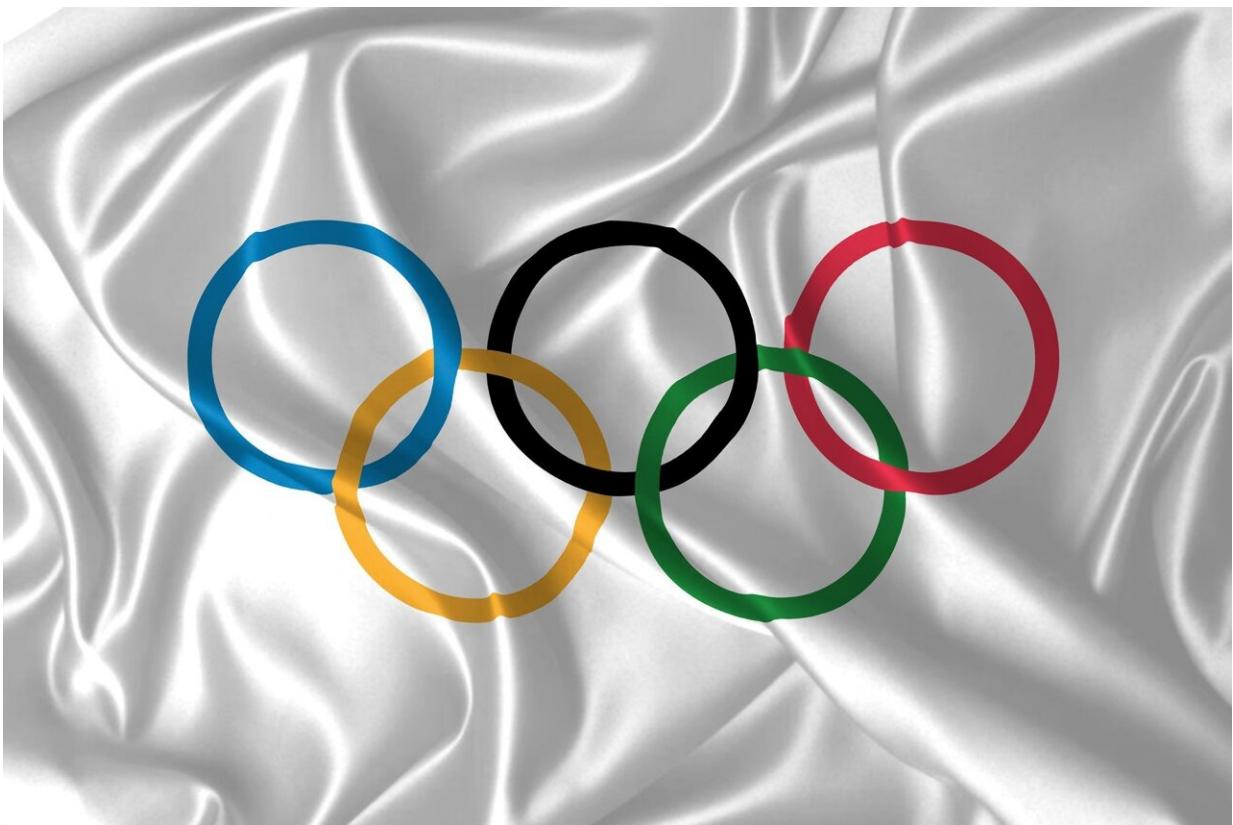


# Does sports participation boom during (or before, or after) the Olympics?

July 1 2024, by Vaughan Cruickshank, Brendon Hyndman and Tom Hartley

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Hosting a major sporting event like the Olympic and Paralympic Games can deliver benefits to the host country, such as [improved infrastructure](#)

(new sport facilities, better public transport, [greater accessibility](#) for people with disabilities), increased employment and [tourism](#), [environmental benefits](#) and greater [national pride](#).

While many of these benefits are mainly seen close to the [host city](#), increased participation in sports and physical activity has the potential to have a positive impact on people throughout the host country and indeed all around the world.

But do major sports events like the Olympics actually improve participation?

