Are “Youth Days” Effective at Promoting New Sport Participation? Evidence from a Pre-Post Event Research Design

Jordan Bakhsh, University of Ottawa
Luke Potwarka (Advisor), University of Waterloo
Ryan Snelgrove, University of Waterloo

Facilities/Events - Other (Youth Sport) 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) Friday, May 31, 2019 1:20 PM Room: Napoleon D1

Abstract 2019-187

Social psychological theories such as the theory of planned behavior (TPB) can predict individuals’ intentions to participate in sport. The TPB focuses on theoretical constructs concerned with individual motivational factors as determinants of the likelihood of performing a specific behavior (Montano & Kasperzyk, 2002). Central to the TPB, is that behavioral intention represents the most important predictor of action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). According to the theory, behavioral intentions are determined by individuals’ attitude toward performing the behavior (i.e., overall evaluation of the behavior); the subjective norms they associate with the behavior (i.e., beliefs about whether peer groups approve or disapprove of the behavior); and perceived behavioral control (i.e., perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior).

Although research has demonstrated the efficacy of the TPB in predicting sport participation intentions and behaviors, considerably less is known about drivers of change in TPB constructs (e.g., developing more favorable attitude toward track cycling). The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of exposure to a “youth day” (YD) event at an elite sport competition on youth spectators’ attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and intentions. These events held by event organizers typically involve hosting youth from local schools at a live sport event. The idea underpinning YD events is that exposure to elite athletes may generate new sport participation via a ‘demonstration effect’ (Weed et al., 2015).

Pre-event and post-event questionnaires were administered to local grade seven and eight students (n=318) before and after a YD event, which was organized as part of the 2016 Milton International Track Cycling Challenge, in Ontario, Canada. Prior to attending YD, participants had never watched a live track cycling event or participated in the sport. Questionnaires assessed each TPB construct 1 week before YD and immediately following the event. Paired sample t-test (t=2.66, p<.05) indicated youth’s intention to participate post-event (M=1.92, SD=.97) was significantly higher than pre-event intentions to participate (M=1.77, SD=.82). Paired sample t-test (t=3.745, p<.01) indicated youth’s subjective norm post-event (M=2.40, SD=1.06) was significantly higher than pre-event (M=2.16, SD=1.05). Perceived behavioral control and attitudes toward the behavior had no significant change.

Our results suggest that YD events can be effective at driving positive shifts in participation intention and subjective norm among youth populations. This finding is consistent with previous research (e.g., Frick & Wicker, 2016), which suggests that observing the performances of elite athletes can alter how spectators think about their own participation in the sport on display. Changes observed in intention to participate indicate spectating may have altered students’ desires to participate from one of relatively strong opposition, to that of being more open to participation opportunities at the velodrome facility. To this end, watching the event may have increased youth’s awareness and knowledge of track cycling. Moreover, our results suggest that YD events may facilitate a shared experience that expands social networks available to participate in a new sport opportunity. Sport managers should educate YD students about the sport on display and present new opportunities in accessible ways.