# Who won at Beijing 2008?

While the dust is settling over the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, an event considered to be the greatest ever organized, it is universally acknowledged that China won, by whatever measure one could bring in.

But the world of sports statistics is as 'dismal' a science as other disciplines like economics or scientometrics (as a recent editorial[1] in *Current Science* so eloquently expressed). A look at http://www.swivel.com/graphs/show/29404869 will confirm this. Sean Carmody (http://twitter.com/seancarmody) has meticulously dissected the results by medals tally, by weighted score, by GDP, by population, and so on. What intrigued me the most was his observation that 'the country with the most medals per capita is the Bahamas'. Naturally, I wanted to see who among the 87 countries that won medals at Beijing 2008, was at the bottom of the table. I have extracted this from the master table at Sean Carmody's website (http://www.swivel.com/data_sets/spreadsheet/1016460), and it is reproduced in Table 1.

**Table 1.** On a medals per million basis, the Bahamas won at Beijing (http://www.swivel.com/data_sets/spreadsheet/1016460 extracted on 30 August 2008)

| Classification | Rank | Country | Population | Total no. of medals | Medals/ million |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Top ten | 1 | Bahamas | 307,451 | 2 | 6.5051 |
| | 2 | Jamaica | 2,804,332 | 11 | 3.9225 |
| | 3 | Iceland | 316,252 | 1 | 3.1620 |
| | 4 | Slovenia | 2,029,000 | 5 | 2.4643 |
| | 5 | Australia | 21,394,309 | 46 | 2.1501 |
| | 6 | Cuba | 11,268,000 | 24 | 2.1299 |
| | 7 | New Zealand | 4,274,800 | 9 | 2.1054 |
| | 8 | Norway | 4,778,500 | 10 | 2.0927 |
| | 9 | Armenia | 3,002,000 | 6 | 1.9987 |
| | 10 | Belarus | 9,690,000 | 19 | 1.9608 |
| | 37 | Russian Federation | 141,888,900 | 72 | 0.5074 |
| | 44 | USA | 304,917,000 | 110 | 0.3608 |
| | 68 | China | 1,325,637,000 | 100 | 0.0754 |
| Bottom ten | 78 | Venezuela | 27,953,701 | 1 | 0.0358 |
| | 79 | Iran | 70,495,782 | 2 | 0.0284 |
| | 80 | Mexico | 106,682,500 | 3 | 0.0281 |
| | 81 | Nigeria | 148,093,000 | 4 | 0.0270 |
| | 82 | Sudan | 38,560,000 | 1 | 0.0259 |
| | 83 | Indonesia | 231,627,000 | 5 | 0.0216 |
| | 84 | South Africa | 47,850,700 | 1 | 0.0209 |
| | 85 | Egypt | 75,219,000 | 1 | 0.0133 |
| | 86 | Vietnam | 87,375,000 | 1 | 0.0114 |
| | 87 | India | 1,136,961,000 | 3 | 0.0026 |

Surely, by this measure the Bahamas and Jamaica won the honours at Beijing. And among the 87 countries that made it to the table, India took the wooden spoon. On a per capita assessment, the Bahamas was 2500 times more effective than India in winning medals at Beijing.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **95**, 431–432.

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# CSIR–UGC NET life sciences exam: Need for a perceptional change

These are my reflections after reading the correspondence by K. Choudhary *et al.*[1].

A person qualifying CSIR–UGC NET life sciences exam should be an expert not only in modern frontiers of life sciences as the authors claim, but also in classical aspects like systematics, embryology, morphogenesis, anatomy, plant and animal diversity, etc. Without the knowledge of these fields, how can a researcher choose a particular experimental organism for his studies? Biotechnology alone is not the only purpose for which life sciences waited for years and there are no particular branches that can be deemed the acme of life sciences. There are so many basic scientific mysteries in plants and animals yet to be resolved, but not looked into seriously because of the craze for biotechnology. For the sake of scientific argument I accuse the so-called biotechnologists of being solely responsible for transforming field-oriented productive research into laboratory-oriented fuzzy research. Both field and laboratory-oriented experimentation are required for validating any hypothesis or concept. Will any of the so-called biotechnologists go on a survey of a hill or a plain, tracing the distribution and natural occurrence of the experimental system they work with? In order to avert these inconveniences, bacterial strains and yeast serve as the prime experimental systems in most of the laboratories. Another awkward observation made by the authors is that the failure to qualify in CSIR–UGC NET exam has led to a shortage of qualified teachers of biotechnology in colleges and universities. More than a life sciences researcher, a biotechnology teacher has to have a broad idea of life forms rather than restricting to forms which accept genetic manipulation or fermentation processes. Coming to their request for specialized biotechnology subject area in the NET exam, again I find the rationale weak for the above-mentioned rea-