

How well is Canada really doing in the Rio Games?

In total medal count, Canada is faring fairly well. But by other, more meaningful measures not so much.



By **RICHARD FLORIDA**

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In many ways the Rio Summer Games is shaping up to be a banner Olympics for Canada. Swimmer Penny Oleksiak has hauled in four medals including gold in the women's 100-metre free-style swim. Sprinter Andre De Grasse took the bronze in the men's 100-metre run. With 13 medals, 11th place among nations as of Monday morning, it's easy to heap praise on Canada's performance.

But total medals can be a misleading measure. Some nations are much bigger and richer than others and field bigger teams. Simple medal counts often fail to provide a meaningful indication of a country's relative performance.

With the help of my colleagues at the University of Toronto Martin Prosperity Institute Charlotta Mellander and Patrick Adler, I ranked each nation's overall medal performance by their population, size of their economy, and the number of athletes on their Olympic teams.

When you look at results through these lenses, how does Canada stack up?

Sadly, when we look at the number of medals based on size of population, Canada falls further down the list. We rank 26th with 3.6 medals per 10 million people. Tiny Grenada takes the top spot on this metric. Its one medal is equivalent to 93.6 medals per 10 million people. New Zealand is second with 17.4, followed by Slovenia with 14.5, Denmark with 12.3, and Hungary with 12.2. Four other countries - Chinese-Taipei (11.5), Fiji (11.2), Jamaica (11.0) and Lithuania (10.3) – have more than 10 medals per 10 million people. (In some cases, these numbers are higher than the countries' actual medal counts because their populations are lower than 10 million).

Large countries generally speaking do worse on this metric. The U.S. falls from first in total medal count to 36th place (with 2.15 medals), Russia goes from fourth to 38th, and China falls from third to 60th.

Canada does even worse when we look at medals based on the size of the economy. Canada ranks 42nd with less than one medal (0.8 medals) per \$100 billion of economic output or GDP. Again, Grenada tops the list: its one medal translates to more than 100 medals (per \$100 billion GDP). Fiji is next with 22.8, followed by Jamaica (21.4) and Mongolia (17.1). By this metric, the United States is 54th, Russia 26th and China 53rd.

Perhaps the most useful way to measure success is to look at how many medals nations bring home based on the size of their Olympic teams. Some nations have very large teams, others field very small teams. How well do the athletes they bring to the Games ultimately succeed in getting medals? This metric makes the size of a country a more neutral factor in comparing Olympic results.

On this list, too, Canada doesn't fare particularly well, placing 37th based on the medals it has brought home compared to the size of its Olympic team: just 0.4 medals per 10 Olympians. Small countries take the top three spots. North Korea places first with 1.93 medals per 10 Olympic team members; Grenada is second with 1.43; and Kosovo third with 1.25. But big countries also do quite well. The U.S. rises to fourth place with 1.22. China is fifth with 1.12 and

Russia sixth with 1.06. Great Britain is eighth with 1.05 and Japan is 14th with 0.76. Canada's rank on this metric is much more daunting, because many big countries with large teams tend to do well on it.

Of course, in a country famous for hockey and branded "We the North" the Summer Games may be something of an afterthought. But Canada has many advantages: it is a big country with a big team, not to mention that its openness to immigration gives it an edge in attracting talent from around the world. There is much to be proud of in the individual successes of athletes like Oleksiak and De Grasse. But, at a broader national level, it's time for Canada to up its summer game.

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