



System1

Presents

**THE
GOLD
STANDARD**

How to Win Olympics Advertising

www.system1group.com



Welcome to The Gold Standard

“The world is watching.” It’s a cliché, and in a media landscape defined by algorithms and personalized content, it feels redundant. But sometimes the world really is watching, and those times are more valuable than ever. More than 3 billion people tuned in for Tokyo 2020. Paris 2024 will be looking to at least equal that. For brands, there’s no bigger opportunity.

So you have to get it right. And that doesn’t just apply to the sponsors with front-row seats at the spectacle. Thousands of big brands will be making work that reflects the intense sporting excitement the Olympics brings.

We opened up the Test Your Ad database to look at some of the best Olympic and sporting ads and ask – what makes the best ones so special? What puts brands like P&G or Nike at the top of the medal table? What is the Gold Standard for Olympic advertising?

The 5 Rings of the Olympic symbol represent continents. Our 5 rings of effectiveness are the five principles Olympics and sports advertisers need to remember. From the importance of making your work truly global, to the need to make sports content appealing to the non-fans watching, the principles reflect what makes the Olympics such a special advertising opportunity.

On your marks, get set, go! And may the best brand win.



Jon Evans
Chief Customer Officer
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THE GOLD STANDARD

The Insights

- 1 CELEBRATE THE EXCEPTIONAL**
- 2 GO FOR GLOBAL APPEAL**
- 3 LEVERAGE THE 'SPORT DIVIDEND'**
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**THE
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1

**CELEBRATE
THE EXCEPTIONAL**

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1 CELEBRATE THE EXCEPTIONAL

The Olympics is all about exceptional achievement, so tell emotional stories of exceptional athletes.

When we watch the Olympics, we know we're watching the exceptional in action. The greatest athletes of this moment in history, straining to prove themselves the best of all. It's a thrill to see elite athletes operating at the top level of their sport. But it's even more emotional when we can tie that achievement to a narrative - stories of struggle and triumph; of underdogs and champions; of team glory and individual redemption.

So some of the best Olympic and wider sports advertising combines those things. It takes top-class athletes and turns their lives and achievements into a story, for maximum emotional impact. This can work particularly well when the athlete in the spotlight is not well-known, as will often be the case in the Winter Olympics or Paralympics.

For example, Toyota's 2021 ad for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics (delayed a year by the Covid-19 pandemic) starred swimmer Jessica Long. She wasn't a household name despite being one of the most decorated Paralympians in the world, boasting 23 medals from 4 games even before the Tokyo games started. The ad mixed footage from her astonishing career with reconstructions of her life as a child and the phone call from her adoptive mom learning that her new daughter had been born with a condition that meant her legs would need to be amputated. The juxtaposition of her mother's faith in Jessica and the determination with which she's pursued her career and dominated her sport made the ad a narrative and emotional triumph, scoring 4.7-Stars. Toyota's faith was well placed too: Jessica Long carried home another 6 medals, including 3 Golds, from Tokyo.

1 CELEBRATE THE EXCEPTIONAL

Better-known athletes can be the subject of great sports ads too, of course. Nike's association with Venus and Serena Williams bore fruit again and again during their two-decade partnership. In 2021, Nike put a fresh angle on their story with their "You Can't Stop Sisters" commercial. It pointed out that while commentators compared the Williams sisters, from their own point of view they were two sisters united in changing the game they played. The ad also scored 4.7-Stars and is a great example of how to make a familiar story and familiar achievements feel fresh for audiences.

The Olympics are a celebration of the very best in sporting ability. They're also a chance for brands to associate themselves with those exceptional performers, capture the hearts of audiences with powerful stories, and in doing so make highly effective ads.

Ad Spotlight:
Toyota – "Jessica Long's Story" (Tokyo 2020 Paralympics)



Star Rating
Strong

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

Ad Spotlight:
Nike – "You Can't Stop Sisters" (2020 US Open)



Star Rating
Strong

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)



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2

**GO FOR
GLOBAL APPEAL**

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2 GO FOR GLOBAL APPEAL

The Olympics is a worldwide spectacle, and the perfect opportunity for campaigns that remove language and cultural barriers to resonate on a truly global stage.

