

Audio Describing Football: A Case Study of Bohemians FC

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ABSTRACT

As organisers of popular public events, football clubs are increasingly expected to foreground accessibility. This has led many European clubs to provide audio-described commentary (ADC) in their stadiums so that spectators who are blind and partially sighted can enjoy the matchday experience. ADC differs from regular football commentary by describing action rather than just commenting on it. At small clubs, ADC provision is usually delivered by volunteers, as is the case at Dublin club Bohemians FC, which has provided in-stadium ADC since 2019, resulting in a Total Access award from CAFE (Centre for Access to Football in Europe) in 2022. Using interviews with club staff, AD commentators and ADC users, this article documents the development of ADC provision at Bohemians as part of the club's societal mission. This study covers commentator training, general guidelines, and the perceptions of ADC providers and users. ADC was the gateway to accessibility for most commentators, who have a personal interest in accessibility and are fans of the club. For some users, the provision of ADC has been transformative, but take-up overall has been low. Nonetheless, the service has proved impactful for football in Ireland, leading several other clubs to offer ADC.

KEYWORDS

audio description, audio descriptive commentary, football, soccer, accessibility, Bohemians FC

1. Introduction

A growing body of research on accessibility across all sectors in society documents and advances audio description (AD; e.g. Fryer, 2016; Snyder, 2008; Taylor & Perego, 2022). Developing new evidence that illustrates advances in AD across different sectors in society is key for: (a) underscoring accessibility in all dimensions of daily life as a vital aspect of quality of life for blind and partially sighted (BPS) people; and for (b) building an increasingly successful social infrastructure that ensures access and wellbeing for all. AD has been defined by the American Council for the Blind as “either live or recorded information, provided by a trained describer that provides descriptions of visual components of an event to become accessible to those who are blind or of low vision” (Taylor & Perego, 2022, p. 1). While most published studies relate to AD for film and television, Taylor and Perego (2022, p. 1) note the use of the term ‘event’ in the definition above to cover an extended range of scenarios and phenomena, including theatre, museums, and “live events such as football¹ matches”.

For this article, audio-described commentary (ADC, also called audio-descriptive commentary) is defined as real-time information, provided by a trained describer who presents descriptions of visual components on and around the pitch at sporting events, making the live experience accessible to those who are blind or of low vision. Accessibility in football and other live sports is growing within the EU, although Atherton and Macbeth (2017, p. 284) argue that this tends to be “imposed on clubs by governmental bodies, rather than coming from clubs’ or football authorities’ own initiatives”. For example, the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Soccer Sight programme in the UK responded to the Disability Discrimination Acts of 1995 and 2005, resulting in volunteer-led ADC initiatives at 29 British football clubs by 2008 (RNIB, 2008). Atherton and Macbeth (2017) credit the establishment of CAFE (the Centre for Access to Football in Europe, since 2024 AccessibAll) in 2009 with increased international ADC provision at large tournaments. This began with ad hoc

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AD initiatives, followed by systematic provision by FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) at the World Cup in 2010 and by UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) and CAFE at the European Football Championships in 2012. At EURO 2012, UEFA provided equipment but ADC was again volunteer-led, with 26 volunteers trained by CAFE and 16 chosen to commentate on matches (Michalewicz, 2014). CAFE subsequently trained over 100 commentators across 30 countries since 2018, and UEFA expanded ADC services for more recent women's and men's EUROs, funding ADC services for major finals.

EU legislation has also advanced ADC provision. The European Accessibility Act (EAA) came into force in June of 2025, promoting accessibility across audiovisual media (European Union, 2019). While it does not explicitly mandate ADC, it requires broadcasters and streaming services to incorporate AD as an accessibility feature, making content accessible to visually impaired individuals across many areas, including live sports broadcasts. This legislation is reinforced by the EU's 2018 Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), which specifically addresses accessibility in television and on-demand services. Under Article 7, EU member states must ensure that media service providers take appropriate measures to make their content accessible to persons with disabilities, including through AD. While the EAA focuses on the accessible delivery of content via digital platforms, the AVMSD complements it by promoting the actual production and provision of accessible content, such as audio-described live sports broadcasts. Together, these directives create a comprehensive legal framework that supports both the creation and dissemination of accessible media.

In line with these directives and a change in perception of accessibility in current societies, football clubs, as organisers of popular public events, are increasingly expected to foreground accessibility, depending on national and international requirements. This has led many to provide ADC in their stadiums so that BPS spectators can enjoy the matchday experience. For big, well-resourced clubs, this does not present a major challenge, although even international tournaments rely on external financial support when providing ADC. For small member-owned clubs that rely on volunteers, ADC is a major undertaking.

This case study investigates the challenges of ADC service provision for a small sports organisation, looking in particular at how ADC is perceived by providers and end users, and assessing the influence of this initiative on similar organisations. The Dublin-based football club Bohemians FC (hereafter referred to as Bohemians and in interviews as Bohs) were the first team in the League of Ireland (LOI) to provide in-stadium ADC, making it available since 2019, despite having a small budget and few full-time staff – the senior men's team only became full-time professionals in 2023. The club sees accessibility as part of their Football Social Responsibility (FSR) mission for community engagement, which has contributed to a period of growth. The club appointed a full-time Disability and Social Inclusion Access Officer in 2020 and in 2022 won a Total Access award from CAFE. Since then, the Access Officer role has reverted to a volunteer position, and the ADC provision has been entirely volunteer-run.

Using semi-structured interviews with club staff and volunteer AD commentators, the article documents the beginning of ADC provision at Bohemians, their preferences for what should and should not be described, and how these have progressed over time.

Interviews are also used to gather information about BPS spectators' reception of the ADC provided, an area that Bywood et al. (2023) note is under-researched, in order to maximise their enjoyment of the matchday experience.

