

Stadium Captioning Interview With NJCaptions President, Jennifer M. Bonfilio

Today Jennifer M. Bonfilio, President of NJCaptions took time out to answer our questions on captioning technology for stadiums. Here is that interview:

Q. What is NJCaptions?

A. [NJCaptions](#), owned and operated by Jennifer M. Bonfilio, provides CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) and captioning services to stadiums and arenas across the country. The term “captioning” refers to data that passes through an encoder and is imbedded in the video; CART refers to data that is displayed on a screen without video. NJCaptions only employs steno-captioners to perform their captioning assignments. Steno-captioners are traditionally trained in the field of court reporting. Steno-captioners typically have spent years honing their skills to be capable of writing verbatim realtime (voice to text) with over 98.5% to 99.9% accuracy.

Q. Why is it important for stadiums to implement captioning?

A. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. Stadiums ought to be proactive in providing access to their deaf and hard-of-hearing fans. Lawsuits have forced some stadiums to provide captioning (Washington Redskins and Ohio State University, for example). In the long run, it is more cost effective to plan for and design a stadium with captioning in mind than after a stadium is already built.

Q. What factors do stadiums need to consider before implementing captioning?

A. The number one factor that stadiums should consider is the quality of the service being provided. There are quite a few captioning companies providing services that do not meet the level of quality and accuracy necessary to satisfy those that will ultimately rely on the captioning. The principle reason for this is cost. Some companies have discovered they can offer services at rock-bottom rates and hire unqualified captioners. You’ve heard the saying “You get what you pay for.” Organizations should be wary of rates that seem too good to be true. Just imagine your star quarterback’s or legendary coach’s name misspelled on a giant Daktronics board for all to see! Imagine your in-stadium reporter’s high-speed highlight spot being so mangled, fans cannot make heads or tails out of what he/she is saying.

Demand all captioners that will provide services possess at least a CRR (Certified Realtime Reporter certification); even better, a CBC (Certified Broadcast Captioner certification) and CCP (Certified CART Provider certification; and better still, an RMR (Registered Merit Reporter certification). I hold all four. These are certifications obtained by the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA — www.ncraonline.org) which tests and measures the skills of court reporters, CART providers and captioners.

The next factor to be considered is cost. Stadium management should budget for captioning on a yearly (or seasonal) basis. Captioning may be paid for in full or in part by sponsors.

Another factor is the technical setup. Are there available boards to display captions? Can boards be added? Some stadiums also display captions on concourse monitors, in which case an encoder would be required. Although captioning software can be connected directly to a Daktronics board, for example, there are advantages to sending data through an encoder. Scripting is much more fluid and seamless through an encoder, and since a lot of what is captioned is repeated for each game, the ability of the captioner to script is crucial.

Will the captioner be on-site or sending data remotely? NJCaptions strongly believes that in certain environments the advantages of on-site captioning far outweigh the benefits of remote captioning:

1. Utilizing the same captioner for each game offers the ability to vet each captioner for the necessary qualifications
2. Being on-site enables the captioner to interact with staff and obtain prep material, scripts and/or the ability to write announcements beforehand
3. Having a direct audio feed affords the captioner a far superior sound quality than obtaining it through a phone line and audio coupler or VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol)
4. A visualization of the action is crucial when captioning live P.A. announcements, which results in a better comprehension of what is taking place on the court
5. Technical issues can be resolved more quickly and efficiently on-site than remotely, which results in less opportunity for missed captions

All of these advantages coupled with an experienced, qualified captioner will ensure high-quality captions at every game.

Q. How can stadiums use captioning across mobile phone applications?

A. Oftentimes, hand-held devices are used to display captions in stadiums and arenas. There has been some negative feedback from the deaf and hard-of-hearing community regarding these devices:

1. Sun glare at outdoor events
2. Difficulty in enjoying refreshments while holding the device
3. Having to place the device on the floor at one's feet
4. The burden of having to go to a special location to obtain a device, leave ID, and return it
5. Text not large enough, color schemes, lack of display options
6. Poor quality of captioning and/or remote captioner not familiar with local names and terms
7. One device in particular uses C-Print or Typewell, which does not produce a verbatim output and is not done by a steno-captioner
8. Some captioning is done by voice-writers using speech-recognition software rather than steno-captioners, which results in poor quality

NJCaptions does not endorse or recommend this method for the above reasons.

For more information, Jennifer is available by email at jen@njcaptions.com, or visit NJCaptions at www.njcaptions.com.