

# Unhappiness of Olympic proportions

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VICTORIA (CUP) – It's not just fans that scrutinize athletes – academics do it too.

The availability of stats and videos make athletes ideal study subjects, and new sports research is being published constantly. Here's a rundown of some interesting studies happening right now:

## Rings of sorrow

With all the fanfare surrounding the Beijing Olympics, did the event actually make Chinese people happier? A new study suggests it didn't, and that they might be better off hosting a soccer tournament instead.

A working paper titled "National Well-being and International Sporting Events," released last month by two researchers in London, England, found that hosting the FIFA World Cup or Euro tournament created a temporary "feel-good" factor in the hosts.

The authors used data from surveys conducted by the European Commission, which asked people in 12 European countries about their life satisfaction.

They then looked at three Euro Cups, the 1990 World Cup in Italy, and the 1992 Summer Olympics in Spain to see if the events affected happiness.

They found that hosting a soccer tournament increased

happiness by twice the amount than having a post-secondary education did, and equaled the happiness of getting married.

"Furthermore, it almost offsets the devastation of being divorced," the authors noted. But they also found the happiness from soccer tournaments didn't last long. "Although we find the magnitude of hosting football events in comparison to a person being married, say, is large, the former effect seems very short-lived, while the latter effect is generally much longer lasting," the study noted.

But while soccer brought smiles, the study suggested the Olympics did not bring happiness, though the authors cautioned this conclusion should be viewed carefully given that they only looked at a single Olympics event.

"It just might be the case that the Barcelona Games, while bringing joy to the Catalan minority in Spain, actually reduced satisfaction levels among the Castilian majority, especially since many Catalans used the event to promote Catalonia's independence from Spain," the authors suggested.

## Steroids leave effects

Steroid scandals have plagued Major League Baseball recently.

With records being broken amidst allegations of steroids, fans want to know how much steroids have changed players' perform-

ance. A new study claims to have an answer: more than 12 per cent.

The paper, published in the latest *Journal of Quantitative Analysis in Sports*, looks at the offensive performance of 89 batters alleged to have used performance-enhancing drugs by the Mitchell Report.

That report was the result of a 20-month investigation into steroid use and human growth hormone use in baseball by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell.

By using runs created (a statistic that incorporates hits, walks, stolen bases, and other measures of offensive performance to estimate the number of runs a player contributes to his team) the study creates 12 statistical models to estimate the effect of performance-enhancing drugs.

The authors found that steroids improved performance anywhere from four to 18 per cent, depending on the model. But the authors believe the best methodology was one that showed how steroid use improved a player's runs created by 12.6 per cent.

Human growth hormone had a different effect, however.

"All but two models show a negligible effect of alleged human growth hormone use



A new study found that players who can lose the game with a penalty kick are more likely to choke. CUP photo

on offensive production, and one of the models even shows a negative effect," the study said. "The weight of evidence from all of the models suggests that there is no effect due to human growth hormone."

## Unsteady shooters

Taking a penalty kick to decide the winner of a soccer match is one of the tensest moments in sports.

Imagine what French defender Willy Sagnol must have felt taking a penalty kick in the 2006 World Cup final against Italy in front of 69,000 fans, knowing if he missed, it would be all over for his country.

After Sagnol scored, imagine what must have been going through Italian defender Fabio Grosso's head, knowing that he had a chance to win the World Cup for his country with a goal (he scored, making Italy the world champs).

A study published in August's *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* sheds light on the penalty shootout, finding that players whose team will lose if

they miss, indeed miss more than players whose team will win if they score.

The study examined 359 penalty shootout kicks from some of the biggest soccer matches since the 70s – including matches from World Cups, UEFA Champions Leagues, and Euro.

They found that players scored more than 92 per cent of the time when their shot could win the game, but less than 62 per cent when the game could end if they missed.

The authors also found a relationship between the pressure and players' behaviour.

When a missed shot meant a loss, players were much more likely to show avoidance behavior – sidestepping the pressure by taking their shot quickly or turning their back on the goalkeeper after placing the ball on the penalty spot.

"Avoidance motivation may help explain why professional athletes occasionally choke under pressure," the authors explained.