



# What Search Trends Can Teach You About Sports Fans

Written by  
Allison Mooney

Published  
September 2016

Topics  
Sports & Entertainment,  
Search,  
Micro-Moments

During the Olympic Games in Rio, Google Trends offered a glimpse into what piqued spectators' curiosity. Use these fresh insights on sports fans to stay competitive this football season and beyond.

think with **Google**

The torch may have been extinguished in Rio de Janeiro, but the legacies of the Summer Games continue to reverberate—and not just in the form of [unstoppable internet memes](#). The Rio Games reminded us of what elite spectator sports are all about: the unbelievable come-from-behind sprints; the awe-inspiring feats of endurance; the [epic stare-downs](#).

For fans, these are the moments they turn to their devices to search. In fact, share of mobile searches for the term "olympics" during the Rio Games grew nearly 3X since the London Games of 2012.<sup>1</sup> For marketers, taking a closer look at how fans used Google Search in those moments can help inform plans for other marquee sporting events, including the Super Bowl and beyond.

## Off the couch: Sports fuel "I-want-to-do" moments

Major sporting events aren't just about passive viewership; watching world-class athletes made fans want to get in the game themselves and connect with other enthusiasts.

Searches for [weightlifting, gymnastics, karate, and judo classes](#) all grew as events got underway, though interest [varied by region](#).<sup>2</sup> Looking at [top "lesson" searches](#)<sup>3</sup> in that first week, we see that rhythmic gymnastics was most popular in California, while diving dominated in Maine, for example.

## In August, search interest in "gymnastics for kids" reached its highest level since the 2012 London Games.

Inspired by the games, fans showed clear purchase intent, using Search to find gear, instruction, and maybe a few adult beverages in their area. "Near me" searches spiked for many sports, including [rugby, water polo,](#)

[fencing, judo, and badminton](#).<sup>4</sup> And, while we see a jump in searches every August, interest in "[sports stores near me](#)" was higher than ever, with the exception of last year's holiday season.<sup>5</sup> Even those content to just watch were looking to do so with other fans. In the last days of the games, search interest for "sports bar near me" peaked.<sup>6</sup> Queries like these show that a [mobile-centric search strategy](#) is essential.

Meanwhile, parents seemed keen to produce the next Simone Biles. In August, search interest in "[gymnastics for kids](#)" reached its highest level since the 2012 London Games.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, searches for "karate classes for kids" logged their [highest interest in the last year](#) during the Rio Games.<sup>8</sup>

Speaking of Biles, her bronze medal on the beam was part of a five-medal haul. Again, fans weren't content to just watch; they wanted to know [how to make a balance beam](#)—a question that trended globally during the games.<sup>9</sup> Come February, expect to see DIY questions like "[how to make a football](#)" pop, and [plan for these I-want-to-do-moments](#).

## Fans look to athletes for life hacks

Whether they're aspiring Olympians or not, fans are looking for performance tips and tricks from the world's best. Everyone is looking for an edge—and they're looking for them with Search.

When U.S. athletes like swimmer [Michael Phelps](#) and gymnast [Alex Naddour](#) showed up bearing purple circles on their bodies, fans asked "[what is cupping](#)."<sup>10</sup> Answer: a type of physical therapy that uses heated glass to improve blood flow.

Given his practice of wearing headphones onto the pool deck, Phelps also sparked curiosity in what he listens to before a race. Search interest for "[michael phelps playlist](#)" surged in step with his renewed assault on the record books.<sup>11</sup> In addition to his pre-race playlist, people were also interested in his actual headphones. Search interest for "[michael phelps](#)

[headphones](#)" was twice as high as the peak for "michael phelps playlist."<sup>12</sup>

From beach volleyball courts to diving wells, athletes were spotted bearing swaths of colorful tape on various muscles. The tape, known as KT tape or kinesio tape, helps support aching muscles and joints. Fans searched for the product, resulting in an uptick in search interest for "[kinesiology tape](#)" during the games compared to the start of the year.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to products, healthy foods were also on fans' radar. Kendrick Farris made headlines not just for being the only male U.S. weightlifter competing in Rio, but for his vegan diet. In the food and drink category, we found that people who searched for [olympic weightlifting](#) also searched for veganism with heightened frequency during the Olympics.<sup>14</sup> Looking at [related searches](#) around athletes in Google Trends is a quick way to spot these connections to explore further.

**Search behavior reveals intent, uncovering a bigger potential audience than when you look at demographics alone.**

## **Fans might not be where—or who—you'd expect**

Search behavior reveals intent, uncovering a bigger potential audience than when you look at demographics alone. In fact, [research has shown](#) that marketers who try to reach their audience solely on demographics risk missing more than 70% of potential mobile shoppers.<sup>15</sup> The world of sports is no exception.

Get this: During the course of the games, people in Switzerland searched "beach volleyball" [more than any other country](#).<sup>16</sup> Puerto Rico searched tennis gold medalist [Monica Puig](#) more than fans in the U.S. searched aquatic deity Michael Phelps.<sup>17</sup> Lithuania was more [basketball-crazed](#) during the Rio Games than the gold medal-winning U.S.<sup>18</sup>

[We also saw](#) that people who searched for Olympic basketball also searched for the Disney fantasy b-ball movie "Space Jam," suggesting what sports fans are up to when they're *not* following the on-court action.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, sports fans are also interested in things aside from sports. On YouTube, [we found that](#) Olympic fans in the United States watch more YouTube content on auto, gaming, and travel topics than the average viewer.<sup>20</sup> Knowing their other passion points can help brands reach sports fans in a [broader, yet smarter, way](#) during events—something to keep in mind as you kick off your Super Bowl plans.

## Sources

- 1 Google Data, Worldwide, Jul. 22–Aug. 11, 2012 vs. Jul. 31–Aug. 20, 2016.
- 2,4,13 Google Trends, U.S., Jan.–Aug. 2016.
- 3 Google Trends, U.S., Aug. 6–11, 2016.
- 5 Google Trends, U.S., Jul. 2012 –Aug. 2016 (pulled Aug. 30, 2016).
- 6 Google Trends, U.S., Feb.–Aug. 2016 (pulled Sep. 1, 2016).
- 7 Google Trends, U.S. Aug. 2012–Aug. 2016.
- 8 Google Trends, U.S., Sep. 2014–Sep. 2016.
- 9 Google Trends, U.S., Sep. 2011–Aug. 2016, (pulled Sep. 1, 2016).
- 10 Google Trends, U.S., Aug. 2015–Aug. 2016.
- 11 Google Trends, U.S., Aug. 2016.
- 12 Google Trends, U.S., Aug. 2016, (pulled Aug. 29, 2016).
- 14 Google Trends, U.S., Aug. 2–Sep. 2, 2016.
- 15 Millward Brown Digital, mobile search and video behavior analysis, U.S., base=mobile video game searchers, Jan.–June 2015.
- 16 Google Trends, Worldwide, Aug. 5–Aug. 17, 2016.
- 17 Google Trends, Worldwide, Aug. 13, 2016.
- 18 Google Trends, Worldwide, Aug. 2016.
- 19 Google Data, Worldwide, Aug. 14–21, 2016.
- 20 Google Data, U.S., categories of video content based on anonymized, aggregated user behavior on YouTube, Apr. 2016.