The article begins by reviewing literature on football ADC, then introduces the context for the LOI and Bohemians, before moving on to research design, the findings and a discussion.

2. Introducing football ADC

ADC differs from many other forms of AD (such as for television, film or museums) in that it is primarily about live and in-person events, although there is also live ADC for televised sport. In her seminal introduction to AD, Fryer (2016) differentiates between AD for screen and AD for live events. Many of the common features of live events apply to football, such as the sense of occasion and the influence of the audience on AD choices. Live AD is often improvised rather than scripted, with live delivery resulting in variable technical quality; it is often provided by volunteers in unregulated scenarios. However, Fryer's examples are drawn from theatre, ballet and opera, as is common in literature about AD for live events.

Little academic research has been published on ADC for football. The chapter by Bywood et al. (2023) on inclusive football commentary provides a useful introduction, explaining the impetus for ADC in the UK from the Soccer Sight programme (RNIB, 2008) and the UK's Equality Act in 2010, the importance of the stadium atmosphere as part of the matchday experience, and comparing in-stadium ADC and radio football commentary. They highlight how, while BPS attendees can hear crowd noises and responses to on- and off-pitch events, "without mediation of the visual aspects of the game, it becomes harder to get the full details of the shared emotional experience and relatedness that forms an important part of the matchday experience" (Bywood et al., 2023, p. 211).

Pedregosa (2025) compares ADC and radio commentary in more detail based on surveys of sighted and BPS listeners and a corpus drawn from nine football match commentaries. She finds that, while both forms contain more time-critical than background or non-time-critical information, ADC tends to contain more time-critical information and to employ more specialised football language. ADC focuses on spatial and action content rather than opinion. In survey responses from 59 BPS participants, they preferred partisan ADC from the perspective of the team they support. Respondents who prefer ADC over radio commentary say that it avoids too much irrelevant detail, but others complain of technical problems (e.g. volume levels) and a lack of passion in ADC.

ADC differs from regular football commentary by describing action rather than just commenting on it. During the match, this means that the AD commentator focuses on describing the action on-pitch rather than discussing other aspects such as statistics, tactics, or summaries of previous action (CAFE, 2019). Thompson (2018, np) reports finding regular commentary to be isolating; however, if she can imagine how the ball moves with the help of ADC, she can "feel immersed in the action of the game". While earlier guidelines recommended a focus on on-pitch action, current recommendations (CAFE, 2019, p. 3) are to describe "all significant visual information such as body language, facial expression, scenery, action, clothing, colours", in order to properly

convey the “surrounding ambience”. Koenigstorfer et al. (2010) and Bywood et al. (2023) highlight the importance of the matchday atmosphere as the major contributor to spectators’ enjoyment, which again supports a broader focus.

While rules and guidelines are an important consideration, the conditions across clubs offering ADC services differ significantly—and in many cases, other factors such as resource availability, staffing models, and local priorities may heavily influence not only the presence of ADC services, but also their quality and consistency. According to Bywood et al. (2023), smaller clubs’ ADC is usually delivered by volunteers, if at all. This is the situation in our case study of Bohemians, where the motivation for introducing ADC was almost coincidental rather than driven by external conditions.

3. Introduction of ADC at Bohemians FC

This section provides important context for our study, introducing Bohemians and the background to the club’s ADC provision, including some quotes from our interview participants (about whom details may be found in Section 4). Bohemians is a members-owned club in the LOI, the highest level of national football in Ireland. Opened in 1901, their home ground of Dalymount Park is situated in a diverse area of north Dublin and was described by the author Roddy Doyle as “a stadium in an area that crackles with history and is also a magnet for newness” (Smith 2024, p. A17).

There are ten professional and semi-professional teams in the LOI Premier Division, with annual budgets of between 2 and 3 million euro, only one of which posted a profit in 2023, although attendance numbers more than doubled from 2019 to 2024 to reach an average of just over 3,500 (RTÉ, 2024). According to Cummiskey (2024), despite unprecedented revenue levels in the LOI, clubs are simultaneously experiencing their highest-ever financial deficits.² Many clubs’ existences are precarious. Bohemians faced near collapse in 2015, but has since managed to rebuild and grow, a shift largely driven by its commitment to community initiatives alongside what Smith (2024, p. A16) calls “distinctly capitalist marketing strategies”. Where merchandise sales came to roughly €100,000 in 2014, they comprised almost half of the club’s 2024 turnover of €4.5m (Haugh, 2025). The club’s renewed emphasis on FSR—including outreach programmes, inclusive fan engagement, and local partnerships—has not only strengthened its ties with the community but also contributed materially to its financial and reputational recovery. Recent high-selling away and third jerseys have linked with left-wing political causes that align with the 2023-2027 Community Strategy commitment to be a ‘force for good’ (Bohemians FC, 2023), along with musicians who played in Dalymount Park and those with direct ties to the club.

The introduction of ADC at Bohemians came in the context of this emphasis on deepening community engagement. In an interview, one of the club officials (P1; see participant list in Table 1) explained that the club found itself without a sense of purpose in the mid-2010s, prompting a shift towards leveraging its member-owned status and fostering a culture of volunteerism. P1 also emphasised the board’s role in facilitating community-oriented initiatives: “Ultimately, anything that, sort of, is of benefit to the wider community [...] making the match day more accessible for people [...], we’re just going to be supportive of that”. Another former club official and AD commentator (P2) was 23 years old and employed by the National Council for the Blind in Ireland (NCBI, now Vision Ireland, the country’s national sight loss agency) when he proposed ADC at Bohemians. With experience in football coaching and as a

Bohemians member, he had previously provided informal commentary alongside televised matches for BPS individuals at a daycare centre, where “we would have been describing stuff consistently every single day for a couple of years”. It was during this time that he came across a video on Facebook featuring Alexis Dobbin, the Disability Access Officer at Celtic FC, discussing their ADC service. Motivated by this example, P2 approached Bohemians’ then CEO—whom he had not met before—at a café the CEO co-owned. “I was like [...] I’m a member, I have this idea for audio description commentary” (P2).

