

**THE INSPIRATIONAL EFFECT OF
MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS**

(2010-12)

UK SPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report presents the key findings emerging from face-to-face surveys undertaken with nearly 7,500 spectators at ten major sporting events held in England between 2010 and 2012. The data collection and analysis was conducted by the Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University on behalf of UK Sport.
- More than half (57%) of spectators interviewed across the ten events felt inspired to participate or to participate more frequently in sport as a result of their attendance at one of the events. This headline figure masks differences in inspiration according to spectators' age and their existing sport participation levels.
- More than two-thirds (70%) of spectators aged under 25 felt inspired by their event experience to participate more frequently in sport than would do normally. This suggests that major events are a particularly powerful way of inspiring young people to participate in sport.
- The inspirational impact of major sporting events is most effective on people already participating in sport or physical activity; however, the study shows that major events can also have some inspirational impact on currently inactive people.
- The primary drivers of the inspirational impact experienced at major sporting events relate to the athletes and the competition themselves, as opposed to the nature, location and presentation of the events.
- Major events in isolation can only make a contribution towards people's journey on the road to increased participation. In the long-term, the significant promotional impact generated by major events will count for little unless it is picked up and connected to resourced programmes designed to activate that interest.
- Major event organisers should consider how they can harness the inspirational impact of their events on spectators, with particular attention being paid to the fact that spectators are likely to already be involved in the sporting system, and will often be inspired to participate more frequently than normal.
- Historically, public investment in elite sport (specifically major events) in the UK has been judged, for the most part, in terms of the wider monetary benefits that they generate. In this context, the findings from this study also support the case for relevant public sector agencies to subsidise major sporting events on the grounds of promoting grassroots sport development.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the key findings from a programme of primary research commissioned by UK Sport and conducted by the Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University with spectators (aged 16 and over) at ten major sporting events held in England between July 2010 and February 2012. The basic aim of the research was to explore the extent to which major sporting events have the potential to inspire people to participate in sport or recreational activity more frequently than they would do normally.

2. METHODOLOGY

A standard self-completion questionnaire was used at each of the ten events. The content of the questionnaire was essentially the same throughout, albeit with some new response options being added to certain questions for the 2011 and 2012 events. Focusing on the immediate inspirational impact generated by the events, the survey included questions about respondents' demographics (e.g. age, gender etc.) as well as their predisposition to, and existing participation in, sport which were used to explore differences in inspiration levels experienced by different types of spectators. Overall, nearly 7,500 responses were achieved across the ten events. An overview of these events and the sample size achieved in each instance is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The ten events

Event	Days	Location & Dates	WCEP Funded?	Sample Size	Unique Spectators (estimated)
Women's Hockey Champions Trophy	9	Nottingham 10-18 Jul 2010	Yes	781	5,100
Triathlon World Championships Series	2	London 24-25 Jul 2010	Yes	781	14,300
Women's Rugby World Cup	5	Guildford/London 10 Aug-5 Sep 2010	Yes	750	8,800
World Junior Rowing Championships	4	Eton Dorney 4-7 Aug 2011	Yes	752	2,947
Aviva London Grand Prix Athletics	2	Crystal Palace 5-6 Aug 2011	No	793	Not known
World Badminton Championships	7	Wembley 8-14 Aug 2011	Yes	768	15,265
UCI BMX Supercross World Cup Series	2	Stratford, London 19-20 Aug 2011	No	778	5,112
Trampoline & Tumbling World Championships	4	Birmingham 17-20 Nov 2011	Yes	741	5,719
ISU European Figure Skating Championships	7	Sheffield 23-29 Jan 2012	Yes	465	5,786
UCI Track Cycling World Cup	4	Stratford, London 16-19 Feb 2012	Yes	849	16,210

3. SAMPLE PROFILE

Across the ten events, 53% of the spectator sample was female and 47% was male. Nearly one-quarter of the sample was under the age of 25 (16-24: 23%); some 43% were aged 25-44; and, the rest (35%) were aged 45 plus. Less than one in ten respondents considered themselves to have a disability (7%). Around 90% of respondents were UK residents, of whom 92% classed their ethnic origin as 'white'.

While it cannot be claimed that the samples were fully representative of the crowds who attended each event, the SIRC research team on each occasion sought to achieve what it considered to be a reasonably representative cross-section of spectators in terms of age, gender and ethnicity within the limited windows of opportunities available to interview. Steps to ensure that the survey samples collected during fieldwork were reasonably representative of their population included: professional research design; training interviewers to Market Research Society standards; overseeing fieldwork by using senior staff at the events; and, interviewing as many spectators as possible to minimize the introduction of bias.

