

Ten Years On: The Youth Olympic Games (Yog) Through The Eyes Of Australian Athletes

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Abstract

The inclusion of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) to the Olympic Movement was the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) action to introduce Olympism and the Olympic values to youth, hoping to turn the tide on rising obesity and the growing rate of inactivity, particularly amongst teenagers. It had been perceived that the Olympic Movement had largely neglected the needs of young people, motivating former IOC president Jacques Rogge to present a case for the implementation of the YOG.

This article reports on research that examined some of the claims of the Olympic Movement related to the YOG through the eyes of Australian athletes at the latest summer YOG of 2018. In addition, it discusses the role of the athletes themselves, in terms of their perception, understanding and experiences drawn from the global multi-sport event, which is rare in the literature and non-existent in terms of Australian participants who have represented their country at all the games.

Keywords

Youth Olympic Games (YOG); International Olympic Committee (IOC); Australian Olympic Committee (AOC); Cultural Education Programme (CEP); Olympism; Olympic Values

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Introduction

It is debatable that the introduction of the YOG has been, or ever could be, an antidote to obesity or inactivity in the young. By definition, these youthful athletes are neither obese nor inactive. In theory, this elite group could be a role model for the youth of the day. However, the public's general ignorance of the YOG makes this unlikely.

In 2007, IOC President Jacques Rogge identified the widespread decline in physical activity, the disappearance of open spaces in the cities and the rise of a computer culture as factors associated with the increase in obesity among youth (IOC, 2007a, as cited in Judge, Peterson, & Lydum, 2009). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2002) had previously issued a warning that a "sedentary lifestyle could very well be among the ten leading causes of death and disability in the world" (WHO, 2002, p. 1). WHO's Director-General, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, called for action and a move for health amongst individuals, families, communities, governments and policy-makers: To improve the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases, WHO Member States agreed on a voluntary global target of a 10% reduction in the prevalence of physical inactivity by 2025.

The introduction of the YOG in 2010 was a response to the call for action from global health organisations and to avoid losing an important target group from within the Olympic Movement. In order to become "more attractive, younger and fresher", Rogge acknowledged the need to "engender the interest of young people in the thrill of the sport" (Schnitzer, Brandsetter, Lang & Kopp, 2014a, p. 138). It is the IOC's ability to adapt to such changes in global market trends that

the vision of the YOG would be to "inspire young people (in the 15-18 age group) around the world to participate in sport and adopt and live by the Olympic Values" (IOC, 2011, p. 7).

Ten years since the inauguration of the YOG, it is questionable whether the multi-sport event has impacted the global obesity crisis. Most recent data of worldwide trends suggest not. The global target, to reduce physical inactivity, has been slow and still rising in high-income areas and amongst women (Guthold, R, Stevens, G.A., Riley L.M., & Bull F.C., 2018). Whether athletes have been inspired to promote the philosophy of Olympism or to increase participation, it is not easy to ascertain. Nevertheless, the YOG appear to be embedded within the Olympic Movement for now. To date, there has been no research directly related to Australian youth participants who have taken part in the Games.

Purpose and Justification

The purpose of this article is to report on research that set out to acquire a greater understanding of Australian athletes' perspectives of the YOG. The research investigated whether the YOG can provide an experience that will foster and empower young Australian athletes in their sporting careers and beyond. Their perceptions, understanding, and experiences of the 2018 YOG was attained over two interview sessions.

Research on the YOG has been limited. Even before the first edition in 2010, some scholars had labelled the games as "The Best Kept Secret" (Judge et al., 2009, p. 173). Kristiansen's (2015) research of the Norwegian Olympic Youth Team's experiences of the first winter YOG in 2012 concluded: "future research is

needed to examine if the IOC's intentions to make this a different kind of competition will succeed both at an organisational level and all the way down to the athletes' perceptions" (p. 40).

In addition to these, there have been some works of scholarship based on athletes from Norway, Germany, Canada, together with some broad cross-sectional studies of participants. However, existing research has predominantly focused on aspects such as the Cultural Education Programme (CEP), the innovative sports formats, and ethical considerations relating to the young ages of the athletes. Ten years and six editions later, this qualitative study aims to add to the YOG literature that is country-specific by examining Australian participants at the 2018 YOG.