Bohemians immediately accepted P2’s offer to voluntarily establish an ADC service using equipment provided by Vision Ireland. As P2 recalls, “I said to them: there’s no financial contributions, there’s no hours, I’m doing everything. Here you go. I have it all: I have all the training, I have the people to attend”. Drawing on guidance from CAFE, Celtic FC and other UK clubs, P2 conducted independent research and prepared for the initial implementation. “I just went and did it” (P2). Where larger funded initiatives such as Soccer Sight offer radio broadcasting systems set up for ADC, Bohemians used small transmitters for bus tours. By implementing ADC services through volunteer efforts using practical, adaptable solutions, Bohemians showed its commitment to accessibility, in line with its FSR.

Before the first match, the club announced the initiative on social media, which quickly attracted national media interest. P2 invited service users from the local community who attended the BPS day service: “We brought them to the match and didn’t have a trial match before; there was media attention. Now, there was RTÉ straight away, like, filming a piece on it, because it was the first of its kind” (P2). The segment produced by RTÉ, Ireland’s national broadcaster, became a viral success: “it got something like 800,000 views” (P2). The response was immediate: “On the Monday morning, the NCBI had phone calls from two different football clubs in Ireland, wanting [their volunteers] to be trained” (P2). The media attended each of the three remaining home matches that season to cover the new ADC provision. P2 described a level of attention that was off-putting for some users (“it was like a circus”), particularly as they were ushered to a specific area, which as Atherton and Macbeth (2017) note is common practice. To avoid this, one attendee reportedly said “I have low vision. I’d rather sit with my friends.” (P2).

At the beginning of the following season (2020³), significant effort was made to engage new ADC users. However, after just two matches, the COVID-19 pandemic brought football to a halt. In response, P2 purchased an online broadcasting account and asked the club for permission to attend closed-door matches during lockdown in order to provide online ADC: “I brought my laptop to the match with a speaker and a microphone and I just spoke to it” (P2). The online broadcasts gained significant traction: “It went bananas, like, over a thousand listeners, I could track them from around the world” (P2). Shortly after reverting to in-person match attendance, Bohemians received the CAFE Total Access award, which brought their efforts to a wider international audience. As P2 recalled, “[An ADC user] spoke to CAFE about it and there’s a really powerful piece on how it’s changed his life being able to have audio description [...] and we didn’t even apply for an award. We just were given it” (P2; see AccessibALL, 2022).

P2 ran the ADC service on a voluntary basis for two years. “I didn’t want to cost the club a penny”, they explained, “I wanted them to see that we could get good

attendance based on users, we had the equipment already supplied” (P2). Initially, the club provided free tickets to ADC users, but this practice was later reconsidered. Disabled fans were “to be treated equal [...] if you treat it like it’s a special thing that they get a freebie every time, that’s not being part of the community. It’s just tokenism” (P2). This shift in thinking was echoed by P1, who noted that “the person with the disability still wants to pay, still wants to contribute” while also recognising the need for practical accommodations: “if it’s required, then obviously [their carer] gets a complimentary ticket”. This fits with the message from disabled supporter associations, reported by Atherton and Macbeth (2017, p. 285), that they want to be “equal members of the football family”.

To ensure fairness and consistency as matches began to sell out, the club introduced a disability ballot system, allowing anyone with a disability to apply for match tickets. Matchday procedures were also formalised: “[We] have somebody waiting at the halfway line to greet” users, and then “two volunteers to do the commentary”; “It runs incredibly smoothly” (P1). RNIB (2008) recommend a ‘journey sequence’ for BPS fans from outside the stadium, but this is difficult in the busy, narrow alleyways around Dalymount Park.

The development of Bohemians’ ADC service has facilitated connections with European networks such as CAFE and with the European Football for Development Network (EFDN). These relationships have proved valuable in securing grant funding and sharing best practices. It is important to note that the introduction of ADC also served as a catalyst for a broader suite of accessibility initiatives at the club. As P2 explained: “This was the thing that started everything for Bohs in terms of a football-for-all team, a special Champions League team, having a Bohs disability supporters association, having wheelchair access seats properly, having accessible tickets, having accessible parking, having an accessible toilet that’s properly used”. While P1 acknowledged that such developments are “obviously the right thing to do”, they also emphasised the strategic value of accessibility work in terms of the club’s wider sustainability: “[T]here’s a material return for the club in that, you know, that you’re getting more supporters in, you’re selling more jerseys, etcetera, and I think that that’s quite a simple diagram of, you know, more community work, more fans, more money for the first team”.

4. Research Design

The ADC service at Bohemians is typical of accessibility efforts in sport across Ireland, in that it is primarily reliant on local, ad hoc initiatives, constrained by budgetary support, and reliant on voluntary efforts. However, after five years of ADC, the service may be considered relatively mature, having adapted to the circumstances of the club and its supporters. It is therefore important to examine how this local ADC initiative is perceived not only by those who provide and facilitate it—such as club staff and volunteers—but also by the BPS users. Additionally, as a pioneering ADC service in the LOI, this study should enable readers to understand its impact on the league and on football in Ireland.

The study is exploratory in nature and reports on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with club accessibility and inclusion staff and volunteer AD commentators, along with BPS users, examining their reception of Bohemians ADC, looking in particular at spectators’ experiences and opinions about what should and should not

be described to maximise their enjoyment of the matchday experience. Although Bohemians has 3,000 members (Smith, 2024), the number of BPS individuals using ADC services at matches typically ranges from three to ten per game. Given this relatively small user base, a sample of three participants is considered broadly representative for the purpose of this study. As qualitative research, the intention is not to generalise findings, but rather to explore individual experiences in depth.

