



Does national pride from international sporting success contribute to well-being? An international investigation



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 October 2012

Received in revised form 6 June 2013

Accepted 6 June 2013

Available online 24 August 2013

Keywords:

Sport events

Sporting success

Subjective well-being

Pride

Instrumental variable

ABSTRACT

The sports industry is viewed as being of growing economic significance, reflected in its promotion in public policy. One specific aspect of this policy is to argue that investment in international sporting success creates pride from sporting success, which contributes to subjective well-being (SWB). However, though it has been argued that indicators of sporting success, such as the number of medals won at major sports events like the Olympics, act as a proxy for pride from sporting success, there have not been any direct tests of this hypothesis. Controlling for the impact of physical activity, attendance at sports events and other standard covariates, this paper addresses this hypothesis by focusing on a variable which directly measures pride felt from sporting success (Pride) by individuals. Because of the possibility that a latent characteristic such as nationalism, or overall national pride, might be linked to both Pride and SWB, i.e. an endogeneity problem is present, an instrumental variable technique is employed. The findings do not support the hypothesis that pride following from sporting success can contribute distinctly to SWB. Moreover, the hosting of events may be more important than success at them, a point suggested by the positive association between attendance at sporting events and SWB. As such the goals of public sector investment in both hosting major sports events as well as investment in sports development to achieve international sporting success are shown to be more distinct than implied in much of the policy announcements and require more careful scrutiny.

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1. Introduction

Whilst traditionally investigation of subjective well-being (SWB) has been associated with psychologists, seminal work by economists such as Van Praag and Frijters (1999) or Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz (1999) has burgeoned into a large literature (Clark, Diener, Georgellis, & Lucas, 2008). Distinguishing features of the economics literature are that it tends to draw upon large-scale secondary datasets (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008) and that it is motivated as an attempt to measure the utility of individuals (Gardner & Oswald, 2006; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Shields & Wheatley Price, 2005). Significantly, policy makers are now recognizing the importance of SWB as a policy target. In the UK, the coalition government has asked the Office for National Statistics to debate and to devise appropriate measures of SWB (see, for

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example, Bentley & Churcher, 2010; Office for National Statistics, 2012; Oswald, 1997). This echoes (the former) President Sarkozy's earlier championing of Professor Joseph Stiglitz's arguments that the welfare of an economy is not measured by Gross Domestic Product but should reflect broader concerns with SWB (Aldrick, 2009). Therefore, knowledge about the various factors influencing SWB has become increasingly important.

Previous research has primarily focused upon the effect of different individual and household characteristics (such as age and education) or exogenous "shocks" (such as political and economic reunification in Germany) upon SWB. However, historically, the literature on SWB has relatively neglected investigation of the impact of sport (Dolan et al., 2008). This is now changing. Sport has become a central policy target for governments because of its significance for health care systems (Colditz, 1999) as well as economies in general (European Commission, 2011). Consequently, progressive governments in the 1990s and 2000s have sought to encourage sports participation, to invest in professional athletes' sporting success and to host major sports events.

The latter two initiatives are based on two arguments: First, there is the claim that sporting success as well as simply hosting major sporting events can act as a catalyst to promoting participation, and indirectly health and SWB, through a trickle-down effect (Frawley & Cush, 2011; Hindson, Gidlow, & Peebles, 1994; Hogan & Norton, 2000). However, the evidence base on these effects has been argued to be of low quality stemming from poor methodology (McCartney et al., 2010). It is also ambiguous. For instance, while Sportscotland (2004) identifies that curling participation increased as a result of Great Britain's Winter Olympic success in 2002, Humphreys, Maresova, and Ruseski (2012) identify a negative impact of past Olympic success upon sports participation.

A second argument and key rationale for investment in elite sports as well as the hosting of sport events is the impact that they have on SWB *directly* and also *through the mechanism of pride* (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002). The latter has been defined to be a sense of national identity and pride, associated with the euphoria that takes place in a country (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002). In economic terminology this suggests that 'non-use'-value – that is utility (or SWB) other than that directly measured as the payment undertaken by spectators to experience the event directly – exists. Significantly this benefit can accrue to all individuals in society through being an 'externality' (e.g. Johnson, Groothuis, & Whitehead, 2001; Owen, 2006) since all individuals in society have the opportunity to associate themselves with a country hosting an event or being successful at an event (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002). In this regard, elite and professional sport can be characterized as having elements of being a public good. It follows that trying to disentangle the relationships of sporting success, pride and SWB is important for policy.

It is important because (as will be discussed in detail in Section 2) though a number of pioneering studies exist, they exhibit shortcomings: First, they either investigate the effects of sporting success on SWB by measuring the former at the country level only (e.g. with the number of medals won, Kavetsos & Szymanski, 2010) which neglects one possible source of heterogeneity between individuals within countries that is connected to their subjective and individual view of success. Second, the studies that consider an individual subjective view of success focus either on an (indirect) monetary expression of SWB, i.e. the willingness-to-pay (e.g. Süßmuth, Heyne, & Maennig, 2010; Wicker, Hallmann, Breuer, & Feiler, 2012) or treat pride from sporting success and SWB from sporting success as essentially independent outcomes (Hallmann, Breuer, & Kühnreich, 2013) which is (at a minimum) subject to discussion. Third and significantly, previous studies analysing the link between pride from sporting success and SWB assume that causality runs from pride from sporting success to SWB. However, this neglects the possibility that a latent characteristic such as nationalism, or overall national pride, might be linked to both pride from sporting success and SWB.¹ Not accounting for this potential endogeneity has repercussions. Statistically it means that the estimated effect of pride from sporting success on SWB when just correlating both variables will be biased (see Wooldridge, 2010). From a policy perspective it means that recommendations are based on presumptions about the mechanisms delivering enhancements in SWB.

Consequently, the current paper investigates the direct effect of the subjective view of success on SWB for a broad cross-section of 33 different countries. This recognizes the individuals' subjective view of what constitutes international sporting success, rather than having to a priori determine what this might mean. For example, it may not be connected with actually winning an event. Furthermore, because pride from sporting success and SWB are measured at the individual level, the causal relationship between them can be investigated, which has not been explored before (Hallmann et al., 2013). It is clear that relevant policy advice and evaluation requires formally examining the causal relations theorized to exist between variables of interest to policy makers and proponents.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 briefly examines the measurement of SWB and then reviews the literature that has assessed the impact of sports on SWB. Section 3 outlines the data and variables employed in this study. Section 4 addresses the identification strategy employed as well as the estimation techniques used. Results are presented in section 5 and section 6 offers the main conclusions to the paper.

¹ Pride from sporting success could be a component of national pride, but not have a direct relationship with SWB. In contrast, national pride and SWB could be linked – not because of sport but because of other (non-)sport components. For instance, citizens might have pride because of health service provision in their country and the health service contributes to their SWB.

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