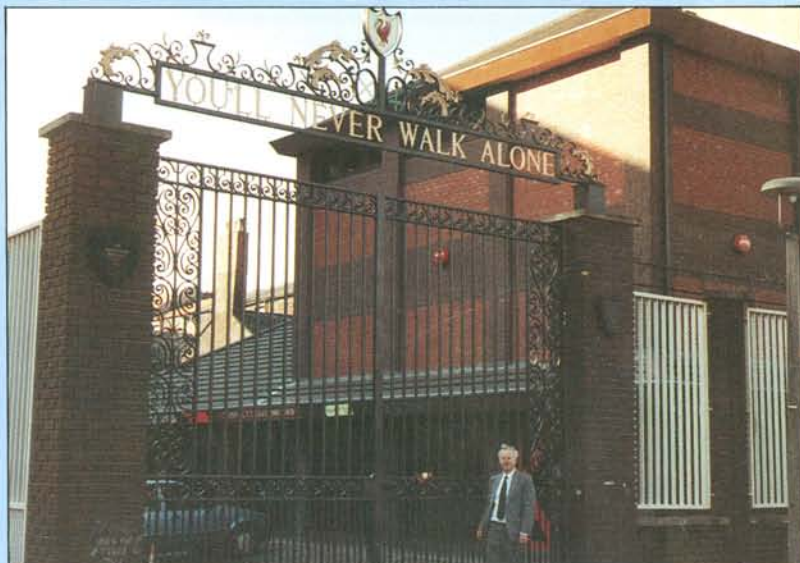
21] The vehicle is under maximum permitted weight and is checked over the pit



20] . . . and Production Control



22] The A team arrive at Liverpool!



23] Peter Thorpe finds the football ground



24] The vehicles arrive and the aerial is rigged



25] Jack Reeves checks the commentary booth

NEARLY TIME FOR KICK OFF



26] Chris shelters from the rain



27] Richard Harding has a quick drag . . .



28] . . . while Mike Coxill checks Unit 1



29] Adrian Sumption and Jack Reeves go aloft . . .



30] . . . to check the link to Winter Hill



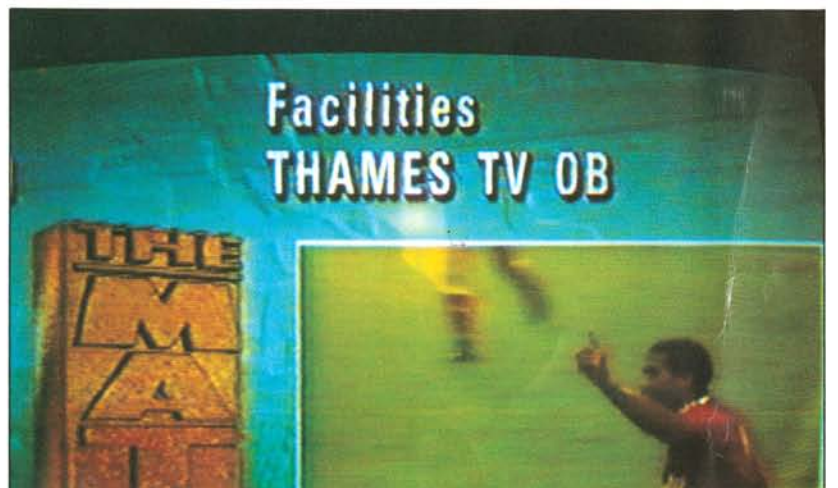
31] Everything is ready . . .



32] On air!



33] For The Match . . .



34] . . . another first for Thames