The study employed purposive sampling, choosing only those with a direct role in facilitating or using ADC. Participants were recruited through direct contact with Bohemians' Access Officer, given the small number of AD commentators and users. All participants were provided with a Plain Language Statement, outlining the purpose and scope of the study, and gave their informed consent prior to their interviews. The study addresses the research question "How did one local accessible commentary (ADC) initiative influence stakeholders' experiences and the broader impact of football accessibility efforts in Ireland?" This overarching question is explored through three subquestions:

- (1) How is this local ADC initiative perceived by the providers (the club and commentators)?
- (2) How is this local ADC initiative received by the end users (BPS individuals)?
- (3) How has this initiative impacted football in Ireland, if at all?

To address these research questions, two different sets of interview questions were designed for the two participant groups (see Appendix). The questions for AD commentators focused on their experience, training and the challenges encountered in delivering the service. In contrast, the questions for AD users explored their preferences, level of satisfaction, and suggestions for future improvement. Data were collected through anonymised interviews, although the small number of participants and high profile of Bohemians' ADC provision means that complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, was employed to systematically identify key themes and patterns from the interview data. Although no qualitative analysis software was used, the analysis followed a structured approach: interviews were transcribed verbatim, read multiple times to ensure familiarity, and initial codes were generated manually. These codes were then iteratively reviewed and organised into themes reflecting commonalities and differences across participants. This approach allowed an in-depth exploration of volunteer AD commentators' perceptions of the service and the motivations underlying their participation. For AD users, the analysis focused on their matchday experiences, including the clarity of player identification, accuracy and usefulness of play descriptions, and overall contextual understanding of the game. By explicitly linking codes to participants' narratives, the methodology ensured that both provider and user perspectives were systematically captured and interpreted. The analysis also considered the users' overall satisfaction of the services and their suggestions for improvements. Given the limited research on ADC in football – and particularly on the reception of services by BPS users, this framework helps us to understand both the practical delivery and user-centred dimensions of AD in some detail and potentially support future research approaches. The study aims to understand how ADC affects

users' engagement and comprehension, while also identifying potential gaps in current practices and informing future approaches to commentator training and service standardisation.

Patterns identified within the data are important for understanding the perceptions and practices surrounding ADC provision, and the themes that emerged from this analysis will help to inform future ADC research. Most interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim, adding punctuation and removing verbal hesitations. One interview (P4) was transcribed directly without recording due to technical limitations. Thematic analysis was then conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps:

- Step 1: Become familiar with the data.
- Step 2: Generate initial codes.
- Step 3: Search for themes.
- Step 4: Review themes.
- Step 5: Define themes.
- Step 6: Write-up.

A total of seven participants took part in this study. Due to the specific nature of this initiative and the limited number of people behind AD provision in Ireland, two interviewees were previously contacts of one of the researchers (P2, P6). The interviews were conducted either face-to-face (including one (P5) at pitchside during half time), over the telephone, or using a video conferencing platform, in order to accommodate the participants' preferences and accessibility needs. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at Dublin City University, and all procedures adhered to the required ethical standards.

Participants comprised members of the club's Operations Team, AD commentators, and AD users as outlined in Table 1.

Participant	Role
P1	Club Operations
P2	AD Commentator (Volunteer and former Club staff)
P3	AD Commentator (Voluntary)
P4	AD Commentator (Voluntary)
P5	AD user
P6	AD user
P7	AD user

Table 1. Participant profiles

5. Findings

This section reviews findings from providers and users of ADC services at Bohemians, covering accessibility, motivation, training, challenges, user experiences, satisfaction, awareness, and social inclusion.

5.1 Findings of Audio Description Commentators and Club Operations

Findings from interviews with AD commentators and Club Operations staff reveal shared perspectives on the development of ADC provision, highlighting positive experiences while also acknowledging areas that are underdeveloped or have been overlooked in current practice. The findings revolve around the following superordinate themes: Accessibility and motivation; Training and improving the experience for AD users; and Challenges for ADC at club and national level.

5.1.1 Accessibility and Motivation

The AD commentators all had certain things in common: they were fans of football, Bohemians in particular, eager to volunteer to help others, and interested in accessibility, usually due to a personal link to someone with access requirements. They also identified with the club's commitment to FSR. P4, for example, explains that “a lot of clubs don't win trophies so they should have something that they stand for, a purpose in the community, that's a good thing to have”. P2 and P3 were inspired to volunteer by media clips on ADC: P2 from a report about ADC at Celtic and P3 from a report from the first year of ADC at Bohemians. P4 knew an AD user (P5), who suggested they try out.

The emotional reward of positive user feedback plays an important role in sustaining Bohemians' ADC provision, particularly because of its reliance on volunteers. P3 explains that the “feedback is amazing. It's really, really heartwarming, even when we haven't been very good”. After “every single game, like, the guys are so thankful and they come up and, like, give you a hug and all that”. These expressions of gratitude highlight the social and emotional value of ADC for both users and providers, even within a modest and resource-constrained footballing environment. At Bohemians there is a dedicated team of six commentators to provide ADC (all but one male). At the time of the interview, P3 and P4 had consistently provided ADC for four and two years (respectively).

5.1.2 Training and Improving the Experience for AD Users

The commentators received different levels of training. Although P2 started providing ADC before receiving any training other than advice and documents from CAFE, they subsequently received two days of training from CAFE, outsourced to a company called Alan March Sports. They later “condensed that into a three-hour training session” and delivered it to interested volunteers, including P3, from Bohemians and other clubs. P2 found the CAFE training scenario to be intimidating for newcomers – they were expected to commentate on international matches in front of other attendees – and inappropriate for LOI level, where they preferred to have newcomers shadow an experienced commentator. This was how P3 trained P4.