Compared with the population generally, spectators surveyed at the sporting events were extremely active. Some 47% of the sample undertook sport or recreational physical activity on a regular basis (at least three times per week for 30 minutes) and a further 42% were occasional sports participants (i.e. they had done at least 30 minutes sport or physical activity on between 1-11 days in the four weeks before interview)¹. The vast majority considered doing sport or physical activity to be a ('very' or 'quite') important part of their lives (89%) and 51% were supporting a particular athlete or team at the event at which they were interviewed². Moreover, all ten events attracted substantial numbers of participants of the sport featured³, with, in most cases, high proportions of those participants also being club members of that sport.

4. KEY FINDINGS

4.1. The inspiration effect

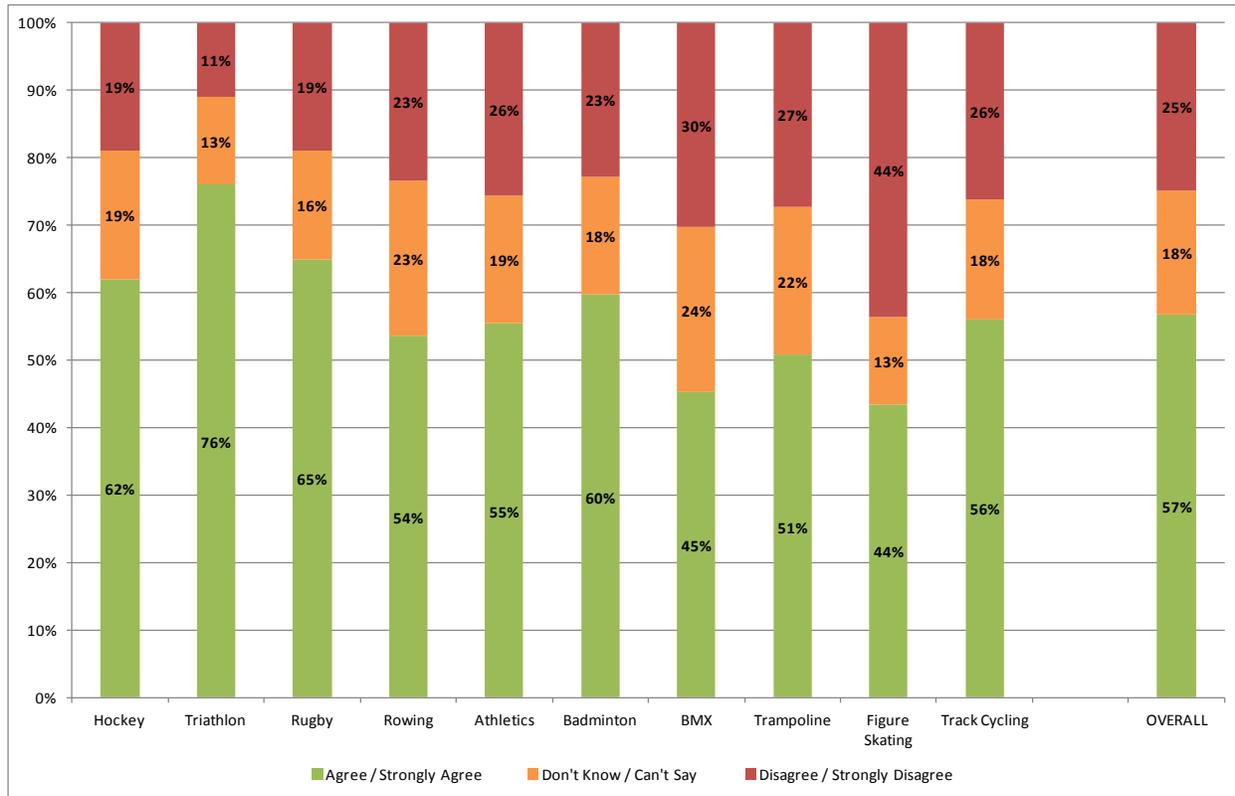
Figure 1 shows the headline level of inspiration reported by spectators interviewed at the ten events. Overall, around 57% of respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that their event attendance had inspired them to do sport or recreational physical activity more frequently than they did normally. This is an average score across the sample of events. The inspiration effect was highest at the World Series Triathlon (76%). The European Figure Skating Championships and the BMX Supercross event at the Olympic Park feature at the lower end of the spectrum - less than half of the respondents at these events reported being inspired by them.

