



#4 – Mixed zone

Nacer Zorgani: Hi, I am Nacer Zorgani, I work at Paris 2024 for the volunteer program. What is the volunteer program? What do the volunteers do? What is their role, what are their objectives? To answer these questions, to talk about the program, volunteer experience, meet me with those who have done, are doing and will do the Games. Welcome to “In the uniform of a volunteer”.

During the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, nearly 20,000 international press and media representatives will gather in Paris to cover the event, the performances, and the athletes. From the journalist’s pen, its smartphone, up to the satellite trucks of television stations around the world, the Games are simply the most covered, most broadcast and most publicized event on the planet. My guest for the day, my work colleague Audrey Canlet, manager in charge of media and press operations, will not contradict me. And certainly not my special guest, the “Voice of the Games”, Mr Nelson Monfort! Thank you very much for being here.

All: Hello!

Nacer Zorgani: Audrey, I'll start with you as usual, as I always start with my colleague. What are onsite press operations and to who it is addressed, can you explain to us, please?

Audrey Canlet: Precisely, it is the members of the international press who will arrive before the competition to prepare the stories, prepare all the photo and TV equipment. Then, during the competition, they will follow all the athletes' performances, photograph, analyze and write their articles to provide media coverage throughout the world. After the competition, they will carry out several interviews, participate in press conferences, finalise their articles.

To answer your second question, Nacer, that represents 6,000 members of the international press, so 4,000 journalists, 1,500 photographers and 500 radio and TV stations that do not hold the rights and cannot broadcast and comment live. More than that, we will add 14,000 members of TV and radio stations rights-holders, who have acquired the rights. This means that they will be able to broadcast the competitions and comment live from the stadiums.

Nacer Zorgani: Do the volunteers have a role in this? How does it work for them? What are their missions?

Audrey Canlet: You should know that we will have volunteers in each of the areas dedicated to the media. For the members of the international press who will be present, we will welcome them at the competition sites. I say “we” because it is the staff but also the volunteers who will help us with this and make sure that this staff will have everything they need to work in the best conditions and ensure the best media coverage of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Nacer Zorgani: Specifically, where does it take place? You talk about media spaces, but what does it consist of, where does it take place?

Audrey Canlet: We have different media spaces. The first is the main press center in the upper town, which welcomes all the journalists from the international press. We also have media centers on site, where journalists will come and work on preparing their stories before the start of the competition and then we have a certain number of spaces dedicated to them.

There is the press box, to allow them to have a very good visibility on what is happening on the competition sites and to be able to watch and analyze the athletes' performances. Additionally, we have the photo positions in the tribes but also at the edge of the competition area, the press conferences, which only concern the medal-winning athletes. And then, of course, we have the mixed zone, but I think our guest is in a much better position to tell us about that than I am.

Nacer Zorgani: You took the words right out of my mouth about the mixed zone. We have a person who knows it well. It's a bit like his second home, he knows this zone well. So, Nelson, can you tell us what the mixed zone is, please?

Nelson Monfort: The mixed zone has a rather strange name, because we don't know exactly what it is. I decided once and for all that it is a mixed zone because we welcome both boys and girls, and that's fine!

Well, it's actually the end of their feat, their races, their jumps, their swims, their riding, their judo, whatever... On almost all the sites there is this interview zone. This deceleration zone where the athletes pass and express themselves in front of the television cameras from all over the world. At least those who are most used to it, among which France Télévisions obviously benefits from privileged locations. Because it's not the same thing to be third or fourth, in this case, in Paris, we will be first, as to be thirtieth or at the third level obviously.

Nacer Zorgani: Thank you very much Nelson. Audrey, to go further, more concretely, can you describe a little bit more the different missions that the volunteers will be able to carry out on site?

Audrey Canlet: Quite simply, the volunteers press when they are going to start their day, they are going to join one of the press areas where they are going to be assigned. If we take the example of an AFP journalist ...

Nacer Zorgani: AFP is Agence France-Presse, a media agency.

Audrey Canlet: Exactly. When an AFP journalist arrives at the competition site, he or she will go to the Welcome desk, which is the journalists' reception office, located in the media center. Then he will be told, I don't know, if he needs to print a brief or an internet connection or if he wants to go directly to the press tribunes, and there the volunteers will accompany him and show him the right areas. The same goes for the mixed zone, for example, in the TV mixed zone, but also in the press mixed zone, when Teddy Riner goes to the mixed zone after his Olympic victory, which can last a very long time, and the volunteers will be there to help organize this mixed zone, to maintain the

media hierarchy and to help the media find a good place and facilitate the exchange between the athlete and the journalists.