Regarding content, P3 and P4 maintain that the focus must always be on the pitch. “We want our listeners to know just as much as what’s going on on the pitch as the non-visually impaired people do” (P3). When commentating, the ADCs ‘map’ the pitch in thirds: defence, midfield and attack, and then differentiate between near and far. P4 says that “in AD commentary you focus on where the ball is rather than what player has the ball”. For them, it’s important to explain moves in detail, for example explaining “what sort of pass, whether it was chipped or along the grass [...] If they take a shot whether they go to the right or left of the goal, or over the bar, or into the bottom corner”. P3 gives the example of a player who “uses the outside of their foot to play the ball over the top of the defence; we have to make sure that we call that out”.

The commentators build mental imagery for users by including physical descriptions of players. “We can talk about the colour of their boots or the hairstyle. Have they got tattoos? All that kind of stuff” (P3). P4 calls out teamsheets and kits, “whether Bohs are wearing the home kit, the red and black, are they playing into the Des Kelly or the Connaught Street end”, adding culture-specific references to give supporters “a sense of belonging”. P3 also likes to explain what’s happening in the stands, as recommended in the CAFE guidelines (2019), so if “the fans have unfurled a big banner saying something, we’ll make sure to [...] put that out over the commentary. If there’s anything kind of unique going on, flares being let off, anything like that”.

For club teams, P2 feels that it’s important for AD commentators to be fans, an opinion that aligns with Pedregosa’s (2025) survey participants. “You can have all the terminologies and the best practices [...] but if your team scores a 90th minute winner, everything goes out the window and you’re screaming and shouting like everyone else and so are the users” (P2). This is significant, as P2 was the originator of football ADC at Bohemians and in Ireland. At international matches, “it’s definitely less biased”, they continue, but at club level, even the Celtic commentators “would have said the exact same thing: that it has to be biased, has to be”. This also fits with Michalewicz’s (2014) recommendation that ADC be subjective. P2 and P3 also try to avoid dwelling on mistakes, as they are inevitable with the pace of the game. “If you make a mistake, you make a mistake it’s natural you just move on” (P2). P3 found this a problem before they began to build confidence. At one match, they lost concentration after “the ball went out for a throw-in, but I was so nervous that I said the ball was going out for a corner kick”.

5.1.3 Challenges for ADC at Club and National Level

Coinciding with the senior men’s team’s lack of success, Bohemians’ ADC user numbers dropped to as few as three regular users in 2024. P2 feels that inconsistent provision in domestic sport is unhelpful for attracting users. “Sport [in Ireland] is like the Wild West in terms of bodies and policies and regulations”. They feel that older BPS people might be daunted by the unknown, which is why the club “brought kids from the Blind Football Academy”, so that “they would become accustomed to it at a younger age, because [many] people who are blind or visually impaired never experience ADC”. P4 thinks that the dilapidated stadium, with its tight spaces, puts users off. They hope that, as part of forthcoming redevelopment, “when they have the new stadium, they could have more things for accessibility, more ramps and areas for disabled fans”. This should allow Bohemians to build a journey sequence for BPS fans, as recommended by the RNIB (2008).

Accessibility has assumed great importance in the lives of the AD commentators (P2, P3, P4), and ADC has led all to develop further interest in accessibility. P2 had worked in the sector, before spending two years as Bohemians Accessibility Officer, leading eventually to their current role in disability coordination for a transnational football organisation. ADC led to P3 succeeding P2 at Bohemians in a voluntary capacity. P4 is interested in “getting involved in helping people with accessibility in sports, to break out into other sports and not just football. Maybe like rugby and the GAA [Gaelic Athletic Association] I think everyone should be included in the match and have the best matchday experience”. A big part of their interest and enthusiasm comes from the feedback from AD users.

5.2 Findings on AD Users

The findings from the AD user interviews highlight several recurring themes. Overarching themes include accessibility and independence, engagement with the match, and perceptions of the ADC service and its personal and social impact. Participants also identified existing barriers to implementing ADC either in football or across other sports, as well as the challenges related to the promotion of these services. Overall, there was a strong sense of appreciation for the initiative driven by Bohemians, while suggestions for further improvements and developments are also provided.

5.2.1 Accessibility, Independence and Engagement with the service

The importance of independence enabled by ADC and associated services (such as touchline collection and drop-off) is a central theme, as AD allows users to follow matches without needing assistance, thus providing a sense of autonomy (P5) reducing reliance on others (P6), and bringing about a sense of empowerment that facilitates a more inclusive experience (P7). The engagement with the match provides an enhanced experience as participants report that ADC improves their connection to the game, enabling them to feel much more immersed in the match atmosphere (P5 and P6), providing a more comprehensive experience than radio commentary directed to the general public, and thus enhancing overall enjoyment (P7). While users resort to the use of AD in different life contexts to a greater or lesser degree, there is a common feeling that ADC in football may be different than AD in other areas, opining, like P7 does, that the challenges of providing AD in sports are unique. This insight suggests that the nature of football and other sports requires a tailored approach. Both commentators and user participants mention the difference between live ADC and traditional radio broadcasts or TV commentaries, stating a preference for ADC, aligning with Bywood et al. (2023) and Pedregosa (2025). These comparisons underline the unique value ADC offers over other formats.

5.2.1 Accessibility, Satisfaction and Quality of the AD Service: challenges and opportunities

All users commend the voluntary work done by the AD commentators and express an overall satisfaction with the quality of the ADC provided. They indicate satisfaction with the service in relation to the detailed descriptions, which are useful and meet their expectations, as indicated by P5 “the lads do a great job!” and P7 “I think it’s all good!”. One could get the sense, however, that end users are so appreciative and close to the AD commentators (who also greet them when they arrive at the stadium) that they are

uncomfortable being critical of their work. Despite this, P6 suggests that further training of AD commentators at Bohemians “would help them to become sharper in their descriptions”, improving the speed, the voice, and the tone they use. They feel that there is an opportunity to enhance the service’s clarity and effectiveness.

