

# EVALUATION OF PLAY THE GAME 2011

## APPENDICES:

1. Final conference programme
2. List of participants
3. Main findings of participant email survey compared with similar surveys conducted after the 2005-2009 conferences

## Introduction

From 3-6 October 2011 the Danish Institute for Sports Studies (Idan) held the seventh edition of the international communication conference on sport and society, Play the Game 2011. Europe's largest sports university, German Sport University Cologne (Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln), hosted the conference, taking part in organising the programme and fundraising as well as being responsible for the practical arrangement of the conference.

It was the first Play the Game conference held after the merger between Idan and the self-governing institution Play the Game, and the conference showed that this amalgamation, in many respects, served to strengthen the programme content and broaden perspectives for further development of Play the Game.

The German hosts' strong engagement and excellent work was a decisive factor in an increased level of satisfaction among the conference participants, even though there is still some way to go to meet the high degree of satisfaction expressed in the surveys conducted after the 2005 and 2007 conferences.

Seen from an organiser's point-of-view, Play the Game 2011 was a clear success. The most important reasons for this success were:

- Enthusiastic and well-prepared speakers who took part in a strong programme. Almost all of the plenary sessions and many of the parallel sessions offered very high and specialised quality, new and sharp angles and intense debate
- An almost ideal framework with close proximity between the auditoriums, coffee serving facilities, meeting areas and canteen, i.e. good conditions for networking
- A well-functioning organisation of employees and a large number of volunteers who got into full gear as soon as the conference began
- Active cooperation from German Sport University Cologne's leadership

This evaluation summarises Play the Game/Idan's evaluation of the conference and is based on:

- an anonymous internet-based survey, which had a response rate of 53.5% of the 296 potential respondents (key persons from the organisation were not permitted to complete the survey)
- individual feedback received from the delegates and speakers at the conference venue and via approximately 50 e-mails
- correspondence with the organising committee
- meetings with local organisers and staff under Idan's staff and board
- information gathered from searching international media databases and the Internet

This assessment of the conference is written in light of Play the Game's ongoing objectives to:

- 1) raise awareness of sport in society locally, nationally and internationally
- 2) paint a comprehensive picture of sport and support the individual's right to choose and shape his or her own daily sporting experience

- 3) ensure a free, independent, open and unbiased debate on the state of sport and its development
- 4) give media professionals, researchers and political leaders both the inspiration and tools to work with sport's cultural, political, social and economic aspects
- 5) create networks across national and disciplinary borders to meet the challenges of a globalised sports and media world.

The evaluation focuses on some of the key elements of the conference's programme and development. Pure organisational and technical aspects of the conference are only addressed if they had any impact on its objectives.

Despite the fact that we consider the conference to have been highly successful, despite the high level of satisfaction among the delegates, and despite the fact that Play the Game's international recognition is growing steadily, it is clear that Play the Game is still challenged by a range of dilemmas which should be addressed in the coming years:

- Difficulties in attracting both media and researchers from countries other than the host nation
- The general problem of attracting paying participants
- Continued development of the conference's profile and the profile of the programme, which, despite having featured a majority of new speakers, was sometimes perceived as a repetition of earlier conferences
- Inspiration for continuing development can, to our advantage, be found where Idan has its strengths, i.e. themes on sports participation, mega-events and sports economics
- The challenge of having both a tight and targeted programme and having to address the need for enough time slots on the programme to accommodate the many participants whose workplace pays for their trip, accommodation and conference fees under the conditions they seek at the conference

### **Delegate numbers and composition**

It was expected beforehand that, due to its central placement in Europe and its staging at the continent's largest and most prestigious institution for sports education and research, Play the Game 2011 would realise its potential of attracting 350-400 participants.

In this sense, the final number of 309 delegates was not satisfying, even though it was approximately 10 percent higher than in the two previous conferences. The number of paying delegates (115 – equivalent to just over a third of the delegates, which corresponds with the last conference) was not so satisfying either, especially in light of the efforts made to make the conference fee cheap.

However, both the German Sport University Cologne and Play the Game have noted that it has been difficult to attract delegates among both academics and the media, despite a marked interest in the conference beforehand.

