

ASA asbl makes sports events accessible to visually impaired fans with Sennheiser Tourguide

Brussels/Wedemark, 10 January 2015 – Disability charity ASA asbl has launched Belgium's first audio description services for sports events. The charity uses Sennheiser's Tourguide system to narrate soccer matches for visually impaired fans.

ASA's initiative helps make sporting events more inclusive for the visually impaired by inviting them to attend events and offering an audio description that allows true participation in the experience. Jean-Marc Streel, Director at ASA, sees this service as a vital social responsibility, inspiring ASA to invest in two Sennheiser Tourguide systems with a total of 40 stethoset headphones.

One system covering the entire stadium

For Streel, Sennheiser's Tourguide system is the optimum choice for the task at hand: "Sennheiser products have a proven track record and I had seen and tested several Sennheiser systems in different installations. Furthermore, Tourguide is very easy to set up. We simply connect the source and antennas to the system and we are immediately on air – it only takes two or three minutes. With one antenna we can cover an entire stadium, such as Standard Liège which has 25,000 seats. With the two systems, we often cover two sports events that are taking place at the same time."



From Mons to Brazil

Streel explains that the idea was inspired by stadia in the UK: "In the UK, every soccer stadium has an internal radio station that provides an audio description of the matches. When I saw this, I wanted to start the same service in Belgium and as I'm a big football fan, I started with this particular sport."

ASA started four years ago at matches played in the stadium at Mons but has since grown its operations: "We initially invited visually impaired together with their attendant – in total 14 people – to a match. Then we preferred to work with one attendant for two service users. Over the following years we have expanded our service to Liège Standard and even to the Belgian national side, the Red Devils. During these games we now have 50 seats at our disposal."

"Perhaps the best experience was the opportunity to go to the World Cup in Brazil with a group. It was fantastic, and RTBF, the French Belgian national broadcaster, even made a documentary about the trip. It was such a success that we are already talking to FIFA to participate in EURO 2016 and in the 2018 World Cup."



And football is only the start, explains Streel: "There is a great demand to expand this service to other sports. There is a huge demand for tennis, but this is really difficult because of the long matches, which can be between 4-5 hours. However, we have been able to cover athletics. For example, we covered the AG Insurance Memorial Van Damme, part of the IAAF's Diamond League of top global athletics meetings. We were the first organisation worldwide to offer an audio description of an international athletics competition."

More sports to follow...

"We will further expand this service to other sports and events," says Streel. "One of our future goals is to do a Formula One event. It would be amazing to be able to offer an audio description during the Spa Francorchamps Grand Prix." Christophe van den Berghe, Director Global Trade Marketing of Sennheiser, adds: "I'm incredibly proud that our products are helping to make sports events more inclusive, enabling the visually impaired to truly enjoy the matches. At Sennheiser, we wish to continue supporting such projects."

About Sennheiser

The Sennheiser Group based in Wedemark near Hanover, Germany, was founded in 1945 and has gone on to become a leading manufacturer of microphones, headphones and wireless transmission systems. Sales in 2013 totaled 590.4 million euros. Sennheiser employs more than 2,500 staff worldwide and operates plants in Germany, Ireland and the USA. The company has a worldwide network of subsidiaries in France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Germany, Denmark (Nordic), Russia, Hong Kong, India, Singapore, Japan, China, Australia and New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, and the USA. It also has long-established trading partners in other countries. Georg Neumann GmbH, Berlin, a maker of studio microphones and monitor speakers, and Sennheiser Communications A/S, a joint venture making headsets for PCs, offices and call centers, are also part of the Sennheiser Group.

More up-to-date information about Sennheiser is available on the internet at www.sennheiser.com

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Captions:

Tourguide ASA asbl_1.jpg: Stadium speaker talking into a Sennheiser Tourguide system during a soccer match

Tourguide ASA asbl_2.jpg: Visually impaired soccer fans using Sennheiser Tourguide