Users unanimously praise the ease of use of the AD receptor equipment on matchday, underlining its importance in enhancing the overall experience. The straightforward technology ensures accessibility, empowering BPS users to engage with the match independently. There are, however, still some barriers that affect the attendance, such as transportation, the stadium and its narrow surroundings, and physical accessibility, identified by P5 and P6, as well logistical challenges that can limit access to live events despite the availability of AD. For instance, P5 says: “[The stadium is] falling apart, really. But if there was a proper accessibility area where people could come in, a wheelchair accessible area and, like, fans with disabilities can come in and be in a safe space and not be in the madness of a match day, they could enjoy it”. These are the main logistical constraints to attending matches beyond personal reasons. Barriers to wider adoption, according to participants, may obey financial limitations and other resource constraints faced by clubs in adopting ADC services, as explained by P6.

P7, for their part, mentions proactive strategies to increase participation, such as hosting open days, offering free tickets, or encouraging attendance to women’s matches with ADC to attract a broader audience: “I think the women’s games are a good way of getting people in because the tickets are available”. P7, in fact, actively introduces the topic of ADC visibility in the women’s league and tangentially mentions gender representation in ADC: “I think the women’s games are the key. I think they should try and bring people to the women’s games, (...) they could have an open day and offer free tickets, do a tour, walk around the pitch ahead of the match, maybe get a volunteer to sort of bring people around and the building of the stadium”.⁴

P7 contrasted a women’s match where there wasn’t any AD, which was “just boring because I didn’t really know what was going on”, with their experience of attending men’s matches where ADC is available. In the absence of ADC, their companion failed to provide meaningful commentary: “[T]he friend I brought didn’t know anything about football. I couldn’t see anything. She wasn’t an expert in football. But she was trying to describe it to me (...)”. This experience is in stark contrast to the organised, volunteer-led ADC provision for the senior men’s team, for which P7 is “really grateful to all the volunteers and everyone who runs it who gives up their time”. This anecdote highlights the need for diversity in sports commentary, making it available for both men’s and women’s football (as has happened subsequently), with an increased number of female AD commentators.

5.2.2 Awareness, Promotion and Inclusion

P6 and P7 stress the importance of promotion and awareness to ensure greater adoption of ADC across other clubs and sports in Ireland. P6 learned about the service through Vision Ireland, while P7 found out about it via word of mouth. This implies a lack of awareness-raising, as perceived by users, which could be natural for these types of local initiatives. Advocacy targeting specific groups, such as older BPS individuals, and raising awareness about AD in less mainstream sports, including women’s football, are two ideas offered by P7.

5.2.3 Inclusion and social interaction and emotional impact

The social aspect of inclusion is key, particularly for P5, who values the ability to interact with family and friends while following the game: “[Using the equipment is] very easy. I mean, the lads at the halfway line, about 20 minutes before the game gets going, they do a sound check. If your sound is working, off I go with the lads to find a seat and that’s me, I’m done”. Similarly, P7 discusses the emotional and social benefits of inclusion, highlighting how ADC allows them to feel more integrated into the matchday experience. P5 finds that sometimes ADC gives him an advantage over sighted match attendees, such as those “sitting beside me that’ll be like ‘What happened there?’, and I get the full recap. [...] People around you are saying ‘Oh, I don’t think he should have got booked, why’d he get booked?’ I’m like ‘That’s what I’m hearing in my earpiece’. So people around you like to know what’s going on as well. And sometimes people are saying: Can we get one of them [ADC headsets]?” This is an example of the notion of ‘blindness gain’ in Bywood et al. (2023, p. 214), whereby tools designed for accessibility can also “enhance the experience of sighted individuals”.

These comments highlight the emotional and social benefits of inclusion, encouraging AD users to attend matches that they enjoy, and to engage or even re-engage with football, becoming an active part of the Bohemians supporters’ community, like for P5: “I was a fan of football all my life and I stopped going to football because I have an eyesight problem about 10 years now [...]. I used to go to watch Dublin [Gaelic football] games with all the lads and that. I stopped going to Dublin games... And then Bohs brought in the commentary, they were like ‘Come along and try it’, and when I came, it’s like the atmosphere, the buzz about the matchday and it was like it was before I lost my eyesight [...]. You soak up the atmosphere, you enjoy your day out with your mates and all that. And the commentary just helps me to understand what’s going on on the pitch, like [...] I feel like I’m part of [the match]. Just with the lads, you know? I just feel like I’m part of the whole day.”

6. Discussion

The interviews highlight both the challenges and rewards of offering ADC within a football league marked by limited financial resources and at times dilapidated infrastructure. As Bohemians’ former CEO Daniel Lambert describes, Bohemians is “a small team in a poor league” (Smith, 2024, p. A16). Nonetheless, the club holds deep significance to supporters, and its commitment to community engagement and FSR enhances this connection. The ADC provision is very much appreciated by its users within this context. For instance, P5, who had disengaged largely from live matches after losing most of their eyesight, described how ADC has enabled a renewed sense of inclusion.