Perhaps only the FIFA World Cup rivals the Olympics for a truly global event with the audiences to match. And it's not only every nation on Earth that tunes in to the Games – they attract a wider demographic audience than any other sporting event, with young and old, men and women, and people of every cultural background enjoying the spectacle.

This is an obvious opportunity for brands, but it's also a big challenge. A global campaign needs a universal human truth that can transcend cultural barriers, and it ideally needs a way to tell that truth without too much in the way of dialogue creating language barriers.

The modern model for how to do this well is P&G. Their classic ad for the London 2012 Summer Olympics took their “Proud Sponsor of Moms” tagline and turned it into a film that captured the hope, dedication and heartbreak that goes into raising an athlete. It gained huge reach online and on TV and became a multi-year campaign: the brand later said that this was the most effective ad in their 100+ year history. And when System1 tested a decade's worth of Cannes Lions winners for emotional response in 2019, “Thank You, Mom” still came out on top. As sports ads go, this remains the GOAT – and its insight is one that any viewer in any country can understand.

2 GO FOR GLOBAL APPEAL

Not many ads match the effectiveness of “Thank You, Mom,” but for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics the International Olympic Committee (IOC) came close. Faced with the extremely difficult challenge of hosting the first Covid-19 era Games, an event already postponed by a year, the IOC reached back into the rich history of the Games to create “What Agnes Saw,” a film linking the oldest surviving gold medalist with the up-and-coming youngsters of the 2020 games. It was a celebration of the undying spirit of the Games which crossed nations and generations and, like P&G’s classic, scored 5-Stars on Test Your Ad.

Finding a human truth that spans cultures isn’t easy, but as these gold medal ads show, the emotional and effectiveness impact is truly worthwhile.

Ad Spotlight:

P&G – “Thank You, Mom” (London 2012 Olympics)



Star Rating
Exceptional

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Ad Spotlight:

International Olympic Committee – “What Agnes Saw” (Tokyo 2020 Olympics)



Star Rating
Exceptional

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)



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3

LEVERAGE
'THE SPORT DIVIDEND'

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3 LEVERAGE THE 'SPORT DIVIDEND'

The Olympics is for everybody, but don't neglect the golden opportunity to reach sports fans in particular.

We've just talked about how the Olympic audience is probably the broadest for any sporting event. But the core of that audience are still sports fans. They may be enjoying the opportunity to become a one-time expert on pole vault or dressage, but at heart it's the thrill of competition and sports itself they love.

At System1 we've been exploring how to make effective ads which appeal to a broader audience, but which especially get those sports fans pumped. In our recent '**The Sport Dividend**' report we look at a range of ads which have wide general appeal and also boosted appeal for a sports-fan demographic. The Sport Dividend effect gives you a double whammy of broad-based effectiveness and a payoff from your core target audience.

The ads we studied aren't specifically Olympic ads but they contain lessons on how to appeal to that sports-fan demographic. For the 2023 Opening Day of the baseball season, Major League Baseball put together "Baseball Is Something Else," a joyful celebration of the culture around the sport. From fans to mascots, stadiums to hot dog stands, all baseball life is here. For the general audience it rated a strong 4.2-Stars, but the ad knocked it out of the park for baseball fans, who rated it the maximum possible 5.9-Stars, a clear example of a Sport Dividend in action.

Frito-Lay's "Unretirement" ad for the 2023 NFL season kickoff is another commercial that does well with a general audience but really well among NFL fans. The concept is former NFL legends coming out of retirement just for a day, with plenty of laughs for the wider audience and a bit of wish fulfilment taking the idea to the next level for the fans. Among said fans the ad scored 5.6-Stars, a big rise from its already strong 4.0-Star general audience rating.

3 LEVERAGE THE 'SPORT DIVIDEND'

What both these ads are doing is taking something that appeals to the wider public – the fun of a day out at the ball game, or the comedy of old legends ‘unretiring’ - but has a special attraction for fans. You don’t need to know anything specific about the sport to get the point, but if you do, the ad is that much better. Brands making Olympic ads can learn from this – you don’t have to choose between broad reach and a narrow target.

