


Competition of Sports

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Claiming that the various sports are competing against each other might be surprising at first sight. Biathlon or athletics can only be found once, which is likewise true for handball or table tennis. As soon as a certain sport shows a specific organization, it is a monopolist for a specific branch of sport. This monopoly position is guaranteed to each sport by the legislative body, which is why in e.g. the German umbrella organization, the DOSB (Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund - German Olympic Sports Confederation) there can only be one member association for each sport.

The same is true on the level of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) where there is only one single contact in respect to each sport. Hence the Olympic sports are generally not subject to any internal competition, as they are played according to codified rules. The

survival of a sport is secured as long as there are enough people willing to comply to the respective rules of that particular sport.

Some sports are subject to internal competition in so far as they comprise different events, which can be of varying attractiveness. In swimming various individual strokes - breaststroke, backstroke crawl or butterfly - are in a sense competing against each other. In athletics there 47 events, all of which respectively strive to ensure attention and new blood for themselves. Running is more successful than the throws. The jumps seem consistently attractive to the public, whereas some events, e.g. race walking, seem less so.

This competitive situation can be quite different from nation to nation. Hence there are athletics nations in which the technical events are very popular, e.g. Hungary, Czech Republic and Germany; there are regions, in which race walking is very attractive, e.g. in the Russian republics of Mordovia and Chevaschia; countries where middle and long distance events dominate, e.g. Kenya and Ethiopia; and countries where the sprints are most attractive, e.g. Jamaica, the Bahamas, Nigeria and the USA.

Setting national priorities in respect to the Olympic sports not only happens within the respective sports, but also in respect to some sports in general. Badminton is extremely popular in Indonesia and Malaysia. Wrestling however is a popular national sport in many African and Asian countries.

These observations reflect the actual competition situation within and between the Olympic sports, as it has developed over the last decades. The success of a sport depends primarily on how accomplished it is at recruiting athletes, drawing spectators and media audiences to competitions and generally in presenting itself as an attractive sport of interest to the mass media and commercial partners.

Apart from the competition of the Olympic sports amongst each other, there has been a competition between the non-Olympic sports and the Olympic sports long. But also the non-Olympic sports are in an increasingly fierce competition amongst each other. In this context, the big question is which of the non-Olympic sports will become eligible to move up to the privileged Olympic group.

Meanwhile a competitive situation has arisen between the non-Olympic sports and the Olympic sports in respect to the partnership between the economy and sports, as well as concerning the reception of these sports in the media, which is carried out in all its severity. Winter sports are fighting against summer sports, and basically everybody is fighting against everybody else.

On a world-wide scale, football (soccer) takes an exceptional position. No other sport can similarly tie spectators, sponsors and mass media down to it, as is the case in football. Without any doubt this dominance creates a disadvantage for all remaining sports, and it is not surprising that an increasing number of sport organisations have initiated discussions on the consequences of this dominance. Nowadays it seems to be inevitable for each sport to be precisely aware of its own market position in the respective international competition.

The market positions of the sports can be defined very exactly. By measuring the volume of sponsorship that an association achieves through selling licenses, one can know the economic value of a sport. The market share can be measured very accurately, just as the number of spectators, that can be reached

at broadcasts of a competition, as well as the audience present at the competition, willing to pay for a ticket. If these calculations are carried out and one looks at these statistics over a longer period of time, one can watch the rise and fall of the market positions of both the Olympic sports and of the non-Olympic sports within the sport market.

Some Olympic sports seem to have become nearly totally dependent on the Olympic Games. Their international market position is extremely weak judged by the sport calendar excepting the Olympic Games, and the bulk of their financial resources come from their share of the Olympic income. This applies to archery, curling, modern pentathlon, synchronised swimming, skeleton and eventing in equestrian. Others, however, are marked by a rising tendency. Some non-Olympic sports show more spectators, sponsoring revenues and television viewers than some Olympic sports are capable of achieving. One simply has to think of sports like dragon boat racing, karate and billiard. In the World Games sports like water skiing, (in-line) speed skating and sport climbing have to be called spectacular.

Trying to evaluate the international competitive quality of a sport, exact and hence reliable data is desirable in respect to spectators per year, sponsoring volume and television viewers per year for each and every sport. However, such data is only available for a few countries and regions. Following expert-ratings concerning these indicators, football (soccer) leads the ranking of sports, except in North America. Leading positions are being taken by sports like baseball, basketball, volleyball and handball. Ice hockey dominates winter sport, followed by skiing and biathlon. Generally team sports bind the most spectators to themselves throughout the year and therefore are also attractive to sponsors. In this competitive situation only a few individual sports can stand their ground, e.g. athletics and swimming. In terms of the afore mentioned indicators, sports like modern pentathlon, curling and mountain biking show only little success.

One also has to take into consideration that national rankings can vary profoundly from international evaluations. This is true when comparing continents to each other, but within one continent one can also observe vast differences. In Europe, England shows e.g. the following ranking momentarily: football, rugby, cricket, cycling, athletics. In France, football and rugby take the top positions, like in England, but then basketball, handball and cycling follow, whereas in Germany football is followed by handball, skiing, basketball and Formula 1.

Some rankings change nearly every year, others have remained constant throughout several decades. Regardless of this situation, marketing experts and sport executives of TV stations and online media are making their decisions about the cooperation with one sport on the basis of the currently valid rankings in the respective nations.

If a sport wants to survive in this aggressive competition, a self-critical examination of its own attractiveness is absolutely inevitable. Is the presentation of its competitions still up-to-date? Which target groups are reached with the competitions? Which ones are not reached? How many paying spectators are there in the events of the national championships? Which sponsoring volume can the association achieve with its events? What would in this context be realistic goals for the future? Which cooperation is there with the mass media? Is there sufficient news coverage on television?

Such questions are to be answered soberly. Consequently sensible goals have to be set to make the sport competitive in the future. Each sport has a realistic chance to increase its share in the competitive market of sports, but only if it takes a systematic and professional approach and is open to the necessary changes.

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