Contextualising the YOG

President Rogge's vision of the YOG was that it would provide education based on Olympic values, which originated from the concept of Olympism (Judge et al., 2009). This closely aligned with de Coubertin's pedagogical philosophy for the modern Olympic Games, which emphasised sport as a means of educating people, creating international understanding and a peaceful co-existence. His five Olympic pedagogical principles of fair play, the pursuit of excellence, respect, peace, and universality would serve as a guideline for the behaviour of participants in sport (Schnitzer, Peters, Scheiber, & Pocecco, 2014b).

The educational rationality behind Olympism suggests that the pursuit of moral values can be shaped by sport, specifically the Olympic Games. With the quest for victory and commercial benefit, amidst highly specialised entertainers otherwise known as

Olympic athletes, Loland (1995) suggests that the values of friendship and mutual respect seem unimportant. However, the Olympic Movement has worked at redefining Olympism in contemporary times, with the YOG as the centrepiece aiming at "fostering the bridging capital of Olympism, notably amongst youngsters" (p. 374). Thus, the Olympic Games represent the platform of the Olympic values of respect, friendship, and excellence.

A key feature of the YOG initiative was the IOC's attempt to de-emphasise the competitive aspect of sport via the inclusion of the CEP and thereby introduce young people to Olympism and the Olympic values. However, without an official medal tally and records to break, the move away from a competitive programme resulted in an initial decline in interest, especially among the athletes (Wong, 2012).

When Jacques Rogge was elected as IOC President in 2001, he pledged "to bring the IOC closer to society through innovation" (Clarey, 2010, as cited in Wong 2012, p. 140). It had been perceived that the Olympic Movement had largely neglected the needs of young people, motivating Rogge to present a case for the implementation of the YOG. Aligning with Pierre de Coubertin's vision of an educationally focused sports festival that targeted the student youth of the world, Rogge believed this sport event would address the needs of today's society (Krieger, 2012).

The vision of the YOG was to find a means to engage young people in active sports participation to counteract the rising youth obesity and the increasing drop-off rates in participation while at the same time educating the youth to become sports ambassadors of

the future. Therefore, the main focus of the YOG is “to deliver an experience on and off the field of play which provides skills to the athletes both for their sporting career and beyond sport” (IOC Factsheet, Dec 2015, p. 1). In addition, the YOG would provide the catalyst for sporting competition and educational and cultural initiatives for young people. Accordingly, through the doctrine of Olympism, the YOG could support and promote teaching values and life skills (Judge, Peterson, Bellar, Gilreath, Wanless, Surber, & Simon, 2012).

Of the various criticisms of the YOG, including high costs, age groups, doping, cheating and over-specialisation, the following are more specific to this research.

Mini Olympics

Former IOC President Jacque Rogge claimed that the YOG “should not be seen as a mini-Olympic Games” (Krieger, 2012, p. 712). However, Krieger’s research of the perceptions of athletes who took part in Singapore shows that they likened it to the “real Olympic Games”. These results are at variance with the rationale claimed by the IOC. Moreover, the format of the sports programme in Singapore so closely anticipated the 26 sports to be held in the London 2012 Olympic Games that it is difficult not to see the connection with high performance and elite athletes.

In addition, the elimination of participants aged 14 sparked suggestions that the IOC wanted to increase the competitiveness and level of competition amongst the athletes (Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016).

John Coates, President of the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), acknowledged that whilst the Australian Youth Olympic

Festival has become a stepping-stone to the Olympics, “this will happen on a world scale with the YOG” and “enhance the Olympics, not detract from it” (Wong, 2011, p. 1844). Rogge reinforced the view of many that the YOG was very much a stage for competition during his opening remarks of the Singapore YOG that “This evening marks your entry to the Olympic world. You will test the limits of your abilities and push past them. Many of you will compete at future Olympic Games” (Weinreich, 2010). On the other hand, a study of young Australians suggests that youth sports do not necessarily develop Olympic champions (Gould & Carson, 2004).