Ad Spotlight: Major League Baseball – “Baseball is Something Else” (Opening Day 2023)



NAT REP

Star Rating
Strong



BASEBALL FANS

Star Rating
Exceptional

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Ad Spotlight: Frito-Lay – (2023 NFL Season Kickoff)



NAT REP

Star Rating
Strong



FOOTBALL FANS

Star Rating
Exceptional

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4

**FASTER, HIGHER,
STRONGER
BRANDING**

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4 FASTER, HIGHER, STRONGER BRANDING

It's easy for fluency to get lost in the emotional mix. Make sure people know who the ad is for

We've looked at how powerful emotional storytelling is in an Olympic ad, but there's another side to advertising around the Games – or any other sporting event. That's Brand Fluency – how quickly recognizable your brand is within your ad.

Like Christmas or the Super Bowl, the Olympics is a time when every brand will be bringing their best game and ads are likely to be more emotional, more celebrity-packed and more eye-catching than usual. But it's easy for the brand itself to get lost in all that. Making sure your Olympic ad is high in Brand Fluency should be a priority.

That doesn't mean spending precious seconds on a dull voiceover or shoving in too many pack shots. It can be as simple as an early, prominent on-screen logo before the action begins. But some of the best ways to boost Fluency without reducing Happiness involve making the product the hero of your ad.

Take Oreo's 2024 Super Bowl ad, for instance, built around the idea of twisting apart an Oreo cookie to make a decision (will you see the icing or the biscuit?) It gets at the excitement of uncertainty that's so much a part of sports, and it puts the product itself at the very center of the ad. The result – an ad which scores 4.1-Stars for effectiveness and a massive 99% Fluency.

4 FASTER, HIGHER, STRONGER BRANDING

Heading over to Brazil, and the 2022 World Cup, an ad by Brazilian beer Brahma managed to go one better, achieving 100% Brand Fluency with an impressive 4.4-Star Rating. Again, making the product the hero of the ad is key to its success, as the commercial follows a runaway trolley stocked with Brahma beer as it rolls downhill past bars, cafes, and crowds of people celebrating Brazil's favorite sport. The brand is hardly ever out of shot – but the ad always feels like a party, not a hard sell.

Bringing out the entertaining side of your product can be the difference between a good ad that falls short on Fluency and a great one that smashes it.

Ad Spotlight: **OREO – “Twist on It” (Super Bowl LVIII)**



Star Rating
Strong



Fluency Rating
Exceptional

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Ad Spotlight: **Brahma – “Waka Brahma” (2022 FIFA World Cup)**



Star Rating
Strong



Fluency Rating
Exceptional

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

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5

**ENTERTAIN
FOR OLYMPIC
GAIN**



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5 ENTERTAIN FOR OLYMPIC GAIN

The Olympics is all about theater as well as sport. Don't be afraid to mix up category conventions and be bold and entertaining.

For a lot of viewers, what they'll remember about the 2024 Olympics isn't the feats of strength, skill and speed, it's the spectacular Opening and Closing Ceremonies. More than any other sporting event, the Olympics understands how important theater and the spectacular is to creating a sense of event. It's something ads can learn from – now is the time to set aside category conventions and create something truly unusual and entertaining.

A brand that's excelled in this across several Olympic Games is Britain's Channel 4, whose "Meet the Superhumans" campaign for the London 2012 Paralympic Games delivered some of the highest viewing figures for any Paralympics. The campaign draws on pop, hip-hop and musical theater to bring to life its vision of Paralympic athletes as superhumans able to achieve uncanny and magical things. Paralympics ads generally stick to a narrative of inspiration, which can work very well, but Channel 4 did something new by emphasizing the theatrical and the entertaining sides too, and transformed the way the Games were seen. They won several Cannes Lions and scored 4.4-Stars on Test Your Ad: a campaign both critics and the public loved.

5 ENTERTAIN FOR OLYMPIC GAIN

The NFL are a sports organization who knows how to put entertainment first in their annual Super Bowl ads. With a cast of gridiron stars available, the NFL could simply put together examples of gameplay. Instead they change the context every year, showing games of football breaking out anywhere from city streets to grand celebratory dinners. In 2024 the ad was set in an African market, with a young boy playing against his imaginary idols, and scored 4.3-Stars. The NFL's ad is a yearly highlight of Super Bowl commercials and like the Channel 4 ad it works by taking sport out of its usual context and making it something even more entertaining and surprising.