In short, the research is currently unclear. While [some studies](#) have found increases, many [others have not](#).

Increases are often a [short-term](#) spike, particularly in sports the country has been [successful](#) in, but these gains decrease over time.

## Inspiration versus participation

Australians have always had a strong interest in sports, with many of us believing sport contributes to our [national identity](#).

This passion is particularly evident during major international events like the Olympics—Sport Australia estimates 82% of Australians [watched](#) at least some of the Tokyo Olympics.

Around one in five Australians who watched those Olympic and Paralympic Games said they saw something that would encourage them to be more physically active. Parents also said they were thinking of enrolling their children in a new sport.

However, engagement and inspiration do not always lead to [participation](#)

Why is this?

[Researchers](#) have noted two different potential relationships between major sporting events and community sport participation.

Firstly, [elite athletes](#) become [role models](#) who inspire us to become more active, by participating more in our current sport or trying a new one.

In contrast, the second is some of us feel watching elite athletes [discourages](#) us because we recognize the massive differences in our fitness, abilities and skills.

It is also important to recognize many other factors can influence participation, including costs and the [availability](#) of coaches, equipment and facilities.

The [COVID](#) pandemic and cost-of-living crisis are other key influences in recent years.

## **Impacts of major Australian sporting events**

While the Sydney Olympics did not significantly increase [physical activity](#) levels in Australia, other big events have been more successful.

The year after Australia hosted the 2003 Rugby World Cup, junior registrations [increased](#) by 20%.

More recently, female soccer registrations have [significantly increased](#) following the Matildas' performance in the 2023 Women's World Cup.

These successes demonstrate a more direct link between major sports

events and increased participation in the specific sport involved.

## **The pre-Olympics boost**

Research has also noted sports participation can increase before an Olympics.

A decade-long survey in England revealed there were major sports participation spikes during the [lead-up](#) to the 2008, 2012 and 2016 Olympics, rather than afterwards.

This could be due to increased [media coverage](#), [school engagement](#) and programs organized by national sporting bodies and clubs.

## **Strategies to capitalize on post-Olympics interest**

So, as the Paris Olympics approach, how can we convert our sports watching into participation?

National sport organizations need to help clubs [promote themselves](#) in their [local communities](#) and make their sport accessible. An online portal or app to find nearby sports clubs could be helpful.

[Free trial](#) days provide a risk-free way to try new sports. Clubs could schedule these regularly after events like the Olympics.

Scheduling activities at [various times](#) to accommodate different schedules may help, as might equipment loan programs that can make starting new sports easier, especially for those needing a lot of expensive gear.

Group activities can enhance enjoyment and reduce intimidation, so

offering special group rates or buddy programs, particularly for beginners, can encourage participation.

Non-competitive skill development programs can attract those interested in sports for [leisure](#) and emphasize that sport is for everyone.

Advice and endorsements from local Olympic athletes can also be highly motivational. Partnering with athletes to create motivational content and provide advice can inspire greater participation, particularly for [children](#).

## **Looking ahead to the Brisbane Olympics**

Increased sports participation and higher levels of physical activity are some of the 2032 Brisbane Olympics' desired [legacy outcomes](#).

For this to be achieved, governments and sporting organizations will have to work together to develop a strategic approach. Paris 2024 has already used this approach to successfully [increase](#) physical activity through school programs and redesigned public spaces.

The impact of new Olympic sports also needs to be considered.

Skateboarding experienced [increased interest](#) following its Olympic debut in Tokyo.

[Paris 2024](#) will include breaking as a new sport, while [Los Angeles 2028](#) is adding baseball, softball, lacrosse, Twenty20 cricket, flag football and squash.

## **What about Brisbane?**

While the new sports for 2032 have not yet been announced, these new,

potentially less well known sports could experience a similar increase in popularity leading up to the Brisbane games.

Some sports such as [gymnastics](#) and [basketball](#) are already struggling to deal with increased demand in Queensland.

Local sports clubs will need assistance from government and national sporting organizations to be ready to deal with any increase in interest and help the Brisbane Olympics meet their legacy goals.

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