



## Norwest to do Olympics PA

EAW network boosted, KF 860 VLA and KF 750 boxes to cover 110,000 seat stadium

**C**hris Kennedy's sound production company Norwest Productions has been offered the contract to do audio for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. The highly coveted contract involves supplying all live audio for the ceremonies, to be held in the new Sydney Olympic Stadium during September.

Norwest are the fifth largest live audio production company in the Australasian region, and feature an extensive inventory of near new EAW loudspeaker systems, driven by Crest amplification.

At press time no statement had been issued by Spektak - the events company operated by Ric Birch, or SOCOG, the Sydney Organising Committee of the Olympic Games. But Connections was able to establish that a draft contract had been issued naming Norwest as audio contractor.

We cold called the Sydney warehouse in Ryde where Norwest are based, and found Chris Kennedy prepared to confirm our line of questioning, but asserting that the contract was not signed. "I need to be careful, because the contract also prevents me publicising the fact we are to do the Olympics, but I can't deny your questions", he stated.

**T**he story starts in July last year when audio legend and LA based Australian ex-pat Bruce Jacksor, was contracted to design the audio for the shows, and do the live audio mix. He called for a demonstration at the Olympic Stadium, and our story in August detailed how five competing systems were auditioned there. At that time the contract became a two horse race, between Jands Production Services, and Norwest.

Jands offered a proprietary speaker system they call the Sportster. Essentially a powered

### Key points-

- The new Bose PA installed in Stadium Australia will be used as intended - for track and field events.
- Norwest will supply temporary audio for massive live events - the opening and closing events.
- The contract is commercial - Norwest tendered a fee, and say they are charging 'a fair price'.



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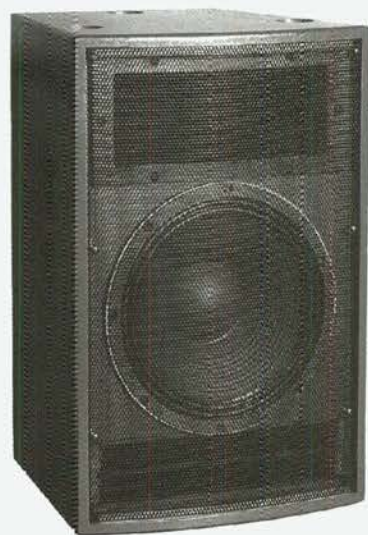
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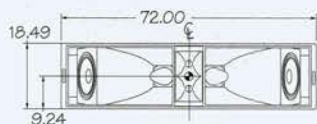
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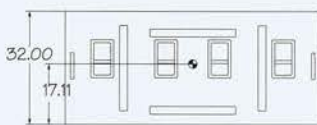
## Norwest &amp; The Olympics



## KF860



FRONT



TOP

loudspeaker cabinet on wheels, the Sportster didn't offer the directionality that Jackson demanded.

Norwest surprised many of the industry types who somehow wormed their way into the shootout, by supplying four VDosc cabinets, from L-Acoustics in France. These were airlifted in from London, where they had been in use with Rod Stewart. They were showed in addition to Norwest's EAW KF860 virtual line array cabinets, which were set up side by side with the VDosc cabinets in front of one of the stands at the stadium.

The hookup with VDosc was fascinating, because until now no-one in this part of the world has owned a V-Dosc system, which is now regarded as the number one preference of most leading sound engineers engaged in large concert audio. Norwest had a Byzantine deal with PRG, the growing conglomerate of production companies in the Northern hemisphere, who assisted them with a bid to supply V-Dosc for the Games.

With two clearly different, but similar, system approaches, Norwest applied the killer stroke by demonstrating a cluster of four EAW KF 750 cabinets, flown to cover the open end stands at the Stadium. This additional effort (not called for in the demo specification) allowed Jackson to hear and compare the existing house system, and ascertain the viability of using the EAW system in this position.

Some time elapsed, but several subsequent demonstrations were run at the Stadium. It became apparent that Jackson favoured a system based on line array speaker cabinets, for reasons of tighter dispersion control in the vertical plane.

Connections received a steady stream of requests from around the world for an update on the story, and numerous communications with the parties concerned all lead to the same place. The position was that any speculation or conjecture about the contract was not useful. We were asked to keep quiet.

Meanwhile, probably realising the Olympics horse had bolted, Jands Production Services entered into negotiations with L-Acoustics in France to buy 36 V-Dosc cabinets, a deal announced last month, but apparently too late for the Olympics contract. It gives Jands a sorely needed new loudspeaker technology to offer alongside their large inventory of aging Clair Brothers and Turbo systems.