Trickle-down effect

Although the IOC believes the YOG has the potential to impact youth participation at community, national and international levels, with little research on the impact of sports mega-events, the “trickle-down benefit” remains to be proven (Wong, 2011). The main premise of the trickle-down effect is that people will be inspired to participate as a result of elite athletes (sports stars and personalities), athlete performances and major sports events. On the contrary, other scholars believe that the trickle-down effect cannot inspire those who have not previously participated in sport to take up a sport. “Weed, Coren and Fiore (2009) concluded that there is no scientifically valid evidence of the effectiveness of the trickle-down effect of major sports events on participation” (as cited in Wicker & Soritiradou, 2013).

The Culture and Education Programme (now known as Compete, Learn and Share)

By developing the cultural and education agenda, the YOG provided a pedagogical

step back towards de Coubertin's ideology and the true essence of the Olympic Idea. Furthermore, for scholars such as Roland Naul, the introduction of the YOG was a positive step for the IOC by recognising a return to the Olympics' educational mission and providing the platform to promote Olympic Education (Schnitzer et al., 2014a).

The inclusion of the CEP was an integral part of the IOC's philosophy for the YOG, endorsing the importance of combining education and sport (Krieger, 2012). The CEP would be an avenue to meet the YOG objectives. The IOC maintained that the skills learnt through unique workshops would "allow the participants to return to their communities as ambassadors for sport and Olympism" (IOC Factsheet, Dec 2015, p. 3/4).

As early as 2009, a study of the youth movement in the United States by Judge et al., consisting of 268 coaches, athletes, administrators/sports officials and parents from six different sports, ranging from youth to professional, concluded that the YOG would achieve Rogge's goal of sharing the Olympic values and increase youth participation in sport.

However, the results of a study by Krieger (2012) of eight German athletes competing at the 2010 Singapore YOG cast doubt on this ideal. While the IOC claimed that the YOG was the most important competition for the participants, the athletes themselves did not perceive it as the main sporting event of the year for them.

Krieger (2012) reported that although the IOC claimed the CEP was popular with the athletes, there was no evidence or indication of the measurements of athletes' feedback. The IOC claimed the cultural exchange was achieved primarily through the CEP;

however, the athletes in Krieger's research felt they learned more about other cultures as a result of the staging of the YOG itself. The author argued that by simply being at the games and in the presence of athletes from other continents and countries, insights into the Olympic Movement and learning via Olympic Education were experienced, but not through the organised and planned activities within the CEP.

Schnitzer et al. (2014b) study of athletes' expectations and perceptions of the CEP activities during the 2012 Innsbruck Winter YOG concluded that whilst participation in the survey was rather low, those who had taken part in the CEP activities had perceived them positively. Thus, after two editions of the YOG, the IOC's goal of ensuring CEP held a high level of importance at the festival had yet to be achieved.

During the same Innsbruck 2012 Winter Games, Kristiansen's (2015) research of the CEP experience of nine Norwegian Olympic Youth team members from a psychological perspective suggests that while the CEP had not remained in the shadow of the competitive events, some athletes did question the learning aspect. Similar to Krieger's (2012) research, the popularity of the CEP programme could be argued as being more of entertainment value during the almost two-week compulsory stay in the village. The international atmosphere, alongside the competitive events, made the biggest impression on the athletes. Consistent with Krieger's (2012) research, the athletes who were interviewed demonstrated little awareness of the cultural mission of the games.

Social learning experiences

At the Lillehammer 2016 YOG, MacIntosh,

Parent, and Culver (2019) conducted a study that examined the young athletes' perceptions of the games through their experiences and learning derived from participation. Central to the athletes' sport experience was "striving for a personal best and a good finish" (p. 13). Achieving a good result was a primary motivator for continuing the pursuit of elite level sport. The results also indicated that social spheres were an important aspect of the Games, being "a place to foster friendships with others (teams and competitors both in and out of the athletes' sport)" (p. 14).

Parent, Kristiansen and Macintosh (2014) obtained similar results from a study of Norwegian and Canadian athletes during the 2012 Winter YOG in Innsbruck. It was noted that the international atmosphere, created in the athletes' village, provided an environment for the participants to make friends from all around the world, learn about different cultures and share experiences. In addition, the athletes preferred the informal process to the structured CEP, which was made easier using the social media tool, the YOGGER.

