Home Advantage in the Winter Paralympic Games

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Management - Other (Elite Sport)  Saturday, June 3, 2017
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  1:30 PM
Abstract 2017-345  Room: Maroon Peak

Introduction
There is now a critical mass of published academic literature examining home advantage in major sporting events. Predictably, most of these studies focus on the Olympic Games (e.g. Balmer, Nevill & Williams, 2001, 2003; Clarke, 2000; Neville, Balmer & Winter 2009, 2012; Pettigrew & Reiche, 2016; Shibli & Bingham, 2008; Shibli, Gratton & Bingham, 2012), with a select few that consider the Commonwealth Games (Ramchandani & Wilson, 2010, 2011, 2012). There is however a distinct lack of research in relation to events targeted at elite athletes with a disability such as the Paralympic Games, which this paper attempts to address.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the prevalence of home advantage in the Winter Paralympic Games from 1976 to 2014. Nine nations have hosted the event in this time frame: Sweden - 1976; Norway - 1980 and 1994; Austria - 1984 and 1988; France - 1992; Japan - 1998; USA - 2002; Italy - 2006; Canada - 2010; and, Russia - 2014.

Methods
The performance of host nations at home and away from home was measured in terms of 'market share' by converting the number and type of medals won in a given edition into points (gold=3, silver=2 and bronze=1) and expressed as a percentage of the total number points available in that edition. For example, in 2006 the host nation - Italy - won 14 medal points out of 348 points awarded - and their overall home edition market share was therefore 4.0% (i.e. 14/348). For each host nation, we compared its home market share with its average market share in the editions immediately before hosting and immediately after hosting. For example, Italy's market share in 2002 (pre host) and 2010 (post host) was 3.3% and 3.1% respectively - an average of 3.2%. Therefore, its performance at home in 2006 was 0.8 percentage points better than its average pre/post host performance in absolute terms (i.e. 4.0% - 3.2%) and 25% better in proportionate terms (i.e. 4.0% / 3.2%).

In instances where there is no valid pre-host or post-host data (i.e. pre 1976 for Sweden; post 1984 and pre 1988 for Austria; and, post 2014 for Russia) only the available away (pre or post) data point is utilized in the home advantage calculation. Comparisons are also drawn with the Winter Olympic Games post 1988, the point from which both the Winter Olympics and the Winter Paralympics have been hosted by the same nations and in the same years.

Findings/Discussion
When comparing the market share of host nations at home with their average performance in the pre-host and post-host (away) editions of the Winter Paralympic Games, we found that all previous host nations performed better at home. The absolute median differential was 8.4 percentage points (range: 0.8 - 23.2). In proportionate terms, host nations improved their market share at home by at least 13% with a median improvement of 92%. Our analysis points to sport-specific variations in home advantage in the Winter Paralympics. Home advantage was more likely to be observed in the sports of alpine skiing and cross country skiing. Traces of home advantage in biathlon, ice sledge hockey and wheelchair curling was also evident. When comparing home advantage in the Winter Paralympics with the Winter Olympics for the last seven host nations (1992-2014), we found that: host nations typically performed better at home in both competitions; and, home advantage was generally more pronounced in the case of the Winter Paralympics.

Ultimately this research extends the evidence base of home advantage in international multi-sport events and, to the best of our knowledge, is the first formal attempt to examine home advantage in the context of elite disability sport.