Academics sent in around 110 abstracts for approval. This doubled the number from 2009, which naturally raised some expectations, but only about half of these abstracts resulted in conference registrations. We also found that the strong interest shown in the conference at meetings with leading German media did not lead to much either.

We have no clear and unambiguous picture of the reasons for this difference in interest and participation because Play the Game's daily work tends to indicate the opposite situation: The interest in Play the Game is growing and it is most noticeable in periods when particular events in sports politics call for background knowledge and commentary.

Generally, an international project like Play the Game is quite vulnerable to the economic crisis which has hit both media headquarters and universities hard.

The media, in particular, tend to be one of Play the Game's assets. At this year's conference the programme was not strongly regarded as one that offered professional development – that is, in the form of workshops on journalistic methods and techniques.

However, this gap in the programme was, as expected, well compensated for with an excellent one-day seminar the German national radio, Deutschlandfunk, conducted in honour of Play the Game on 2 October, the day before the opening of the conference. The programme, which was delivered in German and, for the most part, interpreted simultaneously into English, was targeted towards encouraging debate and development in sports journalism.

There seems to be a growing tendency throughout the registration process that made planning for this year's conference even more difficult: We are used to last-minute registrations, but this time approximately 50 names were confirmed just a week before the conference began. In addition, there was more work associated with changes, cancellations and substitutions among the invited and registered participants than ever before.

But a good new development is that our efforts to attract a greater number of female delegates came to fruition. Approximately every third participant was a woman, as opposed to every fourth participant in 2009. This good or, in any case, better proportion of female participants was also reflected in the number of female speakers: 37 of 122 in total. Our concerted efforts to attract women to the conference should be maintained to ensure that we do not lose ground in this important area.

It is also satisfying that the conference is broadening out geographically – 44 countries spanning five continents – but it could have stretched even further if a handful of potential delegates from developing countries had not been refused visas for no apparent reason. The applications were on time, and the German Sport University Cologne made a lot of effort to persuade the respective embassies.

Thanks to contributions from the Danish Union of Journalists and the Norwegian Union of Journalists, Play the Game was once again able to raise funds to invite 16 journalists from developing countries to participate in the conference and stay in Cologne (two received additional funds for travel costs). The German Sport University Cologne was also successful in raising funds for three sports researchers from third world countries to participate with all expenses paid.

Hopes to get a better grasp on participants from Arabic countries, however, were not fulfilled due to a very late – and negative – response from people invited to speak at the Arabic-themed session.

Professionally, there has been a significant shift in the participant distribution. The work of the 'invisible hand' that had at earlier conferences secured an even distribution between the target groups – journalists, academics and sports officials/politicians – was not that 'steady' this time. When the organisers and volunteers are subtracted, the participants were comprised of the following: Academics (39%), organisations?business?public sector (35%) and media professionals (22%).

#### *Recommendations:*

- The conference should be marketed more towards journalists and media professionals
- The conference's professional development value should be strengthened
- Efforts in increasing the number of female participants and speakers should be continued
- In the evaluation of potential conference hosts it should still be a factor that there are possibilities to raise national provisions for travel grants, etc., and the application process should maybe be carried out even earlier
- The registration procedure should be tightened to put (friendly) pressure on participants to pay their fees earlier in the process

## Media Coverage

It has never been easy to persuade the media to shift their resources from coverage of international and national top sport to social fields, and the economic crisis does not make things any easier.

But the immediate disappointment over the falling number of participating journalists should be nuanced. A range of important stories from the conference after all broke through internationally, and the new blogging-universe has offered new possibilities for Play the Game to extend its sports political debate.

PhD and media researcher Kirsten Sparre has undertaken an analysis based on a comprehensive internet search of every speaker at the conference + “Play the Game”. An investigation such as this can reach many different forms of coverage, from traditional media sites to specific sports sites, private blogs, news portals and other types of homepages.

It is expected that the database will reach a figure of 500 entries plus a possible number of reports in languages Dr. Sparre does not master. An additional limitation is that traditional media platforms such as television, radio and print media may not necessarily be represented on the Internet.

Not surprisingly, most of the coverage originates from Europe, North and South America.

