

Do genes explain why some nationalities are better at sports?

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Speculation, speculation, speculation: This is what characterises most genetic theories about group differences in sport. Such theories are typically speculative in three ways.

Firstly, they assume that any observed physical difference must have a genetic origin. For example, just because [Kenyan runners have thinner ankles](#), it does not follow that genes for thin ankles are more common among Kenyans. It might be that they eat less.

Secondly, they assume that the differences matter. The best evidence that thin ankles help distance runners is that Kenyans run well, but this is a circular argument. Dutch speed skaters wear orange but the colour of the body suits is not why they are so fast.

The third and final assumption is that economic factors are of little or no significance, if they are acknowledged at all. A few extra millimetres of ankle fat, on an athlete, is often given just as much weight as the gluttonous expansion of the Rift Valley running camps.

Genetic speculators enjoy asking what would happen if historical and economic factors were removed. Would small genetic differences result in different patterns of success?

The speculators are right. They would. If genes are symbolised by a fast-breeding rabbit, pushing a basketball around a court, the rabbit would be large enough to make it move.

**Read full, original post:** [The Genetics of Basketball Part 2](#)