Activity Check-In
Impact of major sporting events in 2023
This document is for partners and organisations who work in the sport and physical activity sector. It explores our current understanding on the influence and impact of major sporting events.

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The Activity Check-In tracks behaviours and attitudes from both adults, children and young people towards sport and physical activity, revealing the impacts of a rapidly changing world.

Each wave captures views on a specific topic of current relevance – in this publication we focus on the influence of the major sporting events in 2023 and their impact on activity.

We define major sporting events as national or international-level competitions featuring elite athletes or teams, drawing a large audience and significant media coverage.

Full data sets are available on our website.

Activity Check-In, is conducted by Savanta via an online survey. Completed by n=2000 adults (aged 16+) and n=450 children and young people (CYP) in school years 1 to 11 per wave.

All participants live in England and data has been weighted to be representative of the English population by age, gender, region and socio-economic status.

Context

2023 was a busy year for major sporting events, ranging from the Men’s and Women’s Six Nations Rugby Union in March, the Women’s Football World Cup in July, followed by the Men’s Rugby Union and Cricket World Cups in September and November, respectively.

This report explores the influence of these Major Sporting Events throughout the year. Sport England conducted a series of Activity Check-In surveys at the start, midpoint, and end of summer (Jun/Aug/Nov) to uncover the impact of these events on inspiring people to engage in physical activity.

The surveys explored the activities individuals pursued in response to watching a major sporting event, as well as any barriers encountered.

These findings offer valuable insights for organisations within the sports and physical activity sector aiming to maximize the enduring impact of major events.

By tailoring initiatives to demographic variations and addressing specific barriers, programs can be enhanced to effectively capitalize on the inspiration derived from these sporting events.
Inspiration

Approximately 16% of adults and 30% of secondary-age children and young people said they were inspired by major sporting events, making them do more sport and physical activity.

People are more likely to try a sport they watched at an event rather than a different sport, especially if they have done that sport before.

Men were more likely than women to do more physical activity after being inspired by a major sporting event (20% vs. 11%).

Young and middle-aged adults (16-54) are more likely than older people (55+) to do more physical activity after being inspired by a major sporting event (23% vs. 5%).

Throughout the three survey waves in 2023, the levels of inspiration and action were relatively stable.
Audience Experiences

Most adults and secondary school children who watched major events committed to following them, with 90% of adults and 77% of secondary school children reporting they followed quite a bit or more.

The majority of adults (90%) and secondary school children (89%) watched major events live on TV, while 25% of secondary school children reported attending in person.

Adults engaged with major events through media, with 36% of those who engaged a lot reporting media consumption compared to 24% who engaged a little bit.

Athletes, their skill levels, and role model status were identified as the main drivers of inspiration, influencing 85% of respondents.
Barriers and Motivations

The study explored why some people were not inspired to be more active after watching a major sporting event, and why others felt motivated to be more active. Concerns about fitness (20%) and changing routines (18%) were identified as common barriers. Familiarity with the activity positively influenced those inspired by major events, with 35% reporting they had done the activity before. Demographic variations highlighted differences in barriers among age groups, genders, and ethnicities. Young people (16-34) were more likely to cite lack of motivation or interest (17%) and uncertainty about how to participate (12%). Females faced challenges related to motivation, affordability, self-perception, activity difficulty, and routine change more than males. Older individuals (55+) were more likely to engage in informal activities (35%). Black respondents were more likely than White British respondents to have sufficient information to get involved (38% vs. 26%).
Role of Sport England

This research holds significant implications for the role of Sport England in promoting sport and physical activity. As another summer of sport approaches, we recognise the impact of spectating on increased participation levels, particularly as watching major sporting events is accessible to most communities.

Understanding how watching these events inspires individuals to adopt more active lifestyles is essential for designing effective interventions and strategies aimed at promoting healthier behaviours.

Whether it’s harnessing motivation, leveraging social influence, or addressing perceived barriers, this understanding enables us to improve our decision making.

Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of targeted approaches, acknowledging the diverse demographic groups within the population.

By recognising the role of watching major sporting events as a precursor to increased physical activity, Sport England will continue to champion healthier communities and drive evidence-based interventions.