

THE ATHLETE'S SPORT EVENT EXPERIENCE OF THE XIX COMMONWEALTH GAMES IN DELHI, INDIA

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Abstract

Hosting a mega-sport event such as the Commonwealth Games is a complex task for an organizing committee due to the various complexities and multiple stakeholders to consider (c.f. Parent, 2008). While research has examined the economic impact of mega-events on the host community (e.g., Preuss, Seguin & O Reilly, 2007), and the legacy and meaning of volunteering (e.g., Doherty, 2009; Xing & Chalip, 2009) among others, there has been a virtual absence of research related to athletes.

Chelladurai and Reimer (1997) argued that the athletes are both primary beneficiaries and producers of sport and warrant research attention. Others have recently called for an examination of mega-sport events from a multiple stakeholder perspective to learn more from the likes of the athlete stakeholder group (e.g., Parent, 2008). Chappelet and Bayle (2005) explained that evaluating mega-sport events, while a multi-faceted and lengthy process is invaluable for rights holders and organizing committees in their strategic management initiatives. Freeman (1984, p.46) remarked that any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives is a stakeholder. Arguably then, athletes are key stakeholders in mega-events.

Motivated by a gap in research and guided by the concepts of strategic management and stakeholder theory, this study empirically examined the athlete's experiences of the XIX Commonwealth Games held in Delhi, India. The purpose of the study was to: (1) address the gap in research regarding a primary stakeholder group (i.e., athletes) and how they experience the mega-sport event, and (2) develop an instrument that organizing committees can use to evaluate their performance in future events according to the athlete stakeholder group.

A survey was designed in consultation with Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) executives. A process of item generation, expert judgment and piloting of the survey took place prior to data collection. In total, 39 items were

included on the survey which asked athletes to rate their accommodations, the Athletes Village environment, the sporting venues, travel information, food quality, ceremonies, communication, confidence in security, confidence in medical staff among other items. A Likert-type scale was used anchored by 1 (very poor), 3 (satisfactory) and 5 (excellent). Four open ended questions were also included which asked participants to indicate and describe any immediate concerns they had, whether they had any suggestions on how to improve future Games, to identify and describe one thing above all else not related to their athletic event which has contributed to their enjoyment, and to suggest ways for the CGF to improve the opening ceremonies.

Data collection commenced on day two of the competition. Recruitment took place in the Dining Hall within the Athletes Village. Following the closing ceremonies, an online version of the survey was made available to interested athletes for a period of three weeks. The data was analysed using an exploratory factor analysis technique to describe emergent factor structures from the survey and assist in further analyses of this stakeholder group by geographic region and demographic factors. The open ended questions were transcribed verbatim and underwent a content analysis procedure to produce emergent themes.

In total, 428 useable surveys were collected during the Games. An additional 100 online responses were collected after the Games. Athletes from 46 out of the 71 different countries responded to the survey. 269 men (51%) and 259 women (49%) participated. Responses were collected from various CGF regions including: Africa (n = 57; 10.8%), Americas (n = 94; 17.8%), Asia (n = 67; 12.7%), Caribbean (n = 25; 4.7%), Europe (n = 165; 31.3%) and Oceania (n = 120; 22.7%).

Eight reliable factors emerged: (1) transportation (2) security (3) medical (4) rooms, (5) sport venues (6) ancillary (7) communication and (8) ceremonies. Overall, the athletes experience was good (M = 4.08, SD = .74, \pm = .91). Open ended responses identified some organizational challenges such as athletes not trusting housekeeping staff, difficulties with contacting friends and family, concerns over hygiene and health to name a few. The athletes noted that increased merchandising options and the ability to see more of the city would improve future games experiences. Outside of their sport, volunteer friendliness and socializing with other athletes was found to create positive Games experiences. Lastly, holding the opening ceremonies twenty-four hours in advance of the first competition was cited as the top way to improve the athlete's experiences. The presentation will address other significant findings in more detail.

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