When it comes to journalistic coverage, national and regional angles on every story are still important. For example, UEFA boss William Gaillard’s thoughts on merging national football leagues made its way into several Danish media, just as the Turkish media reported Declan Hill’s comments on the Turkish football mafia.

The international angles regarding FIFA were also noticed. Richard Pound’s attack on FIFA and the clash between English journalist Andrew Jennings and FIFA communications director Walter De Gregorio, in particular, reached wide audiences via traditional media around the world.

Richard Pound’s attack on FIFA is an example of a story the media, in this case, the news bureau Associated Press, have gathered from our own coverage. Unfortunately Play the Game was mentioned so far down in AP’s article that we were not mentioned by many of the other media that produced shorter versions of the story. This lack of credit is a bad habit that we cannot ever count on to go away, so we should be glad that Play the Game’s sports political agenda is at least being carried further.

As mentioned, bloggers have ensured an increase in coverage of the conference’s themes and sessions. Many of the delegates made use of this opportunity: Some, like the Federation of Gay Games, posted short day-to-day reports from a range of sessions; others, like researcher Roger Pielke and journalist Javier Szlifman delved deeper into selected stories. Bloggers can also take up certain matters shortly after the conference, as Christer Ahl on [www.teamhandballnews.com](http://www.teamhandballnews.com) and Hans B. Skaset on [www.sportsanalyse.no](http://www.sportsanalyse.no), for example, have done.

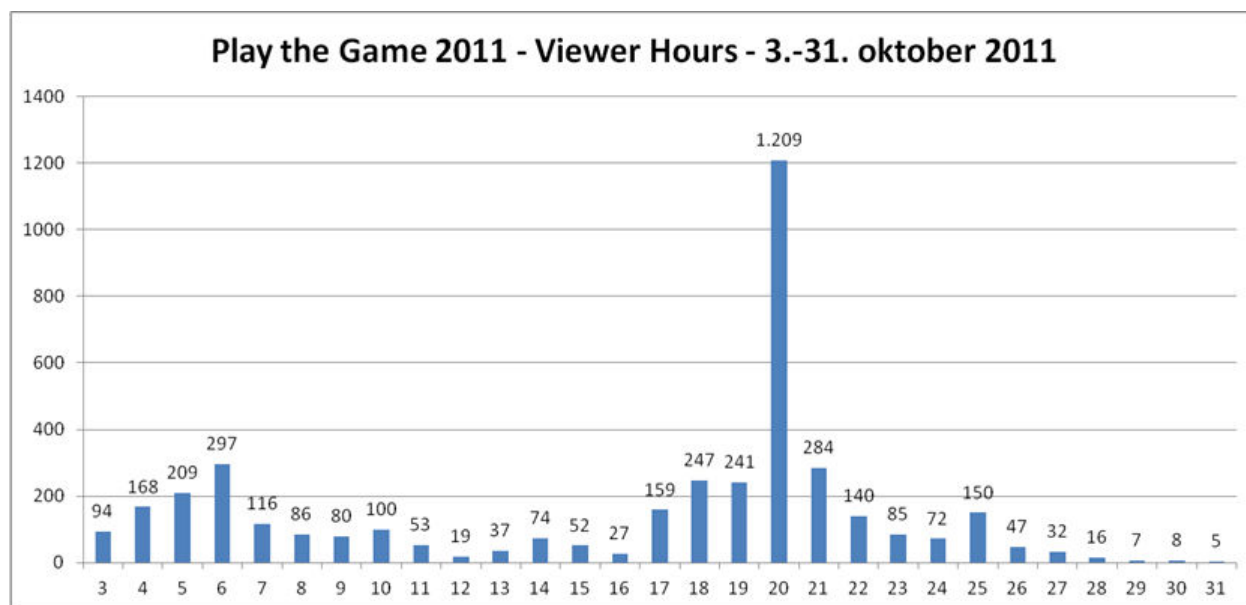
Three tenacious young German bloggers covered an incredible number of topics live – see [vormeistenkaffe.de](http://vormeistenkaffe.de), [jonathansachse.de](http://jonathansachse.de) and [danieldrepper.de](http://danieldrepper.de). In the so-called blogosphere, it is normal to copy articles of interest to one’s own blog without great consideration to copyright. As a result, a number of Play the Game’s own articles have travelled further. One of Martin Hardie’s articles in El Pais has also reached far and wide.

