

Who Watched The Vancouver Winter Olympics?

How Gold Medals Mean Solid Gold Ratings Worldwide

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The worldwide television ratings figures for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games were huge. But are Olympic broadcasts about watching sport or just watching winners?



Vancouver 2010 officials claim as many as 3.5 billion viewers worldwide tuned in to watch the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics from February 12-28, a figure that shows very little can beat sport for ratings on TV .

The Games were shown on more than 300 TV stations and more than 100 websites around the world with a total of about 50,000 hours of broadcast hours of the Games across all media platforms. The 24,000 hours of television coverage alone is about 47 per cent more than for the Torino Winter Olympic Games just four years earlier.

So who was tuning in? Were all sports lovers glued to their TV screens? Was viewing dominated by a particular demographic? Or did fans selectively have a bit of a peek when they were in with a chance at a medal?

One thing that's certain amid the debate about the value in buying Games broadcast rights is that the Games have borne out what appears to be a universal trait – everyone loves to watch a home-grown winner. Even in sun-loving Australia, two gold medals in freestyle skiing helped broadcast rights holder Channel Nine to comfortable wins in most timeslots and most demographics throughout the Games period. And in China, coverage was intense for

what the state-run news agency Xinhua described as an “historic” five-gold medal haul by the world’s most populous nation.

Here’s the breakdown of how the TV audience reacted in the five most successful countries by medal tally at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games.

Topping the Medal Tally

The United States won nine gold medals and a total of 37 medals. The total puts them at the top of the medal tally, though Germany and Canada both claimed more gold.

US broadcast rights holder, NBC Universal, said its broadcast of the Winter Olympics attracted 190 million viewers in the US over the 17 days. The figures place the ratings for the Vancouver Games behind Lillehammer in 1994.

NBC said the prime time average nightly audience for the Vancouver Winter Olympics was 24.4 million.

Nielsen figures showed most of the US viewers watching the Olympics were female (56 percent). The Nielsen figures also showed US Winter Olympic viewers were predominantly older -- ratings among teenagers were 57% lower than the national average for primetime Olympics broadcasts.

NBC said the US-Canada men’s gold medal hockey game (which Canada won) drew an average viewership of 27.6 million which was a 45.5-per-cent increase over the same gold medal hockey matchup at the 2002 Salt Lake City Games.

Germany’s Olympic Gold Ratings

In Germany, which topped the gold medal tally with 10 gold from its total medal haul of 30 which placed it second on the leader board, ratings were strong.

Quotemeter, said public stations ARD and ZDF broadcast as much as 18 hours daily. Germany’s last triumph at Vancouver, the ladies’ gold medal in the speed-skating team pursuit on February 27, claimed an audience of 7.39 million, or a 31 percent share of the market.

Quotemeter figures showed the biathlon, Nordic combined and giant slalom scored 10.01 million prime time viewers.

Host Nation Gold

The 2010 Winter Olympics delivered the five most-watched television events in Canadian history.

According to Olympic broadcast media consortium, CTV-Rogers, , Canadians consumed 1.25 billion hours of Vancouver 2010 coverage. That means the average Canadian viewer watched 38 hours of the Games broadcast.

The consortium said the Vancouver Games audience was 138 percent higher than for Salt Lake City in 2002. The host nation's Olympic Broadcast Media Consortium delivered 4800 total hours of coverage of the 2010 Winter Games. Every second of Olympic Games competition was available live on one of the Consortium's platforms – CTV, V (and CPAC), TSN, Rogers Sportsnet, RDS, RIS Info Sports, OMNI, OLN, APTN, ATN, CTVOlympics.ca and RDSolympiques.ca.

The event that topped the ratings was also the Canada-US men's gold medal hockey game. 16.6 million Canadians tuned into the full match. About 26.5 million Canadians watched part of the game and 22 million viewers were reportedly watching when Sidney Crosby scored in overtime to claim the gold for Canada.

CTV-Rogers said 30.5 million Canadians -- 91 per cent of the population -- watched at least some part of the consortium's Games coverage on the final day of the Olympics.

Norway's Cross Country Ratings

In Norway, which won nine gold of its 23-medal haul, the men's cross-country ski relay race set a record Norwegian television audience for an Olympic sports event. Norwegian public broadcaster NRK said the race, a thriller where Norway finished second behind rival Sweden,- was watched by over 1.8 million viewers in the country of 4.8 million people.

NRK said the relay was topped in Olympic viewing ratings only by the opening and closing ceremonies at the 1994 Winter Games that Norway hosted in Lillehammer.

Silver Ratings Win for Austria

It appears the appeal of a potential gold will lure viewers, even if the

result is silver.

Austria won four gold of its total of 16 medals. Free-to-air broadcaster ORF secured an Olympic audience of 5.542 million viewers, representing 78 percent of the local TV audience.

The men's alpine giant slalom brought ORF the highest ratings with 1.262 million viewers. The women's events attracted 1.247 million – the third highest ranking Olympic event on the TV ratings.

Interestingly, Austria's gold medals came in the teams Nordic Combined, ladies Alpine Skiing, team Ski Jumping and doubles Luge. Austria won silver in the most watched events of men's snowboard parallel giant slalom and women's ladies slalom.

Winter Olympic Winners Rate on TV Worldwide

The debate over the value of broadcast rights to Olympics, particularly Winter Olympic Games, will continue. However, a survey and comparison of Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic television ratings in the countries that collected the greatest number of medals at the Games -- and even those that collected only a few -- shows that where there's a winner, there's an audience.

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