

What kind of city produces Olympians?

We should think less about our cities as sites for athletic competition and more about what it takes to make them better developers of Olympic talent.



Penny Oleksiak, winner of four medals at the Rio Olympics, was discovered several years ago at her local swim club at the University of Toronto. (Ryan Remiorz / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

By **RICHARD FLORIDA**

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In addition to hard work and the support of their families, coaches, and teams, Canada's Olympians are a product of their communities. Perhaps the best example is Canada's youngest Olympic champion, Penny Oleksiak, who was discovered several years ago at her local swim club at the University of Toronto.

These discoveries don't happen only in big cities. Toronto may be the nation's largest metro and the main driver of its economy, but it barely punches its own weight when it comes to the members of Canada's Olympic team. The real standouts of this Olympic Games are smaller metros like Kingston, London, Windsor, and Guelph, which are home to far greater concentrations of Olympians than one might expect given their size.

That's the big takeaway of my analysis of the current hometown locations of Canada's Olympians, which I undertook with my former Martin Prosperity Institute colleague Patrick Adler, currently a doctoral student in Urban Planning at UCLA.

In total, there are 314 Canadians competing in Rio for the Summer Games. This includes 187 women, who make up 60 per cent of the team, and 126 men. Canada's Olympians range in age from 16 to 59 and are competing in 27 different sports. But where do they come from? Which Canadian cities and metros produce the most Olympic athletes?

It will come as little surprise that the biggest clusters of athletes hail from the biggest metros. Greater Toronto, the nation's largest metro, has the largest number of athletes: 57, or nearly a fifth of the total Olympic team. Vancouver is next with 50 Olympians, or 15.5 per cent. Montreal is third with 28 athletes, followed by Calgary with 17 athletes and Ottawa with 16.

Three metros — Edmonton, Hamilton and London — are home to nine athletes each. Quebec City and Winnipeg each have seven, while another five hail from Kingston and Windsor. Halifax, Kitchener, Sherbrooke, and Victoria have four athletes apiece.

Even though we like to think of Canada as a large, widespread country, its Olympians are much more concentrated than their U.S. counterparts. Both Toronto and Vancouver have significantly larger shares of Canadian athletes than America's top Olympic town, Los Angeles, which accounts for roughly 11 per cent of U.S. Olympians. This share exceeds that of Greater New York, which accounts for a mere 5 per cent of the U.S. team. Overall, Canada's top five metros

account for half (52 per cent) of its Olympic athletes compared to slightly more than a third (35 per cent) in the U.S.

But because size has a large influence on a metro's share of Olympians, our analysis also considers the ratio of Olympians to population size. A ratio of 1 means that a metro's share of Olympians is consistent with its population, a ratio of 1.1 means that it has 10 per cent more Olympians than its population would suggest, a ratio of 2 means that it has double, and so on.

Greater Toronto's share of Olympians is essentially proportionate to its population, with a ratio of 1.1, or just 10 per cent more Olympians than expected. But, with a ratio of 2.3, Vancouver has more than double its expected share of athletes. Kingston does even better, with more than three times its expected share, including a significant cluster of rowers and sailors.

Other metros with high ratios include Guelph, London, and Windsor, all of which have about two times their expected share of Olympians. On the flip side, Montreal, Edmonton, and Saskatoon have about 20 per cent fewer athletes than one would expect from their size.

Last summer in Toronto, there was much hoopla and some consternation over hosting the Pan Am Games, and there is continual chatter about a potential bid for the Summer Olympics. Vancouver, of course, already hosted the 2010 Winter Games. But perhaps the better approach is to think less about our cities as sites for athletic competition and more about what it takes to make them better breeders and developers of great Olympic talent.

Thursday night, after winning the bronze medal in decathlon, Damian Warner was asked why he continues to train in London, Ont. when he could train anywhere in the world. "It's their medal," he shot back. "I've been very lucky to have so much support from London, Ontario. It's an honour to bring that back to them." As Team Canada strives to improve on its performance in the 2016 Summer Games, it needs to think hard about how best to support the communities that produce its top athletes.

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