Methodology

The AOC granted permission to conduct a quantitative study with team members of the Australian 2018 Buenos Aires YOG team. Before departure to Buenos Aires, the Australian Youth Olympic Team's official assembly, access to the athletes was made available at Champ Camp. On return from the YOG, arrangements were made for secondary interviews according to an athlete's place of residence.

Interviews were conducted between September and December 2018 and were designed to gain an insight into their expectations as members

of the Australian team, their prior knowledge of the YOG as an international competition, and their understandings of Olympism.

To create a broad sample of differing ages, gender, and sports, consideration was given to the athletes being participants in a team, individual, new (sport climbing) or proposed new event (roller sports) to the Olympic programme. As a result, eight athletes were available for interviews between organised activities on each day of the two-day camp. Ultimately, five athletes (three females and two males) from the sample group were available to conduct a second interview on return from the YOG.

A dedicated room for interviews was made available at the Australian teams' camp, where face to face interviews was recorded and ranged in length from 12–18 minutes. Second interviews were conducted using Skype in the period five to eight weeks after the conclusion of the YOG and were similarly recorded. The interviews ranged in length from 16-32 minutes. One participant was available for a recorded face-to-face interview.

Initial questions enquiring about the participants' background in their chosen sport were aimed at establishing a rapport. Follow up questions and prompts were used to attain further responses that emerged into themes and sub-themes. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim using the services of Rev.com. Finally, a thematic analysis of data was used to regroup information according to relevant data that supported each theme.

Results

The data is presented through five major themes: awareness of YOG, Olympism, YOG experience, the knowledge gained from the

YOG, and future goals.

Theme 1: Awareness of the YOG

There were varying levels of awareness and understanding about the YOG. These directly correlated to when participants had become aware of the global event. For one participant, it was only two to three months before the games. For another, it was when their event, sport climbing, had been recognised as an Olympic sport.

The participants provided clear and definite descriptions of their expectations and what they hoped to achieve. The competitive element of the event featured amongst all responses: winning a gold medal, attaining a place on the podium, or finishing in the top ten, highlighted the high expectations of the athletes. Only one respondent noted: “I want to be able to do the cultural things and meet other people” (Participant 4, personal communication, September 30, 2018).

It was also apparent that whilst the participants may not be aware of the IOC’s vision of the YOG, embodied in their responses were the values of friendship, excellence, and respect. “Learning about people from all around the world, their cultures, their way of life” (Participant 4, personal communication, September 30, 2018) and to “Engage the new generation and to give them the opportunity to have the Olympic Games” (Participant 3, personal communication, September 30, 2018) indicated the participants’ recognition of values.

Theme 2: Olympism

Participants had difficulty articulating their understanding of Olympism. Therefore, with the likelihood they would be more familiar with the term values, additional questions were

directed using this term, whereby the values of friendship, excellence and respect frequently emerged in the discourse, as indicated in the following response:

“No matter what level you play. . . . Be honest, be a good sportsman . . . play fair. . . . And really do your best” (Participant 4, personal communication, November 26, 2018).

During the second round of interviews, post Games, the blending of sport, culture and education was articulated by one participant as:

I think it is sort of like an overarching banner/umbrella to just a sport. As much as everyone that was there was really elite, but it felt like there was a real focus on grassroots development and participation and inclusivity towards everyone. . . . There was a real focus on broadening and taking your knowledge and taking your skills back home and sharing it with other people to try and increase participation in sport (Participant 3, personal communication, December 3, 2018).

Theme 3: YOG experience

The most noticeable discourse that emerged was that the participants’ YOG experiences were notably unique, as they had not previously participated in a multi-sport event with large-scale global participation. Their responses were reflected in these examples:

A really crucial part of my experiences was that it was not just basketball. I had the opportunity to go watch sports and go support athletes in whatever their sport was, whether it was a team event or an individual event, and I think that was really important. . . . It definitely made me realise that there are so many sports that you do not actually realise that play a big role on the international stage (Participant

4, personal communication, November 26, 2018).

