

# The effects on a sport of inclusion in the Olympic programme: The case of elite trampolining in England

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## Aim of paper and research questions

The Olympic Games can be described as “the most powerful expression of international sport” (Segrave, 1988: 149). So, will admittance of a sport to the Olympic programme have an effect on the sport’s development? This study investigates the effects of inclusion in the Olympic programme on elite trampolining in England.

## Literature review

Research on the effect of Olympic inclusion on sports is limited. There is concern for the effect on traditional philosophical and cultural values of a sport after ‘Westification,’ as exemplified by judo and taekwondo (Niehaus, 2006; Cashman, 2004; Villamon, Brown, Espartero & Gutierrez, 2004). There is also a concern that Western sports have become too commercial, as in the case of curling and snowboarding (Cassidy, 2002; Wieting & Lamoureux, 2001; Humphries, 1997; Lidz, 1997). However, there is a gap in examining the impact of Olympic inclusion on central policy issues; for example balancing elite sport and sport for all. This paper examines this issue looking at one sport in one country in detail. Elements of power theory, policy theory, organisational theory and economic theory have been used to guide the investigation.

## Research design and data analysis

Informed by a critical realist ontology and epistemology, a detailed case-study was developed. According to Yin a case study is ideal when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 2003: 9). Investigating the effects of including trampolining in the Olympics on elite trampolining in England fits into this design. Trampoline was selected for a number of reasons: it made its debut at Sydney 2000 and thus whilst it may have undergone some changes already its activities prior to inclusion are still within recent memory; it is now a discipline of the established Olympic sport of gymnastics so there can be an element of internal comparison; it is a mainstream sport; and finally it is competed in by both genders.

The predominant data collection strategy used in this investigation was semi-structured interviewing. Some structure was required to ensure full coverage of the topic. However, in this study standardisation was not such a crucial issue since there was only one researcher and often individual actors were interviewed with slightly differing focuses according to their role or position. Documentary sources were also used, but to a much lesser degree.

Forty-four interviewees were selected using strategic sampling. They represented the following range of interest groups: UK Sport, Sport England, English Institute of Sport, British Olympic Association, British Gymnastics, County Sports Partnerships, clubs and elite performers. Interviews were fully transcribed and subsequent analysis aided by the use of NVivo.

## Results

Results were analysed under the following broad themes: organisational and structural elements; resource changes; and policy and power. Interviewees' perceptions of the impacts of inclusion incorporated a range of issues and indicated an assortment of positive and negative experiences.

## Discussion and conclusion

In structural terms the major change is that the British Trampoline Federation has been subsumed into British Gymnastics. The loss of the British Trampolining Federation was "quite a painful time for a lot of people" (Trampoline Technical Committee member) although joining British Gymnastics allowed opportunities for modernisation and progression. The status of elite trampolining has improved because "the Olympics is saying yeah you're good enough, the sport's important enough to be there" (Elite trampolinist). However it is still viewed as a 'weak link' within gymnastics. Financially elite trampolining may be better off due to the increased possibilities for funding; however this will be dependent on meeting targets. For World Class funding "it's a success criteria and not a participation criteria" (Trampoline Official). This dictates the focus within trampolining and the balance between sport for all and elite sport is now in danger of shifting too far towards an exclusive concern with higher level performers.

This research is useful for the sporting world on two counts. Firstly for the sport of trampolining to be fully aware of the changes which have occurred so they can manage them appropriately. Also potential Olympic sports can be enlightened to some of the negative impacts of being in the Olympic programme so they can guard against them.

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