

## ▣ OLYMPIC GOLD!

Written by Cheryl Pearson-McNeil  
Thursday, 16 August 2012 09:22

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If you're one of the millions of viewers who watched the Olympics recently, you're not alone. Nielsen research shows that the all-important, mega-produced opening ceremony in London garnered a stunning 40.7 million total U.S. viewers (Blacks made up 3 million of those watching), annihilating all previously held records for a Summer Olympics broadcast. Not surprisingly, Americans are far more likely to tune in when the games are happening on home turf. Until now, Atlanta's Olympics opening ceremony in 1996, attracted the largest number of viewers with roughly 40 million. As much as we want to think of the Olympics exclusively as the world's foremost sports competition (and it is), that can catapult participants into national and even international fame (which it can), it is also a marketing bonanza for sponsors, advertisers and marketers. So, while millions of us watched with bated breath to see which of our stellar athletes or teams would ascend the podium to accept the gold, bronze or silver medals, billions of dollars were spent and/or made to capture our attention as we did all of that watching – and you thought consumerism wasn't a professional sport!

As you might expect, ratings for the Olympics will probably dwarf the competition for its two week-plus run when the final numbers are calculated after Sunday's closing ceremony. It's interesting to note that NBC will probably break ratings records with its Olympic coverage even though much of it was tape-delayed to run in primetime, which some analysts believe underscores the growing power of sports programming. It's the excitement, the feeling of power and the awe that attracts audiences to the Olympics. You can't help but feel patriotic when you see the red, white and blue. You get to know the Olympians as if they were your best friends. So, you want to continue to tune in to cheer them on.

Let's talk about what those numbers mean. We all know that the cost of everything continues to climb over the years. Check out the increase in a 30-second U.S. commercial spot during the opening ceremony:

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In 1988, for the Seoul Olympics, a 30-second commercial cost \$155,000.

In 2000, advertisers in the Sydney opening ceremony shelled out \$275,000 for a 30-second spot.

In 2008, the cost climbed to \$320,000 a spot for Beijing's opening ceremony.

A spot in the 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony jumped up to – are you sitting down – as much as \$725,000 per commercial.

Nielsen analysis shows that with some \$1 billion in ad sales and another \$200 million in local TV and digital ad revenue, NBC and its family of networks, the U.S. broadcaster which aired the Olympics, may actually break even with its \$1.28 billion investment into the London games. For the record, NBC owns the rights to the next four Olympics, having spent \$4.38 billion for a package that extends through 2020.

The televised games provide an opportunity for a parade of brands to tap into your inner most yearnings while you are feeling patriotic, or inspired or emotional, or all three. What mother among us -- who hasn't given up our early mornings, late evenings and full weekends and holidays to drive, cheer, and coerce our own little athletes toward glory – could tear our eyes away from the commercial that celebrated mothers globally? Whew. Talk about powerful stuff. My eyes were glistening as my own memories of similar mornings flitted across my mind as I watched moms across the world jostling their little ones out of bed and getting them off to practice, returning home later, to do laundry and cook and clean with the company's products. My 6'4" basketball-playing son looked on incredulously as the tears trickled down my cheeks as I watched the spot. His 16-year-old cynicism collapsing into three words: "Really Ma?! Really?"

But you know what? I don't expect him to understand why that particular commercial resonated with me. Because likewise, I don't feel any connection when my non-athletic self watches a sweaty, hoopster guzzle down energy drinks in a spot that highly resonates with him. And, that my dear fellow consumer is the true sport of advertising – connecting an audience to a product. And when a marketer does that successfully, we, as consumers, repay them with our own form

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of a gold medal – we purchase the product. But, just like we demand of any Olympian – be sure advertisers earn the status we give them.

*Cheryl Pearson-McNeil is senior vice president of public affairs and government relations for Nielsen. For more information and studies go to [www.nielsenwire.com](http://www.nielsenwire.com) .*