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SPORTS GRAPHICS

Sennheiser, Fred Aldous Give Audio-Mixing Student a Day at the Races

By [Dan Daley, Audio Editor](#)

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If you're wondering where the next generation of broadcast-sports audio mixers is coming from, Sennheiser wants to help figure that out. As part of the company's ongoing collaboration with major sports broadcasters and higher-education institutions, David Polster, a music production major in the School of Media Arts and Studies at Ohio University in Athens, spent three days last May shadowing Fred Aldous, an audio consultant and senior mixer for Fox Sports, during the NASCAR Coca-Cola 600, learning some of the ropes of mixing the loudest sport.

Polster's on-site education began Friday May 27, two days before the main event in Charlotte, NC.

The “classroom” was the Coca-Cola 600: the longest race sponsored by NASCAR and one of the largest sporting events in the world, with nearly 200,000 spectators and a nationwide television and radio audience. There would be a lot of sound.

“Whenever I mentor students, I intentionally try to overwhelm them since it gives me a good indication of just how serious they are about going into the broadcast-audio field,” says Aldous, who mixed the show aboard the Game Creek Fox A unit. “The NASCAR Coca-Cola 600 is the perfect event to immerse a student since it’s probably the largest live-production setup they would ever get to see.”

As the host broadcaster for the event, Fox Sports provides feeds for ESPN, International Sports Broadcasting, and other distributors on-site. “We have close to 20 semi trucks in the compound at any one time, so, essentially, it’s a very complex setup,” Aldous explains. “One of the biggest takeaways for the student is to gain an understanding of not only what I do as a sports mixer but also how everything interacts and interfaces as a whole.”

Since the production setup at the Coca-Cola 600 was a holdover from NASCAR’s All-Star Weekend that Fox Sports broadcast the week before, Aldous was able to use that first day to spend time one-on-one with Polster and walk him through all the facilities. The next day involved observing the broadcast during the qualifying and practice shows.

“On Saturday, I had David sit in with me for part of the day and then observe all of the individual setups — from the announce booth to the microphones installed around the track,” Aldous says. “For the actual race on Sunday, he was with me in the mixing truck. All in all, I think he got a very thorough overview.”

Recalls Polster, “It was a very exciting experience. There is no way you can learn about this level of broadcast-engineering event from a textbook. Sennheiser’s mentorship program helped me determine that live sports broadcasting is a very viable career option for me.”

Mike Rodriguez, director of the student professional development program at PBS affiliate WOUB on the campus of Ohio University, recommended Polster for the mentorship. “The Sennheiser mentorship program is an extremely valuable opportunity since we do not get a lot of live productions with big trucks like the NASCAR event rolling through Athens,” he says. “We really applaud Sennheiser for providing such an experience — and it makes my job easier.”

Polster’s interest in sports broadcasting began in high school, where he worked in the AV department, often taping his school’s live sports events. Like Aldous, he was attracted to the “adrenaline rush” that comes with broadcasting live sports events. “I am extremely thankful to Sennheiser for allowing me to do this,” he says. “It was one of the best learning experiences in my life thus far, and Fred is among the most patient people I know in such demanding circumstances.”