¹ By comparison, the latest results of Sport England's Active People Survey (APS 5) indicate that 16.3% of the adult population in England participate in sport three times a week for 30 minutes at moderate intensity.

² These two figures are based on nine events, excluding the European Figure Skating Championships, where this question was not asked.

³ In the case of the BMX and Track Cycling events, interviewees were asked whether they took part in those particular disciplines and/or other forms of cycling. At the Trampoline and Tumbling World Championships, interviewees were asked whether they took part in trampolining and/or other forms of gymnastics. A similar distinction was made at the European Figure Skating event between figure skating and other forms of ice skating.

Figure 1: I am inspired to do sport or recreational physical activity more frequently than I normally do: by event



Of those spectators who claimed to have been inspired, 57% said their sense of inspiration was related to wanting to take part more often in the specific sport featured at the event⁴. This response was most common in the case of the World Badminton Championships, where 80% of respondents said they would like to play badminton more often. On average, around 53% said they felt inspired to do a sport other than the one featured at their event, or sport generally. This figure was considerably higher at the BMX World Cup (80%) and the Grand Prix Athletics (76%).

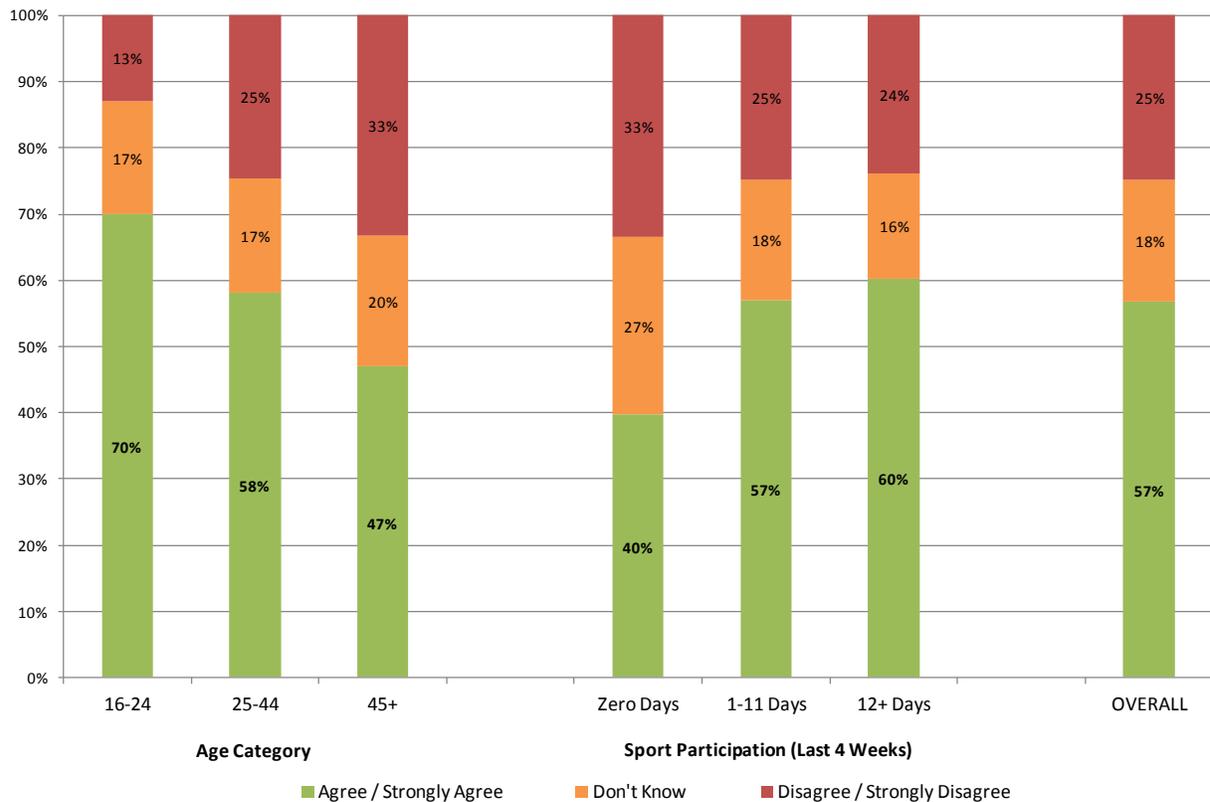
4.2. Who is inspired by major sporting events?