A German blog, [Allesaussersport.de](http://Allesaussersport.de), sought to provide a complete overview of the conference themes via our own output of news, presentations, streaming, etc.

Both the media and bloggers (for example, Pablo Vignone from Argentine newspaper *Página/12*) took advantage of Play the Game’s live streaming, which drew 4,112 “viewer hours” during the whole of October (i.e. one viewer per hour, or ten per six minutes), a relatively satisfactory return on the work

done to transmit the streaming. This result corresponds to more than 100 hard-working conference participants' use of time.

The distribution of viewer figures was as follows:



We have no explanation as to why the use of the live streaming ran amok on 20 October, but Katarina Pijetlovic's dispute of unusual statistical coincidences in Grand Slam tennis draws attracted a lot of attention in chat forums, etc., over that period.

As expected, the conference made its mark on visitor numbers recorded on [www.playthegame.org](http://www.playthegame.org). A calculation of visits for the month, made one week after the conference, indicated the following:

- 14,425 unique visitors (compared with an average of 10,700 in the year before)
- 53,159 page views (compared with 26,500)

These figures include visitors from 159 countries on five continents.

Finally, it should be noted that a team of approximately 15 sports journalism students from German Sport University Cologne contributed with news stories to DSHS's own website and prepared a television programme, which was aired after the conference.

A planned collaboration with the Danish School of Media and Journalism (DMJH) on the multimedia coverage unfortunately had to be cancelled a few weeks before the conference due to logistic and economic barriers for DMJH. This collaboration was very successful for both parties in 2005 and 2007, whereas the conference fell outside DMJH's semesters in 2009.

In summary, the following points can be considered for future conferences:

- More active marketing towards traditional media – i.e. through a programme that addresses journalistic development
- A more conscious and targeted effort towards bloggers
- Strengthening of live streaming and our own production from the conference
- A return to collaboration with DMJH

### Participant satisfaction

One month after the conference, a little later than hoped, the Danish Institute for Sports Studies conducted an anonymous email-based survey, which, despite the delay, had a relatively good response rate of 53.5% of the 296 potential respondents (key persons from the organisation were not included).

The enclosed results are encouraging reading. The tendency for lower levels of satisfaction that were noticeable in the survey conducted after the 2009 conference completely and overtly turned around to the extent that the 2011 survey indicated growing participant satisfaction.

Overall, 94% of the participants were satisfied with the conference, with an almost equal distribution of “good” and “very good” ratings.

- First-time delegates, who accounted for more than two-thirds of the respondents, were generally more satisfied than the regular delegates (51% said “very good” as opposed to 40%)
- This, however, is not owing to the many students whose ratio of good/very good is 33/67
- Journalists and academics gave more “very good” ratings than the other delegates (52-53%), but the academics gave the most “either-or” ratings with 11%

In studies like this it must be taken into account that not everyone chooses to respond to the survey and those who do respond have a tendency to be polite and friendly. Therefore, it is important to take notice when the number of unsatisfied respondents reaches over 20% and be very aware when it reaches over 30%.

It is therefore critical to note that 41% of the respondents believe there were too many presentations at the conference. Academics are clearly more used to choosing from parallel tracks, as only 33% said they would like to see fewer presentations compared to 40-48% of the other groups of respondents. The students were most critical (which could be owing to the fact that it was often their duty to assist the many sessions).

Many of the personal comments given in the survey also tended to focus on the number of presentations, the lack of an overview, the inconsistent quality of the presentations, etc.

At the same time, it is a requirement for a number of both paying and invited guests that they are accommodated in the programme. Therefore this is a genuine dilemma that cannot be avoided, but should be handled in the best way possible.

We therefore need to operate with new presentation formats in the phase where we invite people to submit an abstract. We will need to prepare people that they could be selected to take part in round table discussions and/or very short, 7-8 minute presentations.

