

The Impact of Elite Sporting Success on National Pride in England

Shibli, Simon¹; Ramchandani, Girish¹; Larissa, Davies¹; Downward, Paul² and Bingham, Jerry³

1: Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom; 2: Loughborough University, United Kingdom; 3: UK Sport, United Kingdom
s.shibli@shu.ac.uk

Aim

This paper examines the relationship between sporting achievements and national pride among adults in England. Three questions derived from a Rapid Evidence Review are outlined below.

- To what extent does success in elite sport drive national pride?
- Are fluctuations in sporting pride associated with sporting performance?
- What is the longevity of sporting pride?

These questions are used to inform the policy debate on the societal outcomes of success in elite sport.

Literature review

Evans and Kelley (2002) found substantial variances in sporting pride within groups of countries based on data collected in 1995/6. Great Britain had the lowest sporting pride of all English speaking nations in the sample, although the research was conducted during a period of limited British sporting success. Van Hillvorde et al. (2010) observed small temporary rises in national pride amongst adults in the Netherlands during the European Football Championships and the Olympic Games in 2008, indicating a positive correlation between sporting pride and national pride. They found that sporting success contributed more to a sense of national pride, than other variables used to measure the concept. However, they concluded that there is limited empirical evidence that sporting success increases national pride beyond small and temporary fluctuations. Subsequent studies in the Netherlands (Elling et al., 2014) and Germany (Haut et al., 2016) found that national pride is a relatively stable characteristic of national identity that cannot easily be increased by national sporting success.

The concept of sporting pride has not been examined in England since 1995/96 and has not been mapped over time to look for associations between fluctuations in pride and the specific events that might be associated with them. Pride has however been used as a rationale for supporting high profile sporting events in England, notably the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Research Design

Our research involved secondary analysis of the Taking Part Survey (TPS), which is a continuous household survey of around 10,000 adults. Between July 2011 and March 2016, the TPS included a question designed to identify the drivers of national pride. 'British sporting achievements' was one of the 12 response options to the question: 'Looking at this list, what, if anything makes you most proud of Britain? You can choose up to three.'

We first examined the data on an annual basis to look at 'sporting achievements' in the context of other aspects of Britain that made people feel proud. Second, we examined the level of

pride in 'sporting achievements' on a monthly basis in order to explore fluctuations relative to specific sporting performances.

Findings and Discussion

Indicators of national pride:

On average 16% of the sample selected 'sporting achievements' as one of their options and this statistic varied annually from 21% to 11%. This is a useful finding as it reveals that it is only a minority of respondents who cite pride in sporting achievements as one of their top three drivers of national pride. 'Sporting achievements' was the category with the greatest volatility in its scores (+/-10 percentage points). It appears that the other aspects of pride in Britain are relatively stable. The degree of fluctuation in sporting pride suggested that it might be linked to performance in sporting competition.

Pride in British sporting achievements:

There are some considerable peaks and troughs in the sporting pride question that are at least associated with sporting successes and failures. The most obvious shift occurred between July 2012 and August 2012, when the pride statistic increased from 12% to 30%, which coincides with Team GB's medal success at the London 2012 Olympics.

It is also possible to associate troughs with sporting failures such as elimination from major football tournaments. There are also troughs for which there are no obvious explanations other than perhaps reduced likelihood of selecting 'sporting achievements' once the warm afterglow of an earlier sporting achievement fades.

Longevity of pride:

It is notable that at the start of the sequence in September 2011 the 'sporting achievements' score was 14% and at the end of the sequence in March 2016 was the same. This finding is consistent with the evidence from Netherlands and Germany, suggesting that increases in sporting pride occur in the short term and are temporary (van Hilvoorde et al., 2010; Elling et al., 2014; Haut et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Our analysis identifies sporting pride as a volatile element of an otherwise relatively static notion of national pride. From a sport management and policy perspective, the rationale for investing in elite sport to increase national pride in Britain is not without challenge. We hold this view because our evidence indicates that only a minority of the population experienced sporting pride and its effects were relatively short lived.

References

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