We did everything as one big Australian group. . . . we were always staying together and all supporting each other . . . meeting everyone else, their different sports from all over Australia . . . Other than playing sport, that was I think one of my favourite parts. . . . to become friends with everyone from around Australia . . . we got to interact with all the other different countries. (Participant 2, personal communication, December 19, 2018).

Theme 4: The knowledge gained from the YOG

Responses within this theme were sub-grouped into personal, educational, and cultural. From a personal perspective, the participants felt that the event had given them the confidence to perform on the world stage, with statements, such as: “It made me realise that I am good enough to race against the best in the world” (Participant 3, personal communication, December 3, 2018) and “It is probably the biggest step I have taken in the lead up to, hopefully, the adult Olympics” (Participant 5, personal communication, December 5, 2018).

The athletes had opportunities to engage in activities within the village, take part in field trips and attend information sessions conducted by the IOC designated Athlete Role Models. However, for some of the participants, attending the educational activities was time-consuming due to the rigorous protocol that needed to be followed with a preference to stay focused on their own sport or to be a spectator at other sports events. “I think we got to see every sport, we would maybe go to two or three, or even four different sports in a day” (Participant 3, personal communication, December 3, 2018).

A large amount of the cultural experience was encountered within the village. “It [The village] just brought the athletes together. No matter what country, you would talk to them, and you would meet new friends” (Participant 4, personal communication, November 26, 2018). With daily activities, entertainment, and designated areas for the athletes to relax, meeting people was a part of the total experience. Furthermore, with the use of a social media tool, the YOGGER, which had been introduced at Nanjing 2014 YOG, athletes not only had access to digital documents and videos but could easily develop friendships by a simple exchange of personal information (IOC News, 14th Aug 2014).

“Whenever I did the YOGGER I . . . started conversations that way. . . . Every night, the village square was just packed with athletes until about midnight. There were just people there talking” (Participant 3, personal communication, December 3, 2018).

Theme 5: Future Goals

During both interviews, participants were asked about their future goals. All responded that they aimed to gain Olympic representation at either the 2020 or 2024 games. They viewed the experience as the forerunner to further elite competition with aspirations to achieve what they deemed the pinnacle in sport, to compete at an Olympic Games.

“My goals, at the moment, are to prepare for Tokyo 2020 as best I can” (Participant 5, personal communication, December 5, 2018). Participant 4 (personal communication, November 26, 2018) stated, “I want to make it a focus for me, that one day I will be at the actual Olympics.” While Participant 2 also exemplified the athletes’ competitive sports career aspirations, “I think the YOG

just gave me a little bit of a taste of what the real Olympic Games could be” (personal communication, December 19, 2018).

Discussion

Based on the perceptions and experiences of the young Australian athletes in this study, the YOG provided the platform for athletes to be inspired and learn through sport. However, the learning experiences were not restricted to the activities provided within the CEP (Learn and Share Programme). It was found that there is an awareness of Olympic values, together with an understanding of internationalism through cultural initiatives, albeit predominantly through informal activities. While demonstrating excellence via the competitive programme, is of high importance.

Awareness of YOG

The low level of awareness of the YOG, a view shared by scholars as early as 2009, still has relevance in 2018. Similar to findings of Judge et al. (2009), who labelled the YOG as “The Best Kept Secret” and Krieger (2012), participants in this research demonstrated minimal awareness of the cultural mission of the Games, with the competitive programme being their main focus.

During interviews conducted prior to the departure of the team to Buenos Aires, two participants indicated they did not know of the YOG until almost a year before when they became involved in the team selection process, with one participant not knowing “it was a thing until I was selected. I found out maybe two to three months ago” (Participant 4, personal communication, September 30, 2018). Participant 4 was also the only athlete to acknowledge the cultural mission of the

Games together with the importance of the competitive programme, “I want to try and get that gold medal. . . . but I want to be able to do the cultural things and meet the other people” (personal communication, September 30, 2018). For the other participants, their knowledge of the YOG focused on their respective sports and competition.

