



Editorial

The impact of global sporting events

The recent announcement that Tokyo will host the 2020 Olympic Games got me thinking again about the impact that such global sporting events have on the local and wider community. This, of course, can be viewed through a variety of lenses and this editorial (or personal indulgence as it may be seen by some) will highlight a range of impacts that go beyond the standard accolades for elite sport performance. First of all, congratulations to Tokyo and Japan on their successful bid. From a purely selfish point of view, living in Sydney, Australia I will be able to view as much coverage as I like without having to stay up all night to see it live – my apologies to those in vastly different time zones to Japan.

Along with each Olympic Games come a range of benefits including opportunities to promote sport participation, create sporting role models, encourage a sense of national identity, and an opportunity to showcase a city and country to the global audience. Most large sporting events manage to do these things very well. What is often not factored into that success are the finances required to achieve an event such as the Olympic Games. Whilst no one would argue that to produce an event the magnitude of an Olympic Games cannot be done on the cheap, the budgets for these events appear to have blown right out of proportion. Gathering exact cost data is difficult as it comes from so many varied sources. That said, it is widely touted that the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, for example, will cost in the vicinity of \$50 billion. This figure is around four times the cost of the 2012 London Olympic Games, a much larger event held less than two years earlier. The immediate question is whether the benefits obtained through hosting an Olympic Games match the investment put up. To be somewhat provocative, certain questions come to mind. Using the Sochi Winter Olympic Games as an example, could they be run on half of the budget (still sizable), and the other half be put into health promotion and grass-roots sports promotion initiatives? Could the remaining half of the funding be put into the country's health care system? Could the remaining funds be put into national initiatives that reduce the burden of non-communicable or lifestyle disease? Could these

funds be put into health and medical research of importance to the changing health picture of the world? Whilst most countries will counter these questions with the argument that the Olympic Games encourage people widely to become more active (and hence, more healthy), this could be disputed. I am yet to see robust data that supports this notion, although data does exist that demonstrates greater participation uptake in certain sports after global events such as Olympic Games.

A further impact of hosting events such as the Olympic Games stems from the major sponsorship, without which a Games would find it difficult to be staged. Whilst sponsorship *per se* is fine, it is the type of sponsorship that requires some level of scrutiny. An analysis of any of the recent Olympic Games will highlight sponsors that represent the fast food industry, the automotive industry, the electronics industry, and manufacturers of sugar-rich drinks. The impact on health of most fast food and sugar-rich drinks is obvious. We must also, however, consider the impact of the automotive industry on population levels of physical activity through reductions in active transportation, and the impact that the electronics industry has on sedentary time (also a risk factor for poor health) through production and promotion of screen-based games and entertainment and the general automation of previously active functions. These sponsors, through global events such as the Olympic Games, manage to link their products to what are deemed healthy pursuits such as sport, and have an impact far more globally than the Games themselves.

In summary, the impact of global sporting events is significant, but not always in the direction that we would like. I encourage you to ponder the questions posed above and see what benefits you and your organisations can achieve in the promotion of a health society through capitalising on global sporting events.

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