



Newsletters

Podcast

Video

Countdown to the Miami Grand Prix

15 : 04 : 25 : 53
DAYS HOURS MINUTES SECONDS

PRESENTED BY:
Autotrader

Tuned In

Will Caitlin Clark Restore Olympics to TV Ratings Gold?

BY MICHAEL MCCARTHY

UPDATED APRIL 15, 2024 | 05:06 PM



KEN BLAZE-USA TODAY SPORTS

With roughly 100 days before the opening ceremony of the 2024 Paris Summer Games, I'll be watching like a hawk to see whether Caitlin Clark joins Team USA. There's a fascinating question here: Would Clark supercharge TV viewership for the Olympics the way she did for women's college basketball?

I asked NBC about the prospects of adding a world-class TV magnet like Clark. "Caitlin's impact on viewership is undeniable and historic," an NBC spokesperson told *Front Office Sports* in a statement. "Her presence on Team USA in Paris would only add to the growing anticipation and excitement for the Summer Games starting in just over 100 days."

No argument here, NBC. Clark would instantly gift the network with a global TV draw on par with Michael Phelps or Simone Biles, according to Rob Prazmak, founder of 21 Sports & Entertainment Marketing Group and an Olympic marketing expert.

"Caitlin Clark is a one-person Dream Team. NBC would and should capitalize on her contribution to sport; not just women's sport," Prazmak tells *FOS*.

The problem is that it's not up to NBC; it's up to USA Basketball. We don't know yet whether Clark can make a team loaded with American hoops legends.

Along with Diana Taurasi and Brittney Griner, Clark was one of 14 players invited to participate in USA Basketball training camp in Cleveland. She couldn't make it due to playing in the Final Four. But Clark is still "eligible" for the 12-woman squad, USA Basketball spokesman Michael Terry told me.

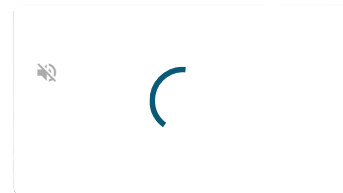
Latest Stories

Stanley Cup-Keeper Miragh Bitove is Ready to Protect the Hardware

Nike Cuts Over 700 Jobs In Second Phase of Layoffs

Hearings Have Concluded in the Pivotal USC Athlete Employment Case. What's Next?

Watch



The committee has yet to select the final roster, he added. Clark, the all-time leading scorer in NCAA history, will have to compete against a murderers' row of WNBA stars, including A'ja Wilson, Breanna Stewart, and Kelsey Plum.

There is precedent for college stars to join the pros on the global Olympics stage. UConn's Taurasi and Stewart joined Team USA after their final college seasons in 2004 and '16, while Duke's Christian Laettner joined NBA legends Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and Larry Bird on the 1992 Olympic "Dream Team."

Clark, who barring an extraordinary development will be taken with the No. 1 pick by the Indiana Fever at Monday's WNBA draft, has [expressed interest](#) in playing for her country: "I think growing up, your dream is always to be on the national team."

A potential beef—or at least the media-friendly appearance of a beef, which amounts to the same thing—between the 42-year-old Taurasi and 22-year-old Clark could also juice ratings. As she guns for her sixth gold medal, Taurasi has cast doubt on Clark's ability to dominate the WNBA the way she did college hoops. "You look superhuman playing against some 18-year-olds, but you're going to come play with some grown women that have been playing professional basketball for a long time," she told ESPN's Scott Van Pelt. In context, this wasn't as incendiary as some have made it out to be: Taurasi was just talking about the fact that moving to the highest level of a sport requires a period of adjustment for even the most gifted player. But it's no doubt the sort of thing yakkers love to go on about, and that could amp up the hype and drama.

There's no question about one thing: Clark's Tiger Woods-like ability to drive TV viewership. Iowa's championship game loss to South Carolina drew an astonishing [18.9 million viewers](#). That was the first time the TV audience for the women's NCAA basketball championship beat the men's title game. Consider this: This year's women's championship viewership actually outdrew four out of the last five men's college championships. It was the biggest TV audience for any basketball game—men's or women's, college or pro—since 2019, according to Nielsen.

NBC's Olympic viewership could use a jolt. Due to a hangover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics were the least watched on record, with prime-time coverage averaging 11.4 million viewers. The Tokyo Summer Olympics in '21 averaged 15.6 million viewers per night, across NBC's linear and digital platforms.

The good news for NBC is that interest in the Olympics is bouncing back. With advertising spending from the International Olympic Committee, or IOC, sponsors up 18%, NBC's tracking toward record ad sales at the Paris Games.

The network has already sold \$1.2 billion worth of ad time for the Paris Olympics, according to Dan Lovinger, NBCUniversal's president of Olympic and Paralympic partnerships. More than \$350 million of that haul is from new advertisers. Back in 2014, NBC agreed to pay \$7.65 billion for U.S. media rights to the Olympics through '32.

"As the Games move to Paris, then Milano Cortina, and eventually to L.A. in 2028, there's an unquestioned resurgence in Olympic interest, which is why we have already sold out all our inventory for both the opening and closing ceremonies across linear and digital platforms in these Paris Games," said Lovinger on a press call. "In fact, digital advertising revenue for this year is already setting a new record, surpassing any digital ad revenue in the history of the Games."

The charismatic Clark would be a force multiplier for TV ratings, adds Prazmark. "The 1992 Dream Team of Jordan, Pippen, Barkley, and Bird and others were fun to watch—and was transformative for basketball," notes the author of [The Olympics Don't Take American Express](#). "It accelerated basketball to a global platform to become the second worldwide sport following soccer. Clark would have the same opportunity."

As Team USA women's basketball team shoots for its eighth straight gold medal in Paris, all of its games will be aired live on either NBC's TV linear channels or Peacock streaming platforms, says a source with direct knowledge of the strategy. The stage is set for Clark to step forward and claim her place in the City of Light. Will she or won't she? That's the question for NBC, the IOC, and sports fans, who'd love to watch her draining three-point bombs in Paris.

Dickie V Talks About His Health, New Book