

***WHO SHOULD WIN SPORTS
PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR 2006?***

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

10 DECEMBER 2006

sportsthanhtank.com is the UK's leading independent research organisation devoted solely to developing new ideas and extending the boundaries of debate in the world of sport. The aim of *sportsthanhtank.com* is to bring insight and analysis to issues in sport in order to help stimulate debate, transform perceptions and provide innovative policy solutions. It will do this primarily in the interests of the participating and spectating public.

The organisation is independent, not for profit and is completely funded by donations. The views of the authors of *sportsthanhtank.com* publications and research are not necessarily the views of *sportsthanhtank.com* itself.

Research led by Nick Laitner

INTRODUCTION

While of course any assessment of sporting performance or achievement is by its very nature subjective, sportsthinktank.com has attempted to grade various sportspeople by a variety of empirical criteria, in order to determine who is most deserving of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award.

The rationale for conducting such a study is the belief that the BBC is placing too much weight on the 'celebrity' aspect of the award, and not enough on sporting achievement. This aim sets out to determine which person on this year's BBC shortlist is deserving of the title on sporting achievement alone.

METHODOLOGY

The ten shortlisted competitors for this year's BBC Sports Personality of the Year have been graded against the following criteria:

1. Elite competition: *The number of people representing England/UK in 2006. The larger the domestic elite pool, the greater the achievement.*

This is the number of people representing England or UK in team sports, or number of English/British competitors in the sport's top 100 (men and women) for individual sports – data taken from NGBs and international governing bodies. Ranked 10-1.

2. Individual achievement: *The individual's own role in the achievement against which they are being judged.*

Main achievement judged at 10 points for individual effort alone, 7 points for individual effort with assistance (horse/car/bike/bat/clubs) 5 for team effort, 3 for team effort with technology assistance.

3. Sporting achievement: *The actual sporting achievement in or throughout 2006.*

40 points are awarded for consistent best-in-world performance, 30 points for 'one off' or frequent best-in-world performance, 25 for European best, 20 for winning international performance, 15 for good international performance, 12 for domestic win, 10 for less

4. Depth of international opposition: *This is the number of countries represented at elite level. The deeper the competition, the greater the achievement.*

Statistics obtained from international governing bodies – for individual sports, the number of countries represented in the top 100 ranked individuals of both the male and female disciplines were included (except for boxing, where only the men's super-middleweight representation in the top 15 of each of the IFB, WBA, WBC and WBO rankings were included). Ranked 10-1.

5. Depth of field: *This is the base participation rate for the sport in the UK. The larger the pool of participants, the greater the achievement.*

Statistics taken from numbers of people affiliated to National Governing Body in England/UK as applicable. These have all been taken from each national governing body's latest public figures. Ranked 10-1.

Two further, non-sporting criteria were also included as control comparator.

6. Web popularity: measured by mentions of each individual's "name" recorded by a UK web search on google.co.uk. Ranked 10-1.

7. Press popularity: mentions of name in UK National Press from 1 January – 20 November 2006. Ranked 10-1.

RESULTS

This empirical study shows that, of the shortlisted men and women, cyclist Nicole Cooke has achieved the greatest British sporting accomplishment of 2006, and therefore deserves to be crowned BBC Sports Personality of the Year.

World champion gymnast Beth Tweddle is second, with undefeated super-middleweight boxer Joe Calzaghe third. However, when the 'popularity' criteria are included, the order changes, with darts player Phil Taylor and Ryder Cup winning golfer Darren Clarke also showing strongly. The full list is as follows, with results including 'popularity' criteria in brackets:

- 1. Nicole Cooke** (1)
- 2. Beth Tweddle** (5)
- 3. Joe Calzaghe** (=2)
- 4. Phil Taylor** (=2)
- 5. Zara Phillips** (7)
- 6. Ricky Hatton** (8)
- 7. Darren Clarke** (4)
- 8. Andy Murray** (9)
- 9. Monty Panesar** (6)
- 10. Jenson Button** (10)

The full table of results is appended to this report.

ANALYSIS

BBC Sports Personality of the Year is not just about sporting achievement, but also about individual popularity, profile, timing, television coverage and emotional narratives. For this reason, it is extremely unlikely that a cyclist or gymnast will win the competition in the near future.

It is interesting that when measures of basic popularity are included in our calculation, sportsmen such as Darren Clarke and Monty Panesar, whose sporting successes in 2006 –

though impressive – have been less of an achievement than many others, rise significantly up our table. We think that it is likely that the emotive and cult appeal of these two sportsmen, in particular, may skew the final awards away from the real achievement of others.

The authors believe that by consistently popularising the format of the competition, the BBC is in danger of removing sporting achievement from the criteria used to decide the award entirely.

Although we appreciate the democracy inherent in a popular vote, the choice which results is likely to be just that – popular, with little heed given to actual sporting achievement.

Sportsthinktank.com recommends an overhaul of the competition, with the winner to be decided partly on a national vote but also by the weighted analysis of a panel of sporting experts judging the shortlist against an agreed set of criteria as set out above.

It is time to put the sports back into Sports Personality.

November 2006

APPENDIX - RESULTS

Criteria for judging:

1. Elite competition
2. Individual achievement
3. Sporting achievement
4. Depth of international opposition
5. Depth of field
6. Popularity (web)
7. Popularity (press mentions)

	Sport	Elite competition	Rank	Indiv achievement	Sporting achievement	Depth of int'l opposition	Rank	Depth of field	Rank	Web popularity	Rank	Press mentions	Rank	Total (with 'popularity')
Nicole Cooke	Cycling	3	3	7	40	30	8	20,028	5	31,400	2	87	2	63 (67)
Beth Tweddle	Gymnastics	7	4	10	30	39	9	105,000	6	33,100	3	62	1	59 (63)
Joe Calzaghe	Boxing	16	7	10	30	17	6	8,496	3	65,800	4	633	5	56 (65)
Phil Taylor	Darts	26	10	7	30	16	4	12,000	4	112,000	7	229	3	55 (65)
Zara Phillips	Equestrian	18	8	7	30	15	2	210,000	7	29,200	1	434	4	54 (59)
Ricky Hatton	Boxing	16	7	10	20	17	6	8,496	3	85,300	5	759	6	46 (57)
Darren Clarke	Golf	9	5	3	20	27	7	700,000	10	123,000	8	2097	10	45 (63)
Andy Murray	Tennis	2	2	7	15	42	10	643,000	9	110,000	6	1110	7	41 (52)
Monty Panesar	Cricket	26	10	3	20	10	1	250,000	8	178,000	9	1930	9	42 (60)
Jenson Button	F1	2	2	7	10	16	4	2	1	262,000	10	1195	8	24 (42)