

The Elite Sport Legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games

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Abstract

Introduction

In After the Gold Rush the various authors consider the potential impacts of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (the events) in terms of: social legacy, employment legacy, green credentials, impacts on mass participation sport, and cultural legacy. Research into the elite sport benefits of hosting the events tends to be confined to immediate host effects as discussed by Balmer et al (2001).

One area of interest that appears to be under researched is whether or not hosting the events leads to any long term elite sport development effects.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical background to this research is covered in detail in De Bosscher et al (2006) where it is held that there is a core of recognised strategies used by nations in their attempt to achieve success in elite sport. Many of these factors are controllable by individual nations but hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games is not. Therefore the aim of this paper is to quantify whether or not the last five hosts of the events have experienced any longer term competitive advantage that might be attributable to host nation status.

Methods

The principal source of data for this report was derived by secondary analysis of data sets that are readily available in the public domain.

If medals' tables are used as the sole determinant of a nation's sporting success, there are inherent flaws which prevent meaningful analysis taking place.

In order to make like for like comparisons between a nation's performance in different editions of the events, it is necessary to use a standardised measure of performance. We recommend the use of 'market share' which expresses the total points won by a nation in a given edition as a percentage of the total points awarded at that edition. Changes in market share are attributable to factors attributable to the efforts and talents of those charged with delivering success.

Results

The last five hosts of the Olympic Games have performed better as hosts than they did in the preceding edition.

Former host nations tend to experience a decline in their performance in the edition immediately after acting as hosts.

However, this decline is to a higher level than pre-hosting performance which suggests that the Olympic Games can be a catalyst to bring about a sustainable step change in a nation's sporting competitiveness.

In four of the last five editions of the Olympic Games, the host nation has achieved a higher market share score in events solely for women than in events solely for men. In standardised terms the host nation's women athletes tend to out perform their male counterparts.

Nations perform better as host than they do in the edition prior to hosting the Olympic Games.

For elite sport the legacy of being host is increased competitiveness in a greater number of sports at a higher level of success than prior to being host. Ten of the last 12 host nations have achieved their highest market share since 1948 in their host Games.

The data for the Paralympic Games are not as conclusive as for the Olympic Games. Three of the last five hosts of the Paralympic Games have performed better as hosts than they did in the preceding edition.

Three of the last five hosts of the Paralympic Games won medals in more sports than in the edition prior to acting as host and two remained the same.

Conclusions

The most likely explanations for positive home advantage effects in the Olympic Games include: the right to contest more events, increased investment in elite sport, familiarity with venues and facilities, crowd impacts on home athletes, crowd impacts on officials in subjectively judged events, and, travel and disorientation impacts on rivals.

The patterns in the data revealed by this research suggest that hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games can provide a measurable longer term elite sport development effect for host nations.

This type of information is likely to increase further the demand for prospective nations to bid to act as hosts in the future.

References

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