In addition, it should be made clearer when a session has a distinct, coherent theme and when it is a mixed bag of presentations.

When it comes to the quality of the presentations and the time set aside for debate, there is also a slightly critical tendency in the responses where the number of “either-or” ratings is close to 25%.

Women and men have, on the whole, the same view on the conference. The women were slightly less satisfied than the men with the quality of the presentations and they also called for more time for debate to a greater extent. The difference between the genders was most evident in their choice of conference themes. Both genders rated countering corruption and mega-events as their two preferred themes, whereas third place was taken by sports journalism among the men and gender discrimination among the women.

### Networking and partners

It is well known that Play the Game conferences are accorded value because they, in contrast with most other conferences, assemble different professions into a collective forum for debate and give opportunities for cross-professional and international networks. This has not changed.

The opportunity to network is one of the things that stands out most in the delegates' comments, and 77% note that the conference promotes networking. 71% even think that there is enough time for networking, but it is, however, worth noting that around a third of the groups that have the most work-related tasks at the conference – journalists and students – point out that they lack time.

As in 2007, Idan and Play the Game invited all participants to a networking evening, this time completely without an agenda, but with set theme tables. It is likely that people did not keep to the themes marked, but in any case the evening lived up to its goal: to create contacts and conversation.

On an institutional level, networking played a markedly strengthened role at Play the Game 2011, as Play the Game had refreshed and formalised a variety of partnerships with related organisations. The aims were to create new forms of co-ownership, renewed content and a broader recruitment of delegates. The first two aspects in particular were full of success, while the latter resulted in approximately 15 delegates.

First, it should again be highlighted that Deutschlandfunk gathered over 100 German and international delegates at its one-day seminar on Sunday 2 October. That was some welcome!

During the conference 1.5-2 hours were made available to our partners:

- Research network MEASURE contributed a session on sports participation and used the occasion to hold an internal meeting.
- Supporters Direct ensured the debate on economic fair play by calling on speakers from UEFA and the German Football Association.
- French/international NGO Sport et Citoyenneté/Sport and Citizenship drew largely on speakers who had previously been part of a workshop on mega-events.
- The European Journalism Centre held a workshop on investigative sports journalism.
- As host, the German Sport University Cologne chipped in with a range of workshops and sessions on doping prevention, gaming, new technology, the EU, and sport in developing countries.

The dilemma with the, in some people's eyes, (too) comprehensive programme is not being lessened by inviting partners to take responsibility for a part of the programme. Despite this, it is certainly worth considering, also in relation to the possibility that the programme's planning should maybe be delegated to more people.

Under all circumstances, these active partnerships do not only benefit the individual participants, they also strengthen Idan/Play the Game's own networks.

The two international studies Play the Game have launched also gained us new friends. Our stadium study pulled in new contributors during the conference, and the International Sports Press Survey had already recruited research teams in 22 countries.

Last, but not least, the conference opened doors for an extended cooperation with DSHS, both at a managerial level and, especially, with their institute for European studies. The first step will be DSHS's contribution to our EU Preparatory Action.

## Economy

In establishing our cooperation with the German Sport University Cologne, Play the Game devised a new allocation of revenue and expenses. Instead of Play the Game taking responsibility for all revenue and expenses associated with the delegates' conference fees, these accounts were shared 50/50. This was easier for all parties to understand, and it gave the local hosts an incentive to further promote the event.

After vigorous requests from the German hosts, we opted beforehand for a price policy with the lowest fees ever offered at the conference, and it should be said that the Germans have also delivered the lowest operating costs so far – for example with a price for full catering including coffee, water, etc., for 30 € per participant per day.

But all in all it must be stressed that the conference would not have been possible without contributions from public and private sponsors, and both Play the Game and German Sport University Cologne had more luck than expected in fundraising for the event.