The service’s reliance on volunteers is not unusual (according to Bywood et al., 2023 and almost all literature reviewed) but nonetheless makes Bohemians and other LOI ADC initiatives inherently vulnerable. The continuity of volunteer ADC at Bohemians is not only motivated by users’ appreciation, but also by a broader culture of volunteerism. The club relies on volunteers to fulfil hundreds of roles during and beyond matchdays “who are co-owners as well” (P1), based on the club’s member-

owned model. “If you’re into your football club, you’re a co-owner and you’re passionate about something, you’re very likely to want to get active within that area” (P1). Currently, five other LOI clubs provide ADC services, having been inspired by the introduction at Bohemians, all but one relying on volunteers (the exception is Derry City, who use trained radio commentators to deliver their service) (McBain, 2025). Despite commentators’ commitment and users’ gratitude, Bohemians’ ADC user numbers have fluctuated due to a number of factors, including the performance of the senior men’s team, travel challenges, and the effort expended to encourage users. From a high of over 30 applications for disability lottery tickets in February of 2022, the club saw a decline to an average of only three regular ADC users in the 2024 season, who, according to P4, “come week in, week out, regardless of the performance”. While this level of consistency reflects strong individual engagement, it also raises questions about scalability. The ADC service at Bohemians has sustained itself for five years, but it is difficult to predict whether the other clubs’ services will survive the departure of key volunteers or a drop in user numbers, particularly if those clubs or the LOI become less successful.

In the context of near sell-out home games, the club finds it difficult to justify significant additional investment in this service based on the level of attendance. According to P2, “the club would always support [ADC] because it’s the right thing [to do]”. However, when P2 was a full-time employee, it was difficult to justify the time spent on ADC, questioning whether “it was best to hand this over to a volunteer”. P2 believes that even a small but consistent demand could encourage other clubs to provide ADC services. “Any club in Ireland, if you told them we’ve got 10 fans who are blind or vision-impaired who want to access this, they will do it and they will do the training”. Drawing on the example set by Bohemians, P2 also points out the media benefits for clubs, suggesting that “they will also use the media and get, like, a good news story out of it, so there is that angle too”. Despite relatively low user numbers, Bohemians remains committed to expanding its accessibility offering for BPS supporters. As P1 noted, the club would “absolutely love to roll this out on a wider basis,” although current resource limitations present challenges: “We wouldn’t have the resources, at the moment, to do that, but I think that ultimately, in the new ground, that it’s definitely something that we’ll look to do and to keep improving on that service”.

One example of these attempts to expand the service is the 2022 trial of an innovative handheld haptic device developed by the Irish startup Field of Vision, designed to augment ADC by allowing users to track the ball on the pitch through tactile feedback (Keogh, 2022; see www.fov.ie). P1 described the experience as “absolutely incredible,” noting the strong emotional response among fans who participated. “You could see how much of a palpable difference it had made to the matchday experience”. P5, who also trialled the device, appreciated the opportunity but also raised practical concerns, particularly about safety of use in crowded environments “when a goal goes in and people start jumping around and I’ve a tablet around my neck”. Several UK football and Australian rules football teams have since supplemented their ADC services with these and similar devices, along with a newer range of augmented reality devices.

The wider context reveals a lack of institutional support for ADC within Irish sport. The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) Inclusive Supporters Club formed in 2010, advocating provision for BPS spectators without any obvious success (Atherton &

Macbeth, 2017). P2 identifies a leadership vacuum regarding accessibility, complaining that “there’s no one to be accountable to”. Although Vision Ireland continues to train potential commentators using materials originally developed by P2, they are perceived to be insufficiently “vocal” in their advocacy. Despite having moved on to other roles and further research on AD, P2 continues to serve as a key national reference point for ADC in football: “The FAI still ring[s] me and ask[s] me questions about ADC and accessibility”. This absence of centralised expertise has resulted in ad hoc arrangements. For example, the FAI requested that Bohemians provide ADC for the 2024 FAI Men’s Cup Final, having previously relied on the club for the two preceding finals, both of which involved Bohemians as finalists. As P1 argues, such reliance on individual clubs is unsustainable and a coordinated approach is needed, with the provision of government funding for ADC for all clubs, “not just in football, but across any sport”. Similarly, P2 questions why such services are absent from publicly owned facilities: “[N]early every stadium is owned by a county council: why is it not there? Why is it not in any GAA stadium?” Users also expressed a desire to see ADC extended beyond football. As P5 pointed out, “You don’t have to be a Bohs fan to come and enjoy the game”, adding that wider sport bodies like “the GAA and the FAI, [...] should all be doing it”. While local initiatives such as Bohemians’ ADC service demonstrate local commitment, often based on the energies of individual volunteers, structural change may require legislative or policy intervention. Future compliance with international standards such as the EU AVMSD (2018) and the EAA (2019), could provide the necessary incentive for wider implementation (European Union, 2019).

7. Conclusions

This study set out to examine how a local ADC initiative at Bohemians influenced stakeholders’ experiences and contributed to the wider accessibility of football in Ireland. Our analysis of ADC services for BPS users at Bohemians highlights various key critical aspects that contribute to an enhanced matchday experience, while also identifying areas for future improvement. Typical of ADC in football (Bywood et al., 2023), provision at the LOI remains largely ad-hoc and delivered by volunteers, which holds true for Bohemians.

In the first place, our findings show a strong culture of commitment and community service among providers (the club and volunteer commentators). Despite receiving limited formal training, AD commentators were motivated by positive user feedback and actively sought to improve their delivery. However, the reliance on volunteer work, together with the absence of structured training models and relatively small user numbers, presents challenges to the long-term sustainability of ADC services within the LOI and beyond.

In relation to end users (BPS individuals), the analysis highlights overwhelmingly positive experiences. ADC enabled participants’ greater independence, reduced reliance on companions, and enhanced inclusion in the social and emotional atmosphere of live football. They reported an improved sense of engagement, allowing individuals to enjoy the matchday. Participants were satisfied with the current high quality of service, although users noted opportunities for improvement in tone, pacing, and clarity of the AD commentary. Importantly, the service was experienced not just as functional, but as contributing to dignity, belonging, and enjoyment of the matchday experience.