Over at Ryde, it's a wet Autumn day outside, and fairly utilitarian inside the Norwest HQ. Chris Kennedy was an entertainment agent for 20 years before entering a five year partnership in his previous sound company, A1 Audio (Australia). When that partnership ended, he established Norwest with his late wife Suzie.

The one constant through his career is that Chris has always worked on corporate events. It's the point of differentiation for Norwest, he says, that its crew can adapt and fit into a show. "As these events have grown larger, so too has my company".

A corporate theatre show is a demanding beast. "There needs to be lots of co-operation, compromise, and adaptability - and there are usually many other suppliers involved" says Kennedy. "It's not like an arena tour, where speed in and out is all that matters".

"The gear needs to be in good condition, and the people need to be good. You need to offer a concise service" says Kennedy.

Clearly Norwest had enough credentials to win over the tough decision makers, headed by Morris Lyda, the head of technical services. And at the time, Jackson said: "It's not a simple decision, we are looking at the depth of support a company can give us - there is not just one factor".

The winning specification from Norwest involves pairs of their EAW 860 and 861 VLA (virtual line array) cabinets. Used together, they offer either 60° wide (860) or 90° wide (861) dispersion. The crucial vertical dispersion is nominally 10 degrees, frequency dependant.

40 or more VLA cabinets will be placed in pairs in front of the two main stands, with long custom made speaker cables run in precise lengths back to Crest loaded amplifier racks.

The second element in the contract calls for two clusters of eight EAW KF 750 cabinets to cover each of the end stands. 32 cabinets will



## Norwest & The Olympics

be used in this manner.

Finally, seven pairs of KF 750's, hung sideways, will cover the upper seating in each of the two main stands. These will be flown between the eight clusters of house loudspeakers, which form part of a large Bose installation at the Stadium which is to be used for audio for all track and field events at the Games.

Aside from the factory supplied boxes, Norwest own the rest of the audio system, and considerably more. They first purchased EAW speaker systems in 1995, and have enough KF 850 and KF 750 speakers to do several large shows at one time. The KF 860/861 Virtual Line Array was used on the Cold Chisel tour, as previously detailed in Connections.

How much factory support are EAW offering Norwest? "The 28 KF 750's for the upper main stands are on loan" explains Chris.

There is considerable irony here, in that the original specification for Stadium Australia featured EAW loudspeakers. This was undone, in spectacular fashion, when the winning tenderer proved an alternate Bose/Crown specification could do the job for less money. Sydney company The PA People went on to install the stadium system, which features one of the largest CobraNet control systems in the world, and this house system has been in use for more than a year.

The house system was never intended to be used for one off concert events like the

opening or closing ceremonies.

**S**peaker cabinets alone don't make a sound system. Designer Bruce Jackson will use XTA Audio Core processors to maximise and tweak each set of cabinets at the Olympics. He will mix live audio on a Midas console, with a second Midas working as a distribution console in a control room.

This console will mix to various speaker zones, and send and receive program from/to the various broadcast mixers.

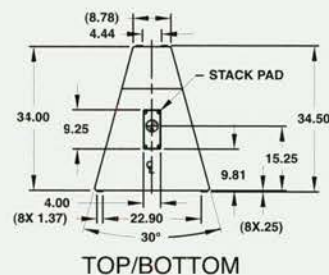
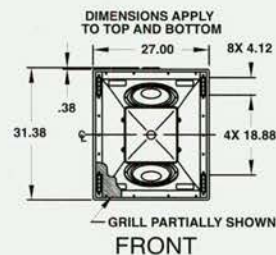
Getting audio around a very large stadium is no small task, and the actual distribution is to be done on a fibre optic network supplied by a third party under another contract. This leaves Norwest to simply deal with whatever microphone and monitoring requirements the program demands. Since the actual form and content of the opening and closing ceremonies are a closely guarded secret, Norwest will need to be flexible.

**I**t's a long way from booking bands for corporate gigs to running a world class audio company poised to display itself at the largest gig of the century. Is the Olympics a promotional exercise, or a profitable show?

"I'm charging a fair price" says Kennedy. "And I'm taking a risk, because if I do a controversial job or bummer up, then it would do harm to my business."

By Julius Grafton

### KF750F



Morris Lyda, Ric Birch and Bruce Jackson audition PA systems in Sydney last winter.