Ad Spotlight: Channel 4 - "Meet the Superhumans" (London 2012 Paralympic Games)



Star Rating
Strong

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

Ad Spotlight: NFL - "Born to Play" (Super Bowl LVIII)



Star Rating
Strong

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)



METHODOLOGY

System1's methodology has been validated in experiments with **The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA)** and shown to predict long-term impact and market share change within categories.

The methodology is ground-breaking because of the leading role it gives to emotion. How people feel about an ad – happiness, anger, surprise, or a range of other emotions (including none) – is an important factor when you are trying to measure the degree to which an ad makes consumers change their habits, behaviors, and perspectives in the long term.



HEADLINE MEASURES

System1's quantitative model is the same we use for commercial ad effectiveness testing. The aim is to measure viewers' emotional responses to ads, as our validated methodology proves that emotion leads to action. Taken together, these responses combine to give us three key measures of creative impact on commercial effectiveness.

Star Rating



The Star Rating is based on how positively viewers respond to the ad. It predicts the potential of an ad to contribute to long-term brand growth and long-term consumer behavior. Star Rating runs from just 1 to 5.9 Stars. The higher the Star Rating, the more brands should invest in and build campaigns around the ad. Around half the ads in System1's database score only 1 Star, and only around 1 in 100 gets the top, 5-Star Rating.

Spike Rating



The Spike Rating predicts the potential for an ad to drive short-term activity – sales, donations or other calls to action. The Spike Rating is based on how intensely viewers respond to the ad and how quickly they accurately connect the ad to the brand. The response doesn't have to be positive – for short-term impact, feeling anything is better than feeling nothing. Spike scores below 1 suggest limited or no short-term impact, Spike scores of 1.3 and above predict strong or exceptional activity.

Fluency Rating



Brand Fluency is a measure of how many respondents correctly identified the brand by the end of the ad. Fluency is a warning light – if Fluency is low, then the ad may be emotional but may risk losing out on the reward and impact it deserves. To stay top of mind, brands need to make effective use of their brand assets and cues.



ABOUT US

System1 is The Creative Effectiveness Platform that harnesses the power of emotion to drive growth for the world's leading brands.

Our Test Your Ad (TYA) and Test Your Innovation (TYI) solutions quickly predict the short- and long-term commercial potential of ads and ideas, giving marketers confidence that their creative concepts will resonate with consumers and drive profitable commercial growth. Complementing TYA and TYI is Test Your Brand (TYB), which measures the impact of ads and ideas on brand health.

With a database of over 170,000 ads, System1 allows brands to compare their ads against competitors, and System1's expert guidance helps brands improve the effectiveness of ads and ideas.

System1 was founded in 2000 by Founder & President John Kearon. Our global operations are led from offices in Europe, North America, Brazil, Singapore, and Australia.

Learn more at [system1group.com](https://www.system1group.com)

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Tallying up the Scores

System1 measures the emotional response that is felt towards ads by audiences. Emotional response can be used, in conjunction with a brand's Share of Voice, to predict the brand's long-term market share growth.

The audience selects one of the 7 basic emotions or neutral from a pictorial scale which promotes fast and frugal mental processing. This way, it is possible to establish how an ad leaves people feeling, i.e. the emotion it elicits, across a large quantitative sample.

Applying positive or negative weights to each emotion enables us to translate the raw emotional profile of advertising into a simple Star Rating, ranging from 1-Star (weak ad, with no likely growth amplification) to 5-Star (strongly positive emotional response, with strong growth-amplification potential).

Positive weights are assigned to happiness and surprise, and negative weights to neutrality and other emotions.



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Let's see what you've got!

So there you have it, our five best practices for effective ads that celebrate sport and reach the masses during major sporting moments like the Olympic Games. All the ads mentioned here were tested using our Test Your Ad platform, which predicts short- and long-term effectiveness within 24 hours. It works for any stage of development, from creative concepts to finished films. We can also give you creative guidance throughout the entire process and suggest improvements that are guaranteed to improve your ad's Star Rating.

Testing is fast, accurate, cost-effective and results in advertising that really delivers brand wealth.

So go for the gold with ads that honor sport, entertain and inspire audiences, and put your brand front and center.



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