Nelson Monfort: What I love, sorry I interrupt Audrey for a second, but it's so charming what she says. Teddy Riner after his Olympic victory, well, he hasn't got the gold medal yet, but it's as if it's done. I love, love that optimism.

Audrey Canlet: We also have volunteers for the photographic positions and here again, it is very important. The photographers will take the images of the games, the images that will be seen in all the media the next day. And for that, we have privileged locations. If, for example, we have a photographer from Reuters, one of the biggest agencies in the world, who is there on the evening of the 100m final at the Stade de France. Well, the staff and volunteers will tell him where he can set up. We'll have positions in the stands, on the edge of the track, positions right in front of the finish line. And there, the volunteers will make sure that all the services he needs are present, for example the connections to be able to transmit the most beautiful images of the final as quickly as possible.

Nacer Zorgani: And therefore, the most beautiful emotion in sport.

Nelson, we understand that media coverage is essential, but why is it particularly important for you, as you know the mixed zone well?

Nelson Monfort: I think it's very important, I even think it's decisive, even for the athletes and their family and friends, because basically, the athletes, the common point, whether it's swimming, athletics, or something else, is that we see them more than we hear them. Whereas here, we see them in action, we see them in close-up, and we also hear them. And I know, I get a lot of feedback, that this is a very important step for them. It is not mandatory, and this is something I would like to say, that, yes, we have the locations, 80-90% of the time, the athletes stop, but they are not obliged to stop, and that is the role of the journalist, which obviously consists of getting the athlete to stop.

Audrey Canlet: And I would like to add to what Nelson said. It's important that athletes stop in the mixed zone during the Olympic Games. For me, it is even more important during the Paralympic Games. It's a key issue for us at Paris 2024. For me, this really underlines the importance of volunteers in this zone to enable the media coverage of the Paralympic Games.

Nacer Zorgani: So, the athlete, if the medals are even better, I imagine, and how does it work? Because there are press conferences for the medallists, how does it work?

Audrey Canlet: Exactly, the last highlight for a media day and for a medal-winning athlete is the press conference. It is the last moment when he will be able to exchange with the press and once again, the staff, the volunteers, we will all be there to facilitate this exchange between the athlete and the international press.

Nacer Zorgani: I guess facilitating communication in terms of languages. I know one person who knows it pretty well, because of his signature, Nelson, I'm not going to ask you the same perpetual question about athletes. But I want you to tell me something about volunteers.

Nelson Monfort: To come back to what Audrey was saying, I think that the main quality of the volunteers, and God knows they have it, is simply kindness. They are already happy to be here. They are happy to share their experiences, they are smiling, they are friendly. I'm sure that in the recruitment criteria, personality and smiles count a lot, obviously. Much more than technical hazards etc.

Nacer Zorgani: Audrey, Nelson followed in your footsteps. Who are we looking for to be a volunteer, press and media support during the Paris 2024 Games?

Audrey Canlet: As Nelson said, we are looking for people who smile, who are welcoming and who have a sense of service. We mustn't forget that the first faces the international press will see when they arrive at a competition site will be the volunteers and therefore, as Alain Blondel also said in the last episode...

Nacer Zorgani: Yes, Alain, whom we interviewed in the podcast "On your marks", which I advise you to listen to, also dedicated to sport volunteers.

Audrey Canlet: Exactly, and so, as Alain said, we expect them to be there without being there, to be available, accessible, but at the same time discreet, present to facilitate the work of the international press.

Nacer Zorgani: Nelson, perhaps a second-to-last question before the final word, did you see, the evolution of the role of the volunteers over the Olympiads and Paralympiads.

Nelson Monfort: Yes, so the first evolution is that there are more and more volunteers. I don't know if we should probably be able to organize games without volunteers, but I think that with volunteers it's much better. It gives, as Audrey said, a smile to these Games. The success of the Olympic Games is not only a medal table, but also not only the organization, that I have no doubt, will be perfect. It is also the smile that should, for me, be the 6th Olympic ring. I have seen this evolution. There are more and more volunteers, I imagine that there are more and more applications to be volunteers. And that is the strength of the Olympic movement and the Olympic Games, because they are volunteers, and I have a lot of admiration, I even have affection for them.

Nacer Zorgani: Thank you very much. Nelson. Audrey, we are opening the platform for applications in March 2023. Would you like to say a few words to encourage those who are listening to us to join us as a volunteer?

Audrey Canlet: I have only one thing to say, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in your country are once in a lifetime.

Nacer Zorgani: Nelson?

Nelson Monfort: There's nothing more to say! Everything has been said. Don't forget that my nickname, Nelson Monfort, is "Met le son moins fort" ("turn down the volume") after such a conclusion, I have nothing to add, everything is said, and I totally agree.

Nacer Zorgani: Thank you very much Nelson, thank you very much Audrey. See you in the next episode!