

Britain's Support for Live Sport is Growing, Despite Recent Blows

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Britain's sports fans may be hanging their heads after the defeats in the World Cup, Wimbledon and the Cricket's Test Series against Sri Lanka this summer, but new research from Mintel has found that Britain's support for live sport is growing.

Whilst ticket sales for the Olympics sparked an inevitable surge in the spectator sports market – marking a boost of 33% from £1.1 billion in 2010 to £1.5 billion in 2011, sales slumped after the games – declining to just £1.3 billion in 2013. However, for the first time since the peak of the Olympics in 2011, consumer expenditure on attending live sport is rising, with sales forecast to reach £1.4 billion in 2014, an impressive 7% ahead of 2013 and set to reach £1.5 billion by 2016, topping the Olympic ticket sales year.

Furthermore, Mintel's new research shows that with culmination of the World Cup, the Tour de France and Wimbledon, this weekend should be sports heaven for the UK's sports fans with over half of Brits (55%) having watched live football matches and 42% live tennis matches via any method in the past year. Indeed, with more than a third (35%) of Brits classified as current cyclists, the Tour de France too should receive high levels of spectatorship. In addition, it seems Brits are beginning to be bowled over by cricket. Whilst one in five (21%) Brits said they watched a live cricket match via any method in 2013, this figure rose to almost a quarter (24%) in 2014.

Paul Davies, Senior Leisure and Technology Analyst at Mintel, said:

“The London Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 took the value of the spectator sports market to a level never seen before, as spectators made every effort to attend the first Olympic Games held in the UK since 1948. A year later, a seat on Centre Court to witness Andy Murray's first Wimbledon title proved to be one of the “golden tickets” to have in 2013 alongside England's home series victory in the Ashes test series against Australia.” Paul said.

“In recent years, the pull of potentially witnessing British success has boosted sports such as tennis and cricket, something which is likely to drive crowds to the Commonwealth Games in 2014, the Rugby World Cup in 2015 and the return of the home Ashes test series the same year. As a result, the value of the spectator sports market is now expected to return to and even exceed the level seen in 2011 (when the majority of Olympic tickets were sold).” Paul added.

With four in five (79%) Brits having watched at least one live sport in the past year, the vast majority (95%) of sport spectators do this from the comfort of their own home. Despite this, these consumers still keep up the conversation with one in five (20%) reading or posting game or event related comments on social media whilst watching.

In addition, Mintel's research shows the pull of the crowd for Brits is strong. Indeed, the amount of consumers who have watched the game from the sidelines trumps those who have experienced it live on TV outside of their home, with over half (54%) having experienced it live at the event, and just 47% watching it live on TV elsewhere (e.g. at the pub, at a friend's house).

Whilst one in three (32%) sport spectators say the high price of tickets has stopped them going to a sports event in the past year, four fifths of this group (80%) say they could be persuaded to attend more live sports events. It seems that for Brits, watching sport live at the game is enjoyed for the atmosphere of the crowd – with a third (31%) of event spectators saying it is generally worth paying to attend live sport events purely for the atmosphere.

“Spectators will always be faced with a cost versus reward dilemma. As with any leisure activity, consumers want to weigh up whether what they expect to see, will be worth what they pay. The unpredictable nature of sport can work for it, but it can also work against it. A dynamic pricing model could be employed across outdoor sports, where fans' enjoyment is so often impacted by the weather and not just the quality of the contest. Cricket was one sport to see huge benefits from a hot summer in 2013, and organisers will be hoping for a repeat of this in 2014.” Paul concludes.

Finally, it seems that London holds the most sports fans with nine in 10 (90%) Londoners watching live sport in the past year, Yorkshire, Humberside are second with four in five (82%), and the North and Scotland at 78%. The smallest number of enthusiasts however, are in the South East and East Anglia where three in four (75%) have enjoyed live sport in the past year, the South East and East Anglia as well as East and West Midlands stand at 76%.