FORECASTING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IN THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES

Author:
Simon Shibli

email:
s.shibli@shu.ac.uk

University:
Sheffield Hallam University

Faculty:
Sport Industry Research Centre

Abstract

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with forecasting the performance of the United Kingdom when it hosts the London 2012 Olympic Games. Making forecasts of how nations will perform in the Olympic Games is an established and growing area of interest for both academics and media content providers. Following Beijing 2008, Kuper and Sterken (2008) conducted an evaluation of the accuracy of the seven forecasts that were made public. They concluded that forecasts based on expert opinion (recent form in elite sport) outperformed forecasts based in econometric modelling (typically variables such as population and wealth). Not reviewed in the Kuper and Sterken research was a forecast made by Shibli and Bingham (2008) which stated that China would win 46 gold medals and would be ranked first in the final medals' table. China actually won 51 gold medals but the forecast of 46 was bettered only by Kuper and Sterken themselves who forecast 47 gold medals. All other researchers and experts significantly under estimated the unique home nation effect that host are able to derive. The Shibli and Bingham research is more closely related to the home advantage literature (see Balmer et al 2001 and 2003) than econometric modelling or form-based expert opinion, and as such, factors in policy factors at national and IOC level that may impact on elite sport success. The purpose of this paper then is to test the accuracy of the Shibli Bingham model for forecasting the United Kingdom's performance at London 2012.

METHODS

This research has been conducted primarily using an extensive programme of desk research as outlined in UK Sport (2003) to provide the raw data for the regression analysis. The raw data was then subjected to simple linear regression examining performance, measured by gold medals won, over time. Further desk research was conducted on the value of home advantage to host nations.

RESULTS

The results of the regression analysis suggest that there is a strong relationship (correlation = 0.78) between the number of gold medals won by the United Kingdom and time over the period 1988 to 2008. Extrapolating the data on a business as usual basis suggests that the UK will win 17 gold medals. Being the host nation is not business as usual and analysis of home advantage reveals that since 1988 the host nation has won between 2 (Greece) and 19 (China) gold medals more than it did in the edition prior to hosting the Olympic Games. Taking the average of all recent hosts yields a host nation effect of nine gold medals and we add this to the results of the regression analysis to derive and overall forecast of 26 gold medals. Replicating the same analysis for total medals yields a score of 57 medals overall. These findings suggest that the United Kingdom will win seven more gold medals and ten more medals in total than it did in 2008.

DISCUSSION

Unusually for a host nation, the UK has set itself a target of a 'top four' finish in the London 2012 medals' table. This target was achieved in Beijing 2008 with 19 gold medals. Should our forecast be accurate and the UK wins 26 gold medals, this would probably be enough to secure third place in the medals' table at the expense of Russia. The UK's recent success in the Olympic Games has been led by a minority of sports, notably cycling, sailing, and rowing. In order to drive improvement from 2008 the United Kingdom will need to maintain its dominance in these sports and develop gold medal winning capability in a range of other sports. As a note of caution, there is some evidence that the IOC and international federations of sport have sought to prevent certain nations from becoming too dominant in particular sports. It is already clear that in cycling it will be difficult for the UK to repeat its success of 2008 as rule changes mean that nations can enter only one athlete per event. It is initiatives such as this that has seen a steady increase in the number of nations winning a gold medal and the number of nations winning a medal of any colour. As a result of sporting success being distributed more widely, the IOC is able to achieve its goal of the Olympic Games being a 'real universality' rather than an event for a small minority of nations. Host nations tend to perform particularly well in events that are subjectively scored (for example boxing) and also in events specifically for women.

References:

Balmer, N.J., Nevill, A.M. and Williams, A.M. (2001). Home advantage in the Winter Olympics (1908-1998). Journal of Sports Sciences, 19, 129-139.

Balmer, N.J., Nevill, A.M. and Williams, A.M. (2003). Modelling Home advantage in the Summer Olympic Games. Journal of Sports Sciences, 21, 469-478.

Kuper, G. and Sterken, E. (2008) Evaluation of Beijing 2008 Olympic medal tally forecasts: Who has won? Unpublished working paper Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Groningen, acquired by personal communication with the authors.

Shibli, S. and Bingham, J. (2008) A forecast of the performance of China in the Beijing Olympic Games 2008 and the underlying performance management issues, Managing Leisure: An International Journal, 13, 3-4, 272-292.

UK Sport (2003) European sporting success: A study of the development of medal winning elites in five European countries. UK Sport, London.