A review of how the dissemination of information can be structured in the future via defined sport performance pathways from grassroots level organisations and sports federations would combat part of this problem in conjunction with NOC’s.

Olympism

The participants in this study had differing interpretations of Olympism and could not clearly define the term. Their understanding and awareness of Olympism centred around their knowledge of values, as they were portrayed specifically through the competitive environment. The participants identified friendship, fair play, honesty, reliability, sportsmanship, teamwork, and respect as elements of Olympism.

Similar to findings by MacIntosh et al. (2019), we can draw from this knowledge that it may not be as important for the athletes to be able to communicate this ideology, but more so to enact on the values via their behaviours and actions. The competitive programme provided the learning environment for the athletes to recognise values and interpret them via their learning processes and judgments. One participant acknowledged, “There was a real focus on broadening and taking your knowledge and taking your skills back home and sharing it with other people to try and increase participation in sport” (Participant 3, personal communication, December 3, 2018).

The YOGGER, a social media tool, was an icebreaker for the athletes to make introductions and share experiences with participants from other countries, particularly within the informal setting of the athletes' village. These findings also support the research of Parent et al. (2014) and Kristiansen (2015), who found that for the Canadian and Norwegian team members at the Innsbruck 2012 winter Games, it was the international atmosphere, together with the competitive programme, that had the biggest impact on the athletes.

Olympic Values

Of the three core Olympic values, friendship was frequently referred to during the two rounds of interviews. The participants acknowledged the benefit of a pre-departure camp, which provided the environment to develop new friendships and build team spirit at the beginning of their YOG experience. This appreciation and mutual respect for other sports disciplines were further enhanced within the very social environment of the village. These findings were in accordance with MacIntosh et al. (2019), who found that developing friendships during the games period was an important factor in the athletes' social learning experiences, and this engagement was not limited to within a team or sports discipline.

In contrast to Loland (1995), who suggests that values such as friendship and mutual respect may be unimportant to athletes when they focus on victory and commercial benefit, this study concluded that friendship was of high importance. The athletes' sort to establish friendships both within their team and with athletes from other countries. Participants noted: "By the end, we had friends from

every country" (Participant 1, personal communication, November 30, 2018) and "Other than playing sport [making friends], that was I think one of my favourite parts" (Participant 2, personal communication, December 19, 2018).

Forming friendships at a national and international level were an integral part of the athletes' overall Games experience and reinforced the IOC's intention of providing a positive, fun sporting experience.

The competition programme

During the early development of the YOG, former IOC president Jacques Rogge claimed that this addition to the Olympic Movement should not be perceived as a mini-Olympic Games. However, ten years on, the participants continue to highly value the level of competition, perceiving it as a stepping-stone to future international events and ultimately participation at the Olympic Games.

The athletes in this research support the notion identified by Krieger and Kristiansen (2016) that IOC publications refer to the YOG as preparation for the Olympic Games. Furthermore, during post YOG interviews, the researcher noted a heightened level of excitement and emotion when the athletes expressed their personal goals to strive towards taking part in either the 2020 or 2024 Olympic Games. All participants viewed the YOG as a step along a perceived pathway of elite competition.

The cultural and education programme

While the IOC claims that the cultural exchange is achieved mainly through the CEP, findings in this research support the findings of Krieger (2012) and MacIntosh

et al. (2019), who identified the unplanned, informal experiences intrinsic to the concept of an international multi-sport event, provided opportunities to develop friendships and learn about other cultures through the presence of being together in the athletes' village. In addition, the international setting within the village fostered cultural exchanges, often during incidental, unplanned occasions. The participants were also spectators at other competitive events, providing learning opportunities and strengthening friendships within the Australian team.

Results from this research indicated that while there were various cultural and educational activities for the athletes to take part in, which were positively received, performance and competition were the primary focus. These results were similar to the findings of Schnitzer et al. (2014b), who also found, that while the educational activities were well received at the Innsbruck 2012 YOG, the athletes were often too busy with their competition commitments or preferred to attend other sports events, resulting in a low level of CEP involvement.

These findings suggest that there continues to be a tenuous balance between the competition and education programmes, which will need to be addressed by the IOC in future editions of the YOG.

