

Sport Students' Background Knowledge of the Olympic Games: The Development of a Holistic Sport Event Management Frame of Reference

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University courses in sport management sciences educate and prepare students for future employment within the greater sport industry. In this regard, students will also pursue careers within the areas of general sport management as well as event management. These current students also represent an important cohort poised for employment within the South African sport industry, the same industry tasked with managing bidding and hosting future mega-events. The South African Sports Commission (2003) has indicated that unsuccessful bids to host mega-event were in part due to a perceived lack of knowledge and skills. This may point to an insufficient holistic frame of reference of an event, such as the Olympic Games in terms of its development, current make-up and governance structure.

Students studying sport sciences and sport management are being prepared for future employment within the sport industry, and future roles in amongst other event bidding and hosting. Basic knowledge of the event, its history, current operations, and governing structure is essential as this constitutes a basic holistic frame of reference. Without this, it is reasonable to argue that future bids may also fail due to perpetuated perceptions of lacking knowledge and substandard organising skills.

The status of background knowledge of the Olympic Games remains empirically untested in South Africa. Various sectors of the South African sport industry expressed interest in bidding again for a future Olympic Games. It is reasonable to assume that current students in sport sciences and management will be intricately involved with this process in the future. However, inadequate background knowledge of the Olympic Games may negatively affect successful bid preparation and subsequent event success.

An initial investigation into the current state of background knowledge of students, studying sport sciences (including sport management) at the University of Pretoria, of the Olympic Games, its history, current operation and governance structure.

The Olympic Questionnaire and procedures for research, as developed by the International Council for Sport Sciences and Physical Education (Telama, Naul, Nupponen, Rychtecky & Vuolle; 2002), was used as research instrument. Questions applied were to determine knowledge relating to past and future Olympic Games. A total of 621 first to fourth year students studying in the sport, fitness and recreation disciplines were selected as respondents. Descriptive statistical analyses were performed on the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison; 2001).

Respondents ascribed the largest differences between the Ancient and Modern Games to technological differences and more events in the latter. Respondent knowledge of the Olympic Games included familiarity with the site of the first modern Olympic ($x=74.4\%$), the date of the first modern Games ($x=42.4\%$ male and 35.7% females), the host city of the 2008 Games ($x=88.4\%$ male and $x=81.0\%$ females). In respect to past and present governance influence, limited respondents correctly identified the current IOC president ($x=12.3\%$ male and 9.7% female). The majority of female respondents ($x= 8.6\%$) indicated that they have not heard of the Pierre de Coubertin, as opposed to 61.6% of male respondents who had positive recollection of the name.

Without insight into the development and progression of the Olympics, and accompanying Olympic Movement ideals and principles, those individuals involved with the process of bid preparation may disregard key direction and strategic indicators of the course the Olympic Games has set for the future. The current knowledge of respondents appears to lack balance between past, present and future, which leads to an unbalanced holistic frame of reference.

This highlights the need to assess possible failure of formal education in providing the students with insight and background to the Olympic Games. A balanced and holistic frame of reference of any event is vital for future success of that event (Bowdin, McDonnell, Allen & O'Toole; 2001).

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