In terms of awareness and promotion, the findings highlight the importance of word-of-mouth communication and community engagement in reaching BPS audiences. Developing targeted outreach strategies seems essential also to engage other groups who could benefit from ADC, such as older supporters or individuals with cognitive impairments. However, several structural barriers were identified as limiting broader options. These include personal and logistical challenges faced by users, old and dilapidated stadiums that were not built with accessibility in mind, and the financial constraints of the LOI clubs. Additionally, the issue of gender representation in football commentary emerged as a critical factor in ensuring diversity and inclusion within ADC provision. All these findings underscore the need to strengthen promotional efforts and address systemic barriers to maximise accessibility, equity and participation for all users. This could have a key impact on ADC services across the sporting landscape, although regarding these broader recommendations, it is important to keep the limitations of this case study in mind. Findings are based on a small number of interviews from a local, volunteer-led AD operation.

Regarding our third research question, which considers the broader impact on football in Ireland, Bohemians' initiative has already shaped the football accessibility landscape. Five other LOI clubs now provide ADC for BPS supporters, and in subsequent research, stakeholders from three of those clubs cited the initiative at Bohemians as the inspiration for their services (McBain, 2025). The FAI has relied on Bohemians for ADC provision at national fixtures, and the rights holder for the LOI introduced ADC in televised matches in June of 2025 (League of Ireland, 2025). These developments illustrate both the initiative's ripple effects and the structural limitations that persist, such as insufficient institutional investment, outdated infrastructure, and the need for more inclusive policies, particularly around gender representation in commentary.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that local, volunteer-driven ADC can significantly enhance user experience and catalyse broader accessibility change, but its sustainability and equity depend on systematic support at institutional and policy levels. Future avenues of research could usefully address several of the key areas identified in this study. These include the development of standardised and sustainable training models for volunteer commentators to enhance the quality of ADC services and an investigation into ADC provision at other football and sports clubs. Further investigation into gender representation in sports commentary, not only in football but across other sports, is essential to contribute toward equality and inclusion. In addition, research analysing national policy approaches to overcoming financial and logistical barriers could support a wider implementation of ADC services at sports venues. Finally, targeted studies on the effectiveness of outreach efforts to older and underserved BPS populations would help to ensure that the benefits of ADC services reach a more diverse and representative audience.

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Appendix

Questions for P1 and P2

1. When did explorations on ADC begin at Bohemians and why did the Bohemians take the lead in such an initiative in Ireland?
2. Who started the idea of making the matches accessible for the blind and the visually impaired and what was the process like?
3. Was this initiative part of a bigger, more comprehensive scheme on inclusivity/accessibility?
4. Was this an exploratory, organic project or was it a well-planned, structured one?
5. What types of support did you obtain, if any (the Club, local authorities, the Government...)?
6. Was there any specific training provided before the ADC was offered?
7. If training was provided, did it take place straight away? Who provided it?
8. In 2022, the Club won the Total Access award from CAFE for this. How did this come about and what did this mean for you?
9. Did this initiative have an impact on other clubs?
10. Has ADC and accessibility initiatives received support from the club and fans? Does that change depending on the performance of the senior teams?

Questions for P3 and P4

1. What made you interested in doing ADC at Bohemians?
2. How and when did you start?
3. Is this the first accessibility initiative that you've been involved with?
4. Does your experience doing ADC at Bohs make you more likely to get involved with accessibility in the future?
5. Was there any specific training provided before you started doing ADC?
6. If training was provided, who provided it?
7. Did you listened to other AD?
8. Has your commentary style changed since you first began?
9. What sort of feedback have you received from ADC users?
10. What do you consider the most important things to remember when doing ADC? What should and shouldn't be described?
11. In 2022, the Club won the Total Access award from CAFE for ADC. Did that make any difference to you?
12. Do ADC and accessibility initiatives receive support from the club and fans? Does that change depending on the performance of the senior teams?

Questions for ADC users

1. How often do you use audio description services for TV, video on demand, cinema, etc?
2. How often do you use audio description services for live performances such as theatre or museums?
3. How often do you use audio description services at Bohemians?
4. Since when have you used audio description services at Bohemians?
5. Are you happy with the services provided, or is there anything that you would change?

6. To what extent would you agree with the following statement: improvements have been made to the provision of audio description in the Bohemians in the past five years?
7. To what extent do you agree with these statements?
 - ADC helps me feel more engaged with the matchday.
 - ADC means that my family and friends don't need to assist me with understanding what happens in the match.
 - ADC improves the matchday experience more than radio commentary.
8. How difficult or easy is it to use equipment for the ADC services on-site?
9. Is the ADC always offered as scheduled?
10. Does the ADC play an important part in your enjoyment of the game?
11. How do you find the quality of the ADC? How could it be improved?
12. When did you become aware of the ADC services?
13. How did you become aware of the ADC services?
14. How might Bohemians do to attract more ADC users (friends, relatives, peers, etc.)?
15. What might prevent users from attending matches while using ADC?

Notes

¹ We use the term 'football' throughout to mean association football or soccer, rather than Gaelic football, another popular sport in Ireland. Irish media will often use the term 'soccer' for disambiguation.

² One LOI club CEO in Kearney and McCarthy (2025, p. 706) blames this on short-termism inherent in the investor-owner model of governance at most clubs, whereby "everything has been thrown at wages, the best players, the best manager", leaving debts when results fall short.

³ Since 2003, LOI Men's Premier Division seasons have run from February/March to October/November.

⁴ Bohemians Women played their first Women's National League game in August of 2020 and joined the new LOI Women's Premier Division in 2023. The first ADC for Bohemians Women was at a home game against Shamrock Rovers Ladies on June 3rd 2023. See <https://x.com/bfcdublin/status/1663591065226559490>. Bohemians currently have one female AD commentator.