

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS



# SINK OR SWIM

## Can the Olympics drive male teenagers back into competitive swimming? The NPD Group investigates

**Now is the time to get serious with teenagers. The Olympics are just around the corner and with it Great Britain has announced a swimming squad that features some of the greatest prospects this country has seen for a long time. With the women's medley team averaging just 17 years of age and up-and-coming diving star Tom Daley just 13, an interest from younger people in aqua sports is surely guaranteed.**

British Swimming's Smart Track programme could indicate that all is healthy in keeping youngsters competing in the pool, but NPD's Consumer Panel shows that the 18-34 age group is purchasing swimwear more for leisure than for sport. It would appear that once British teenagers leave school they simply don't associate swimming with sport (see Fig 1).

Global spending on swimming is healthy, with estimates for 2006 at around the \$11billion mark. Great Britain makes up over \$300million of this market, so could clearly do with some fresh impetus.

### Gender gap

So is there a gender gap? The answer would appear to be yes. Females make up 61 per cent of the British market when it comes to buying swimwear and whether they use it for sport or

not, the gap is noticeable. According to NPD's Consumer Panel, 13 per cent of 18-34-year-old females buy swimwear for sport, compared to six per cent of males in the same age range.

Across the 'big five' markets it is only in Germany that females are ranked higher than Great Britain in this category, but the percentage of German males is far higher than Great Britain. As stated, only six per cent of British males aged 18-34 purchase swimwear for sport, whereas German males from this category add up to over 20 per cent. France, Italy and Spain also have a healthy number of males competing in the pool.

There has been a drop-off in spending on swimwear, particularly for sports use, in Great Britain since the previous Olympics in 2004. Men's spending has fallen away at a much sharper rate than women's. Around 35 per cent of spending on swimwear for sports was recorded for both genders in the six months following the last Olympics, and this has fallen away to the levels seen now. Traditionally there is always a drop-off in spending following any major competition if the sport isn't broadcast regularly.

### Accessible

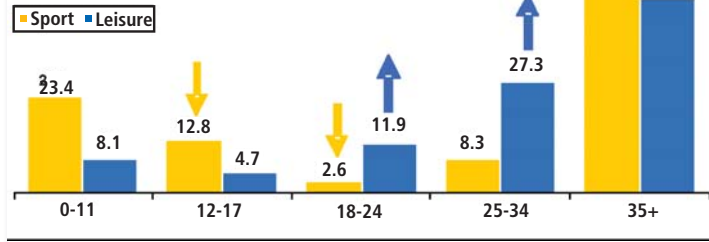
So what can swimming do to attract more male teenagers? The sport needs to be seen to be more open and accessible.





**Fig.1. Percentage of British spend on swimwear for sport and leisure Jan-Dec 2007**

Source: NPD GB Sports Apparel Consumer Panel



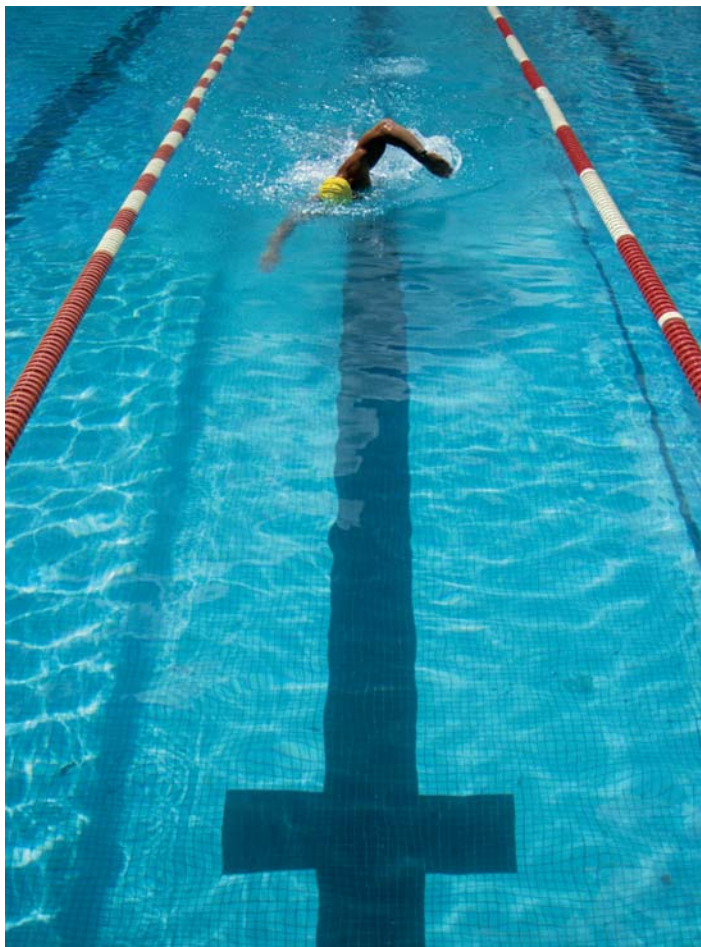
With a number of sports there's a widely held belief that they're a closed shop - and swimming is no different. The fittest, strongest people always rise to the top, but swimming is a sport that anyone can participate in and fun has to exist if success is to be enjoyed. Why is it that five guys can enter a midweek football league, take it seriously in the hope to win, but still enjoy every game? The same cannot always be said of swimming. A person can show an interest and join a club, but then there is a constant push from a coach to be in the pool three-four times a week to succeed.

Britain needs a top-line swimmer as a role model such as Michael Phelps or Ian Thorpe in order to create a sustained interest in swimming amongst males. In fact, Speedo used Phelps in its campaign for the Fastskin FS-Pro swimsuit and broadcast the advertisement on the NASDAQ tower in Times

Square. One can only imagine the interest if in the future Tom Daley is used to advertise his swimwear on a screen in Piccadilly Circus. Targeting teenage males will have to come down to shrewd advertising at the right times and in the right media. Speedo's new record-breaking LZR Racer will generate mass interest, but it has to be advertised widely to make a difference.

It is clear that British females don't necessarily need a reason to carry on swimming (as seen in Fig 2). Males, on the other hand, clearly need a push in the right direction. So the best way to start is to grasp the opportunity of the Olympics and build on the upsurge of awareness as a result of the event. The hardest part will be sustaining such raised interest levels. ➔

For more information on global spending figures and NPD's Consumer Panel call a member of the NPD Group sports team on 01932 355580.



**Fig.2. Percentage of British spend on swimwear for sport by gender Jan-Dec 2007**