4.2.1. Demographics

Among spectators at the ten events, the inspiration effect is above average in the 16-24 age group (70%). This figure falls to 58% for 25-44 year olds and declines further to 47% for those aged 45+, which implies a negative correlation between age and inspiration - see Figure 2. There is a gap of 23 percentage points between the most inspired age group (16-24: 70%) and the least inspired age group (45+: 47%). Differences in the inspiration effect are much more subtle when the data is broken down by gender, disability status and, for UK resident respondents, their ethnic origin. Even though black and minority ethnic (BME) groups reported, on average, a higher inspiration effect than the overall sample average for the ten events (62% cf. 57%), BME groups also comprised a small proportion of respondents at each event.

⁴ For the Track Cycling, Trampoline and Figure Skating, this figure is based on the extent to which respondents at these events felt inspired to take part more often in those particular disciplines of the sports concerned as well as other generic forms of the sport (i.e. cycling, gymnastics and ice skating).

Figure 2: I am inspired to do sport or recreational physical activity more frequently than I normally do: by respondents' age and participation levels



4.2.2. Predisposition to Sport

As mentioned previously (see section 2), taking part in sport and recreational physical activity was important to 89% of the sample across the ten events. In addition, the more important sport was to respondents, the more likely they were to agree – and agree strongly – that they had been inspired by the event they had attended.

4.2.3. Existing Participation Levels

Inspiration is also positively associated with existing levels of participation in sport and physical activity (see Figure 2 above). Of those spectators considered ‘inactive’ (zero days of activity in the past four weeks), 40% reported that they had been inspired to participate more frequently as a result of attending an event. This figure increased to 57% for those who had undertaken occasional activity (1-11 days of activity in the past four weeks). This in turn increased to 60% for those considered to be regularly active (12+ days of activity).

The notion that the inspirational effect is felt more strongly by those already ‘within’ sport is further supported by results that consider respondents' participation in the sport featured at each event. Around 65% of those spectators who took part in the sport featured at the event that they attended reported that they had been inspired by their experience, whereas this figure fell to under 50% for those who were non-participants.

These findings indicate two distinct but related conclusions. First, the inspirational effect itself can be felt by both active and inactive people; however the effect is more pronounced on those who are

already active. Second, major events tend to attract spectators who take part in sport or physical activity more often than the general population. As a result, the inspirational effect is ‘communicated’ through events to a greater number of active people than inactive people. If this is correct, then any inspirational effect generated by a major sporting event on spectators will primarily be a ‘market penetration’ effect, rather than a ‘market development’ effect - see below.

4.3. Market penetration and market development

In the context of sport development, market penetration can be used to describe the potential of an event to effect a positive change in those already considered to be within the sport market – in this case those already active. On the other hand, the process of market development involves bringing new entrants into the market – in this case those who are considered inactive.

The findings of the study indicate that major events have significant potential to support market penetration in that they can inspire those already connected to sport to participate more frequently. Market penetration is a worthwhile outcome and clearly contributes to targets set by bodies such as Sport England for retaining participation in sport. This value is further strengthened given that the inspirational effect of major sporting events is strongest amongst young people, for whom retention in sport is particularly important.

The study suggests that whilst major events are less successful at supporting market development, they can still have some impact in inspiring currently inactive people. Across the ten events, around 40% of the respondents who indicated that they were not active sports participants at the time of interview reported an inspirational effect. Scaling this finding to the estimated number of inactive spectators at nine of the ten events⁵ (c. 8,000), it could be claimed that some 3,200 individuals who were completely inactive in the four weeks prior to being interviewed felt inspired to take up sport as a result of their event experience.

Given that two out of five inactive people reported an inspirational effect, the action most likely to increase overall market development could be the introduction of measures designed to attract more inactive people to major sporting events.

4.4. Attitudinal changes and the likely causes of the inspiration effect

When ‘inspired’ spectators were asked to evaluate in more detail how their attitude towards taking part in sport and physical activity had changed, their most common responses were:

- being reminded about the enjoyment of sport (89%);
- being inspired to get fitter (85%); and,
- a desire to improve their own ability or to achieve personal sporting success (80%).

