

(SP) SO YOU WANT TO BE A PROFESSIONAL SPORTSMAN/WOMAN?

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To play professional sport requires a great deal of natural talent, much hard work, good coaching and not a small amount of luck. Clearly the opportunities to earn a living from sport depend on the sport chosen. For example, football (soccer) is played by every nation on the planet and as such the competition to reach the top as a professional footballer is fierce. Notwithstanding this, most countries have professional football leagues, and so there are many job opportunities for male footballers. However, when it comes to women's football, although many play, few are paid. By way of contrast, track and field athletics (like football) is also contested by every nation, and although there are only a few opportunities for athletes to compete professionally, there are approximately equal numbers of men and women who make money. This being the case, it appears that if the objective is to become a professional sports person, football is a better option than athletics for men, but this may not be the case for women. Putting aside the gender issue, there are many other questions; for example, does golf offer more opportunities than tennis? What about a talented young sportsman trying to decide whether to concentrate on rugby or cricket?

Obviously the decision regarding which sport is chosen will largely depend on a person's predisposition towards that sport. However, there are many examples of talented young sportsmen and sportswomen needing to decide which sport they should pursue. This paper marries some previous research regarding the competitiveness of different sports with the number of opportunities there are to play sports professionally, and then tries to assess, which sport a talented young sportsman or sportswoman should choose to maximise their chances of success.

The paper to be presented at the EASM Congress begins by reviewing the previous work in the area; in particular, a paper by Mitchell and Stewart titled "A Competitive Index for International Sport" (forthcoming in Applied Economics). This paper constructs an index of competitiveness for different international sports. It does this by using econometrics techniques to find the national characteristics that are associated with sporting success and then noting the countries that participate in the different sports. This enables the various sports to be rated in terms of their competitiveness, thereby allowing judgements to be made regarding how difficult it is to be successful in these sports. The table on the next page is from the above mentioned paper and it ranks various sports from the most to the least competitive. The table also gives a few descriptive statistics for the countries involved in each sport.

	# of Nations	Average GDP per capital (\$)	Competitive Index
Athens Olympic Games	201	7,900	1.00
Soccer (Football)	205	7,900	1.00
Tennis	88	12,620	0.87
Tennis (women)	70	13,963	0.83

Tennis (men)	84	12,996	0.81
Golf	47	15,749	0.55
Baseball	6	20,483	0.23
Commonwealth Games	51	7,453	0.11
American (United States) Sports	1	36,300	0.11
Rugby Union	11	16,982	0.09
Cricket	20	9,240	0.07
Rugby League	4	18,650	0.03
Australian Football	1	26,900	0.01

The paper to be presented at the ESMA Congress extends the earlier work of Mitchell and Stewart by counting the number of sportsmen and sportswomen who earn a living from various team and individual sports. The team sports that are assessed are football (soccer), cricket, rugby union, rugby league and Australian football. The individual sports are track and field athletics, tennis and golf. Evidently, the earnings of sportsmen and sportswomen are very unevenly distributed, with a few making large amounts of money, while most make very little. The distribution of sporting income is not assessed in this paper. The test that is applied is whether a sports person could earn a full time living from their sport, and the number of these opportunities that exist in the world is estimated.

The paper then uses statistical techniques to compare the competitiveness of the different sports with the number of opportunities there are to become sports professionals, and then ranks the various team and individual sports in terms of the prospects they offer to sportsmen and sportswomen to become professionals.

References

Mitchell, H and Stewart, M. F. (forthcoming) "A Competitive Index for International Sport". Applied Economics.

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