Limitations

A methodological limitation that arose was the availability of participants for the sample group. The age range of the Australian team was 15 to 18 years, with the 15 and 16 year age group accounting for 30.67% of the team total of 88 participants. (Refer to Table 1).

However, non-acceptance to participate and a busy schedule of activities during the pre-departure camp resulted in no 15 or 16-year-olds being available for interviews during the time frame. The final five participants included four 17-year-olds and one 18-year-old. It is possible that responses may differ, given the athletes' age, gender, and competitive sports experience.

Conclusion

The inclusion of the YOG to the Olympic Movement aimed to introduce youth to Olympism and Olympic values, with the premise to combat the global issue of obesity and inactivity in the young. This is an ambitious initiative, disseminated via a relatively small population of elite youth athletes in six editions of the Games since 2010. However, it is evident that there continues to be a tenuous balance between the competition and education programmes, with the participants' focus directed more toward competition than being ambassadors to global health issues.

| Age of Team Members | 15 years | 16 years | 17 years | 18 years |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Number in Team | 6 | 21 | 37 | 24 |
| % Team Total | 6.81 | 23.86 | 42.04 | 27.27 |

Table 1. Age Breakdown of Australian Team Members at the 2018 YOG

As to the participants' development as ambassadors of the Olympic values, respect, friendship, and excellence, they were able to identify with these values through their own experiences, thereby exhibiting the very attributes of Olympism, but without a definitive understanding of the term, as it is presented within the Olympic Movement. In addition, meeting athletes from other disciplines, other countries, and from within their team provided informal learning opportunities. Significantly, building friendships and respect for competitors in sports other than their own was identified and established early through attendance at the pre-departure camp.

The YOG provides a platform that unquestionably inspires participants to engage in sport at the highest level of competition, using this experience as a stepping-stone for continued participation at elite competitions. After competing at the YOG, the participants' perceived trajectory in sport was for continued national representation and ultimately selection in a future Olympic Games team.

By using the resources provided by the AOC, (personal communication, March 9, 2020) it can be concluded that from the four possible editions of the YOG - the Tokyo and Beijing Olympics not yet having taken place - there have been 22 former YOG athletes who have competed for Australia at subsequent Olympic Games, representing a mere 10% of the total participants. That means that nine out of ten YOG participants before 2018 failed to participate in future Olympics.

While the IOC promotes the YOG as a place for learning, based around the Olympic values, the participants' competition factor and desire for excellence were the primary goals. Hence, de-emphasising the competitive aspect to

include more formal educational activities would not enhance learning through specific programmes based on the Olympic values and Olympism nor encourage the athletes to participate more fully in the CEP. The athletes' desire to perform at the highest level was a key motivator, as they value competition. For the participants, the whole experience of the YOG was predominantly positive.

It was also noted that the participants' awareness of the YOG was relatively minimal before engaging in a selection process within their sports organisation. This is an area that could be addressed through the relevant sports federations in conjunction with the AOC to support the Olympic Movement as it targets the youth age group globally.

It remains to be seen whether the YOG, a different kind of festival from the Olympic Games, will be successful over the long term from the perspective of both participants and organisers. The sporting ambitions of the youth may not align with the structured educational programme conducted within the multi-sport event. For the participants, it is primarily a sporting competition.

Recommendations

Continued research will ascertain whether this youthful, innovative festival will become a platform for driving Olympism within the IOC's mission to overhaul the global problem of obesity.

1) A comparison between athletes from different global regions and broadening the sample to include a cross-section of participants from all age groups, evaluating possible age and gender differences, may prove useful in the future should the IOC aim to tailor the YOG specifically to the needs of youth athletes.

2) Longitudinal studies to track the sport participation pathways and long-term benefits of this global event could be of interest to national sports federations and Olympic committees. In addition, understanding how participants have incorporated Olympism and the Olympic values into their lives would provide data specifically related to one of the IOC's objectives of the YOG.

3) Analysing the trickle-down effects of the YOG across multiple countries/global regions to ascertain any long-term engagement in sport. This data could assist national sports federations and Olympic committees in supporting the IOC's vision to target the youth and create a healthier global society.

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