

# EFFECTS OF AN INTERNATIONAL SPORT EVENT ON YOUTH SPORT PARTICIPATION – AN ASSESSMENT OF THE WOMEN’S TENNIS ASSOCIATION (WTA) CHAMPIONSHIPS 2011-2012

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## Aim of abstract

The objectives of this study were to: (1) Determine the contribution of a recurring international sport event on youth sport participation in the short term, (2) articulate the constraints to tennis participation as perceived by Turkish youth, (3) identify the level of youth interest in tennis as a participant and spectator, and compare the results in the short term.

## Theoretical background

Anecdotal evidence suggests that elite sport events can drive interest in youth sport participation but little empirical research supports this conclusion. Any event that offers participation opportunities, particularly for new starters, can potentially be used for grassroots sports development (Masterman, 2004). As declared by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in UK, with the contribution of Olympic Games, it is expected to increase sports participation by ‘1% year-on-year by 2012’ (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). Still, little is known about the effects of women’s professional sport events on youth sport participation.

The decision by Turkey to pursue the rights to host the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) Championships was a strategic decision on the road to Istanbul’s 2020 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games bid.

In 2012, the WTA Championship’s broadcast coverage reached 167 countries. Nearly 42 million fans were able to follow the Championships via WTA social media and digital platforms, leading to a record-setting week for the Official WTA Website with approximately 4.8 million page impressions and nearly 500,000 unique visitors during the week (New milestones reached in Istanbul, 2012). As these numbers indicate, the WTA Championships represented an opportunity for Turkish sport authorities to promote tennis and connectively increase tennis participation in Turkey.

## Methodology, research design and data analysis

*Tennis in Turkey* is an annual survey of Turkish youth interest in tennis before and after the WTA Championship event. In 2011 and 2012, the survey was administered in eight high schools and two universities in Istanbul. To ensure a proper representation of students from different socio-economic levels, four private high schools and four state high schools were selected for the study. One university selected for the study was public (state); the other was private. A total of 2200 surveys were collected (1100 before and 1100 after the event) in 2011 and another 2200 in 2012. The surveys were sent to teachers at the high schools for distribution/collection. The questionnaire used for data collection was modeled after the sport participation survey developed by Kao et al (2010). Survey data were coded, entered and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

In 2011 for the pre-tournament survey, 53% of subjects were male, 47% were female; the average age was 16 years. Females and males were equally interested in learning to play tennis (37%). Boys were slightly more aware of the 2011 WTA Championships in Istanbul than girls (62% to 53%). Post-tournament survey results revealed that approximately 13.5% of males played tennis regularly compared to 11.7% of females. 37% percent of females would like to learn to play tennis compared to 33% of males. Among the most prevalent constraints to tennis participation for youth in Istanbul were lack of instruction and lack of equipment to play.

For the pre-tournament survey in 2012, 54.86% of subjects were male, 45.14% were female; the average age was 14 years. More males were interested in learning to play tennis (34%) compared to females 29.8. This time girls were more aware of the 2012 WTA Championships in Istanbul than boys (51% to 46.3%). Only 3.81% of the respondents participated in the Turkish Tennis Federation grassroot street tennis projects. Post-tournament survey results revealed that approximately 31% percent of females would like to learn to play tennis compared to 39% of males. In 2012 among the most prevalent constraints to tennis participation for youth in Istanbul were lack of courts and instruction to play. 28.75% of female students indicated that tennis were introduced them at sport lessons, compared to 26% males.

Preliminary analysis of the data does not offer clear evidence that the WTA Championships have increased youth tennis participation in Turkey in the short term. The study will be extended for a third year in 2013. Records from street tennis and tennis instruction programs reveal students are attending these grassroots projects. In order to maximize the sport development legacy of this event, the Turkish Tennis Federation must focus on neighborhood and school-based projects to increase youth tennis participation rates.

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