Therefore, we owe a big thank you to:

Danish Ministry of Culture  
Danish Gymnastics and Sports Association (DGI)  
National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF)  
Team Denmark (the Danish elite sport supporting organisation)  
Danish Federation of Company Sports  
Danish Union of Journalists (DJ)  
Norwegian Union of Journalists (NJ)  
German Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI)  
German Research Foundation (DFG)  
Ministry for Family, Children, Youth, Culture and Sport of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia  
German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)  
Federal Institute of Sport Science, Germany  
Reinenergie Foundation, Germany

- and to our suppliers Fritz-Kola, Kettler, Mars, AbSciex, Toyota and Cologne Tourism Office

It is worth noting that not one of the 122 speakers asked for or received any royalties for their participation. We decided to honour two requests for overseas business class tickets to ensure these VIPs' attendance, but on the reverse side other VIPs were helpful in obtaining funding for these extra costs elsewhere.

## Other issues

Play the Game launched for the first time an editorial process leading towards a conference resolution, a work coordinated first and foremost by Christer Ahl and Jens Sejer Andersen. The overall result achieved its objectives: For the first part giving the participants an opportunity to contribute to a common consensus and to have an outlet for collective action, and for the second part prompting a (on the surface empty but indirectly also very telling) reaction from the IOC to clarify its ambition to carry out a coordinated anti-corruption initiative.

But the editorial process was not entirely satisfactory, seeing as there was no allocated time, space or editorial facilities for it. This must be planned better next time.

Nikki Dryden from the programme committee expressed great dissatisfaction with the absence of female speakers from the plenary sessions. In this regard, it should be noted that we received a number of



cancellations at short notice and that single sessions that were planned to be plenary sessions were “downgraded” slightly and combined with other related sessions due to time constraints.

The awarding of this year’s Play the Game Award to Andrew Jennings and Jens Weinreich was both predictable and controversial. Their selection was probably what many would have expected from Play the Game – with positive and negative connotations.

We are sure that some will consider their selection as a demonstration of Play the Game being just as self-important and closed as the sports political organisations we cast into debate. But aside from the fact that we, in contrast to the other players, are happy to put this debate out into the open, it must be noted that in light of this year’s events in and around FIFA and the IOC it would be just as remarkable to overlook the two people who have been central to exposing these incidents.

Many of the delegates expressed their interest in bidding for the next conference. We have heard many expressions of interest over the years, but they are becoming better and better substantiated. Particularly interesting propositions came this time from Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, Morocco, the Netherlands, Canada, USA and Mauritius.

This broad interest makes it worth considering whether Play the Game can operate on a franchise basis and give its name, guidance, standards and trademark to shorter seminars and conferences with a more regional (read: sub-continental) character.

In staging three conferences in a row internationally, we have experienced that it demands significant resources, both in travel expenses and staff time, to transfer the expectations, know-how and practical coordination from the Play the Game office to the international hosts.

Conversely, we have also experienced that the hosts have quite optimistic estimates of how time- and resource-demanding being a host is – and only in connection to the conference in Cologne have we the impression that this allocation of resources has had a more permanent legacy.

It should soon be clarified whether the host country for 2013 will be chosen through a bidding process, or whether we should make alternative arrangements that live up to the most essential needs among those many engaged people and organisations that express a wish to host a Play the Game event.

There can be significant organisational and political gains from staging the 2013 conference in Denmark, which would be for the first time in eight years. But it will also weaken the perception of Play the Game as an international initiative that has become stronger as a result of branching out to other countries. If this turns out to be the case, this weakness should be addressed deliberately.

Play the Game 2011 was held at a time of transition with the merger with the Danish Institute for Sports Studies and the end of a four year funding period. Despite that, it has been a delight to see that the concept has proven its worth and is seen by many to be relevant. Right upon our return from Cologne, the EU Sports Unit announced that Play the Game/Idan had received a grant for a so-called preparatory action in the field of good governance in sport.

With the speed in which international sports politics has been changing in these years, there is much to suggest that Play the Game has the potential to increase its relevance and continue to work as a catalyst for bringing qualified debates to the fore.

That we once again experienced Play the Game as a unique, open and inspiring meeting place within international sport is a credit to an engaged and competent effort from many parties: The presenters, delegates, journalists, volunteers, sponsors, organisers and so on.

We give a warm thank you to everyone who was there to ensure a successful Play the Game 2011.

---

Mikkel Sarbo, Chairman of the Board

---

Henrik H. Brandt, Director

---

Jens Sejer Andersen, International Director