When asked to rate the particular features of an event that had resulted in the inspiration to do more sport or physical activity, spectators tended to highlight those things connected to the inspirational standard of the competition and athletes, as opposed to the ancillary presentation and ‘show’ of the event - see Table 2. The primary drivers of inspiration were: the ‘skill and ability of the athletes’ (63% of respondents said that this factor had had a ‘high’ impact on them); the ‘quality of the competition’ (51%); and, the ‘performance of any team or athlete being supported’ (46%). Together, these findings all provide useful pointers for event organisers who may have an interest in maximising the sport development impact of a major event they are staging.

⁵ Excluding the Aviva London Athletics Grand Prix, for which spectator numbers are not available.

Table 2: Drivers of inspiration as indicated by spectators

	High	Moderate	Low	None N /A	Total
The whole atmosphere	35%	47%	9%	9%	100%
The physical environment in which the event is taking place	32%	45%	13%	11%	100%
The skill and ability of the athletes	63%	25%	4%	8%	100%
The quality of the competition	51%	34%	7%	9%	100%
The performance of the team / athlete I have been supporting	46%	30%	6%	18%	100%
Activities that have been going on around the main event	11%	32%	29%	28%	100%
Information I've received while I've been at the event	6%	21%	27%	46%	100%
The sense of being part of a big event*	32%	38%	15%	15%	100%

* Option included for 2011 and 2012 events only

4.5. The 'levers' that might cause people to act on the inspiration effect

These surveys have sought to measure feelings of inspiration rather than absolute commitments to action. Although the results are largely positive, particularly in relation to the frequency with which those who are currently active participate and, to a lesser extent, stimulating sedentary audiences to take up sport, there is no guarantee that the motivation generated by spectating experiences actually translates into increased participation, whether in the near future or in the longer term. On the basis that people may need active encouragement to convert intention or aspiration into action, survey respondents were asked to indicate the degree of importance they attached to nine different types of intervention which might harness their inspiration - see Table 3.

The highest scoring interventions (in terms of their importance) were both concerned with the provision of information: either about sports that people can do at an appropriate level given their fitness and ability (68% of respondents rated this as 'very important' or 'quite important') or about local sports clubs (67%). Moreover, information about opportunities to try sport as a family was also regarded as an important factor by nearly half (49%) of inspired respondents. Interestingly, only one in ten respondents across the aggregate spectator sample reported receiving any such information at the event that they attended. These findings highlight the value of using major sporting events as an effective platform for sport providers to 'sign post' potential participants, when seeking to capitalise on the excitement and enthusiasm generated among those who attend them.

Table 3: Potential levers to participation

	Very Important	Quite Important	Not Particularly Important	Not At All Important	Don't Know	Total
Taster sessions in [featured sport] (or other sports) here at the event	16%	27%	32%	13%	12%	100%
Taster sessions in [featured sport] (or other sports) where I live	21%	33%	24%	10%	11%	100%
Information about sports that I can do where I live at a level that is appropriate to my fitness and ability	25%	43%	15%	6%	11%	100%
Information about local clubs or centres where I could have a go	26%	40%	16%	7%	10%	100%
The chance to talk to sports people about the right types of sport for me to try	20%	37%	24%	9%	10%	100%
The chance to meet athletes and hear how they got started in their sport	23%	33%	26%	8%	10%	100%
The chance to try sport in a non-threatening environment (with other inexperienced people)	25%	37%	20%	8%	11%	100%
The chance to try a new sport where I could meet new friends*	20%	41%	21%	6%	12%	100%
Information about opportunities to try sport as a family*	17%	32%	26%	13%	13%	100%

* Options included for 2011 and 2012 events only

5. FINAL REMARKS

Eight of the ten events included in this research were part-funded by UK Sport's *World Class Events Programme*. UK Sport has traditionally supported the bidding and staging costs of major sporting events with a view to generating a positive economic impact on the communities that stage them. Whilst economic impact still remains an important outcome, there is a recognition that not all events that are 'major' in sporting terms will also be 'major' in economic terms. With this in mind, the rationale for this study was to investigate whether such events might serve as a catalyst for grassroots sport development. Being inspired represents an important step in helping people to consider undertaking more sport or indeed taking up sport.

There are, of course, many subsequent causal factors beyond the control of a major event that determine whether people translate any sense of inspiration into actual behavioural change. These may include for example health issues, monetary and lifestyle considerations and the availability of opportunities to participate. What this study does show, however, is that major events can play an important role at the start of what is a complex process, sparking people's desire to participate or to participate more frequently, and sign posting them towards the next stage of that journey.